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Use of social media platforms as a dialogue tool: a case study of a non-governmental organisation in Gauteng.

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my loving mother, who has so patiently endured the course of my studies and given me the support needed to accomplish a task as time consuming and strenuous as this one.

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed_____

Date_____

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MTech Public Relations Management.

Signed_____

Date_____

STATEMENT 2

This thesis is the result of my own work/ investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Sign_____

Date_____

ABSTRACT

It is of utmost importance for non-governmental organisations not only to use social media when it suits them but also learn to incorporate social media into their communication strategy. This study is focused on the use of social media as a dialogue tool by an NGO in Gauteng province in South Africa, namely, The Teddy Bear Clinic/Foundation (TTBC/F). Data was collected through ten semi-structured interviews with the participants being six full time employees and four volunteers who work in the marketing, public relations and fundraising department and manage the online communication for the organisation.

The results of the study revealed that the NGO's social ties are of primary importance for assuring active donor and stakeholder commitment whilst guaranteeing continued stakeholder engagement, therefore social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter should be treated as an invaluable communication tool. Therefore, an NGO that incorporates social media in its communication strategy influences the participation of the stakeholders in the various support, fundraising and activities that promote its cause. The results of the study also revealed that although the NGO operates several social media platforms, (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) for dialogue and relationship building and nurturing with the stakeholders. It is significantly dependent on Facebook and Twitter. The majority of its employees also believed that the NGO was using social media strategically by sending key messages to the public thereby prioritising and greatly facilitating the exchange of ideas as well as understanding the position of others, so focusing on mutuality and relationships rather than on self-interest.

Key words: Communication strategy, Relationship building, Stakeholder commitment, Dialogue

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, social media has become a big component of our society and has evolved to become a topic of research interest. Today any individual or organisation can have a profile on social networking platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram, among others. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) incorporate digital media strategies into their public relations programmes (Waters, Burnett, Lamm & Lucas 2009:1). According to Carroll (2013:17), NGOs must make sure they maintain dialogue with the public and other organisations in order to create and increase awareness of their cause, fundraisers as well as build relationships with the variety of stakeholders.

The impact and significance of the increased use of social media and their integration into society is important from the human science, business and organisational perspectives (Carroll 2013:4). The exchange of information between NGOs and the publics has become simplified and efficient as their sites allow for the quick dissemination as well as the swift exchange of information. However, many NGOs do not fully utilise social media to communicate with the stakeholder, for example, Waters *et al.* (2009:1) found that non-profit organisations (NGOs) are failing to fully utilise the interactive function of Facebook, which could potentially cultivate relationships. The purpose of this article is to look at how an Ngo in the Gauteng province strategically use social media to build and maintain relationships with their stakeholders.

1.2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Resource dependency and dialogic theory both assist in explaining the complex relationships between organisations and publics (Kent, Taylor & White 2003:66). Technologies such as the Internet and other social media platforms are helping organisations to meet the information needs of key stakeholders, which aspect is essential for survival in a competitive marketplace. It needs to be understood that social media platforms that facilitate interactivity and increased responsiveness to stakeholder information are essential for resource-dependent organisations in order to meet their strategic objectives. Therefore, organisations like NGOs that rely on members' donations and goodwill must provide relevant communication on their Web sites and social media pages (Kent *et al.,* 2003:65).

The resource dependency theory is of the notion that organisations vary in their dependency on external publics and their environment. Pfeffer and Salancik (1978:1) believed that to comprehend the behavioural patterns inclinations of any establishment one necessarily needs to recognise the contextual upbringing of the respective deeds, essentially "the natural balance of the organisation". Hillman, Withers and Collins (2009:1)**,** therefore**,** agree that identifying the effect of external factors on organisational performance should help managers act proactively to reduce environmental insecurity and reliance. This leads to an understanding of the stakeholder through the situational theory of publics.

According to Kent *et al.* (2003:65), the situational theory of publics states that external publics exert pressure on NGOs. The theory describes stakeholders as having specific information needs, and proposes particular communication behaviours. Furthermore, this theory explains how individuals identify, outline and solve problems, which are easily applied to Internet-facilitated organisation and public relationships. One of the strengths of communication using social media platforms is its ability to create a bond between publics, and

which shows individuals that they share interests with others. This also leads to another connected theory, namely, the dialogic theory.

The main principle of dialogic theory is that for organisations to create beneficial two-way communication using social digital platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, they must be enthusiastic to interact with publics in honest and moral ways as they are intricately tied together. According to Kent and Taylor (2002:4), participants in a dialogue should be viewed as persons and not as objects, thereby putting more emphasis on the idea of a dialogue being conducted in a spirit of mutual equality. In addition, Kent *et al.* (2003:67) recognise that NGOs sometimes meet the informational needs of the public but have yet to facilitate genuine dialogue between organisations and their stakeholders by being truly interactive.

Social media has created new opportunities for NGOs to engage with their stakeholders by allowing them to receive real-time feedback about organisational announcements and engage in two-way dialogues. Examples of dialogic social media platforms that organisations use currently include Facebook, Twitter, Interactive blogs, Instagram and contact e-mail forms, among others. According to Briones, Kuch, Liu and Jin (2010:38), NGOs should make sure that they foster online dialogic communication with their internal and external stakeholders. This approach is therefore considered important for the building and nurturing of relationships through dialogic communication on the Internet.

Lovejoy, Waters, and Saxton (2012:314) are of the notion that the NGO should ensure that they constantly update their websites and social media platforms at least every week or month in order to maintain two-way communication with the publics. This means that these functions serve as the organisation's main communication tool on social media platforms. Through these public messages, not only is a dialogue created between the organisation and the user, but it is

accessible or can be viewed by anyone following the organisation's account.

1.3 RATIONALE AND MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

The case under study is The Teddy Bear Clinic/Foundation (TTBC/F), which is a South African non-governmental organisation based in Gauteng province, dedicated to ensuring that abused children are protected and rehabilitated. The organisation provides therapy, counselling, financial assistance, love, comfort, safety and on-going support to children who have been abused. However, like most NGOs, it relies on the support of different stakeholders with whom it builds relationships in order to fulfil its mission. According to Brioness, Kuch, Liu and Jin (2010:38), the main goal for all these relationships is to establish trust and accountability to the public. Because digital communication platforms make interactivity and dialogue easier than the traditional media, it is important, therefore, to investigate if the NGO is utilising digital media platforms strategically to build relationships with the stakeholders.

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Social media platforms allow for continual organisation-stakeholder dialogue. These platforms, however, should be used strategically and efficiently to have more impact on the stakeholders. According to Waters *et al.* (2009:1), NGOs are merely creating profiles on social media platforms not fully understanding and recognising that this would not help them increase awareness or intensify instant participation with their stakeholders. Kent *et al.* (2003:64) have also shown that NGOs have not been able to use websites as strategic communicating stakeholder engagement tools, mainly due to a lack of expertise. Although a number of studies on the use of social media platforms by NGOs have been conducted globally, the studies on NGOs in South Africa are still limited. In addition, NGOs are being accused of also not strategically using social media platforms or not using these platforms at all. This is so as these organisations are

struggling to maintain constructive dialogues and relationships with the various stakeholders, which can be attributed to limited or lack of expertise and ignorance of the staff tasked with handling their social media platforms.

1.5 STUDY AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study was to examine how Non-Governmental Organisations use digital media platforms to create dialogue with the publics in order to form and maintain beneficial relationships.

During the study, the following research questions were answered:

- How does the non-governmental organisation use social media to strategically build relationships with its publics?
- How is the process of communicating with the publics through social media managed by the organisation?
- How does the social media communication fit into the NGO's overall communication strategy?

1.5.1 Theoretical objectives

The theoretical objectives of the study were to:

- conduct a literature review on the resources dependence theory and the dialogue theory, in order to operationalise the concept of stakeholder relationships for the purpose of constructing the interview questions; and
- conduct a literature review on digital media platforms so as to establish the state of current knowledge on the use of social media by NGOs.

1.6 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

For the purpose of this study, its key concepts were understood as follows:

1.6.1 Dialogue

Dialogue occurs as stakeholders provide feedback on every facet of an organisation that concerns them as well as other features of its conduct that are connected with the company (Carroll 2013:452).

1.6.2 Digital media platforms

A digital platform consists of a clear technical and commercial offer for access to a universe of distant, interactive or non-interactive services. This offer relies on the development of a community of users who group together to form a body of Web, TV, or even telephone services (Meyer 2000:135).

1.6.3 Online communication

Online communication refers to reading, writing and communication via networked computers and encompasses computer-mediated communication "whereby people communicate in real time via chat or discussion software with participants at the same time" (Warschauer 2001:207).

1.6.4 Publics "Stakeholders"

Stakeholders can be defined as any group or individual who is affected by or can affect the achievement of an organisation's objectives (Parum 2006:559).

1.6.5 Social media

Social networking sites as those sites driven by user-participation and user
-generated content, for example, Facebook, Twitter, among others (Tredinnick 2006:130).

1.6.6 Relationships

Relationships result from the interdependence of the parties, which represent exchange or transfer of information, energy or resources (Broom, Casey & Ritchey 2000:15).

1.7 METHODOLOGY

1.7.1 Type of design

Qualitative research was applied by the researcher to gather and interpret the data, with the researcher specifically using the phenomenological approach. Furthermore, the researcher also used semi-structured individual interviews as a data collection method.

1.7.2 Population

In this research, the first group comprised of volunteers who manage the NGO's online presence, do updates or respond to posts sent by the public. The second group comprised the management in terms of what their goals are, as well as visions and prospects for the organisation's online communication.

1.7.3 Sampling

The researcher used purposive sampling to intentionally select participants who have experience with the central phenomenon or the key concept being explored. The researcher used, firstly, a sample which comprised four volunteers from the organisation who have been directly involved in online content management for the organisation from the year 2013. The second group comprised six employees from the management who have been working at the NGO for four years. Interviews were conducted by the researcher involving the two samples mentioned above. The study sample comprised ten participants in total. In order to ensure that the sample is credible, accurate and includes the main groups the researcher used a strategy called maximum variation sample.

1.7.4 Data collection method

Prior to conducting the field work, the researcher obtained necessary permission to conduct the individual interviews. This entailed focusing on interactive aspects: what do publics post? What do they enquire? What are the organisational responses?

1.7.5 Interviews

The researcher used semi-structured interviews as a data collection instrument. The interviews with all the participants were conducted, when each participant was given a chance to respond and clearly discuss their views. A single interview took at least 45 to 60 minutes. A semi-structured interview was conducted with the researcher, containing eleven open-ended questions as well as audiotaping and transcribing the interviews after all had been finished. They were conducted till data saturation.

1.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS

According to Rolfe (2006:304) trustworthiness in qualitative research is all about establishing these four elements, which are described in more detail below:

Credibility is the how confident the qualitative researcher is in the truth of the research study's findings. This boils down to the question of "How do you know that your findings are true and accurate?" Qualitative researchers can use triangulation to show the research study's findings are credible.

Transferability is how the qualitative researcher demonstrates that the research study's findings are applicable to other contexts. In this case, "other contexts" can mean similar situations, similar populations, and similar phenomena. Qualitative researchers can use thick description to show that the research study's findings can be applicable to other contexts, circumstances, and situations.

Confirmability is the degree of neutrality in the research study's findings. In other words, this means that the findings are based on participants' responses and not any potential bias or personal motivations of the researcher. This involves making sure that

researcher bias does not skew the interpretation of what the research participants said to fit a certain narrative.

Finally, *dependability* is the extent that the study could be repeated by other researchers and that the findings would be consistent. In other words, if a person wanted to replicate your study, they should have enough information from your research report to do so and obtain similar findings as your study did.

1.9 DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The establishment of patterns and categories was done by the researcher after the creation of codes. Therefore, in order to have a highly regarded thematic analysis, the data should assist in the reflection and clarification of reality.

1.10 OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter 1: Introduction and background to the study. This chapter introduces the study and states its focus, that is, the background information regarding the problem under investigation.

Chapter 2: Conceptual framework and literature review. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive review of the literature related to the problem under investigation. The review of related literature should greatly expand upon the introduction and background information presented in chapter one.

Chapter 3: Research methodology. This chapter emphasises the research methodology used in this study. It describes the research design, population used in the study, the process utilised in selecting a sample and data collection procedure.

Chapter 4: Results and interpretation. This chapter provides results of data analysis and findings of the study.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and recommendations. This chapter presents conclusions drawn from the findings and results of the data analysis. Based on the results, recommendations are made.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Non-governmental organisations (thereafter referred to as NGOs) are viewed as significant cogs in civil society as they are effective, capable and resourceful in managing complex issues that range from community health issues, environmental issues, economic issues, and services to disadvantaged communities, among others. Technological advances that are constantly taking place in the environment thus cannot be ignored in trying to improve the NGOs' ability to take care of their day-to-day advocacy activities. Among these technological innovations, the emergence of social media is drastically transforming the way in which NGOs conduct their daily business. Even though some NGOs have decided to incorporate social media into their business activities, the commitment remains minimal and therefore not part of the overall communication strategy (Morris & Baddache 2012:4).

NGOs do not survive in a vacuum, as they require the help of various stakeholders for them to be successful. Such stakeholders may include donors, volunteers, employees, the community, government, advocacy groups and the media, among many participants. Hence, the inclusive approach has led to the rise of two-way communication between the NGOs and their stakeholders through the use of social media, and various groups have become vocal to what they expect organisations to do for them (Morris & Baddache 2012:4). Social media, thus, has developed into a very essential component in the business setting where organisations are always trying to create and maintain strategic relationships with their internal and external stakeholders in order to rectify challenges they encounter.

In this chapter, concepts such as corporate communication, publics and stakeholders, stakeholder dialogue, a non-governmental

organisation, social media and online communication will be elaborated on in great detail.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The following elements are represented in the framework: the resource dependence theory, the dialogue theory and the role of corporate communication in creating the organisation-stakeholder dialogue.

2.2.1 Resource dependency theory

The environmental landscape of non-governmental organisations continues to challenge their daily operations, which has been happening consistently. This inhospitable situation inevitably leads NGOs to constantly search for new strategies and tactics to address the challenges associated with their limited resources. Resource dependence theory, therefore, provides valuable guidance for organisations that are willing to understand the considerations and consequences relevant to different types of inter-organisational partnering. However, according to Davis and Cobb (2009:5), the most widely used aspects of the theory suggest that the sources and consequences of power in inter-organisational relations questions are: where power and dependence come from; and how those that run organisations use their power and manage their dependence.

Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) created the resource dependency theory, which is of the notion that the survival of any organisation depends on its ability to consistently manage external dependencies and whether they are able to acquire vital resources (employees, stakeholders, finances, investment, assets and raw materials) from the external environment (Casciaro & Piskorski 2005:3). Moreover, organisations should show commitment to stakeholders and support them accordingly as they are critically dependent on them. Stakeholder support should be recognised as a very indispensable resource as the success of the organisation is reliant on its stakeholders or when

customer demand continues to increase. Therefore, stakeholders are the critical resource on which companies are dependent.

The resource dependency theory's main thrust is to show that organisations will try to manage their resource dependencies with a variety of tactics, such as the co-optation of sources of constraint in order to achieve greater control, and as a result, reduce uncertainty in the flow of needed resources from the environment (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). It therefore suggests that organisations should vary in their dependency on external publics and their environment to achieve their set goals, and on the power to control resource allocation as the key to organisational survival (Davis & Cobb 2009:6). Key to the above idea is to make sure organisations and the publics are vested in building and maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship.

An important way to understand the limited power of resource dependence theory is to recognise that organisations are not always capable to take actions to manage external dependencies. However, in its current form, resource dependence theory identifies conditions under which an organisation is subjected to external constraints, and a variety of tactics with which organisations attempt to manage them (Casciaro & Piskorski 2005:4). However, it does not identify the conditions under which an organisation's attempts to use such tactics would be successful.

2.2.1.1 Organizational stakeholders as a resource

There are many matters that affect organisations, which cannot be solved by one group of people, but rather require the collaboration of many different participants, players and stakeholders. In order for the issues to be solved, all participating groups should be fully motivated and driven to reach an understanding in order to reach consensus on the implementation and resolving of solutions on certain projects.

Relationship building has become a vital element of how organisations operate as seen by how dependent they are on different groups,

actors and players that have a stake in their business. The researcher will firstly outline the concept of stakeholders before exploring the concept of stakeholder dialogue. According to Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Palmer, de Colle (2007:98) and Hemmati (2002:2), stakeholders can be defined as any player, party or group who are concerned with the activities of an organisation and in turn how they are affected by the actions and operations of the organisation. Furthermore, Caroll (2013:203) identifies stakeholders as broad categories of persons who are affected by management decisions and who might also affect those decisions. This includes people who influence a decision as well as those affected by it, such as the government, employees, community, suppliers, donors and sponsors.

The term "publics", however, is mostly used by corporate communication practitioners, especially when the organisation is trying to create a strategic communication plan. Skinner, Mersham and Benecke (2013:347) define publics as a collection of participants, actors or players with which a business entity is constantly imparting or exchanging information in order to improve relationships and actions, among others.

These two concepts are used interchangeably when describing the actors, groups or players who are involved or are affected directly or indirectly by the decisions that an NGO or a business organisation takes (Mackey 2006:1). Grunig and Repper (1992:125) believe that groups or individuals only become stakeholders when they influence an organisation and are also affected by decisions of an organisation. Furthermore, Tench and Yeomans (2006:241) describe those stakeholders who are aware and active as publics and are of the notion that they are formed when they identify consequences emanating from the attitude of the organisation as a problem, and plan to do something about it. In support, Grunig (2005:778) believes that publics arise on their own free will and usually gain power and attention by targeting the organisation, whereas stakeholders are

identified by strategies used by organisations such as communication or marketing strategies and recruiting, among others.

Puth and Steyn (2000:4) further concur with Grunig (2005) by saying that such groups or actors can be internal to the organisation, for instance, employees, management, shareholders, owners and top management. The other group or actors can be termed as external stakeholders and includes the government, potential customers, suppliers, and creditors, among others.

Freeman *et al.* (2007:98) formulated a stakeholder map that divided the stakeholders into two groups, which are the primary and secondary stakeholders. The primary stakeholders are those that make it possible for the organisation to continue to operate, such as customers, employees, suppliers, communities and financiers. The secondary stakeholders refer to those that are affected by the overall business environment, such as media, competitors, governments, activists and special interest groups. The bottom-line is that all stakeholders involved with an organisation, be it primary or secondary stakeholders, should be taken seriously as it is vital to create and maintain goodwill with the different publics involved with an organisation.

Stakeholders influence the organisation in different ways. Organisations, therefore, like NGOs must make sure that they are able to precisely identify stakeholders that are key to the organisation as well as determine their needs and appropriate solutions to help address these needs as well as those of the organisation (Puth and Steyn 2000:4). According to Skinner *et al.* (2016:40), organisations had the habit of viewing different stakeholders in isolation to each other, which created divisions among stakeholders; for example, relationships with employees or communities were viewed separately with each having its own communication or public relations activities.

This process was biased as it did not recognise that all stakeholders of an organisation are interrelated, interconnected and are

interdependent on the relationships they have amongst themselves and the organisation. This can be attributed to the mere fact that the web of relationships is constantly changing, and depends on the situation at hand. For example, some relationships change over time as some parties in the beginning may participate actively in a dialogue or relationship. In time, that may change as some groups become less participative and less immersed in the activities of the organisation, depending on the wants and needs of the stakeholders.

2.2.1.2 Corporate communication and stakeholder relationships

Van Riel and Fombrun (2007:25) view corporate communication as the set of activities involved in managing and orchestrating all internal and external communications aimed at creating favourable relationships with stakeholders on whom the company depends. In agreement, Cornelissen (2008:25) defines corporate communication as a collaboration of communication efforts/activities in order to create, develop and sustain relationships with different stakeholder groups. Furthermore, Mumby (2006:3290) defines corporate communication as a mixture of communication methods that incorporates people engaged in collaborative goal-oriented behaviour.

According to Roper and Fill (2012:214), corporate communication is a strategic function within an organisation because it is of utmost importance that influences the perceptions of how the public views it. Therefore, in corporate communication, stakeholders must be able to relate with different organisational aspects as relations are created, developed and sustained to its good effect. According to Yamauchi (2001:132), corporate communication entails working closely with stakeholders and making sure they are understood, and to eventually target them with information that uses their responses to communication activities that help create and maintain a sustainable communication plan. Furthermore, Tompkins and Wanca-Thibault (2001:5) characterise corporate communication as a specific subset

within the communication field, a specific "phenomenon that exists in organisations and a significant way of explaining organisations and organisational processes."

Organisations are now acting proactively to stop threats from taking centre stage, which allows it to build and influence their internal and external environment (Cheney & Christensen 2001:253). Building influence entails organisations realising how vital it is to communicate and disseminate information that is significant for the growth of their company to the public, for example, its mission, vision, objectives, corporate philosophy, and corporate culture, among others. Social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook now offer assistance to organisations to disseminate information and build relationships with stakeholders. According to McAfee (2009:45), by communicating and constantly updating the public about activities of the organisation and considering their feedback, needs and expectations is now a prerequisite for all successful organisations, is and is critical to the building of trust and credibility in their long-term relationship.

Yamauchi (2001:132) is of the notion that corporate communication should always explicitly convey, express and display the organisation's corporate philosophy, corporate culture as well as its corporate policy to their stakeholders. These three diverse and complex components are most significant in the operation of the company as they basically embody what the organisation is all about. Although all organisations communicate in some ways with their stakeholders, some organisations put in more resources than others in order to manage and maintain their communication activities.

Organisations do not exist in a vacuum but rather they rely on their stakeholders (Kent & Taylor 2002:28). This is particularly applicable to charities and NGOs who rely on the financial support of publics, donors, partners and governments. In addition, organisations are also influenced by other environmental and technological factors (Kent &

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Taylor 2002:28) such as new media platforms and new perspectives on the role of organisations in society (Cornelissen 2011).

2.2.1.3 Importance of corporate communication

In order for NGOs to have an advantage over their competitors, they should always interact with their stakeholders to adapt themselves to their culture (Yamauchi 2001:132). This will help the organisation's long-term intentions to create a favourable image and identity with stakeholders upon which it depends on. Relationship building is the key motive of any corporate communication strategy; this can be internal and external, thereby encouraging a constant understanding with employees and customers, and in turn improving the reputation of the organisation (Cornelissen 2011:5). An effective corporate communication strategy, therefore, becomes a vital element of everyday business for an organisation.

It is essential for organisations to implement on-going corporate communication activities strategically, subsequently reducing uncertainty among stakeholders (Gunson & Collins 1997:220). Uncertainty is created when parties or actors engaged in on-going communication between an organisation and its stakeholders decide not to actively participate or pull out due to accusations of manipulation, or unethical practices. If actors or parties are uncertain about issues it automatically creates negative assumptions, such as untrustworthiness, lack of credibility and doubt amongst both parties, which in turn damages relationships previously created (Cornelissen 2011:6). Organisations, therefore, are now striving to create credible, trustworthy relationships that enable them to be better placed to communicate the vision and values of the organisation.

Furthermore, the corporate communication function can contribute to the strategic thinking process by providing transparent information on stakeholder thoughts, feelings, prospects, observations and sentiments. This can be a remedy to make sure the organisation and its stakeholders work together in joining their interests by being

involved in the creation of objectives (Lubbe & Puth 2002:7). Corporate communication is of utmost importance as it also entails the gathering of strategic information on stakeholders and issues of the external environment by means of environmental analysis, and takes information to the top management to be incorporated into the organisation's strategy formulation processes (Cornelissen 2011:7). Moreover, the duties of corporate communication usually demonstrate the importance of educating, counselling, negotiating and managing relationships with stakeholders, and motivating them to behave in ways that are beneficial to the organisation and its other stakeholders.

2.2.2 The dialogic theory of public relations and corporate communication

In the 1990s, Grunig (1992:23) highlighted the importance of building, nurturing and maintaining relationships with the publics. The terms such as 'dialogic' and 'dialogue' have increasingly been used by communication practitioners to describe approaches to public relations, which focus on how organisations can build relationships that serve both organisational and public interests.

In line with the ideas of the resource dependence theory, Kent and Taylor (2002:25) state that organisations must not exist in a vacuum, and must realise that their existence owes much to the public; therefore, they must extend their communication strategies so as to receive feedback and evaluation on the effectiveness of their efforts. Furthermore, Esrock and Leichty, (1999) and Kent *et al.* (2003) are of the notion that dialogic public relations is considered as a very open, transparent and effective approach for executing public relationship duties in situations when organisations are highly resource dependent. This entails a reliance of a company on external inputs such as assets, energy, labour, and resources.

However, most organisations have still not come to the understanding that they have a responsibility to their stakeholders to provide

unambiguous information thereby initiating and engaging in genuine dialogue with their stakeholders (Rensburg & Cant 2009:238).

Organisations should be able to build and maintain relationships with their internal and external stakeholders to ensure the continued existence of an organisation and hence implement holistically their strategic communication (Kent & Taylor 2002:25). They should take it upon themselves to understand that a dialogue they enter with the public must not be about winning, losing, or compromising (Cornelissen 2011:7). All individuals engaged in a dialogue should have positions of their own, and should advocate for those positions enthusiastically and vigorously as it can help to reach a mutually agreeable way forward for both parties. The organisation's leadership and communication team must simultaneously communicate its positions to its various constituencies, and should consider the feedback they receive stakeholders (Rensburg & Cant 2009:240). According to Kent and Taylor (2002:28), the following are some of the principles of the dialogic public relations theory that enable asymmetrical communication to take place conductively:

Mutuality refers to the understanding that both the organisation and the stakeholders must work together as well as remember that that both cannot survive without relying on each other. Therefore, this requires both parties to co-operate and take full responsibility for equality amongst both parties, which means taking each other's ideas seriously.

Engagement refers to dialogic participants putting in effort to make sure that the dialogue is successful. This means that the parties must be patient and willing to actively participate in the dialogue without being on the outside/periphery.

Collaboration refers to the dialogue dismissing aspects such as trying to win, or reaching a compromise but rather to allow all

participants in the dialogue to have their own viewpoints and be willing to support their positions vigorously and convincingly.

Supportiveness Dialogue involves creating a conducive environment where participants not only feel comfortable to participate in dialogue but are encouraged to participate. This also means that for the dialogue to be successful anyone who wants to participate should feel free to do so as meetings are open to all interested participants.

Commitment is based on three characteristics of dialogic encounters: "genuineness" and authenticity; "commitment to the conversation"; and a "commitment to interpretation." These characteristics mean that dialogic encounters should be transparent, accountable, credible, and realistic without taking advantage of the participants' efforts.

Although partners in exchanges are often of differing status, discussants should consciously avoid the dynamics and limitations of power to manipulate or otherwise control the flow or direction of conversation stakeholders (Rensburg & Cant 2009:238). This means that the needs, desires, and views of other dialogic partners should not only be acknowledged and recognised, but should also be taken into consideration. According to Kent and Taylor (2002:23), many authors have argued that simply having good "dialogues", creating spaces where people are willing and able to speak their minds and listen carefully to one another, is not sufficient for transformational change to occur. Although "dialogue" cannot guarantee ethical public relations outcomes, a dialogic communication orientation does increase the likelihood that publics and organisations will better understand each other and have ground rules for communication.

Furthermore, simply having "good dialogues" is not enough to create change, but that dialogic approaches can help the top management of organisations meet adaptive challenges and create transformational change (Bushe & Marshak 2015:12). Change is very significant for companies when they are trying to introduce, implement

strategies or resolve problems they are facing so that they become successful players operating in their industry. If a party decides to sabotage the communication or dialogic process through manipulation or any other unethical way then the interaction cannot be described as being dialogic.

However, one must not assume that a dialogic approach will change the way an organisation communicates with their publics, or force it to behave ethically. Gunson and Collins (1997:220) are of the notion that organisations can create a conducive environment for "dialogic" communication although this does not guarantee dialogic conversations or that they are behaving dialogically. It can be because other groups or actors in the dialogical process might not agree with some aspects or elements in the conversation and can decide to pull out, or do not actively participate. Therefore, this will not amount to a dialogue. Organisations might also try and impose their will during a dialogue by not taking into consideration the needs of the stakeholders stakeholders (Rensburg & Cant 2009:238). As a result, on-going communication and relationships can be negatively affected, which does not amount to dialogic communication.

According to Kent and Taylor (2002:25), dialogue has, occasionally, been referred to as being a debate or, as some other researchers call, a rhetorical dialogue. Additionally, the rhetorical dialogue aspect is brought forward when most rhetorical dialogues are characterised by having a statement and counter-statement.

In order for two-way symmetrical communication to take place between an organisation and its publics, the dialogue must encompass trust, collaboration, supportiveness dialogue, mutuality, engagement, and commitment amongst dialogic participants (Bushe & Marshak 2015:12). Symmetrical communication refers to the way in which organisations use dialogue to influence and engage in open and transparent relationships with stakeholders by considering their needs, thoughts, feelings, expectations and ideas (Rensburg & Cant 2009:242). A considerate attitude and behaviour of an organisation

which takes the needs of publics and environmental constraints seriously, can act proactively and anticipate stakeholders' needs and improve allocation resources to meet those needs (Pfeffer & Salancik 1978). Furthermore, Kent *et al.* (2003) expanded the resource dependency model to internet-mediated associations, supporting the fact that organisations that give the impression of being more dialogic undoubtedly possess a better understanding of the communication process. Viewing this from the organisation's perspective, Skinner, *et al.* (2013:32) believe that understanding, influencing attitudes, improved relationships and action are the elements that indicate whether communication has been effective or not.

2.2.2.1 Stakeholder dialogue

Palazzo (2010:2) is of the notion that stakeholder dialogue is an organised discussion between representatives of a company and representatives of one of several stakeholder groups that are affected positively or negatively by the daily running of the business. Stakeholder dialogue can also be a component that leverages organisational resources that encourage two-way communication, transparency, accountability and appropriate feedback to the stakeholders.

Hemmati (2002:3) further supports the above author by defining stakeholder dialogue as a process whereby representatives of groups state their interests and listen also to each other's requirements, views and opinions in order to create consensus of their objectives. The dialogue will require the participation of all the parties in order to be successful, although disagreements and misunderstanding among groups can destroy a dialogue. Therefore, organisations should understand that their dialogue with the public is not a process or a series of steps but is, rather, a product of consistent ongoing communication and relationships.

Encouragement and nurturing of a dialogue with key stakeholders has developed into a very important strategy that can aid in the approach

to which businesses are accountable and responsible for meeting legal, ethical and economic responsibilities placed on them by the stakeholders (Kunkel, Gerlach, Frieg, Gorg, Ferguson, Kohler & Herde 2011:47). In this manner, dialogue helps an organisation associate with stakeholders frequently to share information about business strategy and performance. Stakeholder dialogue is regarded as a mechanism for assisting effective communication between company, government, NGOs, and other societal groups. In order to facilitate these dialogues successfully, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:65) asserted that organisations should use a diverse number of social media platforms to reach the largest audience possible.

The importance of stakeholder dialogue can also be seen in the role it plays as an opportunity for enabling innovation and the pressures of not taking into account the threats and perceptions of important stakeholders when engaging in the organisational activities.

2.2.2.2 Different types of dialogue

There are many different forms of stakeholder dialogues, which depend on the issue, the company and its industry, the country, and the goal of the dialogue. Palazzo (2010:2) is of the understanding that one way to differentiate stakeholder dialogues is to distinguish between different levels of participation. The same author suggests that there might be many ways to differentiate stakeholder dialogues. One method often used by non-governmental organisations is to distinguish between different levels of participation (Palazzo 2010:4). Three levels are specified and described below:

a) The first level of dialogue is entirely informative communication. Information is only conveyed in one direction and therefore flows only one way hence it is not an original dialogue. This level in non-governmental organisations entails informing the public/stakeholders about certain decisions within an organisation without any expectations on discussing these issues.

Organisations will therefore have power and full control over the content of information which is to be conveyed and the way it is communicated (Hemmati 2002:4). The onus is only on informing those who need information with no attempt whatsoever to listen to the views of stakeholders. The communication is normally conveyed on company social media pages, radio, printed media among others.

b) The second level is consultative. This level entails getting the views of the public and after gathering this information the top management gets notified. It is not a guarantee that the stakeholders' views will influence the decision-making process although their opinions should be considered, especially in NGOs where they rely on fundraisers, donors, sponsors and the community at large for their day-to-day running.

In order to get more information for this level, opinion polls, surveys, interviews, workshops, focus groups, online-dialogues, and ad-hoc dialogues on specific issues should be encouraged. This level can also be referred to as the orientation phase and is a stage were the organisation tries to research and find opportunities and problems affecting them (Kunkel *et al.* 2011:6).

c) The final level is decisional. This stage entails the collaboration of the business and the other stakeholders to build consensus and reach agreement in terms of implementing projects (Kunkel *et al.* 2011:6). Since stakeholders will be involved in corporate decision making this will enable the company to reach greater accountability, transparency and will also be helped by other stakeholders to improve.

However, in order for stakeholder dialogue to work it requires the guarantee and openness from all the different stakeholders, which leads to long-term efficiency that can lead to innovation. Techniques of communication will include continuous dialogues, partnerships and joint projects as well as holding stakeholder panels.

2.2.2.3 Key factors for the success of stakeholder dialogue

Whenever there is dialogue between different stakeholders there are a number of essential factors that have a major effect in deciding on the value of the results achieved by the dialogue. According to Kunkel *et al*. (2011:47), these factors help organisations, especially when doing process monitoring and attaining guidance on certain projects. Such factors are explained by the above authors and others as:

a) **Leadership**

In this philosophical stance, leadership, or the decision-making body of an NGO, has the capability to encourage a process which has joint responsibility for attaining results. This is an ability that all the groups, players and stakeholders must have in order to work together to develop further. According Latha and Prabhakhar (2011:116), the strategic decisions that the leaders make affect different stakeholders and also shape organisational culture and communication that in turn shape stakeholder perceptions in the relationship.

b) **Cohesion and Relationship Management**

According to Skinner *et al*. (2013:40)**,** stakeholder management will entail characteristics of identifying stakeholders, discovering their needs and reaching decisions on how they can take care of these needs while considering those of the organisation as well as creating ways to address them. This also entails communication being two-way between the organisation and the different stakeholder groups that have an interest in the organisation. Stakeholder dialogues must be structured in such a way that the different actors in the relationship are willing to work together with trust in order to reach the set objectives.

c) **Credibility**

The parties, groups or individuals in stakeholder dialogues must be trustworthy and transparent in order to have a desirable impression if they are to have a major influence on the organisation. Kunkel

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(2011:47) defines credibility in dialogues as the process by which the role players in the dialogue lack bias, and stress the importance of all participants in the decision-making process. However, this is not always realistic as sometimes a party might decide to manipulate or pull out of the dialogue process. Gunson and Collins (1997:220) believe that organisations can create an encouraging environment for "dialogic" communication although this is not an assurance that they are credible or transparent.

d) Knowledge and Competence

In order for stakeholder dialogues to be successful, the different opinions and interests of the participants should be incorporated so as to develop and find better solutions. However, sometimes stakeholders will not offer valuable viewpoints regarding various issues concerning the organisation because there has been little to no communication at all targeted to them. Skinner *et al.* (2013:42) believe that organisations should make sure they facilitate on-going conversations and communication with the stakeholders to ensure that they are always informed of any news. Thus, if participating stakeholders, especially in NGOs, lack information on fundraising activities, the needs of the organisation and implementation of certain projects, among others, it will impact negatively on the implementation of certain projects or programmes.

e) Goal and Process Clarity

A well-structured and planned strategy is vital for developing a common goal among the participants in a dialogue in order to drive the stakeholder dialogue forward to achieve good results. The organisation should make sure the different stakeholders such as employees, communities, corporate critics, financiers and activists among other groups are aware of the objectives that all the parties have agreed to achieve as they are interconnected and dependent on each other. Evered and Tannenbaum (1992:45) support this and

observe that the key to making the dialogue successful will, however, require readiness to change one's own stance in response to others. Therefore, the participants' egos must not be taken into account.

f) Ownership

People implement what they have helped to shape and in the specific case of TTBC/F, different stakeholders have contributed immensely for the NGO to be functioning today. Participants in a dialogue process must be made to feel important by the organisation to such an extent that they must know and believe that their recommendations in a dialogue are taken seriously.

Therefore, if the organisation changes the way they operate as a result of the stakeholder dialogue, it automatically gives the stakeholder groups a sense of ownership in the organisation (Senge 2006:45). However, if the participants sense that the organisation will not endorse their initiatives and views they might observe the process without being really committed, or withdraw silently from the stakeholder dialogue altogether.

g) Delivery and Outcome Orientation

Stakeholders must not get the idea that a stakeholder dialogue is not meant to cater for their needs. The dialogue must be result-oriented, therefore it is important, to identify participants within the stakeholder dialogue, both in the consultation and cooperation processes. Concrete results are particularly vital and usually take the form of an agreement or an action plan in implementation-focused stakeholder dialogues.

h) Inclusiveness

Stakeholder dialogues that do not involve crucial groups lose their credibility and create mistrust among stakeholders who do not take part in them. It also reduces their impact if actors who are important for implementing or supporting the dialogue are not included in the process. It is important to involve a wide range of stakeholders' in order to get a wider range of opinion/views that can help in developing

strategies for the organisation. The main reason this is done is to find out in the first phase of the dialogue (exploring and engaging) which stakeholders are truly relevant to bring about desired changes.

2.3 PROACTIVE DIALOGUE

"Proactivity" has been observed as a very important element in corporate communication (Zoller & Tener 2010:392). Organisations have discovered how important it is to be proactive in the environment today as an increased number of them are now seeking greater engagement with their publics/stakeholders in response to increasing activism. The organisation must act proactively so as to stop threats from taking centre stage as this allows the organisation to build and influence their internal and external environment (Bushe & Marshak 2015:12). Influencing the external environment is crucial as it allows the public to analyse, and, given the chance, to support what the organisation will be proposing to do, which builds trust, credibility and relationships amongst all parties involved.

The process of involving the stakeholders into the organisation's activities can only take place if the public believe that their ideas and needs are being considered. Cheney and Christensen (2001:253) agree that "instead of waiting for threats and opportunities to develop, a proactive organisation attempts to influence and shape external developments" in ways considered favourable in terms of its own goals and objectives.

When organisations communicate proactively, it provides enough time for their communications practitioner to plan accordingly so as to tackle and respond to stakeholder enquiries and queries before they are probed, and to handle complaints before they are made (Bushe & Marshak 2015:22). The expertise of tackling problems before they turn into crises in an NGO facilitates the organisation to be in a position to improve relationships with donors, business organisations, volunteers, the media and the community while raising efficiency for the organisation (Skinner *et al.* 2013:42). Effective proactive

communication requires thought and well-crafted messages. This implies having a forward-looking approach and an engagement with issues that may affect the organisation (Rensburg & Cant 2009:248). If a potential crisis is not detected earlier when it eventually starts affecting an organisation it might prove detrimental, therefore damage control will be difficult to implement.

According to Zoller and Tener (2010:392), proactivity framing is significant because it influences public perceptions of the sources of corporate innovation, change, and social responsibility when it comes to the organisation. Proactivity framing allows an organisation to communicate and persuade the stakeholders of the diverse work that the business is involved in, especially how they are improving the communities by their social responsibility and corporate innovation programmes, among others (Rensburg & Cant 2009:238). In order for programmes to be accepted by stakeholders, dialogues should be encouraged by management so as to understand the correct needs of the public.

Quality engagement practices also provide NGOs with a successful platform for valuable feedback about stakeholders' views, priorities and concerns and in turn leads to better organisational performance if executed properly (Zoller & Tener 2010:392). NGOs that take a reactive approach to stakeholder communication and reach out to their publics only when a critical issue arises may not be successful in engaging their shareholders when they need their support. Organisations should therefore view stakeholder engagement as a proactive, ongoing activity to be maintained vigorously as it enables for mutual trust and respect to be built and maintained (Rensburg & Cant 2009:239). This stakeholder knowledge will enable the organisation to plan ahead, to be flexible in their environment and will also stimulate the organisation's openness to change.

Lubbe and Puth (2002:220) argue that corporate proactivity should entail identifying the needs of the different publics associated with an institution; for example, politicians, the public, the media, the financial

community, shareholders, employees, customers, competitors and suppliers.

According to Zoller and Tener (2010:392), proactivity framing is significant because it influences public perceptions of the sources of corporate innovation, change and social responsibility. The authors are further supported by Lubbe and Puth (2002:134) who theorised corporate proactivity as a "win-win stance" and viewed it as a chance to thoroughly review the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that might face the organisation, with the view to make informed evaluations and to choose the right options.

Lubbe and Puth (2002:133) highlight the importance of research in corporate communication planning, so as to thoroughly review a company's communication plan, public opinion, emerging issues, concerns of stakeholders including fundraising plans, and political climate. They further suggest that an environmental analysis must thoroughly review a company's business plan, including the company mission, marketing plans, human resources, and industrial relations policies as well as previous public relations' activities and results. This can only be successful if the company clearly engages in two-way symmetrical communication with its constituencies which is mutually beneficial to all parties.

The needs for each of these groups can be viewed in terms of financial, economic, political, social, psychological, health and safety concerns (Vielhaber & Waltman 2008:308). Stakeholders require communication; several ways of providing them with relevant information include social media, organisation web pages, informal meetings, notice boards, announcements and internal journals or newsletters (Lubbe & Puth 2002:221).

However, many organisations have discovered that proactive communication might not lead to the desired effect that they require. According to Cheney and Christensen (2001:232), this is because organisations are increasingly having to deal with complications such

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as trying to persuade their stakeholders on issues such as "their protection of the environment," when sometimes the publics do not accept their approach of handling these relevant issues. Furthermore, City of Kitchener (2010:16) believes that communication practitioners struggle to develop communication strategies that extend beyond just conveying the message, and are continuously looking for ways to incorporate both internal and external stakeholders to assist them in maintaining a positive image and reputation. Social media communication is a critical strategy that can be integrated to function simultaneously with other plans, procedures and tactics for the benefit of the organisation. Therefore, proactive organisations must continue facilitating online interactions and must make sure traditional communications can be used in conjunction with social media to enhance and increase the ways they reach out to and engage stakeholders (City of Kitchener 2010:3).

2.4 SOCIAL MEDIA AND ORGANISATIONAL DIALOGUE

The dynamic changes in the internet and communication world have made it easier for people to interact and share information instantly online in ways that were previously impossible to contemplate. Social media has changed many communication behaviours in human beings, such as who we are able to communicate with, ways we communicate with them, when we communicate, where we communicate, as well as changing the way that businesses conducts commerce and handles public and consumer relations. According to Leonardi, Huysmann, Steinfield (2013:1), there are two ways NGOs can communicate. The first is with external parties, such as stakeholders, the community, donors, suppliers and competitors among others using a multipronged strategy that crosses various platforms as well as internally with their employees. Thus, the introduction of social media/networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Youtube, among others, have revolutionised the way that individuals and business organisations interact.

Boyd and Ellisson (2008:211) defined social media as "online technology services and practices that allow individuals to share views, opinions, feelings, construct a profile, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view their list of connections and those made by others within the system." In support, Skinner *et al.* (2013:148) are also of the view that social media is an online platform or service that helps initiate social relations among people of the same interests who wish to be connected. Mangold and Faulds (2009:357-365) define social media as "wide arrange of online word of mouth forums including blogs, company sponsored discussion boards and chat rooms, consumer to consumer e-mails, consumer product or service ratings websites." Furthermore, Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson and Seymour (2011:1) define social media as "forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and videos, among others."

However, as new trends continue to emerge there has been a new development whereby organisations incorporate what they call "enterprise social media." According to Leonardi *et al.* (2013:2), enterprise social media networking are web-based platforms that allow workers in an organisation to communicate messages with specific co-workers or disseminate to everyone in the organisation, openly indicate or indirectly reveal particular co-workers as communication partners as well as post, edit, and sort text and files linked to themselves or others.

2.4.1 Defining social media

The major observation of all the definitions of social media is that the focus is more on the dissemination of information, networking with people, as well as having key conversations amongst different individuals, groups, parties and actors (Edosomwan *et al.* (2011:8). However, enterprise social media includes the use of in-house intranet software as well as social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook

to improve communication and collaboration between employees. These networks are being used for internal communication and social interaction within the organisations to get employees collaborating and sharing tips and ideas about how to improve the workplace. Unlike external uses of social media that cross many public platforms, most organisations implement an integrated social media platform for internal communications (McAfee, 2009:65).

These internal platforms have similar features to those of popular platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Moreover, NGOs and other business organisations must realise that using enterprise social media and social media exposes them to lot of new and potential stakeholders as well as enabling them to access the knowledge and resources, and need to work together effectively and solve business problems. Accordingly, the Nielsen Company (2017:1) also stated that social media is one of the biggest opportunities that NGOs across industries have in order to connect directly to stakeholders, especially as social media users can be receptive users who frequently spend over three hours per day on social media.

Furthermore, organisations must truly invest their time, effort and resources as well as encourage and facilitate conversations with stakeholders through social media. This can be done, for example, by using Facebook to highlight employees and reach out to publics, provide photos of their current employees, create a Facebook event so followers can RSVP and add it to their calendars, and get personal on Twitter by sending personalised videos. According to Mcgrath (2013:1), employees of the organisation must not forget to also be involved in conversations with stakeholders, taking care not to ignore people who take the time to tweet about their organisation and use their LinkedIn Company page to participate in LinkedIn Groups as using the organisation's name to post articles and comments helps the brand to be known by more people.

The researcher uses "online communication" interchangeably with social media and observes it as necessary to define it. According to

City of Kitchener (2010:3), online communication entails the facilitation of information through the use of the Internet for different aspects, including information sharing, interaction and engagement. Online communications comprise social media, social networking, online advertising and email marketing. The element of online communication facilitates information sharing and interactions among publics that are tied to the organisation and thereby promote diversity, individuality and freedom of expression (Avidar 2009:447).

The use of online communication by NGOs continues to grow with 38 percent of active Internet users, which continues to increase as they are positively involved with organisations that maintain their interactions with the publics (Universal McCann 2008).

Unsurprisingly, this use of online communication is inevitably changing the way organisations now communicate with their target audience as more and more stakeholder groups are now diverting from traditional communication channels. Skinner *et al.* (2013:147) believe that the revolution of the Internet has made the stakeholders expectant of personable, relevant, and informative communications from organisations, with transparency, accountability, credibility and responsiveness as the focal point of engagement. Therefore, the researcher views small, niche conversations and engagements on social media having a fruitful long-lasting impact between an organisation and its stakeholders.

Wilcox and Cameron (2012:327) view social media conversations as being unorganised and difficult to control, hence conversations are compelling and offer insight into many issues. This, however, has changed the way organisations operate as corporate communication practitioners are now more than ever required to be focused on creating, developing and maintaining social media conversations between the organisation and its stakeholders (Theaker 2012:257). Furthermore, social media has also changed the landscape for organisations and their stakeholders as this mechanism allows for greater transparency, accountability and credibility to be displayed at

all times during social media interactions when they were not previously used to having important conversations. The landscape has changed for both NGOs and their publics as they are both encouraged to strategically build online relationships that create opportunities for the NGOs such as funding and volunteer recruitment due to networking with different publics (Cole 2014:14).

According to Skinner *et al.* (2013:148), organisations are discovering that it is essential for the publics to engage in conversations and hence are encouraging their stakeholders to discuss how they can improve their service and activities. However, organisations should also make sure to integrate traditional media platforms such as print, text, graphics, photographs, video, radio and television together with the social media platforms for the big picture (Mersham, Skinner & Von Essen 2001:134). The big picture therefore, uses a combination of the two to engage with stakeholders in a timely and direct consumer contact at a relatively low cost with higher levels of efficiency than can be achieved with one of the two communication tools.

2.4.2 Impact of social media on organisational dialogue

The digital landscape in South Africa has been experiencing a healthy growth every year is comparable to that of the global environment, which can be attributed to the emergence of business, communication and marketing of products or services on social media, and which has changed how organisations conduct business (PR-Landscape-South Africa 2014:38). This apparent growth in the use of social media has also been attributed to the change in communication patterns, that is, the way in which communication flows in an organisation. These patterns are recognised to be changing in organisations from two-way communication to many joint communications that usually take place through open platforms (Van den Dam, Nelson & Lozinski 2008:1).

The rise of new digital platforms that focus more on communication has transformed recipients into active participants, content consumers

into content generators, and recipients into producers (Obasanjo 2007; Dmochowska 2008; Mullins 2011).

Table 2.1: South African Social Media Landscape: 2013-2014

Social Network	Growth of Users
Facebook	9,5million-12million
Twitter	5,5million-6,5million
You Tube	4,5million-7million
Linkeldn	2,5million-4million
Pinterest	0,7million-1million
Google+	0,5million-0,5million
Instagram	0,6million-1million
Mxit	7,5million-4,5million

Source: World Wide Worx and Fuseware

Based on the above research on the use of social media in South Africa (Table 2.1), it is evident that social media platforms are experiencing a rise in popularity within the South African communication context. This has led South African organisations to try and incorporate social media in their day-to-day activities so as to build and sustain strong relationships between the organisation and its stakeholder business (PR-Landscape-South Africa 2014:39). Meier (2013) in agreement notes that the majority of the top 50 brands

in South Africa are very much involved in building relationships with their stakeholders on social media platforms as they all have Facebook pages, with an average of 58 000 fans per page and a collective 48% fan growth per month.

Internet use has fundamentally reinvented the way businesses promotes its products, provides product information, posts news releases, provides services, connects with customers, generates new ones, penetrates new markets and drives revenue streams. According to Wilcox and Cameron (2012:329), social media has proved to be a very impactful mechanism as it allows the organisation to generate accessible information to large numbers of people with little to no costs. Most organisations as mentioned are increasingly discovering the importance of social media platforms in their daily business and are now incorporating it as part of their strategic communications to purposefully communicate their goals and objectives to their stakeholders (Theaker 2012:253).

According to Lovejoy, Waters and Saxton (2012:1), social media sites allow for the rapid dissemination of information as well as the rapid exchange of information. These social media tools speed up information exchange by limiting the size of the messages to easily understandable and compatible information pieces. While it may seem difficult to communicate influentially through social media platforms, organisations must consistently try to have as much impact by using these different communication tools creatively to get a reaction from the stakeholders (Heath 2010:548).

In as much as social media has penetrated globally, many organisations did not immediately incorporate it into their communication plans, preferring to analyse and observe it from a distance (Merrill, Latham, Santalesa, Navetta, 2011:1). The view from Parveen (2012:1) implies that most organisations continue doubting the influence that social media has on their companies because of a lack of information, privacy, security, intellectual property,

employment practices, and other legal risks, and overall, an unclear understanding of how social media could be beneficial. However, social media continues to be a powerful tool that harbours many benefits that can help the organisation; for example, an opportunity to interact globally with stakeholders, approach donors, penetrate into previously unreachable markets thereby building relationships and having instant interaction and engagement with stakeholders at little to no cost.

Table 2.2: South African Social Media Landscape 2016

Social Network	Growth in Percentage	Growth of Users
Facebook	8%	12million-13million
Twitter	12%	6,6million - 7,4million
YouTube	15%	7,2million - 8,28million
Instagram	133%	1,1million - 2,68million

Source: World Wide Worx and Fuseware

Based on the above research on the use of social media in South Africa (Table 2.2), it is of utmost importance to notice how social media continues to penetrate the environment with organisations also having social media presence, As social media continues to be a consistent

factor in how organisations conduct their business, it is important to develop an understanding of how it has affected the way that organisational communication transpires both internally and externally (Leonardi *et al.* 2013:3).

According to Cole (2014:5)**,** there has been an increased use of the Internet as well as social media globally. The popularity of social media can be attributed to their characteristics (City of Kitchener (2010:16), in the forms of:

- **Shareability** – online content is easily passed to others. People can share information they like to others by using functions on the page or using the share 'icon'.

- **Speed and convenience** – with traditional media, for example print media, it usually takes a lot of time for something to appear in print, which is now convenient to read, comment, share and follow a story as it develops online.

- **Portability** – with online content from mobile devices, people can access content anytime, anywhere without difficulties.

- **Instant information sharing opportunities** – it is easier, faster and more convenient than traditional communication methods like the newspaper and even television.

- **Interactivity** – with reading a piece in the newspaper and magazine, one cannot share their views or have a conversation instantly with the author, whereas social media provides the ability to have conversations and provide feedback or comments, often in real-time.

- **Companionship and authenticity** – people find fulfilling online relationships through connections and can catch up with long-lost peers, colleagues, friends and communities of shared interests.

- **The rise of the individual** – individuals can now write and share their feelings regarding their thoughts and views and the opportunity to know what others are thinking on certain issues.

- **The shift away from traditional mass media** - social media eliminates the need for a few centralised organisations to convey information, therefore giving anyone using the platform the ability to compile and share information.

- **How the Internet and social media enable people to portray themselves** - plays a significant role in the shift. These platforms not only enable people to express their tastes, attitudes and beliefs publicly but they mean that people can hide and assume new identities.

Merrill *et al.* (2011:1) observes that social media also has its shortcomings such as:

- **Reputational risks** - social media risks can easily equal or exceed its reputational benefits. In as much as social media can help develop the reputation of the organisation, it can also do irreparable damage to the image of the company. General "bad behaviour" by employees, or the posting of embarrassing information, automatically reflect negatively on the organisation, especially when this is sent to the official social media pages of the organisation.

- **Legal risks -** are linked with such aspects as intellectual property, privacy and security. If the organisation wants to implement social media strategy they should seek advice from lawyers who understand information technology law. These legal risks can be properly planned for they can be circumvented and are not that significant.

- **Security Risks** - social media sites pose potentially increased security risks, and if a security breach arises from social media activities, the organisation may face liability.

- **Intellectual Property and Media Risks** - management needs to make sure that their communication team does not post or repost information they do not own as it is an infringement on the intellectual property of others. This can inevitably lead to a breach of contract if the information belongs to one of the organisation's stakeholders, clients or funders.

- **Privacy Risks:** Companies should make sure that they formulate social media strategy to protect the privacy of members of the public who join their social networking pages on third-party sites, or provide personal information through social media sites. Their personal information can be used unscrupulously by other parties thereby damaging their reputation or putting the publics' lives in danger.

- **Operational risks** – the communication team must take care not to unknowingly harbour malware, viruses, and spyware when they are busy accessing social media platforms at work, as they may risk putting the organisation's work in danger. The viruses, spyware and malware can be used unscrupulously by other parties to access the work of the organisation, for example, strategies, plans and policies that can be used against the organisation.

Organisations need to understand the risks social media can pose even if it is not part of their communications plan, or even if the organisation does not actively take part in social media activities. This is because employees may unintentionally send information that may have a major impact on the day-to-day operations of the organisation. Employees are the face or ambassadors of the organisation, therefore if they engage in any social media interaction with stakeholders - even in any non-official capacity - they put their employer at risk (Heath 2010:46). According to Merrill *et al.* (2011:7), most companies have

started implementing social media policies for their employees to protect themselves in case of danger.

However, the publics also cause damage to an organisation; for instance, when harmful opinions about an organisation are intensified by "word of mouth" online, it provides numerous avenues for consumers to share their views, preferences, or experiences with others, as well as to discuss opportunities that have not been taken advantage of by organisations.

2.5 NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

NGOs are operational in virtually every country in the world. However, their work is rooted from their principles and causes. NGOs differ in the work that they are involved with day by day thereby making it difficult to break them down. The reason for this is that they are a diverse group of organisations that defy generalisation, ranging from small informal groups to large formal agencies but with their main focus being the delivery of services to people in need. Wilcox, Cameron, Ault and Agee (2003:410) define NGOs as organisations that are not profit-oriented and serve the communities under several banners, including social service, health, philanthropic, cultural, and religion.

NGOs are increasingly playing a very pivotal role in both local and international communities as they help solve critical issues that are usually overlooked or forgotten by governments (Carol 2013:17). Issues such as human rights, the environment, certain diseases, child development, corporate behaviour and matters of no interest for businesses are big problems that usually go unnoticed by governments if NGOs do not act. Heath (2010:546) states that organisations that are successful engage in two-way communication with stakeholders, which entails that they must send and also receive information by use of different communication channels. This has led NGOs to adapt new trends in the environment, such as

communicating with publics via social media platforms, as previously mentioned.

These organisations put big corporations and the government under increased pressure, especially with the emergence of social media platforms, which are helping them in communicating and passing information to diverse publics regarding issues that may be affecting them (Carol 2013:17). They also play a huge role in civil society as they manage multifaceted issues ranging from societal health, community environmental and social and economic issues, among others (Wilcox *et al*. 2003:413). Furthermore, organisations must ensure that they adapt to the constantly changing online communications environment so as to take full advantage of new and emerging online communications and social networking technologies that they have not been assimilated in their operations (Heath 2010:548).

2.5.1 NGOs in South Africa

Post-apartheid South Africa has been crippled by poor social indicators with over half the population struggling and living below the poverty-line and inhibiting the worst levels of inequality in the world (In On Africa 2013:1). The work of NGOs can be highly credited for their ability to recognise the conditions faced by the nation and their familiarity with the necessary steps needed to rectify these problems, which places them in a strong position to articulate needs and opportunities for public sector research and the extension of services. The work done by NGOs in South Africa and the world at large deserves support from various stakeholders such as donors, communities, governments and other stakeholders. Clearly, without the work of NGOs, governments would not be able to address poverty or promote effective development by themselves.

NGOs are now an active player in efforts to secure social and economic aid packages for side-lined and disadvantaged populations through collaboration with international agencies involved in donor

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funding to foster assistance towards poverty reduction and other social demands. However, NGOs have encountered a variety of conceptual, technical, logistical and organisational challenges that include global recession, increased corporatisation and competition, reduced government funding, intangible government funding criteria, and a general lack of government support (Coalition on Civil Society Resource Mobilisation 2012:1).

According to Latha and Prabhakar (2011:115), some of the challenges also include:

- **Lack of Funds**: NGOs are encountering difficulties in finding adequate and continuous funding for their work. They find accessing donors and formulating the proposals for such as challenging. They have limited resource mobilisation skills and are often not looking for funds that are available locally, preferring to wait for international donors to approach them. There is a high dependency of donors and a tendency to shift involvements to match donor priorities.

- **Poor Governance**: It is very difficult to achieve good governance with founders who wish to own their NGOs for their own purposes. The majority of NGO owners do not have a better understanding of what it takes to have good governance, which is fundamental to NGO accountability and transparency.

- **Absence of Strategic Planning**: NGOs should have strategic plans, which would enable them to have ownership over their mission, vision, objectives, values and activities. This leaves them vulnerable if they do not have a proper plan and structure to implement the above elements, thus if not utilised it makes it difficult to measure their impact over time.

- **Poor Communications**: NGOs also recognise that there is very poor communication within the sector. Most NGOs have little or no access to reliable email and Internet connections. They also lack the expertise

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to communicate appropriately and timeously with their stakeholders, funders and donors who require constant updates regarding the organisation's activities and current projects. This communication can be done by using social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to reach out and network with various stakeholders worldwide.

The South African NGO sector plays a crucial role in supporting the government to solve social, economic and technology challenges that constantly affect communities. The various stakeholders such as donors, volunteers, communities and governments who play a key role in making sure that the development of the country and help solve various problems such as poverty must support these NGOs with funds and other resources so that they can help solve problems at the grass roots level.

2.5.2 Use of online media by NGOs

Sharing information with the public is critical to fulfilling the commitment to accountability, credibility and transparency in every non-governmental organisation. These organisations must make sure that they openly communicate with residents and stakeholders, provide relevant and timely information about their programmes, services and decisions that affect them. These elements can be broadly defined and categorised as social capital and network-building functions (Nah 2009). But where once they (NGO) primarily communicated important information through traditional communications methods such as radio, print and television, stakeholders today expect information to be available in more convenient online formats, including on the organisation's website, and via social media tools like Facebook and Twitter.

City of Kitchener (2010:16) is of the notion that the majority of NGOs spend resources and efforts to communicate with its stakeholders through traditional forms of communications and marketing such as print, radio and television. It is evident that local NGOs must start to embrace and incorporate online communications into their day-to-day

operations. Although it can take time, it can enable them to interact rapidly with their stakeholders and also allow publics to discuss some of the issues amongst themselves without including the organisation in their conversation. Moreover, it is of utmost importance for an NGO not to abandon the traditional communication tools they have previously used, rather they should use these to establish and build a following for specific social media tools for the organisation.

According to Waters, Burnett, Lamm & Lucas (2009:473), the benefits of using social media for NGOs include: being an easy way to learn about their audience; finding new stakeholders thereby expanding their audience; targeting these audiences effectively; creating meaningful relationships with stakeholders and have an understanding of their needs; receiving instant feedback and reaching potential donors, volunteers and other stakeholders at low cost. Social media can also help an organisation disseminate an organisation's activities and announcements as well as promote their work.

In addition, knowing an NGO's communication capabilities and how they collect and use information is essential to understand how they operate in emergencies. Communications are essential during this time, when NGOs must be able to relay and receive information about constantly changing conditions, needs, operational challenges, and warnings. They should also use online communication mainly to provide information about their topics, aims, and actions, and allow "the real facts to be read without our message being distorted by the (news) media" (City of Kitchener 2010:16). Timeliness, clarity, and effectiveness of communications are critical to the day-to-day activities of NGOs and also when they are facing a crisis. As a result, they are highly reliant on technology, specifically Facebook, Twitter and the company website to function and perform well (City of Kitchener 2010:16).

NGOs also use social media platforms to strengthen support for fund-raising activities, which are crucial in terms of encouraging

stakeholders to work with them. NGO websites and social media platforms can be used in collaboration with traditional media to provide information for donors and volunteers. In addition, online networking with outsiders and other NGOs serve to 'strengthen movement networks'. It may give individuals a sense of belonging to an organisation and further its collective identity as an important facet for social movements to be successful (Heath 2010:548).

However, Li and Bernoff (2008:36), argue that there have been minimal evidence that indicate social media is used in conversation and community building. While its usage is rising each day, in some cases there has been little interactivity and relationship-building. Organisations should rather move away from using social media platforms mainly to inform stakeholders of their views, objectives and future projects, instead of engaging in a two-way conversation or dialogue.

However, as researched by Lovejoy *et al.* (2012:1) most of the major NGOs on the Non-profit Times 100 have not embraced social media wholeheartedly. It is a concern because engaging in social media is of great benefit to organisations as it allows them to have meaningful dialogues with their stakeholders, which leads to an understanding between both parties. According to Universal McCann (2008:43), use of social media is highly beneficial to organisations, considering that a large number of active social media users view companies more positively if they have a social media page.

Online Communications allows for engaging with their stakeholders by being able to receive real-time feedback about organisational announcements and participate in conversations.

2.5.3 Creating an online communications Plan for an NGO

The current literature on social media use by NGOs shows the gap between sending out information and creating "dialogue" (Waters *et al.* 2009), therefore, a proper structure for the use of social media to support strategies and communication should be implemented, as

mentioned previously. A communication plan should aim at informing, persuading, and achieving a mutual understanding with the targeted stakeholders. The corporate communication plan provides focus and direction for an organisation's communication to build relationships with strategic stakeholders. Communication is the thinking and the logic behind practitioners' actions, determining what should be communicated rather than how it should be communicated (Steyn 2004:168).

Steyn and Puth (2000:58) believe that a corporate communication plan makes the communication function relevant in the strategic management process by aligning communication goals to the organisational mission. Corporate communication strategies help recognise the behaviours, attitudes and needs of different stakeholders that play a major role in the functioning of an organisation. If this goal is not met, it means the organisation is failing on their goal to develop a social media strategy that inevitably grows virtual communities with stakeholders (Li & Bernoff 2008:35).

According to City of Kitchener (2010:13), organisations should be able to ask themselves several questions before formulating their communication goals and objectives for the year, or long run. Questions to be asked amongst the corporate communication or fundraising team are:

- Who are your target audiences?
- What messages do you want to convey to your audiences?
- What communication tools should you use to best reach key audiences: traditional media or social media e.g. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram among others?
- How, when and by whom will new tools and accounts be created? How, when and by whom will the tools be used? How will the tools be monitored and evaluated?

Conversely, Theaker (2012:252) adds that social media platforms should be utilised expertly and their use should be carefully

coordinated to influence residents and stakeholders, as well as reach previously unexplored areas or potential stakeholders. Theaker (2012:252) is also of the belief that the best method to easily monitor and maintain consistent use of messages and online communication is to integrate the management of social media tools to ensure that:

- information communicated to the public through social media tools is consistent with messaging that has been or will be communicated through all channels – traditional or online;
- information for updates on projects and initiatives corporate-wide is co-ordinated in a centralised location so that social media tools can be updated with timely, accurate information a few times each day as its followers expect; and
- use of social media tools for engagement and information sharing purposes is part of the communications and marketing plans for all key corporate projects and initiatives.

2.5.4 Use of specific online media platforms by NGOs

Online technology has the ability to track and trace transactions and build a portfolio of customers, enabling the practitioner to develop communication campaigns that are aimed specifically at the stakeholders. Practitioners should therefore make sure that their websites and social media pages are consistently updated, taking advantage of the corporation's social media tools for the benefit of the organisation. Online communication platforms mostly used by NGOs are Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and the company website.

2.5.4.1 Website

Websites are not considered as a social media tool although they are an important medium for online communication by organisations. Non-governmental organisations should make sure that they invest their resources into a website as it can strategically initiate communication with various stakeholders. Focus, therefore, should be stressed on cultivating donors as well as improving relationships (Hart 2002). Websites help organisations post anything related to the organisation;

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for example, videos, pictures and information relating to current activities as well as the current management of the business. Furthermore, they can establish dialogue by developing website locations, provide telephone access and public forums where the public can actually engage other parties or groups in discussion about organisational issues (Ingenhoff & Koelling 2010:172).

Moreover, for companies to engage the publics in dialogue it is significant to implement the principle of generating return visits, which encourage visitors on the site to replicate by making sure the visual elements of the website are eye-catching. This also takes advantage of the interactive elements within web pages, thereby enabling and encouraging dialogue by visitors asking questions and getting answers from the organisation (Esrock & Leichty 2000).

2.5.4.2 Twitter

This will entail the formation of an official organisational Twitter account, which will disseminate information about all the NGO's activities, services, initiatives, projects and decisions. Lovejoy *et al.* (2012:1) believe that a single account will enable the NGO to provide information to stakeholders in yet another way that is becoming increasingly popular among stakeholders. Twitter is growing exponentially worldwide, and organisations can check the amount of people who are concerned about them by checking the number of followers they might be having. Research indicates that the most effective use of Twitter by corporations and organisations is to have real people "tweeting" about their business.

As important as the quantity of followers achieved, is the quality of the engagement, the number of conversations and responses generated from status updates and the number of "retweets" and "hash tags" (people who pass on your information) generated.

2.5.4.3 Facebook

Skerik (2012:27) highlights that Facebook is a very important tool of communication not only for individuals but also companies, as seen

by approximately 750 million people logging 700 billion minutes on the social network monthly. Facebook techniques therefore will become more abundant as NGOs become mindful of their effectiveness with regard to reaching target audiences, promoting a specific cause, and further developing other communication strategies (Curtis, Edwards, Fraser, Gudelsky, Holmquist, Thornton & Sweetser 2009:90).

Additionally, non-governmental organisations have normally maintained a single corporate Facebook page where interested stakeholders can choose to follow daily status updates that share information and/or photographs of events, projects and decisions of the organisation. Facebook is a social utility for connecting people with those around them, be it friends, family, co-workers, or others with similar interests, and it also allows users to connect, engage and share information with current and potential stakeholders. It is an open communication channel that stakeholders can use to ask questions, leave feedback and access an organisation virtually without feeling uncomfortable as it can sometimes happen in personal contact. Status updates for the corporate Facebook page are created and posted daily, often twice daily by staff of the Communications and Fundraising department to inform stakeholders and other followers about upcoming events, volunteer recruitment, project statuses, community consultations and job opportunities, among others.

The status updates are created from information collected from various departments or obtained from the organisation's website and the general public is encouraged to add comments to this page.

The page can be a positive addition to the organisation's communication tools by providing a quick, cost effective way to both give out information to community stakeholders in a way that they have identified and want to receive it. When followers engage in any of these activities, that information is shared with their network of friends – an online version of word-of-mouth, which often generates even more interest.

2.6 IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS IN AN NGO

In order for the NGOs to have successful relationships with their stakeholders, it must be trustworthy and willing to build an organisation that is influenced unconditionally by its constituents.

According to McAfee (2009:45), it is of utmost importance for an organisation to build relationships as their different departments might benefit more from accessing and distributing information to their key publics. The day-to-day running of these organisations should translate into information to the public, which will in turn increase their visibility, transparency, trustworthiness and integrity in the eyes of the community. This will entail the public relations or fundraising department create and develop important online dialogues\conversations with the different stakeholders that help sustain them (Wilcox *et al.* 2003:402).

The fundraising or public relations experts must always be focused on centralising the management and use of social media sites by the organisation and the different target audience, as well as create and maintain the content on those sites. Furthermore, the integration of a centralised system that will assist employees to submit information for consideration and potential posting on social media sites, which is of great importance for the survival of the organisation (City of Kitchener 2010:14).

The information gathered by an organisation can be used in many ways, including:

- top management, which uses information to formulate goals, objectives and improve planning and corporate strategies;
- public affairs, donor relations, community relations, and government affairs, which gives an idea of their audiences, groups and those opposing them;

- fundraising department, which uses information for fund-raising activities of the NGO as well as recruiting, hiring and keeping the best-qualified volunteers;
- programme manager who uses it to maintain current projects as well as formulate new project activities;
- the Public relations department, which works closely with the Finance department and the Programme manager to publicise activities and build a "brand name" for the NGO; and
- Human resources, which uses the information to hire, recruit and keep the best-qualified employees.

Organisations that have two-way communication with their publics usually build fruitful relationships that lead to management and the stakeholders working closely together to such an extent that both parties are not willing to jeopardise each other's interests. Through interaction between all stakeholders, information will be conveyed amongst all parties that allow these different groups to participate in declaring their interests and motives in the relationship. However, unlike NGOs, other business organisations participate in relationships with their stakeholders as they view it as just being socially responsible (Botan & Hazleton 2006:507). Therefore, if the stakeholders feel that the organisation is not fully committed, they may cause problems for them.

Non-governmental organisations have many stakeholders they normally rely on for their survival. These are the media, foundations, businesses, estates, community, employees, volunteers, clients, legislators, donors, government agencies, community groups, related organisations and members, among others. These various stakeholders allow organisations to have special dispensation from the media, particularly radio and television by means of non-paid public service announcements and advertisements that promote their causes and seek donations.

Non-governmental organisations act as influencers for people in communities by encouraging them to get involved in innovation,

growth and social change in ways that would not be possible through government programmes. They occupy a gap which allows the public to be creative and cater for their needs that always prove to be difficult to implement through government programmes. Hence digital media has allowed NGOs to reach communities, groups and stakeholders that have proven difficult to reach previously.

2.6.1 Importance of Message Formulation in Non-Governmental Organisations

According to Heath (2010:502), charitable organisations should be able to convince or persuade potential donors of what they need by using digital platforms as they are faster to convey their message. Cole (2014:14) observes that NGOs communicate in order to acquire new contacts; direct visitors to online donation pages; access information about the needs of their stakeholders; empower influential stakeholders to promote the organisation through their online presence; and enable timely and instant communication with the stakeholders. Digital media platforms among other channels of communication can help NGOs inform the various parties about how they can offer help to the organisation and recruit volunteers, as well as plan organisation fundraising activities with the input of stakeholders.

The corporate communication practitioner for an NGO should be able to influence various mass media into paying more attention to the cause of an organisation as to why the charitable organisation is in existence, or how they manage to survive on a daily basis (Cole 2014). It is not of great concern whether the organisation is small or large; the most important aspect is to gain the support of all the most important publics or groups depending on what the organisation deals with, and how they execute their projects. Hence, that is why NGOs should be encouraged to have social media pages that they consistently update to maintain relations with the different groups that are involved with the organisation.

2.6.2 Overcoming mistrust

According to Latha and Prabhakhar (2011:115), NGOs are constantly struggling to get sufficient funding and appropriate resources from donors so that they continue to execute their work in developing and assisting communities by providing much required services. Furthermore, challenges that they face include poor governance, inadequate strategic planning, political interference, capacity limitation within organisations, competition among NGOs in the same sector, lack of accountability and transparency, minimal to lack of branding or communication, inadequate awareness on available opportunities, inadequate networking skills and donor country priorities changes, among others.

According to Heath (2010:502), the coverage of NGOs in this millennium has been mainly about fundraising abuses, lack of credibility, lack of accountability, lack of transparency amongst the top management and other controversies. Heath (2010:501) refers to the Red Cross Crisis Communication in the wake of the September 11, 2001 incident that took place in the United States of America. The organisation failed to execute their duties in a professional and transparent manner as funds were misused and information was not disseminated to the stakeholders who were involved with the organisation until this grew into a crisis. This should be a warning to NGOs to incorporate social media into their daily activities in order to be successful.

It is, however, vital to offer much needed information to the public, which entails updating social media pages of the organisation with information that they require as with funding and donations comes an enormous desire from the public for accountability. Nonetheless, Heath (2010:501) states that lack of information from NGOs automatically gives the public much undesired speculation, which predictably damages its reputation. Organisations, therefore, should strive to keep their stakeholders informed thereby quenching their thirst for information.

NGOs must always be able to deal with different stakeholders as they require a lot of critical information from them. Heath (2010:501) also suggested questions that organisations normally deal with from their stakeholders which consist of:

a. How do they get funds?
b. Do they follow up to do on what they promise their different stakeholders?
c. Is the organisation credible, transparent and accountable in their use of organisation resources?
d. Why does the organisation view themselves in need of funding compared to other organisations?
e. Is the organisation doing enough to serve their community?
f. Do they work together or combine their efforts with other organisations that are doing a similar scope of work, and if no, why not?
g. Who is part of the decision-making body for the organisation and how qualified are they?
h. How qualified are their staff?
i. Do they have volunteers and if yes, how many do they have and which work do they do?
j. Do they have any fundraising standards they abide to?

Charity organisations are no longer immune from scrutiny and audits, consequently they are increasingly in the public eye. They must therefore be able to answer the above questions with a high degree of expertise and transparency as their objectives should be combined directly together with the needs of their stakeholders and community. Furthermore, answering such questions will help the organisation to also evaluate if they have the right employees with the right expertise to develop the organisation as well as recruit volunteers to help with work.

2.7 PROFILE OF THE TEDDY BEAR CLINIC/FOUNDATION

This is an NGO based in Johannesburg, at the Children's Memorial Institute, 13 Joubert Street Extension, Parktown, and was established

in 1986 to provide holistic child protection services with a mission to minimise the secondary harm to children and their families when they enter the child protection system. The NGO provides expertise, information and support in order to make the journey a healing one. Their vision is to make sure that children will not be abused, but if it happens they would like to provide efficient and professional services that effectively promote their healing and stop any further abuse.

The organisation has created several programmes to help them towards effectively meeting the needs of the children. Such provisions include the Support Programme for Abuse Reactive Children (SPARC), which is a diversion programme that aims to empower low to medium risk child sexual offenders to understand the consequences of their behaviour and equip them with the skills and psychosocial resources to change it. Helping youth who exhibit sexually offensive or inappropriate behaviour as early as in childhood, the programme actively works towards breaking the cycle of abuse by preventing these children from becoming career sexual offenders.

It is one of the few organisations that have specialised in providing holistic services to children that have been abused, and have been doing so since 1986. As such, they have developed a wealth of knowledge, resources and practical experience across various professions within the child protection field. In order to increase the reach of child abuse services across the country, they provide training on child abuse identification and management. In this regard, the NGO embraces the medical professionals and students, social workers, psychologists, prosecutors, magistrates, police, child and youth care workers and other service providers.

2.8 CONCLUSION

In summation, NGOs and the community are entities that have profound effects on each other. This is so as they affect and are also affected by their shared environment. There are many complex issues that have affected both NGOs and the public, which automatically

require both entities to work together using their expertise and energy for the good of both groups. Stakeholder dialogue between these actors, therefore, should be strategic, calculative and should enhance involvement by both an organisation and its publics to the benefit of both groups.

With the media scene changing rapidly from both a technological and communication standpoint, NGOs must embrace the use of social media and adapt appropriately. Social media has been so powerful in transforming the way NGOs communicate that many web experts describe their impact as more significant than the introduction of radio or television. Are NGOs ready to embrace these revolutionary changes and be able to formulate creative communication strategies and take advantage of them? Inevitably because of the Internet and new media, public relations will increasingly be about conversations rather than traditional media. Therefore, adaption to the free exchange of opinions across groups and collectives that previously were merely recipients of communication messages should be facilitated.

Several issues are raised when communication practitioners propose introducing social media into their existing communication strategy in NGOs. Training, awareness and guidelines on responsible online behaviour needs to be implemented for all employees. Multiple stakeholder groups, rather than customers only, will hold public relations programmes to high standards of authenticity in a new era of community and business collaboration. The communication practitioner in an NGO should be trained to keep abreast of these developments to make their contributions more meaningful and responsible both for the clients they serve and for the profession as a whole.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The main objective of most research is to probe and find a solution to some problem, or answer to some question and eventually interpret the results into findings that usually lead to practical decisions of different kinds (Lapan, Quartaroli & Riemer 2012:10). In agreement, Goddard and Melville (2001:1) describe research as not just a process of collecting information but rather a procedure of expanding the boundaries of our ignorance that lead to answering unanswered questions or venturing into the unknown to create that which does not currently exist. In this chapter, the general research approach, research design and research methods used for this study are outlined. In-depth explanations are given on study population, sampling methods, data collection methods and data analysis methods.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design entails information about the research to be done, which helps the researcher organise ideas in a certain manner. The researcher used a descriptive research design in this study.

3.2.1 Qualitative Research approach

The researcher used qualitative research to gather and interpret the data as its method to focus on discovering and understanding the experiences, behaviours, emotions, feelings, perspectives, and thoughts of participants to explore meaning, purpose and reality (Strauss & Corbin 1998:11). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005:3), qualitative researchers mostly study phenomena in their natural settings, attempting to make sense or interpret them in terms of how they are influenced and defined by people. Furthermore, Creswell (2009:175) viewed qualitative research as requiring the collection of multiple forms of data such as interviews, observations,

content analysis and focus groups instead of depending on one source. The objective of this study is to examine how non-governmental organisations use digital media platforms to create dialogue with the publics in order to create beneficial relationships.

The research questions in conjunction with the purpose of the study are:

a) How does the non-governmental organisation use social media to strategically build relationships with its publics?
b) How is the process of communicating with the publics through social media managed by the organisation?

3.2.2 A Phenomenological Study

The researcher also uses a qualitative approach as it enables a particular individual, programme, or event to be studied in depth for a defined period of time and understand it within its context (Creswell & Clark 2007:113). Phenomenological study research is an approach that attempts to understand people's perceptions, perspectives and understandings of a particular situation (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:141). The advantage of using a phenomenological study research approach is that it permits the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the research problem as a whole, and may assist in describing, understanding and explaining a research problem or situation.

The researcher used semi-structured interviews in this research as a data collection method. They involved volunteers who manage the organisation's online presence, that is, update information and respond to comments or queries online. The management of the organisation were also interviewed, so as to understand the objectives and expectations of the organisation's online communication and to check if they are satisfied with the two-way online communication of the organisation with the public.

3.2.3 Data collection

Prior to conducting the field work, the researcher obtained necessary permission to conduct semi-structured interviews with the sample. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010:141) when conducting a phenomenological study the interviewer listens closely as participants describe their everyday experiences related to the phenomenon, the researcher must also be aware of subtle yet meaningful cues in participants' expressions and questions.

Researchers should understand that they are not experts of the case and should understand variables of it from the participants' viewpoint, meaning that it is of great importance for the researcher to maintain his/her naivety and openness and continue to be unbiased when managing the interviews.

3.2.3.1 Interviews

Development and construction of the interview questions was done by the researcher who prepared an interview guide comprising of informal grouping of topics and questions that he asked the participants. He also asked the same questions to all the ten participants individually.

The interviews took place face-to-face and telephonically, depending on the physical availability of the participants, starting on the 30th of March 2017, and ending on the 1st of July 2017. Most of the volunteers and employees were interviewed in mutually suitable and conducive settings that include the headquarters of the NGO. Others were contacted by phone, depending on their physical availability, such as those who were on leave or working in different areas. During the interview, data collected were recorded on audiotape and field notes were taken simultaneously by the researcher.

The researcher used semi-structured interviews which are in-depth interviews (often called a 'conversation with a purpose') as a data collection instrument. Semi- structured interviews usually propose

topics and questions to the interviewee, yet they are carefully designed to stimulate the interviewee's ideas and opinions on the subject of interest, as opposed to directing the interviewee toward predetermined choices (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:186). They are also a verbal interchange in which the interviewer attempts to gather information from another person by asking questions. They are highly dependent on the interviewer following up with enquiries to get in-depth information on topics of interest. During the interviews with all the participants each one was given an opportunity to respond and clearly discuss his/her views. A single interview took approximately 45 minutes to one hour.

A researcher must strive not to lead the interview or impose meanings, and attempt to create a relaxed and comfortable conversation (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:187). A semi-structured interview was conducted by the researcher and contained a few main themes that he chose to be discussed, but the number of questions varied depending on a particular participant since it was more of a conversation. The interviews were recorded and transcribed after they had been completed. Interviews can be highly structured, with specified wording and order, or conducted more like informal conversations, with room for flexibility and exploration by the interviewee (Hennink, Huttler & Bailey 2011:110). The researcher also explained to the participants that the reason they were being recorded was because it helps check whether one has recorded their views correctly.

A semi-structured interview also has a unique advantage of allowing and aiding the researcher to establish a rapport with potential participants and therefore gain their cooperation (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:188). Semi-structured interviews were also used as they resemble everyday conversations, although they focus more or less on the researcher's needs for information. They also differ from everyday conversation because we are concerned to conduct them in the most demanding way we can to guarantee reliability and validity (Creswell 2009:179). Additionally, they are conducted based on an

unfixed structure as the topic guide is usually made up of open-ended questions that define the area to be explored.

Furthermore, the researcher's purpose is to gain an understanding into certain issues using a semi-structured interview guide that leads to them co-constructing reality as they co-create knowledge and meaning with the interviewee (Hennink *et al*. 2011:109). A semi-structured interview must not be viewed as a two-way dialogue because the interviewee is the only party that answers questions as well as sharing their story, the interviewer's role being only to facilitate knowledge that produces conversations. As a result, semi-structured interviewing is termed as 'a meaning-making partnership' between the interviewer and the participants resulting in "knowledge producing conversations" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2006:128).

This means that both the researchers and the users of the results can be as assured as possible that the results reflect what the research set out to answer, rather than reflect the bias of the researcher, or a very uncharacteristic group (Mack, Woodsong, Macqueen, Guest & Namey 2005:33). An appointment was also made with the relevant parties consisting of 'volunteers and the management' so as to arrange a date convenient for all the parties involved in the research.

3.3 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

3.3.1 Study Population for the interviews

This refers to all the subjects that need to be studied and comprises all possible cases (persons, organisation units, case records, objects, events, or other sampling units) that constitute a known whole (Yount 2006:1). Furthermore, Goddard and Melville (2001:34) state that a population in a scenario entails a whole set or group that is the subject of research interest.

There are about 51 full time employees who work in the different branches for the NGO in Krugersdorp, Braamfontein, Soweto and Johannesburg hospital. However, there are six full time employees

who work in the marketing, public relations and fundraising department who usually handle the online communication for the organisation. The organisation also has a total of about 15 volunteers in all the different branches who are assigned to different duties. In this research, every participant was interviewed individually. Firstly, the four volunteers who manage the NGO's online presence, update and respond to information were interviewed in one-on-one interviews. The second group comprised the six public relations and fundraising department employees who usually handle the online communication for the organisation and were interviewed individually on their goals, visions, and prospects for the organisation's online communication.

3.3.2 Sampling

Yount (2006:1) states that sampling is the method of selecting a set of subjects for a study in a manner in which the individuals represent the larger group from which they were selected. According to Mack *et al.* (2005:5), research objectives and the characteristics of the study population (such as size and diversity) determine which and how many people to select. The researcher's objective was to examine how non-governmental organisations use digital media platforms to create dialogue with the publics and therefore create beneficial relationships. This objective entails the researcher to select the participants that deal with the public by using social media platforms as well as the website. Therefore the most logical participants to use were chosen purposively and included the six employees and four volunteers that work in the marketing, public relations and fundraising department.

The researcher applied nonprobability sampling with a method called purposive sampling being specifically used. Purposive sampling was used as it allowed researchers to intentionally select participants who have experience with the central phenomenon or the key concept being explored (Creswell & Clark 2007:112). Additionally, Leedy and

Ormrod (2010:147) assert that purposive sampling allows the researcher to select those individuals or entities/units that will provide the most information or data depending on the topic being explored or under investigation. The main criterion the researcher was looking for when choosing the participants was their involvement in the online presence of the NGO.

Furthermore, Brikci (2007:9) states that purposive sampling means that participants are chosen because they are seen as being in a position to generate important information and valuable insight for the project due to their experience and familiarity with the research subject. Elder (2009:6) emphasises purposive sampling as a selection of units based on personal judgement rather than randomisation. This judgemental sampling is in some way "representative" of the population of interest without sampling at random. One of the most prevalent uses of purposive sampling is in studies based on very small numbers of areas or sites.

The researcher first used a sample which included four volunteers from the organisation who have been directly involved in online content management for the organisation from the year 2013 when the organisation started to seriously incorporate social media into their daily activities. The second group comprised six employees from the management who have been working at the organisation for four years as they have been at the organisation since it started using social media and are involved in the communication department. Interviews were conducted by the researcher involving these two samples. The study sample included ten participants in total.

In order to ensure that the sample is credible, accurate and includes the main groups the researcher was interested in, a strategy called maximum variation sample was used. It entails the researcher being able to select vital demographic variables that are most likely to have an influence on participants' assessment of the subject such as gender, age group, having a certain number of children and having

certain current behaviours (Creswell & Clark 2007:112). A maximum variation sample, is sometimes called a maximum diversity sample and is a very distinctive type of purposive sample. The main objective of this technique is to select a sample that, in most cases, is more representative than a random sample as the latter are not always the most representative, especially when the sample size is small (Elder 2009:6).

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The central task during data analysis in the phenomenological approach is to identify common themes in people's descriptions of their experiences despite diversity in the individuals and settings studied (Creswell & Clark 2007:113). According to Lapan *et al.* (2012:263), data collection and data analysis preferably must occur concurrently in a dynamic and collaborative process. The goal of data analysis is to make sense of the data although it cannot be achieved without data collection.

The processes of data analysis consist of making sense of a text and image data. It involves arranging the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, and can be referred to as "peeling back the layers of an onion" (Creswell & Clark 2007:112). Data analysis can also entail dividing several elements of the research only to explore them in their smallest components, which helps the researcher to eventually assign meanings to them. The initial level of analysis will involve coding, which entails classifying qualitative data from observations, interviews, and other sources (Lapan *et al.* 2012:263).

Thematic analysis was also used as a method of data analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006:79), thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic method meant for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes data set in rich detail. However, it goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic. Javadi and Zarea

(2016:34) also emphasise thematic analysis as an approach for extraction of meanings and concepts from data that includes pinpointing, detection, analysis, examining, and recording patterns or themes. Data can be in any form including transcription of an interview, notes in the field, political documents, pictures, and videos.

This approach also means that data are collected mainly through interviews, but an open-ended question might be used followed by targeted questions about the scheduled categories. Moreover, if there is any textual data that could not be categorised earlier with the initial coding scheme, a new code can be assigned. A thematic analysis is also going to be used here as it looks across all the data identified that includes the common issues that recur, which identify the main themes of all the views collected and summarised.

Patterns and categories were established by the researcher after the creation of codes. A highly regarded thematic analysis should assist in the reflection and clarification of reality. The data was therefore analysed by following the six steps of thematic analysis developed and thoroughly outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006:16) in their 'guide'.

- **Becoming familiar with the data**

This step comprised listening to audio recorded data as well as reading and re-reading the data so as to familiarise with the content. This helped the researcher in trying to search for meanings, patterns and other analytic observations. The researcher started having brief ideas with regards to the views of the population studied and what is interesting about these views.

- **Generating initial codes**

In this phase, the researcher produced initial codes from the data. This transpired after he was familiar with the data, and could identify recurring words, patterns, sentences and expressions of the responses. This phase ended when all the codes and relevant data extracts were organised.

- **Searching for themes**

  The researcher ended this phase by sorting the different codes into potential themes and arranging all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes.

- **Reviewing themes**

  In this phase, the researcher broke down other themes into separate ones to look at data within themes that cohered meaningfully, and showed clear and identifiable distinctions between themes.

- **Defining and naming themes**

  The researcher chose themes that tell a more convincing and compelling story about the data. Some themes were divided into sub-themes because of the diverse meaning arising from them despite their connection to the main theme.

- **Findings**

  Finally, the researcher merged the analytic narrative and data extracts to tell the reader a coherent and persuasive story about the data, and contextualised it in relation to existing literature.

3.5 VALIDITY

According to Shenton (2004:69), the trustworthiness of qualitative research projects is usually questioned by authors who are positivists, perhaps because their ideas of validity and reliability cannot be addressed in the same way in realistic work. Nevertheless, validity is not a single, stationary or universal concept, but "rather a dependent concept, inevitably grounded in the methods and objectives of particular research methodologies and projects" (Winter 2000:1). Golafshani (2003:602) stated that initially some qualitative researchers argued that the term validity was not applicable in qualitative research but eventually realised that there was some requirement to measure, check and evaluate their research. Whatever

their opinion, qualitative researchers inevitably came to the understanding that validity is affected by the researcher's perception of legitimacy and rationality in the study and their choice of paradigm assumption.

Qualitative researchers are of the notion that trustworthiness can be maximised or tested to produce more "credible and defensible results" which lead to generalizability, one of the concepts suggested by Stenbacka (2001) as the structure for both conducting and documenting high quality qualitative research. The quality of a research is therefore related to generalizability of the result and thereby to the testing and increasing the validity or trustworthiness of the research.

The researcher should always make sure that the information collected has legitimacy and therefore must seek to maintain a "chain of evidence" so that any information required can be found from the previously collected data in their unanalysed form (Yin 2004:85). When a source shares information with the researcher, corroboration from other sources should be the next step for the investigator and if multiple sources agree, the evidence can be viewed as being valid.

3.6 RELIABILITY

In order for the researcher to guarantee reliability in a qualitative research study, an examination of trustworthiness is fundamental. Seale (1999:266) is of the understanding that while establishing good quality studies through reliability and validity in qualitative research, trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability.

However, Stenbacka (2001:552) is of the notion that reliability should be more concerned, focused and give emphasis on measurements, therefore must not be deemed as having relevance in qualitative research. Furthermore, Stenbacka also maintains that reliability should not be used when trying to examine or evaluate the quality of

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qualitative research, hence if one applies reliability in a study, the research might be deemed as being not good. Bless and Higson-Smith (2004:126) assert that reliability is the degree to which results are dependable over time and an accurate representation of the total population that is being studied. According to Leedy (2010:29), reliability entails the consistency with which a measuring instrument yields a certain result when the entity being measured has not changed.

Furthermore, considering the reliability of study findings requires the researcher to make judgements about the 'soundness' of the research in relation to the application and suitability of the methods implemented and the integrity of the final conclusions (Noble & Smith 2015:34). A reliable test or measurement of certain attitudes, feelings or behaviour must be able to measure the same thing more than once and be able to reach the same outcome or conclusion.

Moreover, if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable and accurate. Item analysis was therefore used to measure reliability of the instrument. To ensure reliability of the analysis, the researcher kept records of all interviews and discussions, and the reliability was also obtained through inter-coder reliability. Kurasaki (2000:197) suggests that inter-coder reliability measures how various codes can be applied and lead to an agreement on data collected in qualitative research in order to produce accurate information drawn from conclusions.

Moreover, when the researcher began to examine the qualitative data that he had collected he was also interpreting the study findings. This involved linking data, exploring the patterns and themes where appropriate, as well as the search and identification of relevant 'irregular, conflicting or distinctive cases' (Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick 2008:431). This process was carried out by the researcher as questions posed to the participants were re-assessed

and the analysis of data re-examined to confirm the validity and reliability of the research process as a means to verify the data as well as avoid bias in the research findings. Therefore, if the results of the study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable and accurate.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

During qualitative data collection, many ethical issues may arise, which fall in one of four categories that are: protection from harm; informed consent; right to privacy; and honesty with professional colleagues (Leedy 2010:101). It is of utmost importance to make sure that participants are provided with adequate information and are aware of the study and its techniques during the interview or discussion, especially as they have consented to the recording of the session Hennink *et al.* (2011:70).

The maintenance of anonymity and confidentiality during data collection also remains a big issue when it comes to data collection in qualitative interviewing. The researcher preserved the anonymity of the participants as well the organisation being researched and by referring to it in the dissertation as "the Non-Governmental organisation (NGO)". According to Hennink *et al.* (2011:70), qualitative interviewing, especially on delicate issues, can lead to emotional responses from participants that researchers must be prepared to deal with professionally. Informed consent was taken into consideration by the researcher as it ensures respect for persons during research. In order to achieve it, the names of the participants in the interviews were not revealed, and kept confidential (Mack *et al.* 2005:9). Names and the designation of the participants were used as rather "candidate A" or "candidate B".

Researchers face ethical challenges in most stages of qualitative research studies, from execution to reporting. These include anonymity, protection from harm, voluntary and informed participation, right to privacy, honesty with professional colleagues,

confidentiality, informed consent, researchers' potential impact on the participants and vice versa. These ethical issues should be implemented by researchers with utmost respect as they are the key to executing their studies without implications to the participants or organisations they are working with.

3.9 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

According to Wiersma (2000:211) a limitation related with a qualitative study is linked to validity and reliability because qualitative research take place in the natural setting therefore it becomes difficult to replicate studies. The research was conducted among a sample of 10 individuals who are familiar with Teddy bear clinic's online communication. Only the participants that meet the criteria listed in the population and sampling took part in the research.

3.10 CONCLUSION

The main aim of this chapter was to outline the methods and techniques used to achieve the objectives of this study. The researcher considered the techniques, procedures, design, and elements to be used and executed throughout the study. After careful deliberation the researcher deemed it appropriate that this study pursue a descriptive research design based on qualitative research. Further clarification and explanations are given on data collection and interpreted from different participants that meet the criteria for this research project, as well as validity and reliability of the instruments used.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the literature review in chapter two an attempt was made to expose the theoretical foundations of social media as a dialogue tool. The literature review led the researcher to uncover the use of social media in non-governmental organisations (hereafter referred to as NGO) within the dialogic theory of public relations and corporate communication, and the resource dependence theory. These theories provided a lens through which the researcher understood how an NGO in Gauteng uses social media as an important aspect of their day-to-day running of the business.

This chapter represents the results of this study to determine "the use of social media as a dialogue tool: a case study of a Non-Governmental Organisation in Gauteng." The purpose of the chapter is to present the researcher's findings as well as analyse and discuss the data gathered by means of interviews and systematic content analysis.

4.2 THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to examine how NGOs use digital media platforms to create dialogue with the publics in order to create beneficial relationships.

4.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In line with the above objective, the research questions are:
- How does the non-governmental organisation use social media to strategically build relationships with its publics?
- How is the process of communicating with the publics through social media managed by the organisation?

- How does the social media communication fit into the NGOs overall communication strategy?

4.4 INTERVIEW PROCEDURE

The interviews took place face-to-face and telephonically, depending on the physical availability of the participants, starting on the 30th of March 2017 and ending on the 1st of July 2017. Most of the volunteers and employees were interviewed in mutually suitable and conducive settings that include the headquarters of the NGO. Others were contacted by phone depending on their physical availability, such as those who were on leave or working in different areas. During the interview data collected were recorded on audiotape and field notes were taken simultaneously by the researcher.

4.5 TREATMENT OF DATA

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The establishment of patterns and categories was done by the researcher after the creation of codes. In order to have a highly regarded thematic analysis, it should assist in the reflection and clarification of reality. It was analysed by following the six steps of thematic analysis developed and thoroughly outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006:16) in their 'guide' on conducting their six phases.

4.5.1 Becoming familiar with the data

This step comprised listening to audio recorded data as well as reading and re-reading it to become familiar with the content. This helped the researcher in trying to search for meanings, patterns and other analytic observations. These led him to form his own views of the population studied and what was interesting about these views.

4.5.2 Generating initial codes

In this phase, the researcher produced initial codes from the data. This came about after familiarising with the data which led to the

identification of recurring words, patterns, sentences and expressions in the responses. This phase ended by organising all the codes and relevant data extracts.

4.5.3 Searching for themes

The researcher ended this phase by sorting the different codes into potential themes, and arranging all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes.

4.5.4 Reviewing themes

In this phase, the researcher broke down other themes into separate themes looking at data within themes to cohere meaningfully, and showing clear and identifiable distinctions between themes.

4.5.5 Defining and naming themes

The researcher chose themes that revealed a more convincing and compelling story about the data. Some themes were divided into sub-themes because of the diverse meaning the codes could raise despite their connection to the main theme.

4.5.6 Findings

Finally, the researcher merged the analytic narrative and data extracts to tell the reader a coherent and persuasive story about the data, which he contextualised and related existing literature.

4.6 DATA VERIFICATION AND VALIDATIONS

When the researcher examines the qualitative data that he/she has collected, it entails the interpretation of the study's findings. It also involves linking data, exploring the patterns and themes where appropriate, as well as the search and identification of relevant 'irregular, conflicting or distinctive cases' (Burnard *et al*. 2008:431). This process was carried out and executed by the researcher as questions posed to the participants were re-assessed, and the analysis of data re-examined to confirm the validity and reliability of

the research process, and as a means to verify the data to avoid bias in the research findings. Therefore, if the results of the study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, the research instrument is considered to be reliable and accurate.

4.7 RESEARCH RESULTS

The participants interviewed by the researcher are referred to as, for example, P1 or P3, which represents Participant 1 and Participant 3. The researcher did not differentiate the employees and volunteers and are all referred to as participants in the study except during the presentation, analysis and discussion of the data.

In analysing the data for this study, findings were classified into categories using codes to group similar themes. The researcher identified these following categories that emerged from the data collected during the interaction with the communication department employees and volunteers of the NGO under investigation.

4.6.1 Adoption and use of social media technologies by the NGO

The participants indicated that the organisation uses three main social media platforms of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. P1 said that "these platforms provide the organisation with the ability to engage in immediate two-way communication with their different stakeholders as shown by their conversations with stakeholders on their posts." According to P2, "all the aforementioned platforms are very important to the organisation and they have incorporated them into their day to day activities."

Furthermore, when the researcher inquired whether the digital media platforms suit the organisation P4 declared that "the social media tools that we use the most to build relationships are Twitter and Facebook, and we are getting more responses from our postings on Facebook and Twitter than our more traditional platforms. In support P7 went on to say that "Facebook and Twitter have allowed us to have more and

more followers by the day, with the youth basically being the most active group when it comes interactions."

In addition, when also asked about the content that the NGO sends to their stakeholders/publics, P5 declared that "the organisation always make use of posts, tweets, videos and pictures to disseminate and interact with their stakeholders. In support, P6 stated that "we normally send our posts, videos, and other updates randomly depending on the importance of the information that we have in that moment." Participant 8 also confirmed this by saying that, "[we post] activities such as upcoming dinners, radio interviews, fun days, open days, new fundraising initiatives." All of these are also part of the content that the NGO disseminates in order to educate, inform, entertain as well as facilitate dialogues/discussions with the stakeholders.

The participants gave an example of how they approach the Nelson Mandela Day as stated by P5 when adding that, "we send posts about the work done by Mandela and what we are trying to do as well to complement that work." They described how they approached this day and incorporate social media in their communication plan to contribute as an NGO. The posts are sent via Facebook, Twitter and Instagram a month before Nelson Mandela Day so that the stakeholders/publics can contribute in any way, including asking for suggestions from the public on how they want the organisation to approach this day (what activities they want the NGO to do on the day or week).

The participants supported the view that information can be sent once or twice a week or in two weeks or a month depending on the importance, as "all of our platforms will basically carry the same information that has been sent, for example on Twitter it will have to appear also on Facebook." They went on to attribute their consistency to the meetings they have daily as mentioned by P5 who declared that "This is because we sit down each day to plan on things we are going to release on our social media platforms depending on the importance and significance of an event/something in that time period."

4.6.1.1 Maintenance of social media platforms

The researcher asked a question on how the organisation manages its social media platforms including which was the relevant department and personnel tasked with handling such activities. The general responses from all the participants gave the impression that the social media duties, including all communication aspects of the NGO, was handled by the communication department. This was confirmed by P2 when adding that "The communication department is responsible for any communication activities that are needed for the organisation, which entails the handling of the social media activities." This was supported by P5 and P6 when affirming that "The communication department basically handles all communication activities." Participant 7 specifically mentioned the personnel that handles social media daily when confirming that "social media activities are handled by volunteers with the overall supervision done by the employees in the communication department."

Process of deciding content to be posted entails that the employees and the volunteers get together and chose the content to be published on their social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram). P5 confirmed this by saying that "We sit down each morning to plan on things we are going to release on our social media depending also on the importance and significance of something in that time period," with P7 going on to assert that "volunteers find information and send it for overall supervision to the communication manager before it's posted."

In order to manage their social media platforms successfully the NGO always tries to establish interactions, engagement and fruitful dialogues with the stakeholders/publics as it is a critical element to increase donor participation. The researcher asked the participants on how they would make sure they handle progressive dialogues with the stakeholders and their answers centred on commitment to engage in immediate two-way communication. This was confirmed by P1 who asserted that, "[we] engage in immediate two-way communication."

P2 adds that "sharing information with the public is critical, (focussing on accountability)." P4 affirmed that "[it is] established through depth discussions," P7 cited that "[we] invite comments and discussions." P8 added that "[we] inform and update stakeholders on organisational activities," and P9 said that "[we] promote dialogue with stakeholders." P10 also highlighted the "establishment of trust and credibility."

Table 4.1: Use of social media by the NGO

Quotes/codes	Comments generated
Purpose (use of social media by the organisation)	**P1** "To engage in immediate two-way communication", "For fund-raising activities of the NGO as well as recruiting, hiring and keeping the best-qualified volunteers" and "Public affairs, donor relations, community relations". **P2** "Scan the competition" **P4** "To build and sustain relationships" **7** "Broader reach of stakeholders" **P8** "Promote and update stakeholders of organisational activities" **P9** "Promote dialogue with stakeholders" **P10** "To educate and entertain"
Process of deciding content to be posted	**P5** "Sit down each morning to plan on things we are going to release on our social media depending also on the importance and significance of something in that time period" **P7** "Volunteers find information and send it for overall supervision to the communication manager before it's posted"

Frequency of posts	**P1** and **P2** "we usually post 2 times a day". **P6** "Information sometimes sent once or twice a week or in 2 weeks or a month depending on its importance" **P7** "Randomly but at least 2 posts a day sometimes a week or after 2 weeks depending on the information at hand".
Types of content disseminated	**P1** "Momentum 94.7 Cycle Challenge in 2013 and also in 2016". **P5** "Upcoming dinners, fun days **P6** "Upcoming dinners, new fundraising initiatives **P7** "Upcoming dinners, radio interviews, fun days, open days, new initiatives for the organisation "Nelson Mandela Day"
Most active group on social media	**P6** "Normally used by the youths" **P7** "Youth are the most active"

4.6.2 Social media as a dialogue tool

A question was posed to the participants regarding what role digital media played in maintaining the dialogue with the stakeholders. It emerged from the interviews that the participants recognised and highly valued this aspect of digital media. The main idea that transpired was that dialogues/conversations between the NGO and their publics was prioritised and greatly facilitated by social media platforms as it enabled parties to exchange ideas as well as

understand the position of others thereby focusing on mutuality and relationships rather than on self-interest.

The majority of the participants also highlighted that it is more important than ever to use social media as their primary way of communicating and getting in touch with their diverse publics, especially their use of Twitter and Facebook which get publics/stakeholders involved in social media interactions with retweets, conversations, mentions on Twitter and tags on Facebook. Among all the similar responses from most participants, the few chosen quotes/comments here were chosen because they express their comments precisely. P6 frequently mentioned "Engaging in dialogues with the NGO and the stakeholders as important." They further indicated that social media is an integral part of modern communications, and has helped the organisation with real-time sharing experience, turning posts/tweets into conversations and maintaining an online presence, all of which is inexpensive.

P1 affirmed that "Different stakeholders have different interests, attitudes and priorities." The above participant went on to highlight that, "effective communication ensures that the organisation receives information that is relevant to their needs and builds positive attitudes to one's company or project." P2 also believed that "sharing information with the public is critical to fulfilling the commitment to accountability, credibility and transparency in every non-governmental organisation with social media as a convenient and faster method to reach the publics." P3 also asserted that, "[we are] connecting online (establishes relationships) thereby creating online dialogue."

Furthermore, P6 added that, "we believe that dialogue offers us an opportunity to prepare for new challenges promptly, avoid risks and realise our full potential." This was highlighted by P10 who said that, "Two-way communication allows the stakeholders to express their views and opinions to help the organisation make better solutions that

involve them as well, leading to the establishment of trust that we have."

Table 4.2: Social media as a dialogue tool

Quotes/codes	Comments generated
Accountability	P1 "To engage in immediate two-way communication" P2 "Sharing information with the public is critical" P8 "Inform and update stakeholders on organisational activities" P9 "Promote dialogue with stakeholders" P10 "Establishment of trust"
Commitment	P1 "ensuring effective communication" P2 "solve problems/plan activities hence strengthening support for fund-raising activities. P5 "sit down each morning to plan on things we are going to release on our social media depending also on the importance and significance of something in that time period"
Credibility	P1 and P2 "Building positive attitudes". P2 "Prompt feedback from the stakeholders to know if we are doing the right things" P6 "Frequently engaging in dialogue" P8 "Promote and update stakeholders of organisational activities" P10 "Two-way communication leading to establishment of trust"
Stakeholders	P1 "Effective communication" "Relevant information for their needs"

	P2 **"P**rompt feedback from the NGO to know if we are doing the right things"
Two-way communication	P6 **"P**rovides opportunity to have dialogue preparing for new challenges promptly and avoiding risks". **P10** "Expression of views and establishes trust"

4.6.3 Social media as a stakeholder relationship building tool

From the participants' responses it is clear that social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook are being used by the NGO to offer great assistance to organisations when it comes to disseminating information that help build relationships with the stakeholders. The participants' main ideas centred on the essence of the building and maintenance of relationships with internal and external stakeholders as being of the utmost importance when it comes to the survival of an organisation, short term as well as long term.

Constant updating for the public using social media on activities of the organisation and considering their feedback, needs and expectations was frequently mentioned by the participants as important elements for building successful organisations. This is confirmed by P10 who asserted that, "Establishment of trust and credibility is created by recurrent and frequent interactions with stakeholders in the long run."

In agreement with the above, Kent and Taylor (2002:23) were of the notion that some authors have previously argued with Grunig's concept of public relations as "building relationships with publics that constrain or enhance the ability of the organisation to meet its mission." This became the turning point in changing the perception in public relations of managing publics and public opinion to a new phenomenon of building, nurturing and maintaining relationships, not

only of those who agree with the activities of the organisation but even those who oppose them.

Furthermore, P6 made it clear how they build relationships using social media. "Digital media communication is a great way to establish yourself as an industry thought leader and invite contributions from key stakeholders, which provides a platform to share information about what you do and showcase your industry knowledge, as well as offer a platform for two-way engagement as we invite comments and discussion."

P6 believed that comments and discussions, if done correctly, contribute to the construction of relations that can be beneficial long-term to the public and also to the NGO. Below are some of the other comments and responses provided by the participants that support the above participant:

P2 was of the understanding that "Openness, trust, involvement, investment, and commitment can be established through social media and depth discussion groups with key stakeholders therefore this contributes enormously to successful relationships." P7 said that "As well as giving you a platform to share information about what you do and showcase your industry knowledge, [it] also offers a platform for two-way engagement as we invite comments and discussion." These comments and discussions if done right will contribute to the construction of relations that can be beneficial long-term to the public.

P8 believed that "Being aware of our stakeholders' needs and expectations is an important precondition for our success and this is done by using social media platforms for frequent two way communication which is beneficial to our NGO, which then contributes to the building and maintenance of relationships." P9 added that, "Different stakeholders have different interests, attitudes and priorities, effective communication ensures that they receive information that is relevant to their needs and builds positive attitudes to your company or project."

Engagement as a two-way and relational communication strategy involves, benefits and is of interest to all parties through improved understandings between organisations and various stakeholders, important for the NGO.

Table 4.3: Social media as a stakeholder relationship building tool

Quotes/codes	Comments generated
Building/Nurturing of relationships	**P1** "Engage in immediate two-way communication" **P2** "Sharing information with the public is critical" **P4** "Established through depth discussions" **P7** "Invite comments and discussions" **P8** "Inform and update stakeholders on organisational activities" **P9** "Promote dialogue with stakeholders" **P10** "Establishment of trust and credibility"
Effective communication	**P1** "Ensuring effective communication" **P**2 "Depth discussions groups" **P7** "Construction of relations"
Principles of stakeholder relations	**P2** "Openness, trust, involvement, investment, and commitment **P2** "Established through social media and depth discussion groups with key stakeholders"
Stakeholder needs and expectations	**P1** "Effective communication" "Relevant information for their needs"

Quotes/codes	Comments generated
	P2 **"P**rompt feedback from the NGO" **P9** "Building positive attitudes"
Stakeholder groups for the Organisation	**P1** **"E**versheds, European Union, Twala global Cargo, Flicker, Summit college, Social Development SA, the Infant trust, Mahons Attorneys and Protea Hotels.

4.6.3.1 Mutuality

The concept of mutuality also emerged from the participants' perceptions as they believed it refers to the understanding that both the organisation and the stakeholders are willing to work together, and were aware that both cannot survive without relying on each other. The NGO recognises that this requires them and their stakeholders/publics to co-operate with each other and thereby take full responsibility for equality amongst both parties, which means taking each other's ideas seriously. This is mentioned by P2 who affirmed that, "publics like "The Infant Trust" are frequently working together with the organisation as they rely on each other with the NGO."

Furthermore, Kent and Taylor (2002:28) encourage that the exercise of power, control or influence be avoided in dialogue so that members feel comfortable when discussing any topic liberally. The researcher observed that it was essential for the participants in dialogue to feel free to express themselves as it leads to more commitment, openness, accountability and trust in the interaction. This was

confirmed by P1 who said, "Social media helps us to communicate, nurture and sustain stakeholder relations" and "Investment, and commitment can also be established through depth discussion groups with key stakeholders." P10 asserted that, "Involvement in dialogue must not be forced to change their stance but rather express themselves freely and without fear."

The general consensus conveyed by these comments is that the NGO must not dominate the interactions or influence other members into deserting their ideas even when they are met with negativity, but should welcome the exchanges for the betterment of work done by the NGO.

4.6.4 Does the NGO use any specific fundraising platforms?

The participants were asked whether they used any specific fundraising platforms and whether these platforms were free or paid. Most participants did not really grasp/understand the concept of "specific fundraising platforms" and the interviewer had to explain in detail what it meant. They went on to mention that the NGO did not use any specific fundraising platforms and if they did use these fundraising platforms they did not know about it. As a means to show that they did not understand the term "specific fundraising platforms" most of the participants kept using the following term "a strong social media presence is key for successful fundraising." For instance, P1 said that, "We do not have a specific way, rather than to only build a strong social media presence." In support, P6 added that, "I believe we do not have any specific fundraising platforms, we are still trying to see if we can launch at least one." This is confirmed by P7 when affirming that, "We do not have any specific fundraising platforms, we are looking into it." The researcher understood this to mean that the NGO top management does not adequately invest, support or see the importance of social media training for the benefit of their employees and volunteers, hence their lack of knowledge.

Additionally, all the volunteers and a few of the employees believed that the NGO top management should be able to support social media training so that their employees and volunteers can acquire skills and learn how to use platforms expertly and strategically such as "crowdsourcing," among other platforms. They also highlighted that in as much as the communication department tries to incorporate social media as part of the NGOs communication plan they still require a lot of work by their top management for it to be recognised as a very important tool to assist the organisation.

According to Zeng (2011:10), the majority of fundraising platforms, for example, crowdsourcing, do allow the public to participate in numerous tasks, from simply "authenticating" information or a photograph as worthwhile to complicated editing and management, such as those found in virtual communities that provide information. This is a form of collective wisdom information sharing that strongly leverages participatory social media services and tools. In as much as following trends, the NGO should also have specific fundraising platforms as they help in coordinating its fundraising activities.

However, despite inadequate support from the organisation's top management as mentioned by P4 that, "there is no social media training and no budget," and P9 when stating, "No employee at our organisation gets any training for social media," the communication department at the NGO is making small strides with regards to fundraising platforms. These sentiments were supported by participants P2 and P3 who declared, "we have tried crowd funding but at a small scale and we believe we are still in its infancy;" statements further supported by P9 who stated, "We have been keen on trying out various fundraising platforms more specially crowd funding although it's still in its infancy."

The main idea that comes out of the interviews with regards to fundraising platforms is that rapid growth of crowdsourcing and other fundraising platforms should encourage the NGO to embrace it fully.

They also provided the benefits that a crowdsourcing mechanism offers, which includes a comprehensive situational awareness proactively; important and new communications pathways. However, to make crowdsourcing a useful tool, the participants suggested that the NGO solve challenges to control both the data and communication capabilities, including sense- making, security, and coordination.

4.6.5 Need for researching digital media trends

The participants were asked a question that aimed at checking whether they researched trends in social media use by NGOs, and if they mimicked how other successful NGOs used social media. The overall consensus from the participants centred upon the importance of the NGO embracing new social media trends as they have shown time and again to possess undoubted potential. The other idea deduced from the interviews was that the duty of the communication department at the NGO is to make sure that they follow trends and ventures that will make the organisation successful. This was also given emphasis when the participants mentioned that they also learn many ideas by checking what and how NGOs such as Red Cross South Africa and others handle their social media duties and use social media.

Activities that the participants learned and endorsed on platforms from other organisations include donations, meetings, upcoming interviews of the NGO new fundraising activities/initiatives, dinners, meetings, changes within the NGOs, and search for new employees/volunteers, among other things. Participants mentioned that they scan other organisations who are basically their competition such as Red Cross to see how they manage their social media activities. This was affirmed by P2 who said, "We definitely do follow trends we observe and see the potential for success and this helps as we can check what organisations such as Red Cross South Africa and even Red Cross America and others who are using social media successfully for their activities, post, and handle dialogues with their stakeholders." P4

confirmed the above by asserting that, "We do our own thing but it is usually influenced by how and what other successful organisations are posting that assist them to be in constant communication or dialogue with their stakeholders". This is also highlighted by P7 who said, "We do not want to be left out, if new technology can help us reach our promised land which is to have more stakeholders participating in our activities as well as donors who will fund us, why not?"

The participants generally had the idea that the NGO spends significant amounts of time online in order to check what and how other NGOs and other organisations handle their digital media activities as it creates an unexpected and unprecedented opportunity. They confirmed that the NGO tries to ascertain or examine its 'publics' content needs on social media so that they do not waste energy disseminating and engaging in dialogues on certain information that is not suitable/beneficial to their public/stakeholders. This allows the NGO to tailor their content and satisfy their information needs.

The participants, especially all of the employees, believe that in order for the NGO to gain a competitive edge, they must always try to evaluate its internal processes as well as new trends and rearrange its teams so that they capitalise on the massive potential that social media possess. The researcher noticed that the NGO also utilises stakeholder insight to have more engaging conversations with the publics to help make better organisational decisions that incorporate the needs and expectants of the stakeholders.

However, P9 believed that, "If it is done then I don't have knowledge of it in our NGO." This response takes away from the work the NGO has been doing of making sure they mimic the positive work done by other organisations in handling their social media activities. This reflects negatively on the NGO as the researcher observed that all employees and most of the volunteers answered positively when

asked if the NGO follows trends, except P1 and P9 who are volunteers.

Therefore the NGO needs to understand the risks that come with not educating and putting everyone (employees and volunteers) on the same page when it comes to actively taking part in handling social media for the organisation. Thus, meetings between these actors should be strategic, calculative and should enhance involvement by all parties involved in handling social media for the organisation as it is beneficial for everyone involved, including the publics/stakeholders.

Table 4.4: Need for researching digital media trends

Quotes/codes	Comments generated
Competency of the NGO	**P1** "Follow trends/ventures" **P2** "We definitely follow trends" scan competition **P3** "Monitor other organisations"
Skills/things learnt or acquired from other NGOs	**P1**"Try to have more donors participating in our activities" **P2** "how they handle dialogues with stakeholders" and "observe to check potential for success" **P5** "Specific content and activities to post" **P9** "have more engaging conversations with the publics"
Reasons for following trends	**P2** "how they handle dialogues with stakeholders" and "observe to check potential for success" **P4** "learn how to maintain stakeholder relations and use social media strategically" **P7** "We do not want to be left out", "have more stakeholders and donors funding us" and "learn about new technology"

NGOs influencing the organisation to successfully follow digital trends	**P2** "Red cross South Africa and Red Cross America amongst other NGOs"

4.6.6 Allocation of resources for the functioning of social media

When it comes to the question of whether the organisation allocates resources for the smooth running of the digital media platforms, P1 declared that, "There is no budget set for the communication department when it comes to the use of social media." This was also confirmed by P7 when declaring that, "there is no set budget for all the social media activities". Additionally, P2 affirmed that, "No employee at our organisation actually get any training for social media."

The majority of the participants also mentioned that funds and other resources to equip the communication department to be able to apply their social media strategies/plans should be allocated from the overall

communication and marketing budget. However, they are told that there are no available funds for such efforts.

It was pleasing to learn that the organisation does allow the communication department to look for volunteers who can help in the running of these social media platforms. P7 mentioned that, "social media is handled by volunteers with the overall supervision done by the employees in the communication department." This was also supported by all employees when they mentioned the importance of social media in the recruitment of personnel to assist them with organisational work. P1 confirmed this when asserting that, "social media assists in recruiting, hiring and keeping the best-qualified volunteers."

All of the participants, except two employees, acknowledged that there was a social media training/ workshop conducted two years ago. P5 declared that, "two years ago we did take our team including volunteers to a social media training/workshop dealing with skills such as internet etiquette." However, P6 did not attend since the participant did not see the importance of this workshop. "I did not attend, I should have though as I have observed the importance of having social media pages for our organisations." To a lesser extent this quote shows that the organisation previously was trying to help both their employees and volunteers get some training with regards to social media, but had stopped because of a lack of funds or did not see the importance of their employees and volunteers gaining valuable expertise, which would benefit the NGO.

As a result, the researcher is of the observation that the NGO has not fully embraced social media usage and, therefore, has not been able to create opportunities and support systems for their employees as well as their volunteers to learn about digital media and the skills required for its successful use, which in turn hugely benefits the NGO.

4.6.7 Social media as a communication strategy tool (strategic tool)

A question regarding how social media communication fits into the NGOs overall communication strategy was posed to the participants. It emerged from the discussions that social media was being used to pursue the strategic goals of The Teddy Bear Clinic, which centre on the creation of public value as they confirmed that they had integrated social media as part and parcel of their communication strategies. The majority of the participants, especially the employees, believed that the organisation was using social media strategically by sending key messages to the public showing it to be important that communication objectives be seen to contribute or complement the achievement of the organisation's overall objectives to the observations of the volunteers. The opinions of the volunteers and employees were therefore quite diversified on this question.

Overall, the researcher believes there is still a lot of work to be done for the organization to fully incorporate social media in their communication plans. This is because some of the participants do not understand what it means to strategically use social media or incorporate digital media into their day-to-day communication activities. This is evidenced when P4 despondently said, "No, we do not have any strategic approach." P6 also declared that, "We cannot really say we have a strategic approach to digital communication although we do plan on the information to be disseminated to the stakeholders."

This is supported by P7 who gave a straightforward "Well I don't think so" when asked if they had a strategic approach to their use of social media. However, P8 responded to the above question by saying that, "Yes we do." P5 also believed the organisation uses social media strategically by responding with "Absolutely, we do." However, P9 answered the above question by saying "No, we do not have, as far as I am concerned." This form of inconsistency when it comes to answering if whether the NGO uses social media strategically or not

continued for the better part of all the different interviews. This shows that either some of the employees and volunteers have not fully grasped or do not fully understand the concept of strategically using social media, or they are not sure about the work that they are doing.

The participants are also of the conviction that social media is changing the way stakeholders and companies disseminate daily, providing prospects for partnerships, involvement, interactivity, and engagement. Furthermore, they explained how they comprehended social media currently as a strategic communication partner significant enough to drive new and unique opportunities for the NGO to engage stakeholders in conversations. The following were responses from some of the participants:

P2 stated that, "these digital media platforms have developed into very essential components in the business setting where organisations are always trying to create and maintain strategic relationships with their internal and external stakeholders in order to rectify challenges they will be encountering or create opportunities for the organisation."

P9 affirmed that, "We use social media primarily to develop and build relationships with a variety of audiences, some of which we have current relationships with."

This is a new digital era where consumers are becoming active users rather than passive individuals, changing dramatically how society operates, and therefore social media should be part of the strategic approach to cater for the needs of the NGO and the stakeholders. These useful technological tools are employed widely and precisely by organisations in order to facilitate and improve communications, therefore the researcher is of the understanding that the NGO is trying to be successful whilst maintaining good relationships with their publics/stakeholders although there are still some reservations, especially from all the volunteers who believe that social media has not been fully incorporated into the communication strategy of the organisation. This is supported by P3 who asserted that, "We are still

trying to fully integrate social media into our communication strategies since management had problems in agreeing to some of our recommendations to enhance our communication activities."

P10 affirmed that, "Our communications strategy closely reflects our overall organisational plan, this means looking at the overall vision and core aims and objectives." This shows that the NGO is using social media as part of the communication strategy with an overall sense of the principles of communications that underpin the plans they would have created and the key messages that it intends to convey. As part of its strategy the NGO is also beginning to drive the use of social media as a component in their campaigns to reach out to their stakeholders/publics although there are a few concerns with regards to whether they have incorporated it fully.

Table 4.5: Social media as a communication strategy tool

Quotes/codes	Comments generated
Does the NGO use social media strategically	**P4** "We cannot really say we have a strategic approach" **P5** "Absolutely we do" **P7** "Well I don't think so" **P8** ""Yes we do". **P9** "No, we do not have, as far as I am concerned"

Quotes/codes	Comments generated
Communication strategy	**P2**"Essential component in the business setting maintain strategic relationships" **P9** "Have more engaging conversations with the publics" and "Develop and build relationships" **P10 "**Reflect our overall organisational plan"

4.6.8 Benefits and limitations of social media platforms to the NGO

The participants were asked what they thought were the benefits and limitations of the social media platforms they used as an organisation. All their opinions and views were not different on this question, and each gave similar to almost similar responses. They believed that when the organisation decided to incorporate digital media into the day-to-day running of communication activities of the organisation, there was a need to improve prevailing relationships between the NGO and its stakeholders/publics. In confirmation, P8 stated that, "It provides us with high-level guidance on the general feeling of the publics concerning the work we are doing." This participant also mentioned that "It helps in understanding the needs of our publics." The general idea when asked why it was important for them to use social media, the participants highlighted the introduction of new digital media technologies as a dominant means that improve the communication strategies and, eventually, performance of businesses and NGOs.

The participants were also asked about the benefits/advantages they get when using social media for their day-to-day running of the NGO.

P4 mentioned that, "it helps us engage with the community, acquire new donors and retaining those donors, reach out to potential donors, social workers and other users, and help the organisation get feedback." In support, P5 asserted that, "[we have] constant communication between parties, which limits errors." Additionally, P6 affirmed that, "It enables you to track issues, public opinion and news, and respond rapidly." P7 also declared that, "It speeds up information exchange." Moreover, P8 went on to say that, "Social media is efficient, effective, fairly affordable, fast communication," and P9 added, "It helps us in our outreach programmes."

Overall, the main idea developing from the interviews was that social media sites allow for the rapid dissemination of information as well as the rapid exchange of information, which were elements not previously provided by other platforms (traditional mediums for example television and radio). These social media tools speed up information exchange by limiting the size of the messages to easily understandable and compatible information pieces. While it may seem difficult to communicate influentially and frequently through social media platforms, the NGO is not yet consistently trying to have as much impact as it could by using these different communication tools creatively to get a reaction from the stakeholders.

P6 went on to say that social media is a great technological tool that enables the organisation to "retain donors, engage community and generate traffic for our actual site as it leads to more potential stakeholders." This technological development is also helps the NGO create several opportunities to spread content quickly, cost effectively and also reach larger audiences. Probably the most important reason mentioned includes the active role that social relationships play in the globalisation of the NGO as they serve as an effective means to generate knowledge on abuse and other social issues affecting the continent and internationally, as well as source funds for the organisation. Among other issues mentioned was the importance of digital media platforms in its role as an effective online tool for

customer word-of-mouth communication that builds an NGO community.

The key benefits of using social media for NGOs that were mentioned frequently by different participants include: being an easy way to learn about their audience; finding new stakeholders thereby expanding their audience; creating meaningful relationships with stakeholders and have an understanding of their needs; and reaching potential donors, volunteers and other stakeholders at low cost of communication. All these are factors that the NGO considers when creating its communication plan, which acts as an anchor and provides them with focus and direction for their communication, thereby building relationships with strategic stakeholders, as mentioned by P10.

Regardless of the encouraging prospective benefits to organisations when using social networking and social media technology, there are significant challenges and hazards that must be addressed. Some of those were identified by P1 who declared that, "It gives people a license to be hurtful," and also P2 who highlighted "hacking and use of pictures and videos for defamation" as a big problem. Unfortunately, some people say whatever they like, which might give the NGO a bad image and lead to other detrimental effects for the organisation, for example, people who post videos or posts that incite abuse to children, women and the NGO.

Additionally, P5 believed that, "It sometimes does not capture the audiences that we want it to capture." Moreover, P7 believed that, "staff will sometimes not know how to encourage the type of participation that will produce meaningful change and therefore one must not expect immediate results," and P8 who adds, "It is not customer/stakeholder-centric."

A summary of the participants' comments dwelt on the fact that their social media lacked assuredness compared to face-to-face conversation or other traditional forms of communication as well as

the frequent defamation and hacking of the organisation's social media pages from unknown parties. Other reasons given revolved around the messages not reaching the right target audiences as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are normally used by members of the Generation Y (younger generations). Generation Y is a concept that describes human beings born during the time of computers and the internet and are said to be the first generation and largest stakeholder group to be technologically savvy and the most visually sophisticated of any generation (Palfrey & Gasser 2008).

Furthermore, when the NGO tried to communicate via social media with the older generation the message does not reach them or is misunderstood as they lack the expertise to use some of the platforms. The result of this shows that the NGO has minimum communication with the older generation, which still uses other traditional forms of communication, for example, announcements on radio.

However, according to P7, "If not handled properly a few grievances by publics on social media could mislead companies." Social media can lead to companies overreacting when they get emotional with issues raised on the platforms. Additionally, if not handled properly, this overreaction would usually lead to the NGO making wrong decisions, therefore organisations should also pay attention to other traditional platforms (newspapers, radio and television), conversations and stakeholder interactions outside social media. This was supported by P8 who affirmed that, "Social media has not yet completely delivered on its promise of making organisations more stakeholder-centric, but it has definitely moved the conversation forward."

4.7 DISCUSSION

In this section, the researcher discusses the findings based on the theoretical framework explored in the previous chapters.

4.7.1 Adoption and use of social media technologies by the NGO

The researcher believes that the interactive aspects of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, the social media platforms used by the organisation, must be recognised as a stepping stone and used to their best advantage rather than be viewed as a hindrance/obstacle. Parveen (2012:1) believes that an organisation's digital media platforms are created for communication purposes between the organisation and the publics. Hence, they should be utilised as such including high frequency of updates and feedback as well as high participation in dialogues. It should use social media as an opportunity for collaboration, participation, interactivity and engagement with the stakeholders.

The researcher observed that the NGO also has a need to interact frequently with their stakeholders/publics, which is a major reason for them to use social media. This is supported by P1 and P2 who mentioned that, "We usually post two times a day." The NGO also disseminates information on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram depending on the importance and urgency of the message being communicated. This is done so that the organisation can have a broader reach of its stakeholders, which is a very important element of social media. This view is supported by Merrill, *et al.* (2011:1) who add that social media is a powerful tool that provides the NGO with the opportunity to interact globally with stakeholders, approaching donors, penetrating into previously unreachable markets thereby building relationships, instant interaction and engagement with stakeholders.

However, the responses from some of the participants highlighted a lack of participation when it comes to the posts on social media

platforms. P9 cited that, "Sometimes we don't get responses on our posts except likes and shares, therefore it becomes difficult to tell what the stakeholders are saying." In agreement, P7 believed that, "If you post too infrequently, your audience will forget that you exist and you will quickly fade from their minds." To a lesser extent, the NGO might not be updating their social media platforms as frequently or it could be that the content they are creating is just too much for the stakeholders on their feeds or is not easily understood.

The participants also frequently highlighted that the NGO posts more information in the form of videos, tweets, brochures, and an in-house newsletter called the Friday focus, pamphlets, posters and pictures. The information the organisation normally posts include activities such as upcoming dinners, future radio or TV interviews, upcoming fun days, gala dinners, and old and new fundraising initiatives, as cited by P6 and P10. The group mentioned more frequently on being the most active on social media and with regards to the NGO activities was the "youth." It is because this generation, referred to as Generation Y, is very active online, having grown up being technologically savvy, which has aided them in developing skills and knowledge, particularly for communication. Audience research, therefore has always been recommended as it is of utmost importance when determining content suitability depending on the type or audience an organisation is dealing with.

If this is executed well by the researcher with high commitment, the NGO will benefit a great deal. This is supported by Altheide (2015:12) who described that the organisation must have a sense of commitment to offer itself over to dialogue, interpretation, and understanding in its interactions with its stakeholders. This commitment shows that the NGO relies on social media platforms to successfully execute their communication strategies/plans and other activities that contribute to the day-to-day running of the organisation.

4.7.2 Stakeholder Dialogue

Most of the participants interviewed also reasoned that digital media platforms have developed into an essential component in the business setting, which are strategically using Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to create and maintain strategic relationships with their internal and external stakeholders. This shows that the NGO is trying to create a dialogical environment where stakeholders are encouraged to participate and engage in dialogues with the organisation as a means of rectifying challenges that they are encounter and/or create opportunities for the organisation. This is supported by Kent and Taylor (2002:22) when discussing the principle of mutuality in the dialogic theory. They declared that mutuality must recognise a responsibility to engage in communication on an even playing field, which means considering all ideas from different stakeholders. The researcher can therefore say that the NGO is using the social media dialogically although they sometimes do not get the desired results or engagement/interactivity from the stakeholders. This is supported by P9 who asserted that, "We sometimes get likes and shares only".

The fast-growing digital landscape allows a variety of stakeholders, as well as the media to develop messages and content via social media platforms as well as setting up forums or inviting other forms of feedback, which allows organisations to gain a better understanding of their stakeholders' interests and attitudes so as to fine tune their communication. However, according to Kent and Taylor (2002:22), there must be empathy in the dialogues, which means the organisation should be sensitive and understanding in supporting and confirming public goals and interests.

The majority of the participants mentioned that the organisation takes care to try and encourage the stakeholders to participate in genuine dialogues with it in an unstructured way so that the organisation learns about their opinions, objectives and interests. Thus it tailors information relevant to their needs. This is supported by Kent and

Taylor (2002:23) when discussing the principle of propinquity in the dialogic theory. They declared that propinquity must recognise communication as being an authentic interaction with publics in that it is unplanned/spontaneous.

This is further supported by Kent and Taylor (2002:24) who suggested that dialogue and on-going communication can only be nurtured and maintained properly if the needs and interests of the stakeholders in the interactions are well known. The interaction between the NGO and those individuals and groups impacted by, or influence the organisation jointly, therefore co-manage relationships and build meanings to reach mutually beneficial agreements and goals.

However, one of the participants indicated that setting up digital communication platforms does not necessarily mean that the organisation is acting dialogically, especially if there is no follow up or facilitation of the conversations and if it is only one-way communication from either party. This is supported by Gunson and Collins (1997:280) when they stated that if one person interrupts the dialogic process through any form of influence, undermining, or exclusion then the result will not be dialogic, since there is communication breakdown.

It should be noted that the presence of a dialogue means there is two-way communication between parties with a message and feedback taking place two ways between different parties. This kind of communication is credited wholesomely for the construction of a foundation for any given relationship. The researcher also observes that the dialogue between the organisation and its stakeholders is limited or non-existent at times as the stakeholders do not engage dialogically with the NGO on their posts/social media platforms.

4.7.3 Stakeholder relationships

During the interview the participants frequently used the word "two-way communication" to emphasise the importance of reaching out to

potential donors, social workers and other stakeholders. They also implied that by reaching out to these publics they get necessary feedback through social media platforms that helps their organisation to communicate and build relationships with their stakeholders. In agreement, the rise of new digital platforms, which focus more on communication, has transformed recipients into active participants, content consumers into content generators, and recipients into producers (Obasanjo 2007; Dmochowska 2008; Mullins 2011).

This type of communication also allows the stakeholders to have conversations that are productive with the NGO in as much as the stakeholders want to help or want clarity or more information on certain activities that it is engaged in. Moreover, Van den Dam, *et al.* (2008:1) note that with the introduction of new social media platforms, communication patterns are recognised to be changing in organisations from two-way communication to many joint communications that also take place through open digital media platforms. This is supported by the participants who frequently mentioned that it has never been a prerequisite of the NGO to initiate dialogues/interactions with the public all the time, but they rather invite the publics to instigate the content and subject to be discussed, either with different publics or with the organisation only. This encouragement has greatly helped the NGO to always keep in touch with their stakeholders and listen to their concerns, opinions and objectives for the betterment of the NGO and stakeholders.

According to the majority of the participants, the engagements and interactions they have with the stakeholders would not have helped them build relationships with the stakeholders if the majority of participants had no trust in how they handle the social media. McAfee (2009:45) has intimated that communicating and the constant updating of the public about the activities of the organisation and taking into consideration their feedback, needs and expectations, is now a prerequisite for all successful organisations, and is critical to the building of trust and credibility in their long-term relationship.

Social media helps in building mutual trust and satisfaction between organisations and stakeholders, which is part of the communication plan of the NGO.

Social media activity, mentioned by another participant, shows that 50 percent of the posts sent by the NGO always encourage interactions with the public as the creation of relationships with them is at the apex of their communication strategy. However, the other 50 percent is allocated to informing the publics/stakeholders about certain information, as stated by P2 when saying, "The activities promoted on these platforms include donations, meetings and upcoming interviews of the NGO." The researcher can deduce, therefore, that the NGO uses its social media for the purposes of creating relationships with the stakeholders with their ability to inform that the latter plays an imperative role.

From the results gathered from the participants it is very clear that the NGO is trying by all means to create a conducive environment for relationship building with the public, where participants not only feel comfortable to work with the NGO but are encouraged to participate in enhancing the relationship. Participants have revealed that every time the NGO updates its page, it is to inform their stakeholders of an upcoming event and to discuss certain matters.

4.7.4 Commitment

The researcher also observed that there is a perception of commitment that emerged from the participants' comments as they acknowledged that they work hard in order to make sure that social media genuinely contributes to the benefit of the organisation. This concept is based on three characteristics of dialogic encounters: "genuineness" and authenticity; "commitment to the conversation:" and a "commitment to interpretation." These characteristics mean that the dialogic encounters should be transparent, accountable, credible, and real without taking advantage of the participants' effort in the dialogues (Kent & Taylor 2002:28). Firstly, genuineness means that

stakeholders communicate on social media truthfully as the NGO expects each participant to deliberate their points/ideas in an honest manner as they are much more likely to come to mutually beneficial solutions. Secondly, commitment to the conversation entails reaching a compromise among the NGO and its stakeholders so that they can work together for a common purpose or understanding.

Finally, commitment to interpretation means that the NGO and its stakeholders are open to different ideas, therefore it aides them to reach an understanding based on the acceptance and deliberations of others' positions (Heath 2000). This is supported also by Altheide (2015:12) who believed that dialogic participants are advised to be committed to make sure that the dialogue is successful. This means that the parties must be patient and not rush into decision-making.

P1 affirmed that, "Our organisation was committed and asked for help and support from the public on the Momentum 94.7 Cycle Challenge in 2013 and also in 2016,"… "Constantly check time and again what is being written about the organisation," … "Effective communication ensures that they receive information that is relevant to their needs," and "Two way communication allows the stakeholders to express their views and opinions to help the organisation make better solutions." This is reinforced by P2 who stated that, "We follow trends and ventures that make our organisation successful," and "Stakeholders feel the need to have a partnership with the organisation," also that "Commitment strengthened the relationship with various stakeholders."

However, to a lesser extent, the researcher noticed a lack of commitment from the stakeholders/publics as they sometimes do not participate in the conversations or posts disseminated by the NGO. This was affirmed by P3 who said that, "sometimes we don't get responses at all on our posts except maybe likes therefore it will be difficult to tell what the publics, stakeholders are thinking." Even if the posts are sometimes posted irregularly as mentioned by P4, "We normally post whenever we have content that is necessary to

disseminate to the public - sometimes two times a day, a week or even a month, although we have an in-house newsletter called the Friday Focus we send out every week." This is also the responsibility of the stakeholders "To check what is new" and contribute input towards the decisions to be made by the organisation. From the responses of the participants, it was clear to the researcher that the organisation was working hard to create a conducive environment were participants not only feel comfortable to participate in the dialogue with the NGO but they are encouraged to participate. Hence it shows the organisation is committed to maintaining dialogues with the stakeholders as well as using ideas provided for the benefit of the NGO and will also would like the stakeholders to be devoted in these dialogues.

4.7.5 Allocation of resources for the functioning of social media

The researcher also noticed that most of the volunteers and employees do not possess the expertise to strategically use social media platforms as they mention that they did not receive any social media training. This shows that they use social media on a trial and error basis, with most of their employees and volunteers increasing knowledge by learning on the job as mentioned by P3 when stating that, "One learns on the job." According to Parveen (2012:1), the majority of the NGOs continue doubting the influence that social media has on their companies because of a lack of information, intellectual property, employment practices, and other legal risks and overall, an unclear understanding of how social media could be beneficial.

City of Kitchener (2010:16) is of the notion that the majority (of NGOs) have not spent resources and enough effort in communicating with their stakeholders and take for granted how cost-effective and influential digital media platforms can be for them. This was confirmed by P4 who said that, "There is no social media training and no budget" and P9 who also stated that, "No employee at our organisation get any training for social media." Moreover, taking into consideration that

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the organisation is an NGO and operates under a strict and limited budget, the communication department is committed and taking it upon themselves to creatively use social media platforms that are cost effective, for example, Facebook.

The researcher is of the belief that younger managers/participants (Generation Y) are more likely to adopt social media and allocate sufficient resources and budget to it because they are technologically savvy rather than the older generation/participants who are still running the NGO. Additionally, the younger participants at the NGO use social media by frequently interacting with stakeholders as well as contributing to and sharing content. However, the older participants gave different answers when it came to them seeing the importance of using social media. This is confirmed by one of the older participants - P6 who mentioned that, "We had some social media training seminars and workshops done two years ago but I did not attend, i think I should have though as I have now observed the importance of having social media pages for our organisations." As this participant missed the social media training seminars, it shows that some people do not take social media usage by the NGO as important, and because the older generation is not really active online compared to the younger generation/participants.

4.8 MAIN THEMES EMERGING FROM THE RESEARCH

After a detailed discussion on the categories, this section presents and expands the main themes that have emerged from the research. The researcher follows the steps of treatment of data, mentioned above.

4.8.1 Theme 1: Lack of support

This theme refers to the lack of a budget or of allocated resources to assist the NGO in the quest to strategically use social media in their communication and marketing plans. The researcher noted that instead of recognising that digital media use is the new phenomenon

driving organisation goals, objectives and visions, the NGO still lags behind when it comes to supporting the communication department's social media initiatives. This is confirmed by the following remarks issued by the participants, with P1 saying that, "We had to learn by focusing on how other organisations handle their social media., and P4 went on to affirm that, "There is no social media training and no budget." Likewise, P9 stated that, "No employee at our organisation gets any training for social media." To support these statements, P7 also said that, "We do not have any specific fundraising platforms, we are looking into it." The researcher understood this to mean that the NGO's top management does not adequately invest in social media training for the benefit of their employees and volunteers, hence the lack of knowledge. This was also confirmed by P2 when asserting that, "No employee at our organisation actually gets any training for social media, this is a skill that one can learn and end up implementing it on the work that the organisation is engaged in."

The statements above show that the participants were not happy that their social media efforts were not being supported by the NGO to some extent, recognising that the skills or resources that the organisation was going to offer would also benefit the NGO. If the NGO top management were to embrace, adapt social media and allocate a budget/resources for their different organisational activities to their employees and volunteers it would enhance their efforts as they would be able to run more social media platforms/campaigns as well as provide opportunities for collaboration, participation, interactivity, and engagement with the NGO stakeholders/publics. Digital media will benefit the organisation as mentioned by P6 when stating that, "help us engage with the community, acquiring new donors and retaining them donors, and reach out to potential donors."

4.8.2 Theme 2: Proactive use of social media

This theme describes the feeling amongst participants that the NGO is proactively using social media platforms for the execution of

organisational activities. Proactive use of social media entails using digital media as an 'early warning monitoring system' to detect the needs and wants of the stakeholders and publics as well as providing a new opportunity to keep them updated on the activities the organisation is involved in. According to Zoller and Tener (2010:392), quality engagement practices will also provide the organisation with a successful platform for valuable feedback about the stakeholders' views, priorities and concerns and in turn lead to better company performance if executed properly. To show that the NGO was proactively using social media the following views and terms were mentioned frequently by participants: "Reaching out to stakeholders beforehand;" "allows the stakeholders to express their views and opinions to help the organisation make better solutions;" "we do frequent scanning of trends and ventures that can be beneficial to the organisation;" "Do a bit of research before sending information that is relevant to their needs and builds positive attitudes;" and "we prefer to be proactive because messages spread by organisational members are more credible."

The researcher believes that the communication department of the NGO most probably asked themselves some questions before establishing the right platforms and content to disseminate to their stakeholders in their day-to-day meetings. Questions like, "What type of content does our audience like to consume? What kind of content is best aligned with our vision, mission and objectives? Which type of information is suited better to Facebook and Twitter? These views are expressed by P7 who said that, "Content is also decided on by the communication department after the day to day meetings."

The interactive aspects of Facebook and Twitter, which are the social media platforms that the NGO mostly use are also their greatest advantage. The researcher noted that, for example, the organisation's Facebook page was created for communication purposes between the organisation and the publics, hence targeting a platform which they knew most of their stakeholders use, and that it would be easier

to proactively communicate and inform the stakeholders of issues such as new fundraising activities, upcoming interviews and dinners, meetings as well as reaching out to potential volunteers. This was reinforced by P7 who thought that, "Most of our stakeholders do use these platforms so it does make sense to use them."

Content is the cornerstone of every social media strategy and therefore to be proactive, information to be disseminated to the stakeholders/public should be properly scanned and the information chosen to satisfy their needs. This can be seen as the participants expressed their views as follows: P6 stated that, "Before anything is posted we have to sit down as the communications department to decide if the information to be posted is relevant or goes along with our vision, mission, and objectives." This belief is supported by P7 who mentioned that, "Supervisors decide whether the information is right for publicising or not." Successful social media strategy is made up of both proactive components, like strategy and campaign planning, like utilising real-time events and opportunities. This is supported by P8 who stated that, "[we have a] proactive stance, offering our own solutions for discussion and stimulating innovations in the organisation activities."

Furthermore, the NGO also views stakeholder engagement as a proactive, ongoing activity to be maintained vigorously as it enables for mutual trust and respect to be built and maintained. The following were views expressed by P7: "Encouragement and nurturing of a dialogue with key stakeholders must be developed into a very important strategy," and "It can aid in the approach to which businesses are accountable". This stakeholder knowledge will enable the organisation to plan ahead, to be flexible in their environment and will also stimulate the organisation's openness to change.

4.8.3 Theme 3: Opportunity for collaboration, participation, interactivity and engagement needs to be emphasised

This theme refers in general to a positive perception to a large extent, of digital media platforms by the participants when it comes to their use of "Twitter and Facebook" as an opportunity for collaboration, participation and engagement with stakeholders. The fundamental principle of these social media networks is to provide employees and volunteers the ability and opportunities to create, collaborate and share ideas and information in an open manner, all of which are important facets for building and nurturing stakeholder development, knowledge and engagement for the benefit of the NGO. This was confirmed by the following remarks from P4: "Provide the organisation with the ability to have immediate two-way communication with their various different stakeholders," and "Connect to a large audience spreading across the globe," while P6 stated, "We usually post two times a day on the different platforms depending on the importance and urgency of message." P4 added that, "Openness, trust, involvement, investment, and commitment can also be established through depth discussion groups with key stakeholders," and "Leads to more potential stakeholders viewing our organisation engaging community, retaining donors, acquiring new donors and building thought leadership," and P6 who declared that, "These platforms, more especially Facebook and Twitter usually attract more stakeholders by having links that directs them to our websites and our emailing lists."

However, to a lesser extent, the participants also expressed the difficulty they face when trying to engage in dialogues with the stakeholders. They sometimes do not participate in the posts or conversations that the NGO would have started in the hope that they do take part in the discussion of important matters affecting both them both. This is supported by the views from some of the participants, with P6 expressing that, "Information can be sent once or twice a week or in two weeks or a month depending on the importance like I have

mentioned before, and all of our platforms will basically carry the same information that has been sent, for example, on Twitter it will have to appear also on Facebook". P 7 also added that, "If you post too infrequently, your audience will forget that you exist and you will quickly fade from their minds," and "If you are posting too often, you will become a complete nuisance and they will dread seeing your posts overcrowding their feed," and later said, "[it is] difficult to encourage the type of participation that will produce meaningful change." Moreover, P9 confirmed this by "Sometimes we don't get responses at all on our posts except maybe likes, therefore it will be difficult to tell what the publics, stakeholders are thinking."

A few of the participants also went on to confirm their belief that face-to-face conversations drive home the message more effectively and reach the right audience compared to social media platforms. This was confirmed as P6 stated that, "[it is] not as assured compared to a face-to-face conversation," and "Sometimes it does not reach the right audience," also "Facebook and Twitter are normally used by the youths and therefore message might not reach the older generation." This is reinforced by Selwyn (2012:6) who established that social media platforms do not actually encourage innovative or communal participation and interactivity that is often anticipated and are instead "Most often assumed for the one-way inactive consumption of content."

4.8.4 Theme 4: Positive content dissemination

This theme refers to the participants' opinions that they are doing everything in their power to make sure that information is properly disseminated to the stakeholders. Social media has changed how organisations communicate with stakeholders, therefore it is important that the NGO takes advantage of this new media, especially for communication purposes. The NGO has taken digital media's considerable strengths that include rapid dissemination and intensification of content and the ability to lead informal conversations

that make it a very important tool for the organisation. Additionally, P3 stated that "We disseminate, using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and the organisation website as our major platforms," and P5 who declared that, "Using social media to communicate enables us to respond to critical comments or correct any misunderstandings as well as spreading our message." In support, P7 added that, "We normally post whenever we have content that is necessary to disseminate to the public, sometimes two times a day, a week or even a month," and "we also disseminate as much information as possible to encourage two-way communication."

The NGO is creating content, sharing photos, videos, exchanging information and ideas in virtual communities and networks with their stakeholders/publics thus the latter can virtually offer feedback and publicise their opinions as well as participate in the NGOs issues without hindrances. This is reflected by the following remarks, by P4 and P8 who said, "These platforms allow the organisation to send pictures, videos, pamphlets, posters," and "The activities promoted on these platforms include, donation meetings, new fundraising activities/initiatives," and "updates on future activities."

This impact of digital media has powerfully changed the way the NGO communicates as seen by the way they now incorporate social media to work in conjunction with traditional platforms despite digital media platforms seemingly taking over the communication activities of the organisation. This is confirmed as P4 stated that, "we get more responses from our postings on Facebook and Twitter than our more traditional platforms." This was reinforced when P9 expressed that "we have an in-house newsletter called the Friday focus we send out to the public regarding everything that would have taken place, and updates on future activities." All of this information greatly facilitates opinion sharing among the NGOs stakeholders/publics, which ends up greatly assisting both the organisation and the NGO.

4.8.5 Theme 5: Lack of clearly defined and measurable social media objectives

This theme is brought about by the researcher through the realisation that the participants, to a larger extent, could not identify or recognise the primary or secondary objectives of why the NGO was using social media. The researcher further understood that in as much as the NGO uses social media they (participants) did not have the expertise to measure these objectives as well as check whether they were achieved or not. This emerged when P1 asserted that, "We just post information to different publics with the hope that we keep on building different audiences," and "We just make sure we disseminate information to the necessary stakeholders." In support, P2 stated that, "We just post information to different publics."

However, to a lesser extent, the researcher observed that in as much as their objectives were not clearly defined, the overall sentiments of the participants revealed that they used social media for a number of very significant activities that contributed enormously to the day-to-day running of the organisation. This was clearly expressed in some of the participants' responses as they asserted that, "The objectives of the organisation are always to increase the number of donors, participants, volunteers," and "These are measured by comparing the number we had the previous year and the number we have managed now," and "Top management which uses it to formulate goals."

4.8.6 Theme 6: Uncertainty on the regularity and frequency of updates

This theme refers to the participants' views that there is a general lack of knowledge/clear understanding with regards to the number of updates and the frequency in which content should be disseminated by the organisation on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. The researcher noticed that the NGO lacks consistency when it comes to updating the social media platforms, thus it does not follow any pattern of disseminating information, as they express randomness in the way

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they distribute information through their social media platforms "Facebook and Twitter".

This was given emphasis by a number of participants who expressed a variety of comments with the key word being "irregular." P1 and P2 expressed that, "The NGO usually posts two times a day on the different platforms depending on the importance and urgency of the message being communicated. Furthermore, P3 stated that, "We normally disseminate information to the public sometimes two times a day, a week or even a month," and "Sometimes we don't get responses at all on our posts except maybe likes, therefore it will be difficult to tell what the stakeholders are thinking." In order to show the inconsistency in how information is disseminated, P5 asserted that, "So basically posts are sent randomly depending on the importance and significance of something/event in that time period, for example we sent information during the week or two weeks or a month before Nelson Mandela Day including the activities we are going to do on that day."

Moreover, P7 put everything into perspective affirming that, "There are few skills that will make or break your social media success more than posting frequency/" The respondent went on to also say that, "If you post too infrequently, your audience will forget that you exist and you will quickly fade from their minds, however, if you are posting too often, you might irritate the stakeholders and they will not like seeing your posts overcrowding their feed." The NGO therefore should be able to strike a balance between the right time to disseminate information as well as the precise information to send in order to achieve its corporate goals or objectives, which, on that end they have been inconsistent at best.

4.9 CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to examine how non-governmental organisations use digital media platforms to create dialogue with the publics in order to create beneficial relationships. The researcher

observed that due to the new technological trends, especially social media, it was of utmost importance to understand how an NGO uses social media to create sustainable organisational-public relationships that are beneficial to both parties. The data analysis above demonstrates how the NGO in question handles its social media duties as well as whether they have successfully incorporated digital media platforms into their day-to-day communication activities/strategies. This chapter discusses the results of the research and a final attempt is also made to link these findings to relevant theories reviewed in the preceding chapters.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The main focus of the previous chapter was to provide the analysis, discussion and the interpretation of the study's findings. The purpose of the study was to analyse how an NGO in Gauteng uses social media as a dialogue tool to engage with the stakeholders. The participants were chosen because they handle all the communication activities of the organisation, therefore it is of utmost importance to understand how they incorporate social media into the day-to-day running of the NGO. This chapter offers some direction in the manner in which the NGO uses social media platforms dialogically for the benefit of the organisation, including how to maintain interactions as well as relationships with their potential or committed stakeholders/publics who participate in the activities of the NGO. This chapter therefore gives an overview of the study, focusing on the main

objectives, conclusions and recommendations, as well as its limitations and value.

Theoretical objectives were formulated in order to achieve the main purpose of this study, which are as follows:

5.2 THEORETICAL OBJECTIVES

The theoretical objectives of the study were to:

- examine how Non-Governmental organisations use social media platforms to create dialogue with the publics in order to create beneficial relationships;

- conduct a literature review on the resources dependence theory and the dialogue theory in order to operationalise the concept of stakeholder relationships for the purpose of constructing the interview questions; and

- conduct a literature review on social media platforms in order to establish the state of current knowledge on the use of social media by NGOs.

The theoretical objects of this study were achieved in chapter two, which mainly focused and elaborated more on specific aspects essential in achieving the study's main purpose. This chapter discusses the major elements such as the importance of stakeholder relationships and corporate communication, the use of digital media platforms by the NGO, the resources dependence and dialogue theories.

5.3 DISCUSSION

The section below provides the answers to each of the research questions posed by the researcher. This study was based on the theoretical framework of resource dependence theory and dialogical theory. Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) argue that the theory's central focus is that organisational survival depends on the ability to acquire essential resources from the external environment. This is shown by the results acquired by the researcher that the organisation is

constantly building relationships with stakeholders. This is being carried out by the use of social media platforms that include Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to build and nurture dialogues that connect with publics and different stakeholders globally.

The other theory that the study was built on was the dialogue theory. Kent and Taylor (2002:4), stated that participants in a dialogue should be viewed as persons and not as objects, thereby putting more emphasis on the idea of a dialogue being conducted in a spirit of mutual equality. The results acquired by the researcher show from the interviews that the participants recognised and highly valued this aspect of two-way communication. They also show that dialogues/conversations between the NGO and their publics are to be prioritised and greatly facilitated by social media platforms, which enable parties to exchange ideas as well as understand the position of others thereby focusing on mutuality and relationships rather than on self-interest.

5.3.1 What digital media platforms do the NGO currently use in order to engage with stakeholders?

Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are the three main social media platforms being used by the organisation. These are essential to the NGO as they offer a real opportunity to connect with stakeholders in totally exceptional ways when addressing complaints and interacting in instantaneous chats, which offer immediate value to both the organisation and the stakeholders. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:65) suggest that when an organisation incorporates social media it must contemplate on how to use the media, select the right platform as well as check for ways to continue being social. Having said this, the researcher believes that the NGO has chosen the right platforms as they kept in mind their stakeholders and potential stakeholders as well as the message/content to be disseminated.

Accordingly, the Nielsen Company (2017:1) also stated that social media is one of the biggest opportunities that NGOs across industries

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have in order to connect directly to stakeholders, especially as they can be receptive and particular users who frequently spend over three hours per day on social media. Additionally, the researcher noticed that Facebook was the platform that was first used before other social media platforms (Twitter and Instagram) were introduced to the public by the NGO. The Facebook page of the NGO, therefore, is well known by the stakeholders/publics compared to the Twitter and Instagram page of the organisation.

The responses from the participants also showed that Facebook is the principal social media platform preferred by their stakeholders to cater for their communication needs. The participants also indicated that Facebook was being used as a tool to facilitate the NGO's collaboration, participation, interactivity and engagement with the stakeholders. It is also apparent that locally and internationally one of the most popular and frequently used online sites amongst both young people and adults is Facebook. This is so as Facebook is a social utility for connecting people with those around them be it friends, family, co-workers, or others with similar interests, which allows users to connect, engage and share information with current and potential stakeholders (City of Kitchener 2010:16).

Furthermore, Skerik (2012:27) highlights that Facebook is a very important tool of communication, not only for individuals but also companies as seen by approximately 750 million people logging 700 billion minutes on the social network monthly. Therefore, the communication between the NGO and the stakeholders should have an intimate, one-on-one feel to it and respect of the stakeholders' preferences and boundaries should be taken into consideration. Facebook techniques, therefore, will become more abundant as NGOs become mindful of their effectiveness ito reach target audiences that promote a specific cause, and further develop other communication strategies (Curtis, *et al*. 2009:90).

Furthermore, participants mentioned that in as much as they are utilising these three social media platforms they always discover that the stakeholders also have a profound desire to actively engage, especially on Facebook, as they have continuously become both the producers and consumers of information. Therefore when it comes to these social media platforms being used by the organisation, the stakeholder expects the NGO to be focussed on the dissemination of information that is fresh and relevant with the employees and volunteers investing their effort to stakeholder engagement. The participants affirmed that the NGO disseminates truthful and sincere information on their social media platforms as failure to do so could harm the   NGOs credibility. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:65) echoed the same sentiments when they affirmed that the first steps are to understand the stakeholders needs, develop or post authentic content that suits their needs and also try by all means to avoid overly-professional content offerings.

The researcher observed that the majority of the participants frequently mentioned that the information that appeared on Facebook also appeared on the organisation's Twitter and Instagram page at the same time. This indicates that these platforms are linked to each other and therefore serve the same purpose of being communication channels for the NGO. As the NGO communicates the same messages across all their social media platforms it ultimately leads to the avoidance of uncertainty in the disseminated content.

The participants mentioned that the use and introduction of Twitter and Instagram was done so as to cater to the different stakeholders that were now participating in the NGOs online activities. This is supported also by Kaplan and Haenlein 2010:65) who asserted that organisations should use a diverse number of social media platforms so that they can reach the largest audience possible. These new platforms would help the organisation keep up with the new technological trends and not be left behind as the modern world is now too dynamic and constantly changes time and again. Similarly,

Theaker (2012:252) believes that social media platforms should be utilised expertly and their use carefully coordinated to influence residents and stakeholders as well as reach previously unexplored areas/potential stakeholders.

The researcher observed from the participants' comments that social media is a very valuable component as a communication tool in the day-to-day running of the organisation. Their comments also show that the NGO continues to include other new social media platforms so that they continue to reach out to other stakeholders that would like to work with the organisation. Moreover, if an organisation does not fully incorporate social media as part of their communication activities and understand the how essential it is to formulate a social media strategy it will eventually lead to problems when trying to build relationships with stakeholders.

Consequently, in as much as the participants mentioned the importance of utilising social media it is also important to note that they also sporadically highlighted the importance of using social media in collaboration with traditional media (newspaper, magazines, radio, and television) among others.

5.3.2 How does the non-governmental organisation use digital media to strategically build relationships with its publics?

The majority of the participants, especially the employees, believed that the organisation is using social media strategically by sending key messages to the public, showing it to be important that communication objectives be seen to contribute or complement the achievement of the overall objectives of the organisation compared to the observations of the volunteers. Overall, the researcher believes that there is still much work to be done for the organisation to fully incorporate social media in their communication plans. This is because some participants did not understand what it means to strategically use social media or incorporate digital media into their

day-to-day communication activities. Opinion on this issue were therefore quite diversified.

The current literature on social media use by NGOs shows the gap between sending out information and creating "dialogue" (Waters, *et al.* 2009). Furthermore, the indication from the participants is that the NGO is trying to use these social media platforms strategically to interact, share, and converse with stakeholders in a way that ultimately facilitates the creation of an online community with their stakeholders. Posts that fill the above function were also referred to as "community." There are effectively two aspects to this function when the NGO is posting: dialogue and community-building. First, there are posts that trigger direct interactive conversations between organisations and their stakeholders. Second, there are those posts whose primary purpose is to say something that strengthen ties to the online community without involving an expectation of interactive conversation (Waters *et al.*, 2009). This element relates to the social capital and network-building functions, which suggests that it is possible in the social media platforms of the organisation (Nah 2009). In addition, posts normally sent by the NGO that give recognition and thanks and acknowledgment of current and local events can be categorised as "community-building", while "responding to stakeholder messages" and "response solicitation" are more directly associated with the creation and facilitation of "dialogue". What binds all these categories is the goal of building and engaging with a productive and healthy online community comprising the organisation and its stakeholders.

5.3.3 How does digital media communication contribute to the relationships with stakeholders?

Taking into consideration the data collected, the researcher observed that the NGO tries by all means to disseminate information to the public and tries to initiate dialogues although sometimes there seems to be limited communication in terms of responses of the

stakeholders. This fact is supported by most of the participants who frequently mentioned key words such as, "likes and re-shares only," "lack/limited engagement" instead of full on dialogues, engagement or conversations. Therefore, to a lesser extent, one might say that the publics/stakeholders need to increase their participation, either by initiating dialogues with other members or participating in the interactions instigated by the NGO.

According to Skinner, *et al.* (2013:40) stakeholder management will involve identifying stakeholders, ascertaining their wants and needs and reaching decisions on how they can take care of these needs, bearing in mind those of the organisation as well and creating ways to satisfy these needs. The participants recognised and mentioned that how they handle their social media or communication duties is very significant. This means it has established two-way communication between the NGO and the different stakeholder groups that have an interest in the organisation and other potential groups. These dialogues must be structured in such a way that the different actors in the relationship are willing to work together with trust in order to reach the set objectives, as mentioned previously. The researcher also observed that there were external areas where the organisation identified social media as a channel to develop and maintain long-term relationships with the different stakeholders/publics. These include engaging donors, informing the community about services, developing a broader view of the community, and getting more people involved in the work of the NGO.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The research points to the recommendations listed below.

- Future research may wish to investigate further the connection between specific aspects of the organisational mission and social media utilisation.

- The NGO should be able to strike a balance between the right time to disseminate information as well as the precise information to send in order to achieve their corporate goals or objectives as well as catering for the needs of the stakeholders.
- The NGO should also try and introduce social media training workshops for their employees as well as the volunteers.
- The NGO should allocate an effective budget to traditional and digital media channels, with the   most effective channels receiving majority of the resources.
- The NGO should address the limitations by conducting additional research in order to analyse other dimensions of using social media platforms in NGOs.

5.5 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

A few NGOs are fully utilising the dialogic capacity of social media although most use their sites to simply disseminate one-way messages (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Diga & Kelleher, 2009; Kent, 2008). The researcher further noticed that much of the research on the use of social media by NGOs is done and covered mainly in Western countries. This study can thus contribute greatly to the understanding of how NGOs in South Africa use social media, which is an area that has been rarely covered.

NGOs that therefore use social media platforms as well as those that do not will benefit from this study as it would give them an indication as to how one such organisation is using these digital media platforms strategically as a means of creating dialogue with the publics in order to create beneficial long-term relationships for both the organisation and the stakeholders. Additionally, they will also be assisted in understanding how important social media platforms can be when dealing with significant aspects such as stakeholder interaction and engagement, stakeholder feedback as well as stakeholder support.

5.6 LIMITATIONS

The main limitation of this study is that the researcher would have liked to have more time for the interviews with the participants although most of them did not have much time for interviews. The other limitation is that the interviews were time-consuming and led to delays for the researcher as he struggled to get hold some of the participants for several months because of their workload and were busy most of the time.

5.7 CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to examine how non-governmental organisations use digital media platforms to create dialogues with the stakeholders in order to create beneficial relationships. It shows the importance of the resource dependency theory, which emphasises the importance of consistently managing external dependencies in order to acquire vital resources (employees, stakeholders, finances, investment, assets and raw materials) from the external environment for the organisation's survival. It further shows that stakeholder support is an important resource that the organisation depends on daily and must be taken seriously.

The study reveals that social media platforms that the NGO is using are essential for their resourcefulness, and the organisation is trying by all means to take advantage of every available opportunity to effectively reach their publics. The findings conclude that the NGO only uses its social media platforms for a variety of purposes that include social capital, network-building, for information purposes, community-building, responding to stakeholder messages and response solicitation, which is linked directly with the creation and facilitation of dialogue. All of this is done by the NGO with the ultimate goal of facilitating the creation of an online community with their stakeholders that helps them create beneficial relationships for both the stakeholders and the organisation. It also shows the importance of the dialogical theory of Kent and Taylor who support the view that

organisations and the public are inseparably tied together and that dialogue should not only be about understanding the position of others, but to empathise, commit to stakeholders and support them accordingly as they are critically dependent on each other.

The use of these social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter has created hope that the NGO can finally be able to fulfil the potential it had, which is to create a more active, "dialogic" and interactive stakeholder/public society. The findings also show that social media appears to have created opportunities for engagement, interactivity, and dialogue that are qualitatively different from those offered by traditional websites that were solely being used by the NGO. It would thus be reasonable to conclude that social media platforms must be considered by the NGO as they possess considerable potential as an organisational communication and stakeholder relations tool, as they present communication opportunities that differ dramatically from organisationally supported websites.

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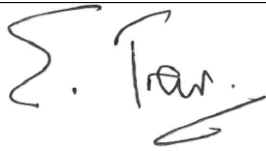
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23 October 2017

LANGUAGE-EDITING
This is to certify that I language-edited the dissertation "Use of social media platforms as a dialogue tool: a case study of a non-governmental organisation in Gauteng," by Kumbirai Felix Mwadiwa in fulfilment for his MTech: Public Relations Management in the Faculty of Human Sciences.

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Vaal University of Technology

Your world to a better future

VUT

**ACCESS LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION TO
CONDUCT RESEARCH**

	22 Edwin
Conroy Street	
	P O
Vanderbijlpark	
	1911

The Director
The Teddy Bear Clinic
13 Joubert St, Johannesburg,
2193
13 February 2017
Dear Ms/Mr

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I am a registered Master's student in the Department of Hospitality, Tourism &
PR Management at the Vaal University of Technology. My supervisor is Mrs Anna
Oksiutycz-Munyawiri.

The proposed topic of my research is: Use of social media platforms as a dialogue tool: A case study of a Non governmental organisation in Gauteng.

The objective of the study is:

(a) To examine how Non governmental organisations use digital media platforms to create dialogue with the publics in order to create beneficial relationships.

I am hereby seeking your consent to conduct a research study based on the outlined topic and objectives. To assist you and your department in reaching a decision, I have attached to this letter:

(a) A copy of an ethical clearance certificate issued by the University

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor. Our contact details are as follows:

Mrs Anna Oksiutycz-Munyawiri: 0833794 9979/0115592 849

MR Kumbirai Felix Mwadiwa: 0745104373

Upon completion of the study, I undertake to provide you with a bound copy of the dissertation and attest that the information collected will solely be used for this research study and will not be made public.

Your permission to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Signature

Name

TEDDY BEAR CLINIC
FOR ABUSED CHILDREN

9 September 2016

I, Angela de Bruyn, in my capacity as HOD Fundraising, at The Teddy Bear Clinic for Abused Children, give consent in principle to allow Mr Kumbirai Felix Mwadiwa, a student at the Vaal University of Technology, to collect data in this company as part of his Masters research. The student has explained to me the nature of the data to be collected.

This consent in no way commits any individual staff member to participate in the research, and it is expected that the student will get explicit consent
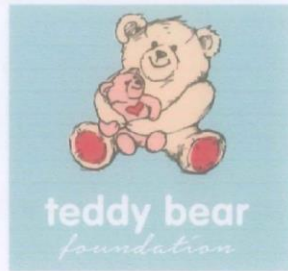
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from any participants. I reserve the right to withdraw this permission at some future time.

In addition, the company's name may or may not be used as indicated below.

	DISSERTATION	CONFERENCE PAPER	JOURNAL ARTICLE	RESEARCH POSTER
	√	√	√	√

Angela de Bruyn

9 September 2016

2 March 2017

I, Shaheda Omar, in my capacity as Clinical Director, at the Teddy Bear Clinic for Abused Children (Foundation), give consent in principle to allow Mr Kumbirai Felix Mwadiwa, a student at the Vaal University of Technology, to collect data in this company as part of his Masters research.

The student has explained to me the nature of the data to be collected.

This consent in no way commits any individual staff member to participate in the research, and it is expected that the student will get explicit consent from any participants.

I reserve the right to withdraw this permission at some future time.

In addition, the organization's name may or may not be used as indicated below.

	DISSERTATION	CONFERENCE PAPER	JOURNAL ARTICLE	RESEARCH POSTER
Yes	√	√	√	√
No				

Dr Shaheda Omar
Clinical Director

Research and Innovation Ethical Clearance Certificate

Applicant:	KF Mwadiwa (MTech Public Relations Management)
Project:	Use of social media platforms as a dialogue tool: A case study of a Non-governmental organisation in Gauteng
Institution:	Vaal University of Technology
Date Approved:	8 May 2017
Ethical Clearance Number:	ECN30-2017
Approved: Yes/No	Yes

DR SM NELANA
CHAIRPERSON: RESEARCH & INNOVATION ETHICS COMMITTEE

Date: 9 May 2017

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<u>**Information Leaflet and Informed Consent for Teddy Bear clinic**</u>
<u>**(Foundation) Employees and Volunteers**</u>

Project Title: Use of social media platforms as a dialogue tool: a case study of a Non-governmental organisation in Gauteng.

Dear Potential research participant,

You are invited to voluntarily participate in a research study titled **"Use of social media platforms as a dialogue tool: a case study of a non-governmental organisation in Gauteng**. This information leaflet will help you to decide if you would like to participate. Before you agree to take part, you should fully understand what is involved. You should not agree to take part unless you are completely satisfied with all aspects of the study.

What is the study all about?

The objective of the study is to explore the Teddy Bear clinic Foundation's strategic use of digital communication platforms as a public relations tool for building relationships with the organisation's stakeholders and in their use of social media as a way of communicating with the external stakeholders. The interview may include such topics as the nature of training for those who maintain social media for the NGO, communication policies, objectives and reporting relationships. It should also be noted that this research focuses on the organisation's communication from the PR management perspective. It is not about how the NGO works with children or any individual cases that they deal with, it is about their use of digital media platforms as public relations tools.

Procedures

The data will be collected through the interviews with the employees and volunteers. If you participate in the study, one should note that each one on one (individual) interview should take 45min to 1 hour.

The conversation will be recorded and it will later be transcribed. The transcripts will be kept in a safe place at the VUT Department of Hospitality, Tourism and PR.

Dates: Wednesday the 5th of April (First proposed date)

Friday the 7th of April (Second proposed date)

Time: Depends on the availability of the participants

Venue: Yet to be confirmed

Location

Wherever is convenient and comfortable for the interviewee but preferably at the organisation's offices in Parktown, Johannesburg

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The participation in this research is voluntary. You can request to stop the interview and withdraw from the interview at any time. Personal information such your name and designation will not be revealed in the dissertation or the interview transcripts. The individuals will be referred to as Participant A, B, C, D, E or F when data is getting collected and analysed. The researcher cannot guarantee or control what participants are to do outside of the individual interviews, but appeal to the integrity of individuals to not disclose any of the discussions or take matters forward.

Each participant is required to sign a consent form before participating in the study. The Director and also the Head of the fundraising department have both given me the permission to approach you "workers and volunteers" and they are fully aware of what the project entail. The information divulged in the interviews will not be shared with them and they accept this.

Incentives

Please note that there will be no monetary exchange for taking part in the discussions. As part of a benefaction, the researcher will provide a short summary of key findings from the final study to participants who are interested in the results.

Consent:

By signing this consent form, you indicate that you fully understand the above information and agree to voluntarily participate in the individual interviews.

Name and Surname	Signature
Date	

Contact information

The research has been reviewed and approved by The Vaal University of Technology Ethics Board. For more information about the study, please feel free to contact:

Kumbirai Felix Mwadiwa Researcher Cell: 0745104373 felixkemaz18@yahoo.com	**The Supervisor on:** Anna Oksiutycz - Munyawiri Tel: 0115592849 aoksiutycz@uj.ac.za

The credit for the ethics template should be given to Tshwane University of Technology

Interview Questions

The objective of this study is to examine how Non-Governmental organisations use digital media platforms to create dialogue with the publics in order to create beneficial relationships. In line with the objective stated above and in order to focus the purpose of the study, the research questions are:

a) How does the non-governmental organisation use digital media to strategically build relationships with its publics?

b) How is the process of communicating with the publics through digital media managed by the organisation?

Introduction

Introductions, providing background of the study, review of ethical issues, explaining the procedure.

1	**What digital media platforms does your organisation currently use?**
	Which social media are particularly useful and why? (The researcher can prompt: Blogs? Instagram? Facebook? Twitter etc. Probing questions: why were these platforms chosen? Do they suit the NGO's? If yes/no explain why? Does the NGO use any specific fundraising platforms? If so what are they? Are they free or paid?
2	**How are the digital media being utilised by your organisation?**
	Probing questions: Content? Frequency of updates? Responses? Do they complement each other or each has a different focus? How they relate to the other communication tools?

		Do you research the trends in social media use by the NGOs? Explain
		Does the NGO mimic how other successful NGOs use of social media? Do you monitor the "competition"? Examples
		What organisational activities are promoted on social media and why?
	3	**What are the advantages and limitations of social media platforms?**
		Provide examples of both
		How do you overcome the problems?
		How do you deal with the negative user generated content?
	4	**Describe your role in maintaining the social media communication for your NGO?**
		Descriptions of everyday practice/ activities
		Do you have an autonomy to post whatever you want?
		Are there any approvals required? If so from whom?
		Do you focus solely on the social media communication or fulfil multiple tasks?
		How much time daily is devoted to maintaining the social media communication?

5 Have you received any social media training?

Where? What was the nature of the training? Internal or external (e.g. only at the university)?

6 What is the role of a digital media in maintaining the dialogue with the stakeholders?

Are there any specific audiences targeted by the NGO through the social media communication?

Elaborate why these audiences?

Why is it a dialogue as opposed to just releasing one way communication? Explain your view?

Do you think the audience trusts your NGO? Explain

7 How does digital media communication contribute to the relationships with stakeholders?

Here some qualities of relationships from the theory such as control mutuality interdependence etc. need to be explored

8. How does the organisation manage its social media communication?

Who is in charge of the NGOs social media communication?

How are they selected?

How much is spent on social media? (in terms of the estimated percentage of overall communication budget)

How does the NGO manage the risks associated with social media?

9. What are the main reasons for using social media by the NGO?

What are the social media communication objectives?

Are these objectives measured? How?

Are these objectives achieved?

10 How does the social media communication fit into the NGOs overall communication strategy?

11. Would you say your NGO has a strategic approach to digital communication?

12. Conclusion