

# Exploring the organisational structuring of professional social media within a modern marketing communication context

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## SUMMARY

Effective marketing communication efforts via social media platforms are hindered due to there being no clear guidelines on how to credibly inform a specific approach to the organisational structuring of professional social media. This study attempted to reduce the uncertainty regarding how internal social media custodians inform the organisational structuring of social media by identifying and exploring the key considerations when deciding on a strategic approach to the organisational structuring of social media.

Before the study commenced an empirical process in order to address the central research problem, the study undertook an exploration of organisational structuring and marketing communication theory. After this exploration, it was noted that there is a noticeable lack of theoretical knowledge that can be utilised to inform a strategic approach to the structuring of an organisation's social media initiatives.

With this in mind, this study's empirical process undertook an expansive process in order to directly address identified theoretical gaps, by extracting sample data from real world applications of social media organisational structuring practice. This was done by means of semi-structured interviews, as well as insights derived from the researcher himself, in his capacity as a social media marketing communication professional by means of self-interview.

The sample data suggested that there was no substantial link between social media custodians' choice of an organisational structuring approach and the reaching of traditional or social media-specific objectives. With this option of informing a strategic approach to social media organisational structuring eliminated, this study explored alternative avenues for addressing the research problem.

Upon further analysis of the sample data, it was observed that certain key favourable characteristics existed that internal social media custodians aimed to attain through specific choices to the organisational structuring of social media. The degree to which each of these favourable characteristics can be attained are contextualised or influenced by various factors. The relative importance and ranking of these favourable characteristics also differ amongst organisations, as they are influenced by an endless spectrum of circumstantial variables. However, once an internal social media custodian has determined which favourable characteristics are most important to the organisation, this study's findings can be referenced to inform a suitable approach to the organisational structuring of social media initiatives.

It is recommended that internal social media custodians apply the following step-by-step guidelines in order to implement an informed approach to their social media organisational structuring:

1. Identifying the relative importance or priority of all possible favourable characteristics of social media, within the context of the unique circumstances and needs of the organisation.
2. Referencing this study's listing of how different approaches to social media organisational structuring impact the attainment of the prioritised favourable characteristics and identifying the most suitable approach to the organisational structuring of the organisation's social media initiatives.
3. Optimising the specific approach chosen by referencing this study's practical guidelines in order to maximise the potential benefits as well as negate the potential disadvantages that are most likely to manifest when applying the relevant chosen approach to social media's organisational structuring.

## **KEY WORDS**

Social media, social media networking, marketing communication, organisational structure, professional social networking, social media guidelines, social media strategy, integrated social media.

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# **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT**

## **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

As an introduction to this study, Chapter 1 provides an overall view, from both a theoretical and empirical perspective. The chapter's most pertinent elements are now identified.

To ensure a clearly identified background to the study, this chapter commences with an exploration of the overall industry context, leading to the defining of the study's central research problem.

The main research problem is then unpacked into separate research questions and research aims in order to provide direction to the study's theoretical and empirical processes. Thereafter, this chapter introduces the study's overall research approach as well as individual research methods.

In conclusion, the chapter justifies the study's overall feasibility and the intended ethical considerations thereof.

The first section of this chapter is set out in the study's contextual background which is discussed below.

## **1.2 CONTEXT AND PROBLEM STATEMENT**

At the start of the 21st century, there was a noticeable increase in the number and diversity of communication options available to marketers (Keller, 2001:819). Some of the more recent developments include the evolution of highly collaborative, co-produced marketing (Bacile *et al.*, 2014:122); the rise in popularity of digital marketing platforms (Nosrati *et al.*, 2013:56) and mobile marketing (Chen *et al.*, 2013:38). These examples illustrate how marketing practice and theory has evolved since the days of the original 4P (product, price, place and promotion) model of marketing.

Modern organisations are forced to transform their overall business strategies, as they need to adapt to the fast-changing communication technology demands of the modern consumer (Assaf *et al.*, 2012:112). One of these changes has been the rise of highly interactive digital platforms, which organisations are expected to utilise as marketing communication tools in order to reach their target audiences both internally and externally (Jerman & Završnik, 2011:351).

One of the most noteworthy new marketing communication tools actively being used to solve modern business problems is social networking on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter (Jeraman & Završnik, 2012:155). Nations (2011:2) makes a clear distinction between the terms 'social networking' and 'social media' by referring to the latter as the platform from which 'social networking' functions are performed. In this study however, the term 'social media' is used as an umbrella term for referring to both the channels and functions of social media communication. This choice is substantiated by the researcher's own experience, in that as a social media brand manager, the researcher has made the observation that the general marketing community and public alike tend to use the term 'social media' as an overarching term for social media related discussions. The term 'social media' is therefore employed for the purpose of conversational conformity.

Social media has quickly grown from humble beginnings to today being an integral part of the business model for most global as well as local organisations (Kirtis & Karahan, 2011:260). With regard to marketing communication functions, social media has rebalanced the ownership of power and authority between marketers and the consumer, with the amount of control that marketers can exert over message transmission steadily eroding (Emerald Group, 2010:6).

Some of the prominent benefits of social media include time, audience, relational and cost advantages for businesses (Kirtis & Karahan, 2011:260). From an organisational point of view, social media has proven to have a significant influence on various organisational contexts, such as marketing communication (Castronovo & Huang, 2012:117) and internal communication functions (Papageorgiou, 2015:2).

Because of the various benefits of social media across different marketing communication functions, many high-profile (as well as smaller) organisations have created a social media presence for their brand (Solis, 2010:20). Other factors that have contributed to the rise of social media include increased social media usage by current and potential customers; the necessity to compete with other brands or organisations and strategising to position the company in more markets (Solis, 2010:20). Another development that has helped accentuate the importance of social media within a professional capacity is the rise of brand journalism, a modern movement that involves utilising engaging content to create evolving brand stories via an organisation's social media platforms (Light, 2014).

The increasing importance of social media has also resulted in the field enjoying a newly found level of attention from within the organisation, with social media siphoning budgets from traditional marketing communication as well as internal communication (Solis, 2010:20). The

CEO Study by IBM (Dietrich, 2012) has shown that organisations across the globe are placing more focus on social media initiatives and less on more traditional communication channels. In fact, tradeshows seem to be the only form of traditional marketing that hasn't had a considerable level of budget siphoned by social media (Albarran, 2013:100). Businesses' decision to invest more in social media is supported by the observation that social media has shown that it can be a valuable investment for the modern organisation, with measurable and accountable results (Mangold & Faulds, 2009:359).

From the aforementioned, it is derived that the rise of social media has had a noticeable influence on the way organisations approach their marketing communication initiatives. This in turn highlights the need to adequately position social media in relation to other marketing communication functions of the modern organisation. As Smith and Taylor (2004:10) explain however, one of the obstacles that marketers face with regard to marketing communication is that there are no clear rules on how to prioritise and incorporate different marketing communication functions and disciplines. Should efforts simply be spread evenly between the different segments of marketing communication, or is there more to be taken into consideration when compiling an integrated marketing communication strategy?

This issue that marketers face regarding how to integrate marketing communication activities is however not only restricted to traditional marketing communication disciplines. It is also a central issue when it comes to the implementation of professional social media, as organisations adopt different tactics and strategies when it comes to the coordination of social media activities. Mathur *et al.* (2012:14) add that there is still a general sense of uncertainty amongst business owners regarding the overall impact that an active social media presence will have on their organisation's sales and other success metrics.

A major concern with regard to the implementation of social media relates to the confusion with respect to the departmental or organisational ownership of social media channels and resources, as social media lends itself to each of the main marketing communication disciplines in various ways. The debate with reference to which communication context enjoys ownership over social media has been a constant one since the initial rise of this new marketing communication channel (Fathi, 2013:15). From a marketing communication viewpoint, it is vital to understand all the different approaches to the organisational structuring of social media, as each approach will result in the need for a radically different tactic to ensure synergy between social media and other marketing communication functions. Differentiating and prioritising between these different viewpoints is therefore the first step in effectively integrating social

media within the modern business. The most prominent of these approaches to social media are discussed next.

Social media is either viewed as a supportive organisational function that is highly integrated with pre-existing marketing communication disciplines; as a totally separate organisational function with its own resources, vision and functioning; as a discipline that is managed by an external organisation on behalf of the company or finally, as a combination of two or more of these different approaches. During a survey (Go Gulf, 2013) it was found that 3% of organisations outsourced all their social media activities; 5% used a combination of outsourcing and internal resourcing; 27% had a dedicated internal social media department and that 65% applied social media roles within the context of existing organisational roles and departments. These different approaches are discussed in more detail next.

One of the most popular approaches to manifesting social media within an organisation is to apply social media within the framework of pre-existing marketing communication disciplines, such as marketing communication and internal communication (Clapperton, 2010:178). This approach to social media organisational structuring is distinguished from other approaches by its high degree of integration with other departments of the organisation. Taking this approach, organisations perceive social media as a way of supporting and complementing more traditional communication disciplines, an approach that has proven to be a successful method of launching an organisation's social media presence (Clapperton, 2010:178). Major corporations such as MTN, Jaguar, Land Rover and Acer define social media business applications within the framework of the organisation's existing marketing communication, utilising it as a means of reaching traditional marketing objectives in the social media arena.

Another approach is to position social media as a separate department within the organisation, leading to less organisational integration. This viewpoint is based on the following premise: to have the previously discussed benefits of social media manifest for businesses is a complex task, seeing as social media as an overarching function has its own set of unique properties. This leads to the argument that it requires special, dedicated attention within an organisation (Erdoğmuş & Cicek, 2012:1255). Because of this realisation, global organisations such as Sony, eBay and Disney (LinkedIn, 2013) have started deploying social media as a completely separate department with its own financial and employee resources in order to ensure that it can flourish as an independent marketing communication instrument.

An organisation can also opt to not have any internal resources dedicated to social media and, instead, have the organisation's social media function managed and implemented by an

external agency on behalf of the organisation. Findings from the Social Media Marketing Industry Report 2014 (Stelzner, 2014:42) however show that this approach is far less popular than dedicating internal resources, with only 27% of marketers opting to outsource social media efforts, a decrease from 30% in 2012. A recent survey published by World Wide Worx (Goldstuck, 2016) notes that only 17% of South African companies plan to utilise the services of specialised social media agencies. One of the main reasons why this approach is however used in the world of marketing communication is due to organisations' general lack of confidence when it comes to social media marketing. This leads to them therefore perceiving social media outsourcing as a more viable and lower risk option. Albarran (2013:6) notes that the low capital requirements for setting up a social media firm that manage other organisations' social media presence also contribute to the viability of it as a business enterprise. Lee (2013) however highlights a major disadvantage of outsourcing social media in that an external agency might have less intimate knowledge and understanding of the organisation, because it can lead to social media marketing actions that are not always in the best interest of the organisation.

Finally, it is also possible for the organisation to not commit to any single one of the above discussed approaches, but to rather opt to combine two or more of the three approaches. The reasoning for this can be diverse, but it is possible that a lack of internal resources, a specific strategic direction, noteworthy agency discounts and other possible grounds can lead to an organisation opting for a combination of the aforementioned discussed approaches. For example, an organisation can have a select few internal resources dedicated to managing social media activities, which are then supported by the employees of an external agency who possess specialised skills with regard to a specific aspect of social media marketing.

The choice between these options is vital, as it has an undeniable influence on how social media is to be optimally integrated as part of the broader marketing communication structure. Furthermore, as there is yet no clear opinion on the most suitable approach (in context of an organisation's unique circumstances), social media's role and purpose in the modern organisation remain vague, making it difficult to properly integrate social media in order to ensure that it is used as an effective marketing communication medium.

Considering this, the central research problem that this study explored is that modern marketing communication efforts via social media platforms are hindered due to there being no clear guideline on how to credibly inform a specific approach to the organisational structuring of social media as an integrated marketing communication function.

Based on the level of complexity exposed with regard to the possible marketing communication applications of social media, this study explored an optimal approach to manifesting professional social media within the modern organisation. Within this context, 'optimal approach' refers to structuring social media within the organisation as a marketing communication tool in such a way that it allows for the attainment of a specific set of favourable characteristics, prioritised accordingly to the contextual factors of the organisation and its broader industry. What might however work optimally in one organisational set-up, may be less optimal in another. Allowance was therefore made for situational circumstances that needed to be considered during this study's final conclusion when an optimal approach to professional social media would be proposed. This aimed to solve the current confusion regarding how to strategically inform the organisational structuring of social media within a marketing communication context. Against this background, the following general research question is proposed:

*What should be considered when deciding on a strategic approach to the organisational structuring of social media?*

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT EXPLORATION: THE STATE OF THE PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE**

As noted earlier, the central research problem that this study explored is that modern marketing communication is hindered due to there being no clear guidelines on how to position professional social media as a marketing communication function. This section outlines the issue in more detail by exploring the current professional social media landscape in more detail.

In a recent global study regarding the professional use of social media (Stelzner, 2014:7), it was noted that 97% of marketers said that social media formed a part of the recipe used to market their business. Furthermore, 83% of marketers noted that they integrated their social media activities with more traditional counterparts (Stelzner, 2014:13). Even though modern marketers acknowledge the importance of social media marketing communication and aligning these efforts with more traditional counterparts, it is noted that most marketers are still struggling when it comes to achieving business success on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Rampton, 2014). Whilst the internet is abundant with social media 'how-to guides' and practical opinions from experts that provide guidelines on how to strategically implement social media, it is noted that these information resources generally lack the backing of a credible research process that is supported by trusted theoretical underpinnings. The result is that social media

marketers haphazardly employ various tactics that are not aligned to the unique needs of the organisation's overarching business strategy.

Looking at more formal academic literature, a similar issue is noted: recent revolutions occurring in the marketing industry sparked by the rise of social media have not yet been adequately explored in academic literature. The result is that there is little to no guidance for field marketers on how to incorporate social media into their marketing communication strategies (Mangold & Faulds, 2009:357; Shankar & Bantra, 2009:285). The multi-adaptability of social media is both its greatest praise and curse because it highlights how flexible the channel is, but also how difficult it is to determine how it fits into an existing organisational structure.

There are various aspects of social media strategy that an organisation needs to consider, such as the importance of aligning to marketing goals, audience and industry research, social media platform choice and tactics as well as content strategy (Daoud, 2014). Unfortunately, there is little guidance supplied regarding the operational aspects of professional social media (Daoud, 2014). The lack of operational guidance with regard to professional social media is particularly worrisome, as a suitable operational tactic should be one of the foundational elements of a well-planned marketing strategy.

This study aimed to address this issue by analysing prevalent tactics for the organisational structuring and management of professional social media, namely that of social media as a separate internally located marketing communication's discipline, a supportive or highly integrated internal function, as a function managed by an external agency and as combination of these approaches. Each approach was detailed to provide social media marketers with a guideline as to the key considerations, advantages and disadvantages of each approach. In so doing, this study hopes to provide insights and guidance regarding the process of structuring and positioning professional social media within a modern marketing communication context.

#### **1.4 SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

**Research question 1:** What key aspects influence and are influenced by the organisational structuring of social media?

**Research question 2:** What favourable characteristics can be attained by employing specific approaches to the organisational structuring of social media?

**Research question 3:** How does the attainment of these favourable characteristics inform a strategic approach to the organisational structuring of social media?

## 1.5 SPECIFIC RESEARCH AIMS

**Research aim 1:** to identify the key aspects that influence and are influenced by the organisational structuring of social media by means of semi-structured interviews and self-interview.

**Research aim 2:** to identify the favourable characteristics that can be attained by employing specific approaches to the organisational structuring of social media by means of semi-structured interviews and self-interview.

**Research aim 3:** to determine how the attainment of these favourable characteristics can inform a strategic approach to the organisational structuring of social media by means of semi-structured interviews and self-interview.

## 1.6 GUIDING ARGUMENT AND THEORETICAL GROUNDING

For the purpose of this study, the following specific guiding arguments have been identified:

- Social media is recognised as a profitable and indispensable marketing communication tool for the modern organisation (Bhanot, 2012:49). This argument is central to this study, as it serves as justification for an academic study regarding social media within a marketing communication context as an important and highly beneficial part of the organisational structure.
- Even though businesses are becoming increasingly aware that organisational structure has an influence on their marketing strategy and overall approach, the volume of academic guidelines available on this topic remains highly scarce (Lee *et al.*, 2015:73). This guiding argument highlights the importance of a study that focuses on adding to the scarce literature currently available on organisational structuring's meaningful influence on marketing communication activities.
- A clear social media governance structure is an important consideration for the effective implementation and management of professional social media (Divol *et al.*, 2012). With the previous guiding argument highlighting the value of a study exploring the organisational structuring of marketing communication, this guiding argument substantiates the need for a study that specifically explores the organisational structuring of professional social media.
- The interpretivist tradition of phenomenology states that researchers in qualitative research are unable to distance themselves from their presuppositions and should

instead acknowledge these biased ideologies (Angen, 2000:386). This guiding argument is central to the approach taken with regard to the study's research methodology, which accepts and directly incorporates the researcher's proximity to the research problem into the study.

To ensure that this study is grounded in a well-established and trusted theoretical context, the study was contextualised within the framework of the following two main theoretical fields: organisational structure and modern marketing communication (Chapter 2). The theoretical segment of this study also includes an exploration of the application and relevance of each of these main theoretical fields within the context of existing professional social media (Chapter 3). However, to ensure that the study also benefits from an overarching understanding of professional social media practice, general theory available on the field was also included as part of the theoretical segment of this study (Chapter 3).

A search was conducted on the following databases: NEXUS; Ferdinand Postma Catalogue; SA Catalogue; International Theses and Dissertations; ISAP; EBSCOHost; Academic Search Premier; Business Source Premier; MCB Emerald and Science Direct to ensure that no other comparable study had been done previously.

The next section unpacks this study's two main theoretical contexts in more detail.

### **1.6.1 Organisational structure**

According to Nagy (2015), organisational structure describes how members are accepted, how leadership is chosen and how decisions are made. Rooney (2013) states that organisations need to consider organisational restructuring as a way of ensuring that the organisation meets the requirements of tomorrow. Whilst there are a wide range of approaches that an organisation can take to organisational structure, the two main divisions are known as 'functional' and 'multidivisional' structures. In a functional structure, employees and their responsibilities are grouped into separate units responsible for particular functions (Habib & Victor, 1991:589), whilst in a multidivisional structure, the organisation is divided into smaller, multi-disciplinarily divisions that ensure organisational adaptability (Lee *et al.*, 2015:75).

There are different levels of abstraction that need to be considered when describing a particular organisational structure. On a high level of abstraction, organisational charts and diagrams are used, whilst elements such as mission statements and job descriptions describe organisational

structure on a granular level (Ulrich, 2001:1). Organisational structure is not only related to the structure of the various functional departments of an organisation, but also considers the inter-social group networks within the organisation. (Flynn, 2015:194)

Plugge and Bouwman (2012:378) note the following dimensions to be the most integral to the management and understanding of organisational structuring: the locus of decision making, the level of communication, the nature of formalisation, the number of layers in hierarchy and the level of horizontal integration.

The movement of structural marketing promotes the notion that organisational structures should be market- or customer-focused, instead of operating- or product-focused, in order to maximise the customer's experience of the organisation (Day, 2006:41). Converging an organisation's marketing and communication functions can help an organisation to adapt quickly and strategically to different threats and opportunities – the volume of which has increase since the popularisation of social media (Shandwick, 2012:2).

As this study explored the organisational structuring of professional social media within an organisation, it was imperative for the organisational structuring theory to be explored in detail. This ensured that the recommendations made during this study could be contextualised within the framework of established theory on how organisational structure is managed and strategically planned. Furthermore, to ensure that organisational structuring theory can be contextualised within the framework of professional social media, this study also explored the existing, but limited theory available on how the function of social media is and can be structured within an organisation (see Chapter 3, section 3.4).

### **1.6.2 Marketing communication and the marketing communication mix**

One of the most important marketing revolutions that developed after the rise of the 4P model is known as marketing communication, which focused more directly on actual and specific forms of marketing elements or tools available to marketers. Doyle and Stern (2006:37) define marketing communication as “the process of transmitting messages with the objective of making the organisation's products or services attractive to a target audience”. In other words, marketing communication aims to establish an overlap between what the marketer is trying to convey and what the receiver understands (Soba & Aydin, 2013:113). Fill (2006:7) defines marketing communication as “the management process through which the organisation participates with various audiences”. These definitions demonstrate that marketing

communication approaches marketing in a more deliberate and planned manner in order to effectively manage an organisation's marketing initiatives.

A recent evolution of the marketing communication movement has come in the form of integrated marketing communication that is defined by Kerin *et al.* (2013:432) as the process of designing marketing communication programs that coordinate all promotional activities, whether it be advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling, sponsorships or direct marketing. Furthermore, it is noted that integrated marketing communication shares an inherent link with another modern marketing theory, namely relationship marketing. This marketing movement has the objective to create long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with the consumer (Csikósová *et al.*, 2014:1617).

Egan (2011:51) states that the personal nature of social media platforms offers numerous relational exchange benefits for organisations, imbuing organisations with human-like personality characteristics. This leads to long-term relationships between organisations and consumers, which aligns to the main objective of marketing initiatives based on the principles of relationship marketing (Egan, 2011:51). From this, an association between social media and the theoretical principles of relationship marketing can be observed. This then indirectly insinuates social media's alignment with the principles of marketing communication.

For this study to have modern theoretical relevance, it is essential that it is grounded within the framework of a trusted marketing communication context, well-documented from both a theoretical and practical perspective. As this study focused predominantly on the relationship between different marketing and communication disciplines of an organisation and it lent itself naturally to the theoretical backing of marketing communication and integrated marketing communication. Marketing communication's comprehensive approach to modern marketing furthermore qualifies the theory as an appropriate tool for investigating a modern marketing tool such as professional social networking.

Furthermore, marketing communication's non-exhaustible classification of marketing functions in the form of clearly distinguishable and discernible categories lends itself to the contextualisation of social media as an additional marketing discipline. Whilst there is no general consensus amongst different marketing theorists on the exact labelling and categorisation of each marketing tool or discipline, most models do seem to have similar origins (e.g. the marketing communication paradigm). This results in them being generally compatible and aligned with one another.

One example of this deviation is that some authors acknowledge the need for adding more modern forms of marketing to the list of available marketing communication mix disciplines. McDonald (2012:289) notes that a marketing communication mix model with modern relevance requires inclusion of a digital marketing communication mix such as social media and search marketing. Mangold and Faulds (2009:359) propose that social media initiatives be included as a hybrid, integrated accompaniment to the traditional marketing communication mix, suggesting that social networking initiatives be used in combination with traditional marketing disciplines (such as personal selling and direct marketing) to achieve an organisation's marketing objectives.

There are numerous different variations of the modern marketing communication mix (Goi *et al.*, 2013:174; Soba & Aydin, 2013:111; Smith & Cook, 2012). Some authors, such as Koekemoer (2014:20), places primary focus on the importance of a modern marketing communication mix that acts as an integrated whole that is bigger than the sum of its parts. Koekemoer's (2014:20) focus on an integrated marketing communication approach resonates with the recent developments in marketing communication where a focus on integration is championed. Also, the marketing communication mix disciplines referenced by Koekemoer (2014:95) include modern marketing platforms such as digital media marketing and alternative communication channels. Whilst the importance of these modern forms of marketing cannot be understated, this study opted to approach these new marketing movements from a platform perspective. Therefore, these disciplines were treated as supplementary platforms on which a marketer can perform established marketing communication disciplines, as opposed to considering them as additional, stand-alone marketing communication disciplines with their own unique characteristics. This approach was taken within the context that an adequate level of theoretical knowledge of these new marketing methods are not yet available (when compared in relation to their traditional counterparts). If these marketing disciplines were to be included as stand-alone elements, it would cause noticeable imbalances during this study's theoretical exploration.

Considering the aforementioned, the marketing communication mix disciplines that were referenced for the purpose of this study are: advertising; personal selling; sales promotion; direct marketing; public relations, event marketing and sponsorships. Using these marketing communication mix disciplines as reference point, the study explored different ways of implementing professional social media with an organisation.

To ensure that this study's theoretical exploration of marketing communication theory can be contextualised within a modern and professional social media context, the theoretical exploration also included an analysis of existing theory on social media's impact on marketing

communication, as well as each of the individual marketing communication mix disciplines identified (see Chapter 3, section 3.3).

## **1.7 RESEARCH APPROACH'S SUITABILITY TO STUDY**

From an empirical perspective, this study aimed to explore the benefits and challenges of each approach to social media organisational structuring, using the findings from the theoretical segment as a reference point for areas of interest to explore in more detail.

A distinguishing characteristic of qualitative research is that it usually explores a topic that is still in a developmental phase, with the aim of acquiring new knowledge on the topic from a variety of external as well as internal (emotional) sources (Hazzan & Nutov, 2014:2). A popular approach to qualitative research is known as emergent theory, where an inductive process is followed in order to generate new theory (Trotter, 2012:398). Due to the exploratory nature of this study in uncovering new theory regarding the organisational structuring of social media, it was therefore opted to deploy a qualitative approach to the research.

Qualitative research has also proven to be an effective approach when it comes to undertaking marketing communication research (Bailey, 2014:167). This study shows an inherent alignment to qualitative research, considering it is firmly positioned within the realm of marketing communication research and utilises a trusted marketing communication theoretical framework.

The intent of this study points to another reason why it is highly suited for a qualitative approach. Whereas quantitative studies relay results in the form of tangible, quantifiable metrics, qualitative studies take a less tangible form, employing research methods that not only capture objective data, but also make provision for capturing data that is directly influenced by emotions and perceptions (Hazzan & Nutov, 2014:2). Seeing as the study analysed the personal perspectives of internal social media custodians, it is unavoidable that subjective thoughts and opinions be present in the study's sample data.

Exploring recent developments in qualitative research, it is noted that the approach has evolved at an accelerated rate in the recent years, leading to researchers being able to use a qualitative approach effectively to produce scientifically defensible theory and sampling tactics (Trotter, 2012:398). Hazzan and Nutov (2014:1) state that the growth in popularity of qualitative research can be attributed to it showing considerable success as a suitable research method for understanding people and their behaviour in a social, cultural and economic context. Considering that this study analysed social media organisational structuring from the perspective of an organisation's internal social media custodians, the social, cultural and

economic aspects of their daily circumstances were directly relevant to the research process. It is also noted that qualitative research studies make provision for the possibility that the researcher him- or herself will become an active participant in the study and in so doing, be influenced by the research process itself (Rennie, 2012:392). Considering the researcher's direct involvement and intimacy with the research problem itself, it was suggested that the study adopted a qualitative phenomenological approach. According to Thibodeau and MacRae (1997:65), phenomenology is "the study of the lived experience from the unique perspective of the individual that is engaged in the experience".

More specifically, this study adopted the interpretivist tradition of phenomenology, which accepts that researchers in qualitative research are unable to distance themselves from their presuppositions and should instead acknowledge these biased ideologies (Angen, 2000:386). Flood (2010:10) notes that one of the philosophical assumptions of qualitative phenomenology is that presuppositions and expert knowledge of the researcher can become valuable assets during the actual research process. In the case of this study, it was noted that the researcher himself has in-depth knowledge of the field of professional social media and therefore has existing perceptions, opinions and qualified experience regarding the research topic. An acknowledgement and acceptance of the research's qualitative phenomenological underpinnings allowed this study three noteworthy opportunities:

- Firstly, it allowed for the inclusion of the researcher's own observations of the research phenomenon as a direct consideration during the study's empirical process (see section 1.8.1).
- Secondly, it allowed the researcher to become an active participant in the study, who was responsible for the undertaking of the empirical as well as interpretative phase of the research, with a complete awareness of the researcher's own predefined perceptions of social media practice and how this influence the interpretation of the study's empirical data.
- Lastly, it allowed for the research sample data to include organisations with a high degree of researcher proximity (i.e. organisations currently being managed or serviced by the researcher in his capacity as a digital manager).

With this overview of the applicability of the study's overall research approach in mind, the next section details the research methods that were utilised in this study.

## **1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE DESIGN**

Within this study's broader phenomenological tradition, as noted in the previous section, two specific approaches to phenomenology were employed, namely autophenomenology (or autophenomography) and heterophenomenology. Whereas autophenomenology gives authority to first-person qualitative accounts of consciousness, heterophenomenology utilises third person accounts to describe and observe a particular phenomenon (Dennet, 2003:10). The combination of these two phenomenological approaches enabled the study to observe the research problem from a variety of vantage points and in so doing, ensured a degree of triangulation in terms of applied research methods.

The next two sections introduce the specific research methods chosen for this study and note how they relate back to the application of both autophenomographical and heterophenomenological research methods.

### **1.8.1 Self-interview**

The study's autophenomenological approach accommodates the inclusion of the researcher's own (first-person) observations regarding the research phenomenon as part of the empirical process. Although autophenomenology is a trusted and widely accepted labelling for a qualitative research approach that relies on first-person accounts of consciousness for sample data (Dennet, 2003:10), certain authors suggest the use of an alternative term when referring to the research process inferred by the term. One such author is Allen-Collinson (2011:48), who advocates the use of the term, 'autophenomography' above autophenomenology, as the former relates more directly to the actual research process undertaken by a researcher that employs this research method.

When further analysing the sub-segments of the term 'autophenomography', the 'graphy' element refers to the written or representational product of the actual research process (Allen-Collinson, 2011:48). It is for this reason that the study adopted the use of the term autophenomography above its more common alternative.

Furthermore, looking at first person research techniques more broadly, Gruppetta (2004:1) notes that there has been a considerable increase in the popularity and variety of autobiographical based qualitative research methods, especially those that rely on personal narratives. One of the most popular of these research methods is known as 'autoethnography', which is a research method intended to connect the personal to the cultural (Ellis & Brochner, 2000:733). Although there are similarities between autophenomography and autoethnography, it is noted that there is a distinct difference between the two terms that highlights one

approach's specific suitability to this study above the other. In contrast to autoethnography's focus on analysing a cultural place, the focus of autophenomenography is on examining a particular research phenomenon (Gruppetta, 2004:1). Considering this study's focus on a research phenomenon (i.e. the organisational structuring of professional social media) rather than a cultural place, it was argued that autophenomenography was a better suited option for the study at hand.

Autophenomenography attempts to provide textured descriptions of individual experience within broader structures of human experience, as a way to identify patterns present within the lived experience being analysed (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2016:216). Within the context of the study, the researcher attempted to scrutinise his own lived experience of the broader professional social media industry, as to uncover underlining patterns influencing the organisational structuring of social media.

In order to incorporate an autophenomenographical approach within a study, Gorichanaz (2015:8) suggests utilising a process of systematic self-observation (Rodriguez & Ryave, 2002:23). Of the various specific methods of data collection that prescribe to the requirements of systematic self-observation (Gorichanaz, 2015:8), self-interview was the most suited to the study at hand. This was based on the need for compatibility between the different segments of empirical data that was collected via the different research methods that this study employed.

Self-interviews are promoted by Keightley *et al.* (2012:519) as being a valuable qualitative research method. This is based on the observation that it improves temporal flexibility by removing the interviewer, but due to it retaining the formal parameters of a normal two-way interview, it also enhances the process of reflection (Keightley *et al.*, 2012:519). Keightley *et al.* (2012:519) do however note that, although self-interviews can be a valuable research method, they are best used as a complementary research tool in a study that employs some degree of triangulation. This observation aligns with the chosen research methodology of this study, in that the self-interview research data is intended to support and complement the data derived from the more expansive semi-structured interview process.

In order to validate the empirical data derived from the self-interview process, this research method included a reflective layer, with the researcher acknowledging and critically assessing the influence of his knowledge biases on his perception of the research problem (Anderson, 1989:249). Reflexivity was therefore included as a supporting component of the self-interview, with the researcher considering his knowledge biases before, during and after the actual self-interview in order to ensure the derivation of validated research findings.

## 1.8.2 Semi-structured interviews

In addition to this study's self-interview research method introduced in the preceding section, the empirical phase also made use of semi-structured interviews as a form of heterophenomenology (Dennet, 2003:10). It is noted that within the context of this study, interviews were a more favourable option compared to focus groups. This was due to the interview subjects (i.e. marketing managers of different organisations) being expected to display hesitance with regard to speaking openly in front of other marketing managers about their strategic and operational strategies.

The use of interviews in this study is also supported by the observation that it is one of the dominating methods of acquiring data in qualitative research studies (Redlich-Amirav & Higginbottom, 2014:2). It is also noted that semi-structured interviews allow for more expansive topic exploration than structured interviews (Stuckey, 2013:57). Seeing as the researcher was investigating a research topic with very little existing literature, it was important that the interviews undertaken allowed for unplanned deviation so that descriptive data gathering could be accommodated.

The semi-structured interviews undertaken were conducted with the marketing communication practitioners responsible for the social media marketing tactics employed by the chosen (i.e. social media custodians). The interviews revolved around the following topics:

- a description of the company's social media organisational structuring;
- the advantages and disadvantages thereof;
- reasons for choosing current organisational structuring;
- suggestions for improving social media organisational structuring; and
- the company's social media objectives.

To ensure that this study revealed expansive insights, interviews were undertaken with brands that each utilised a different approach to social media organisational structuring. The interview question schedule was based on the key discussion points identified during this study's theoretical exploration.

The data to be gathered from the interviews was processed by means of thematic content analysis (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, section 4.4.2), which involved grouping data into categories according to common themes identified (Anderson, 2007:1). The results of these interviews were then consolidated with the observational data gathered on each brand. This analysis highlights the advantages and disadvantages of the respective approaches to social

media organisational structuring, referencing each approach's capacity to fulfil specific marketing communication needs.

With the main research methods now introduced, the final aspect of this segment of the chapter discusses the key considerations regarding the chosen sampling design of this study.

### **1.8.3 Sample design**

Generalisability within the context of qualitative studies is also referred to as 'transferability', which describes the process of using findings from one inquiry in a completely different group of people or context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:23). For the findings derived from qualitative studies to be regarded as transferrable, it is necessary for the findings to have the capacity to be extrapolated to other, similar settings (Polit & Beck, 2010:1453). Seeing as this study's findings are intended to serve as a general guideline for social media custodians across various industries, it is necessary that the findings be generalised so that the understanding that they bring can be applied to the similar experiences of other internal social media custodians.

With the purpose of this study's semi-structured interviews in mind, the focus was on the social media initiatives of twelve different organisations with well-established social media presences. Considering the need for the study's findings to be transferrable, it was vital that the choice of organisations resulted in a representative view of each of the possible approaches to professional social media that the study aimed to explore. Analysing different organisations that prescribed to each of the main approaches helped to prevent prejudice towards a specific approach, as well as increased the value of the findings.

Certain of the organisations included in the sample data were the researcher's own social media clients, resulting in the researcher being very close to the data sample in certain cases. As noted earlier however, this study's acknowledgment of its qualitative phenomenological approach allowed for the inclusion of sample data with a high degree of proximity to the researcher itself. Whilst the researcher's close proximity to the research itself could therefore give this study a valuable sense of real-world relevance, it also conjured a specific danger: the direct and intimate involvement of the researcher in qualitative studies could have hindered the research process, as personal bias could affect the conclusions made (Francis, 1991:35).

To combat this threat to the objectivity of this study, it was crucial that the researcher himself was directly involved in the analysis of the data originating from organisations, and that the sample data was not generated from the perspective of a pre-conceived notion formed by the researcher's direct involvement with the organisation. Rather, the analysis of this data should

take place as naturally as possible, due to a continuous system of data gathering and analysis (Goulding, 2002:299).

Considering that this study's phenomenological approach lead to the utilisation of sampling data with different distances of proximity to the researcher, the empirical data analysis process took place with the researcher shifting between different roles (Baker, 2006:171). When analysing the sampling data that the researcher was actively involved in, the researcher acted in the role of 'Complete participation' whereas, when analysing the sampling data that the researcher was not directly involved in, the researcher assumed the role of 'Observer-as-Participant'. These different roles during the sample data analysis process ensured richer and more objective theory generation that could adapt fluidly to the needs of this study itself (Carey *et al.*, 2001:319).

## **1.9 FEASIBILITY OF THE STUDY**

The depth of this study across different approaches to social media organisational structuring and industry sectors was intended to increase the relevancy and long-term applicability thereof. Furthermore, the researcher's position as a social media practitioner ensured access to a wealth of social media insights from both an internal and external level.

## **1.10 ETHICAL / LEGAL ISSUES**

In order to validate this study's findings, access to organisational information via semi-structured interviews was required. It was important that the necessary permission be granted for the legitimate use of the information needed for these two aspects of the study.

Seeing as the researcher's proximity to certain elements of the data was very close, there was a danger that the researcher's subjectivity towards the data would influence the findings made. Subjectivity was a general concern when it came to qualitative studies and the researcher's close proximity to the data made this an even more pertinent issue. To minimise the possible effect of subjectivity, the researcher noted that a process of triangulation (data gathered from multiple sources) would be followed to ensure that findings were not solely based on the researcher's own viewpoint, but that more objective data sources were also considered.

With regard to the undertaking of interviews, the interviewer always needs to consider the ethical responsibility of striking a balance between the requirement to gain insightful data and displaying compassion and respect for the interviewee (Haahr *et al.*, 2014:6). In other words,

data cannot be gathered in such a way that it encroaches on any rights of the interviewee or puts him or her in an unfavourable or compromising position.

As per the ethical clearance specifications of the NWU Potchefstroom campus, it is noted that formal ethical clearance was granted for this study, with the following ethical clearance code granted to the study: “NWU-0NWU-00202-13-S70202-13-S7”.

## **1.11 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY**

This study’s contribution is positioned within the realm of marketing communication and aims to provide the modern organisation with a practical guideline that can be used to inform the organisational structuring social media, in consideration of the unique circumstances of the organisation and its overarching industry. More specifically, this study attempted a detailed investigation of three prevalent approaches (and combinations thereof) to structuring professional social media within an organisation. In doing so, it is expected that this study will reveal helpful insights into the advantages and disadvantages of each approach. Whilst it is noted that circumstantial factors might influence which structuring an organisation ultimately adopts, this study should provide findings to help marketers make a more informed decision regarding this specific aspect of their social media strategy.

In doing so, it is acknowledged that there are various other facets related to social media strategy, including content strategy and audience and competitor research. Seeing that this study does not address these other elements of social media strategy, it is important to note that the findings by themselves cannot constitute as a descriptive and complete guideline to the strategic undertaking of professional social media. The study specifically aims to assist internal social media custodians in making an informed decision regarding the choice of an organisational structuring approach to social media, in consideration of the unique contextual circumstances at play.

## **1.12 CHAPTER LAYOUT**

### **Part 1: Intro and context**

#### Chapter 1: Introduction and problem statement

This chapter serves as an introduction to the study, detailing the context; the central research problem; the main research questions and research aims; the study’s guiding argument;

background on the chosen research approach; the research methods utilised; the feasibility of the study; its intended contribution as well as the ethical considerations thereof.

## **Part 2: Theoretical exploration and methodology**

### Chapter 2: Organisational structure and marketing communication

To ensure that this study is grounded in a trusted theoretical framework, this chapter explores two important theoretical underpinnings of the study: organisational structure and marketing communication.

Organisational structure is explored from the vantage point of the following topics: the origins and value of this study field; an exploration of the characteristics or dimensions of organisational structure and an analysis of the most prominent approaches to the structuring of an organisation's marketing communication functions.

Modern marketing communication theory is also discussed within the context of: an exploration of the origins of modern marketing theory; criticism of the original 4P model of marketing; the influence of digital technology on marketing; the objectives of marketing communication activities and other related theoretical categories. This chapter includes a description of the traits and implementation of each of the marketing communication mix disciplines.

### Chapter 3: Social media within a modern marketing communication context

This chapter focuses on the impact of social media on the two previously explored theoretical underpinnings, namely organisational structure and marketing communication. To pre-empt this discussion, theory on social media is discussed according to the following guiding topics: existing opinions on the organisational structuring of social media; the development of professional social media and its definitions, the influence of social media on modern business as well as social media best practice and noteworthy obstacles to consider.

### Chapter 4: Research methodology

This chapter presents and explain in detail the research methodology utilised during the empirical phase of the overall research process. In order to ensure an exhaustive detailing of the empirical research process, this chapter addresses the following empirical considerations: the history of the qualitative approach; its suitability to this study; concerns related to qualitative

research; a detailing of the empirical data sample; an exploration of the study's three empirical research methods, namely systematic self-observation, semi-structured interviews and thematic content analysis and how the study will ensure validity, reliability and trustworthiness of data.

### **Part 3: Empirical Research findings**

#### Chapter 5: Empirical research findings

With the detailed process and rationale behind this study's empirical phase laid out, the next chapter presents the findings made as a result of the completion of the empirical research processes described in Chapter 4. To demonstrate the rigour and comprehensiveness of the empirical process undertaken, this chapter first and foremost tangibly showcases how the thematic content analysis process led to the derivation of finalised empirical data themes. Thereafter, each theme identified is discussed in-depth, whilst also describing the relationship between the themes, as well as their relevance to the research problem at hand. This chapter also includes a detailing of the findings observed from the study's self-interview research method.

### **Part 4: Discussion of results**

#### Chapter 6: Guideline informing the organisational structuring of social media

Referencing the insights gathered during this study's findings derived from the empirical phase, the study provided a guideline to social media custodians in the form of key considerations that need to be taken into account when planning or deciding on a specific approach to the organisational structuring of professional social media.

## **1.13 CONCLUSION**

This chapter introduced the study from a variety of vantage points and in so doing, provided a contextual framework for the chapters to follow. First and foremost, the chapter explored the central research problem the study aimed to address. Here it was noted that, although organisations employ a variety of different approaches to the organisational structuring of social media, there are little to no guidelines that inform the suitability of one approach above others. This uncertainty in turn leads to less effective implementation of marketing communication initiatives via social media platforms. After exploring the research problem in more specific

detail, the chapter defined specific research questions and corresponding research aims as to guide the study's empirical process.

Thereafter, the chapter introduced the study's two referenced theoretical fields, namely organisational structure and marketing communication. A detailed exploration of each field in the succeeding chapters is necessary in order to ensure that the study is grounded in a trusted theoretical context.

With the theoretical background of the study introduced, the chapter then highlighted how the study's chosen empirical research methodology is relevant to an exploration of the research problem. This discussion was complemented with an introduction to the study's two main research methods, namely self-interview and semi-structured interviews. The chapter's exploration of methodology also included a discussion on the applicability of the study's chosen sample design. The chapter concluded with thoughts regarding the study's general feasibility, the identification of pertinent ethical issues as well as the predicted overall contribution of the study.

With the contextualisation provided by this chapter in mind, the next chapter of the study initiates the theoretical exploration required to ensure the study's grounding in a credible and trusted theoretical framework. More specifically, the following chapter explores modern organisational structuring theory in more detail.

## **CHAPTER 2: ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AND MARKETING COMMUNICATION**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This study was introduced from a variety of vantage points in the first chapter, which included an exploration of the central research problem; the central research questions; an introduction to the study's theoretical framework; a detailed breakdown of the research methods used as well as a look at the ethical considerations of the study. With the necessary context and background established, the first segment of the research could commence, namely an in-depth exploration of the theoretical framework. There were two important theoretical fields to explore in order to ensure that this study has an adequate level of theoretical context. The two main theoretical fields that are discussed are organisational structure and marketing communication, both of which are vital to a clear contextualisation of the study's problem statement.

Firstly, as this study explored the organisational structuring of social media, it was imperative that an exploration of organisational structure was undertaken. The characteristics and dimensions of organisational structure and the more prominent approaches to the structure of organisations' marketing communication functions are discussed. This section reviews theoretical approaches with regard to organisational structure that affect marketing communication. As the study analysed social media within a marketing communication context, these approaches formed a framework of themes for the study's empirical segment.

The second section of the chapter explores marketing communication and its specific disciplines. Marketing is discussed from the vantage points of its origins, criticism of early marketing models, new marketing philosophies and digital marketing. With this context created, the section then introduces and discusses marketing communication and integrated marketing communication.

The study then looks at traditional and modern marketing communication objectives which are referenced in the succeeding chapter in the discussion of social media. The study then delves into disciplines of the marketing communication mix, their definition and description and their strategic uses and applications.

### **2.2 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE**

This study explored the position of the social media function within the organisation, and for this reason a theoretical review of organisational structure was undertaken. Seeing as this study is

firmly positioned within the realm of marketing communication, the theoretical exploration thereafter extends to focus on the organisational structuring of marketing communication functions specifically, within the context of the broader organisational structure. This theoretical background is crucial to the study at hand, as it will ensure an understanding of the factors that influence organisational structure, which in turn assists in ensuring a high quality, relevant output for this study, i.e. an informed guideline for positioning social media within modern organisations.

### **2.2.1 Introduction to organisational structure**

An exploration of organisational structure will contextually benefit from an initial definition of an organisation. According to Holagh *et al.* (2014:213), an organisation can be defined as an intelligent system, where groups of people are consciously cooperating with each other in order to achieve common goals. Adding to this definition, Bouwman *et al.* (2006:32) defines an organisation as a unit of formal positions, usually occupied by individuals, with explicit objectives, tasks, processes and assets. With this description of an organisation as an intelligent system with individual parts in mind, the theoretical background of organisational structure is explored in more detail.

One of the noteworthy milestones in the theoretical exploration of organisational structure was when Alfred Chandler (1962:357) first described the importance of aligning structure with a firm's strategy so that the structure could directly support the internal objective of superior performance. During the early years of organisational literature, organisations were considered as self-contained units with a traditional management hierarchy (Lee *et al.*, 2015:74). Since then however, organisations have recognised the value in a more adaptable and less rigid organisational structure that allows for rapid and ongoing adaptation with regard to both internal and external circumstances (Bunderson & Boumgarden, 2009:609).

Earlier definitions of organisational structure define the term as “the set of all the ways in which the work is divided into different tasks, achieving coordination” (Mintzberg, 1983:22) and “the formal allocation of work roles and the administrative mechanism to control and integrate work activities including those which cross organisational boundaries” (Child, 1972:163). It is “the typically hierarchical arrangement of lines of authority, communications, rights and duties of an organisation. Organisational structure determines how the roles, power and responsibilities are assigned, controlled, and coordinated, and how information flows between the different levels of management” (Business Dictionary, 2015). Whilst all of these definitions describe and consider organisational structure as referring to mostly formal and static arrangements within the

organisation, other definitions add additional complexity to the scope of what constitutes organisational structuring. The Cambridge Dictionary (2015) defines organisational structure simply as “the way in which a large company or organisation is organised, for example, the types of relationships that exist between managers and employees”. One definition adds that “organisational structure describes how members are accepted, how leadership is chosen, and how decisions are made” (Nagy, 2015). Furthermore, Martínez-León and Martínez-García (2011:542) note that organisational structure is a dynamic construct that changes based on organisational conditions and “reflects the way in which information and knowledge is distributed within an organisation”. Kinsey (2005:190) adds that “at the heart of any organisational structure is a set of social relationships between its component parts”. Unlike the first series of definitions, the aforementioned definitions acknowledge the dynamic nature of organisational structure, as well as the importance of considering the informal relationships when describing an organisation’s overall structure.

Combining all of these different definitions, organisational structure is defined in this study as the dynamic arrangement of authority, communication, duties, social and informal relationships as well as decision making within an organisation. Organisational structure describes how all of these different elements of an organisation are coordinated and influence one another. Adopting this definition of organisational structure imbued the study with an adequate degree of theoretical scope and breadth, allowing for an exploration of the organisational structuring of social media from a variety of vantage points.

Over the years, academic literature has described and defined a wide range of different types of organisational structures. Lam and Lundvall (2006:110) note that one type, namely bureaucratic and mechanistic structures are based on the belief that organisations are rational entities, where the design of the company is a science and people within the organisation are regarded as economic entities. Organic and decentralised structures on the other hand, perceive organisations as complex and social entities, with individual and social forces competing and interacting on a constant basis (Martínez-León & Martínez-García, 2011:542).

Another type of organisational structure is known as a functional structure, where employees and their responsibilities are grouped into separate units responsible for particular functions (marketing, legal etc.) or areas of expertise (Habib & Victor, 1991:589). The benefits of such a structure are that it has the potential to enhance efficiency and it helps to establish specialised, distinctive firm capabilities. The drawback of such an approach is that it could lead to coordination issues and conflicts across different functions (Workman *et al.*, 1998:21).

On the other hand, a multidivisional structure sees the organisation being divided into smaller, separate and multi-disciplinarily divisions that tend to lead to more responsiveness and adaptability with regard to market changes (Lee *et al.* 2015:75). However, a multidivisional structure does duplicate administrative management and staff activities, which leads to the inefficient use of functional resources as well as high costs (Gulati, 2007:98). Since the rise in popularity of these different types of organisational structure, there have been various combinations and variations, with organisations trying to combine the benefits of both a functional and multidivisional structure (Lee *et al.*, 2015:75).

Since the establishment of these approaches to organisational structure, more modern variations have been developed that advocate cross-silo cooperation, agile internal and external boundaries and flattened vertical hierarchies. Some of the most noteworthy structural types are the 'matrix structure', that combines functional and multidivisional structures (Lee *et al.*, 2015:75); team structures, that place separate functions or processes into groups according to an overall objective (Griffin & Hauser, 1996:191) as well as more informal types, such as the 'network structure', that describes a cluster of task-specialised economic entities that are coordinated by relational norms instead of a hierarchical chain of command (Achrol & Kotler, 1999:146). Whichever approach an organisation follows, it is crucial that a management team actively considers the benefits and disadvantages of different approaches when planning their organisational structure in order to ensure that the structure is conducive to the reaching of their business goals.

When it comes to the design of an organisational structure, there are different levels of abstraction that need to be considered (Ulrich, 2001:1). On a high level of abstraction, organisational charts and diagrams can be used to provide a graphical overview, whilst aspects such as mission statements, job descriptions and labour contracts can be used to describe organisational structure on a more granular level (Ulrich, 2001:1).

Traditionally, organisational structure is represented as a classical hierarchal or tree diagram that details the differentiation of positions, formulation of command rules and prescriptions of authority present between different groups of an organisation (Flynn, 2015:194). According to Flynn (2015:194) however, the organisational structure is not only related to the structure of the various functional departments of an organisation, but also includes the inter-social group networks within the organisation. The informal structures within an organisation can be described as the networks in which actors interact with one another (Flynn, 2015:195), but are difficult to study, as they are commonly ungovernable and unobservable (Cross & Prusak, 2002:105). This observation highlights the importance of considering all the different facets of

organisational structure and not only the tangible, when exploring the organisational structuring of social media.

Williams and Triest (2009:156) state that, considering the modern challenges that businesses face, it is vital that an organisation's structure be actively reconsidered as to ensure it works to the benefit of the organisation. Changing factors that could cue the need for a reconsideration of an existing organisational structure include legal considerations; the influence of institutions and taxations; restrictive external financing; the influence of macro economy and regulations on single industry (Zhu & Jiao, 2013:536).

An organisation's development and growth is largely dependent on the correct usage of its human capital and the larger an organisation becomes, the more likely issues regarding its workforce are to arise (Holagh *et al.*, 2014:213). In line with this observation, this study's exploration of the organisational structure of social media included a direct consideration of the actual workforce or team members that typically make up an organisation's social media workforce.

The next section delves deeper into the specifics of organisational structure theory.

## **2.2.2 The dimensions and characteristics of organisational structure**

Although there are various aspects, dimensions and characteristics that are essential to the creation and maintenance of organisational structure, Plugge and Bouwman (2012:378) note the following to be the most commonly discussed in literature: the locus of decision making, the level of communication, the nature of formalisation, the number of layers in hierarchy and the level of horizontal integration. Nahm *et al.* (2003:281), on the other hand, list the following aspects as the most important dimensions of organisational structure: the degree of centralisation of the decision-making process; formalisation of rules and procedures as well as structural differentiation. In this section, some of the most significant dimensions and considerations relating to the choice and development of a suitable organisational structure of an organisation are unpacked.

The degree to which external factors influence organisational structure is described within the context of two approaches, namely that of organic structure or mechanistic structure. An organic structure describes an organisational structure that promotes flexibility, allowing employees to initiate changes and adapt quickly to changing conditions (Ali *et al.*, 2010:91). Cosh *et al.* (2010:301) note that organic structures support role specialisation, decentralisation, responsiveness, lack of formalisation and general flexibility. A mechanistic structure, on the

other hand, is used to describe an organisational structure that induces employees to behave in predictable and accountable ways (Ali *et al.*, 2010:91). According to Alavi *et al.* (2014:6284), an organic organisational structure encourages organisational learning, a rapid response to organisational changes and also enhances workforce agility. Related to this dimension is the characteristic of modularity, a term used to describe a highly adaptable organisational structure, where a business is constantly divided into manageable units and then re-assembled to work together again (Day, 2011:183). Modularity often leads a business to a process of reconfiguration, which refers to “the addition of units to the firm, deletion of units from the firm, and recombination of units within the firm” (Karim, 2006:799).

Another important dimension of organisational structure is formalisation. According to Cosh *et al.* (2010:301), formalisation is “a measure of the extent to which the organisation has structured channels of information and authority which are supported by written procedures and rules”. The formalisation of an organisational structure has shown to create a sense of stability and inertia within an organisation (Moreno-Luzón & Lloria, 2008:250). The rules and regulations articulated across an organisation are integral, as they facilitate the circulation of knowledge produced across departments, which in turn, nurtures new ideas and different viewpoints (Cohendet *et al.*, 2004:27). Creating a formalised organisational structure by means of implementing rules and regulations can prevent an organisational workforce from being disorganised, sporadic or even ineffective in certain cases (Okhuysen & Eisenhardt, 2002:370).

Whether an organisation outsources certain functions to external suppliers or not is also an aspect that is of high importance with regard to organisational structure. According to Paswan *et al.* (2012:909), the degree to which other firms are involved in the decision making process of an organisation is known as participation. Trez and Luce (2012:149) note that organisational structures that rely on inter-firm relationships allow companies to share resources, which in turn, can provide them with new competitive positions in the market. Inter-firm relationships also give an organisation access to additional knowledge in key areas, which might otherwise not be accessible due to time or cost constraints (Trez & Luce, 2012:149). According to a study by Plugge and Bouwman (2012:375), a supplier’s capabilities and organisational structure will affect the quality of the service that the supplier provides to the organisation. This is an integral observation, as it highlights the need for the study at hand to also analyse and explore the organisational structure of the supplier when extracting samples from organisations that outsource their social media offering to external suppliers. Related to the organisational structure dimension of participation is the dimension of interdependence. Interdependence or integration is an internally focused version of participation, focusing on the need for workflows

within the organisation that require cooperation among groups and determining the need for collective action, integration and information exchange (Vorhies & Morgan, 2003:100).

Complexity, or the level of specialisation is also an important consideration when it comes to analysing the organisational structure of an organisation. The complexity of an organisational structure is determined by the degree of vertical, horizontal and spatial differentiation within an organisation (Burton & Obel, 2005:119). A high level of complexity within an organisation indicates a diverse range of employee expertise, which in turn, results in the availability of diverse types of information and perspective for organisational problem solving (Claver-Cortés *et al.*, 2012:994). Organisational complexity implies a diverse range of interests, which stimulate new proposals from various departments and individuals who all seek to improve or protect their position within the firm (Claver-Cortés *et al.*, 2012:994).

Another important aspect of organisational structure is the degree to which the organisation is centralised or decentralised. Decentralisation refers to a process where the number of employees who have decision making power or who participate in this process is increased, as to ensure that this responsibility is distributed more widely across both the vertical and horizontal spheres of the organisation (Claver-Cortés *et al.*, 2012:994). This therefore insinuates that centralisation refers to an organisational structuring configuration where the decision-making power and responsibility is focused amongst a limited group of organisational employees. Generating high quality ideas on how to effectively solve organisational problems often requires the input of individuals close to the source of the problem, who have hands-on experience with the issue at hand (Claver-Cortés *et al.*, 2012:994). Therefore, when an organisation takes a decentralised approach, it can have a positive impact by allowing quality solutions that fast-track the process of resolving organisational issues. Zhu and Jiao (2013:536) note that the influence of the environment should be considered when choosing between a centralised or decentralised organisational structure. For organisations that aren't dramatically impacted by the external environment, a centralised approach can be beneficial, as it can lead to less mistakes being made by the organisation's members in general.

In an attempt to illustrate the linkage between organisational structure types and organisational structure dimensions, the following table maps out each organisational structure type's affinity to different organisational structure dimensions:

Types of organisational structure	Dimensions of organisational structure			
	Centralisation	Formalisation	Specialisation	Interdependence
Functional structure	High	High	High	Low
Multidivisional structure	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Low
Matrix structure	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Team structure	Low	Low	Low	High
Network structure	Low	Low	High	High

**Table 2.1: Linkage between organisational structure types and organisational structure dimensions** (Lee *et al.*, 2015:79)

This section illustrates that there are a number of different factors that should be considered and analysed when choosing a specific organisational structure, or when an organisation is reconsidering its current structure. It also shows how certain dimensions of organisational structure are more conducive to a specific organisational structure type. These identified dimensions of organisational structure were used as a theoretical reference point during the study's empirical phase as to tangibly explore the organisational structuring of professional social media.

The following section references the theoretical background of the preceding sections and explores some of the most common structures of an organisation's marketing communication functions, as well as some of the challenges thereof documented in modern literature. This background was vital during the study's empirical process, which extracted sample data from marketing communication managers regarding the factors that influence the organisational structuring of their social media initiatives, within the context of the broader organisational structure.

### **2.2.3 The organisational structuring of marketing communication and structural marketing**

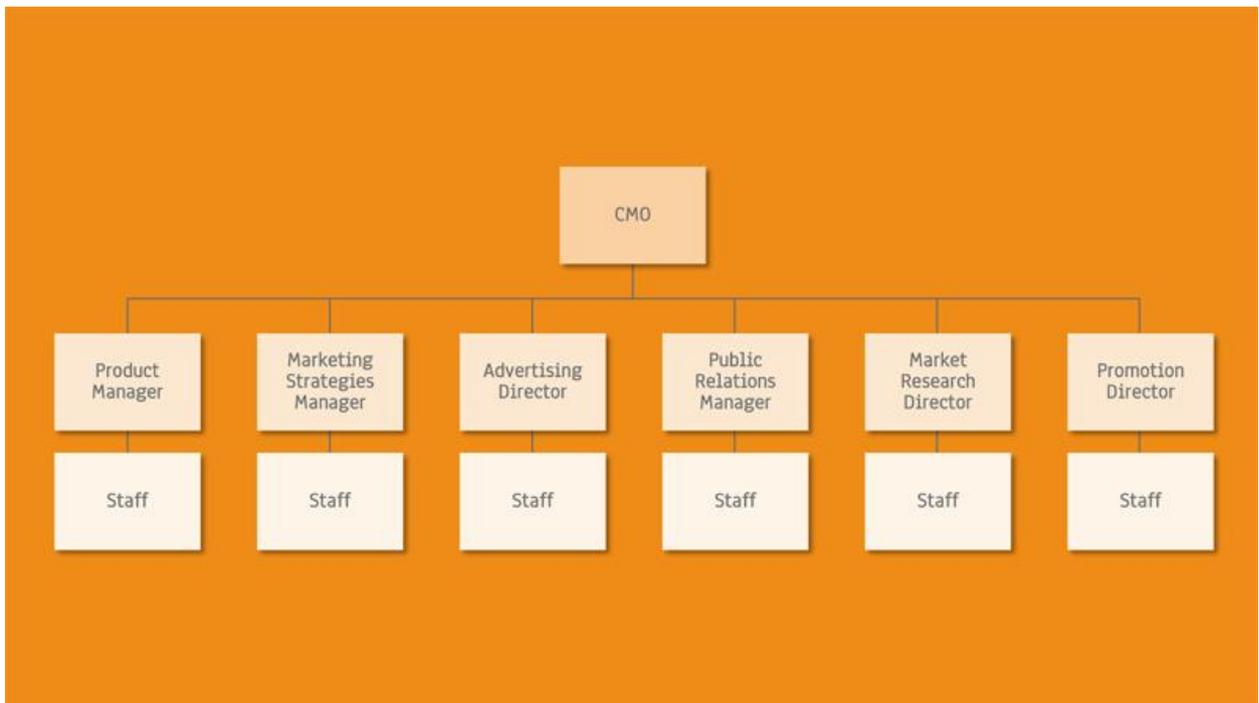
Rooney (2013) notes that organisations that are not restructuring today to meet the requirements of tomorrow, will be left lagging behind their competitors. Even though academics and business practitioners alike are becoming increasingly aware that organisational structure has an influence on their marketing strategy, the volume of literature and academic guidelines available on this topic remain highly scarce (Lee *et al.*, 2015:73). Considering this clear lack of theory in this particular research arena, the Marketing Science Institute (2010, 2012) has nominated “organisational structure” as a priority research focus in two biannual reports, with the main problem statement being raised: “How do organisational structure and marketing capabilities influence business performance?” Lee *et al.* (2015:73) suggest defining this emerging area as ‘structural marketing’, which refers to the firm’s use of structural design elements to the advantage of their marketing objectives.

According to the proponents of structural marketing, organisational structures should be market- or customer-focused, instead of operating- or product-focused, as to maximise the customer’s experience of the organisation and its brands (Day, 2006:41). Lee *et al.* (2015:75) provide a similar description of structural marketing, noting that this approach requires organisations to align each of their business units with the needs of a distinct customer group. One of the noteworthy drawbacks of a customer-centric structure lies in the realisation that such an approach will create a duplication of functionalities across divisions and thus decreases the organisation’s cost efficiency (Gulati, 2007:102). Whether to consider a customer-centric organisational structure therefore depends on the trade-offs between the approach’s customer alignment benefits and the additional costs associated with such a structure (Lee *et al.*, 2015:76).

A study by Paswan *et al.* (2012:908) investigated the influence of different approaches to organisational structure on the performance of an organisation’s marketing initiatives. More specifically, this study found that the degree of centralisation or decentralisation did not have any noticeable impact on marketing strategy (Paswan *et al.*, 2012:908). A high level of formalisation, however, was shown to have a positive impact on a ‘focus’ marketing strategy, where the firm focuses on a limited and specialised product range (Paswan *et al.*, 2012:908). A study by Trez and Luce (2012:143) also explored the relationship between organisational structure and marketing performance, providing evidence that when an organisation has strong inter-firm relationships, a strategy of high participation can have a positive influence on the marketing capabilities of the organisation.

Shandwick (2012:2) explored the trend of organisations reducing the structural distance between its marketing and communication functions. According to Shandwick, (2012:2), the choice to converge these functions is a reaction to the need to respond more quickly and strategically to a variety of different threats and opportunities – the volume of both has proliferated since the mass popularisation of social media amongst the public. Ness (2008) states that digital media's multi-disciplinary applicability necessitates a restructuring of an organisation's marketing communication functions, so that the opportunities that digital presents can be considered for every project or campaign undertaken. Shandwick (2012:2) references the creation of new organisational job titles like 'Chief Marketing and Communication Officer' (CMCO) and 'VP Strategic Marketing and Corporate Communication' as evidence of this emerging trend of integrating marketing and communication.

There are various opinions on how the structural make-up of an integrated marketing communication department should be approached. According to Shandwick (2012:15), most organisations either adopt a centralised or matrix-like structure, with marketing communication team members reporting to both a brand leader and the CMO (Chief Marketing Officer). Perlut (2013) distinguishes between two different marketing communication structures: either all functions report up to the CMO, or the brand and digital teams are located under one structure below the CMO. Perlut (2013) however cautions the modern organisation, stating that the structure chosen should not restrict effective multi-channel marketing integration. In the Digital Marketing: Organisational Structures and Resourcing Report (Perkin, 2013), various typical marketing communication structures are discussed, two of which are having digital marketing resources disperse throughout the organisation; and the creation of a Digital Centre of Excellence. Rooney (2013) advocates a highly integrated, spoke-like marketing communication organisational structure that sees the CMO as the central hub, with different marketing communication mix heads creating the inter-connected 'spokes' and 'rim of the wheel':



**Figure 2.1: The traditional marketing communication organisational structure (Rooney, 2013)**



**Figure 2.2: The new, spoke-like marketing communication organisational structure (Rooney, 2013)**

This section highlights the importance of aligning organisational structure to the needs of the modern, highly dynamic marketing communication context. This requirement has received so much focus, that academics are advocating the approach under the umbrella term of structural marketing, which focuses on the structural factors that could have an impact on a brand's marketing performance. The section's focus on the convergence of an organisation's marketing and communication functions illustrates that the process of integrating these two functions results in more agile, responsive marketers who can face the challenges brought on by the digital age. The suggested marketing communication structures illustrate the integrated approach advocated by modern marketing authors and practitioners. During this study's empirical process, the relationship between marketing performance and organisational structure was explored in more depth.

Furthermore, this section also creates a contextual reference for the organisational structuring of modern marketing communication functions. As this study opted to categorise an organisation's social media activities under the overarching umbrella of marketing communication, this discussion can therefore be extended to also relate to social media itself. Although this section does not discuss social media's organisational structuring within the context of marketing communication directly and explicitly, this topic is explored in the succeeding chapter, which focuses exclusively on social media theory. This section however lays the foundation for a more detailed look at social media's organisational structuring.

## **2.3 THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION**

The next section of this chapter undertakes a detailed exploration of the study's other main theoretical vantage point, namely marketing communication. As the organisational structuring of social media is being contextualised within the context of marketing communication, it is necessary that the field be discussed and analysed in depth. This theoretical exploration starts off with a discussion of the origins and development of marketing theory.

### **2.3.1 The origins of marketing**

Seeing as the development of marketing communication is linked to the origins of marketing itself, a discussion regarding the origins of marketing communication cannot take place without an overview of the evolution of marketing. The development of schools of thought concerning foundational marketing principles can be divided into four main periods, as per the four eras defined by Wilkie and Moore (2003:116):

1. pre-academic marketing thought, prior to 1900;
2. traditional approaches to marketing thought, from roughly 1900 – 1955;
3. the paradigm shift, based on Alderson's work, from roughly 1955 to 1975;
4. the paradigm broadening, mostly following Kotler's (and various co-authors) writings, from roughly 1975 to 2000.

It was at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that academic thoughts around marketing started to congregate, with more established marketing principles gaining popularity from 1955 onwards (Shaw & Jones, 2009:241). Shaw and Jones (2009:241) noted that most historians agreed that marketing as an academic discipline emerged as a brand of applied economics.

During the paradigm shift phase (Wilkie & Moore, 2003:116), the thoughts of the dominant marketing scholar of that time, Wroe Alderson, resulted in or impacted most modern schools of marketing thought, which included marketing management, marketing systems and consumer behaviour (Shaw & Jones, 2009:241).

During the fourth phase, identified by Wilkie and Moore (2003:116), one of the scholars who had a noteworthy impact on the development of established marketing principles was Phillip Kotler (Shaw & Jones, 2005:241). Kotler (1972:46) defined marketing as "the disciplined task of creating and offering values to others for the purpose of achieving a desired response". Kotler's definition highlights the importance of putting the needs of the customer first – an approach that is still very much reflected in more modern marketing philosophies, such as 'relationship marketing', 'customer-orientated marketing' and 'market-driven business'.

Kotler (1988:6) also notes that the origins of marketing are inherently linked to the concept of an exchange - "the art of obtaining a desired product from someone by offering something in return". Kotler forms part of the 'Exchange school' of marketing theory (Shaw & Jones, 2009:265), joining other marketing theorists who propagate the viewpoints of this specific school of marketing. Other marketing exchange school theorists however differentiate between the types of exchanges: Bagozzi (1978:257), as well as Houston and Gassenheimer (1978:3) described the process known as the 'marketing exchange' as transactions that occurred independently of any previous or subsequent exchanges, which were characterised by short-term orientation and motivated by self-interest. In contrast to this, Dwyer *et al.* (1987:11) is of the opinion that 'relational exchanges' have a longer-term orientation and develop between parties who wish to build a supportive relationship amongst one another. This basic concept of exchange is an underlying principle of all marketing transactions, with the two polar spectrums of exchanges being described by marketing and relational exchanges (Fill, 2006:25). A

definition by The American Marketing Association (1985:1) of marketing recognises the fundamental role of exchanges in marketing: "The process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas goods and services to create exchange and satisfy individual and organisational objectives."

After the concept of exchanges within a marketing context had grown in popularity, Bowersox and Morash (1989:2) noted the important role played by effective communication within an exchange context. The roles of communication that were highlighted during the process of exchange are its ability to inform customers, persuade customers, reinforce marketing experiences as well as create differentiation between product offerings (Bowersox & Morash, 1989:2).

A refined definition of marketing from Kotler includes a similar focus on exchanges: "the process of all activities necessary for the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services in order to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organisational objectives" (Kotler, 1997:4). This definition was also a positive step forward regarding the conceptualisation of the concept of marketing, as the definition included direct mentioning of the marketing tools to the disposal of marketing practitioners for promoting products and services.

Although there is merit in Kotler's and other theorists' (belonging to the Marketing school of exchange) approach to defining marketing, it is important to note that there are various other schools of marketing thought that propagate different viewpoints regarding the particulars of marketing as a concept (Shaw & Jones, 2009:241).

Although the concept of exchange is still believed to be an important element of marketing, newer approaches to marketing propagate the viewpoint that interactions between suppliers and customers are also of paramount importance (Grönroos, 2006:395) when it comes to defining marketing as a concept. The American Marketing Association's updated definition of marketing (2013) highlights the importance of the creation of mutually beneficial value between suppliers and customers: "Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large." This definition's focus on marketing as a means of creating value between customers and suppliers aligns with social media's intrinsic link with relationship building (Chapter 1, section 1.6.2, Egan, 2011:51) and was therefore adopted as the preferred definition of marketing that this study employed.

One of the most noteworthy approaches to marketing that explored the concept of the marketing inventory in more detail was the 4P model of marketing. The following section of this chapter explores this movement in more detail.

### **2.3.2 The 4 P model of marketing**

Even though Kotler's (1972:46) overarching approach towards marketing still holds truth and relevance today, there has been a noticeable degree of progression from other authors in this regard.

Frey (1961:33) proposed that marketing initiatives be split into two main categories, namely those based on the marketing offering and those based on factors relating to the methods and disciplines used to market products and an organisation's services. Other earlier forms of marketing models included product, price, place and promotion, which came to be known as the 4 P's of marketing (Smith & Taylor, 2004:7). The 4P model, originating in the 1960s, was introduced by Neil Borden (1964:7), who identified twelve controllable marketing elements that could lead to marketing success for an organisation. This model was an evolution of an explanation to marketing practice by his associate, James Culliton (1964:58), in which he described the role of a marketer as the 'mixer of ingredients'. Illustrating this analogy, a marketer follows the marketing mixing recipe proposed by others, but in other cases, experiments with his own recipe or concoction, possibly even combining different recipes to come up with a fresh view of marketing tactics. Jerome McCarthy (1964:145) condensed this model to a simplified framework of 'Product, Price, Promotion and Place'. The model quickly grew in popularity, until it was adopted as the new benchmark for planning marketing initiatives (Constantinides, 2006:408).

Certain marketing practitioners (Grönroos, 1994:324) initially adopted McCarthy's 4P model as the accepted guide for implementing marketing and operational marketing planning. Several other studies by different marketing theorists (Sriram & Sapienza, 1991:33; Romano & Ratnatunga, 1996:30; Coviello *et al.*, 2000:523) supported the claim that the 4P paradigm was indeed the standard for tactically dealing with marketing issues. One of the reasons why the model gained widespread appeal lies in its simplicity – it's an easy concept to understand, memorise and apply to a wide range of marketing situations (Jobber, 2001:10).

### **2.3.3 Criticism of the 4 P model and the rise of new marketing models**

Despite the initial widespread support behind the 4P model, many marketing authors (Dixon & Blois, 1983; Rafiq & Ahmed, 1992) started to express their reluctance regarding the model. This

led to it becoming a controversial topic of debate, with some of the shortcomings of the model identified as follows:

- Internal orientation: a frequent objection underlying the mix's explicit lack of customer orientation (Schultz, 2001:7). The model focused exclusively on the role of the marketer and his/her efforts and made little to no room for considering the influence that the customer has on the marketing process. Theorists argue that the mix ignores the evolving nature of the consumer who demands not only higher value but also more control over the communication and exchange process (Yudelson, 1999:60).
- Lack of strategic elements: the lack of strategic content is a noteworthy limitation of the model. Because of this, it was argued that the model was unfit to be a planning instrument in an environment where external and uncontrollable factors defined the firm's strategic opportunities and threats (Ohmae, 1982:39). Once again relating to the limited scope of the model, this point notes the importance of using a model that is adaptable and flexible.
- The 4P model has general breadth of relevancy issues, limiting its applicability in the ever-changing marketing landscape (Waterschoot & Van den Blute, 1992:83). A common aspect of 4P model criticism is that there are a multitude of crucial marketing considerations and variables that it does not take into account.

The criticism from the marketing community on the 4P model gradually started to erode its widespread acceptance. This led to many new approaches to marketing evolving that focused on the need for a more specialised approach to marketing.

Two of the models that were created in opposition to the original 4P Model were the 4C's consumer-orientated model of marketing (Lauterborn, 1990:26) and the 7C's Compass model (Shimizu, 2009:146). One of the important considerations that the 4C classification added to marketing theory was a direct inclusion of the role of the consumer. Here, the consumer was recognised as an important variable that had a dramatic influence on the way in which marketing should be approached (Wang & Wang, 2009:18). Directly opposing the 4P model, the 4C model replaced each of the original 4P elements with customer centred counterparts. These ensured a direct alignment to consumer needs, with 'Product' changed to 'Consumer', 'Price' to 'Cost', 'Promotion' to 'Communication' and 'Place' to 'Convenience' (Wang & Wang, 2009:18). This model was later expanded to the 7C's Compass model, which described the factors that played a role in the success and failure of an organisation (Shimizu, 2009:146). Since then, the rate of marketing theory evolution has not slowed down, partly due to the massive influence of new electronic marketing channels and the changes they bring in consumer behaviour.

Shultz (2016:1) notes that reducing marketing to the constraints of the 4P Model and similar theoretical categorisations of marketing dimensions does not adequately explore the entirety of the scope of marketing. Schultz (2016:1) makes the case for marketing to be considered as a social science, with modern theory focusing on the role that marketing plays within society, societal well-being and individual quality of life. Grönroos (2006:398) also notes that the notion of customer value and customer relationships has been important recent evolutions in modern marketing academic literature. Some of the other major influences on modern marketing theory include individualised target markets, personalised business relations and compressed value chains (Csikósová *et al.*, 2014:1615).

### **2.3.4 The influence of digital technology on marketing**

The quick growth and rise in popularity of internet based marketing platforms have brought with it an entirely new range of marketing opportunities and approaches, which are collectively referred to as Internet Marketing, Online Marketing or Digital Marketing (Nosrati *et al.*, 2013:56). Internet marketing can be defined as “the application of the internet and related digital technologies in conjunction with traditional communication to achieve marketing objectives (Chaffey *et al.*, 2009:7). Referencing the concept of exchange discussed in section 2.3.1 of this chapter, the internet has become one of the most important marketplaces for the exchange of goods and services between buyers and sellers (Leeflang *et al.*, 2014:2).

Some of the reasons why marketing via internet and digital platforms has grown in popularity include it creating additional opportunities for identifying needs and wants of consumers; helping marketers anticipate and manage the demand for products and lastly, its propensity to increase overall levels of customer satisfaction (Smith & Chaffey, 2001:49). Bocji *et al.* (2003:99) summarise the main benefits of internet marketing via a 6-C model, namely cost reduction, capability, competitive advantage, communication improvement, control and customer service improvement.

As internet marketing started growing in popularity amongst marketers, one of the first specific uses was to utilise an organisation’s website for the purpose of ‘brochure ware’ or electronic brochures, which are used to promote an organisation’s product and services (Chaffey *et al.*, 2009:8). Since then, the marketing tools available via digital and internet platforms have proliferated, with social media noted as one of the top contributors to the evolution of online marketing in recent years (Nosrati *et al.*, 2013:56).

Broadening the scope of internet marketing, 'E-marketing' refers to all types of electronic marketing, whether it takes place on the internet as well as other forms of interactive and digital communication mediums (Chaffey *et al.*, 2009:7). One of the specific examples of e-marketing is that of mobile marketing, which sees marketers utilising a wide array of mobile devices for the purpose of marketing to an audience focused on convenience and ease of use (Chen *et al.*, 2013:38).

Another one of the sub-categories that falls under the larger overarching umbrella of electronic marketing includes content marketing, a movement that accentuates the importance of unique digital content and how it is vital for differentiation in the online and social media realm (Nosrati *et al.*, 2013:60). Bagley and Lanz (2014:2) differentiate between 3 different types of content marketing in the digital space, namely paid content (purchased inventory on non-owned digital spaces), owned content (content dispersed on digital platforms controlled by the organisation) as well as earned content (content form during the interaction that an organisation has with consumers on digital).

Whilst digital marketing has created many opportunities for marketing practitioners, it does also bring with it certain challenges, which include how to best use consumer data to compete effectively; the threatening influence of social media for brands and customer relationships; the ongoing debate around the effectiveness of digital marketing initiatives, as well as the increasing talent gap in analytical capabilities within firms (Leeflang *et al.*, 2014:10).

This exploration of the development of marketing theory has highlighted how the concept has evolved into a complex and multi-faceted movement with various considerations. With the development of marketing from its traditional roots to its modern uses via digital and electronic channels explored as a theoretical reference point for the study, this chapter can commence an exploration of marketing communication itself.

### **2.3.5 Marketing communication**

Marketing communication is the field that focuses on specific forms of marketing disciplines available to marketers for the promotion of products and services. Žabkar and Zbačnik (2009:50) define the term as "all activities through which the company communicates with the target groups about its offer on the market". Shimp (2003:3), on the other hand, defines the term as "the set of all marketing mix elements of the brand, which facilitates the exchange, positions the brand and forwards the meaning of the brand to target groups". Fill (2006:7) adds that marketing communication is "the management process through which the organisation

participates with various audiences". Whilst these definitions create a broad scope of the term's meaning, they all demonstrate that marketing communication approaches marketing via a more deliberate and planned approach, combining different elements in order to effectively manage an organisation's marketing initiatives. The study's empirical phase explored if the structuring of an organisation's marketing communication functions also reflected a sense of deliberate planning, as propagated by these definitions of marketing communication.

Exploring the reasons for the rise of marketing communication, it is noted that the increase in the number of communication options available to marketers to reach consumers was one of the changes that gave rise to the development of marketing communication (Keller, 2001:819). The need for strategic alignment in marketing was another factor that was noted as contributing to the development of marketing communication. Before the planned approach of marketing communication was introduced, marketers treated marketing disciplines as separate, isolated entities with their own goals and objectives, not recognising that these disciplines should be coordinated to communicate strategically and present a consistent image to a targeted message audience (Belch & Belch, 2001:77). According to Fill (2006:19), a marketing communication strategy must be communicated in such a way that the messages are consistent through time and targeted at the relevant stakeholder groups. Marketing communication also addresses the issues with earlier practical theories of marketing by highlighting the importance of proper public relations and communication as an integral part of the marketing mix (Fill, 2006:19).

The rise of digital marketing (as discussed in section 2.3.4) has also had a dramatic influence on more established marketing philosophies and theoretical approaches, one of which being marketing communication (Porcu *et al.*, 2012:316). One of the modern shifts in marketing communication theory that was brought on by the rise of digital marketing was that of 'co-produced' marketing communication. Here, the consumer and the marketer engage in a highly collaborative, interactive process when it comes to message formation and the tools used to market products and services (Bacile *et al.*, 2014:122). An example of this is when a consumer uses a brand's Facebook page to suggest a new product or possible improvements to a product. During a 2013 social media campaign, the popular board game, Monopoly invited their social media fans to have a direct influence on the product itself (Boles, 2013).

According to Bacile *et al.* (2014:122), co-produced marketing communication has a positive effect on the success rate of marketing in general, as consumers perceive their direct role in the process as an additional reason to stay loyal and committed to the brand. Such a collaborative approach to marketing is a dramatic shift away from a more traditional approach to marketing as

first conceptualised by Kotler (1972:46). This modern approach does not only accentuate the role of the consumer as per more modern manifestations of marketing communication theory, but also accentuates the fact that the consumer him/herself can be an integral part of the marketing process itself.

This background of marketing communication highlighted how this planned and deliberate approach to marketing has been influenced by modern, customer focused developments in the field.

The next section explores a modern development of the original marketing communication theoretical movement.

### **2.3.6 Integrated marketing communication**

Expanding on the traditional scope of marketing communication, integrated marketing communication (IMC) explores how the different facets of marketing complement each other to create a seamless experience for the customer. Schultz and Schultz (1998:18) define IMC as a "strategic business process used to plan, develop, execute and evaluate coordinated, measurable, persuasive brand communication programmes over time with consumers, customers, prospects and other targeted, relevant external and internal audiences." Kerin *et al.* (2013:432) define integrated marketing communication as the process of designing marketing communication programmes that coordinate all promotional activities, whether it be advertising, event marketing, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling, sponsorships or direct marketing.

The general concept behind IMC kicked off in the 1980s, when American companies divided themselves into departments that each operated as a unique profit centre (Ivanov, 2012:538). Back then, the concept of integration was focused internally, with separate departments ensuring they use the same corporate colours, logos and so forth (Ivanov, 2012:538). Once organisations started also noting the importance of integrating and effectively combining their external, public facing initiatives, IMC as the concept we know it as today started developing (Ivanov, 2012:538). Mulhern (2009:10) states that IMC originated from the idea of connecting objectives and messages across numerous media vehicles, with the aim of providing a more integrated approach to marketing communication.

This approach propagates the notion that integration needs to happen horizontally (across marketing disciplines) as well as vertically (across other sectors in the corporate hierarchy (Csikósová *et al.* 2014:1616). The importance of marketing communication integration within the

context of the modern organisation was also accentuated during this study's empirical data collection process, with social media custodians highlighting the benefits, disadvantages and key considerations thereof with specific regard to social media (Chapter 5, section 5.2.2.4).

These observations also align with the theory detailed on the organisational structure of marketing communication functions, discussed earlier in this chapter (section 2.2.3). Even though this study focused on the organisational structuring of an organisation's social media function, it is noted that the influence of the functional aspects of marketing communication's individual elements also needed to be explored during the empirical phase if this study was to include an expansive exploration of the topic at hand.

IMC's focus on the consumer means that the movement also has an inherent link with another modern marketing movement, namely relationship marketing (Egan, 2011:51). Here, the focus is to establish a lasting bond of loyalty with the consumer, which can result in long-term devotion from a brand's target audience (Csikósová *et al.* 2014:1617). This also reflects the collaborative, two-way nature of social media (Chapter 3, section 3.3.1: Sashi, 2012:255).

This section detailed the development of marketing theory from its origins, to modern marketing movements actively considered by practitioners today. This theoretical framework had functional relevance during the subsequent empirical phase of this study, where an understanding of the marketing communication context in which social media custodians operate ensured a contextually relevant interpretation of empirical sample data.

It is furthermore noted that the study's exploration of modern marketing communication theory highlighted its applicability as a relevant and trusted framework from which to explore professional social media in more detail. This is based on modern marketing communication's planned approach and the fact that it reflects social media's focus on relationship building (Chapter 1, section 1.6.2: Egan, 2011:51) as well as a collaborative two-way approach to customer communication (Chapter 3, section 3.3.1: Sashi, 2012:255).

Expanding on the modern marketing communication theoretical framework established, the next section discusses some of the most common marketing communication objectives used by marketing practitioners. These objectives formed a framework for the empirical segment of this study, where the degree to which different approaches to social media organisational structuring has the propensity to reach specific marketing communication objectives was explored.

## 2.4 TRADITIONAL AND MODERN MARKETING COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

The evaluation and measurement of marketing communication and its benefits have not yet been standardised, which is mostly due to there being so many differing understandings of what the theoretical movement entails, as well as the disciplines it includes and excludes (Reinold & Tropp, 2012:114). Adding further complexity to the standardisation of marketing communication theory is the realisation that social media is having a noticeably direct impact on the way in which marketing communication initiatives are managed and measured (Schlee & Harich, 2013:209). This section explores the most common objectives that are assigned to marketers and looks specifically at how these relate back to the overarching business goals of an organisation. This theoretical discussion forms a reference and point of comparison for the succeeding chapter that focuses on the roles and objectives of social media marketing specifically. But before these objectives are discussed, this section starts with a contextual exploration of the reasons behind the need for measuring the success of an organisation's marketing communication initiatives.

There is a constant sense of pressure exerted on marketing departments within the context of a highly competitive business world (Islam, 2008:238). Some of this pressure stems from the requirement to prove the organisational value of marketing efforts, a pressure that has highlighted the need for strategic marketing planning and a focus on a multitude of different tangibly measured marketing objectives (Islam, 2008:238). McDonald (1989) also acknowledges the value of setting up multiple marketing objectives when it comes to marketing planning but accentuates the need to prioritise those that are most crucial to meeting the corporate objectives they are directly related to. Sharma (2013) adds that marketing goals should align with, and originate from the organisation's overarching business or corporate goals of the organisation, such as improving sales.

Other reasons for setting and adhering to marketing objectives include the creation of a proverbial 'yardstick' from which success and failure can be measured, to allow for coordination and common purpose amongst marketing team members, as well as to improve the overall efficiency of marketing efforts (Wolinski & Coates, 2009:108).

Kaho (2013), Guettler (2013) and Wolinski and Coates (2009:120) distinguish between the following broad marketing objectives that could stem from the overall corporate objectives of an organisation:

- **Increased sales and lead generation:** whilst not always possible in a direct sense, it is increasingly important that marketers contextualise the progress of their marketing efforts within the framework of sales lead increases. Whilst the sales impact of certain marketing communication disciplines (such as direct marketing and sales promotion) can be relatively easily tracked, it becomes more complex with other disciplines such as public relations. Digital marketing has simplified the process however, as the consumer's product journey from awareness to purchase can be tracked accurately in the online space.
- **Increased product awareness:** if marketing efforts are not focused directly on the organisation's bottom line, it can also indirectly affect it by focusing on other objectives, such as increased product awareness. This is usually required when a brand needs to create a new perception of its product line as a way of ensuring it is still relevant and appealing to consumers. An example of this is the Old Spice rebranding that was supported by a relevant and modern advertising campaign.
- **Brand positioning and management:** the management of a brand can entail ensuring that the brand has a noteworthy presence in the public eye, or could involve shaping the brand's presence into a specific desired state. Because of the complexity involved with shaping public opinion, brand positioning objectives are normally long-term in nature, focusing on the ideal of generating sustainable increase in sales over an extended period.
- **Customer retention and brand loyalty:** for some organisations, the importance of ensuring that consumers keep using their products and don't switch over to those of competitors cannot be understated. When this is an objective of a marketing campaign, it is crucial to highlight the benefits of the product and in some cases to specifically refer to the disadvantages of the competition's product.

It is noted that the above represents a non-exhaustive list of marketing objectives and is merely provided as background for the main types of marketing objectives.

Looking at the requirements for suitable marketing objectives, authors such as Pendergrass (2013) suggests setting up measurable and tangible marketing objectives according to the SMART framework. These are as follows:

- **Specific** – the goal of the marketing initiative is focusing on one precise area that is clearly distinguished.
- **Measurable** – the goal of the marketing initiative can be tangibly quantified in some way.

- **Attainable** – the goal should be something that can be reachable within the given time constraints.
- **Realistic** – the goal can reasonably be achieved given the resources available.
- **Time-bound** – a specific amount of time has been designated that signifies when objectives need to be achieved.

With a view of marketing communication theory and typical marketing communication objectives detailed, the next section analyses the different tools or disciplines available to marketing communication practitioners for reaching and achieving measurable marketing communication results.

## 2.5 THE DISCIPLINES OF THE MARKETING COMMUNICATION MIX

Even though an overarching understanding of modern marketing theory is imperative for establishing a dependable theoretical framework for the study at hand, it needs to be supplemented by a deeper analysis of modern marketing communication. For this reason, this section unpacks additional theory available on marketing communication.

Whilst many authors agree that there are different tools and disciplines available to the marketing professional for the purpose of undertaking marketing communication activities, there seems to be little consensus in terms of the exact labelling and scope of these disciplines. Nevertheless, a direct consideration of these marketing tools is an integral aspect of marketing communication itself. Kerin *et al.* (2013:432) distinguish between 5 different disciplines used in marketing communication, referring to them as the 'promotional elements': advertising, personal selling, public relations, sales promotion and direct marketing. Goi *et al.* (2013:174) confirm that traditionally, marketers distinguish between the five aforementioned marketing tools when it comes to the marketing communication mix, but that variations are possible depending on the unique circumstances of the organisation. Whilst advertising, sales promotion and public relations were originally known as the main tools for consumer marketing, personal selling was considered to be more effective for business-to-business marketing. Direct marketing only started gaining traction in the 1980s when the need for highly personalised and targeted marketing was accentuated (Goi *et al.*, 2013:174).

Smith and Cook (2012:67) note a similar paring, but add sponsorships as an element that justifies independent consideration to the marketing communication mix. Soba and Aydin (2013:111) debate the relevance of product placement as a separate and distinguishable

discipline of the marketing communication mix, noting it to be a popular marketing strategy with potential for nurturing brand loyalty.

McDonald (2012:289) notes that marketing communication has evolved to such an extent that the traditional categories of the marketing communication mix require inclusion of a digital marketing communication mix. This includes the disciplines of search marketing, social media marketing, advertisements and affiliates, as well as email and viral marketing. The marketing communication mix disciplines referenced by Koekemoer (2014:95) also include individual consideration for more modern marketing disciplines such as digital media marketing and alternative communication channels.

The importance of considering these modern disciplines of marketing when discussing the marketing communication mix cannot be ignored. It is noted that the digital marketing disciplines suggested by Koekemoer (2014:95) also include social media itself, as social media can be regarded as a sub-division of digital marketing. It is important to consider what the impact would be if this study is to explore social media as both an overarching new marketing channel, as well as an individual discipline (tool) of the marketing communication mix. The differentiation between marketing communication tools (disciplines) and channels is explained by Tomše and Snoj (2014:132): Marketing communication tools or disciplines, refer to the general way or methods of communication, whilst marketing communication channels refer to the medium that enables the transmission of the marketing message from the source to the recipient. Seeing as this study aimed to consider the impact of the marketing communication mix disciplines on the organisational structuring of social media, it is suggested that social media be explored from an overarching, marketing communication channel perspective and not as an individual discipline of the marketing communication mix itself.

This however does not mean that this study did not consider the impact of these more modern marketing communication mix disciplines during the course of the research. Where relevant, the impact of digital marketing as a marketing communication discipline is referenced. For this reason, a previous section of the chapter (section 2.3.4) discussed the impact of digital media marketing in considerable length. An additional substantiation for not including these modern marketing communication disciplines as a part of this study lies in the observation that an adequate level of theoretical knowledge of these new marketing methods has not been developed. This has the implication that these marketing movements cannot be detailed in the same depth as their more traditional counterparts.

This study therefore, for the purpose of an in-depth exploration of all established marketing communication disciplines, references the most widely accepted list of modern marketing communication mix disciplines. These are namely personal selling, advertising, sponsorships, public relations, sales promotion and direct marketing. It is however suggested that one additional marketing communication mix discipline be added as a separate consideration, namely event marketing. As noted by Kerin *et al.* (2013:432), an integrated marketing communication approach includes specific consideration for event marketing. This is firstly justified by highlighting the relevancy of an integrated approach to modern marketing communication to the study (as discussed in section 2.3.6). Secondly, it is also noted that, within the context of the researcher's own experience as a marketing communication practitioner, event marketing is often considered as a clearly distinguished discipline of marketing communication, with its own unique consideration and strategies.

The study's identified marketing communication mix disciplines are now each discussed in more detail.

### **2.5.1 Personal selling**

Personal selling is defined as the two-way flow of communication between a buyer and a seller, intended to influence the buyer's purchasing decision (Kerin *et al.*, 2013:434). Some of the advantages of personal selling are the possibility for immediate feedback from the target audience and the potential for personalised messaging (Kerin *et al.*, 2013:434).

Smith and Cook (2012:267) make the observation that personal selling is a more popular marketing communication discipline for business-to-business marketing and that more budget is usually spent on personal selling initiatives in this sphere than on public relations and advertising. The reasoning behind this lies in personal selling's major advantage as one of the most persuasive marketing communication disciplines, making it suitable for driving high revenue sales where the decision is up to a few key stakeholders (Smith & Cook, 2012:267). In saying this though, personal selling has evolved dramatically since its initial rise in popularity, with it becoming less and less used as a short-term sales driver, but rather as a way to build powerful partnerships and relationships with key buyers (Smith & Cook, 2012:267).

Omar (2014:229) highlights the importance of demonstrating appropriate communication cues and how they can be used to effectively attract prospective customers, getting customers to agree to the seller's ideas and ultimately close a sale. Also contributing to the communication needs of effective personal selling, Roach (2014:36) stresses the importance of approaching

personal selling opportunities as being two-way in nature. Adopting such an approach, the sales practitioner can adapt his selling approach midway through a sales process based on information gathered on-the-fly – this, in turn, will result in a more personalised and effective sales approach (Roach, 2014:36). These observations highlight the importance of a customer focused approach to personal selling, a consideration that was previously highlighted as an important element of modern marketing practice.

Whilst numerous studies have explored the factors that influence the success of personal selling initiatives, it is noted that the effectiveness of these tactics themselves can be dependent on a number of different variables (Plouffe *et al.*, 2014:153):

- The inherent personality of the salesperson – extraverted personality types are potentially more successful with selling initiatives than their introverted counterparts.
- The salesperson's ability to effectively use various tactics – no one tactic can be used in isolation and a salesperson will need to be able to use tactics conjointly.
- The product or selling situation – some tactics could be more conducive within a specific context than others.
- Customer differences: whilst some customers might be more perceptible to emotional appeals, others might be more open to rational appeals.

In a study conducted by Parvinen *et al.*, (2014:1567), the evolution of human-to-human selling was explored, with particular focus on the digitalisation of selling initiatives under the umbrella term of 'e-selling'. One of the conclusions of this study was that human immersion was a key aspect of the success of digital personal selling initiatives (Parvinen *et al.*, 2014:56). This highlights the need for digitised personal selling initiatives to appeal on an emotional level with their intended target markets, even though the lack of physical proximity adds complexity to the process of achieving this.

## **2.5.2 Advertising**

Kerin *et al.*, (2013:434) define advertising as any paid form of non-personal communication about an organisation, its products, services or an identified sponsor. The paid and non-personal aspect of advertising is a noteworthy distinction between advertising and other marketing communication mix disciplines.

Commenting on the advantages of advertising, Adhikary (2014:230) notes that it can function as a valuable and comparative hub of information about products and services. Although advertising can also be a useful tool for nurturing purchase intent, it is important to consider that

advertising cannot be used to mask or hide product shortcomings (Adhikary, 2014:230). This is based on the argument that a consumer's prior knowledge of or experience with a product or service could carry more weight in the purchase decision making process (Adhikary, 2014:235). Furthermore, whilst advertising is effective in reaching a large number of consumers, it does have the drawback of high absolute costs and the lack of targeted feedback from its recipients, brought on by its one-way nature (Kerin *et al.*, 2013:434).

Exploring the evolution of modern advertising, Smith and Cook (2012:283) observe that the face of advertising is changing due to the rise of new technologies, with new advertising formats such as user-generated advertising, contextual advertising, location-based advertising and social TV coming to the forefront. The importance of true consumer engagement (as developed from social media roots) has for example necessitated the need to detach advertising from its roots as a one-way communication medium (Smith & Cook, 2012:283). Armstrong and Kotler (2013:465) note that consumers are spending more and more of their time online, with marketers also starting to apply their traditional advertising budgets to more modern, online spaces. The internet gives marketers access to rich media tools, interactive services and a global reach that weren't previously accessible to them (Bakshi & Gupta, 2013:29). New rich media ad units that include animations, video, sound and interactivity are increasing in popularity due to their ability to stand out amongst other online advertising units (Armstrong & Kotler, 2013:467). This look at the evolution of advertising once again highlights the influence of digital communication mediums and a customer focused approach to the development of modern marketing communication practice.

An example of how new technology makes advertising more trackable is online behavioural advertising (OBA), a form of specialised online advertising that collects data about a consumer's online behavioural patterns. Whilst OBA is used in a widespread degree across the globe for more specialised and targeted advertising, this technique does have certain privacy implications (Smit *et al.*, 2014:15). It was found that the general consumer lacks general knowledge as well as awareness regarding the implications of this approach to online advertising (Smit *et al.*, 2014:15). Although targeted online advertising can translate into a sales increase for organisations, the costs related to targeted advertising can be very high when the volume of similar ad units from competitive brands is substantial (Chen & Stallaert, 2014:429). Because of the impact that the level of competition has on the costs of targeted advertising, it is expected that smaller advertisers can enjoy more noteworthy benefits from targeted advertising than would bigger brands (Chen & Stallaert, 2014:429).

### 2.5.3 Sponsorships

According to the Digital Marketing Reference (2015), sponsorships can be defined as marketing communication activities that seek to establish a deeper association and integration between a marketer and a publisher, often involving coordinated beyond-the-banner placements.

When it comes to modern sponsorship initiatives, it is observed that the movement has evolved from its simplistic beginnings of merely 'badging' an event or celebrity with the identity of the organisation. Today, sponsorship experts leverage sponsorships in unique and creative ways in order to ensure a maximum return on investment (Smith & Cook, 2012:342). The most popular type of sponsorships are sports, arts, education, community and broadcast sponsorships (Smith & Cook, 2012:334). Some of the possible objectives for a sponsorship are to increase awareness, to build or develop an image, to improve or maintain relations and to increase sales or revenue (Smith & Cook, 2012:345).

The costs involved with sponsorships are predominantly related to either the fees required to buy the rights to the sponsorship or the activation costs, which relate to all costs above and beyond the initial rights fee that will need to be invested to see the sponsorship come to fruition (O'Reilly & Horning, 2013:424). Sponsorships are known to be high cost marketing opportunities, but it is important to note that adequate funding alone will not lead to sponsorship success. A specialised, dedicated team of marketing specialists are needed to ensure that a sponsorship initiative is managed effectively from a range of different aspects (O'Reilly & Horning, 2013:436).

One of the important factors that influences the success of brand sponsorship is the level to which the sponsoring brand is involved and publically engaged with the sponsored event or entity (Grohs & Reisinger, 2014:10189). A study by Mazodier and Quester (2014:16) also examined the way in which the sponsored entity's alignment or natural fit with the sponsoring brand affected the value of the sponsorship initiative. This study observed a positive correlation between the level to which the sponsored entity aligned with the brand and the positive effect that the sponsorship had on the brand image and brand equity (Mazodier & Quester, 2014:16). Grohs and Reisinger (2014:1018) however note that the correlation between sponsorship alignment and brand image can also have negative implications. When a sponsored entity that is perceived to have a low fit with the brand receives increased levels of marketing exposure, this could have a negative impact on perceived brand image. These observations highlight the importance of critically evaluating all sponsorship opportunities, as to ensure that only relevant and aligned sponsorships are undertaken that have the maximum potential for the brand.

One of the suggestions for minimising the negative effect of a poorly aligned sponsorship provided by Uhrich *et al.* (2014:2023) is to link the sponsorship with one of the organisation's relevant corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. This suggestion is based on the finding that linking a sponsorship with a relevant CSR initiative can increase the credibility of the brand, which counters the negative effect of brand and sponsorship misalignment (Uhrich *et al.*, 2014:2023). Interestingly enough, this study found that the positive linking effect did not have the same affect when the alignment between the sponsored entity and the sponsoring brand was indeed high (Uhrich *et al.*, 2014:2023).

#### **2.5.4 Event Marketing**

Event marketing, emerging in the 1980s, shares roots with philanthropy and another relatively new marketing phenomenon, namely sponsorships (Cunningham *et al.*, 1993:407). Even though alternative marketing methods were used for decades in the past, at the start of the 21st century, mainstream marketing practice started acknowledging that conventional marketing communication media were not enough in order to differentiate and propel their brand above competitors. One such marketing medium that started gaining extensive popularity from this need was event marketing (Zarantontello & Schmitt, 2013:256). Shimp (1993:8) defines event marketing as "the practice of promoting the interests of an organisation and its brands by associating the organisation with a specific activity". Such an activity can be owned by the company, or owned by a third party and endorsed by the company via a sponsorship initiative (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010:505). Drenger *et al.* (2008:138) suggest that an organisation's involvement in third party events rather be regarded as a sponsorship initiative and not as an event marketing initiative for the organisation.

One of the defining characteristics that distinguishes event marketing from the other disciplines in the marketing communication mix is that event marketing involves the active participating of the target audience in the communication process (Drenger *et al.*, 2008:138). Adding to this, it is noted that events allow for highly interactive, local consumer-brand encounters where the consumer can experience the brand in a highly intimate way (Zarantontello & Schmitt, 2013:256).

Marketing events managed by organisations can take on various forms, for example product launches, open days, conferences, publicity events, road shows, exhibitions, corporate entertainment, charity fundraisers and trade shows (Wood, 2009:247). Before deciding which type of marketing event to plan, the organisation first needs to understand customers' opinions when it comes to the exact type of event, as different events suit different customer needs

(Kapustina & Reshetilo, 2011:152). Different organisational departments can be involved in the process of planning and managing an event. In the case of product related events, for example, it would be beneficial to have the organisation's sales team members involved with the process (Kapustina & Reshetilo, 2011:152).

According to Gupta (2003:119), event marketing has been proven to be useful as a means of generating awareness for the brand, but less research has been done on its suitability to increase brand equity. A study by Zarantontello and Schmitt (2013:255) did however investigate event marketing in order to assess if there was a positive correlation between effective event marketing and brand equity. This study concluded that event attendance increased brand equity and that a direct experience of the brand was the most important mediator of a positive result (Zarantontello & Schmitt, 2013:256).

Even though event marketing has shown to be an effective avenue for reaching marketing objectives, many organisations are still unsure whether events can influence marketing outcomes effectively and how precisely they can be used to do so (Wood, 2009:247). One of the issues raised by marketers is a lack of a mind-set geared towards sustainability when it comes to planning an event marketing initiative, with many events including large-scale production elements and entertainment (Tinnish & Mangal, 2012:228). Tinnish and Mangal (2012:246) note that an organisation can imbue their events with a sense of sustainability by aligning the event to the organisation's overall sustainability values as well as by embedding sustainability into the event planning process.

### **2.5.5 Public relations**

A simplified definition of public relations, namely that public relations is "the development and maintenance of good relationships with different publics", accentuates the vastness of the field and hints at its opportunities as a relationship marketing tool (Smith & Cook, 2012:312). There are many tools at the disposal of the public relations practitioner which can include special events, lobbying efforts, annual reports, press conferences and more recently, social media (Kerin *et al.*, 2013:434).

Logan (2014:667) emphasises corporate public relations' role in developing and establishing pro-business ideologies that propagate the viewpoint that the organisation's corporate objectives are beneficial to public welfare. Related to this is the public relations activity known as lobbying, where organisations actively build and develop relationships with stakeholders that

have the propensity to change legislation in favour of organisational goals and objectives (Ray, 2014:58).

One of the advantages of public relations is that it is one of the most credible forms of marketing communication (Kerin *et al.*, 2013:434). A disadvantage however is that it can be plagued by difficulty with handling the media and other important stakeholder groups (Kerin *et al.*, 2013:434). This disadvantage highlights the general lack of message control when it comes to public relations.

Expanding on public relations' role in managing brand image, Olkkonen and Luoma-aho (2014:233) suggest that organisations take an 'expectation management' approach to public relations. In basic terms, expectation management is the process of ensuring that publics have clear expectations of what the organisation can actually deliver, seeing as too high or too low expectations can lead to stakeholder dissatisfaction (Coye, 2004:54). Central to expectation management is the process of public monitoring, which enables an organisation to detect gaps between public expectations and the actual performance and activities of the organisation (Olkkonen & Luoma-aho, 2014:234).

There are various public relations strategies that can be deployed by an organisations as a way to reverse the negative impact of a reputational crisis situation (Marisa, 2014:117). Marisa (2014:118) notes that a combination of corrective action and mortification action strategies can convey the message that an organisation admitted fault and is working towards a suitable solution. Some of the other important considerations suggested for effective crisis communication are (Marisa, 2014:121):

- Organisations should closely monitor media content in order to understand public tone.
- Stakeholders and customers should be updated regularly with clear, factual statements.
- The organisation needs to position itself as the credible authority on the crisis.
- Information dispersed needs to be consistent and complementary of each other.
- A detailed crisis communication needs to be developed beforehand.

Ruler (2014:1) notes that the digitalisation of public relations has made it even more challenging to control the interpretation and spread of public relations messages. The sense of anonymity and social distance that internet users experience has proliferated the spread of negative commentary regarding brands on digital platforms (Dullum, 2014:32). Because of this, Ruler (2014:1) calls for a re-evaluation of the way in which public relations programmes are planned and implemented, so that these programmes can be more conducive to the unpredictability of

the digital age. Instead of following the trusted process of strategy, smart goals, action planning and evaluation, Ruler (2014:6) proposes the setting up of reflective communication scrums that focus on a highly agile and adaptive approach to public relations planning.

### **2.5.6 Sales promotion**

The American Marketing Association (2015), defines sales promotion as "The media and non-media marketing pressure applied for a predetermined, limited period of time at the level of consumer, retailer, or wholesaler in order to stimulate trial, increase consumer demand, or improve product availability". Smith and Cook (2012:368) differentiate between three types of sales promotion, namely customer promotions (premiums, gifts, prizes, and competitions), trade promotions (special terms, point-of-sales materials) and sales force promotions.

Ailawadi *et al.* (2014:94) note that sales promotion can also differ with regard to their level of certainty. Sales promotion with a high level of certainty usually have traditional rebates, where the achievement of the discount or promotion is certain to the consumer (Ailawadi *et al.*, 2014:94). Sales promotion with a high level of uncertainty, on the other hand, employs a more complex promotional incentive. Here, the reward is contingent on an external event, making the rebate conditional (Ailawadi *et al.*, 2014:94). Whilst the perceived risk factor of uncertain sales promotion does make it a less obvious choice for marketers, Ailawadi *et al.* (2014:94) note that it can be a highly cost-effective and successful tactic if the organisation manages to present it as fun, entertaining or an exciting form of sales promotion.

One of the major benefits of sales promotion is that they can be used to increase store traffic amongst consumers who haven't yet displayed high loyalty towards the brand (Kerin *et al.*, 2013:434). Sales promotion is also particularly effective in raising awareness and initial interest of a product or service as it adds to the perception of its value (Smith & Cook, 2012:358).

However, because of sales promotion's high cost implications, it needs to be followed or supported by public relations, advertising and social media initiatives (Smith & Cook, 2012:358). Some of the other disadvantages include that it steadily loses effectiveness if used repeatedly and that it could lead to a long-term delay in product purchases when promotions aren't running, as users start expecting them and resultantly only make purchases once a sales promotion is available again (Kerin *et al.*, 2013:434).

When deciding on which types and combination of sales promotion types to utilise, Olajide *et al.* (2014:58) suggest that organisations should consider the target audience specifically, as different types of sales promotion will appeal to different target groups. An example of this can

be extracted from a study by Büttner *et al.* (2015:170), where it was found that the type of shopping behaviour could be a helpful barometer of a sales promotion's likelihood of success.

Factors that could play a significant role with regard to the effectiveness of sales promotion are the physical environment, the social environment and the rate of discount (if applicable) that is offered by the marketer (Ashraf *et al.*, 2014:179). With regard to factors that could potentially influence a consumer's perception towards sales promotion, Khare *et al.* (2014:272) note that age, education and income level can all play a significant role and that it is important for marketers to consider such variables when planning their sales promotion activities.

A recent study on the perceived effectiveness of different sales promotion on the African Generation Y cohort (African individuals born between 1986 and 2005) revealed that a substantial part of the South African consumer market responded favourably to various types of sales promotion (Marais *et al.*, 2014:51). There is also evidence that sales promotion can be used to effectively induce specific buying behaviour with regard to low involvement products: the sales promotion types most effective in inducing behaviour changes with regard to low involvement products are free samples and 'buy one get one free' promotions (Marais *et al.*, 2014:51).

### **2.5.7 Direct marketing**

According to Smith and Cook (2012:380), direct marketing is an umbrella term for marketing communication activities that directly interact with the consumer and includes direct response advertising, direct mail and telemarketing. As the name would suggest, one of direct marketing's most obvious characteristics is its direct nature, with marketers using immediate call to actions and easy-to-use response devices to sell, invite or entice a consumer (Csikósová *et al.*, 2014:1618). Another noteworthy characteristic of direct marketing campaigns is that they usually include a very clear action orientation or 'call to action', that might be to sell or invite a step toward an eventual sale (Csikósová, 2014:1618).

Csikósová *et al.*, (2014:1615) state that the recent advancements in database management and communication technologies have made it possible for marketers to be more direct, focused and interactive when it comes to their approach. This has led to a move away from traditional direct marketing to highly interactive and modern variants thereof (Csikósová *et al.*, 2014:1615).

More specifically, the rise of modern technology has had a positive influence on the development of personalised and highly targeted e-mailers as a valuable direct marketing tool (Smith & Cook, 2012:381). Opt-in e-mailers have proven to be successful tools for reaching

customer retention objectives (Smith & Cook, 2012:383). One of the other advantages of direct marketing is that messages can be crafted in a short turnaround time and that the personal nature of the medium allows for long-term consumer relationship building (Kerin *et al.*, 2013:434).

Armstrong and Kotler (2013:468) warn of a disadvantage of email marketing, namely that a brand's direct marketing efforts can be perceived by consumers as unsolicited, unwanted commercial email spam messages that clog up a consumer's email mailbox. Recent research states that more than 75% of email messaging can be labelled as spam, highlighting how big an impact these messages have on the overall credibility of this marketing medium (Armstrong & Kotler, 2013:468). Chang *et al.* (2013:316) have found that the degree of perceived intrusiveness of email marketing significantly impacts the effectiveness thereof. Seeing as spam email messaging is seen as an intrusive form of email marketing, it is less effective than email marketing where the user has given direct consent to receive the messaging (Chang *et al.*, 2013:316). Janssens *et al.* (2014:265) explore the nature and effect of spam email messages, providing evidence that the modern consumer lacks knowledge regarding what constitutes as spam and the measures they can take to protect themselves against spam messages. The general uncertainty and negative perception regarding spam messaging necessitates that marketers be cautious of having their direct marketing campaigns be perceived as spam messages, as this could dramatically reduce their overall effectiveness.

Another noteworthy disadvantage lies in the exponential costs of managing a direct marketing consumer database, due to such databases needing to be updated on a regular basis in order for direct marketing efforts to be effective (Kerin *et al.*, 2013:434). Hambelton (2013) however notes that social media can support direct marketing in this regard, seeing as a brand's social media channels constantly mine in-depth insights and behavioural information from account subscribers. This rich consumer data can be highly beneficial when used to update a direct marketing database for more targeted and relevant marketing communication.

Housh (2014:22) adds the direct marketing best practice consideration of segmenting your email database so that highly targeted emails can be sent, based on pre-identified customer groups. The more targeted your emails become via a process of database segmentation, the more personal and intimate they can potentially be, which should significantly influence their effectiveness (Housh, 2014:22).

With each of the disciplines of the marketing communication mix discussed in detail with regard to their intrinsic qualities, the final segment of this chapter summarises the chapter's main findings.

## **2.6 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, the researcher aimed to create a theoretical framework for this study to be undertaken. More specifically, it explored two important theoretical fields that pertained directly to this study, namely organisational structure and modern marketing communication.

Firstly, the section undertook a review of organisational structure theory and how this study field developed. During the more in-depth exploration of organisational structure that followed, the discussion highlighted a number of theoretical constructs that need to be taken into account when deciding on or optimising an organisational structure:

- Centralisation: the degree to which the decision making power of an organisation is concentrated within a particular group or location.
- Formalisation: the degree to which the organisation has structured channels of information and authority which are supported by written procedures and rules.
- Specialisation: the degree of vertical, horizontal and spatial differentiation within an organisation.
- Interdependence or integration: the degree to which workflows within the organisation require cooperation among different employee groups.

Each characteristic was found to have specific advantages and disadvantages for an organisation. The exploration also showed how specific types of organisational structures link to each of these dimensions and have a natural propensity for certain dimensions, but not for others.

Building on these theoretical building blocks, the final section on organisational structure focused on the theoretical opinions regarding how organisational structure influences an organisation's marketing communication initiatives. It was noted how certain dimensions of organisational structure can potentially be more conducive to the reaching of marketing communication results for the business. This section created a contextual reference for the organisational structuring of modern marketing communication functions, forming an important vantage point for the empirical phase to follow. Expanding on this theoretical foundation, the succeeding chapter discusses social media's (and digital media's) organisational structuring within a modern marketing communication context in detail.

With the theoretical underpinnings of organisational structure explored, the second segment of the chapter explored the rise and development of modern marketing communication theory. It was noted that although the concept of marketing started from very simplistic roots, the concept of marketing developed over the decades at a proliferated rate.

With marketing origins chronologically detailed and highlighted as a valuable contextual reference point for the empirical segment of the study, the chapter explored more recent marketing movements, in an attempt to find a suitable modern vantage point from which to explore professional social media more closely. This exploration led to the realisation that modern marketing communication presents a well-established and trusted approach to modern marketing practice and conclusively also provides enough flexibility to incorporate a discussion into social media's marketing communication influence.

As a theoretical prelude to the empirical process to follow later in this study, the objectives of modern marketing communication disciplines were explored and discussed.

Lastly, the chapter explored each individual discipline of the modern marketing communication mix in more detail, focusing on creating descriptive theoretical references, with regard to modern applications and strategies.

The next chapter of the study further expands the study's theoretical framework by exploring available theory available on professional social media.

## **CHAPTER 3: SOCIAL MEDIA WITHIN A MODERN MARKETING COMMUNICATION CONTEXT**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter explores the professional use of social media from a variety of vantage points. The chapter expands on the review of organisational structure theory and marketing communication theory unpacked in the previous chapter, with greater focus on the relevance of social media for each of the spheres discussed in the previous chapter. A more sweeping, general look at social media theory however takes place first, as to ensure that the study can effectively leverage the existing research done regarding the professional use of social media. This also ensures a thorough background on professional social media practice, which anticipated relevance during the study's empirical process. Existing social media theory that focused on the following aspects was explored: the development of social media and its definitions, the influence social media has had on modern business as well as social media best practice and noteworthy challenges to consider.

With this background of social media foundational theory in hand, the chapter then expands on the ever-increasing relevance of social media within the context of the modern organisation by exploring the variety of roles that social media can perform within a marketing communication context. This is done in an attempt to compile an inventory of situations and circumstances in which social media can be utilised by organisations for marketing communication purposes. This is done by firstly exploring social media's influence with regard to a broader marketing communication context. Secondly, social media's influence on each individual discipline of the marketing communication mix is discussed. With this inventory of social media roles and uses relating to the marketing communication mix established, the chapter provides an overview of the diverse role played by social media within a modern marketing communication context.

Thereafter the chapter examines the existing opinions available on the organisational structuring of social media, with specific focus on its role within a marketing communication context. This discussion predominantly focuses on operational and departmental considerations. This section also aims to expand on the theory previously discussed regarding the organisational structuring of marketing communication in the preceding chapter. Here, specific mention is made of the different approaches to social media's organisational structuring that the study aimed to explore and in so doing, created a reference point for the study's empirical process. This includes demonstrating how each of the dimensions of organisational

structure (discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.2.2) are applicable to each of the main approaches to social media organisational structuring being assessed in this study.

The chapter commences with an exploration of professional social media theory.

## **3.2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL MEDIA**

### **3.2.1 Development of professional social media**

Lamberton and Stephen (2016:146) note that the growth in digital and social media has coincided with technological innovations, such as affordable high speed internet, which in turn has had an influence on the way digital and social media marketing has evolved. Even though social media has grown rapidly in terms of global use and application, it is still a relatively new web phenomenon that is expanding and increasing in scope on a daily basis (Chapter 1, section 1.2: Kirtis & Karahan, 2011:260). For this reason, modern theorists are yet to agree on a widely accepted definition of the term. In an attempt to provide clarity on the matter, Berthon *et al.* (2012:261) state that the term social media is intrinsically linked to the evolution of the internet, referencing the terms 'Web 1.0' and 'Web 2.0'. Web 1.0 refers to the start of the World Wide Web and was characterised by organisations starting to recognise the importance of creating and developing an online presence via digital media formats (Berthon *et al.*, 2012:261). Thereafter the web proliferated, with marketers finding new ways of harnessing the possibilities of the digitally connected world and the high volume of content that became available to them – this led to the new web era of Web 2.0 (Berthon *et al.*, 2012:262). In the age of Web 2.0, businesses now fully embrace the web as a platform with a variety of strengths (Graham, 2005). Kietzmann *et al.* (2011:241) support the notion of a Web 2.0 origin for social media, stating that, in the Web 1.0 age, consumers merely consumed content on the internet. In the new age of Web 2.0 however, consumers are utilising digital media for additional purposes, such as contributing, sharing, modifying and co-creating new content (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011:241).

Constantinides (2014:41) also suggests that social media be defined within the context of the overarching movement of Web 2.0, as social media's development has often been linked to the rise of Web 2.0. Constantinides and Fountain (2008:231) define Web 2.0 as: "A collection of interactive, open source and user-controlled internet applications enhancing the experiences, collaboration, knowledge and market power of the users as participants in business and social processes. Web 2.0 applications support the creation of informal users' networks facilitating the flow of ideas, information, knowledge and promote innovation and creativity by allowing the efficient generation, dissemination, sharing and editing of content."

In the light of this applications-focused definition of Web 2.0, the social media is defined as: “Web 2.0 applications enabling the creation, editing and dissemination of user-generated content” (Constantinides, 2014:42). Kaplan and Haenlein’s (2010:61) definition of social media aligns with this: “A group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of the Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content”. Whilst these definitions of social media do not provide all-encapsulating definitions of the term (due to the ever changing nature thereof), they do manage to highlight one of the defining characteristics of social media content, in that it focuses first and foremost on user-generated content. Another crucial aspect highlighted by these definitions is that social media is a collection of technologies and not a marketing communication discipline or ideology. In other words, social media is a collection of digital channels from which marketing communication disciplines, such as advertising and public relations can be undertaken. This aligns with the justification presented in Chapter 2 (section 2.5), where it was suggested that social media be regarded as a marketing communication channel and not a stand-alone marketing communication discipline, with its own established principles and ideologies. In saying this, the unique nature of social media does create unique considerations that marketing communication professionals need to consider when utilising social media for marketing communication purposes. Considering the suggested positioning of social media in this study, as well as the definitions of social media provided, the study refers to the term ‘social media’ as per the following derived definition: *Social media is a collection of Web 2.0 channels that disseminate messages from a source to a recipient. These messages are usually in the form of user-generated content.*

In order to contextualise social media within the framework of this study, a derived definition of ‘social media marketing communication’ is also provided: *Social media marketing communication is the process of utilising social media for achieving specific marketing communication objectives.* Because of the dynamic, fast-paced nature and other unique characteristics of social media, there are however certain considerations that need to be taken into account when utilising social media for marketing communication purposes.

Today, social media has grown to become a major corporate priority, with the vast majority of traded companies being actively present on at least one or a number of social media platforms (Paniagua & Sapena, 2014:720). Social media started growing exponentially because of the immediacy of a fast developing and changing internet infrastructure and the ease with which those with a desire for self-expression could converse with a global audience via such platforms (E-Consultancy report, 2009). Kumar and Sundaram (2012:4) believe that social media and its platforms continue to rise in prominence, because they allow a global network of people to

instantly connect with one another and also because of the diverse variety of communication options they present to users.

Looking at the psychological factors that contributed to the rise of social media usage, Zolkepli and Kamarulzaman (2015:189) identify three types of human need categories, namely personal (enjoyment and entertainment), social (social influence and interaction) and tension release (belongingness, companionship, playfulness) that can be fulfilled via human participation on social media platforms. Furthermore, these needs are motivated by the following social media innovation characteristics that increase the likelihood of social media adoption rates: relative advantage, observability and compatibility (Zolkepli & Kamarulzaman, 2015:189). Considering these elements that drive social media, usage can become the foundation of a business' approach to social media, as it provides a foundation for what is needed for attracting customers to a brand's social media channels.

Social media, from the viewpoint of a set of Web 2.0 channels from which marketing communication activities can be undertaken, does not include a unified and clearly defined set of approaches (Jussila *et al.*, 2014:607). Moreover, the platforms from which social media activities can be executed differ with regard to technical and technological features (Jussila *et al.*, 2014:607). An example of this is the character length restrictions placed on individual pieces of content posted on the social media platform known as Twitter. On Facebook, however, the same restriction does not apply, allowing for more descriptive and detailed messages and conversations with audience members. This implies that, although there are certain principles that can be applied and observed across groups of social media platforms, it is important that businesses consider the unique characteristics of each social media platform they choose to be active on.

The ambiguity related to social media also extends to its place within a general marketing communication context. Whilst social media can be regarded as a completely separate marketing communication discipline, it is the opinion of Paniagua and Sapena (2014:720) that social media marketing in essence functions according to the same principles as traditional marketing communication tools, which are also aimed at increasing sales of the company's products or services. Social media is therefore not unique in its goals, but rather in terms of its approach to reaching these goals and the means used to reach them (Paniagua & Sapena, 2014:720). The different approaches towards the ownership of social media within an organisational governing context are discussed in section 3.4 of this chapter.

The above discussion illustrates how the sudden rise and dynamic nature of social media has complicated the process of ring-fencing the concept of social media itself.

### 3.2.2 Influence of social media on businesses

The section explores the influence that social media has had on the way in which the modern business is managed. Mitrou *et al.* (2014:1) note that social media has caused a shift to interpersonal, horizontal and mutual communication structures within businesses, where information is aggregated from a variety of different online sources.

One of the other aspects in which social media has shown to have an influence is the avenues it provides for engaging with customers or potential customers (Cabiddu *et al.*, 2014:175). Social media provides the following forms of business-focused engagement to an organisation (Cabiddu *et al.*, 2014:185).

- **Persistent engagement:** the possibility of maintaining an ongoing dialogue with the customer, even if they are not physical close to the organisation. Example: an organisation can use social media to promote deals and special offers to customers whilst they are not close to an owned property of the company.
- **Customised engagement:** the possibility to interact with customers in an informed manner, based on prior knowledge of an individual level. Example: conversations on a brand's Facebook page can create a reference point for a customer's opinion on certain aspects.
- **Triggered engagement:** this represents engagement with the customer based on an external, customer-initiated event. Example: when a customer tweets to the Twitter account of a brand, it creates an opportunity where the brand can openly converse with the customer.

Social media's effect on business performance can be through four different channels (Paniagua & Sapena, 2014:720-721):

- **Social capital:** the degree to which social media can influence an organisation's relationship with society. Displaying transparency and engaging socially to build trust is one way social media can be used to generate social capital for a business.
- **Revealed preferences:** this is the extent to which social media can shed light on the attitudes, thoughts and preferences of an organisation's customers. Keeping track and

analysing subscribers' responses to published content on social media channels like Facebook and Twitter can translate into valuable insights.

- **Social media marketing:** this relates to the extent to which marketing efforts on social media platforms can lead to improved financial performance for an organisation. It is vital that organisations put in place the necessary business measures to enable their social media channels to effectively drive revenue.
- **Social corporate networking:** this refers to the extent to which an organisation's relationship with their employees via social media can be transformed into operational performance capabilities. Here, the focus is on utilising platforms such as LinkedIn and internally focused social media platforms to build relationships with and between staff members.

Elaborating on social media's ability to positively affect an organisation's social media marketing efforts, Rawat and Divekar (2014:626) highlight how social media efforts complement a strong focus on e-commerce. Social media can be utilised to create awareness for an organisation's online shopping portal, as well as actively drive additional visits, leading to an increase in sales (Rawat & Divekar, 2014:626).

Zoonen *et al.* (2014:850) add to Paniagua and Sapena's (2014:720) observations regarding how social media can influence an organisation's internal environment by noting social media's role as a vehicle for information dissemination, relationship management and organisational ambassadorship.

Social media platforms can also be used as a source of real-time consumer information, with the volume of information available to businesses increasing at a rapid rate (Gao, 2014:1). The collation of such data is however a challenging process due to the short, conversational nature of social media content; the huge volume of content as well as the increasingly heterogeneous multimedia content being transmitted via social media streams (Gao, 2014:1). Because of the value that this rich consumer data holds for modern businesses, there is a growing need for advanced tools and applications that automate the gathering and grouping of such data into meaningful segments (Gao, 2014:1).

Mukerji (2014:115) investigates the different elements that lead to brand trust and which can be influenced by social media:

- **Brand experience:** social media provides organisations with opportunities to convey ideas and thoughts consistent with its image, which can lead to the strengthening of a consumer's experience of a brand in the online space.
- **Perceived brand image:** due to the quickness, effectiveness and directness of messages sent to customers on social media platforms, social media has the potential to have a noticeable impact on perceived brand image.
- **Brand personality:** due to the personal nature of social media, a brand's presence on such platforms can be used to help customer's relate to the human characteristics of a brand, thus affecting brand personality.
- **Brand quality:** social media can be used to influence the perceived brand quality of first-time buyers, but has a limited effect on overall brand quality. This is due to overall brand quality being heavily influenced by the physical use of a product.

The above discussion illustrates the scope by which social media can potentially influence businesses and the way in which they approach various stakeholders. This discussion provided valuable context and affirmation for the influence of social media noted by the study's research participants during the empirical phase of the study. Considering the dynamic nature of social media and its far-reaching influence, the following section explores some of the general challenges related to social media, as well as highlight examples of best practice uncovered from modern theory.

### 3.2.3 Social media best practice and challenges

Constantinides (2014:40) suggests that there are two approaches that an organisation can take when deciding to utilise social media as a business tool. Firstly, the passive approach, where the focus is on utilising an organisation's social media domain as a channel for customer voice and extracting marketing intelligence. Secondly, the active approach, where the organisation actively engages the audience via marketing disciplines such as public relations, utilising social media as a way of influencing customers, promoting customer-generated innovation and personalisation of the product offering (Constantinides, 2014:40). The choice between these two approaches needs to be considered thoroughly by an organisation, as clarity in approach could lead to better results for the organisation and its external stakeholders.

In a study by Figueiredo (2014:979), the factors that influence the popularity of content dispersed on social media platforms are explored in greater detail. The study found that, whilst the degree of exposure that information received had a noticeable impact on the popularity of social media content, the best measure of information popularity was the level to which the

content itself was interesting, topical and of a high quality (Figueiredo, 2014:979). The study highlights an important consideration for social media marketing communication practitioners, as it implies that content dispersed on an organisation's social media channels needs to adhere to the highest standards if it is to obtain widespread appeal (Figueiredo, 2014:979).

One of the very real dangers of social media lies in the high accessibility of sensitive user information, which could potentially put the customer in an unfavourable situation (Mitrou *et al.*, 2014:1). Furthermore, social media platforms can become a breeding ground for social exclusion, prejudice and discrimination, both in the workplace and in a more casual, social setting (Mitrou *et al.*, 2014:1). The potentially negative impact of social media on consumers and employees is something that needs to be taken into account by organisations when compiling a social media marketing strategy. In particular, organisations need to generate social media content that builds positive associations in the minds of consumers, establishing a sense of belonging and inclusion (Mitrou *et al.*, 2014:1).

Bright *et al.* (2015:148) examine the concept of 'social media fatigue', a consumer's tendency to back away from social media participation when he or she becomes overwhelmed with the information received via social media platforms. The following aspects are noted as having a negative correlation with social media fatigue levels (Bright *et al.*, 2015:151-152):

- **Social media confidence:** a person's self-perceived perception of their ability to use social media in an effective manner.
- **Social media self-efficacy:** a belief in one's ability to engage and participate adequately via social media platforms.
- **Social media helpfulness:** the extent to which a user gains helpful information and resources from their exploration of social media platforms.

In contrast to these aspects, Bright *et al.* (2015:151) note that the degree to which a user identifies privacy concerns with regard to their use of social media, the higher their level of social fatigue will likely be. Considering this, a recommendation can be made to ensure that the content published on a business' social media platforms promotes a sense of social media confidence, self-efficacy and helpfulness, whilst reducing the level to which a user has privacy concerns. By taking such an approach, an organisation can reduce the likelihood of social media fatigue reducing the effectiveness of their social media strategy.

This section discussed some of the useful guidelines (such as the importance of interesting, topical content) that modern literature has delivered regarding how to successfully implement

social media for business purposes. No matter which approach to the organisational structuring of social media an organisation employs, aspects like these need to be considered to ensure the successful use of social media for business purposes. Certain challenges and pitfalls of social media (such as the possibility of social media fatigue) have however also been highlighted that should be considered before any specific approach to social media is decided on by an organisation.

The next few sections that complete the general theoretical exploration of social media explore the most noteworthy organisational areas or fields not directly related to marketing communication on which social media has a noticeable impact. Whilst it is noted that the study's focus is mainly on social media's role within a marketing communication context, this discussion is added to illustrate the vastness of social media's applicability within the context of the modern organisation. The discussion also provides the interviewer with an ample level of background regarding all the various ways in which social media affects an organisation. This should help to ensure that informed and relevant follow-up questions are asked during the study's empirical interview process.

### **3.2.4 Social media's influence on business research**

One organisational use of social media that multiple authors address, is that of research, whether it be market related, consumer related or internally focused. He *et al.* (2016:145) note that the fact that the modern customer is using social media more frequently to express feelings and concerns, has led to social media channels becoming valuable sources of knowledge that can be used to inform how a business can better meet customer needs. By listening to the needs and issues of customers, instead of merely broadcasting messages on social media platforms, organisations can understand their customers much better (Van Heerden, 2010:418). Funk (2011:2) agrees, stating that listening to customers' feedback should be prioritised above any selling objectives assigned to an organisation's social media efforts. Kumar and Sundaram (2012:4) note that social media offers organisations the chance to learn more about their customers' preferences and obtain insights with regard to customers' opinion of products and services. Social media can in so doing facilitate and inform product improvement (Weber, 2009:39). A simple, but effective way of undertaking marketing research on social media platforms is via public and open polls, where users are encouraged to share their opinions and thoughts on specific subjects (Albarran, 2013:89).

Cambria *et al.* (2012:557) accentuate the importance of in-depth opinion mining for product positioning as well as other forms of knowledge gained via social media. Kaplan (2012:133)

adds that insights from social media platforms can be used to optimise marketing strategies, as it allows the corporation to mine valuable consumer behavioural data. For example, the mobile based social media platform known as FourSquare allows companies to gather data such as the number of check-ins (i.e. visits to a certain store or place) per time of day, gender, or age group and so forth.

Gillin and Schwartzman (2011:15) note that insights mined from social media do not have to be restricted to an organisation's consumers or services, but that social media is also an important tool when it comes to the mining of market intelligence regarding competitors and the wider industry itself. He *et al.* (2016:145) however note that the rapid growth in the volume of data that can be mined from social media platforms necessitates that organisations utilise automated social media analytical techniques and tools in order to group and process huge amounts of available data effectively. Insights gathered from social media listening tools can also be used to advise other parts of the business offering, indirectly helping to build a case for wider use and support of social media tools within an organisation (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2011:15).

Greengard (2012:19) however highlights the importance of legal and ethical behaviour when it comes to online data mining and urges organisations to familiarise themselves with the restrictions regarding how, where and which data can be mined on social media platforms.

This exploration of social media's significance with regard to marketing research highlights the need for research proficiencies within the social media department of an organisation, as well as the importance of the social media department having access to the organisation's research resources and facilities.

### **3.2.5 Social media's influence on human resources and an organisation's internal functions**

Social media's role as a relationship building tool is gaining recognition amongst various fields and industries (Ulrich *et al.*, 2013:464). Human Resources professionals have also started utilising social media as a tool for improving social relationships within an organisation (Ulrich *et al.*, 2013:464). Hunt (2010:36) believes that organisations that do not utilise social media platforms' variety of recruitment possibilities could lose out on quality candidates. Manuti and De Palma (2016:x) however highlight the importance of Human Resource professionals understanding both the risks and opportunities related to the use of social media platforms for talent management reasons.

A study by Bolton *et al.* (2013:255) substantiates social media's human resourcing relevance, noting that it can be used to search for quality employees, as well as motivate and manage existing ones by means of internal social media platforms, such as Yammer (Bolton *et al.*, 2013:255). Slovensky and Ross (2011:55) add that social media can also help prevent negligence when it comes to the thorough screening of prospective job applicants, as it simplifies the process for human resource managers. Fawley (2013:32) notes in particular that the social media platform, LinkedIn, has become a popular Human Resources tool for organisations. This is due to the platform's focus on a user's professional identity and history, giving organisations access to a wealth of information regarding prospective job applicants.

A study by Eran and Vardarlier (2013:852) explored the ways in which an organisation could employ social media in order to maintain employee organisational commitment. A high degree of organisational commitment yields not only important benefits for an organisation such as heightened productivity, but is also advantageous to employees themselves, as it can provide them with a sense of security and professional satisfaction (Eran & Vardarlier, 2013:855). It is noted that one of the main contributors to a heightened level of employee organisational commitment is a sense of belonging by the employee force (Eran & Vardarlier, 2013:855). The study concluded that employees closely followed their employer's social media activities and that they placed such messages in a high regard (Eran & Vardarlier, 2013:859). Furthermore, the study found that there was a positive correlation between an employee's level of organisational commitment and the level of the social media activity of an organisation (Eran & Vardarlier, 2013:859).

Manuti and De Palma (2016:7) note that social media platforms can be used to convey a positive corporate image and in so doing, can help attract the interest of new human capital for the organisation. Aligned to this, Sivertzen *et al.* (2013:473) explore the ways in which social media can be used to influence the corporate reputation of an organisation, with the conclusion that social media activity can be used to effectively increase the attractiveness of an organisation to future job applicants. This is a crucial realisation, as it implies that organisations need to also consider the impact of their social media content strategy on prospective employee's perception of the organisation, as it can influence the quality and amount of future job applications.

Another important field within Human Resources that social media has shown itself to play a role in is that of internal training and learning. Thomas and Akdere (2013:340) explore social media's capacity as a collaborative employee learning tool and conclude that such platforms' high level of accessibility and immediacy makes them an effective place for organisational

learning. Furthermore, it is noted that learning that takes place on such platforms, tends to be retained more easily and shared more readily (Thomas & Akdere, 2013:340).

It is also important to highlight the benefits that social media has had for networking and collaboration. As noted by Funk (2011:35), business professionals have much to gain from the business networking possibilities of social media platforms, such as LinkedIn. If handled optimally, an organisation can use social media to connect with prospective customers, manage joint projects as well as connect and identify new suppliers (Funk, 2011:36). Another possible role of social media that hasn't received much attention is its usefulness as a way of strengthening investor relations and creating open communication channels with shareholders (Funk, 2011:45).

### **3.2.6 Social media's influence on customer service**

Whilst social media is being utilised to a widespread degree for a variety of marketing and public relations applications, some organisations tend to neglect one of the other aspects that social media has shown to play a massive role in, namely customer service. Nonetheless, a considerable portion of the modern business world has recognised the importance of fulfilling customer service roles on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2011:22). This is mainly due to the modern consumer earmarking such channels as one of their preferred methods for enquiring and complaining to organisations (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2011:22). Because of this, the modern consumer expects that an organisation has taken the necessary measures to ensure a streamlined and simple query resolution process via the organisation's social media channels. A few years ago, a customer might have still been pleasantly surprised by a speedy reply from an organisation via their social media channels. Today, timeously and detailed query management via social media channels is the standard expected of the modern organisation (Anon, 2014).

Even though customer service via social media channels has grown in importance, studies that explore the intricacies of utilising social media for customer respond handling purposes remain noticeably scarce (Rossman *et al.*, 2017:3950). Exploring the reasons why an organisation should invest in dedicated resources for fulfilling customer service roles via social media platforms, DeMers (2014) highlights how immediately resolving a customer complaint via social media channels can have the spin-off effect of increased positive brand sentiment. Just as a customer is likely to voice his discontent when not being attended to timeously and thoughtfully

via a brand's social media platforms, so too is the customer likely to praise the organisation that does attend to queries sufficiently. A benefit of query handling via social media channels is that direct follow-ups with consumers are simpler when compared to traditional channels, as the social media community manager has direct access to a wealth of information about the customer lodging a query.

Chitwood (2014) notes that many organisations have taken their customer service via social media channels a step further by not only responding to customers' issues reactively, but also in a proactive sense. This process involves actively trawling the digital realm for customer queries that haven't directly been address to the organisation via one of their official social media platforms (Chitwood, 2014). By taking such an approach, brands have the opportunity to make a lasting positive impression on customers and potential customers in the online space.

Funk (2011:36) states that integrating customer service via your business' social media platforms should be an organisation's first priority when setting up a social media presence, even before one starts investigating the marketing capabilities thereof. It is vital however that an organisation dedicates the necessary amount and level of skilled resources to manage its social media customer service channels – thus ensuring descriptive, fast and friendly query handling (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2011:22). Rossman *et al.* (2017:3957) however note that, although customer service via an organisation's social media channels can be an effective way of ensuring ongoing customer satisfaction, customer response handling via traditional channels is still necessary to ensure ongoing customer retention.

Hammond (2011:45) also highlights the importance of honesty and truthfulness when it comes to replies to enquiries on social media platforms, noting that giving a truthful answer is more important than a reply that a user might be expecting. If social media is used correctly from a customer service perspective, it is likely that it can lead to the strengthening of an organisation's relationships with its customers (Funk, 2011:5).

Some of the measurement metrics proposed (Scott & Jacka, 2011:58; Seiter, 2014) to assess the quality of an organisation's customer service roles on social media platforms include issue resolution rate, issue resolution time, customer satisfaction rate and external customer engagement. These metrics are growing in importance as a way for social media brand managers to assess the success of their team members. To accommodate this growing need, online analytics software such as SocialBakers.com has been exclusively designed in order to accurately track a brand's success with regards to social media customer service.

### **3.2.7 Profession specific uses of social media**

Social media has also shown to have uses unique to certain professions. In medical practice, for example, social media has been proven to be useful as a tool for effective disaster response and identification, as well as rapid, point-of-care consultation (DeCamp, 2012:299). Yin *et al.* (2012:52) add to this observation, stating that social media has emerged as a popular medium for emergency services that need to apply rapid communication, especially during the course of a natural disaster.

A study by Nah and Saxton (2012:306) examined the adoption and use of social media by non-profit organisations. It was found that social media platforms presented valuable opportunities for lobbying and fund raising, as the personal nature of social media platforms made them suitable for strong emotional appeals for enlisting community support. Martin (2010:138) agrees, noting that social media platforms have gained affinity with non-profits due to their low cost and the fact that key target markets such as volunteers and donors use social media on a daily basis.

Social media has also proven to be a valuable tool to those practicing law, as such platforms house a wide array of freely available data, which can be used to research clients, opposing parties, third-party witnesses, experts and even jurors (Parker & Swearingen, 2012:34).

Social media has drastically changed the way news is dispersed, which results in it also having a dramatic impact on the way in which journalists approach their duties (Albarran, 2013:133). More specifically, social media has changed the way news pieces are delivered; increased press houses' access to readers; increased the possible sources for news stories; accentuated the need for timely news releases and so forth (Albarran, 2013:134).

This section of the study demonstrates that professional social media has a noticeable influence on various organisational departments and roles. It illustrates how social media's influence is not just restricted to marketing communication roles and that other departments within an organisation can benefit from direct access to social media employee resources. It is however stressed once again that the study's main focus was on social media's organisational structuring within a modern marketing communication context. These sections are merely intended as illustration of the vast role that social media plays across various organisational spheres.

With a context of professional social media now established by means of an exploration of different theoretical groupings, the following segment analyses the available theory regarding

social media's influence on modern marketing communication, as well as the specific disciplines of the marketing communication mix.

### **3.3 SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING COMMUNICATION INFLUENCE AND ROLES**

The following section references modern marketing communication theory in order to compile a list of social media marketing communication roles.

From a holistic marketing communicating perspective, Huang (2011:615) acknowledges the trend of social media platforms such as blogs being used as customised marketing channels for organisations. Whilst Facebook and Twitter provide a vast degree of marketing opportunities for brands, the value of an organisational blog that can be customised with regard to functionality and appearance is one that should not be overlooked. Adding to these comments, Duffet and Wakeham (2016:23) note that social media within a marketing communication context has been shown to be an effective way of increasing organisational revenue. Divol *et al.* (2012) sum up social media's marketing possibilities as to monitor, respond, amplify and lead consumer behaviour.

Whilst many organisations have praised social media for its marketing communication opportunities, Sponder (2013:5) notes that the actual impact of social media activities are still to be completely understood by marketers. Social media listening tools that monitor online engagement are but one modern marketing communication trend that is helping marketers better understand the influence of social media, even though many of these tools still can't provide proper context to the type of engagement (whether it be positively or negatively inclined) an organisation receives (Sponder, 2013:7). For a more accurate measurement of the impact of social media initiatives, it is suggested that social media be integrated with traditional sales channels, such as point of sales systems in stores (Sponder, 2013:5). This requirement becomes even more pressing when one considers that social media has impacted the way leads are nurtured and eventually converted into sales for the organisation (Albarran, 2013:95).

Berthon *et al.* (2012:264) accentuate the power shift that social media has caused, shifting the control of communication away from the organisation and towards the consumer. Kietzmann *et al.* (2011:242) add that corporate communication has been 'democratised' – the authority of communication has been taken away from organisations and has been dispersed between consumers who create and spread content about brands. In the communication context created by social media, consumers play an active role in communication dispersion, generating and spreading popular ideas and influencing their peers regarding their opinions of issues and

events (Khang *et al.*, 2012:281). Consumers can publicise how they feel about a brand or a product, without any interference from a brand (Stratten, 2012:29). Considering this, Qualman (2013:22) suggests that organisations accept that they no longer have full control over messaging and adapt their marketing tactics accordingly.

Whilst this shift in power might at first appear to be a danger for the modern organisation, there are ways in which this could play to the benefit of the organisation. Because of this power shift, a meaningful and interactive approach to collaborative marketing can make it possible to identify and develop solutions that benefit both the consumer and the organisation (Sashi, 2012:255).

With a broad understanding of social media's influence on marketing communication established, the next sections expand this discussion by exploring the influence of social media on each of the individual disciplines of the marketing communication mix disciplines, as introduced in Chapter 2 (section 2.5): Sales promotion, advertising, public relations, event marketing, sponsorships, direct marketing and personal selling.

### **3.3.1 Personal selling**

When looking at the influence of social media on personal selling, Andzulis *et al.* (2012:312) note that social media has had a noteworthy influence on the structure of modern personal selling. Carlson (2016:1) notes that digital and social media channels represent an alternative source for product information, which would normally have been a direct part of the seller-buyer relationship. Social media has become a consideration in each phase of the selling process, from understanding the customer needs, presenting the product, closing the sale and gaining referrals for future sales (Andzulis *et al.*, 2012:312).

Rapp and Panagopoulous (2012:300) note the obvious advantage of social media's relational qualities for modern sales people, adding that it is the next logical step in the evolution of customer relationship management, known as 'Social Customer relationship management (CRM)'. Building on this, Agnihotri *et al.* (2012:333) suggest drawing on existing literature available on relationship marketing in order to create a social media strategy for personal selling with relational selling objectives.

A study by Marshall *et al.* (2012:349) explored the impact of social media on the personal selling process and the salesforce of an organisation itself. One of the noticeable effects that social media had on the process of personal selling was that it had proliferated consumer's expectation and need for an always-on sales approach (Marshall *et al.*, 2012:352). Whilst some

salespeople embraced this, others noted that it reduced their ability to effectively plan their selling attempts ahead of time (Marshall *et al.*, 2012:352).

Another adjustment that social media has for the personal selling profession relates to sale staff's general approach to selling. Whilst salespeople have grown accustomed to pushing requests for information and products' specifics to channel members, social media necessitates that salespeople position and equip themselves as product "experts" to attract customers (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2012:345). This highlights the importance of organisations providing their salesforce with adequate training and resources required to fulfil this expanded role.

The rise of social media as a sales tool has also divided sales practitioners from a skills point of view, as younger sales people with a background in digital technology seem to flourish, whilst their older counterparts are at a disadvantage (Marshall *et al.*, 2012:353). Rapp and Panagopoulous (2012:300) echo this observation, noting that even though older sales practitioners are somewhat reluctant to utilise such platforms as sales tool, the pressure to do so will just intensify, as both buyers and sellers are demanding the widespread adoption of technology.

Nevertheless, it is hard for the sales industry to ignore the benefits brought on by the access to a global sales audience that social media brings (Marshall *et al.*, 2012:356). Another benefit that social media holds for personal selling is that of advanced and descriptive sales follow-up initiatives, a stage in the sales process sometimes overlooked, but that comes highly simplified due to the sales person's high ease of access to the buyer via social media platforms (Andzulis, 2012:305).

### **3.3.2 Advertising**

Okazaki and Taylor (2013:58) accentuate the global reach and opportunities for personalisation of social media as the main reasons why such platforms are playing an increasingly important role in global advertising initiatives. Social media has also provided advertisers with the opportunity to deliver more targeted advertising, based on certain contextual as well as behavioural characteristics of a social media audience (Smith & Cook, 2012:283). This is due to the advanced data mining capabilities of online systems, making it possible to accurately target consumers, minimising costs and maximising effectiveness (Greengard, 2012:18). This has made it possible to make advertising messaging more personal, as advertisers now know their audience more intimately (Smith & Cook, 2012:283).

Qualman (2013:134) notes that the unobtrusive nature of advertising on social media platforms explains why such platforms are gaining popularity as advertising medium. It is however suggested that advertising via social media focuses on conversational content, instead of pushing advertising campaigns that are one-sided in nature in order to harness the full power of social media as an advertising tool (Qualman, 2013:134). Adding to this, Alhabash *et al.* (2016:124) note that social media advertising amplifies the need for overall advertising strategies to consider the human factor of the discipline, with marketing communication practitioners aiming to better understand how consumers respond, react and generate online content themselves.

Sutton (2013:71) notes that, if used correctly, advertising on social media platforms can be used to effectively improve a business' lead generation success, but that it is important to clearly define your targets, approach and your corporate tone beforehand. An important consideration with all instances of social media advertising is whether to utilise it to take consumers to an external platform or keep the audience on the social media platform on which the advertising messaging was received (Funk, 2011:98).

One of the benefits highlighted by Kaplan and Haenlein (2012:30) is the ripple or 'viral' effect of social media platforms that can be used to effectively increase awareness of new product launches and in so doing, promoting the product use amongst early adopters. Lipsman *et al.* (2012:40) confirm the usefulness of social media's referential nature, noting that it leads to secondary message exposure to the social connections of social media users exposed to such messages. From a product or service perspective, social media platforms provide its users with the opportunity to publicise their personal experience and reviews of the deliverables of a brand (Chen *et al.*, 2011:85). The benefits of the referential power of social media has led to a development of a new field, known as 'social commerce', in which selling relies on social media users sharing products and services with others via social media platforms (Weaver, 2013:119). On social media platforms, an endorsement of your product from a consumer's friend can act as a very powerful advertising call to action and is known as an 'influenced sale' (Weaver, 2013:125).

Observations made by Mathur *et al.* (2012:14) support this, stating that social media has shown to have an impact on sales, as consumers who are subscribed to the social media accounts of an organisation are more likely to suggest the products of the company to their friends. Fang (2012:1) adds to this, noting that social media's referential nature makes it suitable as a way of reaching new clientele or as a way of re-establishing a brand presence. Fisher's (2012:14) sentiments align with those of others, but accentuate the need for continuous content

optimisations when it comes to social media advertising, as message exhaustion takes place to an accelerated degree on social media platforms. Part of the reason for this is due to the social media consumers having immediate access to their social media platforms, whether it be via mobile or desktop and because of this, they will visit the same platform continuously during the day (Powers *et al.*, 2012:479). Whilst influenced sales and even direct sales can be a result of social media initiatives, some authors warn this should not be a primary reason for an active social media presence (Weaver, 2013:124). Rather, social media should be seen as a platform for generating quality and targeted leads, as well as a way of increasing online conversions, where a web user is persuaded to undertake a desired action, like for example subscribing to an organisation's newsletter (Weaver, 2013:124).

A study by Hadija *et al.* (2012:19) examined the effectiveness of social media advertising when compared to that of other more traditional advertising media, providing useful insights. The study found that, although social media users disliked advertising on social media platforms such as Facebook, they did not always notice these ads (Hadija *et al.*, 2012:19). This is due to the fact social media advertising competes with user-generated content on the platforms, which can be more attractive to users compared to similar paid counterparts (Hadija *et al.*, 2012:19). A study by Schivinski and Dabrowski (2013:2) explored the impact of user-generated social media content and found this content type had a positive influence on brand equity and brand attitude, whereas firm created social media content only affected brand attitude. These findings accentuate the importance of credible and authentic content for social media advertising, as a firm-centric promotional approach will most likely hinder the success of these ads.

The importance of social media advertising becomes even more apparent when considering how social media platforms can be used in classrooms to practically test a variety of modern as well as more traditional advertising principles in a cost effective manner (Lester, 2012:116).

### **3.3.3 Sponsorships**

Social media has started playing an increasingly important role when it comes to the online management and amplification of sponsorships (Martin, 2010:135). Rosenberg and Ferguson (2014:3) note that, with overall organisational expenditure on sponsorship deals increasing, the sponsorship marketing industry has become increasingly cluttered. This has necessitated the need for more sophisticated marketing tactics, like social media in order to reach target markets successfully (Rosenberg & Ferguson, 2014:3).

One of the ways whereby social media supports sponsored events is that it helps a brand to leverage the public relations-inclined benefits of a sponsorship before, during and after an event to a maximum degree (Martin, 2010:135). Sponsored events, sport teams and individuals use social media channels actively and purposefully to engage with their supporters for the creation of long-term, credible relationships (Anon, 2014). Social media brings with it the additional advantage of allowing organisations to actively measure the sentiment and image of a sponsorship, as such platforms provide access to unfiltered public opinion (Donlan & Crowther, 2014:291).

Twitter's inherent affinity with live event coverage for example, makes it the ideal platform for increasing the degree of online exposure an organisation can gain from a sponsored event (Martin, 2012:135). Oakley (2013) agrees, stating that brands need to leverage the social talk ability of their sponsorships by actively engaging their social media audiences during key moments of the sponsored persona's career.

Donlan and Crowther (2014:291) however note that the unrestrained nature of social media can however erode the level of control that marketers have over the experience that consumers have of a sponsorship. This observation highlights the need for marketers to carefully plan their social media initiatives in relation to the amplification of sponsorship as to ensure that the highest degree of possible brand control is achieved.

### **3.3.4 Event marketing**

Social media's suitability as a platform from which to initiate event marketing initiatives lies in the realisation that event-goers are likely to talk about both their expectations before the event, as well as their experiences post the event with likeminded people on social media platforms (Mangold & Faulds, 2009:361). Tinnish and Mangal (2012:242) suggest that organisations use social media platforms as an effective event marketing platform and note that social media is particularly suitable for encouraging event participant evangelism. Sharing similar sentiments, Castronovo and Huang (2012:117) note that, when integrated through social media platforms, event-based marketing can be a cost-effective promotional tool that delivers measurable business results. Another noteworthy benefit of social media marketing is that it is an ideal tactic for collecting post event insights, as event-goers are very likely to share and discuss their feedback of an event on their favourite social media platforms (Solaris, 2014:33). Social media also presents a valuable opportunity for giving those interested that are not present at the event

(as well as those who are) a unique experience of the event, which can lead to a more positive brand sentiment (Henderson, 2014).

Solaris (2014:18) also acknowledges the immense potential that event marketing via social media platforms can hold, but warns that not all events should be leveraging social media and also, not with the same level of intensity. One of the key insights highlighted by Solaris (2014:18) as justification for this warning is that not all types of event-goers might be likely to use social media platforms before, during and after actual event participation. Whilst events aimed at a younger audience can be effectively marketed via social media platforms, events targeted at a much older audience might not benefit as much from a strong social media event marketing strategy (Solaris, 2014:18). These insights of Solaris (2014) highlight the general importance of ensuring that the audience which a brand is targeting via social media platforms is indeed active on such platforms, before planning and undertaking such marketing initiatives.

One social media platform with particular relevance with regard to event marketing is Foursquare, which leverages networked activity to connect consumers, whilst also encouraging event participation by means of incentivising (Castronovo & Huang, 2012:124).

### **3.3.5 Public relations**

Booth and Matic (2011:186) propagate a natural connection between public relations and social media, as the fundamentals in the development of a corporate communication campaign remain unchanged when undertaken on social media platforms. Kim (2016:21) propagates that, when viewed from within the context of social media, public relations “rests on the understanding that conversations, activities, and dialogue are driven by publics, not organisations”. A noticeable difference between traditional public relations and public relations via social media is that social media allows traditional public relations practitioners to engage with important influencers one-on-one, making it possible to instantaneously elicit a high value conversation with an influencer (Booth & Matic, 2011:190). Martin (2010:126) states that the use of traditional public relations to reinforce social media initiatives and vice versa can be an effective way of increasing the level of positive publicity for an organisation. Ruby (2012:14) supports the sentiments raised by Booth and Matic, stating that social media and public relations is a sensible modern business pairing that complements one another.

Analysing the influence of social media on public relations, Fernando (2011:10) notes that many public relations practitioners are moving away from the traditional press release, optimising its format for the new digital age and renaming it the ‘social media release’. The social media

release, unlike the traditional public relations release is a media rich, digital document that is built around the need for creating both conversations with the press and the consumer (Fernando, 2011:10).

Funk (2011:2) agrees that social media can be used to amplify press releases in the digital space, but suggests that there are other public relations benefits to be gained from a strong social media presence.

Kim and Ko (2012:1484) explore social media activities' impact on customer equity, with the conclusion that social media has an influence on all drivers of consumer equity, whether it be value, relationship or brand related. De Vries *et al.* (2012:83) note that social media platforms can be used to nurture meaningful long-term relationships with consumers, by for example creating brand pages on social networking sites such as Facebook. Fallon (2012:1) however notes that, for these valuable relationships nurtured on social media to remain intact, organisations need to adopt a marketing approach of constant customer nurturing. Chikandiwa (2012:376) investigates how South African banks utilise social media platforms in order to reconnect with their customers, undoing negative publicity and rebuilding the trust and credibility of the organisation.

Social media's aptitude for promoting similar brand mechanisms as public relations, such as a credible perception of a brand, brand equity and trust means it has a naturally affinity with public relations (Fill, 2006:235). Hammond (2011:12) agrees, noting that social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn are suitable for running comparatively effective brand campaigns. This is substantiated by highlighting that indirect conversational messaging via social media has the capacity to promote a brand more credibly than would marketing via other, more direct marketing channels (Hammond, 2011:12). It is however important to note that brand building can only be achieved if relevant content is presented to the community – if messaging is restricted to promotional, non-conversational content, such messaging can have an adverse effect on brand perception (Hammond,2011:34).

Another noticeable advantage of social media platforms is the positive effect of user generated content (i.e. content not originating from the organisation itself) that paints a favourable picture of the brand (Kaplan, 2012:133). The positive effect of such messaging is amplified due to user generated content usually being perceived as more credible and authentic than messaging originating from the organisational itself. Social media also opens up new opportunities for communicating with a wide range of stakeholder groups and allows public relations practitioners to combine social media with more traditional counterparts (Alikilic & Atabek, 2012:56).

Adding to social media's influence from a public relations perspective, Park *et al.* (2012:1) highlight the dangers of social media when it comes to the spreading of negative news stories relating to a brand. As rightfully put by Martin (2010:124), social media has become the latest vehicle for the oldest form of news, namely word of mouth news. Hemsley and Mason (2013:139) add that grass-root level viral events are able to reach a massive audience via social media platforms, with a speed and reach that can leave an organisation vulnerable and unprepared.

Since the web and social media platforms can be the main source of breaking news in today's world, it follows naturally that the management of public opinion on social media platforms should be a priority for companies (Funk, 2011:87). Active and transparent consumer engagement on social media platforms can prevent negative new stories from causing long-term damage to brand or the development of a full-blown public relations crisis. This observation adds an additional consideration to the relationship between public relations and social media, namely the important role it plays in active organisational knowledge management and opinion management. When using social media proactively though, it has the potential to be a powerful crisis management tool, helping to manage the opinion and expectations of the public in cases when an organisation is most vulnerable (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2011:18). Gattiker (2013:65) agrees, stating that many companies have been able to avert a potential reputational crisis by means of effective and responsive opinion management via social media platforms. Many organisations have made a considerable investment in managing perceptions via social media channels, leading to the creation of social media command centres, where all online and social mentions of a brand are actively tracked and issues are flagged immediately (Funk, 2011:88).

### **3.3.6 Sales promotion**

Smith and Cook (2012:363) note that social media has become an important aspect of sales promotion initiatives, as the referential nature of social media results in consumers naturally increasing the awareness of such promotions when they share them with others. The rise of social media as a sales promotion mechanism is closely linked to the rise of the broader e-commerce movement, which has led to many sales promotions being designed specifically with the virtual consumer environment in mind (Heiens *et al.*, 2016:1).

Social media creates an opportunity for businesses to run sales promotion and campaigns in new and interesting ways that were previously not possible (Kaplan, 2012:134). Furthermore, the incentives and rewards related to campaigns do not have to be physical in nature, providing

organisations with a variety of options for incentives that do not necessarily have to lead to additional expenses (Kaplan, 2012:134). For example, the international acclaimed coffee house, Starbucks, rewards Foursquare users with digital 'badges' of recognition for checking in to a certain amount of Starbucks branches (Kaplan, 2012:134). Some organisations do however allow for more tangible rewards to users who showcase their dedication to the brand, allowing their customers loyalty-based discounts based on their social media endorsement of the brand.

Lee and Lee (2012:441) investigated the recent trend in sales promotion where organisations were offering group discount deals (known as Groupons) where the level of discount was impacted by the social interactions of consumers. The possibilities for increased sales by means of group discounted deals are well-documented, further strengthening the case for undertaking such sales initiatives via social media platforms (Albarran, 2013:89).

Another way that social media can be used in order to augment sales promotion is by running time sensitive sales promotion and communicating key phases of the sales promotion instantaneously to an organisation's social media audience (Martin, 2010:13). In doing so, the brand adds a sense of enticing urgency and exclusivity to a sales promotion that might otherwise not have been obtainable (Martin, 2010:13). Heiens *et al.* (2016:4) agree with this, noting that limited hour sales promotions has greatly benefited from the immediacy and accessibility of social media platforms such as Twitter.

Adding further insights, Sponder (2013:1) notes that it can be beneficial to define the intended return on investment as well as the milestones or standards to be achieved from a sales promotion administered via social media platforms. Qualman (2013:203) however advises organisations against directly applying traditional marketing objectives to their social media activities, as it is not always an effective way of assessing the success of such endeavours. Whilst sales promotion on social media platforms can be a highly successful sales drive, it is important that sellers leverage the relational advantages of social media to such an extent that it also nurtures long-term consumers, as opposed to once-off buyers (Lee & Lee, 2012:446). Customer reviews and feedback on social media channels are also helpful tools in assessing the effectiveness and overall response to an organisation's sales promotion (Lee & Lee, 2012:446).

### **3.3.7 Direct marketing**

Palmer and Koenig-Lewis (2009:162) investigated the level to which social media had influenced the nature of direct marketing and proposed that it had become an integral

consideration in modern direct marketing campaigns. Rimlinger (2013:61) observes a positive relationship between direct marketing formats such as email marketing and social media, noting that email marketing is a highly suitable platform for promoting a brand's social media pages.

As a tactic for more effective purchase conversations, Idugboe (2014) suggests building long-term trust with consumers via social media channels and then following up with a more direct sales tactic via direct marketing channels. Adding to the idea that social media and direct marketing should be seen as mutually supporting media, Ellis (2014) suggests using social media as a way to tease and build anticipation around high profile direct marketing initiatives. These examples illustrate how a marketer can utilise the relationship building benefits of social media as a tactic for supporting and strengthening the efforts of the marketing communication mix disciplines.

Qualman (2013:13) adds that, whilst social media has the potential to strengthen digital direct marketing initiatives, it can however have an adverse effect on the uptake of traditional direct marketing initiatives due to direct marketing via social media channels generally being a more cost effective approach. This observation aligns with earlier observations made, where it was shown how social media has led to a reprioritisation of the modern organisation's marketing expenditure and strategy.

This section has shown that not only has the rise of social media provided new avenues for applying the principles of the various marketing communication mix disciplines (advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, event marketing, public relations, direct marketing and sponsorships), but it has also fundamentally changed the way in which these disciplines are applied within the context of modern marketing communication.

Referencing this analysis of social media's influence on marketing communication in general, as well as each of the marketing communication mix disciplines, the following marketing communication roles are highlighted for illustrative purposes:

- Monitoring, responding and guiding customer behaviour
- The nurturing of collaborative, long-term relationships with customers
- Nurturing credible consumer generated endorsements
- Supporting traditional marketing channels and disciplines
- Increasing opportunities for personal selling initiatives
- Creating opportunities for user-generated advertising
- Leveraging the social talk ability of sponsorships

- Promoting a credible brand perception, brand equity and consumer trust
- Effective and planned crisis management
- Amplifying the reach and attractiveness of sales promotion

It is noted that the above list was compiled by reconsidering and analysing the modern theory explored in this section regarding social media's influence on marketing communication and highlighting certain key roles that became apparent during this process. It is also noted that these roles identified are by no means intended to be an exhaustive list of social media's influence on marketing communication and its disciplines. These are merely referenced as non-exhaustive, demonstrative examples of social media's influence and served as a useful contextual reference during the study's empirical data collection process.

With the various roles and influence of social media within a marketing communication context fleshed out from a theoretical perspective, the next section of this chapter explores the structuring of an organisation's social media function in more detail. This section expands on the discussion of the organisational structuring of marketing communication in Chapter 2 (section 2.2.3), serving as a reference for current best practice with regard to the delegation of social media responsibilities as well as social media governance structures.

### **3.4 THE STRUCTURING OF AN ORGANISATION'S SOCIAL MEDIA FUNCTION**

#### **3.4.1 General considerations with regard to the structuring of an organisation's social media function**

This section explores the relatively scarce volume of existing theory available on the organisational structuring of professional social media. Although existing theory on the subject is not available in great depth, an exploration of this theory is vital for creating a reference point for the study's empirical process to follow, where each main approach to social media structuring identified is explored in depth.

Taking an organisational perspective towards social media, Divol *et al.* (2012) highlight the importance of a clear social media governance structure and also identify clear roles when it comes to social media responsibilities. Funk (2011:45) agrees, stating that it is advisable to determine which department or individuals will be responsible for an organisation's social media presence, as well as the day-to-day and strategic management thereof. Gattiker (2013:47) believes this needs to happen before undertaking any social media marketing activities, as to

ensure that organisations provide their social media employee force with the necessary resources and tools to perform the said roles efficiently.

Scott and Jacka (2011:29) accentuate the need to clearly define to which departments of an organisation social media responsibilities will be assigned to. This becomes especially problematic in the light of all the possible organisational applications of social media (as discussed in section 3.2 of this chapter). Any of the following departments of an organisation can be charged with heading an organisation's social media activities: legal, communication/public relations, compliance department, risk, marketing, human resources, IT and more (Scott & Jacka 2011:111; Go Gulf, 2013). Whilst there are many possibilities with regard to which departments can lead an organisation's social media initiatives, most organisations are of the opinion that the main direction should either come from the marketing or public relations department (Creative Group, 2013). Considering this, it can be expected that social media's role within an organisation has, until date, most clearly been defined within the context of public relations and marketing. This realisation also aligns with the study's marketing communication' contextualisation of social media activities, discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 (section 2.3). It furthermore substantiates the study's preference for exploring social media within the context of marketing communication instead of other organisational spheres. The realisation that social media can however be led by almost any department highlights the vast multi-adaptability of social media as a strategic organisational instrument.

Considering that the modern consumer uses social media as a way of enquiring about various aspects of the organisation, Ho (2014) highlights the importance of ensuring that the social media team of an organisation has immediate access to various departments. Considering this, it is vital that an organisation's structure be conducive to streamlined, centralised and integrated communication amongst social media team members. This viewpoint is further substantiated by the theoretical discussion of marketing communication's organisational structuring in Chapter 2 (section 2.2.3), where an integrated, converged approach to marketing communication is suggested. In order to practically implement this structure, Ho (2014) suggests setting up a 'social media committee' within an organisation, which entails a designated social media representative being appointed in each relevant department of the organisation. Ho's (2014) observations also indirectly accentuate one of the challenges that could potentially arise from having an external company manage an organisation's social media presence, in that much of the decision making power needed for effectively managing a brand's social media presence lies within the organisation. This then highlights the importance of a high level of integration between the agency and the organisation itself in order to ensure that the disadvantage that

comes from a lack of direct proximity does not affect the outsourcing approach to social media organisational structuring too severely.

Adding to the complexity of social media responsibilities are the numerous job titles organisations assign to an individual managing social media activities, which all hint at the diversity of possible social media responsibilities. These titles can include, but are not limited to: social media manager, social media specialists, chief blogger, online community manager, brand advocate, community executive, community developer, head of interactions and chief community officer (Funk, 2011:67). Souza (2013) suggests that organisations assign specific job titles and corresponding responsibilities to their social media management team to ensure a streamlined and efficient approach to managing social media assets. This infers that the organisational structure dimension of specialisation (initially discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.2.2) is also relevant within the context of social media organisational roles and responsibilities. This is an important observation, as it highlights how the influence of different dimensions of organisational structure previously defined should be considered when choosing a suitable approach to social media's organisational structuring.

Some of the main specialised roles defined for social media team members (Owyang, 2012; Souza, 2013) are:

- **Social media manager:** main responsibilities include overseeing the workflow of other team members and ensuring that the social media strategy is aligned and adhered to. The manager is also the direct point of contact with the client or agency (if relevant).
- **Content manager:** this team member ensures that the content being publicised on a brand's social media channels is created in a timely fashion and also ensures that the daily, weekly or monthly content produced aligns to the overarching social media strategy.
- **Graphic designer:** working closely with the content manager, the graphic designer is responsible for producing the visual aspect of a brand's publicised social media content. It is important that the visual element aligns with the accompanied copy produced by the content manager.
- **Community manager:** this team member focuses specifically on day-to-day engagement with the community members of a brand's social media platforms. This could be for the purpose of query resolution, marketing related strategies, building a sense of rapport between the brand and its consumers and so forth.
- **Social media analyst:** this team member actively monitors, analyses and reports on the organisation's social media initiatives as to advise on suitable content and campaign optimisations that will help an organisation reach their social media objectives.

- **Social media strategist:** this team member is responsible for creating and updating a brand's strategic social media approach. This also includes ensuring that the social media objectives are aligned to the marketing and overall business objectives of the organisation.

This section of the chapter indicated that social media's role within an organisation is still mostly being led by the public relations and marketing departments of the organisation. However, the widespread applicability of social media across most other departments highlights its multi-pronged role in the modern organisation.

The section also highlighted how certain approaches to social media organisational structuring can have inherent drawbacks. However, it was also shown that measures can be taken to overcome some of these challenges, which could increase the value and attractiveness of certain approaches to the organisational structuring of social media. During the study's empirical process, the inherent challenges of each approach, as well as the ways in which they could be overcome were explored.

The section also demonstrated that the organisational structure dimension of specialisation is relevant in the context of social media's organisational structuring. In so doing, the section highlighted the need to examine the impact of all organisational structure dimensions on the performance of social media activities during the study's empirical phase. Seeing as these dimensions relate back directly to the four approaches to social media organisational structuring that the study analysed (see Chapter 1, section 1.2) such an analysis can directly contribute to the study's ultimate goal of providing a guideline regarding the suitability of different organisational structuring approaches to social media.

Although this exploration of the existing theory available regarding the organisational structuring of professional social media managed to uncover some key aspects regarding the study's main research problem, it is once again highlighted that the theory available does not accommodate a thorough exploration of the topic. The most noticeable shortcomings and gaps of modern theory's exploration of the study's main research aim are:

- The lack of clear criteria that inform the choice of a specific organisational structuring approach to social media above others.
- The lack of detailed advantages and disadvantages of each main approach to the organisational positioning of social media.

- The lack of detailed suggestions to overcome the challenges and leverage the inherent advantages of each approach to the organisational positioning of social media.
- The lack of best practice guidelines that inform the relevancy of each approach, in consideration of the unique circumstances of an organisation.

The study at hand aimed to address the apparent shortcomings of existing theory available on the organisational structuring of social media. This was done by attempting to derive new theory regarding the above mentioned topics by means of a process of empirical research. Considering the highlighted lack of theory available regarding the study's main research problem, the remaining sections of this chapter attempt to create additional theoretical vantage points from which to explore the study's research problem.

Expanding on organisational structuring dimensions' relevance to social media, the next section contextualises each of the main approaches to social media organisational structuring from the vantage point of the dimensions of organisational structuring.

### **3.4.2 Social media organisational structuring approaches**

As illustration of the dimensions of organisational structure's relevance to the study (as discussed in section 2.2.2, Chapter 2), a brief analysis of their applicability to each of the main approaches to social media organisational structuring being assessed in this study is provided:

#### **3.4.2.1 *Social media as a separate marketing communication discipline***

Considering the internal locus of this approach, it can be expected that one of the defining dimensions at play here would be a high level of centralisation, due to external parties not playing such a noteworthy role as it would when the company opts to out-source part of their social media offering. Another logical assumption that can be made regarding the approach is that it includes a high level of specialisation, due to the opportunity to assign specific social media roles to specific team members of the organisation's social media department. Also, as the social media initiatives of the organisation is not reliant on external parties, one would expect a low level of participation, but some level of internal inter-dependence, as the social media department would need to align with other organisational departments to ensure the optimum performance of the department. Due to the department having its own unique characteristics that distinguish it from other marketing communication disciplines, it can also be expected that a considerable degree of formalisation exists, as rules and procedures specific to social media can be easily communicated and enforced. But, because the department does not necessarily need to adhere to the rules of other departments, the level of formalisation could be

comparatively lower in relation to when social media functions as a supportive layer to other marketing communication disciplines.

### **3.4.2.2 *Social media as supportive layer of another department***

As with the other internally focused organisational structuring approach to social media, it can be expected that this approach will include a high level of centralisation. Due to social media however being positioned as a sub-department of another, it can be expected that the level of centralisation will be even higher compared to when social media is managed as a separate department. This is because decision making power will most likely be restricted to a few key team members. Furthermore, as it can be deduced that this approach will also result in less staff members being dedicated to social media specific roles, it can also be expected that the approach will include a lower level of specialisation than a dedicated social media department, due to staff members needing to fulfil multiple roles to ensure that social media efforts are performed optimally. Integration levels can however be expected to be high, due to the organisation's social media efforts relying on the direct support of other marketing communication disciplines. Formalisation, on the other hand, can also be quite high, due to social media team members requiring to adhere to the rules and regulations set by more established marketing communication disciplines.

### **3.4.2.3 *As a discipline managed by an external agency***

The most logical dimension at play with this approach is the expectation of a high level of participation, as both the external supplier and the organisation will need to constantly collaborate to ensure an effective and aligned social media approach for the brand. Integration, can however be expected to be low, compared to the level of participation, as the relationship that the social media custodian within the organisation has with its external supplier is more crucial than the relationships with other internal team members. Considering that the locus of decision making extends outside of the boundaries of the organisation, it can also be expected that the level of centralisation is comparatively low in comparison to other approaches. One of the dimensions that this approach can be expected to have in common with a dedicated internal social media department is that of a high level of specialisation, as the external supplier can assign specific responsibilities to specific team members, based on their individual skill set. Formalisation, from the perspective of the internal organisation, can be considered to be comparatively low, as the external supplier can be expected to be in a position to not have to adhere to all of the organisation's internal regulations. This, can potentially result in a more agile, responsive approach for the organisation's social media initiatives.

### 3.4.2.4 A combination of these approaches

It is nearly impossible to predict the level to which different organisational structure dimensions play a role with regard to a combined approach to social media organisational structuring, as this would depend on the exact combination and intensity with regard to how the approach incorporates the other three approaches. When analysing an organisation that employs a combined approach to its social media organisational structuring, it would be important to understand how each individual dimension of organisational structure manifests itself by means of an in-depth analysis of the overall approach itself.

Considering the above analysis based on general assumptions with regard to the level to which organisational structure dimensions play a role in each approach to social media organisational structuring, the following table is presented:

Approaches to social media organisational structuring	Dimensions of organisational structure			
	Centralisation	Formalisation	Specialisation	Integration
Separate marketing communication's discipline	Moderate	Moderate	High	Low
Supportive element of another department	High	High	Moderate/Low	High
Managed by an external supplier	Low	Low	High	Low

**Table 3.1: Perceived relation between the different approaches to social media and selective dimensions of organisational structure**

This section created a series of assumptions regarding how each dimension of organisational structure is predicted to manifest within each approach to social media organisational structuring that the study explored. These assumptions played an important role during the empirical phase of the research, where they were explored and validated within the context of real life organisational samples. Furthermore, as each dimension of organisational structure also infers certain advantages and disadvantages for the organisation, contextualising social media within the framework of these dimensions created a framework of potential advantages and disadvantages for each approach to social media organisational structuring that the study explored. This will therefore serve as a useful reference point from which to assess the advantages and disadvantages of each of these main approaches.

### **3.5 CONCLUSION**

As the study's second theoretically based discussion, the chapter firstly created a theoretical framework for the in-depth exploration of social media practice undertaken. This was done by exploring modern theory regarding the development of social media, the influence of social media on businesses in general as well as specific fields or professions and finally also highlighting certain guidelines regarding social media best practice, stemming mainly from potential challenges with implementing professional social media. This section also explored the complexity, widespread organisational applicability and fast growing nature of social media and its platforms.

Thereafter, the chapter explored the different roles and responsibilities of social media within the modern organisation. This exploration was focused on social media's role within a modern marketing communication context.

The chapter then focused on the organisational structuring of social media. It was highlighted how social media is predominantly seen as either a marketing or public relations function of an organisation and is therefore mostly under the custodianship of these departments. This observation is aligned with the discussion regarding the convergence of an organisation's marketing and communication disciplines (Chapter 2, section 2.2.3), which demonstrates how professional social media reflects the principles of modern marketing communication. In this section, theory discussing the relevance of the organisational structure dimension of specialisation highlighted the need to consider the influence of each of the dimensions (Chapter 2, section 2.2.2) on the informed choice of a social media organisational structuring approach. This section also highlighted the noteworthy limitations of existing theory available on the study's main research problem. These shortcomings were addressed during the study's empirical process.

With a theoretical view of social media in place, the empirical phase of the study could extract real world knowledge via a process of empirical research in order to add depth and practical relevancy to the theoretical findings of this chapter. By analysing the way social media is approached in different types of organisations, the study was able to add additional social media roles to the list already created, thus enriching the study's findings and ensuring its practical relevance.

Before undertaking the empirical segment of the study, the methodology first had to be detailed and bedded down as to ensure effective and accurate data sourcing and analysis. This is addressed in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

During Chapter 2 and 3, a theoretical framework was created for this study. In Chapter 2, two main theoretical branches were explored, namely organisational structure theory and marketing communication. With this framework established, Chapter 3 undertook an in-depth exploration of modern social media theory within the context of marketing communication and organisational structure.

The empirical phase that followed (detailed in this chapter) aimed to explore the key considerations at play when choosing a suitable approach to social media organisational structuring.

However, before the empirical process was undertaken, this study's research methods and overarching methodological framework had to be established and fleshed out. Chapter 4 recalls the approach taken during this study's empirical process. The chapter discusses the following:

Firstly, the chapter unpacks the study's qualitative research background, the science of qualitative research and how the qualitative research approach is suitable for the study.

Secondly, when the general research approach has been explored in depth, the chapter thereafter directs its focus to the research sample, which involved an exploration of the most important considerations when deciding on the size of a data sample design, as well as how the sample data collection process was approached.

Thirdly, the study's three research methods, namely self-interview, semi-structured interviews and thematic content analysis are discussed according to their background, suitability to the study and possible pitfalls.

Finally, the chapter detailed the applicable evaluation criteria that were referenced during the study's empirical phase.

As an introduction to the chapter at hand, a step-by-step recollection of the overall empirical research process undertaken is presented in order to illustrate how each phase ultimately contributed to an exploration of the different approaches to social media organisational structuring.

Diagram 4.1: A sequential flow of the research process



With an overarching background of the research process followed now provided, the first section of this chapter explores qualitative research in more detail.

## **4.2 RESEARCH APPROACH: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

It is noted that this study employed a qualitative approach to the empirical phase thereof. A detailed justification for the suitability of this approach was undertaken in Chapter 1 (section 1.7). This section aims to further expand on qualitative research approach theory by exploring qualitative research from a variety of theoretical vantage points.

The section firstly explores the evolution and growth of qualitative research in more detail.

### **4.2.1 The evolution of qualitative research**

In a study conducted by Bailey (2014:167), it was argued that the origins of modern qualitative research comprised of a series of disciplines, which had first been identified in 1925 in the work of psychologist, Paul Felix Lazarsfeld. Bailey (2014:172) hypothesised that qualitative research's roots were firmly tied to that of motivation research. This research approach is trademarked by its focus on procedures and interpretations relating to psychoanalysis and post-Freudian psychotherapy (Bailey, 2014:172). Even though the principles behind qualitative research aren't new to the academic world, it's only during the last 20 years that the approach has established widespread credibility. Today it is used as a successful way of utilising research methodologies such as interviews and focus groups to gather data which is then interpreted by a researcher to answer particular research questions (Bailey, 2014:169).

One popular approach to qualitative research is that of emergent theory, where the researcher follows an inductive process to generate new theory (Trotter, 2012:398). Welch *et al.* (2013:245) label this approach as the modernist viewpoint of qualitative research, noting that researchers who adopt this viewpoint praise qualitative studies for their exploratory and theory building advantages. The theory building advantages of qualitative studies were of direct relevance to the study at hand, as the overarching aim was to create new theory regarding the organisational structuring of professional social media within a marketing communication context. These comments align to the discussion regarding the suitability of a qualitative research approach in this study, as initially discussed in Chapter 1 (section 1.7).

Redlich-Amirav and Higginbottom (2014:1) note that communication has a crucial role to play in qualitative research, whether from a planning or execution perspective. It therefore does not come as a surprise that new communication technologies have also played a significant role in

the way in which qualitative studies are undertaken. Interviews, for example, no longer have to take place face-to-face and are now more convenient in the form of instant messaging interviews, online focus groups, email interviews and so forth (Redlich-Amirav & Higginbottom, 2014:6). However, one of the main concerns with utilising modern communication technologies for the purpose of qualitative data collection, is that privacy and confidentiality of conversations on online platforms can't always be assured (Redlich-Amirav & Higginbottom, 2014:10).

Another modern development in the field of qualitative research is that of the generic qualitative approach, which is research that does not follow established assumptions or methodologies (Kahlke, 2014:37). This approach instead utilises a combination of different philosophies or approaches in order to provide additional flexibility during the research process (Kahlke, 2014:37). One of the major concerns raised with regard to a generic approach is that it could lack credibility, as it is challenging to contextualise and relate these to other more established studies and approaches (Kahlke, 2014:49). Nevertheless, the generic movement in qualitative research places a focus on further evolution of this relatively young approach to academic research.

With an overview of the development of qualitative research established, the next section takes a closer look at the specifics of the study's overarching qualitative approach.

#### **4.2.2 Phenomenology**

As discussed in Chapter 1 (section 1.7), an acknowledgment of this study's phenomenological underpinnings allowed the researcher to observe the research phenomenon from a variety of functional and valuable vantage points.

Moran (2002:1) defines the phenomenological approach as "the unprejudiced, descriptive study of whatever appears to consciousness, precisely in the manner in which it so appears". Thompson and Walker (2000:67) identify phenomenology as an accepted qualitative research approach and a review of phenomenological literature reveals a wide variety of different viewpoints regarding the specifics of phenomenology (Earle, 2010:286).

Traditional approaches to phenomenology suggest that the research process starts free from preconceived ideas, with its founder, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) defining it as 'the science of pure consciousness' (cited in Mohanty, 2008; 191). In contrast to this, this study adopts the interpretivist tradition of phenomenology, which opts to rather accept the researcher's unavoidable proximity to the research phenomenon to utilise it to the advantage of the research process itself (Angen, 2000:386). Other prominent phenomenology supporters, such as Martin

Heidegger, originally a student of Husserl (Annells, 1996:705) also adopted this approach to phenomenology, noting that understanding cannot be achieved without a form of presuppositions (Moran, 2000:23; McConnell-Henry *et al.*, 2009:6). One of the key advantages of adopting a modern phenomenological approach to this study (as discussed in more detail in Chapter 1, section 1.7) was that it allowed for the presuppositions and expert knowledge of the researcher related to the research phenomenon to become valuable considerations during the actual research process (Flood, 2010:1).

As discussed in Chapter 1 (section 1.8), this study employed an approach of heterophenomenology, as well as autophenomenography (Dennet, 2003:10) in order to ensure that a degree of triangulation with regard to the study's empirical data collection process be contained. The specific research methods aligning to these two approaches of phenomenology are discussed in more detail in section 4.4 of this chapter.

### **4.2.3 Concerns related to qualitative research**

The usefulness of qualitative research has been a topic of debate for many years, with some quantitative researchers noting that it is a very complex research approach that is difficult to get published and also lacks a sufficient amount of rigour (Humphrey, 2014:54).

One of the lingering issues or concerns with qualitative research lies in the approach's multi-disciplinary heritage, which includes contributions from nursing, anthropology, sociology, education and public health (Trotter, 2012:398). Because of this diverse heritage, there are a multitude of discipline specific terminology for qualitative research, which to date, have not yet been standardised (Trotter, 2012:398).

Another general disadvantage of qualitative research is that it can be more time-consuming than its quantitative counterparts, leading to it being a high risk, high research approach to commit to (Marshall *et al.*, 2013:12).

It is noted that researchers opting for a qualitative approach when conducting marketing research can expect to also face some specific challenges (Kapoulas & Mitic, 2012:361). Some of the challenges noted are issues with regard to gaining access to research participants who are sceptical towards the agenda around open-ended research and participants questioning the ethical merit of questions asked (Kapoulas & Mitic, 2012:363). There are also methodology specific issues such as time constraints for interviews, data confidentiality and changes in the staffing structure of marketing departments (Kapoulas & Mitic, 2012:363).

When exploring criticism specific to phenomenology as a scientific approach, it is argued that the approach faces problems concerning the legitimacy of its introspective investigations of specific phenomena (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2007:45). Roy (2007:8) notes that the most prominent scepticism regarding the phenomenological approach in general is the long standing objection that first-person investigations are unable to identify tangible and reliable phenomenological properties that substantiate the data or knowledge derived therefrom as being truly scientific in nature. Nevertheless, the phenomenological approach continues to be utilised as a popular approach to qualitative research enquiry.

Exploring more specific criticism against the phenomenological approach, it is argued that the process of phenomenological description itself transforms the perspective of the phenomenon it is describing (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2007:45). To prevent the negative impact of this, it is suggested that researchers utilising phenomenology separate their reflective experience from the naïve-involved experience, so that the involved experience can be left unaltered (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2007:45).

As an evolution of the original phenomenological approach, heterophenomenology has the potential to negate the criticism of phenomenology by incorporating reflective experience as part of the investigative process (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2007:45). It is however noted that heterophenomenology can still alter data being investigated if the researcher interprets the subject's data as a reflective report (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2007:45).

Exploring academic scepticism against the autophenomenological approach reveals similar criticism. The key criticism against autophenomenology lies in its reliance on human consciousness, making the method perceptible to the imperfect nature of how the human mind processes information, which in turn leads to the potential for information distortion (Roy, 2007:12).

It is imperative for a study that applies phenomenology, heterophenomenology or autophenomenology to be considerate of these pitfalls when planning how to employ these approaches effectively. To negate these concerns, this study needed to ensure that a systematic, consistent and thoroughly planned process was followed when applying the principles of these approaches during the empirical process. It is for this reason that the study presents the detail of each of the chosen research methods that formed part of the heterophenomenological, autophenomenological and broader phenomenological tradition that the study subscribes to.

With the background of the study's main research approach in hand, the following section unpacks the sampling design considerations.

## **4.3 SAMPLE DESIGN**

### **4.3.1 Justification of sample size requirements**

Trotter (2012:398) notes that, although the gap between what exactly entails quantitative and qualitative studies have dramatically narrowed, there are still noticeable differences in terms of how key methodological aspects of these two broad approaches to research are managed. One of these key differences are the guidelines and rationale used when assessing to which the degree the sample design is relevant to the study at hand (Trotter, 2012:398). As Horsburgh (2003:307) notes, utilising quantitative criteria for qualitative research is not only inappropriate, but may also create the impression that the qualitative study at hand is not academically rigorous. This is an important observation, as it highlights the need to ensure that the study's sample design considers guidelines specific to qualitative research, rather than those that are more relevant and suitable to quantitative studies.

It is however noted that amongst the expansive corpus that exists regarding sample design or participant selection specifically in qualitative studies, there are various discrepancies and inconsistencies present (Trotter, 2012:398). Although there seems to be a general consensus amongst researchers about what aspects are not important to sample design in qualitative studies (e.g. extensive, statistical breadth), there are various contrasting views with regard to the aspects that should be deemed as important (Curtis *et al.*, 2000:1001).

This is due to the influence of a diverse range of disciplines and industries that employ qualitative approaches to research, which include nursing and education (Trotter, 2012:398). The situation is even further complicated by the vastness of the labels, methods and specific criteria used by qualitative researchers when referring to sample design, namely theoretical sampling, snowball sampling, nominated expert sampling, convenience sampling and respondent driven sampling to name but a few (Trotter, 2012:398).

There are also contrasting viewpoints regarding the overall appropriateness and value of sampling size criteria amongst different authors (Boddy, 2016:2), with Curtis *et al.* (2000:1001) noting that, in some cases, the concept of sample size might not be relevant within the context of the qualitative study being undertaken. It is for this reason that certain authors opt to use the term 'case selection' as an alternative to 'sampling size' or 'sampling design' (Curtis *et al.*, 2000:1001). Considering the popularity of the approach of not assigning sample size

justifications to qualitative studies, it is not surprising that a study of 81 separate qualitative studies by Marshall *et al.* (2013:11) concluded that minimal attention was given to the estimation or justification of sample sizes. The irrelevance of sample size justification in qualitative studies is supported by Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005:280), based on the observation that qualitative studies do not usually focus on the generation of statistical generalisations.

Even if a study opts to utilise the term 'case selection' due to its more direct relevance, Curtis *et al.* (2000:1003) highlight the importance of researchers being reflective and explicit about their rationale for case selection, noting that there could be theoretical and ethical implications for a specific case selection strategy. They furthermore argue that "it is important to justify the rigour of qualitative research and that this is difficult to do without some discussion of what aspects of sampling may be widely accepted to be important" (Curtis *et al.*, 2000:1003).

Considering the contrasting views regarding the appropriateness of sample size justifications in qualitative research, the question arises: how does a qualitative researcher then determine a suitable approach? Boddy (2005:29) as well as Bock and Sergeant (2002:235) propagate the value of sample size justifications especially in qualitative studies where the insights being derived are intended to be representative of a specific population under consideration.

Although the degree to which qualitative studies should adhere to generalisability is a controversial topic amongst academics, Polit and Beck (2010:1451) note that many leaders in qualitative research have begun to observe the importance of ensuring the generalisability of qualitative studies as a way of validating the value of research findings in informing real life practice. Morse (1999:5) argues that, if the findings of a qualitative study cannot be considered to be generalisable to a certain extent, it diminishes the overall value of a study and its findings. It is however important to keep in mind that the concept of generalisability has different implications in quantitative and qualitative studies. In quantitative studies, generalisability is statistically based, but in qualitative studies the aim is to select participants based on their ability to provide emergent theory relevant to the broader research problem being studied (Morse, 1999:5). In qualitative studies therefore, generalisability refers to the degree to which the findings of the study can be exported or applied to the experiences of other individuals who are in comparable situations: "the aim is to make logical generalisations to a theoretical understanding of a similar class of phenomena rather than probabilistic generalisations to a population" (Popay *et al.*, 1998:348).

Academic discussions regarding generalisability in qualitative studies also propagate the use of the term 'transferability', referring to the process of using findings from one inquiry in a completely different group of people or context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:23). For a qualitative study to be regarded as transferrable, it is necessary for the findings to have the capacity to be extrapolated to other, similar settings (Polit & Beck, 2010:1453).

After analysing and investigating modern viewpoints regarding the need for sample size justifications in qualitative studies, Boddy (2016:6) concludes that the answer is highly contextual to the study at hand and that the final decision should be based on the needs and the purpose of this study itself.

With this in mind, the following is noted concerning how this study and its purpose either support or discredit the value of sample size justifications: the study's empirical phase focused on generating new theory that aimed to provide a better understanding of the main themes influencing the choice of a specific approach to the structuring of an organisation's social media function. Furthermore, it is intended that the study's findings serve as a general, but practical guideline for social media custodians across various industries. The study therefore needs to ensure that the new theory generated can be generalised so that the theoretical understanding it brings can be applied to the similar experiences and the context of other internal social media custodians or marketing communication managers. It is for this reason that it is argued that some degree of sample size justification is not only relevant to the study at hand, but that it also increases the overall value and general relevancy of the findings derived. It is however important that the sample size justifications chosen to promote the generalisability of the study's findings are relevant to the nature of qualitative studies.

With this substantiation now provided, the following section unpacks the chosen sampling size criteria selected for this study.

#### **4.3.2 Chosen sampling design criteria**

Although there are countless criteria cited for planning the sample design in qualitative studies, this study decided on certain specific criteria, based on their relevance to the interview research methods and the need for generalisability, highlighted in the preceding section.

Trotter (2012:398) notes that a qualitative study that utilises interviews can either collect data to a point of redundancy (i.e. conducting interviews until all concepts are repeated multiple times), or to the point of saturation (i.e. conducting interviews to a point where all questions have been thoroughly explored and no new themes emerge). Guest *et al.* (2006:59) propagate and support

the use of data saturation as a suitable sample size criteria for qualitative studies. Trotter's (2012:398) observations align to this, adding that qualitative studies that aim to inductively uncover new theory prioritise data saturation as a sampling criteria, seeing as a reliable and generalisable sample size cannot be pre-determined when exploring a yet unknown area of research.

Marshall *et al.* (2013:11) however criticise the use of data saturation when it comes to determining sample size, as there are very few concrete guidelines to this somewhat ambiguous concept. This leads to many qualitative researchers abusing this criterion as a way of justifying inadequately small qualitative research sample sizes (Marshall *et al.*, 2013:20). To combat this issue, Marshall *et al.* (2013:20) suggest using a combination of sample size justifications in order to make a more informed decision when it comes to the choice of an adequate sample size in qualitative research.

For the purpose of deciding on an appropriate sample size for this study, it is noted that a combination of the above considerations was taken into account. With regard to the semi-structured interviews that were conducted with internal social media custodians, data was gathered up until a point of saturation, but also considering redundancy as an additional criterion. This ensured that no important findings were overlooked during the data collection process. In terms of redundancy, it is noted that, by completion of the 10<sup>th</sup> interview, all main themes or considerations that influenced the structuring of social media were repeated multiple times within the sampling data. In terms of saturation, it is noted that interview 12 did not reveal any new themes or noteworthy considerations regarding the structuring of social media. Considering this, the data sampling process was deemed to be adequately undertaken at the completion of 12 semi-structured interviews.

Additionally, Horsburgh (2003:310) notes that qualitative sampling should be purposive, in that the selection of participants should be made based on the population's propensity to provide relevant data on the research problem being addressed. In consideration of that, key observations concerning the sample data's relevancy to the research problem is also noted as additional substantiation of the sample size's adequacy. Seeing as this study's focus is the different approaches to the organisational structuring of professional social media, it was crucial that sampling data be gathered from a list of organisations and/or brands that would incorporate an expansive spectrum of organisational structuring approaches with regard to professional social media. This was necessary in order to also ensure the theoretical generalisability of the study's findings, as discussed in the preceding section of this chapter. The 12 South African organisations and/or brands (or global brands with a distinct localised presence) included in this

study's empirical phase therefore represented each of the different approaches to ensure that the study could analyse the advantages and disadvantages of each approach sufficiently. Furthermore, in order to ensure that the study would include data that could be generalised across various industries, it was decided to analyse brands from different industries. These broad industry sectors from which empirical sample data was gathered included financial industry, broader technology industry, retail industry, media publishing, sports industry, entertainment and arts. The general size of and the organisation's degree of access to physical and human capital were also considered with regard to the rationale behind the final combination of individual data samples. For this reason it was ensured that the final data sample of organisations incorporated a wide representative spectrum of these aforementioned variables.

Furthermore, to ensure that the empirical process extracted broad and generalisable data regarding an organisation's approach to social media structuring, interviews from which data was extracted were arranged with the custodians of social media within the organisation. Within this context, 'custodian' is used to refer to the internal resource that is directly assigned to manage and oversee the brand's/organisation's overall social media presence and individual activities. In other words, the interviews were undertaken with the most senior team members within the organisation's social media staff complement. Considering the broad spectrum of industries and organisation sizes that were included in the research data, the social media custodians interviewed covered a wide range of job responsibilities, titles and the organisational departments that they were formally assigned to. Some of the titles and organisational positioning of the interviewees included "Marketing and Corporate Communication Manager", "Social media manager", "Social Media Coordinator", "Group Content Marketing Manager", "Central Marketing Organisational Lead" and "Head of Brand" (see Annexure 1). There was also a considerable variation in the degree to which the participants interviewed were specialised with regard to the overall scope of their expected responsibilities. Whilst certain interviewees were dedicated to managing the social media activities of the organisation/brand, social media only formed a segment of the overall organisational responsibilities of others. Although these inconsistencies in terms of the actual interviewees at first seemed to jeopardise the direct comparability of the individual data sets, it in fact only broadened the overall relevance and generalisability of this study's research findings, in that it allowed for the exploration of the structuring of social media from the perspective of various different general structuring approaches. These differences also addressed the overarching context of the research problem (Chapter 1, section 1.2), as it directly illustrated the lack of overall consistency and

standardisation apparent in relation to the implementation of social media within a marketing communication context.

With the scope and variation of this study's sampling discussed and substantiated, the next section of the chapter describes the study's two main research methods in more detail.

#### **4.4 RESEARCH METHODS: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND, IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSESSMENT**

The empirical phase of the research study made use of three main research methods, namely self-interview, semi-structured interviews and thematic content analysis in order to analyse and explore the organisational structuring of professional social media. The use of more than one research method would ensure that rich data from different avenues could be gathered for more descriptive and accurate findings (i.e. triangulation). The following section delves deeper into the background of each research method used, describes the practical detail regarding how each method was implemented and also provides criteria for their assessment.

##### **4.4.1 Semi-structured interviews**

As a form of heterophenomenology (i.e. third person accounts of a phenomenon; Dennet, 2003:10), this study's empirical phase utilised semi-structured interviews with selected marketing communication practitioners and internal social media custodians, based on the study's chosen sampling design criteria (see section 4.3.2).

When making the decision between questionnaires and interviews, the decision should be based on the type of data to be extracted during the empirical process (Rowley, 2012:262). When a study opts to explore a general topic influenced by public opinion, a questionnaire is a useful approach, as a large sample can be drawn for the reaching of research generalisations (Rowley, 2012:262). However, when the data sample is specific to a particular knowledge set, an interview is the preferable method, as it is more conducive to gaining research data from specific opinion leaders (Rowley, 2012:260). In the context of this study, it is noted that an interview was therefore more suited for gaining the required empirical data, as a very specific data sample was utilised, namely the internal social media custodians of a representative set of organisations.

The semi-structured interview process was conducted and the individual questions ordered in accordance with the interview schedule proposed (to be discussed in section 4.4.1.3). Interview questions were grouped within a series of clearly defined research notions, each relating to

predetermined research themes relevant to the overall research problem explored. This ensured that each individual interview undertaken could be guided and stayed relevant to the research problem explored.

As an introduction to this research method, a theoretical background of the research method is presented. It is noted though that the theoretical background to semi-structured interviews discussed in this section is not exclusive to this study's heterophenomenological interviews and that in certain cases, these considerations were also relevant to the preceding self-interview undertaken. These considerations are discussed here, due the broader scope and volume of the study's heterophenomenological process.

#### **4.4.1.1 *Theoretical background***

Interviews are one of the dominating methods of acquiring data in qualitative research studies and are often preferred above other qualitative methodologies such as observations and documentation (Redlich-Amirav & Higginbottom, 2014:2). It is noted that interviews are however also widely used in quantitative studies as a way of gathering preliminary data, which further highlights its worth as a dependable way of gathering empirical data during an academic study (Qu & Dumay, 2011:238). Interviews are particularly beneficial as a way of gaining rich qualitative data where the researcher is exploring people's inner feelings and attitudes towards a certain matter (Dilshad & Latif, 2013:191).

A distinction is made between casual interviews and scientific interviews. The latter is used for gathering research data and involves advanced note taking, careful planning and sufficient preparation (Qu & Dumay, 2011:239). The scientific interview can be defined as "face-to-face verbal exchanges in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to acquire information from and gain understanding of another person, the interviewee" (Rowley, 2012:260).

Interviews can also differ with regard to the level to which they are structured: when a structured interview format is followed, the interviewer strictly adheres to the asking of a specific set of research questions. With a semi-structured interview on the other hand, the interviewer displays more flexibility in terms of the general direction of the interview, allowing for follow-up questions and unplanned questions to steer the interview in a new, but guided direction (Stuckey, 2013:57). Semi-structured interviews are the more popular choice when it comes to qualitative studies, as they allow for more expansive topic exploration. Semi-structured interviews are normally preceded by unstructured interviews or a process of scientific observation to ensure that the researcher has adequate knowledge for steering a less structured scientific

conversation (Stuckey, 2013:57). Semi-structured interviews were used in this study, based on the requirement for an expansive exploration of the topic at hand to support effective theory generation.

Another important distinction that needs to be made relates to the amount of people being interviewed at any given time. If more than one person is interviewed (usually around 6 at a time), a researcher is opting for a 'Focus Group Interview' structure to analyse a subject amongst a relatively homogenous group of research subjects (Dilshad & Latif, 2013:192). Some of the noticeable drawbacks of this interview structure are that one participant could dominate the conversation and certain participants might not speak truthfully due to a need to conform to group attitudes and behaviour (Dilshad & Latif, 2013:197). It is also noted that the sheer size of a focus group adds to the management responsibilities of the interviewer, who is required to act as moderator to ensure that a conversation stays focused and insightful (Doody *et al.*, 2013:18). The one advantage of a focus group scenario however is that the dynamics and interactions of the interviewee group can reveal deeper insights into a topic that would otherwise have not come to light if the group dynamic was not present (Doody *et al.*, 2013:16).

In the context of this study, the researcher noted that a group interview structure was less favourable, as the interview subjects (i.e. internal social media custodians of different organisations and/or brands) were expected to be hesitant when it came to speaking openly in front of other marketing managers in fear of trade secrets being divulged. For this reason, the researcher chose a one-on-one interview structure, which aimed to reduce participation reluctance amongst research participants.

When exploring interview best practice, it is noted that advanced listening skills are an important prerequisite for an effective interview and involve (Branthwaite & Patterson, 2011:438):

- building an atmosphere and relationship of trust and acceptance with the interviewee,
- scanning continuously for alternative meanings or ambiguities that may conceal hidden motives, pleasures or dissatisfactions;
- awareness of non-verbal expressions of values, feelings and the over- (or under-) tones in attitudes;
- spotting ambiguities over the course of an interview that need exploring an clarification for deeper meanings, ideas or solutions; and
- triangulation to check for reliability in what is said by asking the same question in different ways.

The following section explores the most crucial aspects considered during the interview process.

#### **4.4.1.2 Considerations during the interview process<sup>1</sup>**

##### ***Ethical considerations***

A major ethical consideration in interviews is the responsibility of striking a balance between the requirement to gain insightful data and the interviewer showing compassion and respect for the interviewee (Haahr *et al.*, 2014:6). There is usually a power imbalance created during the interview process in favour of the interviewer and the impact of this on the interviewee needs to be considered throughout the interview (Haahr *et al.*, 2014:7). If this is taken into consideration, it will prevent any instance of unfair compromise from taking place (Haahr *et al.*, 2014:7).

Cain (2012:396) notes that, although many authors warn against the implications of the interviewer showing emotion during interviews, the showing of empathy can in certain cases be to the benefit of the research process. This is based on the observation that the display of empathy could help create a connection between the interviewer and interviewee which could lead to the interviewee revealing more during the interview than would have been the case otherwise (Cain, 2012:396).

One of the pitfalls with this research method occurs when there is a significant cultural divide between the interviewer and the interviewee, which can cause a misalignment between the meanings that the two subjects place on words (Qu & Dumay, 2011:239). A clear understanding of the interviewee's cultural background is therefore of vital importance as a prerequisite to any scientific interview, as it could reduce cases of cultural misunderstanding (Qu & Dumay, 2011:239).

It is noted that, due to the strategic insights divulged in each of the 12 semi-structured interviews undertaken (as a natural result of the general discussion themes of the interviews), interviewees requested that their identity and that of their brand be kept anonymous. In ethical

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<sup>1</sup> It is noted that the considerations discussed in this section are not exclusive to this study's heterophenomenological interviews and that in certain cases, these considerations were also relevant to the preceding self-interview undertaken. These considerations are discussed here, due to the broader scope and volume of the study's heterophenomenological process.

respect of this, all references made during the semi-structured interviews that could relate back to the interviewee or the organisation they represented were omitted from the final empirical data sample. It should however be kept in mind that the absence of this data is not regarded as having affected the quality of the research process and its findings, as this study did not aim to explore the organisational structuring of social media of a specific organisation, but rather in a broader sense, as an initial exploration of a research topic with limited existing theoretical data available. In order to ensure that the empirical data still had a degree of contextual relevance, the interviewees included a mentioning of the broad industry in which each organisation represented by the interviewees was positioned. All interviewees agreed to this superficial information being added to this study data based on an appreciation for how this contextual information would ultimately add richness to the research data and conclusive research findings.

### ***Preparing questions***

Turner (2010:757) notes that the creation of effective research questions is one of the most important aspects of interview design and highlights that questions must be crafted with the intention of allowing the interviewer to gain a maximum amount of data from interviewees. McNamara (2009) suggests that questions be as neutral as possible, as to avoid planned questions influencing answers. One of the other important requirements for high quality qualitative research interviews is that they usually need to be open-ended and expansive in nature, to ensure that rich and descriptive data can be gathered from the questions answered (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012:3). A suggestion related to the ordering of research questions is to start with a series of simpler questions before asking high stakes questions that require more effort from the interviewee (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012:4). These considerations were taken into account when the interview schedule for this study was created.

### ***Contacting interviewees***

Before potential interviewees were contacted, careful planning in terms of how this study would be contextualised to the interviewee needed to be done (Mikéné *et al.*, 2013:55). Considering this, an introduction was prepared beforehand and referenced when the interviewer introduced himself to the interviewee over the phone. Furthermore, it was also important that the potential interviewees were notified upfront that their organisations would not be identified during the research study. This was necessary to ensure that the threat of marketing trade secrets and valuable strategic knowledge being divulged via this study did not create participation reluctance.

### ***Conducting interviews***

Preparation is also important when conducting a research interview. A suggestion has been made that a script be prepared for the initial stages of the interview as well as for the end of the interview, when the interviewer thanks the participants for their time and effort (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012:3).

Interviews should take place in an environment that is familiar and comfortable to both the interviewer and the interviewee to ensure that the environment itself has a minimal effect on the interview process itself (Mikèné *et al.*, 2013:55). For this reason, the interviews were conducted in the offices of the respondents / interviewees.

The interviewer must also pre-empt and be aware of the possibility of unexpected emotional or adverse reactions by interview participants. These could be triggered by certain questions or the way in which certain questions are asked (Mikèné *et al.*, 2013:56). Haahr *et al.* (2014:13) agree, adding that every interview undertaken is unique and offers unexpectedness that requires a researcher to always act in an ethical, knowledgeable and sensitive manner. With regard to this study, one of the practical implications of the unexpected nature of interviews that required flexibility on the interviewer's part was that certain answers could lead to the need for unplanned questions (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012:5). These questions were necessary for expanding on certain data themes uncovered during the interview process that were not originally expected, but still of value to the greater research question explored.

### ***Recording data from interviews***

Although note taking during an interview is an effective way of gathering data during the interview process, the process of note taking does detach the interviewer from the conversation at hand, which could be detrimental to the study (Stuckey, 2013:58). One popular way of reducing an interviewer's reliance on note taking is by using some sort of digital recording device, which can then be referenced after the interview as way of analysing the interview in extensive detail (Stuckey, 2013:58). In light of this, the interviewer made use of audio recording hardware during each of the interviews undertaken in order to ensure the interviewee's active participation in each interview undertaken.

The following section details the interview schedule that was constructed for the purpose of ensuring that all interviews captured data relevant to the research problem being addressed.

#### **4.4.1.3 Interview schedule**

Even though the interview process followed a semi-structured nature (see Annexure 1), all interviews undertaken were guided by an interview schedule, consisting of individual questions, grouped into 3 overarching notions that represented the planned questions that were directed at research participants. The overarching categories of questions were constructed by referencing the general focus areas identified during this study's theoretical exploration, namely overarching organisational structure, the organisational structuring of marketing communication as well as the organisational structuring of social media. Once again, the interview questions also aimed to directly address the shortcomings of the existing theory available on the organisational structuring, as identified in Chapter 3 (section 3.4.1). The following planned interview schedule was referenced during the interview process:

##### ***Notion 1: Overall organisational structure and social media structuring approach***

1. Describe the overall organisational structuring of the organisation and how your role is positioned within the said structure.
2. Describe the positioning of social media within the context of the broader organisational structure.
3. Describe the structuring of social media within the context of the following dimensions of organisational structure: centralisation, formalisation, specialisation and interdependence.
4. Describe the organisation's approach to social media structuring within the context of the following main approaches: social media as a supportive function that forms part of other pre-existing marketing communication disciplines; social media as a separate, but integrated internal department; as managed by another organisation or as a combination of aforementioned approaches.
5. Describe the organisational structuring of marketing communication and its disciplines, as well as the relationship thereof with the organisation's social media function.

##### ***Notion 2: The benefits and disadvantages of organisational structuring of social media***

6. Describe the advantages of the current internal structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives.
7. Describe the disadvantages of the current internal structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives.
8. Describe the advantages of the current external structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives.

9. Describe the disadvantages of the current external structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives.

### ***Notion 3: Deeper exploration of factors that influence social media structuring***

10. Describe the organisation's social media workforce (includes internal and external resources) with regard to: number of team members, main responsibilities and the hierarchy of the team.
11. Describe the funding availability and budgetary allocation strategy with regard to the organisation's social media initiatives.
12. Describe the objectives defined for the organisation's social media initiatives and any possible obstacles or complications in reaching them.

#### ***4.4.1.4 Interview schedule rationale***

The following section attempts to justify and contextualise the choice of interview questions that were set up. These were required so that the interview process could be steered into a fruitful direction that would ensure the gathering of valuable empirical data that directly addressed the main research aim, namely exploring the different organisational structuring tactics employed with regard to social media. Each notion is now discussed separately in more detail.

### ***Notion 1: Overall organisational structure and internal social media structuring***

Before delving into the finer detail of the organisation's structuring approach to social media, the first notion attempted to create a macro level background of the organisation's structuring and the influence thereof on the organisation's social media approach. This was done by guiding the interviewee towards describing the organisation's approach to structuring within the context of the theory explored around organisational structuring in Chapter 2, section 2.2.

This notion also explored the internal context and factors that influenced the structuring of the organisation's social media function, which included an attempt to understand the impact of the organisation's social media approach on marketing communication and vice versa.

- Question 1: Contextualised the organisational structuring and how the interviewee was positioned within the said structure in order to create a contextual background for the rest of the interview.
- Question 2: Created a context of the organisational positioning of social media within the broader organisational structuring. This exploration added to the study's initial theoretical

exploration undertaken in Chapter 3, section 3.4.1, adding to the insights from authors such as Scott and Jacka (2011:29), Ho (2014) and Souza (2013) regarding the organisational context of social media in modern organisations.

- Question 3: Contextualised the organisational structuring of social media according to the main dimensions of organisational structure identified in Chapter 2, section 2.2.2 (Plugge & Bouwman, 2012:378; Nahm *et al.*, 2003:281).
- Question 4: Guided the interviewee to describe the organisation's approach to social media within the context of the main approaches to social media that this study explored, as introduced in Chapter 1, section 1.2 (Go Gulf, 2013; Clapperton, 2010:178; Erdoğan & Cicek, 2012:1255; Albarran, 2013:6).
- Question 5: Created a context of the broader structuring of the organisation's marketing communication disciplines and how social media related to or influenced marketing communication, within the context of this study's existing theoretical exploration in Chapter 3, section 3.3.1 (Sponder, 2013:5; Sashi, 2012:255).

### ***Notion 2: The benefits and disadvantages of organisational structuring of social media***

With a broader context created by the aforementioned questions, it was then explored how the current organisational structure influenced social media activities by probing both the advantages and disadvantages of the organisation's internal and/or external approach to social media structuring.

- Question 6 and 7: Attempted to uncover the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the organisation's internal approach to social media (if applicable). This question attempted to add to the limited existing theory available regarding this research theme, as introduced in Chapter 1, section 1.2 (Clapperton, 2010:178; Erdoğan & Cicek, 2012:1255).
- Question 8 and 9: Attempted to uncover the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the organisation's external approach to social media (if applicable). This question attempted to add to the limited existing theory regarding the advantages and disadvantages of an external approach, as introduced in Chapter 1, section 1.2 (Albarran, 2013:6; Lee, 2013).

### ***Notion 3: Deeper exploration of factors that influence social media structuring***

Whereas the first notion attempted to create a general understanding of the organisation's approach to structuring and its influence, the third notion focused on contextualising and

describing the organisation's social media approach in finer and more descriptive detail. In order to uncover additional data regarding the factors that influenced the organisational structuring of social media, the planned questions attempted to probe the strategy or thinking behind the workforce, budget allocation and objectives of the organisation's social media offering.

- Question 10: Attempted to create an additional context and description of the operational aspects of the organisation's approach to social media structuring and more specifically, the social media workforce utilised by the organisation. This question aimed to add to the existing theory discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.4.1 (Owyang, 2012; Souza, 2013).
- Question 11: Attempted to uncover to which degree the social media team's access to funding inhibited or stimulated the workings and overall effectiveness of the organisation's social media initiatives. This question attempted to add to the limited existing theory introduced in Chapter 1, section 1.2 (Solis, 2010:20; Albarran, 2013:100).
- Question 12: Attempted to uncover if there were any obstacles in the way of reaching the brand's defined social media objectives that were relevant to the exploration of organisational structuring. Furthermore, the question also aimed to uncover to which degree there was a conflict between the objectives of social media custodians and that of their broader marketing communication counterparts within the organisation, as per the general marketing communication objectives discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.4 (Kaho, 2013; Guettler, 2013; Wolinski & Coates, 2009:120).

#### **4.4.1.5 Noteworthy deviations from planned interview schedule<sup>2</sup>**

Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews undertaken, the interviewer allowed for a natural and unrestricted conversational flow between himself and each of the interviewees. Because of this however, there were certain noteworthy deviations from the interview schedule presented in this section amongst the individual interview data sets provided in Annexure 1. The main reasons for these deviations were as follows:

- **The natural, conversational flow of semi-structured interviews:** It was observed that, by posing one planned question to an interviewee, there was a probability that the interviewee would naturally address other planned interview question(s), even without the

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<sup>2</sup> It is noted that the deviations discussed in this section are not exclusive to this study's heterophenomenological interviews and that in certain cases, these considerations were also relevant to the preceding self-interview undertaken. These considerations are discussed here, due to the broader scope and volume of this study's heterophenomenological process.

interviewer being required to explicitly state the said question(s) to the interviewee. For the sake of creating a comfortable and natural conversational atmosphere for the interviews, the interviewer did not explicitly pose any questions that were already addressed (as part of an answer to another question) or attempted to force the interviewee to address individual questions in a particular chronological order (i.e. as they appear in the planned notion breakdown).

- **The contextual relevancy of certain questions:** Although the interviewer ensured that the planned interview schedule was followed as closely as possible, it was noted that certain planned questions were not directly relevant to the industry or organisational context of all of the brand representatives that were interviewed. An illustrative example of this was how the questions regarding the advantages and disadvantages of an external social media approach was not relevant to interviewees that did not make use of this structuring approach. Because of this, questions were omitted from individual interviews in cases where the interviewer had prior knowledge of their non-relevance to a particular interviewee's organisational context. This was done in order to ensure that interviews were not prolonged unnecessarily and in so doing, that the interviewer showed respect for interviewees' time dedicated to taking part in this study.

For these aforementioned reasons, it is noted that the individual interview data sets represented in the transcribed sample data (Annexure 1) do not align with the planned interview schedule verbatim, in terms of number of planned questions, as well as the order in which individual planned questions were asked. Furthermore, considering the deviation in the planned ordering of interview questions, including the notions within the transcribed data sets would add additional and irrelevant complexities to the transcription process. Because of this, the transcribed interview data sets (Annexure 1) also do not refer directly to the aforementioned planned overall notions, but merely to the individual questions themselves.

#### **4.4.2 Analysing data from semi-structured interviews: Thematic content analysis**

After all the interview data sets (stemming from the completed heterophenomenological process) were transcribed, the data gathered was analysed by means of a process of thematic content analysis, where data is analysed by grouping it into categories according to common themes identified (Anderson, 2007:1).

One of the benefits of thematic content analysis highlighted by Guest (2012:17) is its suitability as a research technique for finding solutions to real world problems or creating new theoretical

models. This point highlights the technique's suitability to the study at hand, as this study aims to solve a practical business problem concerning the organisational structuring of professional social media. Furthermore, it is also noted that the research technique's analytic breadth can be increased by including non-theme-based research and quantitative techniques (Guest, 2012:17). Vaismoradi *et al.* (2013:398) add that, in certain cases, thematic content analysis also allows for the possibility of quantification of data in that the frequency of different categories uncovered could lead to additional research insights.

The following main steps were followed during this study's thematic content analysis process (Anderson, 2007:2)<sup>3</sup>:

1. Marking all descriptions from the data relevant to this study (open coding).
2. From these descriptions, note all distinct units of meaning or codes (open coding).
3. Group units with similar meanings that are relevant to the research question (closed coding).
4. Label groupings into initial categories (closed coding).
5. Repeat process to ensure research rigour.
6. Use themes as reference point of final analysis and finalised research findings.

When assessing the validity of the themes identified during a thematic content analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006:79) note that themes need to capture something important about the data in relation to the research question. This observation highlights the importance of considering the main research aim of this study when compiling and analysing the research data by means of thematic content analysis. Considering social media's far-reaching influence with regard to the modern organisation, it was necessary to explore various themes during the empirical process to ensure that all important factors were considered.

To see to it that the thematic content analysis process was kept on topic, the interview schedule focused on uncovering the factors that affected and were affected by the organisational structuring of social media. Furthermore, whilst each interview was firstly thematically analysed in isolation, the themes identified were then also compared across interview data sets. This was done in order to ensure that themes with broader consequences could be recognised and that similarities between the various individual data sets analysed could be highlighted and considered.

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<sup>3</sup> It is noted that this chapter only includes a summarised view of the overall thematic content analysis and corresponding coding process utilised in the study. A more descriptive and specific detailing of the actual thematic content analysis process is provided in the succeeding chapter (Chapter 5, section 5.2), as a tangible illustration of the degree of rigour utilised during the process followed in order to identify the study's main empirical themes of analysis.

### **4.4.3 Autophenomenography by means of self-interview, interpretation and reflexivity**

This study's overarching phenomenological underpinnings and more specifically reliance on autophenomenography, allow the researcher to leverage and incorporate his own observations about the research phenomenon as part of the actual research process. As with the heterophenomenological research method, the study's autophenomenographical research method also utilised a form of interview in order to collect scientific data. This interview process was also guided and logically ordered via a set of predetermined research notions (see section 4.4.3.4), each consisting of individual research questions.

The following section explores the particulars of the study's autophenomenographical approach and the specific research method employed in order to undertake the autophenomenographical investigation.

#### **4.4.3.1 Theoretical background**

According to Allen-Collinson (2011:48), autophenomenography is the "genre in which the phenomenological researcher is both researcher and participant in her/his study of a particular phenomenon, subjecting her/his own lived experience to sustained and rigorous phenomenological analysis". The primary focus with employing an autophenomenographical approach is therefore on the researcher's own lived experience of a phenomenon, rather than a 'cultural place', which is the case in another popular autobiographical research approach, known as autoethnography<sup>4</sup> (Spooner, 2014:19). Young and Atkinson (2012:207) advocate autophenomenography as a research approach capable of "producing the rich, finely textured, thick descriptions of first person experiences".

Although there is a limited volume of literature available on the specific pitfalls of adopting an autophenomenographical approach in a study, Gorichanaz (2015:7) advocates that, due to the inherent similarities between autophenomenography and its more popular counterpart, autoethnography, a study that adopts the former approach can benefit from the high volume of literature available on autoethnography to inform a sound application of its principles within a study. Because of this, Holt's (2003:18) caution against the pitfalls of an overemphasis of narrative rather than analysis, as well as the excessive reliance on memory as a data source in autoethnographical studies are also applicable to autophenomenography (Gorichanaz, 2015:7).

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 1, section 1.8.1 for a detailed rationale on why the study opted to use the term autophenomenography instead of its more popular counterpart, known as autoethnography.

It is however noted that autophenomenography itself did not infer a tangible research method and merely referred to the overall approach of considering the researcher's own lived experience as part of this study's empirical process. To be able to implement an autophenomenographical approach, a study needs to utilise a research method compatible to and suitable with the principles of autophenomenography.

To implement an autophenomenographical study, Gorichanaz (2015:8) therefore suggests utilising a form of systematic self-observation. As an overarching research process that includes sub-sets of specific research methods, systematic self-observation relies on the acknowledgement that many aspects of any experience are taken for granted and therefore go unnoticed, reducing the potential to recall the detail of the experience (Rodriguez & Ryave, 2002:23). Aligned to this, Gorman and Clayton (2005:40) define scientific observation as involving "the systematic recording of observable phenomena or behaviour in a natural setting".

In order to make the overall research process of systematic self-observation tangible as an actual research method with clear and distinguishable steps, Gorichanaz (2015:8) suggests various specific methods of data collection when employing systematic self-observation. These include memo writing (or diary keeping), free-format narrative and self-interview (Gorichanaz, 2015:8). Although diary keeping is acknowledged as being a valuable method for implementing systematic self-observation, Keightley *et al.* (2012:511) note that this method cannot replicate the lightness and flexibility of the self-interview method.

Considering this as well as the importance of ensuring that empirical data collection took place in a compatible manner across this study's research methods, it was suggested that the study's autophenomenographical segment utilised the method of self-interview as a way of practically implementing a process of systematic self-observation. Because the study's heterophenomenological approach also utilised a form of interview, collecting data during the autophenomenographical process by similar means simplified the process of relating the results from these separate and heterogeneous empirical data sets with one another. Section 4.4.1.2 of this chapter details the theoretical background and ethical considerations related to the interview research method in more detail, some of which also apply to the self-interview process, albeit to a far more limited and restricted degree.

#### **4.4.3.2 Reflective self-interview process**

In order to employ the principles of autophenomenography tangibly within this study, the researcher utilised a process of self-interview (as a specific form of self-observation). Although

there are noticeable similarities between the self-interview process and the semi-structured interviews undertaken with internal social media custodians, it was noted that an in-depth analysis of the self-interview sample data via a process of thematic content analysis was neither feasible nor conducive to increasing the quality of this study's new theory contribution. Additional substantiation of this observation is now provided:

1. The scope of the self-interview process was noticeably restricted (i.e. one single empirical data set) in comparison to the semi-structured interviews with the 12 internal social media custodians.
2. Considering the distinct differences in the vantage point of the researcher and that of the internal social media custodians interviewed, merely including the single self-interview data set as part of the overall thematic content analysis process of the other 12 interviews would skew the results thereof and in so doing, reduce the quality of the findings derived.

Considering that the rigour of the self-interview process was not to be determined by means of thematic content analysis, other methods of validating the empirical data had to be explored. Bolam *et al.* (2003:12) highlight the importance of a self-interview process including a highly reflexive approach, as to ensure that the researcher becomes aware of his or her own interests and presuppositions in the research process. Aligning to this, Boufoy-Bastick (2004:31) opt to use the term, 'critical auto-interviewing' when referring to the self-interview method, noting that the method presupposes spontaneous reflexivity and critical awareness. These observations highlight reflexivity as an important consideration for the self-interview research process, confirming that it should be considered during the study's autophenomenographical segment.

When describing reflexivity as a general concept, Pillow (2003:178) notes that the term is used to refer to a process of ongoing self-awareness during research, which in turn, makes visible the process of knowledge generation. Anderson (1989:249) adds that reflexivity also includes acknowledging and critically interpreting the impact of the researcher's knowledge constructs and ideological biases. Davies (1999:4) defines reflexivity as "turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference. In the context of social research, reflexivity at its most immediately obvious level refers to the way in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and process of doing research".

Exploring specific types of reflexivity, Macbeth (2001:38) advocates the importance of positional reflexivity in qualitative research, a process of interrogative self-referential analysis that articulates the researcher's position towards the research problem. Positional reflexivity involves a highly sceptical self-reflection of the researcher's epistemology, questioning how the

researcher's perception of acquired knowledge impacts the analysis of the research data itself (Macbeth, 2001:38). Johnson and Duberley (2003:1293) refer to 'epistemic reflexivity' as a participatory approach that increases a researcher's awareness of his/her own habitual processes. Here, the researcher is not seen as an autonomous and objective assessor, as the researcher actively deconstructs and scrutinises his/her own accounts and interpretations of the research data (Johnson & Duberley, 2003:1295).

It is however important to note that reflexivity in qualitative research is not without criticism. Linstead (1994:1325) for example questions to which extent reflexivity can take the form of self-knowledge necessary for purging biases and worldviews from a research study. This criticism highlights the requirement of the researcher being completely committed to the critical analysis of their self-knowledge, as to ensure that the reflective process can effectively uncover most, if not all of the researcher's worldviews impacting the research study. Johnson and Duberley (2003:1295) also note that one of the major challenges of reflexivity is achieving the necessary degree of democratic co-operation between researchers and their participants in order to make the reflexive process as critical as possible. It was observed that within the context of this study's self-interview, the researcher and participant were one and the same, effectively eliminating the potential negative impact of a lack of co-operation.

Based on this discussion of the importance of reflexivity and its relevance as a supporting component of self-interviews, it was suggested that it be included as part of the actual research process, both as a pre-ambule and concluding aspect to the actual self-interview undertaken. Additionally, the researcher also committed to taking a reflexive approach during the actual interview process, critically analysing the presuppositions present in the empirical data and highlighting their implications to the research.

It was therefore suggested that the researcher followed the below process for deriving tangible findings from the autophenomenographical self-interview undertaken:

1. Firstly, the researcher explored and identified his knowledge biases with regard to the research problem.
2. The researcher then predicted how these knowledge biases would influence the empirical data to be gathered.
3. The self-interview was then undertaken in the form of a written answering of each planned research question, during which the researcher was still actively engaged in a reflective process of critical analysis.

4. After completion of the self-interview, the interview was transcribed in a denaturalised manner (see Chapter 5, section 5.2.1.1). The transcription was re-read by the researcher and any fidelity issues were addressed in the written transcription.
5. The researcher then highlighted and wrote down key observations identified in the sample data that were relevant to the research problem. These constituted as the preliminary findings derived from the self-interview process.
6. The researcher referenced his initial knowledge biases previously identified and critically analysed the preliminary findings derived, highlighting any generalisations and overarching epistemological trends present in the empirical data, interpreting their relevance to the study.
7. These critically analysed findings were then further distilled, grouped and interpreted as to streamline the inclusion of these findings in the final discussion of this study's results.

#### **4.4.3.3 *Relevance to research phenomenon***

It was essential that the systematic self-observation process via self-interview directly contributed to a better understanding of the phenomenon that the research aimed to explore (i.e. the considerations that should be taken into account with regard to the organisational structuring of social media). With regard to this, the researcher noted that there was value in observing the research problem from the vantage point of an individual who had experience with managing the social media presence of various brands from an external point of view (i.e. a member of an agency that provides social media services on behalf of other organisations). In a professional capacity, it is noted that the researcher himself (at the time of writing) was being employed in the capacity of 'Head of Digital' of a marketing communication agency, specialising in public relations services. This role (including the total span of the researcher's professional career of approximately 6 years) includes the strategic management of clients' social media platforms. More specifically, the researcher's role includes, but is not limited to the following responsibilities:

- Advising clients on social media strategy and general best practice.
- Managing and resolving potential escalations or issues relating directly or indirectly to clients' social media presence.
- Managing other social media team members responsible for specific social media output (content production, reporting, community management etc.).
- Highlighting any tactical and ad-hoc strategic opportunities for the clients in terms of their social media presence.

- Managing and fulfilling 'Client service' responsibilities related to the agency's social media revenue stream.

Considering the above illustration of the researcher's experience with managing social media platforms on behalf of other organisations, it was argued that acknowledging the researcher's first-hand experience of the research phenomenon had the potential to uncover valuable insights with regard thereto. Furthermore, considering that the heterophenomenological segment of this study captured internal stakeholder perspectives, it was argued that the researcher's external and detached perspective during the autophenomenographical phase could help uncover unique empirical data related to the research phenomenon that would otherwise not have been considered in this study.

#### **4.4.3.4 Interview schedule**

Considering the differences in the researcher's and the 12 internal social media custodians' perspective and vantage point of the research problem, it was argued that the planned interview questions intended for the self-interview process should include clear deviations from the interview schedule utilised in this study's heterophenomenological phase. This was important in order to ensure that the interview questions were relevant to the position of the researcher as an external agent that managed the social media platforms of other organisations on their behalf.

It is also important to note that the researcher's external vantage point and resulting knowledge biases (identified in Chapter 5, section 5.3.2) limit the degree to which he can provide valuable insights regarding internal considerations that influence the organisational structuring of social media. It is for this reason that the planned interview schedule focused on extracting sample data related specifically to the researcher's experience of the agency's social media organisational structuring.

As with the semi-structured interviews utilised in this study's heterophenomenological segment, the overarching categories of interview questions were informed by the focus areas identified during the theoretical exploration, namely overarching organisational structure, the organisational structuring of marketing communication as well as the organisational structuring of social media. The interview questions also aimed to directly address the shortcomings of the existing theory available on the organisational structuring of social media, as identified in Chapter 3 (section 3.1). The following planned interview schedule was referenced during the self-interview process:

### ***Notion 1: Overall organisational structure and social media structuring approach***

1. Describe the agency's overall organisational structure and how you are positioned within this structure.
2. Describe the responsibilities of your role as 'Head of Digital', with particular reference to how you service the agency's clients from a social media perspective.
3. Describe the structuring of the agency's social media team within the context of the following dimensions of organisational structure: centralisation, formalisation, specialisation and interdependence.
4. Describe the agency's social media workforce and their relation to other departments of the agency.

### ***Notion 2: The benefits and disadvantages of external agency support***

5. Describe the general advantages of an organisation enlisting the support of an external agency with regard to social media services.
6. Describe the general disadvantages of an organisation enlisting the support of an external agency with regard to social media services.

### ***Notion 3: Deeper exploration of the external agency model***

7. What are the most important requirements or considerations for the successful external management of an organisation's social media presence (both from an agency and client perspective)?
8. What do you believe sets your agency apart from other agencies that deliver similar social media services to clients?
9. What are the unique challenges of managing another organisation's social media channels on their behalf?
10. Describe the typical objectives that the agency aims to fulfil for their social media clients and to which degree this typically aligns to the expectations set by clients.

#### ***4.4.3.5 Interview schedule rationale***

The following section attempts to justify and contextualise the choice of self-interview questions that were set up. Each notion is now discussed separately in more detail, highlighting the way in which each question is informed by the study's prior theoretical exploration in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

### ***Notion 1: Overall organisational structure and social media structuring approach***

Before delving into the finer detail of the agency's structuring approach to social media, the first notion attempted to create a macro level background of the agency's organisational structuring and its influence on how the agency approached the social media responsibilities it fulfilled for clients. The intention here was to guide the researcher towards describing the agency's approach to organisational structuring within the context of the theory explored in Chapter 2 and 3.

- Question 1: Contextualised the organisational structuring of the agency and how the interviewee was positioned within the said structure in order to create a contextual background for the rest of the self-interview. This question did not relate back to the study's earlier theoretical exploration, as it was merely included here for contextual purposes that supported the rest of the interview.
- Question 2: Created a context of the researcher's role in terms of managing client's social media platforms on their behalf. This question attempted to generate additional theory regarding the specific roles and titles present in organisational structures for the management of marketing communication initiatives, as discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.2.3 (Shandwick, 2012:2).
- Question 3: Contextualised the organisational structuring of social media within the agency according to the main dimensions of organisational structure identified in Chapter 2, section 2.2.2 (Plugge & Bouwman, 2012:378; Nahm *et al.*, 2003:281).
- Question 4: Created a context of the agency's social media workforce and how the social media department or team related to it. This question attempted to add to the theoretical classification of social media workforce roles, as discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.4.1 (Owyang, 2012; Souza, 2013).

### ***Notion 2: The benefits and disadvantages of external agency support***

With a broader context created by the aforementioned questions, it was explored what the perceived benefits and disadvantages were for an organisation in enlisting the support of an external agency for the delivery of social media output.

- Question 5: Attempted to uncover the perceived advantages of an external approach to social media organisational structuring. This question attempted to add to the limited existing theory regarding the advantages of an external approach, as introduced in Chapter 1, section 1.2 (Albarran, 2013:6).

- Question 6: Attempted to uncover the perceived disadvantages of an external approach to social media organisational structuring. This question attempted to add to the limited existing theory regarding the disadvantages of an external approach, as introduced in Chapter 1, section 1.2 (Lee, 2013).

***Notion 3: Deeper exploration of the external agency model***

Whereas the first notion attempted to create a general understanding of the organisation's approach to structuring and its influence, the third notion focused on contextualising and describing the agency's social media approach in finer and more descriptive detail. It is noted however that not all of the questions in this notion were informed by existing theory explored in this study's theoretical segment. Rather, these questions attempted to address the lack of existing theory regarding the organisational structuring of social media, as discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.4.1.

- Question 7: Attempted to uncover what the researcher perceived to be the most important requirements for the external management of an organisation's social media presence, both from an agency and client's perspective. This question attempted to address the lack of existing theory available on this topic.
- Question 8: Attempted to uncover what the agency perceived to be the differentiating factor of its approach to the management of organisation's social media presence, in the hope of uncovering additional requirements for the successful management of social media from an external perspective. This question attempted to address the lack of existing theory available on this topic.
- Question 9: Attempted to uncover what the perceived challenges were of managing another organisation's social media presence on their behalf. This question attempted to add to existing theory regarding the challenges of an external approach to social media, as discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.4.1 (Ho, 2014).
- Question 10: Attempted to uncover the most typical set of objectives that the agency aimed to achieve via its support of an organisation's social media output delivery, in order to explore to which degree these objectives aligned with traditional marketing communication objectives, as explored in Chapter 2, section 2.4 (Kaho, 2013; Guettler, 2013; Wolinski & Coates, 2009:120). Furthermore, this question aimed to assess to which degree alignment existed between the objectives envisioned by the agency and those of its clients.

## 4.5 EVALUATION CRITERIA AND QUALITY CONSIDERATIONS

As qualitative research evolves, the need for more rigorous methodologies during the empirical phase of the research becomes an increasingly important indication of the quality of such studies (Humphrey, 2014:53). It is however important to keep in mind that the criteria used to evaluate the quality of qualitative research needed to align to this study's overall research approach (Horsburgh, 2003:307). An example of this principle's implications is that evaluation criteria used in quantitative studies are not suitable and compatible with qualitative research (Horsburgh, 2003:307). This is due to the inherent difference between the nature of qualitative and quantitative studies. Considering this, this section presents the key evaluation criteria and quality considerations taken into account during the study.

Popay *et al.* (1998:341) highlight the need for a qualitative study to provide sufficient depth with regard to the research phenomenon in order to ensure that it is exposed in descriptive contextual detail. Concerning this criteria, it is noted that the long form interviews undertaken aimed to explore the research problem from various vantage points and in substantial detail.

Koch (1994:976) on the other hand highlights the need for the reader or reviewer of a qualitative study to be able to discern the means by which the researcher has reached the interpretations made in the study. For this to be possible, a qualitative study needs to include a transparent and detailed audit trail of the analytical, theoretical and methodological decisions made throughout. With regard to this evaluation criteria, it is noted that this study included substantial and step-by-step recollections of the research process made, as to ensure a transparent audit trail throughout.

Another evaluation criteria referenced for this study was that of internal validity. According to Mikéné *et al.* (2013:50), in qualitative studies, the researcher him-/herself becomes a tool of internal validity, in that the extent to which the researcher is trained and prepared often plays a critical role in the quality of research data. It is for this reason that it was decided to undertake an information observational process before the series of interviews. This was done to ensure that the interviewer was adequately informed about high level aspects of each brand beforehand. This would ultimately prove to benefit the interview process, as the interviewer could conduct these as an informed agent asking relevant questions, increasing the quality of data gathered.

Although reliability was regarded as a secondary evaluation criteria in this study, it was noted that the study's research design considered this aspect. Reliability in qualitative research can be

determined by means of different assessments, one of which is known as triangulation, a process where the same data is acquired from multiple, unconnected sources and multiple methods (Trotter, 2012:398). As discussed in Chapter 1 (section 1.8), the need for triangulation in this study was accentuated by the observation that there was a very close proximity between the researcher and the data being analysed. Triangulation was achieved in this study by collecting empirical data originating from a combination of heterophenomenological and autophenomenographical research methods (see section 4.4 of this chapter).

Furthermore, seeing that the qualitative researcher is most often influenced by the research process itself, it is highly crucial that researchers undertaking such studies do what they can to disclose and note their perspectives on certain topics (Rennie, 2012:392). This is necessary so that the influence of these perspectives can be considered when the researcher draws findings and conclusions (Rennie, 2012:392). This was especially important within the context of this study, as the researcher evaluated a public relations firm which he himself actively functioned within at the time of the study, in the capacity of Digital Head. Whilst the researcher's inherent knowledge and experience of professional social media added additional insights to this study, it was vital that these perceptions and knowledge biases be addressed prior to the undertaking of the empirical phase in order to ensure that any prejudices did not adversely affect the study's findings.

## **4.6 CONCLUSION**

With a theoretical background of modern social media practice and marketing communication established, this chapter aimed to detail the informed approach taken during the study's empirical phase.

Firstly, the qualitative context of the study was discussed, which included a look at the history of the qualitative movement and some of its most modern evolutions. The conclusion from this was that qualitative research methods would serve as a suitable approach for a study such as this that aimed to generate new marketing theory in a developing field of modern marketing.

Thereafter, the general considerations when choosing a suitable sampling design were discussed as well as a detailing of this study's sample type and size. The next section discussed the three research methods that were used in the empirical segment of the study, namely self-interview, semi-structured interviews and thematic content analysis. With regard to self-interview, a background of the research method's autophenomenographical context was provided, whereafter the self-interview process was discussed in detail. With regard to semi-

structured interviews, the chapter discussed the theoretical background of the research method, some of its most important considerations and the interview schedule that guided the interview process. Thereafter, the thematic content analysis research method utilised was discussed, based on its theoretical backing and the process followed to derive the final empirical research themes. The exact process followed to derive themes by means of a systematic coding process is presented in descriptive detail during the succeeding chapter, as illustration of the rigour applied to this process.

Lastly, the measures taken in this study to evaluate the quality of the data gathered were detailed.

With the process and rationale behind this study's empirical phase laid out, the next chapter of this study commences the discussion of the findings derived from the thematic content analysis process undertaken.

## **CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

With this study's theoretical exploration completed and the methodology of the empirical phase discussed, the following chapter addresses the key findings derived after completion of the empirical process.

More specifically, Chapter 5 details the finalised groupings of main themes uncovered during a rigorous process of thematic content analysis (Chapter 4, section 4.4.2) applied to data extracted from a series of semi-structured scientific interviews (Chapter 4, section 4.4.1) with the social media custodians of different organisations. This chapter also details the findings derived from the self-interview process (Chapter 4, section 4.4.3).

The discussion of findings undertaken in this chapter laid the foundation for answering each of the study's individual research questions (Chapter 1, section 1.4), as well as addressing this study's central research problem (Chapter 1, section 1.2).

### **5.2 THEMATIC CONTENT ANALYSIS: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**

Before the main themes uncovered during the thematic content analysis were presented, the process by which these themes were derived were illustrated by detailing the coding process utilised during the thematic content analysis process (Chapter 4, section 4.4.2). Although it can be argued that such a detailed illustration of the coding process is more suitable as part of Chapter 4, it is included here as a contextual interlude to the detailing of the study's research findings. The derivation of the semi-structured interviews' final themes are intrinsically linked to and informed by the coding process undertaken and therefore further substantiates the decision to integrate the illustration of the coding process with the detailing of research findings itself.

#### **5.2.1 Detailing of coding process**

This first section of the research findings chapter unpacks the coding process introduced in Chapter 4 (section 4.4.2) in more detail, as to illustrate how the main themes of analysis were derived via the aforementioned coding process. The more in-depth detailing of the coding process in this chapter is also functional in that it demonstrates the degree of rigour applied to the analysis of the study's empirical data. This section is divided into sub-sections, reflecting the order in which the various steps were undertaken in the actual analysis process itself:

### **5.2.1.1 Interview transcriptions**

After the completion of the 12 semi-structured interviews and the self-interview process, the recorded audio from each interview was transcribed into separate electronic documents, reflecting verbal data. The theoretically-based rationale regarding how the transcription process was approached is now provided:

According to Oliver *et al.* (2006:1273), there are two generally accepted scientific approaches for the transcription of a recorded interview data. The first approach, referred to as naturalism, involves capturing each and every utterance made by both the interviewee and interviewer during the interview process as close as possible to verbatim. The second approach is referred to as denaturalism and involves the correction of grammar, the removal of interview noise and all non-standard accents. Researchers employing a naturalism approach are usually concerned with the intricacies of the spoken language and actively intend to analyse the specifics of a conversation between certain individuals, as this has specific relevance to the research problem being explored (Oliver *et al.*, 2006:1277). In contrast to this, a denaturalised transcription is exclusively focussed on detailing the informational contents of a recorded segment of speech or conversation (MacLean *et al.*, 2004:115). With this approach, the focus is less on a verbatim depiction of the recorded speech, but rather on ensuring that the substance of the interview (i.e. the meanings and perceptions created and shared during the conversation) has been accurately recorded from the original source material and faithfully represented in written format.

Considering the interviews undertaken for the purpose of this study which aimed to explore the considerations relevant to the operational tactics employed by the custodians of social media within an organisation, it is noted that only the factual contents of the transcribed semi-structured interviews would be relevant to the analysis undertaken. For this reason, the transcription process aligned to the process of denaturalism, which led to the finer intricacies of the interviewer and interviewees' speech patterns (i.e. turn-taking, repairs, overlapping talk etc.) not being included in the finalised interview data sets (see Annexure 1). Grammar irregularities were also rectified in order to increase the readability and accessibility of the interview data for analysis purposes. Lastly, any instances of interview transcription data that had the potential to jeopardise the anonymity of the interviewee or related brand/organisation were also removed from the final empirical data sample extracted, in order to comply with and respect the ethical considerations of this study (as discussed in Chapter 4, section 4.4.1.2).

After each recorded interview had initially been transcribed, the original transcription process was repeated with each individual interview data set, with the aim to further increase the accuracy of each individual interview set. The repetition of this process was a crucial element that contributed to the overall rigour of the empirical phase of the research process.

After each individually transcribed interview was completed and rechecked, the 12 individual interview data sets were combined into one single electronic document, so that the empirical data of this study could be coded and analysed holistically and in an integrated manner. As discussed and rationalised in Chapter 4, section 4.4.3.2, the interview data sample sets pertaining to the 12 internal social media custodians were kept separate from the self-interview data set, due to the requirement for the data sets to be analysed by different means.

### **5.2.1.2 Open coding**

With the transcriptions of each individual semi-structured interview data set now transcribed and combined into one consolidated document, the coding process could now be undertaken. The first phase of thematic content analysis was the open coding process, which involved marking all descriptions from the data that was relevant to this study and then from these descriptions, noting all distinct units of meaning or codes. To increase the accuracy of the open coding process, the first phase of coding was managed via reputable professional qualitative research coding software, namely Nvivo 11.0 ([www.qsrinternational.com](http://www.qsrinternational.com)) & CATMA 5.0 ([www.digitalhumanities.it/catma/](http://www.digitalhumanities.it/catma/)). By using this combination of software packages, the impact of human error could be minimised and in so doing, ensured that any relevant and meaningful codes were not overlooked during the open coding process.

The first step taken was to broadly analyse the consolidated and complete interview data sample (approximately 26 400 words in total) with the purpose of identifying the words most prevalent within the sample data. It is noted that, before the first data query was implemented, a total of 233 words (prepositions, pronouns and articles) that generally form part of normal English conversational speech were removed from consideration. This was done in order to reduce the occurrence of words that could be confidently labelled as being insignificant even before the first formal analysis stage and in so doing ensured a more streamlined data analysis process. The below word cloud (i.e. a visual representation of word frequency) displays the 100 most popular words that appeared in the sample data:







Stem Word and variations (bracketed)	Frequency in data sample
<b>agency</b> (agencies)	232
<b>marketing</b>	205
<b>content</b>	150
<b>department</b> (departments)	124
<b>campaign</b> (campaigns)	112
<b>internal</b> (internally)	90
<b>budget</b> (budgets, budgeting)	82
<b>external</b> (externally)	69
<b>specialised</b> (specialisation)	46
<b>integration</b> (integrate)	46
<b>management</b>	46
<b>dedicated</b>	37
<b>effectively</b> (effective)	34
<b>report</b> (reports, reporting)	34
<b>access</b>	33
<b>centralised</b> (centralisation)	31
<b>project</b> (projects)	31
<b>strategy</b>	31
<b>support</b> (supported, supportive, supporting, supports)	30
<b>nature</b>	30
<b>interdependence</b>	29
<b>quality</b>	29
<b>value</b>	28
<b>context</b>	27
<b>agile</b> (agility)	26
<b>information</b>	25
<b>formalised</b> (formalisation)	24
<b>industry</b>	23
<b>understand</b> (understands, understanding)	22
<b>process</b> (processes)	21
<b>knowledge</b>	19
<b>relationship</b>	19

volume	19
control	19
customer service	17
workload	14
hours	12
immediate	12
jurisdiction	12
always-on	11

**Table 5.1: The 40 most prevalent words from the data sample, identified following a process of open coding**

During this process of grouping of individual codes, the following 7 main categories of grouped codes were derived:

**Grouping 1: Key team roles of professional social media (orange)**

Terms such as ‘content’ and ‘customer service’ are used within the context of the sample data to refer to the key roles or specialisation areas of a typical social media resource, namely the creation of content and the managing of a brand’s social media community via a customer service role.

**Grouping 2: The operational mechanics of social media (purple)**

Terms such as ‘always-on’, ‘campaign’, ‘volume’ and ‘workload’ all refer to the operational aspects relevant to the management of professional social media.

**Grouping 3: The dimensions of organisational structuring’s relevance to social media (red)**

Terms such as ‘interdependence’ and ‘specialisation’ are used in the data sample to refer to the dimensions of organisational structuring, as introduced in this study’s theoretical exploration (Chapter 2, section 2.2.2: Plugge & Bouwman, 2012:378; Nahm *et al.*,2003:281).

#### **Grouping 4: The internal environment of an organisation (blue)**

Terms such as 'jurisdiction', 'process', 'access' and 'integration' all refer to how the internal environment of an organisation influences the structuring of a brand's social media team and activities itself.

#### **Grouping 5: The external environment (grey)**

Terms such as 'agency' and 'external' are used in the sample data to refer to the impact of the external environment on the organisational structuring of social media.

#### **Grouping 6: Desired characteristics of social media structuring (brown)**

Terms such as 'quality', 'value', 'knowledge', 'control' and 'agile' all refer to desired characteristics or attributes that social media brand custodians are attempting to achieve through the way they approach the organisational structuring of social media.

#### **Grouping 7: Contextual variables relevant to the organisational structuring of social media (green)**

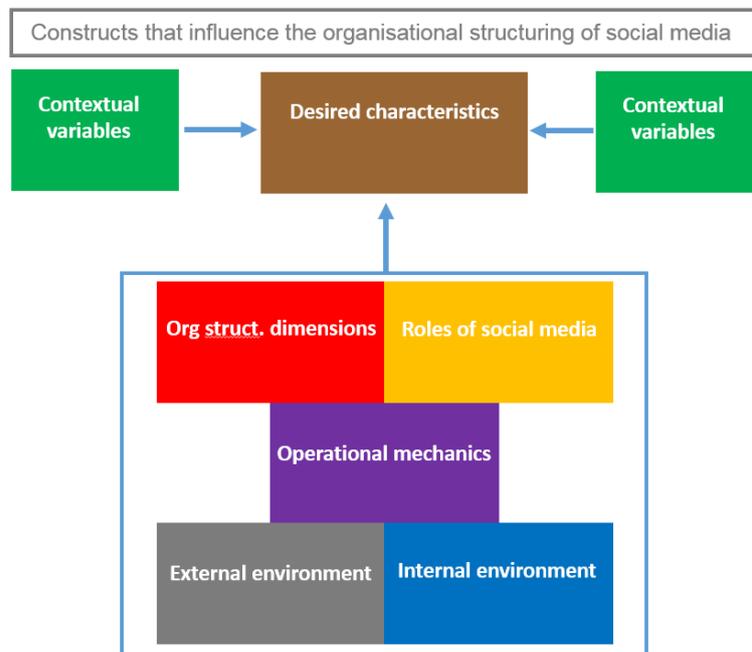
Terms like 'variety', 'nature' and 'industry' all relate to the variables and unique conditions (both of the organisation itself and the broader industry context) that play a role in the organisational structuring of social media.

With both the open and closed coding processes now completed, the final step would lead to the defining of structured and significant themes that could then be discussed and analysed in further detail.

#### **5.2.1.4 *Defining of final themes***

To ensure that the themes identified during the coding process could lead to a fruitful analysis of this study's data sample, it was vital that the grouped code sets identified be verified in terms of their relevance to the study at hand before final themes were defined. More specifically, it was necessary to ensure that each grouped code set related to the overarching research problem in a significant and meaningful way. Furthermore, it was also important that themes were analysed according to a structure of sub-themes most relevant to the research problem at hand.

The below diagram illustrates how each grouped code set related to one another, as well as the overall research topic and research problem:



**Figure 5.4: Diagram illustrating the relationship of the various coding groups to one another**

Upon closer inspection of the various coding groups generated by analysing their contextual occurrence within the sample data, certain key associations were noted amongst the grouped code sets. The reasoning behind these connections is as follows:

Within a marketing communication context, the social media custodians of different organisations have different objectives (as introduced in Chapter 2, section 2.4: Kaho, 2013; Guettler, 2013; Wolinski & Coates, 2009) for their brand’s social media initiatives in mind and the link between how the choice of a social media structuring approach influences their ability to reach these objectives is unclear and intangible (explained in more detail in section 5.2.2.7 of this chapter). However, closer inspection of the sample data revealed that there were certain recurring desired characteristics (agility, control, value etc.) that informed a social media custodian’s choice of a specific social media approach. The degree to which each of these individual desired characteristics can be attained are contextualised or influenced (to differing degrees) by a range of various factors, which include operational mechanics, the external environment, the roles of social media, the dimensions of organisational structure as well as the internal environment of the organisation. In addition, the relative importance or prioritisation of a specific desired characteristic in relation to others is determined by a range of contextual variables, which include the unique prerequisites of the organisation’s broader industry context.

With broad associations established between the various coding groups or sets, the next step was to unpack each coding group into sub-groups, which ultimately defined the main themes as well as the scope and individual focus points of each finalised theme. The sub-categorising was informed by analysing the contextual occurrence of each coding group in relation to their applicability to the research problem of this study. The reasoning for how each coding group was separated into sub-groups and eventually also into themes, is now discussed:

### **Grouping 1: Key team roles of professional social media (orange)**

An analysis of the sample data revealed the identification of a series of distinguishable roles that make up the responsibilities of a social media team. The final theme originating from this coding group attempted to describe the specifics of each role, as well as the relationship amongst them. This discussion created a contextual reference for the themes to follow:

Final main theme 1: The distinguishable roles of a social media team

- [No sub-themes necessary]

### **Grouping 2: The operational mechanics of social media (purple)**

An analysis of the sample data revealed budgetary considerations to be the most prevalent operational mechanic influencing the organisational structuring of social media. Because of the smaller volume of data acquired on other operational mechanics relevant to social media structuring, these were discussed collectively under one separate sub-section. A discussion of the operational mechanics was meaningful, as it created a contextual reference for a more in-depth discussion of the factors that influenced the organisational structuring of social media.

Final main theme 2: The operational mechanics of social media

- Sub-theme 2.1: General operational mechanics related to social media organisational structuring
- Sub-theme 2.2: Budget considerations with regard to social media organisational structuring

### **Grouping 3: The dimensions of organisational structuring's relevance to social media (red)**

The interviewer guided interviewees (by means of planned questions) to contextualise their organisation's social media structuring within the context of each of the separate dimensions of

organisational structuring. Because of this, there was separate and distinguishable data on each of the dimensions, which justified discussing each of these as a separate sub-theme within the overarching main theme. A discussion of these dimensions was vital to address the research problem, as it enabled the contextualisation of the research problem within the main theoretical framework of this study. By doing so, the principles that were implied by the theoretical framework could be taken into account as part of the study's final discussion of the research problem:

Final main theme 3: The dimensions of organisational structuring's relevance to social media

- Sub-theme 3.1: Specialisation
- Sub-theme 3.2: Centralisation
- Sub-theme 3.3: Formalisation
- Sub-theme 3.4: Interdependence

#### **Grouping 4: The internal environment of an organisation (blue)**

A considerable amount of sample data related directly to the internal environment of the organisation and how this influences and was influenced by the structuring of a social media. Upon closer inspection, it was discovered that there were two main themes that could be distinguished amongst the body of data related to this. The first was referring to social media's integration with the rest of the internal environment (especially the broader marketing communication functions) and the second was referring to the internal social media team itself as a functioning unit. For the sake of consistency, these two main themes were discussed under aligning sub-themes. The first sub-theme aimed to create a broader background of the key considerations related to each theme, whilst the other two sub-themes discussed the advantages and disadvantages of each respectively. The discussion of the benefits and disadvantages of each directly related to the research problem in that it allowed for an in-depth analysis of how the internal environment of an organisation impacted the organisational structuring of social media, both in terms of the social media team's relationship with the broader organisation, as well as the social media team's own, immediate circumstances.

Final main theme 4: Integration with marketing, communication and broader organisation

- Sub-theme 4.1: Key considerations and general observations
- Sub-theme 4.2: Benefits of integration with marketing, communication and broader organisation

- Sub-theme 4.3: Disadvantages of integration with marketing, communication and broader organisation.

Final main theme 5: Managing social media internally

- Sub-theme 5.1: Key considerations and general observations
- Sub-theme 5.2: Benefits of managing social media internally
- Sub-theme 5.3: Disadvantages of managing social media internally

**Grouping 5: The external environment (grey)**

A considerable amount of sample data related directly to the external environment of the organisation and how this influenced and was influenced by the structuring of social media. Upon closer inspection, it was noted that most of the data specifically related to the impact of the use of external resourcing on an organisation's social media structuring. Seeing as this represented one of the key approaches to the structuring of social media that this study explored, it justified including it as a separate theme. For the sake of consistency with the manner in which the theme regarding managing social media internally was discussed (as to accommodate a streamlined comparison), the following sub-themes were utilised:

Final main theme 6: Managing social media externally

- Sub-theme 6.1: Key considerations and general observations
- Sub-theme 6.2: Benefits of managing social media externally
- Sub-theme 6.3: Disadvantages of managing social media externally

**Grouping 6: Desired characteristics of social media structuring (brown)**

As explained in the introduction to this section of the chapter (see Figure 5.4), the identification of the desired characteristics that influenced a brand's approach to the organisational structuring was crucial to a complete and meaningful discussion of the study's research problem. Seeing as the sample data did not establish a tangible link between the reaching of specific marketing objectives and the adoption of a specific approach to social media structuring, an exploration of the aforementioned characteristics presented a more credible and functional exploration of the key drivers that determined the choice of an approach to social media structuring. Because of this, it was included as a stand-alone main theme that explored each noteworthy characteristic identified in the sample data:

Final main theme 7: Desired characteristics that influence the choice of social media structuring approach

### **Grouping 7: Contextual variables relevant to the organisational structuring of social media (green)**

As indicated at the beginning of this section of the chapter (see Figure 5.4), a discussion of the contextual variables relevant to the structuring of social media was vital to the research problem, as it determined the relative importance of the desired characteristics that social media custodians aimed to achieve by means of specific approaches to social media structuring. Considering the above, the most significant contextual variables uncovered via the data sample were discussed as per the following main theme:

Final main theme 8: Contextual variables relevant to the organisational structuring of social media

## **5.2.2 Analysis of themes derived from semi-structured interviews**

With main themes for analysis now identified, the thematic content analysis process could be concluded with a detailed analysis of each theme within the context of the empirical research data derived from the semi-structured interview process. Note that all quotations from section 5.2.2.1 - 5.2.2.8 were extracted from the transcribed research sample data (Annexure 1).

### **5.2.2.1 *The distinguishable roles of a social media team***

Although not all social media custodians interviewed distinguished between each of the below listed specialised social media team roles, their general occurrences across individual data sets validated their relevance as the main distinguishable roles that made up a social media workforce. A discussion of these distinct roles was functional within the context of this study, as they created a contextual reference for the different types of social media output a social media department would be expected to produce. An analysis of the sample data confirmed the relevance of the following defined social media team roles:

- **Team managers and leads:** depending on the size of the social media team, an agency or organisation might opt to assign a resource that is specifically attended to manage and lead the rest of the social media team. Because such a management role requires broad knowledge into various different social media specialised fields, such a resource should be able to perform a number of tasks that support the overall social media team.

Furthermore, seeing as this is usually the most senior and experienced member in the team, the resource is also expected to fulfil some of the more advanced responsibilities within the team, such as strategy development.

- **Content creators** (copy & design): these resources' key responsibility is the creation of social media content, which is to be disseminated via the brand's owned social media platforms or channels. As accentuated by the high frequency of mentions of 'content' in the sample data, it is reasonable to assume it to be the most important or prevalent role and also output of an organisation's social media workforce: "Q: *So in saying that, what do you believe is your main objective for social media?* A: Publishing the great content we are creating" (Interview 3, question 5).
- **Client service managers**: social media client service roles (mostly only relevant to external teams) are responsible for managing the expectations of a social media client, as well as managing the workload of a broader agency-based social media team. Client service managers are often responsible for functioning as the link between the internal organisation and the agency's own external resources: "...a client service manager that attends client meeting and acts as the mediator between internal and external parties." (Interview 9, question 5).
- **Community managers**: social media community managers are tasked with engaging and servicing the brand's social media community members, whether it is for customer service reasons or for the purpose of building a one-on-one relationship with the brand's social media community. In many cases, the community manager complement of a social media team is expected to fulfil customer service functions via the brand's social media platforms. The specific role of a social media community manager is influenced by the organisation's overall social media strategy and objectives: "Community management is also a great way to listen and understand the needs of your audience better" (Interview 4, question 4).
- **Analysts**: social media team members who are responsible for measuring and reporting on the impact of a brand's social media initiatives. These insights are used in order to inform certain key changes to the way an organisation's social media strategy is implemented.
- **Strategist**: social media strategists research, plan and collate proposed strategic approaches and tactics that aim to address specific shortcomings of the brand's current social media approach, or identify and explain how a brand can potentially leverage certain opportunities and negate pitfalls. This is an advanced social media team role that is usually reserved for more senior or management team members with specific experience in producing marketing communication strategies for a brand or organisation.

An analysis of the sample data revealed that the actual number of social media team members who make up the social media function or department of an organisation can vary greatly depending on the degree of specialisation, the availability of budget and the specific requirements of the organisation itself. These roles can also be decentralised in that some roles can be performed by means of external support and others by means of internal support. It is also important to note that not all brands or organisations might consider the need for each of these distinguished roles within their social media workforce. The following example taken from the research sample illustrates how a social media custodian could potentially choose to plan their social media workforce in terms of specific responsibilities:

“Firstly, on a junior level, there are Community/customer interaction managers (60% of team) that respond to customer queries and resolves customer issues... Then, on a senior level, we have content managers and strategists (40% of team) where more expertise in social media is needed... Then we also have designers and animation specialists (40% of team) that create compelling, impactful creative that boosts engagement and promotes products/promos” (Interview 5, question 4).

### **5.2.2.2 *The operational mechanics of social media***

During the coding process discussed earlier in this chapter, it was noted that certain specific operational mechanics or constructs regarding the operationalisation of social media as an organisational function recur within the sample data. A discussion of these operational elements was functional within the context of a study that explored the organisational structuring of social media, as it created a beneficial framework and reference point for the themes to be discussed subsequently in this chapter.

#### **General operational mechanics related to social media organisational structuring**

Firstly, this section discusses and contextualises a series of generally occurring operational mechanics that recurred in the sample data and were directly relevant to the exploration at hand:

***Terms referring to the different work streams of social media: ‘Always-on’, ‘Campaign’, ‘Ad-hoc’ and ‘Project’:*** during the interviews undertaken, interviewees used these terms most frequently to label and identify the different types of work streams of a social media team (whether internal or external). Within the context of the research, ‘Always-on’ refers to the planned and generally expected work streams that a social media resource or team will be expected to deliver within an agreed-upon timeframe, based on past volumes of standard

workload. The term 'Always-on' refers to the 'Always-on' nature of social media itself, in that social media is a medium that functions within a never-ending continuum of conversations between brands and their customers and clients. In contrast to this, 'Campaign', 'Ad-hoc' or 'Project' based work streams refer to work being delivered by a social media team that falls outside of the 'Always-on' work streams of the team and are usually centred around advocating a set of specific objectives, related to the organisation's initiatives, services or product offerings. One of the main reasons why a differentiation between these two main types of work streams is noteworthy, is that it also relates to the general way in which budgets are managed for a brand's social media function. In most cases, the social media custodian of an organisation will receive an 'Always-on', monthly recurring budget allocation which needs to be used to ensure uninterrupted and ongoing social media presence for the brand. In most cases, the social media custodian has a higher sense of freedom with regard to how this budget is specifically spent. In addition to this 'Always-on' budget stream, the social media custodian can also receive budget for certain 'ad-hoc', 'project' or 'campaign' based work, which the social media custodian has less control over and is required to reach specific and measurable marketing communication objectives via the expenditure allocated. A quotation from the sample data is now provided as illustration of the relationship between these two work streams:

"We have an 'Always-on' budget for social media, which ensures that there is always some level of social media presence for the brand in the online space, allowing for consistency and preventing 'dips' in communication frequency and penetration. There is also additional budget that is received from various other departments or product owners, who have dedicated a specific budget to pushing their campaign or product via social media channels. This budget must then be used by the CMO team to specifically push the objectives of that product or campaign owner" (Interview 8, question 7).

***Terms relevant to the management of agency resources: 'Dedicated', 'Shared', 'Accounts', 'Retainer' and 'hours':*** in certain cases, 'dedicated' is used within the context of the sample data to refer to the degree to which the resources of an external agency work exclusively on the social media work streams of a specific brand or organisation being serviced by the agency. 'Accounts' is a term used by agencies to distinguish between the work done for different clients, brands or organisations. In most cases, a specific 'Account' Team would encapsulate a group of social media staff members that work for a particular organisation and the brands relating to that organisation. As soon as an agency social media resource does work for more than one 'Account' on a regular basis, that team member becomes a 'shared' resource. If the resource works exclusively on one 'account' group, the resource is regarded as a 'dedicated' resource. The amount of work that an agency does for a client on a recurring basis

is usually managed by means of a budgetary 'retainer', which refers to a specifically allocated recurring budget that the agency is expected to utilise in order to fulfil an agreed-upon and exhaustive range of social media responsibilities on behalf of the brand or organisation itself. Usually, the specific monetary value of a retainer is translated into a set number of 'hours' of work that the agency is to deliver to a client. These 'hours' are usually related back to the monetary value of the overall retainer by assigning a monetary value to each hour of work that an agency does for an organisation. When added up, the total individual hours of work's monetary value must then correlate with the total monetary value of the retainer: "The agency is not always able to accurately track and recon the hours that resources spend on the account, which makes it difficult for us to determine where their monthly retainer hours are actually being spent" (Interview 9, question 7).

### **Budget considerations with regard to social media organisational structuring**

For many interviewees, their approach to the organisational structuring of social media was affected or influenced by certain specific budget considerations. However, there were certain key discrepancies amongst interviewees regarding the way in which budget considerations influenced their approach to social media organisational structuring.

One key observation noted by many interviewees was the perception that social media initiatives received a low degree of dedicated funding, when compared to established marketing communication initiatives and disciplines. Various reasons were cited as the cause of this, but most interviewees agreed that one of the main reasons for this was that budgets for social media initiatives usually manifested as secondary, smaller pockets of funding received from other departments' dedicated funding allocation.

With regard to budget considerations when outsourcing social media work, most interviewees agreed that there was value in an agency retainer that accommodated the delivery of a series of social media campaigns on a fixed basis, as this would allow the organisation more agility in terms of their social media offering. To be able to implement this approach however, an organisation will be required to supply an agency with a dedicated, fixed and recurring budget allocation for social media initiatives. But because the social media budgets allocated to internal social media custodians by the broader marketing communication teams are usually limited, this approach is not a viable financial option for all organisations.

Because of the minimal budget allocation for social media initiatives, the internal custodians of social media activities are required to carefully plan and manage their budget, as to ensure that maximum results can still be achieved. More often than not, this leads to the need for the

prioritisation of social media activities, which could lead to certain prospective social media activities not coming to fruition. One interviewee noted that there was not enough funding to outsource both always-on and campaign based social media work (terms explained in section 5.2.2.2): “A retainer that accommodates a series of social media campaigns on a fixed basis, will allow me more agility in terms of our social media offering, something that is currently not possible. An ‘always-on’ retainer will however lead to increased costs, which is the reason why it has not been implemented” (Interview 1, question 9).

The reason why campaign work is prioritised stems from the fact that campaign work is usually briefed in to the internal social media custodian by the broader marketing communication department, which means that these campaigns are usually associated with crucial objectives that marketing and communication managers will be expected to reach. Because of the potential need to prioritise campaign work above always-on social media requirements, a brand’s always-on initiatives might not benefit from the same quality injection that stems from external resources’ involvement. This could lead to these activities not being implemented to the same standard of quality and effectiveness (desired characteristics that are discussed in section 5.2.2.7 of this chapter) as initiatives that are indeed supported by external agency contributions.

In cases where the social media budget allocated to an agency is restricted, an organisation will expect the agency to be able to perform a multitude of different responsibilities, as a single agency will be required to perform and execute a variety of varying social media tasks: “Based on the outputs needed on social media by the brand, it is the agency’s responsibility to ensure that the budget is spent in such a way that it ensures that social media platforms and campaigns are managed as effectively as possible within the constraints of that overall budget” (Interview 10, question 7).

Whether an organisation decides to utilise internal resources or external resources for social media related output, the sample data suggests that there are two main aspects that should be key considerations when planning the budget or funding of an organisation’s social media activities.

On the one hand there is the degree to which the budgeting structure allows for agility and flexibility. Flexibility is needed as it allows the social media team to prioritise budget in an organic manner, aligned to business objectives: “The digital team are free to use this one single pool of budget as they please, on a number of different specific initiatives, platforms and promotions. This flexibility allows the social media team to prioritise budget according to the

specific tactics that are generating the highest rate of return, ensuring the best use and maximum effectiveness of social media for the brand” (Interview 5, question 8).

On the other hand, agility is necessary as to ensure that allocated budgets can be used in the most tactical and time relevant ways possible, an observation that aligns with the inherent fast paced and highly dynamic nature of social media.

### **5.2.2.3 *The dimensions of organisational structuring’s relevance to the structuring of social media***

Because this study aimed to explore the key organisational structuring considerations of professional social media, it was vital that the data extracted be framed within the context of existing organisational structuring theory. This would also ensure that trusted and established guidelines stemming from organisational structuring theory could be referenced during the study’s final chapter, where the study’s results and ultimately, certain key suggestions are to be discussed. Because of this requirement, the first notion of planned interview questions referenced during the empirical process focused on unpacking and questioning the ways in which the dimensions of organisational structure (as discussed in Chapter 2, 2.2.2: Plugge & Bouwman, 2012:378; Nahm *et al.*, 2003:281) influenced and contextualised the structuring of each organisation’s social media offering. The following section discusses the key findings derived during the empirical process relevant to each of the specific dimensions of organisational structuring.

#### **Specialisation**

Considering the volume of data uncovered during the semi-structured interview process regarding specialisation (compared to the other key dimensions of organisational structuring), it can be concluded to be one of the most pertinent aspects that influence how internal company stakeholders justify or rationalise their decisions regarding the organisational structuring of their social media offering.

Interviewees regarded specialisation as a way to allow a resource to become an expert in a specific sub-field of social media marketing communication, leading to the resource being able to deliver higher quality social media output in the field that he or she specialised in.

Numerous interviewees mentioned the efficiency and productivity benefits of a specialised approach to social media resourcing. Specialisation’s efficiency benefits have stemmed from the observation that resources can be much more productive if they are able to focus their

attention on a highly specific type of work responsibility or output, compared to having one resource fulfil a broader range of responsibilities, which leads to a resource having to switch between different responsibilities within any given time frame. This process of switching from one specific role to another requires additional resource time and in so doing, can lead to time inefficiencies.

It was however noted that the overall value of the efficiency benefit of specialisation seemed to directly correlate with the sheer size and scope of the organisation itself. Some interviewees went as far as stating that specialisation was a necessary element in businesses that required a high volume of social media output on a daily basis. Specialisation was positioned as a tool by which to effectively manage massive social media workloads, especially in the cases where organisations had expansive social media communities that expected quality and timeous interaction from the brand: “This specialised structure is once again necessary due to the substantial workload of the team, brought on by the substantial volume of conversations that is initiated with the brand in the online space” (Interview 12, question 2).

Because greater team efficiency should also lead to a greater reduction in costs, certain interviewees also noted the cost saving benefits of specialisation. Once again though, as with the efficiency benefit linked to specialisation, the benefit of cost savings was also more noticeable and profound in bigger companies, as there was a big enough volume of workload to justify the additional workforce numbers.

A high volume of workload and potential cost savings aren't the only reason for considering social media team specialisation in bigger companies. In large companies, the outlining of detailed job responsibilities is required, as to ensure that a certain degree of standardisation can be achieved across the organisation's various departments. This standardisation is necessary in order to create an objective and credible reference for the salary and raise expectations of specific job titles in the company.

Even with these benefits noted, social media specialisation isn't a viable option for every type of business. In small organisations with comparatively smaller workloads, it is not uncommon for a brand's social media initiatives to be managed by a limited amount of social media team members. In such cases, the organisation is forced to dedicate various social media roles to one specific team member. If the social media workload is too minimal in nature, applying a specialised approach can potentially have a negative effect on cost savings, as there isn't enough work to justify or show the return on investment that comes from splitting these responsibilities amongst different team members.

When an internal team is too small to justify a specialised approach to their roles, this could however lead to specific outputs not being produced efficiently in-house, as the team is not enjoying the efficiency benefits that come with specialisation. In such cases, an external, highly specialised team can be used to fulfil the need for role specialisation, missing internally. The data also supports the value of utilising a highly specialised external team as a way of negating the disadvantages that come with a broadly skilled internal team: “Because of the minimal internal resources dedicated to social media responsibilities, I rely heavily on my dedicated and specialised agency to plan, action and report on a variety of social media campaigns and always-on, day-to-day content” (Interview 6, question 3).

Some interviewees did however note an important pitfall of a highly specialised approach to social media resourcing. Seeing as the range of social media skills needed within a social media team is relatively broad, it is important that social media team members have a certain degree of fluidity, even if they are highly specialised in terms of their skillset. Furthermore, considering the dynamic and fast-paced nature of social media in general, it is important that team members have a certain level of adaptation with regard to their skillset, as to ensure that any specific team member can assist any other team member in the performing of certain key or urgent tasks. Employing multi-skilled social media resources therefore negates the risk of inconsistency and degrading of overall social media quality, as other resources can step in to substitute unavailable resources, ensuring an uninterrupted delivery of social media output. One interviewee however noted that a high level of specialisation did not necessary need to lead to a highly skilled social media workforce: “There is a level of specialisation centred around each team member having key responsibilities, but that has a natural layer of cross pollination in terms of wider social media proficiencies across team members” (Interview 7, question 4).

## **Centralisation**

Although interviewees did not place as much attention on the influence of centralisation on the way social media was structured within the organisation, a few key observations were noted.

Firstly, interviewees noted that the organisational structuring of social media could both be centralised and decentralised at the same time. This can occur when there is a difference between the degree to which the internal social media is centralised (in relation to the broader marketing department) and the degree of centralisation that the internal social media team has with external resources.

In most cases, interviewees noted that the internal social media team had a high level of centralisation with the broader marketing communication department of the organisation, as this

was necessary for ensuring ongoing alignment and heightened accessibility between the social media team and the broader marketing communication department. Although internal centralisation was mostly seen as a beneficial arrangement, certain interviewees argued that a decentralised approach could hold certain advantages: organisations could opt to place social media employees in different departmental spheres. This way, the social media team could ensure a higher degree of alignment with the broader organisation as to ensure that a varied degree of objectives were considered on social media channels. Another interviewee noted a specific benefit of a decentralised approach: “The social media function of the organisation is highly decentralised (from a structural perspective), as to accommodate the need for various different company resources to be able to disperse breaking news on social media, at any given time” (Interview 4, question 2).

When looking at the degree of centralisation between the internal social media team and external social media suppliers or resources, interviewees noted that the relationship was usually defined by a low degree of centralisation. This was brought on by the natural restrictions originating from the fact that external resources usually worked in different offices than their client, leading to physical distance between the two parties. It was however noted that this decentralisation was usually to the detriment of the organisation’s social media efficiency, as the loss in immediate access between resources naturally led to delays that negatively impacted social media output delivery timeliness. One interviewee however described a way that the organisation actively attempted to negate this issue: “We’re situated in one town and the external agency in another, which means there is some physical distance between the two of us, which makes it difficult to have regular face-to-face meetings. To combat this though, the agency uses each and every opportunity possible to create visibility around who is servicing the client and producing the actual output” (Interview 10, question 3). This was done in order to nurture rapport between the organisation’s social media custodian and the agency that serviced them. Furthermore, the social media custodian also had complete visibility regarding which specific agency resources were responsible for which segments of the organisation’s social media output. Because of this, the organisation could address any issues or crises directly, as the organisation did not have to communicate with certain resources indirectly via other resources.

Although centralisation is usually used to either refer to the accessibility of the internal social media team to the broader marketing communication department or the social media team’s accessibility to external resources, centralisation can also refer to the degree of access that the individual members of an internal social media have to each other. In certain cases, the internal social media team is dispersed across geographic locations or regions, which is likely a result of

the broader structuring of the organisation itself. In cases like these, the concerns raised with regard to the lack of centralisation between an internal social media and an external team also become applicable and is something that needs to be actively managed by the organisation.

### **Formalisation**

The researcher noted a varying degree of organisational formalisation amongst the interviewees representing the different organisations that made up this study's empirical data. Nevertheless, all interviewees noted that the internal social media team formed part of the organisation's formalised hierarchical organisational structure. Because of this, there were certain rules, regulations and lines of authority that the social media teams needed to adhere or align to. It was however important to note that a direct correlation between the degree of formalisation and the degree of integration that the social media team had with other departments of the organisation, such as marketing or communication, was observed. Due to the need for fast decision making, brought on by the fast paced and highly dynamic nature of professional social media, interviewees suggested that an internal social media team be allowed to diverge from the organisation's formal structuring in certain respects, especially if the formalisation jeopardised the social media team's responsiveness and adaptability: "There is no time for strict process. The process needs to be more flexible a so that it can accommodate faster turnaround times without me having to annoy people" (Interview 6, question 4).

Although formalisation with regard to the structuring of external teams was not a major discussion point by interviewees, it was noted that agencies usually had a less formalised structure than the organisations that they serviced. Herein lies one of the key benefits of utilising external resources, in that the less formalised structure of agencies allows for more adaptive and responsive handling of time sensitive social media outputs. Although a low degree of formalisation within an external team was seen as a generally beneficial aspect by interviewees, it was important to note that many interviewees did expect a certain degree of external agency formalisation, especially with regard to the contractual arrangement between the agency and the client, as well as transparency with regard to how specific social media responsibilities were dispersed amongst individual team members of an external social media team.

### **Interdependence**

As with formalisation, interdependence was one of the dimensions of organisational structuring that wasn't considered by interviewees as a paramount consideration to the way in which their social media teams were structured. When interdependence was however discussed, it was mentioned within the context of the internal social media team's degree of dependence on the

broader marketing communication department of the organisation. It was noted by interviewees that interdependence with marketing communication should allow for a workable degree of self-sufficiency and autonomy for the organisation's social media team. Nevertheless, most interviewees acknowledged that a certain degree of interdependence with the organisation's marketing communication department was a necessity, as it allowed the team to integrate and align with the broader marketing communication needs of the organisation: "The lack of integration with the organisation's marketing department is a massive issue, as it leads to social media not being used effectively to promote specific marketing objectives for the brand" (Interview 4, question 4).

Many interviewees however warned that a high degree of internal interdependence on resources that did not appreciate or comprehend the value of social media initiatives, could have a highly negative impact on the success rate of social media initiatives, as this could lead to a de-prioritisation of social media related output. A high degree of interdependence when there is a lack of general social media knowledge and understanding within the organisation can therefore be to the detriment of the organisation's social media presence and activities.

#### **5.2.2.4 Integration with marketing, communication and broader organisation**

Note that there was a dismissible degree of data gathered amongst interviewees regarding how specific disciplines of the marketing communication mix (as identified in Chapter 2, section 2.5: Kerin, Hartley & Rudelius, 2013; Goi *et al.*, 2013; Smith & Cook, 2012; Koekemoer, 2014) influenced an organisation's approach to social media organisational structuring. Most of the observations were about how marketing communication in general influences the approach taken.

One of the key themes that did however come to light during the thematic content analysis of the empirical data was the consequences of the degree to which social media were integrated as a part of the broader organisation, as well as more specifically, the marketing communication department of an organisation. The following section analyses the key findings uncovered regarding this theme.

#### **Key considerations and general observations**

There were various key considerations and observations that were highlighted during the thematic content analysis of questions asked regarding the social media function of the company's integration with the broader organisation as well as the marketing and communication department, more specifically.

Of the most apparent observations that came to light was the complicated and sometimes even strained relationship between the organisation's social media workforce and broader marketing communication employee complement. Interestingly, this level of tension seemed to be more prominent in organisations where the social media complement of the organisation was clearly defined as a separate, distinguishable organisational department.

Nevertheless, in most cases, there was a general sense that social media were perceived as lower in priority to other, more traditional marketing communication responsibilities, such as print, television and radio. This perception is also enforced and reflected in the overall budget limitations of social media teams, in relation to their traditional marketing communication counterparts (as discussed in section 5.2.2.2). Another clear impact of this lower standing of social media is that the broader marketing communication complement usually has the jurisdiction to force the social media team to implement a campaign in a certain way, even if the social media team has provided clear suggestions and substantiation on why the approach is not suited for the brand's social media channels or are in clear conflict with the brand's approved social media strategy: "I am definitely forced to do campaigns on social media that I have advised are not suitable for social media platforms. This happens no matter how much I push back" (Interview 6, question 6).

When interviewees were probed regarding the perceived cause or reason for this perception issue of social media internally, it was mostly noted to be a result of a further-reaching issue: the rest of the broader organisation seemingly lacked both an understanding and therefore, also an appreciation for the overarching role, as well as more specific tactics that made up an organisation's social media approach. In particular, interviewees noted that the top executive tier of the business did not comprehend the specifics of social media and its business worth. The reason for this lies in social media's ever-changing nature, preventing the social media department from standardising the success metrics of their social media initiatives, as metrics are required to change based on how the social media landscape itself evolves and changes over time, compared to traditional marketing communication, where metrics and the way success is determined have stayed consistent over a much longer period of time. To alleviate this issue, an interviewee highlighted the importance of translating social media results into terms that traditional marketers and top tier executives would understand, taking into consideration the ever changing nature of social media: "We also actively attempt to show the value of social media for other departments with the hope of creating more advocacy for the brand's social media initiatives, which will hopefully lead to the organisation being more social in nature and having employees becoming actively involved on social media" (Interview 7, questions 7).

Considering this lack of social media knowledge amongst the broader organisational members, it is not surprising that one of the key responsibilities highlighted by interviewees of the social media team is the dissemination of widespread social media knowledge and training, as to ensure that social media gets incorporated across the organisation. As a way to ensure widespread social media education, one of the interviewees noted a big drive in the organisation to ensure that all business departments have a certain degree of digital jurisdiction: “The responsibilities in terms of digital output have been centralised, compartmentalised and spread across our business unit, with each Marketing and communication lead having certain specific digital responsibilities that they need to fulfil and take ownership of” (Interview 8, question 3).

Related to the importance of social media knowledge sharing across the organisation was another consideration raised by one of the interviewees, i.e. the value of positioning your internal social media team as trusted advisers. It is important that the organisation ensures that there is a high degree of integration between its internal social media team and the broader marketing or communication department, so that these social team members can position themselves as trusted advisers with regards to social media campaigns and other initiatives. Once the internal social media team has been positioned as trusted advisers in relation to social media initiatives of the organisation, they will be able to act as gatekeepers of social media within the organisation, effectively increasing the degree to which they have control over the implementation of the organisation’s social media initiatives.

This need for broader social media training and education becomes even more vital when non-social media team members are expected to perform social media roles. It was noted by numerous interviewees that, even when an organisation had a fully-fledged social media department, it did not mean other departments couldn’t still be responsible for certain social media output. In saying that, having non-social media resources perform social media functions can have noticeable risks, which stems from a lack of direct accountability and a lack of direct interest in the social media initiatives they are taking part in. In such cases, it is vitally important that the core social media team takes on the responsibility of upskilling these non-social media resources, as to prevent a decline in the quality of the brand’s social media activities. Another noticeable risk is that of an imbalance of social media content subject matter, as each department is free to use social media to push their own specific agenda.

Another theme that came to light was the interviewees’ contrasting views regarding if an internal social media team required direct integration with the organisation’s marketing communication function in order to be successful. Whilst most interviewees acknowledged the value of some

degree of integration with the organisation's marketing communication functions, certain interviewees noted that social media did not need to be managed under the umbrella of a marketing or communication team in order to deliver on specific objectives. Expanding on this, some interviewees stated that the specific objectives of social media for their organisation did not necessitate integration with marketing and was therefore not a priority: "The reason why Digital is not part of the broader traditional marketing department is because a differentiated approach to selling is used, where there is a focus on increased engagement, trust as well as brand love via social channels" (Interview 5, question3). Whilst integration with marketing communication was agreed to be of some value, it is however important to note that in certain cases, such integration is not relevant to the unique circumstances of the organisation. However, non-integration cannot be successful if the organisation's social media team is not allowed complete autonomy to perform its roles and define its own unique objectives.

### **Benefits of integration with marketing communication**

Regarding the benefits of a high degree of integration with the organisation's marketing communication functions or department, various interviewees were confident in noting how integration could have broader and long-term reputational benefits for the organisation's social media initiatives. Not only does integration with marketing communication have the potential of leading to an increased degree of overall social media advocacy (an issue identified in the previous sub-section) in the organisation but it can also lead to more effective social media campaigns in general, as the social media department's initiatives are then more likely to benefit from the support of the broader marketing communication function of the organisation, benefitting from their generally higher level of organisational credibility. This support can also manifest in the social media team having access to a bigger pool of funding for their initiatives.

Furthermore, it was also noted that it was vital that the internal social media team had direct and streamlined access to each vertical of the organisation, as to ensure the effective fulfilling of their responsibilities: "We're working with everybody in the organisation and are involved with every stage of the consumer's life cycle. Because of this, the social media team has access to all the different vertical and horizontal layers of the organisational structure. We're often the go-to guys when someone in the company wants to gauge the public opinion around a certain campaign, promotion or activation" (Interview 7, question 2).

Another reason that highlights the overall value of integration comes from a potential risk of non-integration. It was noted by certain interviewees that when an organisation's social media department is positioned within a non-marketing department, it causes social media not to be

considered upfront in the planning and implementation of marketing communication campaigns or tactics. Aligned to this, numerous interviewees noted integration as a way of ensuring that social media isn't only perceived as an 'after thought' of the traditional marketing communication process, but a direct consideration that impacts all phases of campaign creation, with social media being considered from the initial planning phases of each and every marketing communication campaign or initiative. When social media is included as a vital consideration from the inception of a campaign, it leads to the development of campaigns that are better aligned to the best practice guidelines of professional social media. Campaigns that consider social media as part of the initial planning are generally more effective, as opposed to campaigns that do not and are then required to be retro-fitted at a later stage to accommodate the campaign's requirements.

One of the interviewees suggested a strategy of having staff members dedicated to social media as part of the broader marketing communication function, as a way of ensuring integration with the organisation's broader marketing communication functions.

### **Disadvantages of integration with marketing communication**

Even with these advantages noted, many interviewees also highlighted the dangers of marketing communication integration. One of the important concerns here was noting that a high degree of marketing communication integration had the potential to jeopardise the autonomy of the social media team itself. Because of this, certain of the social media team representatives interviewed noted the influence of broader marketing teams as having a negative impact on the brand: "The influence that the marketing department exerts over the social media team can lead to additional complexity, as time is wasted pushing back on campaigns that are not suited for social media" (Interview 2, question 6).

The issue here stems from the realisation that integration with marketing or communication creates the concern that an expectation will be created for the social media team to promote each and every element of marketing content or campaign work on the brand's social media platforms. This could lead to social media teams being forced to promote certain campaigns that aren't aligned to social media best practice and the brand's social media strategy and in so doing, negatively affecting the effectiveness of the brand's social media initiatives in reaching specific objectives. In certain cases, there is also a conflict in terms of the objectives being pushed by the social media team and those of broader marketing teams, negatively affecting the degree to which the social media team can work towards a set of focused and complementary objectives. This concern relates back to the general issue regarding a lack of

widespread social media education and knowledge in the organisation and how it negatively impacts the social media function of an organisation.

As a potential solution to the issue, one interviewee noted the importance of considering the structural positioning of social media internally, not only from a horizontal perspective, but also in terms of a vertical perspective: “The only change that will fix this issue is if I or someone in my team gets promoted to a ‘Chief Digital Officer’ role, which will give the digital team more jurisdiction to push back on campaigns that are not suited for social media” (Interview 6, question 6). For social media to be truly effectively implemented with the right amount of jurisdiction, the social media manager needs to be positioned in both the correct horizontal and vertical hierarchy of the organisation. The correct horizontal positioning, as to ensure the necessary integration with other marketing departments (in order to have social media considered in campaign planning phase) and the correct vertical positioning, as a way of ensuring the necessary degree of jurisdiction to enable the social media team to deny certain requests from the broader marketing communication team that are deemed to not be in the best interest of the brand’s social media strategy and overall success.

Another suggestion made to combat the lack of autonomy risk that comes with integration is to ensure that there are clear and workable restrictions for marketing communication messaging and campaigns on social media platforms that can be communicated via a clear and aligned social media strategy for the brand.

#### **5.2.2.5 *Managing social media internally***

One of the key aspects explored during this study’s empirical phase of interviews was a comparison of two approaches to social media organisational structuring. The first approach is when a brand’s social media presence is managed by an in-house team of resources (whether as a sub-division of another department or a stand-alone department) or secondly, by an external team, not directly employed by the organisation who they represent or produce social media output for. In cases where an organisation employs both internal, as well as external resources for social media purposes, the interviewer aims to derive separate insights for both, from the same organisation. Although the aim of this study was not to approve or disapprove the value of either of these approaches (but merely highlight the unique challenges and considerations of each), it was important to note that interviewees that took part in this study had very strong and polarising views of the two approaches. Because of this, there was a noticeable skew in the data towards highlighting the benefits and disadvantages of each approach. The researcher did however utilise this data in the succeeding chapter to inform the

answering of this study's main research question. Considering that, the following section details the key benefits and disadvantages of an approach that focuses on managing social media internally.

### **Key considerations and general observations**

When referring to 'managing social media internally', the researcher defined and contextualised the approach as follows to the interviewees: it is when the custodian of social media within an organisation is supported via an internal, company-employed workforce that produces, plans or strategises the organisation's overarching approach to social media as well as individual social media initiatives. Although interviewees were in agreement with this broad description of what an internal approach to social media entails, it is important to note that there were certain key differentiators amongst companies that employed an internal approach to social media. These differences included, but were not limited to: the scope of the internal social media team's responsibilities; the level to which the internal social media team integrates or is integrated within the organisation's broader marketing communication department; the size or number of team members dedicated to social media responsibilities; the amount of budget dedicated to social media initiatives; the degree of autonomy of the social media team and so forth. Whilst these differences were directly considered during the initial interpretation of the empirical data, they will only be highlighted in the section to follow where directly relevant to the research findings.

### **Benefits of an internal social media team**

With regard to highlighting the key benefits of having an internal team manage a brand's social media platforms, the researcher noted a clear trend. Whilst there were contrasting views regarding the overall value of an internal social media team (compared to an external team), there was a general consensus that a certain type of social media role specialisation was better managed from an internal perspective, namely social media community management. It was noted that, locating social media community management in-house, improved the customer query resolution rate by cutting out unnecessary steps in the query escalation process between external and internal parties, resulting in a shorter, more time-efficient customer or client query resolution in general.

Related to this, some interviewees also noted another benefit of an internal community management team, in that it created the opportunity for evolving or training traditional customer support staff (i.e. non-social media staff that perform customer service roles) for social media community management roles. This resulted in resources managing the brand's communities

that not only had adequate social media training, but intricate knowledge of the brand's product and services as well, ensuring higher quality and more efficient customer query resolution.

One of the key advantages highlighted of an internal team is the general acknowledgement that, when compared to external resources, internal resources are generally more dedicated and entrenched in the business itself: "Having more resources located internally for social media would be beneficial, as work commitment, brand knowledge and industry knowledge is usually higher with regards to internal resources, than it is with agency resources" (Interview 6, question 3). When questioned regarding why interviewees believed there to be a higher degree of commitment amongst internal resources, it was noted that, because external resources weren't directly employed by the company for whom they were managing social media platforms for, there was a lower degree of perceived accountability and therefore also commitment to their work output. This issue was further accentuated in cases where the external resource was expected to perform social media responsibilities for more than one brand or organisation, leading to their responsibilities being split amongst various organisations.

Various interviewees also noted the general time-efficiency benefits that stemmed from the utilisation of internal team members to perform social media responsibilities. This lies in the realisation that, by using internal resources, a company can cut out time spent briefing external resources. The process of training and briefing external resources is generally perceived as being more time consuming in nature, due to these resources usually not having intricate and detailed knowledge of the brand's products, services and overall industry landscape.

Although there were noticeable discrepancies amongst interviewees regarding the cost saving potential of an internal social media team compared to an external team, certain interviewees did note that there were cases when an internal social media could be more cost effective than the alternative. This alleged cost-saving benefit did however also seem to be more apparent in bigger companies, who required a high degree of social media role specialisation and because of this, had the need for dedicated resources, vs. shared resources from an agency that worked on multiple brands: "I would be very surprised if there were other big corporates that felt that the agency model makes more sense from a cost saving perspective. I think when an organisation becomes a certain size, the value of an agency becomes more and more obsolete" (Interview 5, question 6).

Interviewees also noted that, having a substantial internal social media team, also assisted the custodian of social media in the organisation to have a higher degree of organisational visibility. Related to this, certain interviewees noted that having an internal social media team delivering

social media output allowed the custodian of social media in the organisation to also have a higher degree of control in terms of the brand's social media initiatives, as social media resources could be directly managed and controlled.

A strong internal presence can also assist the social media team in nurturing widespread organisational advocacy for organisations' social media initiatives: "We also actively attempt to show the value of social media for other departments with the hope of creating more advocacy for the brand's social media initiatives, which will hopefully lead to the organisation being more social in nature and having employees becoming actively involved on social media" (Interview 7, question 7). This is opposed to agency resources, where the lack of proximity and immediate access leads to a lower degree of control.

### **Disadvantages of an internal social media team**

One of the key disadvantages that was noted with regard to employing an internal social media team was the realisation that an internal social media team was less abreast with the latest developments and trends related to social media within a marketing communication context, when compared to agency resources. As had been noted earlier in this chapter, there was a general lack of understanding and competence when it came to professional social media within organisations, which meant an internal social media team had limited opportunities for improving its social media capabilities by means of knowledge sharing with broader organisational members. Agency resources on the other hand, generally have much broader access to other social media competent resources and therefore also commonly have a better understanding of the intricacies of the social media industry. The general nature of an agency also places more focus on social media innovation and continuous research that can assist a brand in deploying an innovative and forward thinking approach to their social media initiatives. Furthermore, having only internal resources dedicated to social media responsibilities also leads to a lack of access to costly, but useful information and social media research, which is more cost-effective for an agency to purchase, as costs can be shared by various clients and even be provided as extra value to the wider client base. Certain interviewees were however aware of this issue and actively addressed it: "My internal team does however try to negate these disadvantages by ensuring active knowledge sharing within the team structure, where each team needs to work on certain research projects and present this back to the rest of the team" (Interview 7, question 5).

Interviewees further noted that an internal team's lack of knowledge was not only restricted in terms of general social media knowledge and best practice, but also in terms of their exposure

to how social media was approached and managed within different industries, contexts and scenarios. One of the disadvantages of having dedicated in-house social media resources is that social media content runs the risk of becoming stale and dated, due to the same resources continuously working on the same brands. In comparison to this, agency resources can potentially be working on multiple brands at any given time, resulting in them usually having exposure to a much broader spectrum of ways and methods of implementing social media activities for a brand. This lack of knowledge from an internal perspective could result in tactical opportunities for improving the brand's social media presence being missed or squandered. As with the previous disadvantages noted, social media custodians do however actively attempt to negate this drawback: "We do however try to alleviate this issue by allowing swapping of content managers amongst its individual brands as well as regular content brainstorming between different team members, which increases content diversity and reduced repetitiveness. This also applies to the design work we do" (Interview 5, question 7).

There was also a general perception amongst interviewees that utilising internal social media resources resulted in a less adaptable and flexible approach to social media in general. Seeing as an internal resource is usually hired as a permanent resource and consists of a highly specific skillset that might not be relevant to the work done by other departments in the organisation, it is more costly and time-consuming to replace such a resource with an alternative. In comparison to that, agencies usually have multiple resources skilled in various forms of social media specialisation, making these resources more adaptable and able to work on multiple brands belonging to different organisations. Because of this lack of adaptability present in internal social media resources, there is a noticeable risk that, when a specific resource becomes incapable of performing his/her tasks, it is more challenging to arrange a suitable replacement within a short timeframe. This therefore means that organisations that depend too heavily on an internal social media team can run the risk of not delivering certain key social media outputs when a certain team member is incapable of performing his or her role due to unforeseen circumstances.

#### **5.2.2.6 *Managing social media externally***

##### **Key considerations and general observations**

When compared to other themes identified by means of a process of thematic content analysis, one of the most frequently recurring themes revolved around managing social media externally. This did however not mean that most organisations interviewed utilised an outsourcing approach, but that, even when a company did not make use of outsourcing, justification for this

was contextualised within a comparative framework that referenced the benefits and disadvantages of outsourcing versus an internal approach. This highlights the relevancy of the outsourcing versus internally managed choice that faces organisations within the modern South African business context.

Interviewees acknowledged that outsourcing can manifest in different ways, depending on the structure and process followed by the agency delivering the social media service to an organisation. One example of this is how there can be different degrees of resource participation from an agency's perspective. Agencies can employ a flexible approach when it comes to their servicing of a brand, with certain resources completely dedicated to one specific brand and others servicing multiple brands, depending on the specific needs of their clients.

Although the interviewees had slightly differing ways of approaching outsourcing, all interviewees agreed to the following broad description of what outsourcing social media functions entails.

Under this approach, there is a noticeable degree of the organisation's social media activities that are planned, implemented and monitored by individuals not directly employed by the organisation itself. These resources are employed by and work for a third party provider that has a contractual arrangement with the organisation who is being represented via the social media activities that the agency provides to the organisation.

By far the most pertinent point raised by interviewees when it comes to the main requirements of utilising external resources for social media activities is the need for an agency to be highly responsive and agile in their approach as well as their overall thinking. Although various interviewees noted the overall importance of agency agility, interviewees noted that the requirement for agility needs to manifest itself in specific ways. Interviewees highlighted the importance of agility in terms of an agency's overall working process, which is especially important when servicing businesses with high volumes of marketing and communication output. One interviewee even stated that agency agility can be more important than other desired characteristics: "Q: Are you saying that agility is more important than the quality of the work produced? A: In certain cases, yes, agility must be the first priority. I think it's a bit of mind-set change for a lot of agencies. Things are very last minute in our industry and that's just the way things work" (Interview 6, question 4).

Another interviewee noted the importance of agency agility from a costing perspective, as to allow for a speedy response to urgent requirements from the organisation's side. This interviewee suggested a costing approach that allows for flexibility and general accommodation

when it comes to crisis situations, in that costings for urgent agency outputs are only managed and dealt with after the initial crisis, as to ensure that the handling of the urgent task at hand becomes the first priority, rather than the payment of the work needed to fulfil the urgent need identified. Aligned to this, interviewees also noted other important considerations of agility when it comes to costings. In this context, it was highlighted that the costing structure needs to consider the different types of work that an agency will be considered to fulfil on behalf of the organisation: “Because of the trust that the social media agency has built up with us, there is flexibility and accommodation when it comes to crisis situations, in that costings for urgent outputs are managed after the initial crisis, as to ensure that the task at hand is the first priority” (Interview 12, question 5).

Usually, agencies plan the resources needed to effectively service a specific brand or organisation, based on the budget that they are awarded from the client to service the brand. In many cases, these budgets only consider the ‘Always-on’ layer of resources’ work. Seeing as an organisation also has various ad-hoc or unplanned social media initiatives that need to be accommodated, there can however be an unexpected increase in overall workload. This can then lead to delays from an agency’s side (as well as issues in terms of quality), as the initial resourcing plan (based on always-on work scope) does not adequately accommodate the additional workload that can be experienced due to the influx of ad-hoc work. Agencies need to consider this issue and ensure that they utilise a costing and process structure that allows for contingency, as to prevent ad-hoc work from negatively affecting the overall quality of their output, whilst also allowing for accommodation and general adaptability in their approach.

Another consideration noted by interviewees as a key requirement for effective social media outsourcing is the importance of the client’s mediation role between the agency and the broader organisation. Seeing as the agency usually has a limited degree of access to the broader internal organisation (due to the natural constraints imposed by their lack of immediate organisational proximity), it is of paramount importance that a qualified internal representative acts as the key mediator between the agency and the broader organisation. Interviewees noted the importance of a dedicated social media custodian within the organisation, who has an adequate amount of time for the effective support of an external social media team. The role of this mediator is to ensure that the agency resources always have a suitable degree of organisation-specific knowledge necessary to effectively fulfil their assigned responsibilities on behalf of the organisation. When an organisation has a complex outsourcing structure which includes more than one agency, then the client’s mediation role needs to also extend to ensuring clear communication and constant alignment between all the different agencies that service the organisation. It is important that the organisation’s different agencies align and

integrate as far as possible, as to ensure that social media campaigns are effectively managed within a complex network of external brand suppliers. An intensive and intimate mediation role is especially important during the agency's initial on-boarding phase, as to ensure that agency resources understand the brand as quickly as possible, reducing the room for errors caused by a lack of inherent brand knowledge: "The initial on-boarding phase of the new agency did create certain issues: Social content was produced incorrectly, or not totally aligned to our expectations. These issues have however since been eliminated or minimised, as the agency increased their understanding of the brand and have now grown accustomed to the way we do things in general" (Interview 10, question 6).

Another consideration of outsourcing highlighted by interviewees is the need for agencies to actively invest in their own social media resources. Interviewees are of the opinion that a certain level of investment from the agency's side is required to ensure that social media resources can fulfil their duties. It is important that the agency enables its resources to fulfil all their necessary responsibilities, without additional, undisclosed costs being inferred from the organisation's side.

Lastly, it was also noted that agencies need to focus on innovation in order to ensure their future livelihood and indispensable relevancy. Agencies that do not have intricate knowledge of each and every social media platform and isn't actively trawling and looking for new opportunities for their serviced brand to explore are not delivering an optimum degree of contribution to their client.

### **Benefits of an external social media team**

There was a vast amount and wide breadth in the variety of advantages noted as the substantiation for dedicating external resources to performing all or some of an organisation's social media responsibilities.

One advantage of outsourcing that was unanimously agreed on by most interviewees was an agency's ability to produce social media content that attested of a higher standard of quality, better strategic insight and high levels of creativity. Because of agencies' general focus on innovation and constant improvement (fuelled by the need to stay relevant in a highly competitive landscape), external social media resources naturally get exposed to the latest social media industry knowledge. This puts external social media teams in a position to quickly identify new social media trends and marketing communication opportunities for the organisations they service. To maximise the potential benefit of higher quality social media content when adopting an external approach, one interviewee suggested enlisting the services of more than one agency: "Different agencies have very different ways of implementing things.

The benefit of utilising different agencies is that it leads to higher levels of creativity, as you have different minds, working on different campaigns. Using more than one agency therefore heightens the quality of social media content output, which is an advantage for us” (Interview 2, question 2). Adding to this, another interviewee also noted that, employing more than one agency to service the brand, can lead to an increase in social media content quality: “I can leverage them a little bit better, due to the nature of the agreement that is set up. I have created an atmosphere of ‘healthy competition’ between the different agencies that service me. Because of the temporary, short-term nature of the service agreements put in place, it puts pressure on agencies to consistently perform to ensure they maintain the pockets of business currently assigned to them” (Interview 1, question 7).

Furthermore, there was also an acknowledgement that external social media resources had better access to costly, but useful social media research, which was more cost-effective for an agency to purchase, as costs could be shared across various clients and even be provided as extra value to the wider client base.

Interviewees also noted a benefit of outsourcing in that it allowed an organisation to utilise highly specialised resources that were experts in their niche field to perform specific social media responsibilities and in so doing, delivered a higher quality work output. Due to costs associated with hiring additional internal permanent staff, it can be challenging for the custodian of social media within an organisation to justify the hiring of specialised resources to fulfil highly specific responsibilities. As an alternative, an organisation can utilise the services of an agency, who uses a combination of specialised, expert resources across different clients to perform high quality work for their clients.

Stemming from interviewees’ perception of the contribution that external resources could make to the overall quality of an organisation’s social media approach, certain interviewees suggested specifically outsourcing the social media content production responsibilities of an organisation. If social media content production is outsourced, the content can benefit from the agency’s exposure to innovation and experience on other brands, which nurtures a more creative atmosphere, leading to better quality content. Other social media role specialisations, such as community management and analytics don’t require the same level of creativity, so the conclusion can be made that outsourcing these specialised resources won’t have the same benefits as outsourcing social media community management responsibilities. Considering the higher quality social media content benefit related to an external approach, some interviewees suggested a mixed approach to the organisational structuring of social media, where content creation is outsourced and community management managed internally: “This combination

helps to balance two very important considerations for social media, namely time efficiency and the quality of the social media content produced” (Interview 2, question 5).

In other cases though, interviewees noted that certain situational organisational factors influenced the degree to which outsourcing could be beneficial for an organisation. Interestingly enough, certain interviewees noted that the overall value that an organisation derived from an outsourcing approach to social media negatively correlated with the size of the organisation. The agency’s value therefore seemed to be more pronounced in smaller companies, where the customer interaction base was usually smaller.

One interviewee noted the advantages of agency support for brands with fluctuations in workload: “Because workload fluctuates depending on the current timeline that a project is in, it is difficult to justify the permanent hiring of additional marketing resources that support me internally, as there won’t be a consistent stream of work that justifies the resources’ salary throughout the year. The budget and structure of the agency do however accommodate and consider these natural fluctuations, so that the agency can shuffle around their internal resources at key phases of a project so that the increase in workload can be managed” (Interview 10, question 5). Due to the fact that agency resources are usually not dedicated to a single organisation, the agency can afford to have a resource’s workload relating to a single client fluctuate. This allows the agency to accommodate and consider these natural fluctuations in workload from the client’s side without running into an issue where a specific resource’s salary cannot be accounted for from a revenue perspective, as resources’ salary justification is not dependant on their contribution to one client only. Because of this, the support of an agency allows smaller organisations with fluctuating volumes of social media work to still be able to produce social media output in an agile and time effective manner.

Another specific advantage of an outsourced social media team within a smaller organisation relates to how external resources can be used to support an internal social media team that is not specialised. When an internal team is too small to specialise its roles (as there is not enough work to justify the hiring of specialised resources), this might lead to specific outputs not being produced efficiently in-house, as specialisation helps deliver certain specific outputs more efficiently (as discussed in section 5.2.2.3). An external, highly specialised team can therefore be used to fulfil the need for role specialisation, lacking internally.

Within the context of a small organisation, a substantial external social media can also assist a company’s overall marketing communication functions by serving as an unofficial extension of the organisation’s broader marketing communication team, compensating for the challenges

created by the lack of adequate internal support for this broader business discipline. For this however to be possible, the organisation needs to allow the agency to become directly involved in the management of their marketing communication initiatives, which requires the building of trust and the maintaining of an overall healthy relationship between agency and client.

Relating to the additional benefits that outsourcing can lead to for an organisation when there is a high degree of trust between the agency and client, some interviewees noted the benefits of blurring the lines between agency and client. When most social media responsibilities are managed by external resources to an independent level, it can have massive time saving benefits for a client that does not have the capacity to manage social media responsibilities and deliverables internally: “In many cases, my internal team and I are completely detached from the process, with agency staff managing projects from end-to-end, fulfilling both traditional agency roles, as well as roles that would normally be expected to fall under the jurisdiction of the client. I sometimes simply don’t have the time to get involved on that level. That’s an example of how entrenched my agency is within the business” (Interview 6, question 3).

Another recurring benefit noted by various interviewees of outsourcing was the general perception that outsourcing lead to cost saving benefits for an organisation. Interviewees explained the need for utilising external resources from a costing perspective as follows: as the value and role of social media activities are still not common knowledge and always tangible to the top tier management of an organisation, the custodians of social media find it challenging to justify an increase in head count needed to perform social media activities internally to the top executives of the organisation. For certain interviewees, this cost saving potential was noted as the most important justification for why an outsourcing approach was utilised. Here, it was noted, that if there was a way to reduce the costs of hiring internal social media staff, then the value of outsourcing would be nullified and the organisation would rather adopt an internal resourcing approach: “There isn’t really any advantage in the outsourced model and the only reason why certain elements are currently being outsourced is due to financial constraints and the costs regarding hiring full-time internal staff to fulfil the function that the agency currently plays” (Interview 3, question 6). In other words, the cost saving benefits of agency support were the only reasons why certain of the interviewees employed an external approach to their social media structuring.

It is important to note though, that, as mentioned in section 5.2.2.6, there were noticeable discrepancies amongst interviewees regarding the potential for cost saving via outsourcing, when compared to the adoption on an internal resourcing approach. The cost saving benefit of outsourcing social media seemed to be more profound in smaller organisations, where the

organisation could not afford to hire permanent resources to fulfil social media specific responsibilities. This once again correlates with the earlier observations of this section, where it was highlighted that the benefits of outsourcing was manifested more strongly in smaller organisations, than it was in bigger organisations with generally higher volumes of social media workload.

### **Disadvantages of an external social media team**

As with the benefits of social media outsourcing noted by interviewees, the potential disadvantages were equally broad in scope and variety. Interestingly enough, it was noted that most of the disadvantages raised by interviewees all stemmed from one general aspect that greatly influenced the way agencies and organisations interact with each other on a daily basis, namely the general lack of close physical proximity between the agency and the organisation. Therefore, taking formal as well as informal steps to reduce the distance between external and internal resources can help to negate many of the disadvantages of utilising external resources.

One of the noticeable disadvantages raised by interviewees was directed towards the way in which the relationship between an agency and the client was structured and approached. In many cases, the agency-client structure leads to clients having to liaise with an agency account manager (or client service manager), as it is too costly to have the entire social media team travel to and from the client's offices on a continuous basis. Within this structure, the client liaises with an overarching agency representative, as opposed to each of the individual resources that are performing social media responsibilities on behalf of the client: "This makes it more challenging for me to enact the change needed for improving the functioning of the team, as I do not have direct contact/link or jurisdiction over those resources" (Interview 5, question 6).

Related to this, it is noted that many interviewees associated a lack of general control and communication issues with the use of agency resources. More specifically, certain interviewees noted the process of communicating specific urgencies to agency resources as being highly challenging, making the immediate reprioritisation of an external team's workflow difficult to manage: "It's very difficult when you're not sitting as a team and everyone can see how everyone else is working towards an urgent objective. So what often happens when a new, urgent brief comes in, the agency resource will send me all other deliverables, but they won't send me that one urgent deliverable I am anxiously waiting for" (Interview 6, question 4). Some interviewees also warned that hiring agency resources could lead to a loss of the essence of the brand voice, something that is easier to maintain and manage via an internal team of social media resources.

The physical distance between an agency and an organisation they service also makes it more challenging to ensure that external resources always have access to the most up-to-date brand information originating from the organisation internally that affects the way they approach their social media responsibilities. To negate the disadvantages brought on by the distance and lack of immediate access that external resources have, it is vital that the internal custodian of social media feed quality and relevant information to the social media team. If this role is not present and adequately fulfilled, then the team will not be able to deliver quality content and service the brand. Another suggestion made by interviewees to negate this issue is to ensure that external resources spend a considerable amount of time at the organisation itself: “the external resources spends a considerable amount of time at the company itself, so that she can have quick access to the resources and info needed to effectively resolve queries” (Interview 8, question 4).

The challenges stemming from a lack of proximity do not only relate to the physical distance between the organisation and the agency resources, but also to a more abstract distance, relating to the distance between the agency’s resources, the direct industry in which the organisation operates and the brand itself. Many interviewees noted that agency resources often lacked the knowledge, context and experience of the client’s industry and brand itself needed to create high quality, customer relevant content. External resources need industry, brand and social media knowledge to produce high quality content and the first two knowledge types are often found to be lacking.

Interviewees also noted a lack of work commitment and accountability when employing an external approach. Agency resources lack a sense of entrenchment into the client’s business, as they are often working on multiple accounts and not focussed on one organisation or brand in particular. Many interviewees noted this issue as the root cause of a disconnect between an agency resource and the organisation that they are providing services to, which in turn can reduce the quality and relevance of the work they produce.

Another of the noteworthy disadvantages that can stem from a high reliance on external resources, is that it could lead to the brand being highly perceptible to changes and fluctuations experienced on the agency’s side. For all organisations using external resources, there is a certain on-boarding period that is necessary to ensure that the social media resource understands the brand’s industry adequately enough to create high quality social media content for the brand. This on-boarding process is even more important and extensive in the case of organisations who operate in a highly niche industry, which results in the agency’s social media resources likely not having in-depth knowledge thereof once they start working for a new brand.

When the designated agency resource servicing a specific brand is suddenly and unexpectedly unable to perform its duties, it could lead to a consistency issue for the brand, as the substitute resource might not have the same level of exposure and brand knowledge as the unavailable resource. In consideration of this, agencies require a clearly planned contingency plan for cases when there needs to be a sudden change in the members who service a specific brand or organisation. “The contingency plan can include cross-team training and workshops, inter-team meetings etc. Agency resources cannot be too isolated and this needs to be considered” (Interview 9, question 7).

Some interviewees also noted general issues in the way in which agencies costed and structured their social media resources servicing an organisation. In relation to that, one interviewee highlighted the challenge of determining the tangible value of certain agency resources, as well as the hours spent servicing the organisation: “An example of this is the client service role of social media, which doesn’t deliver tangible outputs for me and I’m honestly not always sure what the purpose of the role is” (Interview 9, question 7). Here, the interviewee was stating that the value that the organisation derived from certain allocated agency resources and activities was vague and put into the question if the organisation was receiving tangible value from those roles or activities, seeing as their value was either not explained well, or highly intangible compared to the time spent by other resources. It is therefore extremely important that each role and activity performed by an external social media team be clearly defined so that it can be proven to deliver tangible value back to the client, which justifies the expenses related to the specific activity or role.

Many interviewees also noted a general lack of agility and timeliness when it came to the production of time-sensitive social media content by external team members. The reason for this stems from the way in which agencies structure their contracts with clients. In most cases, agencies plan their resources for servicing a client based on the budget that they have been awarded from a client to do so. These budgets usually only consider the ‘Always-on’ layer of the work that resources will be expected to perform. Due to the fast changing nature of social media, it is likely that an organisation might also have various ad-hoc campaigns that need to be accommodated, which will increase the workload of agency resources and also lead to the incurring of additional servicing costs. This can then lead to delays from an agency’s side (as well as issues in terms of quality), as the initial resourcing plan might not adequately accommodate the additional workload now experienced due to the influx of ad-hoc or campaign work. As an example of this issue, one interviewee noted the inadaptability displayed by an agency when the client requested certain emergency or time sensitive outputs: “This issue was aggravated when we would then request certain emergency or time-sensitive outputs and the

agency would then push back stating that the work falls outside of the retainer hours, without being able to accurately show where time was spent. This causes friction and mistrust between the agency and ourselves” (Interview 9 question 7). It is vital that agencies and organisations plan their contractual relationship carefully and with agility in mind, to ensure that contingency measures can be put in place for situations when the social media workload increases suddenly.

#### **5.2.2.7 *Desired characteristics that influence the choice of social media structuring approach***

As an introduction to this theme, a more detailed rationale (first introduced in section 5.2.1.4) as reasoning for how relational links have been created amongst the finalised themes) substantiating the theme’s relevance is presented.

A contextual analysis of the sample data revealed that there are various challenges with associating a brand’s social media activities with the reaching of traditional and established marketing communication objectives (as discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.4: Kaho, 2013; Guettler, 2013; Wolinski & Coates, 2009). This incompatibility between the agenda of a social media team and broader marketing communication counterparts can lead to a conflict within the organisation: “There is however sometimes a conflict, as the objectives being pushed by the broader marketing teams do not always align to the objectives of the social media team” (Interview 2, question 9). Even in cases where there was a more direct alignment between the objectives of the social media team and that of the marketing communication team, the sample data suggested that these objectives were approached in an alternative and frequently indirect capacity by the social media team: “Customer acquisition and Customer retention are always an important one. But once again, our approach is always indirect in nature. We try our very best not to be too direct in our approach” (Interview 2, question 8).

Furthermore, when analysing the specific objectives that social media custodians had in mind for their social media initiatives (those not aligning to traditional marketing communication objectives), they were noted as being represented within the sample data as being highly diverse and non-standardised. Some examples of objectives mentioned by interviewees included: “Quality engagement” (Interview 2, question 9), “Content publishing” (Interview 4, question 6), “Creating conversation” (Interview 5, question 9) and “Open doors of communication between brand and its stakeholders” (Interview 9, question 10).

Lastly, the interview data suggested that social media custodians were not able to make a direct link between how their choice of social media structuring approach affected or was affected by the specific objectives they were aiming to achieve. This, in contrast to how social media custodians actively based their choice of other strategic elements of social media (such as content strategy) on the objectives they were pursuing: “Social media content is also focussed on driving one-on-one engagement, creating the impression that the social media audience has access and direct communication with the teams themselves” (Interview 1, question 11). In general, the research data suggests that the choice of a specific social media structuring approach is often the result of seemingly unrelated management decisions, a natural evolution of an organisation’s overall structure and in some cases, because of general ignorance with regard to the role that social media should play within an organisation: “Digital has been grouped as part of the ‘Digital products’ department, which I don’t believe is right. Because there is ‘digital’ in my title, it was assumed I must be a part of the digital products team. This is wrong though and I am looking at moving my role into the brand and communication team as we can only have an integrated approach if I sit there” (Interview 6, question 1).

Considering all of this, the conclusion was made that attempting to inform the choice of a specific approach to social media structuring by exploring the degree to which each approach was conducive to the reaching of either traditional marketing communication objectives or even social media-specific objectives would not add practical and useful theory to the research problem at hand. With the irrelevance of an analysis centred around social media and marketing communication objectives within the context of this study now justified, a more relevant, consistent and tangible alternative for informing a preferred approach to social media structuring is consequently discussed.

Upon closer interrogation of the research sample data, it was noted that there were recurring mentions of certain favourable attributes or characteristics that interviewees actively attempted to attain by means of a preferred choice of social media structuring approach or, as a substantiation of why a specific approach was taken. Considering the general occurrence of these characteristics throughout the sample data, they provided an exciting opportunity for the study at hand, in that they could be referenced in order to contextualise an informed approach to social media structuring that could be practically applied across various organisational types and industries. The most prominent of these characteristics or attributes are now discussed in greater detail:

***Effectiveness:*** within the context of the data sample, ‘Effectiveness’ was used to refer to the degree to which a specific approach to social media was conducive to reaching a specific end

result, pre-defined by the social media custodian of the brand. An analysis of these desired end results revealed them to be varied and broad across data sets:

- Example 1: “The lack of integration with the organisation’s marketing department is a massive issue, as it leads to social media not being used effectively to promote specific marketing objectives for the brand” (Interview 4, question 4). In this example, the interviewee related efficiency to the reaching of marketing objectives. As noted earlier in this chapter, the utilisation of marketing objectives as a benchmark for an informed approach to social media structuring was not advised.
- Example 2: “The internal positioning of the social media team ensures that the team can effectively resolve customer queries, as they have quicker and more immediate access to internal resources needed for resolving queries” (Interview 7, question 4). In this example, ‘effectively’ was used to refer to the degree to which the social media team could perform their roles in a time-efficient manner. Seeing as the research data illustrated a tangible link between how a specific approach to social media structuring could lead to **time-efficiency**, it was suggested that it be included as one the favourable characteristics to be discussed in further detail in the succeeding chapter.
- Example 3: “Having only internal resources also leads to a lack of access to costly, but useful information and social media research, which is more cost effective for an agency to purchase, as they can share costs across various clients and even provide it as extra value to other clients” (Interview 7, question 5). In this example, ‘effective’ was used to refer to the degree to which the organisation’s structuring approach was cost effective. Seeing as the research data illustrated a tangible link between how a specific approach to social media structuring can lead to **cost- efficiency**, it was suggested that it be included as one the favourable characteristics to be discussed in further detail in the succeeding chapter.

**Quality:** Although quality is a relatively ambiguous term, a more detailed contextual analysis revealed that it was used somewhat specifically within the research data, allowing it to have tangible relevance with regard to how the attainment of quality can inform a specific approach to social media structuring. When interviewees referred to quality, it was mostly used to refer to the quality of a certain specialised social media team output, namely the quality of the brand’s social media content: “Using more than one agency therefore heightens the quality of social media content output, which is an advantage for us” (Interview 2, question 2). A contextual analysis of the sample data revealed that ‘quality social media content’ referred to substantial social media content that upheld a high degree of creativity, audience relevancy and brand alignment. Considering that the sample data directly inferred how certain approaches to social

media structuring could lead to the attainment of higher quality social media content, it was suggested that it be included as one of the favourable characteristics to be discussed in further detail in the succeeding chapter.

**Value:** Although the concept of value was used broadly and relatively inconsistently across the sample data, there were certain specific contextual examples in which the term was used that justified its inclusion in this list:

- Example 1: “The value that the brand gets from certain allocated agency resources are vague and puts into question if we are getting real value from those roles, seeing as their value is either not explained well, or the value is intangible compared to other resources” (Interview 9, question 7). In this example, ‘value’ was used to describe the degree to which an agency was able to tangibly contribute to the expectations of a serviced client - a further analysis showed that this tangible value could specifically refer to the tangible value of specific agency resources, agency processes and added value originating from the agency.
- Example 2: although the above mentioned example positioned tangible value as an externally focussed characteristic, the sample data suggested that it was also an important consideration with regard to the relationship between the internal social media team and the broader organisation: “We also actively attempt to show the value of social media for other departments with the hope of creating more advocacy for the brand’s social media initiatives...” (Interview 7, question 7). In consideration of this, **‘Tangible value’** was included as one of the favourable characteristics that this theme aimed to identify.

**Visibility:** Within the context of the sample data, visibility was used to refer to a characteristic that had relevance from both an internal and external perspective. Separate examples are now referenced in order to illustrate this:

- Example 1: “A larger team would also make it possible to create more visibility and presence around social media in the business, which means there will be more ownership and consideration for social media in the broader business context” (Interview 6, question 3). In this example, visibility was described as a characteristic with internal relevance.
- Example 2: “We’re situated in one town and the external agency in another, which means there is some physical distance between the two of us, which makes it difficult to have regular face-to-face meetings. To combat this though, the agency uses each and

every opportunity possible to create visibility around who is servicing the client and producing the actual output” (Interview 10, question 2). Here, visibility referred to the degree to which the agency created a sense of transparency in terms of the resources servicing a client. In consideration of this, ‘Visibility’ was included as one of the favourable characteristics that this theme aimed to identify.

**Agility:** Within the sample data, agility was used to refer to how a specific approach to structuring allowed for a highly responsive, adaptable approach to the generation of social media output: “A retainer that accommodates a series of social media campaigns on a fixed basis, will allow me more agility in terms of our social media offering, something that is currently not possible”. Considering that the sample data inferred how agility could be attained by means of specific social media structuring tactics, it was added as a favourable characteristics to be discussed in further detail in the succeeding chapter. It was noted that the classification did consider this characteristic’s potential overlap with the ‘time-efficiency’ characteristic. Whilst both agility and time-efficiency refer to how quickly social media output can be produced, agility as a characteristic added an additional consideration, as the attainment of agility does not only necessitate faster turnaround times, but also the need for flexibility, ensuring that an existing approach can be adapted based on changing circumstances.

**Knowledge and expertise:** It is not surprising that generic terms such as ‘information’ and ‘knowledge’ were used within different contextual references throughout the sample data. Nevertheless, there were certain specific contextual uses of the term that warranted closer inspection:

- Example 1: “That doesn’t however mean that there are not benefits to having internal resources. Having more resources located internally for social media would be beneficial, as work commitment and brand knowledge is usually higher with regard to internal resources, than it is with agency resources” (Interview 6, question 3). Within the context, knowledge was used to refer to the degree to which social media resources understood the intricacies of the brand they were servicing. In consideration of this, **‘Brand knowledge’** was added as a favourable characteristic that social media custodians aimed to attain by means of a specific approach to social media structuring.
- Example 2: “Except for that, there is also a lack of widespread knowledge and experience on an agency side with regard to the broader industry, as well as the specifics of the company’s service offerings”. Although this example similarly referenced knowledge to refer to brand knowledge as per the previous example, it added an additional layer of knowledge, namely the degree to which a social media resource had

knowledge of the broader industry in which the brand or organisation functioned in. In consideration of this, '**Industry knowledge**' was added as a favourable characteristic that social media custodians aimed to attain by means of a specific approach to social media structuring.

- Example 3: "The agency provides the benefit of having in-depth knowledge and experience of both the overall social media landscape, as well as the particulars of specific social media platforms" (Interview 9, question 6). In this example, knowledge referred to attainment of knowledge that was specific to implementation of social media as a professional service. In consideration of this, '**Social media expertise**' was added as a favourable characteristic that social media custodians aimed to attain by means of a specific approach to social media structuring.
- Example 4: "My role is to continuously feed the agency with up-to-date information, as to enable them to create high quality and relevant messaging for the brand in the online space" (Interview 9, question 5). In this context, information was used to refer to the frequency and adequacy by which social media resources were continuously fed with significant and relevant information that informed the management of a brand's social media platforms. In consideration of this, '**Conversancy**' was added as a favourable characteristic that social media custodians aimed to attain by means of a specific approach to social media structuring. Within this context, 'conversancy' is defined as the degree to which someone has "personal knowledge or information about someone or something" (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2011).

**Control:** when referring to control, social media custodians used it within the context of the sample data to refer to the degree to which the social media team could influence and direct the brand's social media initiatives, without the interference of other parties: "The social team does have jurisdiction to promote their own objectives and ideals, although, most control is in the hands of the broader marketing department, due to the high amount of marketing campaigns that are required to be pushed on social media platforms by the social media team" (Interview 2, question 3). Although this example presents control as an internally focused characteristic, it also has relevance from an external perspective: "Having a smaller internal marketing communication team that produces day-to-day social media content gives me a high level of control in terms of social media messaging, which would be more complex if the entire social media offering was outsourced to an agency" (Interview 1, question 6). In consideration of this, '**Control and ownership**' was added as favourable characteristics that social media custodians aimed to attain by means of a specific approach to social media structuring.

**Autonomy and independence:** when it came to autonomy, the terms were mostly used within the data sample to describe the relationship between an internal social media team and that of other internal departments or team members: “When it comes to content, we are also relatively autonomous, although we do require the assistance of the branding department in terms of the design and creation of some content pieces” (Interview 7, question 4). This example showcased the degree to which the social media team was empowered to deliver their own social media output in a self-sufficient manner, without requiring to support of other broader organisational members. In consideration of this, **‘Autonomy’** was added as a favourable characteristic that social media custodians aimed to attain by means of a specific approach to social media structuring.

**Support and consideration:** in terms of ‘support’, the social media custodians mostly used this term to refer to the degree to which they were supported, considered and understood by other departments within the organisation: “I have limited access or integration with the marketing department of the organisation, but can request the support of the marketing department in certain cases” (Interview 4, question 2). In consideration of this, **‘Support and advocacy’** was added as favourable characteristics that social media custodians aimed to attain by means of a specific approach to social media structuring.

**Dedication and accountability:** the research data also suggested that certain approaches to social media structuring could lead to a higher or lower degree of dedication from team resources (whether internally or externally located): “Also, because social media are not these resources’ main responsibility, there is a lack of dedication and accountability when it comes to the performing of their social media roles, which also affects the success of the brand’s social media presence negatively” (Interview 4, question 4). In consideration of this, **‘Resource dedication and accountability’** was added as a favourable characteristic that social media custodians aimed to attain by means of a specific approach to social media structuring.

**Consistency:** within the context of the sample data, consistency referred to the degree to which a social media team could keep to a specific and pre-defined approach or strategy in terms of their approach, content tone and so forth: “Resignations, regular team instability and changes can therefore have a massive impact on the consistency and quality of the brand’s messaging” (Interview 9, question 7). In consideration of this, **‘Consistency’** was added as a favourable characteristic that social media custodians aimed to attain by means of a specific approach to social media structuring.

A summary of the favourable characteristics identified by means of the completed theme analysis is now presented:

- Time-efficiency
- Cost-efficiency
- Quality social media content
- Tangible value
- Visibility
- Agility
- Brand knowledge
- Industry knowledge
- Social media expertise
- Control and ownership
- Conversancy
- Autonomy
- Support and advocacy
- Resource dedication and accountability
- Consistency

The degree to which the attainment of these characteristics or attributes identified are influenced by the themes discussed prior in this chapter (section 5.2.1.1 - 5.2.2.8) were referenced in the succeeding chapter as a practical benchmark for informing a specific approach to social media structuring and in so doing, led to this study ultimately addressing the main research problem identified.

However, a contextual analysis of the research sample suggested that it is important to consider how certain contextual variables influence the importance or general prioritisation of these favourable characteristics in relation to one another. The final theme identified during the coding process unpacked this consideration in more detail.

#### **5.2.2.8 Contextual variables relevant to the organisational structuring of social media**

As highlighted earlier in this chapter (section 5.2.1.4), there are certain contextual variables that influence the degree to which a specific desirable characteristic or attribute discussed in the previous section is relevant or significant to a specific organisation when planning their approach towards the organisational structuring of social media. Note that the sample data did

not deliver an exhaustive amount of data on all specific contextual variables, due to the infinite nature of all conceivable variables. The detailing of specific examples of contextual variables observed from the sample data to follow, merely illustrates how an organisation's informed choice of a prioritised set of desirable characteristics are contextual in nature.

In the case of one interviewee, the nature of the organisation's industry necessitated that the organisation be able to timeously adapt to changing circumstances in a highly responsive manner: "Because of the nature of the news industry (the need for agile and immediate news dispersion), numerous other internal resources are expected to perform social media responsibilities. All the news editors (i.e. day editors, weekend editors) are expected to plan, create and publish social media content on the fly in order to ensure that we can leverage news as it breaks" (Interview 4, question 3). In this case, the broader context of the industry and the prerequisites for maintaining a competitive advantage it suggests, necessitated a prioritisation of the attainment of agility above other favourable characteristics.

Another interviewee noted that, within his or her particular organisational structure, there was no clearly defined marketing or communication department, with the organisation's marketing and communication needs being managed across the organisation by various team leads. Social media, as part of a function of marketing and communication was therefore managed across the organisation by various different stakeholders. Because there were no designated social media resources in the organisation that could be referenced for guidance in the implementation of a social media campaign, all individual organisation team members were forced to sharpen up their social media knowledge, as well as broader marketing and communication skillsets: "We like to empower individuals to develop skills amongst a broad range of business fields and get out of their comfort zone. We also believe that this approach results in more rounded individuals that can perform a variety of different tasks" (Interview 11, question 2). In this case, the specific philosophy that informed how the organisation was managed necessitated a high degree of focus on the attainment of widespread internal support and advocacy for social media as favourable characteristic.

Another interviewee, whose organisation fell within the financial industry, placed a high degree of importance on the attainment of consistency and brand knowledge as key favourable characteristics: "Because of the niche nature of the company's industry, there is a certain on-boarding period that is necessary to ensure that the social media resource understands the brand's industry adequately enough to create high quality social media content for the brand. Resignations, regular team instability and changes can therefore have a massive impact on the consistency and quality of the brand's messaging" (Interview 9, question 7).

An interviewee whose organisation functioned within the broader sports industry, noted the prioritisation of agility as one of the most important favourable characteristics, as it was mandated by the requirements inferred by the industry itself: “I rarely stay within the constraints of my job description and perform a variety of different roles within the company. This is due to the nature of the sports industry that I work in. Marketing and communication strategy needs to be very fluid and agile and because of this, I need to perform a wide variety of tasks” (Interview 1, question 4).

The above mentioned examples illustrate how an infinite amount of potential contextual variables can influence the degree to which the attainment of certain favourable characteristics are judged to be more important in relation to others. This observation was considered during the study’s concluding chapter, where all of the noteworthy research results were combined into one consolidated discussion.

With the findings from the study’s semi-structured interview process discussed in considerable depth, the chapter shifts its attention to the findings derived from the study’s self-interview process. To demonstrate the rigour applied during the implementation of the study’s second research method, this section commences by illustrating the reflective process undertaken before, during and after the self-interview process.

### **5.3 REFLECTIVE INTERPRETATION: SELF-INTERVIEW**

As discussed in Chapter 4 (section 4.4.1), this study employed both an autophenomenographical and heterophenomenological approach in order to derive empirical data related to the research problem. The final section of this chapter describes the key findings derived from this study’s autophenomenographical (self-interview) approach. In order to illustrate the rigour applied during the undertaking of the reflective research process, this section further unpacks and tangibly demonstrates the research steps noted in Chapter 4 (4.4.1.2) and followed in relation to the completion of the self-interview process and the derivation of findings.

Similarly to the detailing of the coding process of the semi-structured interviews (see section 5.2), it can be argued that this detailed unpacking of the reflective interpretation process that led to the derivation of findings could be better suited as part of Chapter 4. The decision to however integrate the illustration of the reflective interpretation process with the detailing of research findings itself is once again substantiated by noting that the final self-interview findings derived are intrinsically linked to and contextualised by the reflective interpretation process itself.

Including this finer detailing of the reflective interpretation process here therefore improves the degree of transparency in terms of how findings were derived from the sample data.

Considering this, the first segment of this section identifies the researcher's position and experience with regard to the research problem.

### **5.3.1 Experience and knowledge of the research problem**

In order to effectively identify the researcher's knowledge biases regarding the central research problem of the study, it is necessary to first describe the researcher's relation to and knowledge (experience) of the research problem, in order to contextualise and illustrate why the researcher perceives the research problem in a specific way.

As noted in Chapter 4 (section 4.4.3.3), the researcher himself is currently (at time of publication) employed as 'Head of Digital' at a marketing communication agency that services a broad spectrum of clients in terms of strategic digital services. Although this role extends beyond the constraints of social media, the majority of the researcher's day-to-day responsibilities are either directly or indirectly related to the professional practice of social media. Over the course of the researcher's professional career, he has been employed in various social media related roles, servicing a variety of clients that cover a wide spectrum of industry types and organisation sizes. This means that the researcher has been exposed to a high volume of opinions and strategies regarding what the effective implementation of social media involves and does not involve (i.e. social media strategic best practice). These opinions do not just originate from all the clients that the researcher has serviced, but also via interactions of the researcher with colleagues at each of the agencies he has been employed by. The researcher's knowledge and approach to social media and all its various facets is therefore the result of direct experience (trial & error) and exposure to the opinions and approaches of other marketing communication practitioners with social media related roles and responsibilities.

In order to contextualise the researcher's position towards the research problem, it was necessary to assess the degree to which the researcher's knowledge of social media strategic best practice (originating from multiple sources) extended to the central research problem that the study aimed to explore. As noted in Chapter 1, section 1.3 (Daoud, 2014) there is a vast degree of strategic insight available regarding various different elements of social media practice, which include social media content strategy, social media platform choice, alignment to marketing goals and so forth. But, as noted, there is a distinct lack of strategic knowledge and

guidelines regarding the effective organisational structuring of social media. Not dissimilarly, the researcher himself acknowledges that most of his knowledge and experience with regard to social media best practice revolves around social media content strategy, platform choice and other related topics. The researcher's knowledge of strategic considerations regarding the organisational structuring of social media is noticeably limited, when compared to his knowledge of other aspects of social media best practice. The researcher believes the main reason for this lack of personal knowledge with regard to social media organisational structuring best practice is a result of the fact that strategic guidance with regard to social media organisational structuring is not a directly monetised service offering that any of the agencies he has worked for provides to their clients. This is in comparison to other aspects of social media best practice (such as content strategy) that the researcher is expected to distil advice about to clients on a daily basis. In other words, whereas client expectations naturally resulted in the researcher acquiring in-depth knowledge of most aspects of social media best practice, the distinct lack of a perceived need for guidance in terms of an organisation's social media structuring has resulted in the researcher having a noteworthy lack of knowledge and experience with regard to this particular aspect of social media best practice.

However, even though the researcher's knowledge and exposure to the study's research problem is comparatively limited in relation to other aspects of social media best practice, it is noted that the researcher has accumulated some degree of knowledge regarding this aspect of social media best practice via exposure to its implications within the context of his daily responsibilities. An example of this is now provided for illustrative purposes.

One of the key responsibilities that the researcher has as a social media practitioner is the delivery of social media content to clients. Upon delivery of social media content to clients for approval processes, the researcher has observed how a lack of agility within an organisation can negatively affect the turnaround times for social media content approval, in that content needs to be approved by various departments before it can be published. In this example therefore, the researcher has been exposed to how a high reliance on formalisation within an organisational structure can negatively impact a brand's timely publishing of social media content. In other words, although the researcher does not actively advise clients on best practice regarding the organisational structuring of their social media function, he has been naturally exposed to how specific organisational structuring choices influence an organisation's social media function. Therefore, although the researcher has already formed perceptions and opinions with regard to the organisational structuring of social media, these thoughts have not been formalised and develop to the same degree as the researcher's knowledge of other aspects of social media best practice.

It is believed that the researcher's perceived lack of extensive knowledge of social media organisational structuring best practice was to the benefit of the self-interview process. The justification for this statement is now provided.

The researcher's credibility as a capable and proficient social media practitioner is based on his ability to verbalise and defend his opinions on social media best practice. Also, for the researcher to be able to expand his agency's client base and retain existing clients, he needs to be able to 'sell' his ideas to clients in a highly persuasive manner. To be able to effectively persuade clients of the value of his opinions, the researcher himself first needs to develop self-assurance with regard to the legitimacy of his convictions. This catalyses a cycle of ideological self-deception (Cowen, 2013:438) that leads to the development of a natural biases or favouritism towards the researcher's own ideas. This has resulted in him developing a preference and subjectivity towards his own opinions of what constitutes social media best practice and what does not. However, seeing as the researcher's level of self-assurance (driven by a pressure to persuade) with regard to this knowledge of social media organisational structuring best practice specifically is comparatively lower, it can be expected that he is also less subjective and defensive of his knowledge and opinions regarding this particular aspect of social media best practice. It is therefore also expected that, compared to other aspects of social media best practice, the researcher has fewer knowledge biases relating to social media organisational structuring. This was argued to be to the benefit of the self-interview, as it was expected to simplify the process of identifying and ring-fencing the researcher's existing assumptions regarding the research problem, allowing for higher quality empirical data collection during the self-interview process.

With the researcher's position and relation towards the research problem now described, the next section of the study explores the researcher's identified presuppositions and knowledge biases towards the research problem, highlighting how these were expected to influence the self-interview process.

### **5.3.2 Identification and predicted influence of knowledge biases**

As noted in the preceding section, it is believed that the researcher has comparatively less presuppositions or knowledge biases with regard to social media organisational structuring than he does of other aspects of social media best practice. In saying that, the researcher still has certain key knowledge biases regarding the organisational structuring of social media that need to be considered before, during and after the reflective self-interview process is undertaken. As noted in Chapter 1, section 1.8.1 (Anderson, 1989:249), reflexivity includes acknowledging and

critically interpreting the impact of the researcher's knowledge biases. It is therefore important that the researcher not only acknowledges these knowledge biases, but also predicts and assesses the degree to which they are expected to influence the self-interview process. It is noted however that the researcher acknowledges that his natural limitations to act as a self-reflective being (Linstead, 1994:1325) inferred that he would not be able to identify and deter the influence of each and every one of the presuppositions that influence his opinion of the research problem. With this in mind, the following section highlights the predicted influence of the key knowledge biases of the researcher towards the research problem identified.

### ***5.3.2.1 Preferential bias towards an external approach to social media organisational structuring***

The first and most apparent knowledge bias is a result of the perspective from which the researcher perceives the research problem. Considering that the researcher experiences the impact of social media organisational structuring from the vantage point of an external agency, it follows naturally that the researcher is to a certain degree partial towards an external approach to social media organisational structuring. This is based on the researcher having less exposure and therefore also less empathy for the challenges present in the internal context that impacts social media structuring. This also infers that the researcher has a certain degree of ignorance towards the complexities faced by internal social media custodians and how these challenges influence their choices with regard to social media organisational structuring.

A reflective example of this is illustrated as a continuation of the situation used in the previous section. As mentioned, the researcher perceives the impact of formalisation as a wholly negative force that impacts the agility by which an organisation can timeously approve and publish social media content. In this scenario, the researcher is unaware of or ignorant to the role that formalisation plays as a way of ensuring that the organisation's social media function integrates and aligns with the broader marketing communication functions of the organisation, undermining the value of formalised approval processes within the organisation as a way of ensuring overall brand messaging alignment across all of the organisation's consumer touch points. This example illustrates how the researcher's lack of knowledge and understanding of the organisation's internal context influences his views regarding the research problem.

Because of the researcher's position and access to knowledge with regard to the research problem, it was noted that this was a knowledge bias that could not be averted in the self-interview process. The predicted implication of this knowledge bias was that the self-interview was unlikely to provide deep and meaningful insights regarding how the internal context of an

organisation influenced the choice of an informed approach to social media organisational structuring. Furthermore, it was also likely that the data from the self-interview process could be expected to demonstrate a bias towards an external approach to social media. It is however noted that the study's research design accommodated and addressed this concern by including semi-structured interviews conducted with internal social media custodians, which were shown in section 5.2 of this chapter to provide meaningful insights from an internal vantage point regarding the research problem. Nevertheless, it was important that this knowledge bias be considered when interpreting and deriving findings from the self-interview process, especially those that demonstrated a baseless preference for an external approach to social media organisational structuring.

### **5.3.2.2 Knowledge bias towards specific types of social media responsibilities**

Another identified knowledge bias stems from the researcher's position within the organisation as the most senior resource that performs social media responsibilities on behalf of clients. As a senior social media resource, certain social media responsibilities such as content creation and community management (discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.2.2: Plugge & Bouwman, 2012:378; Nahm *et al.*,2003:281) are delegated to agency team members less senior, with the researcher managing client liaison, presentations and more strategic account roles. Because of this, the researcher could be expected to have a certain degree of negative bias towards how the organisational structuring of social media influences content creation and community management responsibilities.

An example that demonstrates this knowledge bias is now included for illustrative purposes. The researcher notes that when presenting new ideas and strategic social media approaches to potential as well as existing clients, there is an apparent lack of what he believes to be foundational social media knowledge within the organisation. In some of these cases, the researcher is able to identify a relational link between this lack of internal social media knowledge and the way in which the organisation's marketing communication structuring creates silos of social media knowledge within the organisation. In saying that, the researcher still acknowledges that the organisational structuring of social media influences the fulfilment of other social media tasks and responsibilities, such as community management and content creation. However, seeing as these responsibilities are not part of the researcher's day-to-day responsibilities, the way in which organisational structuring influences them is not top of mind to the researcher. In other words, because the researcher manages strategic pitches to clients on a regular basis, he perceives organisational structuring issues related to this direct tasks of him

to be more pertinent than those of other members of his agency team that also perform social media responsibilities.

In saying that, during the course of the researcher's career, he had previously been in positions where he was directly responsible for performing community management and content creation responsibilities. However, as the researcher has been more detached from these responsibilities over the last 2 to 3 years of his career, it is possible that he can undervalue their role and impact in the informed choice of an organisational structuring approach to social media. It was suggested that this knowledge bias be considered during the interpretation and analysis of the self-interview's empirical data, as to ensure that any data that showcased apparent preferential or negative bias towards specific types of social media responsibilities be scrutinised within the context of the researcher's relation towards each of those responsibilities.

### **5.3.2.3 Knowledge bias regarding approach to professional social media**

The next potential knowledge bias that needed to be addressed relates to the overall marketing communication discipline from which the researcher has experienced the organisational structuring of social media. As was noted in Chapter 1, section 1.2 (Fathi, 2013:15), there is still no consensus within the industry with regard to the marketing communication context that should enjoy ownership of social media functions. This has resulted in both organisations and agencies alike employing marketing (advertising) as well as public relations (the two dominant approaches) lenses to the management of social media.

Although the specifics of how the application of these two broader perspectives influence the management of social media have not been clearly defined due to a lack of existing theory, the study's analysis of each of the disciplines of the marketing communication mix (see Chapter 2, section 2.5) does highlight some key general differences. Whereas an advertising approach entails a focus on increasing sales and product awareness (Adhikary, 2014:230), public relations focuses on increased brand awareness via relationship building techniques (Smith & Cook, 2012:312; Olkkonen & Luoma-aho, 2014:233). It can be inferred that these theoretical traits are also relevant as key differentiators when defining how an advertising or public relations approach to professional social media differs from one another.

With this in mind, the researcher notes that he has been fortunate to have been exposed to and implement over the course of his career, both general advertising as well as public relations approaches to social media. This is a result of the researcher working for multiple agencies that position their approach to social media in different ways across the broader spectrum of overall

marketing communication disciplines, with advertising and public relations being the two polarised main approaches within this spectrum. For example, the researcher's first three positions were at agency's that positioned themselves as advertising agencies, whereas the researcher's current position is at an agency that is firmly positioned within the public relations or integrated communication space. Considering this, it was expected that the researcher had a minimal degree of bias towards any specific approach to social media, as he had been exposed to both of the two main approaches to the implementation of professional social media.

In saying that, it is possible that the researcher can be harbouring preference for the public relations approach to social media, keeping in mind his current position within a public relations firm that requires him to have self-assurance of the value of this approach, above others. Seeing as the researcher was previously employed at agencies that adopted an advertising approach to social media, it is likely that his move to a public relations firm led to a certain degree of 'cognitive dissonance' regarding what constitutes the best approach to implementation of professional social media. The central proposition of cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1962:2) is that if a person holds two ideological convictions that are inconsistent with each other, the person will experience the pressure of a motivational state called cognitive dissonance, a pressure which he will seek to then remove. One of the ways in which to resolve or remove this state of cognitive dissonance, it to change one's beliefs to once again create a sense of consistency in one's ideology regarding a specific topic (Bem, 1967:183).

In order to eliminate the researcher's cognitive dissonance regarding the preferred approach to social media that was caused by him moving to a public relations firm, it is argued that it was necessary for the researcher to adopt a high degree of self-assurance and preferential bias towards the public relations approach to social media. It was therefore likely that the self-interview research data would attest to some degree of preferential bias towards the broader public relations approach to social media implementation. The impact of this potential bias needed to be considered when analysing and interpreting the data collected during the self-interview process.

This section highlighted the key knowledge biases that the researcher was able to identify with regard to his perception of the research problem. As however noted in the prelude to this section, the researcher was limited in his capacity to identify each and every possible knowledge bias regarding the research problem. In saying that, this discussion was believed to have created a valuable framework for reflectively scrutinising the sample data derived from the

self-interview process. With this in mind, the self-interview process was undertaken, keeping the identified knowledge biases in mind during the actual interview process.

### **5.3.3 Self-interview transcription and reflective process**

With the researcher having identified and anticipated the influence of a series of knowledge biases on the actual self-interview process, the self-interview could be undertaken. The self-interview process was guided by the planned interview schedule as to ensure that the interview was grounded in the study's earlier theoretical explorations of organisational structuring and marketing communication, as detailed in Chapter 2 and 3. Following the planned interview schedule (as per Chapter 4, section 4.4.3.4), also ensured that the interview questions focused on addressing the study's central research problem from a variety of relevant vantage points.

During the self-interview process undertaken, the researcher endeavoured to actively consider the knowledge biases identified, being cognisant and reflective of the ways in which they affected his answers and thoughts regarding the topics covered in the self-interview. The researcher notes that there were a few cases during the self-interview that he became aware of how his identified knowledge biases were affecting his answers. For example, the effect of knowledge biases was particularly apparent to the researcher once he started to list the advantages and disadvantages of an external approach to the organisational structuring of social media: "Many organisations don't understand that social media is about giving value to your audience – if you just bombard them with messaging about your brand and don't give them any tangible value in return, they have no reason to come back to your platforms" (Self-interview, question 5). The researcher made notes during the interview process, highlighting the segments that he believed to be susceptible to the identified knowledge biases. These knowledge biases would be analysed in more detail after the completion of the self-interview process.

After the self-interview was successfully completed (i.e. all planned questions were asked and answered by the researcher himself), the self-interview was transcribed in a denaturalised manner. This, as to simplify the process of comparing the findings from the self-interview process, with the findings derived from the series of semi-structured interviews. The process of transcribing the interview data therefore followed the same process as identified in section 5.2.1.1 of this chapter. The transcription was then also re-read by the researcher and any fidelity issues addressed in the written transcription.

With the self-interview sample data now transcribed, it was necessary to expand on the initial reflective process undertaken during the self-interview, critically assessing the influence of the researcher's knowledge biases on the self-interview by identifying and then analysing their presence and influence within the transcribed sample data.

In order to practically implement this, the researcher critically re-read the transcribed data and highlighted (by means of different colour codes) the specific segments of the transcribed data that were suspected to be influenced by the researcher's identified knowledge biases. This was done by means of the following process:

1. Firstly, identifying and colour-highlighting the research questions and data segments that were suspected to be linked to each of the knowledge biases based on their logical relevancy to one another. For example, it follows logically that question 5 and 6 of the planned interview schedule that aimed to address the advantages and disadvantages of an external approach to social media would be susceptible to the researcher's knowledge bias towards an external approach, identified in the previous section.
2. Secondly, identifying potential preliminary findings from the sample data.
3. Thirdly, critically re-assessing the preliminary findings that overlapped with the colour-highlighted questions and sections, scrutinising the degree to which they were believed to have been influenced by the relevant knowledge bias(es).
4. And then lastly, verbalising the influence or lack of influence of each knowledge biases on each individually highlighted segments of text, describing their implications for the derivation of findings via the self-interview process.

The following colour legend was utilised within the transcribed sample data (see Annexure 2) in order to tangibly demonstrate the reflexive process undertaken:

- **Knowledge bias 1:** A preferential bias towards an external approach to social media organisational structuring – Blue

**Example:** "In saying that, clients do often want the agency to push certain objectives via social media platforms that do not align to the strategic suggestions of the agency" (Self-interview, question 10).

- **Knowledge bias 2:** A bias towards specific types of social media responsibilities – Green

**Example:** “Senior agency resources need to make sure that certain clients do not get preferential treatment if the client’s retainer does not justify it” (Self-interview, question 7).

- **Knowledge bias 3:** A bias towards an overall approach to professional social media – Red

**Example:** “I think my agency’s grasp of the business-to-business market and how an understanding of this market should inform a brand’s approach to social media is one of our key market differentiators” (Self-interview, question 8).

With the segments of sample data that were believed to be susceptible to the researcher’s knowledge biases identified and critically analysed, the following section highlights the degree to which the reflective re-reading of the sample data reinforced or contradicted the suspected influence of each of the identified knowledge biases on the researcher’s experience of the research problem. The final aim of this reflective and interpretive process was to assess the validity and relevance of the key observations identified during the study’s self-interview process.

### **5.3.4 Reflective analysis of self-interview transcription**

After identifying segments of the transcribed sample data that was susceptible to the researcher’s identified knowledge biases, the segments of sample data that were believed to include potential key findings were interpreted and a preliminary listing of potential findings was generated. Afterwards, these potential findings were critically analysed with regard to their relation to the study’s identified knowledge biases. This section details the key interpretations made with regard to the assessment of the degree to which each knowledge bias influenced the preliminary findings derived from the self-interview process. It is noted that only observations and findings that were unique to the self-interview process were discussed, as to ensure that the discussion of the self-interview findings focused on deriving additional insights (not present in the semi-structured interviews) regarding the organisational structuring of social media.

#### **5.3.4.1 *Knowledge bias 1: A preferential bias towards an external approach to social media organisational structuring***

It is noted that an analysis and colour-labelling of the transcribed self-interview sample data (as per the colour codes identified in the previous section), revealed a preferential bias towards an

external approach to social media to be the most prolific and recurring knowledge bias within the sample data.

Upon closer investigation, it was derived that the bias was most prevalent with regard to the researcher's description of the advantages and disadvantages of an external approach, which in many cases, was presented within the context of a direct comparison with an internal approach to social media organisational structuring. This highlights a caution, in that the researcher should critically assess the potential validity of each of the advantages and disadvantages in order to determine the degree to which they were influenced by the researcher's knowledge bias towards an external approach.

The following observations are made regarding the degree to which this knowledge bias impacted the validity of specific advantages of an external approach to social media structuring identified by the researcher during the self-interview process.

- **Advantage:** an external approach provides access to valuable and objective external perspectives regarding the state and quality of an organisation's social media presence.

**Assessment:** although there is some merit in this as an actual advantage, it is noted that the researcher's preferential bias towards an external approach led to him ignoring the possibility of objective perspectives regarding the quality of an organisation's social media presence originating from within the organisation. Although it is not contested that objective external opinions can be of value, there was no evidence provided that this is not possible when adopting an internal approach to social media. Based on this assessment, the advantage was dismissed due to its apparent grounding in the researcher's knowledge bias.

- **Advantage:** due to organisations' usual high regard for the opinions of agency resources, having an agency validate the opinion of an internal social media custodian can assist in attaining approval on certain initiatives that would otherwise not have been approved.

**Assessment:** this potential benefit of an external approach also highlighted the researcher's knowledge bias towards an external approach to social media structuring, in that the researcher was potentially over-valuing the regard to which internal stakeholders respected the opinion of external suppliers. For this benefit to be validated, it needed to also be represented within the semi-structured interviews and seeing that it was not, it was dismissed as a potential benefit of an external approach.

- **Advantage:** agency resources' expertise in managing social media for a wide range of clients can lead to cost saving benefits for a client, as the client can rely on the agency's experience for more informed strategic decisions, preventing costly mistakes.

**Assessment:** although it was possible for this benefit to also be grounded in the researcher's knowledge bias towards an external approach, it is noted that it was justified via an objective observation of the usually wide array of clients that agency resources service. Based on the objective soundness of the benefit's justification, it was validated as a potential benefit of an external approach to social media.

- **Advantage:** the pressure on agencies to ensure that they maintain a competitive edge above their competition, leads to clients naturally enjoying access to innovative ideas that can improve their social media presence.

**Assessment:** although it could have been contested that the researcher's knowledge bias towards an external approach makes him ignorant of the pressures faced by internal social media custodians, it is not believed that this undermines the validity of this benefit. Seeing as the livelihood of an agency rightfully depends on their availability to stay competitive, it was objectively plausible that this pressure can be to the benefit of the organisation's social media presence. Based on this, the benefit was validated.

Considering that it was noted that the researcher's knowledge bias towards an external approach to social media structuring was preferential in nature, it was argued that it acted as a validation of all of the disadvantages noted during the self-interview. In saying that, it did however highlight the possibility of the researcher being ignorant to certain other possible disadvantages of an external approach, inferring that the sample data's listing of potential disadvantages of an external approach to social media did not constitute an exhaustive list of potential disadvantages.

Utilising similar assessment logic as per the disadvantages noted during the self-interview process, the researcher's preferential bias towards an external approach also validated the key considerations and challenges observed in the self-interview sample data that reflected impartial honesty and a seemingly pessimistic view of the challenges faced by an agency. An example of such a challenge is the sample data derived finding that agency resources need to invest in a considerable amount of time understanding the brands they manage and all of its related intricacies, in order to negate the natural handicap of agencies' due to their low proximity to their clients. This example showcased an honesty towards the proximity challenges faced by

agencies. But once again, the researcher's knowledge bias towards an external approach did highlight the possibility that the researcher is ignorant of certain challenges faced by an agency in the management of professional social media. It can therefore be inferred that the self-interview's sample data did not constitute an exhaustive list of potential challenges faced by agencies.

With the impact or influence of this knowledge bias with regard to the self-interview sample data assessed, the impact of the remaining two identified knowledge biases was explored.

#### **5.3.4.2 Knowledge bias 2: A bias towards specific types of social media**

Even though the researcher's knowledge bias towards certain types of social media responsibilities was not as frequently observed as impacting the sample data as the previous knowledge bias discussed, there were still instances where it needed to be considered in the process of validating the findings from the self-interview. These instances are now discussed.

Findings from the self-interview data suggest that it is more often than not the responsibility of the agency's more senior resources to manage and implement new business pitches and proposals for the agency. For this reason, the sample data suggested that an agency should put measures in place to ensure that senior resources not only invest time and effort into new clients, but also in existing clients, to make sure that current clients are adequately serviced by the agency. Whilst the validity of this statement, as it relates to a specific social media responsibility, was not contested, it did clearly reduce the relevancy of the observation in terms of its applicability to other social media responsibilities and in so doing, put into question its relevance across various types of social media tasks or responsibilities. Based on this assessment, it was dismissed as a potential consideration to be considered in the study's findings.

Although the aforementioned assessment showcased how the researcher's knowledge bias towards specific types of social media responsibilities negatively impacted the validation of the sample data findings, there were other instances where the knowledge bias was shown not to impact the degree to which the researcher considered and included other types of social media responsibilities. These instances are now listed:

- **Finding:** community management (in the form of customer service) is difficult to effectively manage on behalf of a client, especially for brands that receive a very high volume of service related requests and queries from customers via their social media platforms.

**Assessment:** focuses specifically on a type of social media responsibility that the researcher is not currently employed to perform under normal circumstances. Based on this, it was validated as a valuable finding of the self-interview process.

- **Finding:** it is important to ensure that certain clients do not receive preferential treatment above other clients, merely because of a heightened degree of pressure experienced from one client, as opposed to others.

**Assessment:** as with a previous insight examined under this section, this insight did not showcase any bias towards a specific type of social media responsibility and was therefore validated as a valuable finding of the self-interview process.

With the potential impact of the second identified knowledge bias identified now discussed, the impact of the final knowledge bias on the sample data's findings can be explored in more detail.

#### **5.3.4.3 Knowledge bias 3: A bias towards overall approach to professional social media**

The section addresses the last identified knowledge bias related to the researcher's opinions and presupposition regarding the most appropriate overall approach to the implementation of professional social media. Earlier in this chapter (see section 5.3.2.3), it was argued that the researcher (at the time of undertaking the self-interview) had developed a bias towards the broad public relations approach to the implementation of professional social media.

In terms of this knowledge bias, it was noted that there was only a small percentage of the self-interview transcribed data that could be identified as having been potentially influenced by this bias (in comparison to the other knowledge biases identified). Furthermore, many of these instances identified were noted as not deriving any valuable findings regarding the study's central research problem, as they revolved around the researcher's beliefs in terms of the competitive advantage of the agency he is currently employed by: "Our agency's understanding of how public relations and public relations objectives can be fulfilled in the digital realm is another key market differentiator for the agency" (Self-interview, question 8). Considering this, it was argued that a further critical analysis of these insights was not relevant to the study at hand.

There are however two instances of potential findings that warranted further critical analysis via the lens of this particular knowledge bias, which is now unpacked:

- **Finding:** a noticeable degree of complexity can exist within the organisational structure of agencies. These complexities can include, but are not limited to a formalised hierarchical chain of commands and a wide range of departmental groupings.

**Assessment:** although there was potential for this insight to only be relevant to the researcher's current agency environment within a public relations firm, further contemplation regarding this insight by the researcher confirmed it to also be applicable to the context of the advertising agencies that the researcher was previously employed at. Based on this analysis, the insight was validated as a valuable finding of the self-interview process.

- **Finding:** it is important that specialisation does not come at the expense of the multi-adaptability of agency resources. Multi-adaptability is an important requirement for agency resources, as it enables them to act as trusted advisers to clients with regard to a wide array of business fields, effectively increasing the degree to which they contribute to a client's business.

**Assessment:** the particular aspect of this insight that came under reflective scrutiny was the degree to which multi-adaptability is indeed as a crucial requirement for any agency resource that fulfils social media responsibilities. With regard to this, it was noted that multi-adaptability was indeed an important trait within the context of the researcher's current public relations agency. However, upon further reflection, the researcher acknowledged that multi-adaptability was valued much less highly within the context of some of the advertising agencies he was previously employed at. It is therefore argued that the need for multi-adaptability could not be proven to be a universal requirement for agency resources and was therefore dismissed as a finding derived from the self-interview process.

- **Finding:** although there is an unavoidable degree of interdependence amongst agency resources due to the need for specialised social media expertise, a strategy of cross-departmental and cross-team learning can help ensure that interdependence stays within manageable levels as to not negatively impact client deliverables.

**Assessment:** as with the previous finding, it was argued that this insight generalised the value of a specific approach to social media. In this case, although specialisation is important within the context of the researcher's current agency, it cannot be proven to be true in terms of all agencies that employ different approaches towards professional

social media. It was therefore dismissed as a finding derived from the self-interview process.

With this chapter now having illustrated the depth of the reflective process undertaken during the self-interview process by exploring the influence of a series of identified knowledge biases, the final segment of this section presents and discusses the eventual findings derived from the self-interview process.

### **5.3.5 Derived findings from self-interview process**

With the previous segments of the section on self-interview detailing the rigour utilised in the critical and reflective analysis of the transcribed sample data, this final section presents and discusses the final set of derived findings extracted from the self-interview process. It is noted that the findings presented here represent the following: firstly, the final findings that were identified to have potentially been influenced by the researcher's knowledge biases but were then validated via a critical process of reflexivity (see section 5.3.4) and secondly, all the unique findings that were not believed to have been influenced by the researcher's identified knowledge biases and therefore not placed under the same degree of critical and reflective analysis.

All of the aforementioned findings identified were then analysed, interpreted and categorised into logical groupings to ensure that they were contextualised with regard to their direct relevance to the research problem the study aimed to address. These finalised grouping of findings are now discussed.

#### **5.3.5.1 *Advantages of an external approach to social media organisational structuring***

In addition to the advantages previously identified via the thematic content analysis process, the following advantages of an external approach to social media organisational structuring is noted from the self-interview sample data. As noted earlier in this section, additional advantages of an external approach to social media were identified in the sample data that are not discussed here. Based on the scrutiny of these omitted findings with regard to the degree to which they represent key knowledge biases of the researcher, they were not considered in the final findings.

One of the validated advantages identified during the self-interview process was the insight that agency resources' expertise in managing social media for a wide range of services clients can

lead to cost saving benefits for a client, as the client can rely on the agency's experience for more informed strategic decisions. Not only does this help the client to make more informed decisions, but it can also indirectly lead to cost saving benefits, as the agency can prevent themselves from making costly mistakes within the realm of social media.

Another insightful benefit that arose from the analysis of the self-interview sample data was in relation to the pressure experienced by agency resources. As noted by the researcher, agencies are under constant pressure to perform and outperform their competition, in the hopes to retain their existing clients and attract new potential clients. Agencies need to make sure they are continuously identifying new opportunities for their clients in order to ensure their ongoing indispensability. Although this constant pressure to perform can place strain on agency resources, it does hold a noticeable benefit for the organisations that these agencies service, as it naturally leads to the organisations enjoying higher quality service and the influx of new innovative ideas from their external social media suppliers.

#### **5.3.5.2 *Disadvantages of an external approach to social media organisational structuring***

With the validated advantages arising from the self-interview process discussed, the next section describes the disadvantages derived from the analysis of the self-interview sample data. In addition to the disadvantages previously identified via the thematic content analysis process, the following disadvantages of an external approach to social media organisational structuring is noted.

One of the key disadvantages noted during the self-interview process is the likelihood of agency resources showcasing comparatively lower commitment levels to the brands they service than would an internal resource. This disadvantage is justified by highlighting that agency resources aren't directly employed by the organisations they deliver output on behalf for, which leads to a lower sense of perceived accountability towards the brands they service.

Exploring an external approach's influence on specific types of social media responsibilities, the self-interview sample data also showed that community management (in the form of customer service) was noticeably challenging to manage effectively on behalf of a client, especially for brands or organisations that received a high volume of service related requests and queries from customers via their social media platforms. Due to the proximity issues of an external approach (highlighted in section 5.2.2.6 of this chapter), agency resources usually cannot source answers to customers' queries as quickly as an internal resource can. These delays in

fulfilling customers' requests on social media channels can lead to negative brand sentiment, which can be to the detriment of the brand's overall social media presence.

Finally, the self-interview sample data also suggested that the use of external support by an organisation required a certain time investment from client's side to ensure that agency resources are constantly fed with up-to-date information about the organisation, which in turn is necessary to ensure that agency resources can effectively fulfil their expected social media responsibilities on behalf of clients.

### ***5.3.5.3 Key considerations regarding an external approach to the organisational structuring of social media***

With the key validated advantages and disadvantages derived from the analysis of the self-interview process presented, the final segment of this section discusses key considerations regarding an external approach to social media, as informed by the critical analysis of the sample data.

One of the insightful contributions of the self-interview sample data was the observation that, although the thematic content analysis process highlighted that internal social media custodians usually operate within the context of a complex internal organisational structures, the self-interview data suggested that there could potentially be a similar degree of complexity within the organisational structure of agencies. These complexities can include, but are not limited to a formalised hierarchical chain of commands and a wide range of departmental groupings. This is an important consideration, as it highlights that the evaluation of the organisational structuring of external suppliers is as important as that of the internal organisation itself when planning a specific approach to organisational structuring.

The sample data also highlighted the importance of agencies ensuring that certain clients did not receive preferential treatment above other clients, merely because of a heightened degree of pressure experienced from one client as opposed to others. Seeing as certain clients can be more demanding than others, agencies need to make sure that they do not neglect clients that aren't as vocal about their needs. Related to this, the sample data also highlighted the importance of agencies taking care to nurture a relationship based on mutual respect with all of their clients. The ability to manage client disagreements in a respectful way is an important requirement for agencies.

Finally, it was also highlighted that agency resources need to invest a considerable amount of time understanding the brands they manage and all of their related intricacies, in order to

negate the natural handicap of agency's due to their low proximity to their clients. This observation correlated with similar observations from the thematic content analysis process.

This concludes the study's reflective interpretation of the self-interview sample data that derived validated findings which spoke directly to the central research problem that the study addressed.

During the final chapter of this study, these findings derived from the self-interview process are discussed alongside the theoretical and other empirical data in order to directly address the central research problem.

## **5.4 CONCLUSION**

This chapter aimed to transparently illustrate the process undertaken to derive valuable and tangible findings from analysing the study's empirical sample data.

Firstly the chapter attempted to illustrate the rigour applied to the thematic content analysis methodology, as introduced and detailed in Chapter 4 (section 4.4.2). To do this, the chapter demonstrated how the coding process was undertaken and how this ultimately led to the derivation of finalised main themes for further contextual analysis. The key themes identified during this process are as follows: the distinguishable roles of a social media team; the operational mechanics of social media; the dimensions of organisational structuring's relevance to social media; integration with marketing, communication and broader organisation; managing social media internally; managing social media externally; desired characteristics that influence the choice of social media structuring approach and the contextual variables relevant to the organisational structuring of social media.

During this thematic content analysis process, it was also possible to define the relationship between these themes. An analysis of the sample data revealed that there were recurring desired characteristics that informed a social media custodian's choice of a specific social media approach. The degree to which each of these individual desired characteristics can be attained are contextualised or influenced (to differing degrees) by a range of factors. Furthermore, the relative prioritisation of a specific desired characteristic is determined by a range of contextual variables.

During the final chapter, the relationship between these themes is discussed in greater detail, as to ultimately address the main research problem of the general uncertainty that exists regarding how social media custodians should determine an informed approach to the

organisational structuring of social media. More specifically, the way different aspects relating to organisational structuring (section 5.2.1.1 – 5.2.2.8 of this chapter) influence the degree to which certain characteristics can be attained by adopting a specific approach to social media structuring are explored.

The chapter also highlighted the key findings from the study's self-interview process, pointing out to which degree the findings correlate with the findings derived from the study's thematic content analysis process, but also showcasing how the self-interview process further supported the exploration of the study's identified research problem. This section also illustrated the reflective process applied to the analysis of the sample data in order to demonstrate the rigour applied in deriving findings from the self-interview process.

During the next and final chapter, the findings of the study's empirical phase are cross-referenced with the findings from the theoretical exploration, in order to highlight any deviations or ways in which the study's newly generated theory regarding the research problem supplemented existing theory. This also ultimately aims to address the study's main research problem in a way that considers all the significant data encapsulated within this study.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

During the previous chapter, the study's empirical findings were presented, grouped according to the two main research methods, namely semi-structured interviews and self-interview. In this concluding chapter, the key findings derived from the empirical process related to each specific research question defined in Chapter 1 were summarised and interpreted with regard to how they relate and directly address the central research problem that this study aimed to address.

The central research problem statement (Chapter 1, section 1.2) is as follows:

*What should be considered when deciding on a strategic approach to the organisational structuring of social media?*

In order to address the individual components of the overall research problem from an all-inclusive perspective, this chapter's discussion was framed around the following individual research questions (Chapter 1, section 1.4):

**Research question 1:** What key aspects influence and are influenced by the organisational structuring of social media?

**Research question 2:** What favourable characteristics can be attained by employing specific approaches to the organisational structuring of social media?

**Research question 3:** How does the attainment of these favourable characteristics inform a strategic approach to the organisational structuring of social media?

Before the identified research questions are addressed, the next section of this chapter first provides a brief overview of the study's theoretical exploration. By means of this exploration, the highlights and how they laid a theoretical foundation for the process of answering the study's identified research questions are pointed out.

### 6.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY'S THEORETICAL EXPLORATION

#### 6.2.1 Organisational structuring

At the onset of this study, it was argued that, to be able to explore the organisational structuring of social media effectively, the study would require a relevant theoretical framework which could

guide an exploration of the research problem at hand. As the study's focus is on the organisational structuring considerations related to social media, it was reasoned that an exploration of both traditional and more modern organisational structure theory would help form a relevant contextual framework for the study at hand.

The theory related to organisational structuring was explored by focusing on the following main topics: the origins and value of the study field; an exploration of the characteristics or dimensions of organisational structure and lastly, an analysis of the most prominent approaches to the structuring of an organisation's marketing communication functions.

A noteworthy insight from this theoretical exploration was the acknowledgement that the concept of organisational structure not only consists of the hierarchical and formalised chains of command present with an organisation, but also of the inter-social groups and informal relationships with the organisation itself (Chapter 2, section 2.2.1: Flynn, 2015:194). Based on this, it was highlighted that the study's exploration of the organisational structuring of social media needed to include scope and consideration for all the different facets of organisational structure and not only the tangible, but also the more abstract components thereof.

It was also noted that organisational structure theory includes a substantial corpus of observations regarding a specific series of theoretical dimensions that are essential to the creation and maintenance of an effective organisational structure. Based on an analysis of the literature available on these various dimensions, the following main dimensions were identified grounded on their relevancy to an exploration of the organisational structuring of social media (Chapter 2, section 2.2.2: Plugge & Bouwman, 2012:378; Nahm *et al.*, 2003:281):

- **Centralisation:** the degree to which the decision making power of an organisation is concentrated within a particular group or location.
- **Formalisation:** the degree to which the organisation has structured channels of information and authority which are supported by written procedures and rules.
- **Specialisation:** the degree of vertical, horizontal and spatial differentiation within an organisation.
- **Interdependence:** the degree to which workflows within the organisation require cooperation among different employee groups.

An exploration of these different dimensions of organisational structure highlighted their relevancy as a foundational reference for analysing and describing an organisation's organisational structure. Within the broader context of this study, it therefore provided a useful

reference point for contextualising an exploration of each of the organisations that would later form part of the empirical data collection.

Finally, the exploration of organisational structure theory concluded with an investigation of the common structures of an organisation's marketing communication functions. One of the key observations highlighted here was the lack of available theory on how the organisational structuring of an organisation's marketing communication functions' impacted the effectiveness of the organisation's marketing communication initiatives (Chapter 2, section 2.2.3). Even with this lack of available theory, certain guiding theoretical observations were derived, including the importance of aligning organisational structure to the needs of the modern, highly dynamic marketing communication context (Rooney, 2013). Although these insights did not necessarily relate to the organisational structuring of social media itself, it did provide this study with a snapshot of the context in which the various interviewees of the semi-structured interviews operated in. This in turn helped to establish empathy and understanding for the challenges faced by the internal social media custodians from which empirical data was collected.

## **6.2.2 Marketing communication**

Although organisational structuring theory was shown to provide a relevant theoretical framework for the study at hand, it was argued that the exploration of additional theoretical fields would need to be included as a preamble to the empirical process in order to ensure an adequate contextualisation of the research problem. More specifically, considering that the modern organisation's social media initiatives typically fall under the jurisdiction of one of the organisation's marketing communication departments (Chapter 3, section 3.4.1: Creative Group, 2013), it infers that an understanding of modern marketing communication theory would be crucial to a broader discussion regarding the organisational structuring of social media.

However, before modern marketing communication theory could be explored from various theoretical vantage points, it was first necessary to ensure a firm grasp of the evolution of marketing communication, by exploring its origins. With a detailed grasp of the evolution of marketing theory undertaken, this study could commence an exploration of marketing communication itself. One of the key insights highlighted when exploring marketing communication theory was the importance of ensuring that integration happened both horizontally, across marketing disciplines as well as vertically, across other sectors in the corporate hierarchy (Chapter 2, section 2.3.6: Csikósová *et al.*, 2014:1616). The importance of marketing communication integration within the context of the modern organisation was also accentuated during the study's empirical data collection process, with social media custodians

highlighting the benefits, disadvantages and key considerations thereof with specific regard to social media (Chapter 5, section 5.2.2.4).

Another important aspect of modern marketing theory that was functional as a preamble to the study's empirical phase was an exploration of the most common marketing objectives utilised by marketing communication practitioners as a way to tangibly measure and evaluate the performance of their marketing communication initiatives. A contextual framework of common marketing communication objectives would assist this study's subsequent phases, which included an assessment of the degree to which specific choices with regard to the organisational structuring of social media could potentially be more conducive to the reaching of certain marketing communication objectives. The most common, but non-exhaustive list of marketing communication objectives identified included: increased sales and lead generation; increased product awareness; brand positioning and management as well as customer retention and brand loyalty (Chapter 2, section 2.4: Kaho, 2013; Guettler, 2013; Wolinski & Coates, 2009).

To ensure that the study's theoretical background of modern marketing theory would be sufficiently expansive, the study's marketing communication exploration concluded with an analysis of each of the discernible disciplines of the modern marketing communication mix. Seeing as this study aimed to consider the impact of the marketing communication mix disciplines on the organisational structuring of social media, it was suggested that social media be explored from an overarching, marketing communication channel perspective and not as an individual discipline of the marketing communication mix itself (Chapter 2, section 2.5).

### **6.2.3 Professional social media**

With the study now having acquired a contextual framework of organisational structuring and modern marketing communication theory, the final segment of the theoretical exploration involved analysing the existing theory available on the application of social media as a professional business tool within a marketing communication context.

First and foremost, the exploration of professional social media undertook a sweeping, general analysis of the development of the business field itself. Seeing as the study aimed to add to the corpus of theoretical guidelines that inform a strategic approach to social media, it was also appropriate to explore the existing theory available on professional social media best practice. One of the most significant deductions derived from the exploration of existing social media best practice, was that, although an extensive corpus of theory existed that can help guide an

organisation's approach to social media, there is an apparent lack of theoretical guidance that specifically addresses an informed approach to the organisational structuring of social media. This highlights the relevance and significance of the study's exploration of the considerations that influence an approach to social media's organisational structuring.

Even though the availability of existing theory specifically related to the organisational structuring of social media is noticeably scarce, an assessment thereof would be functional within the context of the study, as it could provide initial insights that inform the empirical process. One of the most noteworthy points highlighted as part of this particular theoretical exploration, was that the application of a clear social media governance structure and the defining of team roles were prerequisites to the effective implementation of social media for marketing communication purposes (Chapter 3, section 3.4.1: Divol *et al.*, 2012).

An analysis of the existing corpus of theory related to social media organisational structuring theory also highlighted certain theoretical gaps in existing theory and in so doing, created a guideline that informed the new theory which this study attempted to uncover during the empirical phase, namely:

- the lack of clear criteria that inform the choice of a specific organisational structuring approach to social media above others;
- the lack of a detailing of the advantages and disadvantages of each main approach to the organisational positioning of social media;
- the lack of a detailing of suggestions to overcome the challenges and leverage the inherent advantages of each approach to the organisational positioning of social media; and
- the lack of best practice guidelines that inform the relevancy of each approach, in consideration of the unique circumstances of an organisation.

With social media discussed within the context of organisational structuring theory, the final segment of the theoretical exploration of professional social media theory explored social media within the context of marketing communication theory, the other main theoretical framework of this study. Social media's influence on each of the marketing communication mix disciplines was also discussed, highlighting how social media has provided new avenues for applying each discipline, as well as how these disciplines have been applied within a marketing communication context.

With a brief overview of the study's theoretical exploration within the context of how it relates to the research problem presented, the next section of this chapter can address the study's individual research questions, as to ultimately address the central research problem.

### **6.3 ADDRESSING OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

With the study having undertaken an exploration of existing organisational structure, marketing communication and professional social media theory, it now had an adequate degree of contextual background necessary for undertaking an empirical process that aimed to answer the individual research questions and in the process, addressing the central research problem. This was done to ultimately describe the study's contribution to emergent theory regarding the organisational structuring of professional social media. After completing a rigorous process of semi-structured interviews with 12 internal social media custodians, key findings were derived by means of a process of thematic content analysis. These findings were then further supported by undertaking a self-interview process, ensuring that additional empirical data was gathered which explored the research problem.

#### **6.3.1 Research question 1: What key aspects influence and are influenced by the organisational structuring of social media?**

A contextual analysis of the empirical sample data revealed that there were various challenges with associating a brand's social media activities with the reaching of marketing communication objectives. These challenges include, but are not limited to the existence of an incompatibility between the objectives pursued by an organisation's social media team and broader marketing communication counterparts; social media teams usually taking an indirect approach to the reaching of traditional marketing communication objectives as well as the non-standardised and heterogenous nature of social media-specific objectives between different organisations. In addition to these general challenges, there is no substantial evidence that internal social media custodians are able to inform their social media organisational structuring choices by referencing these choices' influence on their defined objectives, whether an attempt has been made to align these social media objectives to traditional marketing communication counterparts or not.

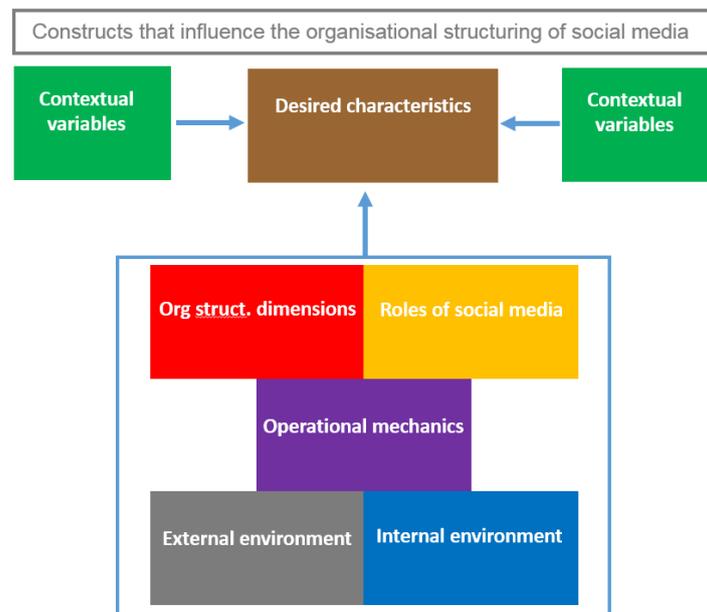
It was rather shown that a specific social media structuring approach is often the result of seemingly unrelated management decisions, a natural evolution of an organisation's overall structure and in some cases a lack of knowledge with regard to the role that social media can play within the broader organisational context.

Considering all of this, the conclusion is made that attempting to inform the choice of a specific approach to social media structuring by exploring how each approach is conducive to the reaching of either traditional marketing communication objectives or social media-specific objectives will not add practical and useful new theory to the research problem that this study addresses.

With this in mind, the study suggests an alternative theoretical guideline for informing a specific approach to an organisation's social media structuring approach. This guideline focuses on providing social media custodians with a practical way of understanding how certain key considerations should influence their decisions regarding a specific approach to organisational structuring. However, in order to be able to formulate this guideline, the study had to first contextualise all the different aspects that influence and are influenced by the organisational structuring of social media.

During the empirical process, the study defined a series of constructs that influence and are influenced by the organisational structuring choices relating to an organisation's social media activities (Chapter 5, section 5.2.1.4). The relationship between these constructs is explained next.

Certain key favourable characteristics or traits related to the organisational structuring of social media exist. The degree to which each of these desired characteristics can be attained is contextualised or influenced (to differing degrees) by the following factors: the operational mechanics of social media structuring, the influence of the external environment, the defined social media teams, the dimensions of organisational structure as well as the internal environment of the organisation. In addition, the relative importance or prioritisation of a specific desired characteristic in relation to others is determined by a range of contextual variables. Figure 5.4 below (also refer to Figure 5.4 on page 139) illustrates the relationship between the aforementioned key favourable characteristics and the factors that influence them:



**Figure 5.4: Diagram illustrating the relationship of the various coding groups to one another**

This discussion of results illustrated how the study's empirical process answered the first research question, in that it not only identified the key aspects that influenced the organisational structuring of social media, but also described the relationship between these key aspects.

With this research question now answered, the next segment of this chapter addresses the study's second research question.

### **6.3.2 Research question 2: What favourable characteristics can be attained by employing specific approaches to the organisational structuring of social media?**

As mentioned in the previous section, an analysis of the study's empirical data identified the presence of certain favourable characteristics that internal social media custodians attempted to attain by means of employing specific approaches to the organisational structuring of social media. These favourable characteristics are noteworthy, as they present an opportunity to be referenced in the process of formulating a practical guideline that informs internal social media custodians' choices with regard to social media organisational structuring. These favourable characteristics are now identified and described:

- **Time-efficiency:** the degree to which the social media team can perform their roles in a time-efficient manner.

- **Cost-efficiency:** the degree to which the organisation's social media activities are conducive to an efficient utilisation of expenses.
- **Quality social media content:** social media content that upholds a high degree of creativity, audience relevancy and brand alignment.
- **Tangible value:** the degree to which a social media team can tangibly contribute to the expectations of other relevant stakeholders, whether internally or externally focused.
- **Visibility:** the degree to which a social media creates a sense of transparency with other stakeholders (whether internal or external) in terms of the team's output.
- **Agility:** the degree to which a social media team can be responsive and adaptable with regard to the generation of social media output.
- **Brand knowledge:** the degree to which a social media team understands the intricacies of the brand they are servicing.
- **Industry knowledge:** the degree to which a social media team has knowledge of the broader industry in which the brand or organisation functions in.
- **Social media expertise:** the degree of knowledge that a social media team has with regard to the implementation of social media as a professional service.
- **Conversancy:** the degree of frequency and adequacy by which social media resources are continuously fed with significant and relevant information that informs the management of a brand's social media platforms.
- **Control and ownership:** the degree to which a social media team can influence and direct the brand's social media initiatives, without the interference of other parties (whether internal or external).
- **Autonomy:** the degree to which the social media team is empowered to deliver their own social media output in a self-sufficient manner, without requiring the support of other stakeholders (whether internal or external).
- **Support and advocacy:** the degree to which a social media is supported, considered and understood by other departments within the organisation.
- **Dedication and accountability:** the degree to which social media team members are dedicated to their defined responsibilities and show accountability for them.
- **Consistency:** the degree to which a social media team can maintain a specific and pre-defined approach or strategy in terms of their approach, content tone and so forth.

As noted earlier however, there are certain contextual variables that influence the degree to which these favourable characteristics or attributes are relevant to a specific organisation when planning their approach towards the organisational structuring of social media. Due the infinite nature of all conceivable variables, it is not possible to define an exhaustive list of all these

contextual variables. It is the responsibility of the organisation to determine the relative significance of each of these variables before deciding on a preferred approach to social media organisational structuring.

This discussion of empirical results illustrated how the study's empirical process answered the study's second research question, in that it identified the favourable characteristics that social media internal custodians can attain by employing a specific approach to the organisational structuring of social media. In so doing, it provided a foundation for the study's process of formulating a guideline by which internal social media custodians can inform their specific approach to the organisational structuring of social media.

With this research question now answered, the next segment of this chapter addresses the study's third research question.

### **6.3.2 Research question 3: How does the attainment of these favourable characteristics inform a strategic approach to the organisational structuring of social media?**

With a listing of the key favourable characteristics of social media now defined, the study can reference these characteristics as a way of suggesting an informed approach to organisational structuring, by noting how certain key factors influence and contextualise the degree to which each of these characteristics can be attained.

The degree to which different approaches to social media organisational structuring influence the attainment of favourable characteristics of social media was determined by exploring and critically assessing the correlations between these elements. More specifically, the empirical findings detailed in Chapter 5 of this study were referenced in order to determine all the observable positive as well as negative correlations between specific approaches to social media organisational structuring and the identified desired characteristics of social media. An example of the deductive method followed in order to establish these correlations is now presented as illustration of the process. The sample data suggested that internal social media team members have a higher likelihood to be less abreast with the latest trends and expert knowledge regarding professional social media practice. This therefore insinuates that the more an organisation relies on an internal approach to social media organisational structuring, the less likely it is to attain the favourable characteristics of social media expertise within their social media organisational structure. It can therefore be inferred that a negative correlation exists

between an internal approach to social media organisational structuring and the desired social media characteristic of social media expertise.

An important disclaimer is however made with regard to this: the correlations noted are only based on the empirical data that the research uncovered. Due to this, this study cannot guarantee that the correlations noted from this study will always manifest in the same way as was observed here. A broad and potentially infinite range of contextual circumstances is likely to influence the way and the degree to which these correlations recur when applied in new circumstances.

However, before the findings regarding how different approaches to social media organisational structuring influence the attainment of favourable characteristics of social media are provided, the key findings from the empirical sample data that contextualises this discussion are first presented.

### ***6.3.2.1 Key contextual findings related to the organisational structuring of social media***

Although the empirical study's focus was on establishing a guideline that informs the organisational structuring of social media, the study uncovered a substantial volume of broader findings regarding the organisational structuring of social media. The most pertinent of these are now discussed as contextualisation to the answering of the final research question as well as overall research problem.

One of the most pertinent general findings derived from the empirical research process is the observation that a brand's social media initiatives are placed in a relatively low regard, in comparison to other, more established marketing communication disciplines. The main reason for this relates to the general lack of understanding of the importance and role that an organisation's social media activities play amongst the broader organisation. This ignorance most likely stems from professional social media still being a relatively novel approach to marketing communication practice, compared to the other more established marketing communication disciplines, such as public relations and advertising.

Another reason for the lack of broader social media understanding and appreciation within an organisation lies in the ever-changing and constantly evolving nature of social media, which requires social media custodians to continuously adapt and change their approach to marketing communication challenges. This also complicates the process of demonstrating the tangible value of an organisation's social media initiatives, as results are not always aligned to traditional

business objectives that senior management are accustomed to utilising as evaluative references. This is in comparison to the practice and application of other marketing communication disciplines that utilise more established and static approaches and solutions to marketing communication challenges. The dynamic nature of social media is also one of the key factors that distinguishes social media from other organisational functions and leads to the need for a highly agile and adaptable approach by social media custodians, both in terms of team structure and access to funding.

The repercussions of the lack of understanding of the value of social media initiatives manifest in various ways, with one of the most notable being that an organisation's social media initiatives receive a poor degree of dedicated funding, usually as smaller pockets of funding received from other department's more substantial dedicated funding allocation. This could force the organisation's social media custodian to take a minimalistic approach, necessitating the forgoing of certain planned social media initiatives.

Except for the lower perceived degree of priority in terms of an organisation's social media initiatives, the research data also suggested the presence of a complex and somewhat strained relationship between an organisation's social media team and other marketing communication departments or functions. This tension however seems to be more accentuated and apparent in organisations where the social media team is structured as a separate, but interdependent unit. One of the substantiations for the presence of this tension is related to the observation that, in many cases, an organisation's broader marketing communication complement has jurisdiction over the organisation's social media resources.

This leads to the social media team being required to implement broader marketing communication campaigns on a brand's social media channels, even if it is against the social media team's recommendation. Not only can this lead to animosity between the social media team and other organisational departments, but it is also to the detriment of the brand's overall social media presence, as the social media team's informed strategic suggestions are disregarded. On the other hand, a lack of integration and a healthy working relationship between an organisation's social media team and broader marketing communication complement could also lead to the social media team not being included in the initial planning of marketing communication campaigns. This results in social media becoming an 'after-thought' of the marketing communication process, which causes existing campaigns to be retro-fitted after the initial planning phase so that they are suitable for the brand's social media platforms. Not only does this lead to less effective campaigns, but it also creates time-inefficiencies with regard to the implementation of an organisation's marketing communication initiatives.

Considering the debilitating impact of the lack of understanding of social media's role amongst the broader organisation, it is imperative that social media custodians take active steps to increase the degree to which the broader organisation is educated in terms of social media's role and purpose. It is for this reason that it is suggested that the social media custodian sets up formalised and recurring social media workshops and information sessions across the entire organisation. Additionally, the organisation can also consider giving all departments some degree of social media responsibilities, which will naturally lead to a better understanding of its role across the organisation.

Furthermore, the self-interview process demonstrated that a similar degree of complexity existed within the organisational structure of the agencies that fulfilled social media tasks on behalf of clients. These complexities can include, but are not limited to, formalised hierarchical chain of commands and a wide range of departmental groupings.

With key contextualisation regarding the organisational structuring of social media now provided, this chapter further attempts to address the final research question by exploring the degree to which different approaches to the organisational structuring of social media influence the attainment of the aforementioned favourable characteristics of social media.

### ***6.3.2.2 Favourable characteristics of social media and the dimensions of organisational structuring theory***

During the study's empirical process, social media organisational structuring was framed within the context of the four previously defined overall dimensions of organisational structuring. Based on an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of an organisation's social media structuring having a moderate to high degree of each dimension, the following is noted in terms of all dimensions' contributions to the attainment of each favourable characteristic of social media.

#### **Specialisation**

The following favourable characteristics of social media were noted as showing a **positive correlation** with a high degree of specialisation in terms of the defined and distinguished roles of a social media workforce:

- **Time-efficiency:** attainment is proportionate to the size of the organisation. The bigger the organisation, the less likely the organisation is to observe time-efficiency benefits from a high degree of specialisation.

- **Cost-efficiency:** attainment is proportionate to the size of the organisation. The bigger the organisation, the less likely the organisation is to observe cost-efficiency benefits from a high degree of specialisation.
- **Quality social media content:** a high degree of specialisation can result in better quality social media content, due to a specific resource being able to become an expert in a specific sub-field of professional social media.
- **Social media expertise:** due to a specific resource being allowed to become an expert in their specific sub-field of social media, specialisation has a positive correlation with deeper levels of specific social media expertise.

The following favourable characteristics of social media were noted as showing a **negative correlation** with a high degree of specialisation in terms of the defined and distinguished roles of a social media workforce:

- **Agility:** due to specialisation leading to a resource losing a certain degree of multi-adaptability, a high degree of specialisation has the propensity to lower the degree of agility that a social media team has.
- **Consistency:** the more specialised a resource becomes, the more challenging it is for that resource to step in for colleagues in the event that they are unable to perform their role. This leads to a heightened risk of loss in consistency in approach.

## Centralisation

The following favourable characteristics of social media were noted as showing a **positive correlation** with a high degree of centralisation in terms of the degree to which social media team members have immediate access and proximity to each other, as well as other significant stakeholders:

- **Consistency:** the more centralised social media teams are to each other, as well as other significant stakeholders, the easier it is to ensure alignment amongst the teams.
- **Agility:** the more centralised a social media team is, the easier it is for the team to act as a cohesive unit that can react to changing circumstances in an adaptive manner.
- **Time-efficiency:** a centralised social media team can align faster in order to effectively deliver social media output timeously.

It is noted that empirical data did not deliver sufficient evidence to support any negative correlations between centralisation and the identified favourable characteristics of social media.

### **Formalisation**

The following favourable characteristic of social media was noted as showing a **positive correlation** with a high degree of formalisation in terms of the defined rules, regulations and lines of authority from an organisational perspective:

- **Visibility:** formalisation is conducive to social media resources displaying transparency in terms of how specific social media responsibilities are dispersed amongst individual team members.

The following favourable characteristic of social media was noted as showing a **negative correlation** with a high degree of formalisation in terms of the defined rules, regulations and lines of authority from an organisational perspective:

- **Agility:** an overly rigid adherence to the formalised lines of authority within an organisation can have a negative impact on a social media team's ability to be responsive.

### **Interdependence**

It is noted that empirical data did not deliver sufficient evidence to support any positive correlations between formalisation and the identified favourable characteristics of social media<sup>5</sup>.

The following favourable characteristic of social media was noted as showing a **negative correlation** with a high degree of interdependence in terms of the degree to which the social media team is reliant on other stakeholders to fulfil their responsibilities:

- **Autonomy:** the more reliant a social media team becomes on other internal and external stakeholders to fulfil their responsibilities, the less autonomous and self-sufficient they become.

With the relationship between the attainment of this study's favourable characteristics of social media and the dimensions of organisational structuring theory now established, the next section

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<sup>5</sup> Due to similarities between interdependence and this study's identified theme of 'integration with marketing, communication and broader organisation', the study opts to group the correlations from these two themes during the final analysis.

explores the relationship between these favourable characteristics and integration with marketing, communication and the broader organisation.

### **6.3.2.3 Favourable characteristics of social media and integration with marketing, communication and broader organisation**

As noted in the previous chapter of the study, a comparatively substantial corpus of data was uncovered regarding a social media team's integration with the marketing, communication and the broader organisation itself. The most pertinent insights uncovered are now presented in the form of deductions that illustrate how a high degree of social media integration relates to the attainment of this study's identified favourable characteristics of social media.

The following favourable characteristics of social media were noted as showing a **positive correlation** with a high degree of integration between the social media department and other organisational departments, such as marketing and communication:

- **Visibility:** the more integrated a social media team is with other internal stakeholder groups, the more visibility there will be around the organisation's social media initiatives.
- **Brand knowledge:** a high degree of integration with the organisation's other departments will result in the social media team having more streamlined access to expansive knowledge of the organisation across various business disciplines.
- **Conversancy:** the higher the degree of integration with other internal stakeholders of the organisation, the more likely the social media team is to be regularly fed with up-to-date and relevant information from other stakeholder groups.
- **Support and advocacy:** a higher degree of integration with the organisation's other departments enables a social media team to nurture a deeper understanding of the role and influence within the organisation. This deeper understanding in turn can lead to more widespread organisational support and advocacy for an organisation's social media initiatives.
- **Control and ownership:** a high degree of internal integration can allow an internal social media team to position themselves as trusted advisers for the organisation's social media initiatives. In so doing, they are able to act as gatekeepers, increasing the degree to which they have control over the implementation of the organisation's social media initiatives.

The following favourable characteristics of social media were noted as showing a **negative correlation** with a high degree of integration between the social media department and other organisational departments, such as marketing and communication:

- **Autonomy:** the higher the degree of integration between a social media team and other organisational departments are, the more likely the social media team is to lose their ability to execute and deliver social media content in an autonomous, independent manner.
- **Dedication and accountability:** having non-social media team members performing social media roles can have noticeable risks, which stem from a lack of direct accountability and a lack of direct interest in the social media initiatives they are taking part in.
- **Quality social media content:** a high degree of integration with other organisational departments creates the risk that the social media team will be expected to promote content not aligned to social media best practice, negatively affecting the quality of the content being produced.

With the relationship between the attainment of this study's favourable characteristics of social media and a social media team's integration with other internal organisation departments established, the next section explores the relationship between these favourable characteristics and an internal approach to social media organisational structuring.

#### ***6.3.2.4 Favourable characteristics of social media and an internal approach to social media organisational structuring***

Considering the current debate regarding the choice between an internal and external approach to social media's organisational structuring, it is not surprising that this study's empirical phase uncovered a vast volume of data comparing the benefits and disadvantages of these two approaches. Although most of the data uncovered presented polarised views of the two approaches, this study opted to attempt an objective process of deriving deductions from the sample data by analysing the two approaches within the context of their relevancy with regard to the attainment of the aforementioned favourable characteristics of social media. The next two sections of this chapter unpack each approach's propensity to attain specific favourable characteristics of social media.

The following favourable characteristics of social media were noted as showing a **positive correlation** with the adoption of an internal approach to the organisational structuring of social media:

- **Brand knowledge:** due to internal resources having more streamlined access to other internal organisational departments, it is likely that internal resources will acquire a high degree of brand knowledge.
- **Industry knowledge:** due to internal social media resources' close proximity to other internal stakeholders that work within the same industry as themselves, internal social media resources have expansive industry knowledge to their disposal.
- **Dedication and accountability:** seeing as internal resources are directly employed by the organisation for which they perform social media responsibilities, it can be expected from them to have a high degree of dedication and accountability with regard to their output.
- **Time-efficiency:** the time-efficiency benefits from adopting an internal approach stem from the realisation that an internal social media custodian can cut out time spent briefing external resources, which can prove to be a timeous task due to external resources usually not having intricate and detailed knowledge of the brand's products, services and overall industry landscape.
- **Visibility:** the close proximity of an internal social media naturally leads to them having a high degree of organisational visibility.
- **Control and ownership:** the close proximity of an internal social media team also allows an internal custodian of social media to have a high degree of control over the resources that manage the brand's social media output.
- **Support and advocacy:** the close proximity of an internal social media team also allows them the opportunity to actively nature support and advocacy for the organisation's social media initiatives.

The following favourable characteristics of social media were noted as showing a **negative correlation** with the adoption of an internal approach to the organisational structuring of social media:

- **Social media expertise:** an internal social media team can be less abreast with the latest trends related to social media within a marketing communication context. This is due to an internal social media team having limited opportunities for improving their social media capabilities by means of knowledge sharing with broader organisational members.
- **Social media content quality:** an internal approach to social media creates the risk of content becoming stale and dated, due to the same resources continuously working on the same brands, leaving little room for the creativity that comes with cross-brand knowledge sharing.

- **Agility:** seeing as an internal social media resource usually consists of a specific skillset that is usually not relevant to the work done by other organisational departments, it can be time-consuming to replace such a resource with an alternative. This leads to a general lack of agility in terms of overall team output in cases where a specific resource is unable to deliver.

### **6.3.2.5 Favourable characteristics of social media and an external approach to social media**

The following favourable characteristics of social media were noted as showing a **positive correlation** with the adoption of an external approach to the organisational structuring of social media:

- **Agility:** due to agencies' access to a wide base of resources with social media specific skillsets and less formalised organisational structures, they are usually regarded as being highly agile and being able to respond timeously to sudden changes that require an flexible approach to address.
- **Social media expertise:** due to agencies' focus on innovation and constant improvement (fuelled by the need to stay competitive in a highly pressured agency landscape), external social media resources naturally are exposed to up-to-date social media industry knowledge.
- **Quality social media content:** seeing as agency resources can be working on multiple brands at any given time, they usually are exposed to a broad spectrum of ways of implementing social media activities for a brand, which could lead to social media content attesting of a higher standard of quality, better strategic insight and high levels of creativity.
- **Time-efficiency:** when most social media outputs are managed by external resources to an independent level, it can lead to time saving benefits for a client who does not have capacity to manage social media responsibilities and deliverables internally.
- **Support and advocacy:** due to organisations' usually high regard for the opinions of agency resources, having an agency validate the opinion of an internal social media custodian can assist in attaining approval on initiatives that would otherwise have been dismissed by other internal stakeholders.

The following favourable characteristics of social media were noted as showing a **negative correlation** with the adoption of an external approach to the organisational structuring of social media:

- **Visibility:** the typical agency-client structure leads to clients having to liaise with an agency account manager (or client service manager), instead of the actual resources responsible for specific work output. This reduces the visibility of the external social media team.
- **Control and ownership:** due to the lack of proximity in an external approach, the process of communicating urgencies to agency resources can be challenging, complicating the process of reprioritisation an external team's workflow.
- **Tangible value:** the value that an organisation derives from certain allocated agency resources is sometimes vague, questioning the degree to which the organisation receives tangible value from those roles, seeing as its value is either not explained well, or the value is intangible compared to contributions made by other resources.
- **Conversancy:** the low proximity of agency resources makes it challenging to ensure that these resources have uninterrupted access to the most up-to-date brand information originating from the organisation internally.
- **Industry knowledge:** external resources often lack the knowledge, context and experience of the client's direct industry, due to less frequent exposure thereto within the confines of their agency.
- **Brand knowledge:** as is the case with industry knowledge, external resources have infrequent exposure to the intricacies of the brands on behalf of which they produce social media output on.
- **Dedication and accountability:** seeing as external resources are not directly employed by the organisations for which they deliver social media output, a lack of dedication and accountability can be observed amongst external social media resources.
- **Consistency:** when a designated external resource is unexpectedly unable to produce their output, it could lead to consistency issues, as the substitute agency resource is unlikely to have the same level of exposure to the brand as the unavailable resource.

With the correlations between the favourable characteristics of social media and different approaches to the organisational structuring of social media defined, a consolidated view of these correlations can now be presented.

### ***6.3.2.6 The attainment of favourable characteristics of social media's correlation with various approaches to social media organisational structuring***

The following table summarises the correlations uncovered via the research data in terms of different approaches to the organisational structuring of social media's influence on the attainment of specific favourable characteristics of a brand's social media presence:

Favourable social media characteristic	Specialisation	Centralisation	Formalisation	Integration	Internal approach	External approach
Time-efficiency	+	+			+	+
Cost-efficiency	+					
Quality social media content	+			-	-	+
Tangible value						-
Visibility			+	+	+	-
Agility	-	+	-		-	+
Brand knowledge				+	+	-
Industry knowledge					+	-
Social media expertise	+				-	+
Conversancy				+		-
Control & Ownership				+	+	-
Autonomy				-		
Support & advocacy				+	+	+
Dedication & accountability				-	+	-
Consistency	-	+				-

**Table 6.1: Correlation between different approaches to social media organisational structuring and their respective influence on the attainment of favourable characteristics of social media**

Based on the correlations noted in the preceding table, the following summarised observations of each approach to the organisational structuring of social media that the study aimed to explore (see Chapter 1, section 1.2) is now presented:

**Social media as a supportive, highly integrated internal organisational function:** A highly integrated internal approach to social media was shown to provide the opportunity for increased organisational visibility, as well as internal support and advocacy. Highly integrated internal social media custodians also claim to have more control and find it easier to keep their team members up-to-date with the latest information required to perform their duties. The quality of social media content, as well as the degree of dedication and autonomy of the social media team itself does however seem to suffer when adopting this approach.

**Social media as a separate, internal organisational function:** Of the numerous benefits observed of an internal approach, the opportunity for ensuring that social media team members have access to adequate brand and industry knowledge are some of the distinguishing

attributes that manifest with this approach. An internal approach was also shown to increase the degree of team member dedication and accountability. However, as with a highly integrated internal approach, the overall quality of social media content can suffer when adopting this approach. Other distinguishing disadvantages include a lack of social media team expertise and general agility in delivering social media outputs.

**Social media as managed by an external agency:** Of the many benefits identified as being related to this approach, the propensity for higher quality social media content, team agility and social media team expertise are the most distinguishing of positive attributes. This approach can however lead to a lower degree of internal visibility of social media initiatives, which in turn leads to difficulties with showing the tangible value of the social media team's outputs. Other noticeable disadvantages include a lack of brand and industry knowledge; lower levels of control and team member dedication; as well as a lack of overall consistency in the organisation's social media presence.

Furthermore, certain noteworthy observations regarding the contents of the table and its practical relevance are now discussed.

In cases where there was not ample data to substantiate or infer either positive or negative correlations with a specific favourable characteristic of social media, the correlations were left as undefined. This does not mean that distinct correlations between these elements do not exist in practice, but merely that this study's sample data suggested that there is not enough evidence to substantiate a clear and definite correlation.

Correlations were also noted as undefined in cases where the sample data produced highly contrasting and contradicting viewpoints regarding certain correlations. The most pertinent of these contradictions relate to the cost-efficiency of an internal approach versus an external approach to social media organisational structuring, with highly polarised views being presented by different social media custodians, as well as during the self-interview regarding whether these correlations are negative or positive amongst these two approaches to social media organisational structuring. Nevertheless, the sample data did suggest that, whether cost-efficiency correlates positively or not, is dependent on the size of the organisation. Bigger companies typically require a high degree of social media role specialisation and because of this, have the need for dedicated internal resources, instead of shared resources from an agency that works on multiple brands – an internal approach can therefore in this case, manifest a positive correlation with cost-efficiency. In contrast to this, the cost saving benefit of outsourcing social media seems to be more profound in smaller organisations, where the

organisation cannot afford to hire permanent resources to fulfil social media specific responsibilities.

It is also important to note that this study did not compare the relative degree to which certain approaches to the organisational structuring of social media positively or negatively correlate with the attainment of favourable characteristic of social media. The study merely presents two polarised states of 'wholly positive' or 'wholly negative', as there is not enough empirical data to justify a more granular scaling between the polarised descriptive states of 'positive' or 'negative'. It is however noted that, for this study to have included a specific correlation to be either negative or positive, it was required that a substantial volume of data was derived from the sample data to support such a labelling. In so doing, the study references the findings from its empirical sample data to inform a sweeping view of which correlations social media internal custodians can commonly expect to see manifested when employing certain tactics of social media organisational structuring.

It is also noted that a comparison between the amount of favourable social media characteristics that each social media approach correlates with positively or negatively does not represent a ranked perspective of the overall value of one approach above another. The relative value of one approach above another should be determined by first assessing which favourable characteristics' attainment is most significant within the unique context of the organisation in question.

As noted in this chapter as well as Chapter 5, a limitless amount of potential variables exist that influence the importance that internal social media custodians place on the attainment of one favourable characteristic above the others. For this study's findings to be useful as a guideline for an informed approach to social media organisational structuring, internal social media custodians need to first assess which favourable characteristics are most significant, based on a consideration of all unique contextual variables relevant to the organisation, its overall business strategy and its approach to social media. With these variables taken into consideration, an internal social media custodian can then reference the study's results in order to anticipate the likely opportunities and challenges that will manifest with the adoption of a particular approach to the organisational structuring of social media.

Furthermore, with a clear view of how a particular approach to social media organisational structuring is likely to manifest, it is also possible for a social media custodian to identify ways to maximise the potential benefits and negate the disadvantages or challenges related to a

specific chosen approach. In so doing, a social media custodian can prevent potentially costly mistakes and employ a more considered approach to the organisation's social media presence.

Considering this, it is noted that, for this study's contribution to social media organisational structuring theory to be practical in nature, it should include how the positive correlations of certain approaches to social media organisational structuring with favourable characteristics can be maximised, whilst the negative correlations be negated.

### **6.3.2.7 Maximising positive and negating negative correlations of favourable social media characteristics**

Although the study's sample data did not reveal an exhaustive scope of how to maximise the positive and negate the negative correlations of favourable characteristics of social media and certain approaches to the organisational structuring of social media, certain guidelines were identified that provide valuable insight to marketing communication practitioners with regard to the planning and execution of their approach to social media organisational structuring. The discussion of these guidelines are now segmented into the three approaches of which an exploration uncovered noteworthy data regarding this, namely integration, an internal approach to social media structuring and an external approach to social media.

#### **Integration with marketing, communication and broader organisation**

***Negating the negative correlation with autonomy:*** although a social media team's integration with other departments can hold a variety of benefits. One of the key concerns is that it has the potential to lead to a loss of a general sense of social media team autonomy. To negate or prevent this issue, it is suggested that a brand's social media team be positioned in both the correct horizontal and vertical hierarchy of the organisation. The correct horizontal positioning will help to ensure the necessary degree of integration with other marketing departments (in order to have social media considered in campaign planning phase) and the correct vertical positioning will ensure the necessary degree of jurisdiction to enable the social media team to deny requests from the broader organisation that are not in the best interest of the brand's social media strategy. An additional suggestion is to put in place formalised guidelines and restrictions for marketing communication messaging on social media platforms that can be communicated in the form of an approved social media strategy for the organisation.

## Internal approach to social media

**Maximising the positive correlation with time-efficiency:** in order to maximise the degree to which an internal approach to social media could lead to time-efficiency benefits, it is suggested that an organisation's social media community management responsibilities be managed by internal resources. Facilitating community management internally has the potential to improve the customer query resolution rate by cutting out steps in the query escalation process between external and internal parties, resulting in more time-efficient customer query resolution rates.

**Maximising the positive correlation with brand knowledge:** to ensure that a brand's social media team maximises the benefit of increased access to brand knowledge from adopting an internal approach, it is suggested that the organisation considers training traditional customer support staff for the purpose of social media communication management positions. This ensures that social media community managers have intricate knowledge of the brand's product and service.

**Negating the negative correlation with social media expertise:** in order to minimise the negative impact of internal resources' naturally lower levels of access to social media expertise, it is suggested that internal social media custodians promote active knowledge sharing by allowing social media team members the opportunity to present research on new social media trends to one another on a regular basis.

**Negating the negative correlation with quality social media content:** in order to negate the risk of social media content becoming stale and dated due to a lack of exposure to other industries and approaches to social media, it is suggested that internal social media custodians create a culture of regular social media team brainstorming amongst team members with different role specialisations, as to increase content diversity and reduce the degree to which content becomes repetitive.

## External approach to social media

**Maximising the positive correlation with social media expertise:** it is suggested that agencies focus aggressively on innovation in order to ensure their future livelihood and indispensable relevancy to their clients. Agencies need to have intricate knowledge of social media best practice and need to be continuously exploring new opportunities for their serviced organisations to further strengthen and improve their social media presence. It is vital that internal social media custodians closely and critically monitor their agency's performance in this regard to ensure that this important expectation is met.

**Maximising the positive correlation with quality social media content:** the research data suggested that employing differentiation and fluidity in terms of external suppliers can lead to higher quality social media content. Having more than one agency working on social media content, ensures a higher degree of content diversity and overall creativity, leading to more effective social media campaigns. Furthermore, utilising different agencies at the same time by means of a short-term service contract structure, can also lead to higher quality social media content, as it creates an atmosphere of healthy competition between agencies.

**Maximising the positive correlation with agility:** considering that the sample data accentuated the potential for increased agility as one of the key differentiating benefits of an external approach to social media organisational structuring, it is vital that organisations take active measures to ensure that this benefit manifests in the most substantial degree possible. To maximise this benefit, it is suggested that organisations make sure that their contractual agreement with their social media agency allows for flexibility and general accommodation when it comes to crisis situations. This is important, in order to allow for costings related to urgent agency outputs being managed and dealt with post the initial crisis situation, as to ensure that the handling of the urgent task itself takes priority above the payment of the work needed to fulfil the urgent need identified. Furthermore, organisations need to ensure that their contractual agreement with agencies allows for contingency and general adaptability in their approach.

**Negating the negative correlation with conversancy:** in order to minimise the degree to which an agency's lack of proximity creates challenges with regard to how frequently the external team is kept up to date with the latest pertinent brand information, it is suggested that a competent internal representative acts as the key mediator between the agency, other agency partners and the broader organisation. It is important that this resource has enough time to their disposal to keep the agency continuously informed, ensuring they always have an adequate degree of organisation-specific knowledge for the effective management of their responsibilities. This mediation role is especially crucial during the agency's initial on-boarding phase to ensure that the agency can deliver high quality, brand relevant content for the organisation as soon as possible.

**Negating the negative correlation with consistency:** to negate the potential risk of a loss of consistency when an external social media resource discontinues his/her work on a specific serviced brand, it is suggested that organisations insist that agencies present a clearly thought through contingency plan that minimises the negative impact of situations that necessitate a sudden change in team members servicing the organisation. Contingency measures can

include, but are not limited to, cross-team training workshops and inter-team meetings. The key consideration here is to ensure that a specific social media resource does not become isolated from his/her broader social media agency colleagues, which could hamper cross-account learning.

***Negating the negative correlation with tangible value:*** in order to negate this negative correlation, it is suggested that the role and activities performed by each individual member of an external social media team be clearly defined and communicated to serviced organisations, in order to illustrate the tangible value that the role provides, justifying the expenses incurred by the organisation related to that activity or role.

***Negating the overall negative impact of low proximity:*** the sample data suggested that various potential negative correlations associated with an external approach to social media stem from the lack of proximity between an organisation and the agency that manages social media responsibilities on its behalf. It is therefore suggested that internal social media custodians take active measures that increase the proximity and opportunities for direct interaction between the organisation and the agency. These include, but are not limited to, regular agency-client status meetings, arrangements to have agency members work at the client's offices, team building initiatives and so forth.

Although there is evidence of active steps that can be taken to negate the disadvantages and maximise the benefits of a certain approach, the empirical research data also delivered evidence of the value of combining more than one specific approach to the organisational structuring of social media as a way of leveraging the positive aspects of various approaches. For example, it was noted in the empirical data that, by utilising both an internal and external approach to the organisational structuring of social media, it can lead to a balance between quality social media content and time efficiency. This is due to external resourcing delivering higher quality work, whilst an internal team delivers more time efficient outputs that are time-sensitive. Furthermore, the empirical data also suggested that certain social media roles are more effective when applied to specific approaches to social media organisational structuring and therefore justifies a mixed approach. Community management is suggested to be managed in-house for its time-efficiency and brand knowledge benefits, whilst it is suggested that content creation be outsourced, due to the higher quality social media content benefit related to an external approach.

Considering the above, it is claimed that the study successfully answered the third research question, in that it showcased how the attainment of the aforementioned favourable characteristics can be used as a guideline that informs a strategic approach to social media.

With the study now having presented practical suggestions on how to optimise an organisation's informed choice of tactics with regard to social media organisational structuring, the final section of this chapter summarises the key findings in order to illustrate how the overall problem statement was addressed.

## **6.4 CONCLUSION**

### **6.4.1 Final discussion of results**

The study's first two chapters undertook a detailed exploration of how existing theory (organisational structuring, marketing communication and professional social media) could contextualise a study that aimed to add new theory regarding the organisational structuring of social media. After this exploration, it was noted that there is a noticeable lack of theoretical knowledge that can be utilised to inform a strategic approach to the structuring of an organisation's social media initiatives. With this in mind, the study's empirical process undertook an expansive process in order to directly address these theoretical gaps, by extracting sample data from real world applications of social media organisational structuring practices, as well as insights derived from the researcher himself, in his capacity as a social media marketing communication professional.

With the key aim of addressing the study's central research problem by uncovering a guideline by which internal social media custodians can better plan the organisational structuring of social media in mind, this study explored the key considerations that should influence the informed choice of a specific approach to social media organisational structuring. It was found that there is no substantial link between social media custodians' specific choice of an organisational structuring approach and the reaching of traditional or social media-specific objectives. With this avenue as a way of informing a strategic approach to social media organisational structuring eliminated, the study explored alternative avenues for answering the final research question and central problem statement. The study's proposed solution to the research problem is now presented.

It was observed that there are certain key favourable characteristics (see section 6.3.2) that the internal custodians of social media aim to attain through specific approaches to the organisational structuring of social media. The degree to which each of these desired

characteristics can be attained is contextualised or influenced (to differing degrees) by various different factors (see section 6.3.1 of this chapter). Furthermore, the relative significance or importance of these favourable characteristics differ amongst different organisations, as they are influenced by a wide degree of circumstantial variables that are limitless in potential scope. However, once an internal social media custodian has determined which favourable characteristics are most important to the organisation, the study's findings regarding the degree to which different approaches to the organisational structuring of social media influences the attainment of these favourable characteristic (see Table 6.1, section 6.3.2.6) can then be referenced to inform the most suitable approach to the organisational structuring of the organisation's social media initiatives. Furthermore, to optimise the specific approach chosen, the social media custodian can then reference the practical guidelines presented in this study (see section 6.3.2.7) to maximise the potential benefits as well as negate the potential disadvantages that are most likely to manifest when applying the relevant chosen approach to social media's organisational structuring.

With this in consideration, it is noted that the study answered the final research question and addressed this study's central research problem by identifying and discussing the key considerations that social media custodians should consider and utilise as a guideline for the planning and application of an informed approach to the organisational structuring of social media.

#### **6.4.2 Challenges identified**

The key challenge related to the study was highlighted as relating to the countless potential contextual variables that influence the relative importance of the study's identified listing of favourable social media characteristics. As mentioned, it is impossible to explore and analyse the influence of each potential eventuality and how this influences the relative significance of each favourable characteristic. This places responsibility on the social media internal custodian who plans to use the study's results as a guideline for informing a specific approach to social media organisational structuring to first critically assess which favourable characteristics are a priority, in consideration of the organisation's unique circumstances and objectives. Only once this relative significance has been determined, can the study's findings be used to inform an organisation's social media structuring approach.

### **6.4.3 Contribution of the study**

In addition to providing a practical guideline for identifying an informed approach to the organisational structuring of social media, this study also provided useful contextual insights into the key challenges faced by internal social media custodians as well as practical suggestions on how these obstacles can potentially be overcome.

It is noted that, even though this qualitative study's emergent theory regarding the organisational structuring of social media does not constitute generalisability from a statistical standpoint, there is merit to suggest that the findings are transferrable to the circumstances of other internal social media custodians. This is based on the observation that the study's key insights and overarching themes were shown to be relevant within the context of each of the social media internal custodians interviewed. The researcher's self-interview further corroborated and substantiated this conclusion. However, the provision to the degree to which this study's findings are generalisable is that the unique circumstances of an organisation will ultimately influence the general priority of different favourable characteristics of social media and therefore impact the overall approach taken.

### **6.4.4 Recommendations**

It is recommended that internal social media custodians apply the following step-by-step guidelines in order to implement an informed approach to their social media organisational structuring:

1. Identify the relative significance or priority of all possible favourable characteristics of social media, within the context of the unique circumstances and needs of the organisation.
2. Referencing this study's listing of how different approaches to social media organisational structuring impact the attainment of the prioritised favourable characteristics (see Table 6.1, section 6.3.2.6) and identify the most suitable approach to the organisational structuring of the organisation's social media initiatives.
3. Optimise the specific approach chosen by referencing this study's practical guidelines (see section 6.3.2.7) in order to maximise the potential benefits as well as negate the potential disadvantages that are most likely to manifest when applying the relevant chosen approach to social media's organisational structuring.

#### **6.4.5 Shortcomings of the study**

Although the study delivered practical insights that can assist social media custodians to apply a more informed social media strategy, the findings only addressed one of many elements necessary for the strategic implementation of professional social media. Other aspects of social media strategy that are not addressed in this study include social media content strategy, platform strategy, and influencer strategy and paid media strategy. This study's results are therefore not intended to constitute as an exhaustive guideline for professional social media strategy and it is advised that social media custodians utilise additional developing research relating to social media when planning an all-encompassing social media strategy and tactics.

#### **6.4.6 Suggested areas for future research**

Although the study's findings are of particular relevance to the organisational structuring of social media, a follow-up study could potentially explore the degree to which the findings can be made relevant to the organisational structuring of other marketing communication functions and departments, such as sponsorship, traditional marketing and public relations.

Another avenue for a potential follow-up study is an exploration of the organisational structuring of social media from the perspective of agencies and other external suppliers. Although the organisational structuring of social media agencies was covered directly via the study's self-interview process, it was only covered indirectly during the semi-structured interview process. A follow-up study that focuses more specifically on agencies' organisational structuring challenges can provide valuable additional insights into the research problem.

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## Annexure 1

### Semi-structured interview denaturalised transcribed data

#### Note:

The following structural identifiers of this annexure are introduced upfront in order to increase the general readability of the study's empirical sample data:

- **Planned questions asked by the interviewer**, originating from interview schedule (Chapter 4, section 4.4.2.3): Represented by all numbered, bolded questions in the transcribed data. Example: “**2. Describe the organisational structuring of marketing communication and its disciplines, as well as the relationship thereof with the organisation’s social media function**”
- **Follow-up, non-planned questions asked by the interviewer**, originating from the natural flow of the conversations that took place during each interview are represented by non-numbered, bolded, italicised questions. Example: “***To which degree is the social media department centralised?***”
- **All responses by interviewees** are represented by non-numbered, non-bolded text. Example: “Well, I do most of it myself, so yes. So I suppose I work on a lot of different levels”.
- **Coded terms originating** from the thematic content analysis process (Chapter 4, section 4.4.3), are represented by bolded, colour-coded text within the sample data. Terms are coloured according to the thematic grouping identified during the thematic content analysis process (Chapter 5, section 5.2.1.4).

## Interview 1

### **Broad industry Context: SA Sports**

#### **1. Describe the overall organisational structuring of the organisation and how your role is positioned within said structure**

I am the **Marketing** and Corporate communication manager, **reporting** to the CEO of the company. I am responsible for all brand communication, media liaison, PR, **marketing** and commercial coordination and sponsorship relations.

#### **2. Describe the organisational structuring of marketing communication and its disciplines, as well as the relationship thereof with the organisation's social media function**

I am part of the **marketing** and communication **department** and head up this **department**. I oversees the **marketing** and communication **strategy** and the day-to-day implementation of the **strategy**. There is a total of 3 people in this **department**, who manage all of the necessary **marketing** responsibilities for the organisation.

#### **3. Describe the organisation's social media workforce (includes internal and external resources) with regards to: number of team members, main responsibilities and the hierarchy of the team**

I have a **marketing** assistant that manages social media platforms, creates **content**, publish **content**, general maintenance on web and social. Then I also have a Suite liaison who looks after all the corporate suites in the stadiums and sells packaged deals.

#### ***How are you supported from an external perspective?***

I am **supported** from both a social media **content** production side, as well as a creative production side by **external** suppliers, with more than one **external** supplier working on social media **content** production for the brand. The **external** structure is therefore quite complex, with different **external** suppliers managing specific pockets of social media production for the brand.

#### ***Why have different agencies do different types of work for you?***

I base my choice of **external** supplier on the extensiveness and vastness of the service offered by the **agency**. This is especially important in light of minimal **marketing budgets** that can be used to outsource social media and digital work to **agencies**. The requirements fluctuate depending on the specific needs of that time.

Agencies work mostly on a **campaign-by-campaign** basis, where I brief the **agency** upfront on the specific **campaign** to be delivered. **Always-on content** social media **content**, as well as highly time sensitive **content** where there is no time for briefing an **agency**, is all produced in-house, mostly by myself.

#### **4. Describe the structuring of social media within the context of the following dimensions of organisational structure: centralisation, formalisation, specialisation and interdependence**

**Firstly, to which degree is the **department specialised** in their workings?**

I rarely stay within the constraints of my job description and perform a variety of different roles within the company. This is due to the **nature** of the sports **industry** that I work in. **Marketing** and communication **strategy** needs to be very fluid and **agile** and because of this, I need to perform a wide variety of tasks. I am also responsible for the **management** and overseeing of new opportunities for the brand. I also do annual **reports**, corporate reviews and other overarching corporate communication responsibilities.

Everything that I do on a day-to-basis, needs to be revenue driven, i.e. drive increased stadium game attendance. There are numerous ways to increase sales, which is why my job is highly varied. Nowadays, when you're selling stuff, you need become more and more creative. Because of that, my day-to-day responsibilities includes a wide variety of activities, with a low level of **specialisation**, due to the limited number of **marketing** and communication **dedicated** resources in the organisation. The world is pretty much my oyster, as long as I stay within certain ethical bounds.

*[NOTE: Respondent here explained a specific example of her job responsibilities that illustrate the vastness of her role. This example was omitted from the sample data based on it jeopardising the anonymity of the respondent.]*

**To which degree is their **interdependence** in your role?**

I am highly dependent on other employees in the organisation in order to fulfil my role on a daily basis. This leads to massive frustrations, as I need to rely on resources that don't see the **value** of **marketing** efforts and are not focussed on **marketing** objectives, to whom this probably not an objective. Some people see the **value** of this exposure, but other don't. This is a big frustration.

**To which degree is the social media **department centralised**?**

From an **internal** perspective, there is a considerable degree of **centralisation**, as all social media initiatives are managed by a small, **centralised** team with **immediate access** to one another. From an **external** perspective however, there is less **centralisation**, as different **agencies** are outsources and mandated to work on different pockets of social media business for the brand. The structure is therefore, from an overall perspective, **decentralised**.

#### **5. Describe the advantages of the current internal structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

Having a smaller **internal marketing** communication team that produces day-to-day social media **content** gives me a high level of **control** in terms of social media messaging, which would be more complex if the entire social media offering was outsourced to an **agency**. This higher level of **control**, allows me to execute social media **campaigns** in a much more consistent manner, which strengthens overall messaging strength and recall.

My multi-adaptable and wide scope of responsibility (which is split between strategic and more operational roles) is positive from a personal development perspective, as it gives me exposure to a wide variety of business roles, leading to the development of a varied skillset.

#### ***Because you are closer to the higher **management** needs of the brand?***

Well, I do most of it myself, so yes. So I suppose I work on a lot of different levels.

#### **6. Describe the disadvantages of the current internal structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

One of the disadvantages of the **internal** structure is a lack of exposure to other business fields. Because of my exclusive **internal** focus, I do not get exposed to other business fields and opportunities. Something that would happen and take place in an **agency** environment, where **agencies** are working on more than on client, across different industries.

There is an issue with **internal** under resourcing when it comes to the production of social media **content** and the **management** of social media platforms.

The reliance on such a small **internal** team for **marketing** and communication activities in the organisation also creates a massive risk for the loss of intellectual property, in the case where I would not be able to perform my duties (let's say I get hit by a bus). Because of the small **nature** of the **department**, the level of reliance on one resource to perform a wide variety of functions, puts the business at risk, as no one else in the organisation would be a suitable substitute for my position, if needed.

**7. Describe the advantages of the current external structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

I can leverage them a little bit better, due to the **nature** of the agreement that is set up. I have created an atmosphere of 'healthy competition' between the different **agencies** that service me. Because of the temporary, short-term **nature** of the service agreements put in place, it puts pressure on **agencies** to consistently perform to ensure they maintain the pockets of business currently assigned to them. This is possible because the social media work briefed to **agencies** are for specific social media **campaigns**, with **always-on** social media **content** being produced in-house by myself and my team.

***So what you are saying is there is a clear drive for agencies to continuously perform well?***

Yes, that is correct.

**8. Describe the disadvantages of the current external structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

Instead of following the current **process** of **campaign-by-campaign budgeting** for each social media **campaign**, I would suggest the setting up of a social media retainer with **agencies**, that includes a wide variety of responsibilities that the **agency** will be required to fulfil. Not doing this, you shoot yourself in the foot in terms of what you can do. Because all work is currently briefed on a **campaign-by-campaign** basis, quick-turn social media work cannot be briefed to **agencies**, as all work that needs to be costed for separately. This separate costing **process** for each piece of work to be created, leads to longer turnaround time for social media production.

***And that in turn reduces your agility, correct?***

Yes, that is correct. A retainer that accommodates a series of social media **campaigns** on a fixed basis, will allow me more **agility** in terms of our social media offering, something that is currently not possible. An '**always-on**' retainer will however lead to increased costs, which is the reason why it has not been implemented.

**9. Describe the funding availability and budgetary allocation strategy with regards to the organisation's social media initiatives**

My **marketing budget** is mandated by my superiors and gets reduced, year-on-year. I can however try and motivate for additional **budget** if needed, although this is rarely awarded. In

saying that, the **budget** that I do have, I has complete **control** over to spend and use as I see fit – as long as the **budget** can be shown to promote the bottom-line of the organisation.

***So you need to just motivate for **budget** and if it's approved, the **budget** is yours?***

Sure, in a perfect world.

**10. Describe the objectives defined for the organisation's social media initiatives and any possible obstacles or complications in reaching them**

In reality, I need to ensure that all my initiatives on social media drives increased stadium attendance. This is done by ensuring that social media drives a higher level of affinity between the brand and their intended audience, which should result in higher stadium attendance – that is actually the goal.

***And everything you do on social media needs to drive this?***

Yes, majority of what we're doing is engagement with our audience, with **content** being created in such a way as to ensure a sense of anticipation and attraction for events. The **industry** is under massive pressure, so everything we do has to be driving sales. Social media **content** is also focussed on driving one-on-one engagement, creating the impression that the social media audience has **access** and direct communication with the teams themselves.

***Are these objectives always aligned to the objectives that others want to push on social media? Is there ever a conflict between objectives?***

I think it fluctuates a lot. There are instances where other people in the organisation apply pressure to employ new tactics on social media that were seen from other brands on social media. There is a lack of interest in the brand's social media objectives (from an overall organisational perspective), which is why I do not receive frequent feedback from other members in the organisation.

***So what you're saying is that you sometimes get requests for **content** to be pushed on social that doesn't really align to you know should be happening?***

Yes, in certain cases, these tactics are not deemed to be conducive to reaching social media objectives and because of this, I then need to push back and advise my fellow employees that the approach is ill-advised. I do have the **jurisdiction** to then not employ these tactics based on my recommendation.

***One last question: does the current structure of your organisation support the fast-paced, highly dynamic nature of marketing in your industry?***

Overall, I feel that the current organisational structure gives me enough flexibility in order to meet the unique expectations of my industry. It gives me a lot more flexibility in terms of what you can do. The high level of control (and autonomy) that I have also makes it possible for me to be as agile as possible in my approach. It's going to be very hard to negotiate with an agency in a crisis situation, so I think in that regard the structure works.

## **Interview 2**

### **Broad industry Context: SA Entertainment**

#### **1. Describe the overall organisational structuring of the organisation and how your role is positioned within said structure**

So I am the social media manager of the brand, and I manage all the content that goes out on the company's social media platforms. I try to balance the campaigns that are to be pushed on social media. Pretty much everything that goes out on our social media pages. It can be anything from 2 to 55 campaigns. My job is to explain to the business: this can go out, this can't go out.

#### **2. Describe the organisational structuring of marketing communication and its disciplines, as well as the relationship thereof with the organisation's social media function**

I am part of the Digital Media team, which is now part of the marketing team. We have a brand team that is split into acquisition and retention, with campaigns being built around those two main objectives – marketing manager push the campaigns relevant to them. The DM team is seen as the 'Digital agency' of the company. The social media team are considered as the social media consultants of the organisation, with the rest of the company perceiving them as the custodians of social media for the company. The DM team sort of falls under the brand team, but are at the same time, touch point to various other teams in the organisation.

Although the team falls under the brand team, they are exposed and integrated with many other departments of the business, such as customer service, as an example.

#### ***So if you say 'we', which team members are you referring to?***

The social media team consists of 3 members: The manager and two community managers that create, plan and manage communities and liaise with the customer care team. The customer

**service** team works on social as well, but only attend to technical queries on social platforms. My team handles all **content** queries.

***I would guess your team and the customer service team work on a central system to manage queries?***

We are actually at the moment looking at a tool that both the social team and **customer service** team can work on at the same time. The technology still needs to be consolidated. It's currently difficult, but that's what we're working towards.

***Do you have any external suppliers that contribute to social media?***

We have a wide array of **external agencies**, some that have very specific deliverables and others, that offer a wider array of social media services to the company. We apply a **specialisation** approach to **agency** work, where one **agency** does very specific work. Other **agencies** however do a wide array, but are limited because of capacity, and then in such cases, work needs to be outsourced to other **agencies**. There is however one, mother **agency**, that is first choice when it comes to social media output.

***So do you try to stick to this mother agency for social media work as far as possible?***

Different **agencies** have very different ways of implementing things. The benefit of utilising different **agencies** is that it leads to higher levels of creativity, as you have different minds, working on different **campaigns**. Using more than one **agency** therefore heightens the **quality** of social media **content** output, which is an advantage for us. So I wouldn't stick to only using one **agency**. We look at changing **agencies** every 6 months or year, in order to obtain the creativity advantage noted.

***That is a very interesting point that makes a lot of sense. How closely do you work with your agencies?***

I think that are a little bit more distanced from us and work on a **campaign-by-campaign** basis, only doing work which they are briefed to do. For example, the everyday, **always-on content** does not get created by them.

***So who then creates this content? The internal social media team?***

Yes.

3. Describe the structuring of social media within the **context** of the following dimensions of organisational structure: **centralisation**, **formalisation**, **specialisation** and **interdependence**

*To which degree is the organisational structure **formalised**?*

The structure is quite formal and the social media team is segmented according to **content** types that are presented by the company to consumers. We have taken the two biggest packages and split the teams according to these product types. I would say the only time the structure changes is when there are queries around some of the other, less popular **content** packages, where the social media team then needs to step in and also answer these queries. There is therefore a certain level of fluidity to the structure, but for most part, the team sticks to the formal structure of the social team when it comes to daily responsibilities. There has to be some sort of flexibility when someone is ill.

*To which degree is the organisational structure **specialised**?*

There is also a considerable level of **specialisation** amongst team members, as the social media community managers respond to specific query types, becoming specialists in answering those queries.

My role however has to be more broadly skilled, as I need to be able to step in and assist the social media community managers.

*How dependant is the social media team on the other spheres of the organisation?*

A lot of the work done by the social media team is not governed by other **marketing departments** and they plan and produce this **content** in complete independence.

The social team does have **jurisdiction** to promote their own objectives and ideals, although, most **control** is in the hands of the broader **marketing department**, due to the high amount of **marketing campaigns** that are required to be pushed on social media platforms by the social media team. The social media team can advise though when certain **campaigns** are not suited or ideal for a specific channel.

*Are there **campaigns** though that are not under the **jurisdiction** of another **marketing department**?*

Yes, definitely there is always work we are doing that falls outside **campaigns**. So there is work that the social media team is doing that does not involve another **department**.

***Do you feel there is balance here in terms of having enough control over the content that is being pushed out?***

I think it is very much skewed towards the campaign work and at any given time there are a lot of campaigns that are running at once. Because of that, it is very difficult to start your very own social media campaign and get it off the ground. I do push back though, as we can't push each campaign on every channel. There are however some campaigns that are non-negotiable and the social media team need to support these campaigns. The team does not have total control over the content being pushed out, due to the integration with marketing.

**4. Describe the advantages of the current internal structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

Having social media team members internally, I think is very beneficial. I would love to see the social media team grow. Having it in-house, cuts down on the content production turnaround time, as an extensive agency briefing can be prevented.

**5. Describe the advantages of the current external structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

External agencies contribute in the broader scheme, as they contribute with high quality social media campaigns. It adds a fresh spin and we need it. A team in-house can't be changed every 6 months.

***So what you're saying is that it is all about maximising the benefits of having and internal team and external resources?***

Yes, exactly. This combination helps to balance two very important considerations for social media, namely time efficiency and the quality of the social media content produced.

**6. Describe the disadvantages of the current internal structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

The influence that the marketing department exerts over the social media team can lead to additional complexity, as time is wasted pushing back on campaigns that are not suited for social media. It also creates additional frustrations, as marketing managers are pushing social media strategy that is ill-advised and does not take into consideration social media best practice. People must understand and accept that the social media team knows best. Not everything needs to go out on every platform. That is a disadvantage for me and its very delicate situation.

***Any other disadvantages?***

Yes, **marketing** managers apply pressure for certain time-sensitive jobs, which, can then not be delivered on time, due to delays on **agency** side, working on multiples **campaigns** and **projects**. Having more in-house resources that can managed the broader organisation's expectations can also help with this.

Social media is often an after-thought for other members of the organisation, and because of that, social media isn't properly **integrated** with the rest of the **marketing** teams. I think that more **integration** with social media being considered in the initial planning and production **process** will improve this considerably.

***So this integration cannot however be to the detriment of the autonomy and independence of the social media team?***

Yes, other **departments** also need to **understand** that social media isn't merely a 'quick fix' when their **campaign** targets are not being met. This thinking is detrimental, as it leads to social media **campaigns** being pushed 'last minute', leading to lowers levels of success.

**7. Describe the disadvantages of the current external structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

Some **agency** resources should be moved **internally**, as to allow a focus on **always-on content** (especially media), so that non-campaign **content** can be improved in terms of **quality** as well. Our everyday **content** needs attention as well. Taking more resources in-house will also ensure that some pieces of **content** can be produced in a shorter timeframe.

***So it's about expanding your in-house team even more and making them stronger?***

Yes, that's true.

**8. Describe the funding availability and budgetary allocation strategy with regards to the organisation's social media initiatives**

Social media has **dedicated** funding that is for social media specific jobs. This has nothing to do with our **campaign** work and only looks at **always-on content**. Additional funding will also be provided by **marketing** teams for pushing specific **campaigns** on social media. The **marketing** teams therefore allocate **support** for social media as a consideration in their **campaign** financial planning.

## **9. Describe the objectives defined for the organisation's social media initiatives and any possible obstacles or complications in reaching them**

For me the main goal is **quality** engagement. As a service provider it is important that social media is used to **understand** the **content** preferences of the audience better. What do they like, what don't they want to see more. Social media therefore plays a massive role in terms of mining **quality** customer feedback that informs business decisions.

Engagement needs to be positive **nature** and is not focussed on the **customer service** issues, which should be managed by the **customer service** team. The customer care should be focussed on dealing with customer issues and queries.

***So it's not just engagement for the sake of engagement.***

Exactly.

**Content** discovery is another important objective – **content** highlights help consumers **understand** what other **content** is available for viewing, which then increases the **value** that the consumers gets from the brand. Social media is a great place for getting feedback from your customer.

Growth is not a big thing for me and we see it as a secondary objective.

***What objectives are being pushed by the broader marketing team then?***

Increased sales is part of it, product awareness, brand positioning and public relations.

**Content** discovery **campaigns** are also sometimes a focus for the broader **marketing** team and it is these **campaigns** that my team are most open to **supporting**, as they directly complement the objectives of the social media team.

*[The respondent explained a very specific example of why **content** discovery is important for the brand. Because of the specificity of the example, it jeopardises the respondent's sense of anonymity and was therefore omitted from the research data.]*

There is however sometimes a conflict, as the objectives being pushed by the broader **marketing** teams do not always align to the objectives of the social media team.

***Are the objectives being pushed by the marketing department ever contradictory to your own?***

Yes. I'm hesitating a bit to day yes, because I'm struggling to think of an example. But yes, sometimes the objectives are in conflict to such a noticeable degree, that it has a negative influence on the objectives being pushed by the social media team. In these cases, the social media team try to push back in an attempt to not hamper the progress of the social media platforms. The 'children' need to then go to 'the headmaster' and have a difficult conversation in order to resolve this.

### **Interview 3**

#### **Broad industry Context: SA Entertainment & Sports**

##### **1. Describe the overall organisational structuring of the organisation and how your role is positioned within said structure**

So the structure is a little bit more complicated, as I am part of another **department** and not a direct member of the core brand team itself. I officially fall under a **department** known as 'Digital media' (as part of the **marketing department**), who manages certain aspects of the brand's digital outputs, for example the official brand website – this includes social media, as a sub division.

##### **2. Describe the positioning of social media within the **context** of the broader organisational structure**

The responsibilities of 'social media brand manager' are divided, as there is a second social media manager that is part of the core brand team, falling under the **Marketing** and communication **department**. So the two of us basically started at the same time and have worked together ever since.

##### ***How are responsibilities then split between these two social media managers?***

The rationale for the split was based on the fact that social media in relation to the brand, plays a dual role. One where social media builds a sense of online presence and the other, around social media as a **marketing** and broadcasting function. By having this split, the organisation could ensure that an equal amount of attention could be placed into these dual roles. But since the split was initially made, the clear boundaries between the two of us have disappeared, with there actually not being a clear differentiation between the roles of the two of us anymore, as we both work towards a common goal. The split is however still formally recognised, although it isn't practically implemented. The split doesn't really mean anything anymore.

##### ***You're saying it does not influence things really anymore?***

No, not anymore.

***What are the roles of the external agency that services the brand?***

The role of the **agency** that services the brand has changed quite a lot and changed over time. Initially, their scope was limited to specific **content** production for certain **campaigns**. Literally just producing images for us. Now, the **agency's** role has evolved into a digital partnership, with the **agency** producing most **campaign content**, as well as creating most 'Always-on' day-to-day social media **content**. The **agency** does however only create **content** and final **content** publishing and approval happens within the organisation. They also do activations and web development.

***Is it therefore accurate in saying that they play a roll-out role for the brand?***

No, the **agency** also plays a strategic role in terms of **campaign** mechanics, concept and so forth. They will then come and present this back to us and assist with the roll out of the **campaign** if we approve it.

**3. Describe the structuring of social media within the context of the following dimensions of organisational structure: centralisation, formalisation, specialisation and interdependence**

The structure is highly **specialised**, with **formalised**, clearly defined roles for each of the different team members. It's also Non-**centralised**, as the team members are actually sitting in different **departments** and even different organisations. There is a high degree of **interdependence** with social media responsibilities split amongst different **departments**. Participation is also high, but the locus of decision making is very **centralised** within a restricted **internal** group.

**4. Describe the advantages of the current internal structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

So before, social media lacked **integration** into the broader **marketing** communication sphere and was not considered a priority when it came to the implementation of **campaigns**.

***Little bit of an afterthought?***

Absolutely as an afterthought, yes and that's how it was for quite a while. There wasn't really a clear digital or social aspect to a **campaign**. Since then, social media has become much more **integrated** within the organisation, with social media being a direct consideration with most **campaigns**, from the initial conceptualisation phase of the **campaign**. Since the **integration**

with the brand team however, social media is now much more **integrated**, with all **campaigns** taking an all-encompassing, 360 approach. The new structure has forced other **departments** to actively consider social media and how that consideration impacts social media. Even when the TV production company gets brief, they incorporate and consider social media into their thinking.

***Does the **integration** with broader **marketing** communication affect the social media function?***

I can imagine that happening in other organisations, but not here. The **integration** is not to the expense of a lack of **control** when it comes to the implementation of social media **campaigns**. The core social media team still has complete ownership over the brand's social media channels and have the final say around the **content** being pushed on these channels. There's no one checking our **content** calendars or anything like that. But I'm talking here specifically from my organisation's side.

There are however instances where social media will be expected to push certain direct **marketing** messages on social media platforms, as an imperative from the broader **marketing** and communication teams. But that's absolutely fine and acceptable.

***What are the roles of the various social media team members?***

The production of **agile**, relevant and engaging social media **content** (in-house, as well as **external agency** resources) and the **marketing strategy** – when specific **marketing campaigns** need to be implemented on social channels.

**5. Describe the disadvantages of the current internal structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

So the one thing we have already touch on. One of the potential disadvantages is because of the direct **integration** with **marketing** communication, there is a concern that the expectation to push direct **marketing content** on each social media platform could intensify. This means that our social media platforms can maybe become **marketing** platforms instead of editorial platforms. This, could have a negative effect on the success of the brand's social media platforms, as editorial **content** should always be the most important **content** pillar, as this **content** ensures for a highly engaged audience. That is not to however say that **marketing** does not happen on the channels currently. The approach to **marketing** is currently covert, in that messaging focusses on the **content** as a sales driver. The concern however is around pushing a more overt approach to **marketing** on the channels.

***So in saying that, what do you believe is your main objective for social media?***

Publishing the great **content** we are creating. We see ourselves as a news provider and also need to push people to watch our shows. But at the end of the day, it's all about the editorial **content**. That is where our focus lies.

**6. Describe the disadvantages of the current external structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

One of the issues with **external** resources is that of a lack of **agility** and timeliness when it comes to the production of time-sensitive social media **content**. The **nature** of the business also requires the need for considerable time spent working after-**hours** – managing after-**hours** time for **external** suppliers is a complex and time consuming **process**. The issue is however not valid within the **context** of the current **agency**, which works in a highly **agile** manner and closely with the brand team to create and produce high **quality** social media **content**. You can call them anytime and ask for something and they will assist. The time it takes to create **content** is the biggest thing for us. The degree of distance between the **agency** and the brand is also an important consideration for us, which is why the **agency** regular works alongside our team in the same office, which, in turn reduces turnaround time even more, increasing **agility**.

There has also previously been issues in that **agency** lack entrenchment into the business, working on multiple accounts and not focussed on sport and the brand itself – this is usually an issue in bigger **agencies**, where the scope of the accounts makes it impossible for **agency** resources to be **dedicated** to a specific client account. With the current, smaller **agency**, where resources are completely **dedicated** to the brand, this issue is not relevant any longer. They really know and **understand** our **content** well.

***It comes naturally to them.***

Yes, that's it. There are very few **agencies** that can give you dedicate resources There is also a concern sometimes regarding communication problems, where the expectations of the **agency** are not aligned with ours. This results in unnecessary reverts and delays, which affect the impact of time-sensitive social media **content**. It's all about the time it takes to create **content**.

***So considering these issues, why then make the decision to have agency resources at all? Why not take all social media in-house?***

There isn't really any advantage in the outsourced model and the only reason why certain elements are currently being outsourced is due to financial constraints and the costs regarding

hiring full-time **internal** staff to fulfil the function that the **agency** currently plays. You can't just go and hire 8 people.

#### **7. Describe the funding availability and budgetary allocation strategy with regards to the organisation's social media initiative**

There is **dedicated** social media and digital **budget** that gives the brand **agility** to do social media specific **campaigns**. This is especially relevant in terms of the brands 'day-to-day' social media **content**, which focusses on creating an engaging social media community.

#### **8. Describe the objectives defined for the organisation's social media initiatives and any possible obstacles or complications in reaching them**

Customer acquisition and Customer retention are always an important one. But once again, our approach is always indirect in **nature**. We try our very best not to be too direct in our approach. There are however times that we really do blatantly push product, but it's always balanced.

### **Interview 4**

#### **Broad industry Context: SA News publishing**

#### **1. Describe the overall organisational structuring of the organisation and how your role is positioned within said structure**

I am the Social media coordinator and I **report** directly to the editor-in-chief. There were talks of including a middle managerial role between the editor-in-chief and the SM coordinator, but they decided to can that. We do however have these new roles that have been incorporated, called Audience development specialists, which are on the same hierarchical level as I am, also **reporting** to the editor-in-chief. They actually wanted to make the Audience development roles higher than mine, but that never happened.

#### ***Can you describe the structure of the social media team?***

My role is the manager in the social media team, which is a sub-**department** within the editorial **department**. My role is interlaced between the news editors and the reporters. The role is completely **integrated** within the editorial staff.

#### **2. Describe the organisational structure within the context of the following dimensions of organisational structure: centralisation, formalisation, specialisation, interdependence and participation.**

#### ***To which degree is the social media team **centralised**?***

The role of Social media coordinator is shared between two company resources: One resource situated in Johannesburg and the other in Cape Town. There are the only two resources in the organisation that are completely **dedicated** to social media job responsibilities.

***Are these then the only people in the organisation **dedicated** to social media?***

Yes, but this does not however mean that these are the only two resources in the company that perform social media responsibilities within the company. Because of the **nature** of the news **industry** (the need for **agile** and **immediate** news dispersion), numerous other **internal** resources are expected to perform social media responsibilities. . All the news editors (i.e. day editors, weekend editors) are expected to plan, create and publish social media **content** on the fly in order to ensure that we can leverage news as it breaks. Because of this positioning, it is of vital importance that the social media team are not only proficient in terms of core social media skills, but also broader editorial and journalistic skills.

Because of this, the social media function of the organisation is highly **decentralised** (from a structural perspective), as to accommodate the need for various different company resources to be able to disperse breaking news on social media, at any given time. This includes live news coverage via social media channels by a network of news journalists. From a physical perspective, there is more **centralisation**, as my role is centrally situated within the editorial team, giving me streamlined and **immediate access** to other resources.

***It seems as if social media has a broad role throughout your organisation?***

Yes, it does. Social media is approached from the perspective of 'channels from which news needs to be dispersed', so when there is a valuable news story to promote, it must be pushed on all relevant channels (including social media) by the editor responsible for that news story, as per their news beat/theme.

***To which degree is your role **specialised**?***

Considering the fact there are so few resources **dedicated** to social media in the organisation, it is of vital importance that I am able to perform a wide variety of responsibilities within the organisation. I am also expected to perform certain roles which are not traditionally part of social media (i.e. the administration of social media giveaways), merely because these responsibilities are administered on social media platforms.

My roles usually include the publishing of **content** on social media, **quality control** on social media, driving traffic to other digital platforms, using social media as 'teasers' and sharing/distribution social media **content** between various news networks or individual news

brands. Another important part of my role is to determine on which platforms to share which stories when.

*[The interviewee goes on to explain an example of the importance of knowing when to share a news story and on which platforms. The example has been omitted from the sample data due to its probability of jeopardising the anonymity of the researcher.]*

**What is the degree of *interdependence* on other roles in the organisation?**

Well, you are actually very reliant on other people within the organisation. It's easy to miss things in my **industry**, especially if a specific role is understaffed. So, because of the scarce amount of resources **dedicated** to social media responsibilities, I am highly reliant on colleagues and other company resources to fulfil social media responsibilities on a daily basis. For example, the responsibility of managing and monitoring social media stories across the news network is shared with resources in news editor roles.

The organisational structure also **supports** this need for **interdependence** between myself and other members of the editorial team, ensuring quick and **immediate access** to relevant resources in the organisation, which, in turn, increases the degree of **agility** of the team and the speed by which **content** can be pushed out on social media channels. To ensure that team members not adept in managing social media communities can perform these roles, it is vital that I invest in broad team training and **information** sharing, so that these resources can be upskilled to ensure higher success rates on social media for the brand.

***It's seems like there is a lot of *integration* between you and the editorial teams, but what about the broader *marketing department* of the organisation? How closely do you work with them?***

I have limited **access** or **integration** with the **marketing department** of the organisation, but can request the **support** of the **marketing department** in certain cases. The social media team is completely removed from the organisation's **marketing department**.

***Do you think this lack of *integration* with *marketing* is bad thing?***

Yes, definitely. We should have **marketing** investing in social media. The reason for the lack of **integration** is because the company's **marketing department** perceives social media as a high risk platform for the fulfilling of **marketing** responsibilities, due to the open-ended, two-way **nature** of social media platforms. One of my suggestions would definitely be to get the line open between the social media team and **marketing** and also just to allocate some specific **budget** to social media via **marketing**.

***Do you think certain opportunities are missed because of this lack of *integration*?***

Yes, definitely.

**3. Describe the advantages of the current internal structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

I have **immediate** and streamlined **access** to other editorial team members, which ensures **content** is published as quickly as possible. I have all the resources I require to do my job **effectively** at my **immediate** disposal at any given time. I can just shout out a question in the office and someone will have the answer I'm looking for.

The organisational structure **also** ensures a higher degree of **quality control**, as I can easily review other team member's work, as well as vice versa in a highly efficient manner.

**4. Describe the disadvantages of the current internal structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

The **decentralised nature** of the SM coordinator role being split between the resource in Johannesburg in Cape Town creates communication issues. You don't always know what the Cape Town resource is up to. But in saying that, I have a highly capable and confident colleague in Cape Town, so I can basically leave my job up to him without worrying.

The lack of resources **dedicated** to social media creates an overload of work, making it difficult to manage social media responsibilities in a timeously manner. We need additional resources that specialises in closing the loop in terms of engagement with the brand's social media communities and also monitoring and managing incoming news stories and developing news stories on social media platforms. Community **management** is also a great way to listen and **understand** the needs of your audience better. Because of the fact that I'm fulfilling a role that is diverse in terms of responsibilities, additional roles that can be **dedicated** to specific responsibilities that need attention on an on-going basis will highly benefit the social media presence of the brand. The under resourced **nature** of the **department** currently leads to **quality** issues, as the resources in the **department** can't attend to all responsibilities efficiently.

The lack of **integration** with the organisation's **marketing department** is a massive issue, as it leads to social media not being used **effectively** to promote specific **marketing** objectives for the brand. I suggest a more **integrated relationship** with the company's **marketing department** as well as the resources available to the **marketing department**.

Whilst distributing social media responsibilities across the organisation does assist in lightening my **workload**, it does have the disadvantage of employees without an in-depth **knowledge** of social media performing social media roles on behalf of the organisation, which leads to a lower degree of **quality** when it comes to the **content** being published on social media channels. Also, because social media are not these resources' main responsibility, there is a lack of dedication and accountability when it comes to the performing of their social media roles, which also affects the success of the brand's social media presence negatively.

***So would then buffing up the social media team and moving all social media responsibilities to this team improve the **quality** of the work?***

Actually, yes, that would definitely help improve the **quality**.

#### **5. Describe the funding availability and budgetary allocation strategy with regards to the organisation's social media initiatives**

No, social media shares **budgets** and resources with the overarching editorial teams, and focus their efforts based on their alignment within the broader editorial team. I can however request that the **marketing department** of the organisation invest more funding into promoting certain social media **content** pieces, to specific target groups in a strategic manner.

#### **6. Describe the objectives defined for the organisation's social media initiatives and any possible obstacles or complications in reaching them**

Social media is perceived as platforms that fulfil a **content** publishing role, with the benefit of being able to disperse news stories in a cost **effective** and time saving manner. That is the main objective.

Social media enables the brand to engage with their customers/readers in open, two-way dialogue. That's why we encourage everyone to close the loop with audience members.

Social media also fulfils an income role, in that it pushes traffic to the brand's web platforms, where **content** consumption is monetised.

Another one is brand positioning and carrying the brand, establishing the brand identity in the online space. It's very important that we have visibility in the online space?

***Are there any other objectives from other **departments** that contradict with the objectives being promoted on social media?***

I need to ensure a balance between the different **content** pillars/themes being pushed on social media, ensuring that the **content** that is most relevant to the social media audience takes priority on social media channels. There needs to be balance in **content** themes, as well as a limit to the amount of **content** pushed on social media, as to ensure that **information** and news saturation does not impact the success of the brand's social media platforms. I really push a **quality** over quantity approach.

When a specific editor of a specific news beat wants to push **content** on social media that does not align to the interests of the social media community, then it is my responsibility to advise against this said **content** being pushed on social media platforms. Some of the editors request that you push news stories that are just plain boring and these cases I push back.

***Do you do any training for the rest of the organisation to educate them regarding the role of social media?***

Yes, training is very important, but I also makes use of an internship programme in order to alleviate some of the pressure on myself. These internships also help identify prospective future employees that can be considered for social media roles in the future. I also do a lot of refresher courses regarded social media in the organisation, but a lot of time, people just ignore them. There is a perception amongst the rest of the organisation that social media is a sub-par form of editorial.

## **Interview 5**

### **Broad industry Context: SA Retail**

**1. Describe the overall organisational structuring of the organisation and how your role is positioned within said structure**

I am the Group **Content marketing** manager and manage all aspects of the company's digital **marketing** and social media initiatives falls under that.

**2. Describe the positioning of social media within the context of the broader organisational structure**

Digital doesn't fall under **marketing**, but rather under the **jurisdiction** of the Chief **Information** Officer (CIO). Our structuring is different to that of most companies, as digital channels does not fall under the broader traditional **marketing department** of the organisation. 'Digital' forms part of another **department**, known as '**Information**', which makes 'Digital' part of the same group as 'IT' and 'Operations', 'Logistic **management**' etc.

### 3. Describe the organisational structuring of marketing communication and its disciplines, as well as the relationship thereof with the organisation's social media function

Except for the organisational distance in terms of structure, there is also considerable physical distance between the **marketing department** and the digital team, as the two teams work in completely separate buildings.

Traditional **marketing** focusses on **marketing** that pushes a specific product and price related to that product (i.e. Promos and offers). The reason why Digital is not part of the broader traditional **marketing department** is because a differentiated approach to selling is used, where there is a focus on increased engagement, trust as well as brand love via social channels. Our first priority is to create a **relationship** with our audience. We get people to buy in a different way. Digital therefore takes a 'softer', more indirect approach to selling (focussed on customer retention), as opposed to the hard sell approach of the traditional **marketing department**. Customer care is also a big focus on digital channels, and not in terms of traditional **marketing**. The Digital team aims to provide **value** to the consumer first, before pushing the promotion itself.

**Marketing** is segmented according to objectives and not channels. For example, although SMS **marketing** can be regarded as non-traditional **marketing**, it falls under the **jurisdiction** of the traditional **marketing department**, due to the way the channel is used to approach **marketing** initiatives (e.g. Aggressive selling). The **marketing department reports** to the Chief **Marketing Officer (CMO)**.

There is very little **integration** or alignment with the broader **marketing department**, due mainly to the organisational structuring of the organisation. Promotions are determined each month by the 'Merchandise' **department**, who utilises both **information** and **reports** from traditional and digital channels, to determine the promotions (in ranked order). Each **department** then references this **information** to determine which products to promote.

In saying that, there is still a level of **integration** between the two **departments** in terms of the types of products and promotions that are promoted at any given time, although the way they are promoted would differ.

Within the group structure, there are also separate brand teams, **dedicated** to each brand under the JD Group umbrella. Each of these brands also have their own **marketing** team, with a brand custodian as part of that team, overseeing both digital and traditional **marketing** efforts for the brand. These resources ensure that all messaging related to that brand being promoted

by the broader **marketing** and digital teams aligns to the overarching brand values and principles and that offer, pricing and promotional details are always correct.

**4. Describe the organisation's social media workforce (includes internal and external resources) with regards to: number of team members, main responsibilities and the hierarchy of the team.**

There are 10 members **dedicated** to administration duties and **Content** deployment on each of the Group's brand social media platforms. All members of the team **report** to the Group **Content marketing** manager, with there being no intermediate managers in the structure. I then **report** to the General Manager of Digital. The General Manager **reports** to the Chief **Information** Officer (CIO).

When it comes to social media, we are interested in four types of roles.

Firstly, on a junior level, there are Community/customer interaction managers (60% of team) that respond to customer queries and resolves customer issues. Community managers that perform well are considered for the more senior role of **content** manager. It is very important that the community managers not only respond to queries quickly, but also resolve queries efficiently. A response and a resolution is not the same thing.

Then, on a senior level, we have **content** managers and strategists (40% of team) where more expertise in social media is needed. Their role is focussed on creating **content** for both sales and community engagement objectives. **Content** is highly experimental and topical, to ensure high talkability through diversity of **content**. **Content** also gets changed regularly to ensure that the **content** stays fresh and interesting to consumers. We need to change our **content** quite frequently in order to ensure that it does not become stale to our audience.

Then we also have designers and animation specialists (40% of team) that create compelling, impactful creative that boosts engagement and promotes products/promos.

The ratio of community managers versus **content** creators can change based on the amount of additional temporary staff we hire to assist in times when an influx of **workload** can be expected. This is usually based on trends in consumer spending habits across the year.

**Content** plans gets brainstormed with both designer and **content** manager resources, aligned to broader agreed-upon brand **content strategy** – there is a high sense of collaboration within the team structure. We feel that this is important as ensures that both team's inputs are considered when **content** is created.

**5. Describe the structuring of social media within the context of the following dimensions of organisational structure: centralisation, formalisation, specialisation and interdependence**

***How formalised is the team structure?***

The structure is quite **formalised**, with clear hierarchy in terms of operations. The structure is however flexible in terms of responsibilities, based on the current requirements of the organisation.

***How specialised is the organisational structure of the team?***

There is a high level of **specialisation**, as resources are **dedicated** to specific resources **dedicated** to very specific social media responsibilities.

This is needed due to the high **volume** of **workload** that the team needs to manage, and is also a result of the size of the company, which requires detailed job responsibility outlining so that a level of standardisation can be achieved. This standardisation is necessary in order to create an objective and credible reference for the salary and raise expectations of specific job titles in the company. This ensures that across the entire group, salary expenses can be **controlled** and managed more **effectively**, as salary rates are fixed within certain margins for each specific type of job description.

***What degree of interdependence is there with other departments?***

Although the digital **department's** isolation from the broader **marketing department** does create distance between these two **departments**, the **integration** with brand-level resources does ensure a higher degree of **interdependence**, where the digital team needs to align and collaborate with the brand custodians of each brand on a daily basis.

***Is there any outsourcing of social media work?***

For the most part, no. Only in very specific circumstances when very specific and **specialised content** needs to be created for the social channels of the brand that cannot be produced in-house. This is however very minimal and not part of the formal functioning of the team. For most part, we do everything **internally**. We don't even have a media **agency**.

**6. Describe the advantages of the current internal structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

The separation between the traditional **marketing** and the digital **department** ensures that the digital **department** has complete **jurisdiction** on which products or promotions they push and how the messaging is formulated. This is necessary, as the Digital **department** that a 'quality over quantity' approach with their **marketing**, which means they cannot promote all the currently live promotions all at the same time. Also, it ensures that promotions are run in a way that aligns to social media best practice, as the traditional **marketing department** does not have the level of insight or experience necessary to advise **effectively** on this. This structure therefore allows the digital team to consider the fluid and ever-changing **nature** of social media platforms in their approach. Something that traditional marketers are not well acquainted with, as the **nature** of traditional **marketing** is more static in **nature**.

This lack of **integration** with **marketing** also does not lead to friction between the two **departments**, as neither **departments** determine which products are promoted (this is determined by the merchandise **department**).

Having community managers **internally**, instead of **externally** is perceived as being much more efficient. This is due to them having a better **understanding** of the brands and their products, ensuring that they can directly respond to all queries and mentions, without needing the assistance of other team members – this shortens the query resolution time substantially. This has also had the added benefit of having customers move away from using traditional customer care channels, as they can see that posting queries on social media is a truly **effective** and convenient alternative. This makes it easier to predict the **volume** of queries. Query resolution took much longer when an **agency** was handling this, as they didn't have the same degree of streamlines **access** to the necessary **information** to resolve queries as sufficiently.

The workforce is also highly flexible, due to the **nature** of employee contracts being temporary in **nature**. Because of this, the digital manager can boost the **support** of one **specialised** team (design, **content** or community **management**) in times when it is specifically needed. Resources can also be moved around in terms of the brands they are working on. Ensuring that resources 'swap' out between different brands, leads to the **content** being more creative, fresh and interesting.

There is also a cost-saving benefit in hiring community managers versus, call centre agents, as the **process** of resolving queries over the phone is much more time consuming than on social media channels (due to the need for brief communication). Having more customers use social media, therefore ensures that the company can resolve more queries and in shorter time periods.

***Why do you think this the case?***

Generally, people talk longer over the phone. Because of the effort involved with typing out a query on social media, people are usually more brief and to the point with their query than they would be over the phone.

***And in general? Does it seem to be more cost effective to have your entire social media team located in-house?***

Hiring mostly in-house resources for social media has noticeable cost and time saving benefits for the company. This is due to the company being able to save on **management** fees from **agencies**. These savings on expenditure can then be put back into the **department** itself, to create more **content** and promote this **content** by means of paid media channels. The salaries of his in-house employees are more cost **effective** than hiring **agency** resources. A lot of the services that **agencies** charge for I feel is intangible and cannot be shown to have **value** for the brand. We can use that time and money much more **effectively** in-house, delivering tangible results that contribute to the ROI of the organisation.

***So are you saying the role of an agency becomes less apparent the bigger a company becomes?***

I would be very surprised if there were other big corporates that felt that the **agency** model makes more sense from a cost saving perspective. I think when an organisation becomes a certain size, the **value** of an **agency** becomes more and more obsolete. When your company is smaller and you don't need **dedicated** resources from them, then the **agency** model might be more cost **effective**.

I also think we can be much more flexible because we manage social media in-house. The more you manage social media in-house, the more **agility** and **control** you have to identify key opportunities and mobilise the relevant groups **internally** in order to make tactical changes that speak directly to a time sensitive opportunity in the market.

Another advantage is the high degree of direct **control** and **jurisdiction** over the resources that are responsible for the output of social media. The **agency**-client structure leads to client having to liaise with an **agency** account manager, as opposed to the actual resource that is performing the social media work. This makes it more challenging for me to enact the change needed for improving the functioning of the team, as I do not have direct contact/link or **jurisdiction** over those resources.

**7. Describe the disadvantages of the current internal structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

A disadvantage of having a more efficient social media query resolution rate, is that there is no limit to the **volume** of queries that can be received on social media at any given time. With a call centre, a company can **control volumes**, as 'call waiting/queue' structures prevent this. With social media, there is no limit to the amount of queries that can be received at one given time. Digital has put the power back in to the hand of the consumer, with the brand not being able to managed the degree to which queries and complaints are received. This creates the problem that when there is a massive influx of queries (brought on usually by a specific promotion), it can be challenging to manage all queries efficiently, as the community managers can't always work fast enough to keep ahead of queries in terms of **volume**.

*[The interviewee here explains a detailed example of a recent promotion that caused a massive influx in social media query **volume** and highlights the pressure that placed on the organisation's social media team.]*

Not responding to queries on social timeously can have a negative impact on the brand, as this can lead to reputational issues for the brand. Consumer do not take into account the **volume** of queries, so when there is a huge influx of queries, it can pose a massive reputational risk for the brand.

One of the disadvantages of having **dedicated** in-house social media resources is that social media **content** runs the risk of becoming stale and dated, due to the same resources continuously working on the same brands. In **agencies**, this is less of an issue, as the structure of **agencies** allows for more fluidity in resource swapping, which helps to keep **content** fresh and new. We do however try to alleviate this issue by allowing swapping of **content** managers amongst its individual brands as well as regular **content** brainstorming between different team members, which increases **content** diversity and reduces repetitiveness. This also applies to the design work we do.

## **8. Describe the funding availability and budgetary allocation strategy with regards to the organisation's social media initiatives**

Social media has its own **dedicated budget** and because the digital team can directly show ROI in terms of their social media expenditure, **budgets** can be relatively flexible. **Budgets** are assigned by the corporate team of the group as a pool of digital **budget**. The digital team are free to use this one single pool of **budget** as they please, on a number of different specific initiatives, platforms and promotions. This flexibility allows the social media team to prioritise **budget** according to the specific tactics that are generating the highest rate of return, ensuring the best use and maximum **effectiveness** of social media for the brand.

Except for the added flexibility, there is also more **agility** to use the **budget** in the most tactical and time relevant ways possible (something that aligns to the inherent **nature** of social media platforms). For example, booking a specific trend based on competitor tracking and other time relevant events. As opposed to traditional **marketing**, where the needs for flexibility and **agility** is less important.

**9. Describe the objectives defined for the organisation's social media initiatives and any possible obstacles or complications in reaching them**

Sales and customer retention is the main objectives for social media. Social media focussed on creating brand loyalty and conversation with existing customers. Free offers and incentives helps drive loyalty in the online space.

***Is there ever a sense of friction or incompatibility between the objectives being pushed by my **marketing** and the objectives being pushed by the social media **department**?***

There was initial distrust and friction around the objectives and the way the social media team approaches their objectives (compared to traditional **marketing department**). However, the digital team have been able to show the **value** of the approach with the **reporting** they've done that relates the approach back to real ROI for the brand.

**Interview 6**

**Broad industry Context: SA Technology and telecoms**

**1. Describe the overall organisational structuring of the organisation and how your role is positioned within said structure**

So at the moment the structure works as follows. There is a CMO position that manages all **marketing** initiatives for the business. My role sits within this **marketing department**. The Digital and Direct **Marketing** manager position is part of Digital services **department** and I **report** into the Acting General Manager of this **department**. I have one **internal** team member that **reports** directly to me. She is a digital and direct **marketing** specialist that does **content** for digital and social media platforms.

The structure is unorthodox though, as me and my **content** specialist are the only employees in the entire company performing **marketing** functions that do not fall under the brand and comms team.

***That's **marketing and communication**, right?***

Yes, the brand and communication team. There is a vacancy in that team that hasn't been filled yet. Digital has been grouped as part of the 'Digital products' **department**, which I don't believe is right. Because there is 'digital' in my title, it was assumed I must be a part of the digital products team. This is wrong though and I am looking at moving my role into the brand and communication team as we can only have an **integrated** approach if I sit there.

***What are some of the challenges you face because of this?***

I'm very detached from the brand and comms team, but luckily I have wormed myself into the **process**. Segment analyses the market and comes with a **value** proposition, which is then sent to the product team that advises if it's technically possible or not. Once that has been compiled, they brief the brand & comms team. After a week or so, the rest of the business then receives the brief, which then includes the digital team. This causes a lack of **integration**, as digital isn't part of the initial **marketing** planning around a brief. I however wormed myself into the initial briefing sessions with brand and comms so that our **marketing** approach can be more aligned across channels.

***And this ensures that social media and digital is not merely an afterthought?***

Exactly, yes. What happens now is that a lot of time the brand and comms team will realise that a certain **campaign** is best pushed on digital, which makes them not waste **budget** on unsuitable platforms. The cost-saving benefit of digital is often used here as substantiation. This way, digital is pushed as a priority channel for **marketing** activities.

***What happens when you are not part of that initial briefing? Would some **campaigns** go live on social media that shouldn't?***

It has happened in the past, yes, but it has been reduced substantially. **Campaigns** are designed for traditional media in mind first and then needs to be retro-fitted for social media, instead of them being designed with social media being considered upfront. This affects the success of these **campaigns** on social media platforms. However it has changed a lot, because we have gotten involved much earlier in the **process**. This allows me to raise concern if certain digital channels are being advised that are not suitable for the **campaign**. That negative impact has definitely been reduced.

***Any other disadvantages of the current **internal** structure?***

Another disadvantage of this approach is that there is a complex **process** involved in getting new social media **campaigns** or initiatives approved, which can cause massive time delays.

**2. Describe the structuring of social media within the context of the following dimensions of organisational structure: centralisation, formalisation, specialisation and interdependence**

*How **specialised** and formal is the structure?*

The structure is highly **specialised**, but with my role, there is less **specialisation** as I have to have my fingers in more than one pie. The structure is also highly formal, but includes informal **relationships** which enables me to have social media considered up-front, making the social media team more **agile** and responsive to business's requirements.

*And **centralised**?*

The structure is not as **centralised** as it should be. This is the cause of the issues with **integration** I explained earlier. I have however put measures in place to make the structure more **centralised**.

**3. Describe the organisation's approach to social media structuring within the context of the following main approaches: Social media as a supportive function that forms part of other pre-existing marketing communication disciplines; social media as a separate, but integrated internal department; as managed by another organisation or as a combination of aforementioned approaches**

The Digital team were initially 9 people, but since then, the structure has changed and we are now only 2 people in the digital **department**.

Because of the minimal **internal** resources **dedicated** to social media responsibilities, I rely heavily on my **dedicated** and **specialised** agency to plan, action and **report** on a variety of social media **campaigns** and **always-on**, day-to-day **content**. It is extremely important that the **agency** is highly **agile**, as the **volume** of work is high and the turnaround time for work is very short.

Because of this high **volume** of work, there is a highly complex and well-resourced team that assists me, which includes Client Service roles, technical (development), **strategy**, **reporting**, media, analytics, as well as a team of social media specialists who are managed by a social media account lead.

Further than that, we have an entire social media complement. So we have a Social Media Account Lead, who heads up the team; we have a Brand Manager who is the main **Content**

planner and team manager. Then we've got 3 Community managers that are **specialised**, per social media platform, in order to manage the high **volume** of work on a daily basis. One was supposed to focus on **content** production, but has been forced into community **management** due to the high **volume** of queries we have been receiving.

The social media team are intended to exclusively work on **marketing** and communication work, but because of a lack of **internal customer service** resources, the **social** media team at **agency** need to fulfil a very important and direct **customer service** role. The plan is however for the **customer service** element of work to be moved in-house, as this will ensure better query resolution rates, due to the **access** to customer **information** that an **internal** team will have. The social media team will then be freed up to focus on customer **relationship** building and **marketing** related responsibilities on social media platforms. If you look at our competitors, this is the one glaringly obvious issue on our side: We don't do **relationship** building on social, as we only have capacity for **customer service** work. We are also getting in a community manager resource that can work after **hours** to assist in terms of the **customer service** backlog, as we don't do **customer service** over weekends.

To put it into a bit of an analogy for you: We are a bit like an iceberg. There is a very small piece of the team that you can see over here, but then we have a massive **agency** team that enables us to produce at the rate we do.

***Why are all of these resources located externally then? Is there a specific reason for this?***

It is much easier to motivate for **external** headcounts than **internally**, as the costs for outsourcing are highly affordable, when compared to hiring **internal** resources, as additional expenses such as bonuses, medical aid etc. do not need to be **budgeted** for. There is therefore cost-saving benefits and also has the benefit of being able to move around resources more easily, than it would be **internally**.

That doesn't however mean that there are not benefits to having **internal** resources. Having more resources located **internally** for social media would be beneficial, as work commitment, brand **knowledge** and industry **knowledge** is usually higher with regards to **internal** resources, than it is with **agency** resources. No one **understands** the brand better than the people that are directly employed by it. A larger team would also make it possible to create more visibility and presence around social media in the business, which means there will be more ownership and consideration for social media in the broader business **context**. We are however therefore trying to change the structure and this is something that we would like to push for.

***How do you then negate the complexities of having such a massive part of your team sitting outside of the company?***

I probably speak to the **agency** more than what I speak to my own husband, to be honest. Constant communication is key and we have daily informal catch-ups, formal weekly status meetings and a variety of ad-hoc meetings for specific **projects** with **agency** resources.

***So in other words, there is a system been set up where these resources are seen as external resources, but are actually treated, in many respects, the same way internal resources would be treated and interacted with?***

Exactly. In many cases, my **internal** team and I are completely detached from the **process**, with **agency** staff managing **projects** from end-to-end, fulfilling both traditional **agency** roles, as well as roles that would normally be expected to fall under the **jurisdiction** of the client. I sometimes simply don't have the time to get involved on that level. That's an example of how entrenched my **agency** is within the business.

Because of the high-**volume** of work, **agency** briefing is kept to the minimum, as the **internal** team do not have the capacity to supply the **agency** with descriptive briefs for each **project**. The **agency** therefore manages social media to a highly independent level, where many daily actions and responsibilities are actioned without any interaction needed from our side.

The massive benefit of the **agency** therefore is that they can manage and run completely independently, without the need for my direct interaction, which leads to massive time saving benefits, as I do not have capacity to manage all of these **projects**.

#### **4. Describe the disadvantages of the current external structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

I think that **processes** in the **agency** are too rigid and procedural, which causes delays in social output. Within fast-moving **nature** of my **industry**, this can become a massive obstacle, as complex **agency processes** can sometime cause work to be produced too slowly. There is no time for strict **process**. The **process** needs to be more flexible a so that it can accommodate faster turnaround times without me having to annoy people. That was probably my biggest issue with my **agency** about a year ago. I do believe it has improved.

The reliance on an **external** team for most of my output is another disadvantage. I don't like relying on **external** parties for my deliverables and I don't think anyone does. I don't have complete **control** over when work can be delivered to my superiors and other **internal**

colleagues. It is a bug bear of most people, but unfortunately because of cost issues, it's not something that is possible.

I find it difficult to communicate urgency, due to the physical distance between me and the majority of the resources that deliver my output. Especially when you need to communicate this over the phone or email. It's very difficult when you're not sitting as a team and everyone can see how everyone else is working towards an urgent objective. So what often happens when a new, urgent brief comes in, the **agency** resource will send me all other deliverables, but they won't send me that one urgent deliverable I am anxiously waiting for. They don't **understand** that this annoys me, as I'm more focussed on the urgent deliverable that I require from them. I'm not interested in you sending me anything else, other than what I have requested urgently. This comes from **agency** relying to heavily on their **internal process** that determines how and when work gets done. If we could be merged and sit in the same building, my **agency** partner will be able to see how urgent this is.

***So you're saying that reprioritisation needs to take place in order to ensure that the urgent deliverable is delivered before the other projects currently being worked on?***

That's exactly it. In a corporate, things are worst - there are many more **processes internally**. It's much worse here than it is at the **agency**. It's just strange when this is an issue with an **agency**, as **agencies** are expected to be much more **agile** and responsive.

***And what do you think is the cause of this?***

I believe the size and rapid growth of the **agency** lies at the heart of the issue, as the size of the **agency** has led to stricter **processes** and higher levels of bureaucracy. There is a lot more red tape. In saying that, I do have appreciation for the **value** and worth of certain **processes** (i.e. research phase) and I am not advising that these steps be skipped, but rather have certain steps shortened in terms of total length. Instead of spending 14 days on **strategy**, rather spend 14 **hours** on **strategy**. We must rather use smaller samples of data to shorten the **process**.

***Are you saying that agility is more important than the quality of the work produced?***

In certain cases, yes, **agility** must be the first priority. I think it's a bit of mind-set change for a lot of **agencies**. Things are very last minute in our **industry** and that's just the way things work.

**5. Describe the funding availability and budgetary allocation strategy with regards to the organisation's social media initiatives**

A **marketing budget** is assigned to me specifically to run any **campaigns** as needed for the full year. These **campaigns** are not part of other broader **marketing campaigns** and are me to spend as I see fit.

Ad-hoc media **budget** is then also received from other **marketing departments**, who set aside specific **budget** to have certain **campaigns** promoted on social media platforms. The use of this **budget** is however dictated by the **marketing** team members who are the custodians of those **campaigns**. So that's how it works.

**6. Describe the objectives defined for the organisation's social media initiatives and any possible obstacles or complications in reaching them**

I am definitely forced to do **campaigns** on social media that I have advised are not suitable for social media platforms. This happens no matter how much I push back. This is a result of the vertical hierarchy and not the horizontal hierarchy of the organisation, as my role is not positioned as a 'General Manager' and therefore needs to adhere to all requests from a General Manager level.

***So what would be a potential solve for this issue? Would a structural change fix this issue?***

The only change that will fix this issue is if I or someone in my team gets promoted to a 'Chief Digital Officer' role, which will give the digital team more **jurisdiction** to push back on **campaigns** that are not suited for social media.

**Interview 7**

**Broad industry Context: SA Technology and telecoms**

**1. Describe the overall organisational structure or structuring of the organisation and how you are positioned within said structure**

I am the Social media manager of the organisation so my main responsibility is to guide the rest of the **internal** social media team in terms of high level social media **strategy**, managing our **budgets**, managing our resources and a lot of the administrative stuff. I do not see this role as superior to that of the rest of the team, but rather fulfilling a **supportive** and guiding function. We're not an autocratic team and I try not be the be-all and end-all of the team.

**2. Describe the positioning of social media within the context of the broader organisational structure**

It started out with no real resources **dedicated** to it. As the role of social media started to develop within the company, so too did the structure and positioning of the social media **department** evolve over time. Social media first started as a sub-division of the branding **department** and has grown to become its own full-fledged, but **integrated** organisational **department**. The company has recognised that social media relates back to and affects virtually every aspect of the company and because of this, the social media team requires a high level of **integration** with the rest of the organisation (due to the need for specific **information** for **effective** community **management**). We're working with everybody in the organisation and are involved with every stage of the consumer's life cycle. Because of this, the social media team has **access** to all the different vertical and horizontal layers of the organisational structure. We're often the go-to guys when someone in the company wants to gauge the public opinion around a certain **campaign**, promotion or activation.

From a formal structuring perspective, the social media team is a separate, autonomous **department**, **reporting** directly into the board of directors. There is also a separate branding **department**, which my team works with very closely on a daily basis. The branding **department** is responsible for all digital **marketing** efforts, as well above-the-line **marketing**, like billboards. The social media team does not produce their own graphics and visuals for social – this is briefed to the branding team to be produced.

The high level of **integration** has two important functions. Firstly, it ensures the necessary **access** to other **internal** resources required to run the brand's social media platforms. It also builds more brand advocacy, by highlighting the importance of employees' social media interaction.

**3. Describe the organisation's social media workforce (includes internal and external resources) with regards to: number of team members, main responsibilities and the hierarchy of the team?**

The amount of team members are based on the various different outputs of the social media team. The team consists of 5 people, with different resources being responsible for different, core tasks or roles, although, the team focusses on cross pollination when it comes to skill development, with all members of the team having a wide range of daily responsibilities. This includes social media analytics, community **management**, influencer development, **strategy** development and so forth. Each core responsibility for each team member is determined based on their own unique skills and talents to ensure the maximum overall team efficiency.

There is therefore a high level of fluidity within the team, although primary and secondary responsibilities have been designated to specific team resources. So if one team member gets

a bit bored with one of his specific outputs, this can potentially be swapped out with another team member. One key responsibility that all team members perform on a daily basis is that of community **management**. There is also a very direct focus on **knowledge** sharing within the team, with team members working on designated **projects** and then presenting their findings back to the other team members.

Some of the current team members were originally members of the customer **support** team, which means the team has a lot of experience in managing customer queries **effectively**. The team therefore has a lot of experience with **customer service** and is a big part of the reason why the team has been so successful to date.

Some team members are situated at the head office in Johannesburg, with other team members working remotely from home (one specific team member lives and works in Cape Town). Regular visits to the Johannesburg offices, as well as electronic conferences helps to negate the disadvantages that come from having a **decentralised** team structure.

When we first formed the team and devised a team vision, we all agreed that we wanted to ensure that the future of the team was not vested into a single person. This ensures that is always a sense of contingency in the way we work and function as a **department**.

***Is the brand being supported by means of any external resources currently?***

No, not at the moment.

***Why is that?***

I have had **agencies** come and pitch for our social media business before and the costs have always seemed much higher to me from an **agency** side than running it **internally**.

I also think that hiring **agency** resources will lead to a loss of the essence of the brand voice, something that is easier to maintain and manage via an **internal** team of social media resources. What always scares me is that the **agencies** I've met with are so confident that can capture what your brand is about. **Effectively** training a new **internal** resource in terms of ensuring an accurate representation of the brand voice and brand personality is less time consuming. I say this, because **agency** resources usually work on various different brands at any given time, which makes it more challenging to maintain the specific brand voice of each individual brand. It's very important that we have people working on the brand's social media platforms that really **understand** the **industry**. There is a uniqueness and subtlety in our current social media tone that we cannot afford to lose. It's so important to us that we speak to our clients in a way is personal and real. It's so easy to create a distance between yourself and

your community. One thing that I do believe we get right is that we really get to know our clients and customers.

*[The interviewee went on to explain a very specific example of the brand's dedication to authentic and sincere interaction with their digital audience. This has been removed from the sample data as it jeopardises the anonymity of the interviewee.]*

*[Another example was then provided that illustrates the complexity involved with an **agency** resources working on multiple brands and is therefore required to switch between different brand voices. The point made here was that this leads to inconsistencies in tone, as the community manager cannot commit and invest him or herself into one specific brand tone and voice. This has been removed from the sample data as it jeopardises the anonymity of the interviewee.]*

#### **4. Describe the structuring of social media within the context of the following dimensions of organisational structure: centralisation, formalisation, specialisation and interdependence**

##### ***To which degree is the team **specialised**?***

There is a level of **specialisation** centred around each team member having key responsibilities, but that has a natural layer of cross pollination in terms of wider social media proficiencies across team members. We also have regular **knowledge** sharing sessions set up, to ensure broader **knowledge** sharing amongst the team. If we are starting to develop a new aspect of our offering, we also make sure to introduce this to the rest of the team and give them hands-on experience thereof.

##### ***To which degree is there **interdependence** with the team and the rest of the organisational structure?***

There is also a high level of **interdependence**, as the social media team is dependent on multiple other **departments** (like the **support** and technical team) within the organisation in order to **effectively** resolve customer queries. There is also a high level of **interdependence** in relation to the branding team, for all the native and original **content** that the team produces for social media. There are however certain **departments** in the organisation that we don't deal with that much, but we still have **access** to them.

Certain measures that have been put in place do allow for the team to be more autonomous and independent. That was very much part of the philosophy of how we structured our social media **strategy**. One example is how about 60% of queries received on social media start and

end with our team, without us having to liaise with members from other **departments**. We want people to have that **immediate** satisfaction of being helped on the platform of their choice, without them being referred to another party.

When it comes to **content**, we are also relatively autonomous, although we do require the assistance of the branding **department** in terms of the design and creation of some **content** pieces. A lot of the **content** we post is curated **content** that the social media team sources themselves, without the input of the branding team. There is a lot of proactive **content** that we do on our side.

The team's vision is to become a more integral part of the rest of the organisation, to ensure that social media is seen and used a useful resource for the entire organisation. We want other people in the organisation to rely on us, not just for a yardstick, but for actually getting real insights into the work each **department** is doing, how the **departments** are perceived by our customers, but also in the company as a whole. We never want to be isolated, because we really want to work towards building more reliance on our team **internally**.

#### ***How centralised is the team?***

There is a high level of **centralisation**, with the team having **access** to each segment of the organisation. There is however a relative degree of **decentralisation** in terms of the actual social media team, as certain resources are based in Cape Town and others in Johannesburg.

#### ***Are there any challenges with some of the team members being situated in Cape Town?***

I think in the beginning, it was definitely a challenge, but I think as the team has grown, we have found a way for this to work. We have a daily Skype catch-up and may have more depending on the needs of the day. Either way, we are connected the entire day, so it's feel as if the whole team is situated in the same office.

#### **5. Describe the advantages of the current internal structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

The **internal** positioning of the social media team ensures that the team can **effectively** resolve customer queries, as they have quicker and more **immediate access** to **internal** resources needed for resolving queries. This, as opposed to the **agency** model, where I believe **access** to **internal** resources due to distance limitations, is a more complex **process**.

Because of this structure that ensures the development of multi-skilled employees, it also has the benefit of ensuring a lower risk when one specific employee is unable to fulfil their

responsibilities. Other team members can easily step in to fulfil those responsibilities because they have already been exposed to those specific work outputs as part of the broader team.

## **6. Describe the disadvantages of the current internal structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

The **decentralised nature** of the social media team itself does create certain communication complexities for resources that are not situated in the Johannesburg office, where the majority of team resources are located. We do however try to negate this by means of daily electronic catch-ups, as well as visits to the Johannesburg office, by the Cape Town team.

There is also the disadvantage of it being more difficult to persuade **internal** stakeholders of the need to hire specific resources to fulfil specific responsibilities (i.e. paid media), than it is to have an **agency** run it for you as part of a combined retainer, that includes these functions as part of a packaged deal to their clients. If we are with an **agency**, certain of these initiatives would be have been a no-brainer.

Another disadvantage is the lack of **immediate knowledge** and **access** to broader social media **industry** trends, something which I would assume happens more organically in an **agency** environment, where learnings and trends across various clients and industries are shared amongst social media team members, in order to identify opportunities for growth for their brands. This is also due to the **relationships** that **agencies** have with **external industry** partners and opinion leaders, which, gives their brands **access** to exclusive opportunities. I feel that **agencies** are more **agile** in terms of recognising and identifying new social media trends, due to their natural **access** to them. We have to play a lot of catch-up and sometimes we can't get onto the bandwagon fast enough, even though we know about it.

Having only **internal** resources also leads to a lack of **access** to costly, but useful **information** and social media research, which is more cost **effective** for an **agency** to purchase, as they can share costs across various clients and even provide it as extra **value** to other clients. It's also more difficult to justify the need for this from an **internal** perspective, as our superiors don't always **understand** the **value** of said initiatives or research. Inter-**agency** sharing also contributes to **agencies** having a wide range of valuable research and expansive **knowledge** sharing. My **internal** team does however try to negate these disadvantages by ensuring active **knowledge** sharing within the team structure, where each team needs to work on certain research **projects** and present this back to the rest of the team.

## **7. Describe the funding availability and budgetary allocation strategy with regards to the organisation's social media initiatives**

Previously, there was no specific allocated **budget** for the **department** and the **department** had to motivate for **budget** on a case-by-case basis. Since 2016, my team has been receiving a **dedicated budget** pool, specifically to be used by the social media team for their own **campaigns**, competitions and **content** production. The team are then free to use this **budget** as they see fit, as long as it can be shown to contribute to ROI or other noteworthy objectives for the company.

#### **8. Describe the objectives defined for the organisation's social media initiatives and any possible obstacles or complications in reaching them**

There is a big focus on brand building and **relationship** building, which is reflected in the **content** that we push out for the brand on social media. Community **management** also has a highly personal, empathetic and intimate tone, which helps us build authentic and sincere **relationships** with our social media audience.

#### ***Is there any friction and conflict in terms of the objectives that the social media team run via social media channels?***

There is a lack of **knowledge** and **understanding** of the **value** of social media within the broader organisation. What happens a lot is that we will have managers from other **departments** expecting us to push **marketing** collateral from above-the-line **campaigns** in the exact same format on social media. We then need to explain to them that this **content** will not resonate with our audience.

Because of this, the social media team spends a lot of time educating the rest of the organisation in terms of the **value** and social media and best practice guidelines. In general though, most of the other **departments** in the organisation do not display interest in the brand's social media initiatives and only have a basic **understanding** of the functions fulfilled by the team. The team are actively nurturing a more transparent **nature** in order to give the social media team more visibility within the organisation.

We also actively attempt to show the **value** of social media for other **departments** with the hope of creating more advocacy for the brand's social media initiatives, which will hopefully lead to the organisation being more social in **nature** and having employees becoming actively involved on social media. We want the managers to **understand** how important social media are to them and how they represent themselves as part of the brand on social media platforms. Customers love having **access** to the people within the organisation and we would really like to nurture more **internal** involvement for this reason. Our main challenge is to make social media part of the lifestyle and culture of the organisation.

## Interview 8

### **Broad industry Context: SA Technology and telecoms**

#### **1. Describe the overall organisational structuring of the organisation and how your role is positioned within said structure**

I am the Central **Marketing** Organisation Lead for the organisation. Our company employs a matrix organisational structure. Our company is a subsidiary of the global group and within that subsidiary, there is a segment called '**Marketing** & Operations' and within the '**Marketing** & Operations' segment, there is a business unit named the Central **Marketing** Organisation – it is within this unit that my team exists and that I manage as team lead.

I **report** into the '**Marketing** & Operations (M&O)' lead, with the M&O Lead **reporting** into the General Manager for the Microsoft SA subsidiary. This is kind of the blueprint across the globe. Each subsidiary has a CMO **department**.

***So it's a global structuring standard that is applicable across the global organisation's operating countries?***

That is correct, yes.

#### **2. Describe the structuring of social media within the context of the following dimensions of organisational structure: centralisation, formalisation, specialisation and interdependence**

***To which degree is the 'CMO' business unit centralised?***

So the CMO **department** acts as a type of service provider to the other divisions, such as Enterprise, SMB & consumer divisions, with a '**Marketing** & communication' manager **dedicated** to servicing each segment. So we are quite tightly **integrated**. All **marketing** activities for the brand need to be channelled through the CMO **department**. No **marketing** can be done without the requesting coming through us first.

***To which degree is the department formalised in terms of the hierarchy?***

We are a matrix organisation. There is a high level of **formalisation** within the **department**. However, although certain resources **reports** directly to me, these team members do not deal with and **report** to other stakeholders within the company structure. There is a certain degree of fluidity to the structure.

***To which degree are the roles within the department specialised?***

There is a low level of **specialisation** within the **department**, with all members fulfilling a variety of different roles. It's quite complex as the team members need to service a variety of different **departments** (Enterprise, Technical, consumer etc.) within the organisation, which leads to there being quite a significant amount of variation in team responsibilities. The team markets both vertically and horizontally.

***To which degree is there **interdependence** within the **department**?***

There is a high level of **interdependence**, as the **department's** deliverables are mostly tied inherently to the specific objectives of those **departments**. The CMO team are provided **budget** by those **departments** to push these specific objectives, which leads to there being a high level of **interdependence**, as most of the work done by the CMO **department** gets briefed in by the other **departments**.

### **3. Describe the positioning of social media within the context of the broader organisational structure**

So it's quite interesting. We have recently become more aggressive in terms of our **marketing** initiatives. The responsibilities in terms of digital output have been **centralised**, compartmentalised and spread across our business unit, with each **Marketing & communication** lead having certain specific digital responsibilities that they need to fulfil and take ownership of. There is a big drive in the organisation to ensure that all leads have a certain degree of digital **jurisdiction**, as to ensure all leads have **knowledge** of the intricacies of the digital landscape.

***In saying that, is there someone within the organisation that takes lead of social media and digital media from an overarching perspective?***

Yes, the accountability ultimately sits with me, but the various team leads are empowered when it comes to digital **knowledge** because of the structure we have.

### **4. Describe the organisation's approach to social media structuring within the context of the following main approaches: Social media as a supportive function that forms part of other pre-existing marketing communication disciplines; social media as a separate, but integrated internal department; as managed by another organisation or as a combination of aforementioned approaches**

There is a global **agency** assigned to Microsoft, with the global **agency** required to have a localised presence in each operating country.

***What does the structure of the agency team servicing the brand look like?***

There is an Account manager for each different sphere of the business' **marketing** initiatives, which includes an Above-the-line Account manager, Digital Account Manager, as well as a Social Media Account Manager. It's interesting though because there are two different **agencies** responsible for Social paid media and Organic Social media or Community **management** respectively. The social media **agency** is however only responsible for community **management**, with the organic **content** and overall **strategy** being produced within the organisation.

***Why this separation between two agencies when it comes to social media?***

The justification for this split between 'Digital' and 'Social media' is related to economies of scale, with the brand receiving certain discounts due to global paid media contracts signed with the global supplier. But because the same global contracts do not apply to social media, we can justify having a separate **agency** for social media services, that specialise in this area.

***Does the above-the-line agency lead in terms of creative direction?***

9 times out of 10, creative direction comes from the above-the-line **agency** and is then dispersed to other **agencies**. When the above-the-line **agency** creates assets, they create it for both traditional and digital channels of the brand. In most cases, the Creative **Agency** gives the lead in terms of creative execution, with the Digital **agency** then providing rolled out assets based on the creative direction provided by the Creative **agency**. My **department** plays an important mediator role between the two **agencies**, ensuring that the Creative **agency** provides all necessary assets to the Digital **agency** and so forth.

Important to note that when we refer to community **management**, we do not include **content** creation with this. Social media **content** is generated in-house and the social media **agency** only does one-on-one engagement with our community. In other words, they only handle the **customer service** component of social media.

***Why do you outsource customer service but not organic social media content production? What is the rationale for this split?***

The company feels that from a **customer service** perspective, the company is not yet geared to handle the **volume** of **customer service** queries in-house. So the heavy lifting needed here is outsourced.

***That is a very interesting structure and to be honest, I'm used to it usually being the other way around. How do you work around the issues usually caused by a lack of brand knowledge on the agency side when it comes to community management?***

To work around the issue of an **external** community manager not having **immediate access** to **internal** resources and query resolution **knowledge**, the **external** resource spends a considerable amount of time at the company itself, so that she can have quick **access** to the resources and **info** needed to **effectively** resolve queries. So, although the function is technically outsourced due to costing constraints (and the global mandate of staying operationally lean), the resource spends most of her time at the client. She is considered a part of the brand team. She also attends meetings here at our office.

#### **5. Describe the advantages of the current internal structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

The great thing is that it allows for widespread digital **knowledge** within the organisation. This means that when digital work gets briefed to the CMO **department**, it naturally leads to higher **quality** briefs and better planned communication and messaging via digital platforms, such as social media.

#### **6. Describe the disadvantages of the current external structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

Although the current split between digital and social media allows for more **specialised** work, it does lead to extra **relationship management** time from our side, as there are more parties to liaise with and ensure alignment between. This however stresses the need for proper planning before a **campaign** gets briefed, as this leads to faster turnaround times when the **agencies** are crafting the **campaign**.

There are restrictions that come with the social media community manager resource fulfilling a hybrid role between the **agency** and the brand itself. Because the team member is not completely part of the brand's employed team, there are limitations in terms of how the resource can be utilised, which includes handling briefing sessions independently and so forth. This means my team needs to spend additional time mediating and briefing the resource, instead of the resource being briefed directly, which would save on operational **hours** and increase efficiency.

#### ***Do you think the agency is agile enough to service you effectively?***

They are **agile**, yes, because they have to be based on the global agreement with the global **agency** that they form part of. I'm saying that, there are sometimes certain issues. **Agencies** plan their resources for servicing an account based on the **budget** that they have been given from us. These **budgets** usually only consider the 'Always-on' layer of the resources' work. Seeing as our brand also has many ad-hoc **campaigns** that need to be accommodated (which

increases **workload**), this then leads to delays from an **agency** side (as well as issues in terms of **quality**), as the initial resourcing plan does not accommodate the additional **workload** experienced. Unfortunately with all the pros, that is the one negative. Pre-planning in terms of **campaign** work is vital and **agencies** need to plan and ensure contingency measures for when the **workload** increases.

## **7. Describe the funding availability and budgetary allocation strategy with regards to the organisation's social media initiatives**

We have an '**Always-on**' **budget** for social media, which ensures that there is always some level of social media presence for the brand in the online space, allowing for consistency and preventing 'dips' in communication frequency and penetration.

There is also additional **budget** that is received from various other **departments** or product owners, who have **dedicated** a specific **budget** to pushing their **campaign** or product via social media channels. This **budget** must then be used by the CMO team to specifically push the objectives of that product or **campaign** owner.

There is therefore a certain degree of spend that my team has complete **control** over, but this additional spend needs to be used directly to promote specific objectives. This does however create an additional challenge in that there are sometimes spikes in conversation **volume** due to various **campaigns** being live at the same time. This increases **workload** for the community manager team.

## **8. Describe the objectives defined for the organisation's social media initiatives and any possible obstacles or complications in reaching them**

Objectives for social media cover a wide spectrum, from product promotion, brand affinity, awareness and sales.

Due to the complexity of both the local and global organisational structure, there is a considerable amount of pressure on my team to promote **campaigns** or initiatives on social media platforms that do not align to the social media **strategy**, certain important local market nuances, and best practice guidelines of the various channels in the social media ecosystem. But because my team are the experts and custodians of the brand's social media initiatives in the local market, we have the right to overthrow or object to any **campaign** that does not align to the social media **strategy** of the brand. 80% of the **content** we push on social media is locally produced and only 20% is part of a shared global **campaign**.

## **Interview 9**

### **Broad industry Context: SA Financial**

#### **1. Describe the overall organisational structuring of the organisation and how your role is positioned within said structure**

As Head of Brand, I am responsible for ensuring brand consistency across all communication and messaging mediums and platforms of the brand and ensuring that all communication align to the central brand identity. My role later expanded to include direct custodianship over certain key communication platforms of the brand, which include digital, paid media advertising, social media, corporate social investment and so forth.

#### **2. Describe the organisational structuring of marketing communication and its disciplines, as well as the relationship thereof with the organisation's social media function**

So Head of Brand **reports** directly the Head of **Marketing** or the CMO. The CMO then in turn **reports** to the CEO, the highest rank within the company structure.

Lower down the hierarchy, there are a few roles that **report** directly into the 'Head of Brand'. These are the CSI manager, Web/technical developer, Print/production manager, graduates and Graphic Designers. The graphic designers have a dotted line **report**, as they also work for another brand, doing both digital and print design. There is no separate between print and web design. So it's only a dotted line **reporting** and not as direct as it used to be.

Other roles that are on the same hierarchical level as the Head of brand and that **report** directly to the CMO are Head of Events, Head of **Internal** Communication, Head of Thought leadership & communication, Head of technical and creative writing and Head of PR.

#### **3. Describe the positioning of social media within the context of the broader organisational structure**

Because social media was not a consideration for the company back when the initial organisational structure was planned, it had to be accommodated within the existing structure when social media was finally being considered a channel. Because there was no real home for social media within the **marketing department**, it came to be that the responsibility and custodianship for social media fell to Head of Brand, where it now still lies.

**4. Describe the structuring of social media within the context of the following dimensions of organisational structure: centralisation, formalisation, specialisation and interdependence**

***To which degree is the structure formalised? Is there a high degree thereof?***

See, that's a tough one, but I would probably say yes. The structure is quite **formalised**, with the hierarchical chain of command being respected. In saying that, I do have direct **access** to the CEO, meaning the chain of command can be skipped in certain cases. I do not need to channel everything through my line manager in order to have **access** to other Exco members like Head of retail, Head of institutional etc. I don't have to channel everything through my line manager to get to other Exco members. So in that sense, it's relatively **formalised**.

The reason for this is to ensure quicker turnaround times within the organisation, as it is not always feasible to use the **formalised** chain of command, as this could cause certain delays. Because of the custodian role that I play across different operating countries of the brand, it is important that I am able to advise all business sections of how to best represent the brand.

***So there is a certain level of fluidity within the structure?***

Yes, there needs to be.

***How specialised is the marketing team in terms of deliverables?***

The head of each **marketing** team (events, **internal** communication, thought leadership, creative writing, PR etc.) are highly **specialised** and technical within their roles, as they are responsible for certain specific deliverables and sections of the brand's communication. The one role that is a bit of a mess is Head of Brand, as I need to interact across all the different business units, as the brand is affected by each of the various communication **departments** or sections of the brand.

Because of this, the structure is also highly **centralised**, as I needs to have **immediate access** to all other communication **departments** within the organisation. All communication initiatives need to be approved by me. There is also a high level of **interdependence**, with my deliverables being highly dependent on interaction with the other communication **departments**.

**5. Describe the organisation's approach to social media structuring within the context of the following main approaches: Social media as a supportive function that forms part of other pre-existing marketing communication disciplines; social media as a separate, but integrated internal department; as managed by another organisation or as a combination of aforementioned approaches**

Initially, there was a discussion around finding a resource to be housed **internally** that would manage the social media communities of the brand, as to fulfil the community **management** role needed. The complication came in that we struggled to find a resource with the suitable level of financial and **industry** related **knowledge** needed to fulfil the role. Because of this, it was decided to enlist the **support** of a digital **agency** in order to drive the social media presence of the brand.

***What does the team consist of that services the brand from an external perspective when it comes to social media?***

The **external** resources consist of a client service manager that attends client meeting and acts as the mediator between **internal** and **external** parties; a social media brand manager that is a senior **specialised** social media role, focussed on overarching **strategy**; community managers that do most of the **content** writing and day-to-day community **management** as well as an ORM analyst that monitors the brand in the online space and alerts the company of any reputational risks to the brand. This resources also attends client meetings on a weekly basis. There are certain junior resources here that I don't deal with as I deal with the more senior resources, like the ORM analyst and the Brand manager. Unlike the **internal** structure of the brand, the organisational structure utilised on the **agency** side is highly **specialised**, with a considerably-sized team responsible for specific deliverables each.

My role is to continuously feed the agency with up-to-date **information**, as to enable them to create high **quality** and relevant messaging for the brand in the online space. It is very important that I fulfil this role, as without this **information**, the **external** social media team are not aware of what is happening **internally** within the organisation and this affects the **quality** of the messaging produced, as well as their overall **quality** of work. I can see the difference when I have been on leave for two weeks and I go on Twitter and check the **content** being pushed out. What happens then is that there is **content** going out that is not of substance. And it's not because there's nothing going on in the business to talk about on social, it's just because it's not being communicated to the **agency**. It's definitely a two-way street, where I need to assist my **agency** and my **agency** also needs to assist me.

**6. Describe the advantages of the current external structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

The **agency** provides the benefit of having in-depth **knowledge** and experience of both the overall social media landscape, as well as the particulars of specific social media platforms. These learnings are very valuable to the brand, as we don't have that level of expertise available within the organisation.

It is also beneficial from a capacity perspective, as the **internal** team does not have the time to invest enough in social media in order to ensure it is done properly. So they also definitely help from that perspective.

## **7. Describe the disadvantages of the current external structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

The **agency** does not also **understand** the business. This is due to the **agency** not having natural **access** to all the most up-to-date **information** about the company and our plans. Because of this, they need to be fed with **information** about the company and its vision on a continuous basis. This is time consuming for our **internal** resources.

Except for that, there is also a lack of widespread **knowledge** and experience on an **agency** side with regards to the broader **industry**, as well as the specifics of the company's service offerings. This takes years to learn, which sometimes leads to lower **quality content** being produced that does not represent the brand well. It's very difficult to find a social media resource that **understands** the intricacies of the financial **industry**.

One of the noteworthy disadvantages of the high reliance on **external** resources, is that it leads to the brand being highly perceptible to changes and fluctuations experienced on the **agency's** side. An example of this is how the high turnover rate of the **agency** affects the consistency of the output of the **agency**. You just simply cannot have those many changes to who manages your brand in a short period of time. Because of the niche **nature** of the company's **industry**, there is a certain on-boarding period that is necessary to ensure that the social media resource **understands** the brand's **industry** adequately enough to create high **quality** social media **content** for the brand. Resignations, regular team instability and changes can therefore have a massive impact on the consistency and **quality** of the brand's messaging. Another disadvantage of this is that it also requires even more time from the **internal** resources at the company, as additional training and mentoring needs to take place. It really is a big issue, because the inconsistency it creates raises a big alarm bell that needs to be considered when **agency** contracts are up for renewal. **Agencies** need to find a way to ensure consistency in their service offering.

### ***What do you think is the solution for this problem?***

**Agencies** need a clearly planned contingency plan for cases when there needs to be a sudden change in the members who services a specific client. The contingency plan can include cross-team training and workshops, inter-team meetings etc. **Agency** resources cannot be too isolated and this needs to be considered.

***Were there any other disadvantages that you would like to raise?***

Our **agency** is quite bad when it comes to admin. The **agency** is not always able to accurately track and recon the **hours** that resources spend on the account, which makes it difficult for us to determine where their monthly retainer **hours** are actually being spent. This issue was aggravated when we would then request certain emergency or time-sensitive outputs and the **agency** would then push back stating that the work falls outside of the retainer **hours**, without being able to accurately show where time was spent. This causes friction and mistrust between the **agency** and ourselves. The **agency** therefore had **agility** issues, which impacted the delivery of certain time sensitive outputs.

There were also issues with negotiations regarding certain **external** costs, where there was friction around whether the costs should be paid by us, or by the **agency**. An example of this is the **agency** resources' data costs for live tweeting at an event, which I was expected to pay without this being discussed me beforehand. There needs to be a certain level of investment from the **agency** side to ensure that social media resources can fulfil their duties. Live tweeting at an event is standard procedure for a social media resource, so it is important that the **agency** enables their resources to this, without costs being inferred by the client. Social media responsibilities don't stick to office **hours** and the **agency** needs to enable their resources to be able to **effectively** work around the challenges of the **industry**, without the client being expected to resolve such issues for them.

The **value** that the brand gets from certain allocated **agency** resources are vague and puts into question if we are getting real **value** from those roles, seeing as their **value** is either not explained well, or the **value** is intangible compared to other resources. An example of this is the client service role of social media, which doesn't deliver tangible outputs for me and I'm honestly not always sure what the purpose of the role is. It is important that the client service role is clearly defined and can be shown to deliver tangible **value** back to the client, which justifies the expenses that we suffer for that resource. When I review my hour allocation per resource with the **agency**, they always want to include more client service **hours**. I'd rather have less **hours dedicated** to client service and more to the roles that I can deliver tangible outputs, such as community **management**.

***What do you think is the solution for this issue?***

It's all about the strategic **value** that I get from my client service resources. I wouldn't mind spending those **hours** on client service if the resources was providing strategic guidance. But if the resource is only communicating my requests from one party to another, I don't see the **value** thereof. Client service roles should be gatekeepers, critically analysing the briefs coming

from client and fine tuning them before they reach the resources who will be delivering the output required.

#### **8. Describe the disadvantages of the current internal structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

The company should employ a **specialised, dedicated** resource to be the custodian of social media within the organisation, instead of the current structure, where the resources that looks after social media, also has many other responsibilities not related to social media. This will help that resource have enough time to spend on **supporting** the **external** resources, which should lead to even greater results for the brand, as more **information** gets fed to the **external** team.

This role requires a highly specific skillset though, which makes it difficult to find a suitable candidate. I would suggest training up and mentoring junior resources from the **financial industry** or the **marketing industry** (i.e. graduates) so that they can be moulded to fit the requirements of such a role.

#### **9. Describe the funding availability and budgetary allocation strategy with regards to the organisation's social media initiatives**

There is a specific **budget** allocated for social media expenses from the broader **marketing department**. It is then up to me to manage that **budget** in the best way possible so that the social media presence of the brand is managed the best way possible. I then communicate the **budget** to the **agency** and it is then the **agency's** responsibility to present a proposal on how the brand must be serviced on social media via the **budget** allocated to them.

#### **10. Describe the objectives defined for the organisation's social media initiatives and any possible obstacles or complications in reaching them**

Open and honest communication with clients and other stakeholders via social media channels creates an impression of transparency and leads then to trust, which is vital for the livelihood of a brand in the asset **management industry**. Social media's primary function is to open doors of communication between the brand and its stakeholders.

Other important objectives are driving brand equity and Public Relations objectives. Social media should also drive thought leadership for the brand within their **industry**.

It's important to ensure that social media has a clear focus and isn't used for a too wide range of objectives.

## Interview 10

### **Broad industry Context: SA Arts (Events)**

#### **1. Describe the overall organisational structuring of the organisation and how your role is positioned within said structure**

I work for a company that hosts a series of different **projects** that happen over the course an annual cycle. This company has a top line Directorial team or Directorship, which basically **controls** the general direction of the company as a whole. The vertical below that consists of a series of senior managers known as the **Management** team and includes the creative head, operational manager, financial head and so forth. I am positioned within the vertical just below this vertical, as part of the Executive team, with the job title of **marketing** manager for the entire organisation. I **report** to the operational head and am on the same vertical as the following positions: Logistics manager, programme manager, office head and so forth. Most of those managers have staff **reporting** directly to them. Unlike most of these managers, I am the only manager with no permanent **support** staff working underneath me. **Marketing** starts and end with me. The total amount of permanent staff of the organisation is approximately 10, which means the organisational structure is very top-heavy.

The overall organisational structure can vary dramatically depending on the time of year. As certain **projects** increase the **volume** of work that has to be completed, there is a lot of additional staff that needs to be hired to ensure that the **project** is **effectively** executed. When our main event happens, there are more than 400 people working at the office.

#### ***Are most of these additional resources then temporary resources?***

Yes. From the day our main **project** for the year begins, there is a massive **volume** of additional staff that need to perform a variety of tasks. Some of these staff are hired for longer periods, depending on the scope of their involvement.

#### **2. Describe the structuring of social media within the context of the following dimensions of organisational structure: centralisation, formalisation, specialisation and interdependence**

#### ***To which degree is there **specialisation** in your role/department?***

Considering I am the only person with a **dedicated marketing** and communication role within the organisation, the variety of responsibilities and expected outputs for my role is very broad. Not only do I liaise with a broad range of **external** parties, but I also need to produce certain

copywriting and even design outputs for the organisation. I am also responsible for all forms of **marketing** and communication mediums and platforms: From traditional media like print and radio, to digital media, such as social media and web presence.

***Can you cope with the capacity of work that you are expected to deliver by yourself?***

I don't think there is anyone in the modern business world that would say no to additional assistance. Previously, the **marketing** team consisted of a **marketing** manager and a **marketing** coordinator, which meant it was possible to share **marketing** responsibilities between these two resources within the organisation. Since then, the **marketing** coordinator role was removed, which meant that the amount of pressure on me increased quite a bit.

For this reason, it was necessary to obtain the assistance of an **external agency** that could produce **marketing** and communication output for the company.

***To which degree is there centralisation in your role/department?***

My role is also highly **centralised**, due to the small size of the organisation in general. I also have **access** to all other members in the organisation as needed, which includes the CEO. As long as the reason for communication is reasonable and justified, my **access** is readily available.

***To which degree is there interdependence within your role?***

There is a high degree of **interdependence**, as I need to have **budgets** for **marketing** initiatives approved by more senior **management** team members. Look, in terms of approval, certain **marketing** outputs need to also be approved by certain other **management** team members, if the communication being pushed out is relevant to their responsibilities. A good example is the approval of a **campaign budget**. I can't just decide I want to use **budget** without it being approved. The need for constant communication and checking in with other team members is therefore vital. In saying that, I do appreciate the **value** of having to check in and bounce off ideas with other team members. I remember chatting to one of my suppliers and he mentioned that he has never actually met their CEO. But because of our small structure, it's very different for us and **access** to more senior resources is readily available.

**3. Describe the organisation's approach to social media structuring within the context of the following main approaches: Social media as a supportive function that forms part of other pre-existing marketing communication disciplines; social media as a separate, but integrated internal department; as managed by another organisation or as a combination of aforementioned approaches**

We are serviced by an **external agency** that were required to provide a comprehensive editorial solution to us, which consisted of a broad range of **content** production types, ranging from the initial conception of the **content**, to final rollout. They delivered a solution from A to Z and because it worked so well, we decided to continue with this structure this year. Because of the broad scope of the **agency's** involvement, the lean **internal** structure works.

***So you're saying they have become an extension of your **internal** team?***

Yes, they are unofficially considered an extension of my team, which compensates for the challenges created by the lack of an **internal support** team on my side. Also important to note is that the **agency** does not only produce work for one single **project** of the client, but has signed a three-year contract to service us for all of our various **projects**. They really do an immense amount of work for us.

We're situated in one town and the **external agency** in another, which means there is some physical distance between the two of us, which makes it difficult to have regular face-to-face meetings. To combat this though, the **agency** uses each and every opportunity possible to create visibility around who is servicing the client and producing the actual output. When we first decided to work together, the **agency** brought almost a third of the entire **agency** to our offices and we met the CEO, **project** managers, strategists and so forth. This was extremely valuable to us as a company.

***Do you know exactly which agency resources are responsible for which segment of the social media responsibilities?***

The **agency** has ensured that we know who is producing what **content** type for the brand. I always know who I'm talking to. From a social media perspective, there is a **dedicated** team for social media. There is a Head of Social media that manages the social media activities for the brand, as well as a **content** production team and community **management** team that services the brand from a social media response handling perspective. I have direct **access** to these resources, so in the case of issues arising, they can be addressed directly and therefore, more **effectively**.

***Is the agency's structure relatively **specialised**?***

Yes, there is a considerable degree of **specialisation** in the **external** social media team. Specific resources are responsible for specific social media outputs. Considering the **volume** of output and the fast, **immediate nature** of social media, the **specialisation** allows for more efficient ways of working.

***Do you see these teams more frequently the closer you get to the launch of a high profile project?***

There is a natural increase in **workload** the closer we get to the actual launch date of a specific **project**. Because of this, the **agency** also adapts by sending certain editorial team members to our offices to work more closely with the client when **workload** is at its highest. Reducing distance like this reduces approval delays and allows for more efficient output delivery, which is critical at certain key stages of a **project**. The **agency** is really **agile** and mobile in their approach, adapting to our changing needs, based on the **nature** of individual **projects**. Certain smaller **projects** obviously have smaller teams **dedicated** to them.

***Are the specific needs of the different projects part of your contractual agreement with the agency?***

Yes, seeing as the scope of the **project** influences the **workload**, it is important that the **agency** plans their servicing to us based on this fluctuating **workload** over the course of the year.

#### **4. Describe the advantages of the current internal structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

Because of the simplified organisational structure, **reporting** lines and the responsibility breakdown for each member of the organisation is very clear and transparent. This makes issue resolution easier.

#### **5. Describe the advantages of the current external structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

Because of the **dedicated**, **specialised** roles of the **external** social media team, they are able to respond to social media queries **effectively** and timeously, something I myself do not have capacity for. This leads to a more engaged, vibrant social media community for the brand, ensuring that social media can **effectively** be used for **relationship** building purposes.

The heavy reliance on an **agency** for **content** production also accommodates the sporadic **nature** of the company, caused by the **project**-based work that we need to do. Because **workload** fluctuates depending on the current timeline that a **project** is in, it is difficult to justify the permanent hiring of additional **marketing** resources that **support** me **internally**, as there won't be a consistent stream of work that justifies the resources' salary throughout the year. The **budget** and structure of the **agency** does however accommodate and consider these natural fluctuations, so that the **agency** can shuffle around their **internal** resources at key phases of a

**project** so that the increase in **workload** can be managed. The **agency** contract is set up in such a way as to accommodate flexibility and **agility** during a crisis situation, so that additional resources can be quickly mobilised to address a concern. If we had to rely on **internal** resources to address these issues, then they we not be able to address them as **effectively** as the **agency** resources would.

In saying that, **quality control** from our side is a very important consideration and we don't give our **agency** carte blanche to do as they please.

#### **6. Describe the disadvantages of the current external structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

The initial on-boarding phase of the new **agency** did create certain issues: Social **content** was produced incorrectly, or not totally aligned to our expectations. These issues have however since been eliminated or minimised, as the **agency** increased their **understanding** of the brand and have now grown accustomed to the way we do things in general.

#### **7. Describe the funding availability and budgetary allocation strategy with regards to the organisation's social media initiatives**

There isn't a specific **budget** allocation for social media initiatives. **Budgeting** for social media is managed via a combined pool of **marketing budget** that has been designated to the **external agency** to manage a specific **project** or **campaign**. Based on the outputs needed on social media by the brand, it is the **agency's** responsibility to ensure that the **budget** is spent in such a way that it ensures that social media platforms and **campaigns** are managed as **effectively** as possible within the constraints of that overall **budget**.

#### **8. Describe the objectives defined for the organisation's social media initiatives and any possible obstacles or complications in reaching them**

There are various different objectives for the various different **projects**, so it's a difficult question to answer. In saying that, the most important objectives for us are the dissemination of important **information**, ticket sales and the streamlining of the ticket sales **process**, to share unique **content** that the audience can't see anywhere else and also **relationship** building with our social media audience.

### **Interview 11**

#### **Broad industry Context: SA Software development**

**1. Describe the overall organisational structuring of the organisation and how your role is positioned within said structure**

We are software development firm and I head up business development as part of the company's senior **management**. I am part of the company's senior **management**, which is one hierarchical layer underneath the executive **management** committee, the most senior hierarchical level within the organisation. Our company is a **management**-run business. We believe that investors should be part of the **management** of the organisation. In other words, investors need to manage and run their own investments. We need to prove the **value** of our expenditure.

Within the **management** structure, there are other senior managers that all have very specific focus areas within the business that they are responsible for.

As part of my mandate as business development senior manager, I am also responsible for advertising, **marketing** and public relations initiatives of the organisation.

**2. Describe the organisational structuring of marketing communication and its disciplines, as well as the relationship thereof with the organisation's social media function**

Although I head up **marketing** and advertising for the organisation, there is no specific **marketing**, public relations or advertising **department** within the organisation, as it is a relatively new focus area for us that still needs time to develop into a **dedicated** business portfolio. Our business has mostly been driven by word-of-mouth and only recently have we focussed on sales as well as **marketing** and advertising. Because of this, the organisation's **marketing** and communication initiatives are all managed across the organisation, with different staff members having specific or broader **marketing** communication responsibilities that they need to fulfil.

***Does this approach result in social media filtering through the entire organisation?***

Yes, our approach is slightly different and we haven't taken the traditional route. We like to empower individuals to develop skills amongst a broad range of business fields and get out of their comfort zone. We also believe that this approach results in more rounded individuals that can perform a variety of different tasks.

**3. Describe the structuring of social media within the context of the following dimensions of organisational structure: centralisation, formalisation, specialisation and interdependence**

***To which degree does **specialisation** play a role within the organisation?***

Although each senior **management** member and other staff members have specific focus areas, we focus on a **strategy** of cross pollination, where staff members have a variety of tasks and responsibilities shared across the organisation. This promotes a multi-adaptable workforce that can **support** each other with regards to a variety of different tasks. Another main reason or benefit of this structure is the way in which it mitigates risk for clients. The intellectual expertise necessary to fulfil certain client responsibilities are dispersed throughout the organisational structure, making it possible to have a high level of output contingency.

***To which degree is there **formalisation** within the organisational structure?***

It's very flat, but in saying that we do have team-based or initiative-based structures in place that gives the business' organisational structure a certain degree of **formalisation**. Where team-based roles usually revolve around specific client work or client **projects**, initiative-based teams are structured around responsibilities that cut across the organisational structure – some of these initiatives are focussed on public relations and **marketing** functions. By means of this structure, we are able to identify certain champions of a cause that are best suited to drive or lead certain initiatives. This is based on their unique skillsets or interests.

***To which degree is there **centralisation** within the organisation?***

Because of the flat organisational structure, the organisation is also highly **centralised**, resulting in the entire organisation having relatively simplified **access** to each other. There is much less bureaucratic red tape.

***To which degree is there **interdependence** within the organisation?***

Because of the need for initiative-based teams to work across the organisation, there is a high degree of **interdependence**. Various team-based structures need to interact with members from other team-based structures to be able to **effectively** fulfil their responsibilities.

**4. Describe the positioning of social media within the context of the broader organisational structure**

There are broad communication guidelines that have been set out by our senior **management** team. All social media **content** being produced needs to adhere to these guidelines. It is the responsibility of each initiative-based structure to fulfil the social media related responsibilities of their particular **project** according to these communication guidelines. Most of the social media work being done is on an initiative basis and not on a team basis.

***So is most of the work being done on social media brand related?***

The main focus areas within the business that pertains to social media responsibilities are: Staff or **internally** focussed, Recruitment and Business development.

**5. Describe the advantages of the current internal structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

Probably interconnectedness. The new generation of employee prefers being hyper connected to the rest of their peers. Seeing as there is a big focus on utilising social media for **internal** purposes, social media plays an important role in creating a sense of interconnectedness amongst employees within the organisation. It also assists in connecting individuals across a wide geographical area. We even have a few social clubs that revolve around promoting the social life at the company.

***So social media is also used as a motivational and cohesion mechanism for employees?***

We also use social media to nurture stronger **relationships** and bonds amongst employees. It's really important to us.

**6. Describe the disadvantages of the current internal structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

There are no noticeable issues or drawbacks with the way in which social media is currently being managed from an **internal** perspective. The challenges around social media is minimal.

**7. Describe the organisation's approach to social media structuring within the context of the following main approaches: Social media as a supportive function that forms part of other pre-existing marketing communication disciplines; social media as a separate, but integrated internal department; as managed by another organisation or as a combination of aforementioned approaches**

We do make use of **external** resources when it comes to fulfilling specific social media responsibilities.

Firstly, there are **agencies** responsible for the design and creation of social media imagery. They are responsible for the production of graphics that we post on digital. There is also an **agency** that assists with the development of social media **content** and social media community **management** – this **agency** also manages the organisation's public relations initiatives. There are also **external** editor resources that are responsible for the writing and editing of specific priority **marketing** and public relations related **content** pieces.

***Who manages the **relationship** and **integration** of these agencies **internally**?***

As part of my responsibilities, I am responsible for managing the **relationship** with **external marketing** and communication suppliers. I also manage the flow of **information** between them, ensuring that the right **information** is provided to the right supplier at the right time to ensure **effective** social media output delivery across the organisation's supplier network.

***What type of **content** do your external agencies produce for you with regards to social media?***

We have specific streams of work that is outsourced. More **internally** focussed social media output about the organisational culture is produced in-house, produced by the employees themselves. We outsource most brand and recruitment focussed **content** to our supplier network. Approximately only 30% of the organisation's total social media output is delivered by **external** parties.

***Do you ever have social media specific **campaigns**?***

Not really, no. I don't think we've ever had that. Certain initiatives have a social media focus, but they aren't specific to social media. It's all handled as part of a broader **project**.

**8. Describe the advantages of the current external structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

The need for an **external agency** to manage our social media platforms originated from the **agency's access** to media and their expertise in media **relationships**. Social media was a natural complement to this requirement as we started to become more and more interested in promoting the business via digital channels. This why we decided to make use of the **agency** for social media output purposes.

The main reason or benefit of why we make use of the **external agency's** social media **support** is due to time constraints. **Internal** resources do not have the necessary time to adequately manage all the social media outputs required for the organisation. We do not consider the work that the **agency** provides from a social media perspective to be something that cannot be performed in-house – due to the technical **nature** of the firm, I am confident that the organisation can perform these functions **internally** as well. But because of time limitations however, this is not possible, which is why the **agency's** services are being utilised.

***Any other benefits that the agency has worth mentioning?***

One of the benefits of the agency's **support** is their **access** and focus on keeping up to date with the latest trends and movements within the social media **marketing** communication **industry**. **Access** to this **information** can be valuable to us and it manifests as an added **value** benefit of the **relationship** with the **agency**. **Information** like this is more fragmented within the organisation itself.

#### **9. Describe the disadvantages of the current external structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

The services of the **agency** with regards to a social media perspective is a costly expense for us. This certainly forms part of our consideration.

One of the key disadvantages is the presence of a sense of disconnect between the **agency** us, which results in certain social media output being delivered not aligning to our needs and expectations. Part of the reason for this disconnect is a lack of an active **management** of the **relationship** with the **agency**, which, I admit, the organisation is partly responsible for. This leads to certain opportunities not being capitalised on fully or not in a timeous manner.

#### **10. Describe the funding availability and budgetary allocation strategy with regards to the organisation's social media initiatives**

Currently, because of the fact that the social media presence and **strategy** of the organisation is still in its infancy, there are no **dedicated budgets** for social media-specific initiatives. In saying that, **marketing** initiatives do have defined **budgets** and it's up to the initiative Lead to **effectively** utilise that **budget** across various **marketing** communication tactics and platforms. Social media would form a part of this. Defining and measuring the success of our social media initiatives is of massive importance and part of how we justify spending **budget** on these platforms.

***Is the effective measurement and tracking of an agency's social media initiatives then part of the expectation to them?***

I think there is less **value** placed on that. Return for us is very indirectly measured currently. The measurement of an **agency's** performance is quite grey and needs to be paid attention to. Just generally speaking.

#### **Interview 12**

**Broad industry Context: SA Financial**

## 1. Describe the overall organisational structuring of the organisation and how your role is positioned within said structure

My role falls within a broader Group **department**, called '**Marketing** and Corporate Relations' and within this **department** there are different functions, namely **marketing**, communication, corporate relations and so forth. My role is that of General Manager of Digital **Marketing**. This role falls under the **Marketing** function, looking after social media, direct **marketing** and digital **marketing**.

## 2. Describe the positioning of social media within the context of the broader organisational structure

So let's take it one level up first. I **report** to the Head of **Marketing**, and there are various roles that **report** into me from an **internal** perspective. I have resources **dedicated** to Direct **Marketing** and then also a Head of Digital **Marketing**. From a social media perspective, there is a total of 6 people in the team. There is a 'Head of Social Media', which leads the overall social media team and also assists with crisis **management**. Underneath this role, there is a 'Head of **Content**' and a 'Head of Community **management**', with four community managers working underneath the 'Head of Community **management**'. This then means that the biggest segment of my team fulfils social media roles.

### ***Why is that?***

The reason for this is based on the high **volume** of conversation that the brand receives in the social space which needs to be actively and timeously managed. Most of our community **management** is done in-house, which is why this team needs to be so big. We started with a small team which then expanded to a much bigger team. Our social media team used to reside in a **department** called 'Digital channels' because **marketing** was too slow to pick it up as a sub-**department** of **marketing**.

### ***Did the **department's** move to **marketing** have any noteworthy influence on it?***

Massively so. Originally, the digital **marketing** function of the brand did not fall under **marketing**, but rather under 'Digital Channels'. Under this initial positioning, there was a lack of **integration** with the broader **marketing** efforts of the brand. The new positioning within **marketing** doesn't only lead to better **integration** with **marketing**, but also broader communication, which ensures that social media both **supports marketing** and communication initiatives of the brand. From our perspective, it definitely makes much more sense that it resides there.

***That this integration with marketing lead to any possible challenges for the team?***

Yes, it has. Although the better integration with marketing is mostly beneficial, it does also lead to more pressure from the broader marketing team to push specific messaging on social media channels. This, can become an issue, as there are cases where the messaging that marketing wants to push are not always in the best interest of the brand itself in that it does not always align to social media content best practice). To combat this, my team has put together a 'quality over quantity' content strategy, wherein there is a specific, but limited allocation for aggressive sales messaging. Within this grouping of content, broader marketing objectives can be promoted. Because of the limited volume, the negative effect of these messages can be negated. In so doing, a workable compromise can be achieved with the broader marketing function of the brand. The social media team also makes sure to report back to the relevant marketing team members on the performance of said content, which enables the team to optimise their content on an on-going basis, ensuring for better quality content overall.

**3. Describe the structuring of social media within the context of the following dimensions of organisational structure: centralisation, formalisation, specialisation and interdependence**

***To which degree is the social media team specialised?***

This means that the social media team is highly specialised, with each team member having specific responsibilities that need to be fulfilled on a daily basis. This specialised structure is once again necessary due to the substantial workload of the team, brought on by the substantial volume of conversations that is initiated with the brand in the online space.

***To which degree is the social media interdependent?***

Due to the need for constant alignment with marketing and communication, there is also a high degree of interdependence with the broader marketing team, as to ensure that our content being produced reflects the intent of the relevant departments. When there is a specific marketing campaign that needs to be pushed on social media, it is the responsibility of the social media team to advise and support the marketing team with how to most effectively push the intended campaign objective on social media platforms. Frequently, this includes advising on ways to make the campaign more conversational or interactive on social media platforms. We align with other departments not because it is forced upon us, but because we believe it is in the best interest of the business.

***Is this **integration** also important in terms of the general visibility of the team amongst the broader business?***

Quite right. It is also important for the social media team to constantly engage with the broader business, as to ensure that they can be recognised and respected as the custodians of social media in the organisation, acting as trusted advisors or thought leaders when it comes to any matter that involves the brand's social media platforms.

***To which degree is the social media team **centralised**?***

The team is also highly **centralised**, with the entire **marketing department** being situated in close proximity to one another, making alignment and a close working **relationship** possible for all parties involved. They can easily get up from their desks and speak to their colleagues. Facilitated by the communication team, there is also a news room team, which includes **marketing**, digital and social media resources that work as a close team in the case of any issues or crises arising.

**4. Describe the organisation's approach to social media structuring within the context of the following main approaches: Social media as a supportive function that forms part of other pre-existing marketing communication disciplines; social media as a separate, but integrated internal department; as managed by another organisation or as a combination of aforementioned approaches**

There are multiple components to consider here. From a social media perspective, there is an **external agency** that **supports** the **internal** social media team with high **quality content** production. The **external agency** also does pockets of community **management** for accounts that the **internal** team do not have capacity for. Community **management** is however weighted towards **internal** resources, based on the fact that the **internal** team knows and **understand** the intricacies of the brand much better and also has a better **understanding** of who to escalate queries to **internally** for the most **effective** possible query resolution. The **nature** of the **industry** also means that the community **management** resources have to have an intricate **understanding** of the sector.

There are also other **agencies** that could potentially assist with community **management** in times of crisis, but this is only in cases when the main social media **agency** does not have the capacity to assist the **internal** team.

The social media **agency** is also required to align and interact with the brand's other **agencies** when there is a specific **campaign** that needs to be promoted on the brand's social media pages and the **campaign** was initially led or conceptualised by another **agency**. It is then also

the responsibility of the social media **agency** to advise if certain **campaigns** are not applicable to the brand's social media pages.

The origin of the **campaign's** inception therefore determines which **agency** takes leads on that particular **campaign**. Each **agency** has a specific proficiency, which determines which types of **Campaigns** each will take lead on.

***Why not also take these functions in-house and expand your **internal** team's scope?***

Certain **content** functions are however outsourced due to the fact that it is challenging to justify an increase in head count to the top executives of the organisation, as the **value** and function of social media resources is still not common **knowledge** and always tangible to top tier **management**. There needs to be a limit to the amount of work that is in-sourced by the brand.

The social media **agency**, as with the **internal** social media team, are positioned as trusted advisors and thought leaders when it comes to social media **campaigns**. In other cases, the social media **agency** will conceptualise social media-specific **campaigns** and then be seen as the lead **agency** on that specific **campaign**.

***Are the external resources that service you on social media **dedicated** your brand exclusively?***

There is a mixed approach used, where certain resources are **dedicated** to the brand and others are shared between different accounts that the **agency** services. For most part, the community **management** resources are not **dedicated**, as we manage this in-house. On the other hand, the **content** producing resources are **dedicated** to our brand.

**5. Describe the advantages of the current internal structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

From an **internal** perspective, the **integration** with broader **marketing** also allows the brand to react more **effectively** and timeously to **marketing** issues.

**6. Describe the advantages of the current external structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

Because of the trust that the social media **agency** has built up with us, there is flexibility and accommodation when it comes to crisis situations, in that costings for urgent outputs are managed after the initial crisis, as to ensure that the task at hand is the first priority. The **agency** even includes certain tasks as **value**-adds for us and do not cost us directly for these.

## **7. Describe the disadvantages of the current internal structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

Even though social media is **integrated** with the broader **marketing** team, there are still cases where there is a noticeable lack of **integration**, especially in cases where the social media team are not included in the initial inception or briefing of a **campaign** and then only considered later in the **campaign's** life cycle. In cases like this, social media needs to then be retrofitted to accommodate the **campaign**, which in most cases affects the overall **effectiveness** of the **campaign**. Considering social media upfront with each **marketing campaign** or initiatives is however the ideal that we are working towards.

Considering the multiple **internal**, as well as **external** stakeholders when it comes to social media, the **management** of the entire network of resources can be a challenging, complex and time-consuming **process**. Trust and respect within the network is therefore key to ensuring the arrangement works for the brand.

## **8. Describe the disadvantages of the current external structuring for the organisation's social media initiatives**

Because of the size of the social media **agency** that services the brand, there are cases where the **agency** struggles to be **agile** and mobile in their approach when it comes to a reaction or solution to a crisis situation. In such cases, we will outsource the work to another **agency** within our network of suppliers.

There are certain cases where the **quality** of the **content** being produced by the **agency** is not at the exceptional level that I expect. This is something that I myself are very critical of. There are too many companies out there that are just pushing out **content** on social media for the sake of it. We see every post we push out on social media as a mini-**campaign** and needs to be considered very carefully.

We also expect and want to see a higher degree of innovation from the **agency's** side, in terms of new approaches, more objective-based **content** and so forth.

The **agency** does not have intricate **knowledge** of each and every social media platform and isn't actively trawling and looking for new opportunities for the brand to explore. This focus on innovation is a clear requirement from the **agency** side and something that needs to be focussed on much more strongly.

## **9. Describe the funding availability and budgetary allocation strategy with regards to the organisation's social media initiatives**

**Budgets** are mainly distributed from a **campaign** perspective, with the total **campaign budget** then separated into pockets of **marketing** work, based on the overall objectives and **nature** of the **campaign**. In terms of this structure, there will therefore be a specific **budget** allocated for promoting a **campaign** on the brand's social media channels.

There is also a separate **budget** that is not **campaign** based and is used to promote 'Always-on' or 'Ever Green' **content**, that is not related to a specific **campaign** and is intended to build brand affinity a long term **relationship** with our social media audience. We do have the **jurisdiction** to advise how this **budget** is spent and we only spend this **budget** on **content** that is worth promoting.

#### **10. Describe the objectives defined for the organisation's social media initiatives and any possible obstacles or complications in reaching them**

There are cases where my team will advise that a certain **marketing campaign** is not suited for promotion on social media. In these cases, our suggestion will either be overridden or respected. In any case, the social media team will always alert the broader **marketing** team of the risk involved with a specific **campaign** and if the **campaign** is implemented, provide a **report** to the relevant **department** that shows how the **campaign** performed, providing them additional insights based on that suggestion.

There is also an issue where the top executive tier of the business does not **understand** social media and its worth. My team is therefore also working on a new system that will change the way they **report** on **campaign's** performance on social media platforms, ensuring that they can translate results into tangible metrics that are understood by traditional marketers and focus on showing a tangible return on investment for the **budget** that was spent on social media for any particular **campaign**. This **project** has massive potential to better showcase the overall **value** of social media for the business and will also help to give social media more credibility within the broader **marketing** function. The ever-changing **nature** of social media and how metrics are measured also creates additional complexity, as metrics can't be completely standardized and needs to change based on how the social media landscape itself evolves and changes over time. This, compared to traditional **marketing**, where metrics and the way success is determined has stayed consistent over a much longer period of time.

## Annexure 2

### Self-interview denaturalised transcribed data

#### Note:

The following structural identifiers of this annexure are introduced upfront in order to increase the general readability of the study's empirical sample data:

- **Planned questions asked by the interviewer**, originating from the planned interview schedule (Chapter 4, section 4.4.1.4): Represented by all numbered, bolded questions in the transcribed data. Example: “**2. Describe the responsibilities of your role as ‘Head of Digital’, with particular reference to how you service the agency’s clients from a social media perspective**”
- **All responses by the researcher** are represented by non-numbered, non-bolded text. Example: “Part of my role in assisting other team members also involves up-skilling the agency’s staff in terms of digital and social media best practice, as well as new trends”.
- **Coloured-coded segments susceptible to the researcher’s identified knowledge biases** (see Chapter 5, section 5.3.2), each represented by bolded, colour-coded text within the transcribed sample data. Terms are coloured according to following representative colour groupings:
  - Knowledge bias 1:** A preferential bias towards an external approach to social media organisational structuring – **Blue**
  - Knowledge bias 2:** A bias towards specific types of social media responsibilities – **Green**
  - Knowledge bias 3:** A bias towards overall approach to professional social media – **Red**

## **1. Describe the agency's overall organisational structure and how you are positioned within this structure**

As Head of Digital for the agency, I am responsible for overseeing the digital services and activities that the agency delivers on behalf of our wide array of clients. **The agency is positioned as a fully integrated public relations agency and is split between two offices** – one located in Johannesburg and the other in Cape Town, with a relatively even split in staff numbers across the two offices. The agency's organisational structure consists of a number of different account teams, each dedicated to a specific range of clients, based on certain industry or broad business type groupings (e.g. consumer or business-to-business). Within those account teams, there are different hierarchical levels, with the lowest being an Account Assistant and the highest position being an Account Director.

My positioning within this structure is an interesting one, as I'm at the same time, part of these accounts teams, but also separate from them. **My role in overseeing Digital activities for the agency requires me to fulfil responsibilities for clients across all account teams and both of the offices of the agency.** As part of this supportive role across the agency, it is extremely important that I integrate with all staff members, across both offices.

From a hierarchical perspective, I am part of the Executive management committee of the agency, reporting directly into the CEO. **Directly underneath me, there are other digital managers and social media content creators that also fulfil roles that stretch across the agency's various account teams. Although there are employees that fulfil digital specific roles that report directly into me,** I do also have a certain level of jurisdiction over other team members that might not exclusively perform social media functions, due to my hierarchical level within the organisation as an executive management committee member. This puts me in a good position to enact and direct the actions of other staff members in order to improve the quality of the agency's digital services to clients.

## **2. Describe the responsibilities of your role as 'Head of Digital', with particular reference to how you service the agency's clients from a social media perspective**

As explained, due to my positioning within the agency, **I play a role that is quite varied in scope and extent. Also, because of my supportive function within the agency, I have roles that are both internally and externally focussed.**

Some more specific examples of my roles include: **advising clients on social media strategy and general best practice, managing and resolving potential escalations or issues relating directly or indirectly to the clients' social media presence; managing and guiding other social media team**

members responsible for specific social media output (content production, reporting, community management etc.); highlighting any tactical and ad-hoc strategic opportunities for the client in terms of their social media presence and lastly, managing and fulfilling 'Client service' responsibilities related to the agency's social media and digital revenue streams.

Although a lot of my time is spent on existing clients, I also spend time on new business pitches and tenders. The rest is spent on supporting the agency's existing clients, whether that happens by directly advising the client themselves, or assisting other team members with the work they deliver for the agency's clientele.

Part of my role in assisting other team members also involves up-skilling the agency's staff in terms of digital and social media best practice, as well as new trends.

**3. Describe the structuring of the agency's social media team within the context of the following dimensions of organisational structure: centralisation, formalisation, specialisation and interdependence**

As mentioned, there are a few team members that are dedicated to social media roles and part of my role within the agency is to manage this team.

In terms of centralisation, there are social media team members situated in the Johannesburg and the Cape Town office. Although I usually work from the Johannesburg office (based on the volume of digital revenue that comes from the Johannesburg office in comparison to the Cape Town office), I do require to fly down to the Cape Town office every now and then for new business pitches being managed by the Cape Town teams. The agency does however employ technology (such as virtual conferencing) to try and virtually increase the proximity between the Joburg and Cape Town office, as this really helps build a strong working relationship between the members of the two offices.

The structure is relatively formalised, with clear chains of command in terms of who reports into who. The social media team members underneath me need to report into me and I am responsible for assigning tasks to them. If there is any escalation from a client in terms of their performance, I need to address the issue with that resource and ensure the client's concern is addressed adequately.

Although there is a certain degree of specialisation needed within the social media team itself, the agency does have a very strong mandate for nurturing employees that are broadly skilled in terms of their capabilities and expertise, so that one team member can fulfil a variety of roles for a client and in so doing, position themselves as trusted, indispensable advisers to that client. Another reason why the social media team have broader public relations related skillsets, is so

that they can support their colleagues that are responsible for broader public relations and communication responsibilities.

The social media team members have a high degree of interdependence amongst each other, as well as with regards to the other team members that have responsibilities not specific to social media. The reason for this is that to be able to deliver specific tasks for a client, one team member usually needs the expertise and support of another. For example, when the social media content manager plans and creates a social media content plan for a client, the resource would need the assistance of the designer in order to create the final product that is to be sent to a client. The fact that team members do however get exposed to broader skills (as part of the agency mandate I mentioned earlier), does however reduce the degree of interdependence to a manageable extent in that the interdependence does not lead to unnecessary delays. The approval process for work being sent to client also leads to a certain degree of interdependence, as before a social media team member can send a specific deliverable to a client, it needs to be checked and approved by me first.

#### **4. Describe the agency's social media workforce and their relation to other departments of the agency**

The following defined roles exist when it comes to social media specific responsibilities within the agency: Firstly, there are social media community managers that are responsible for community management, content production, reporting and client services responsibilities. One resource is situated in Cape Town and the other in Johannesburg.

Then there are also designers that create the visual aspect of all social media content delivered on behalf of clients. One resource is situated in Cape Town and the other in Johannesburg.

Lastly, there are social media and broader digital managers (which I form part of), who oversee and manage the rest of the digital/social media team members. One of these resources is situated in Cape Town and the other in Johannesburg.

As noted earlier, these social media team members support other agency team members across the agency and are in an interesting position in that they deliver output across all of the agency's clients and not only a limited few, as is the case with the dedicated account teams that are managed by the various PR Account Directors.

#### **5. Describe the general advantages of an organisation enlisting the support of an external agency with regards to social media services**

From my experience, I think one of the key benefits of having an agency support a brand is that it gives an organisation a valuable external, objective perspective on the state and quality of their social media initiatives. Many times, I feel like organisations have a narrow minded view of the possibilities and purpose of their social media presence and this could lead to them missing valuable opportunities. Having that external perspective (that isn't influenced by the pressures from other internal stakeholders) can be extremely helpful.

Because there is a perception that social media agencies are experts in the field of social media marketing communication, their recommendations to clients are regarded very highly. Having an agency resource therefore back the opinion and ideas of an internal social media custodian on how to improve the social media presence of the organisation can help that custodian immensely in getting approval on certain initiatives and ideas that would otherwise not have been approved.

Also, I've found that when an agency enlists external social media support, it also helps create more balance in terms of their social media content. Many organisations don't understand that social media is about giving value to your audience – if you just bombard them with messaging about your brand and don't give them any tangible value in return, they have no reason to come back to your platforms. The two-way, reciprocal nature of social media is key to its success and organisations ignore this fact way too often.

The access to more time, is a simple, but recurring benefit when it comes to a social media agency. In many cases, the main reason why an organisation's social media presence fails, is simply because the organisation does not put enough time or effort behind it. One of the most important benefits of a social media agency is simply that it gives the organisation more manpower (and therefore also time) to dedicate to a successful social media presence.

Even though organisations have different viewpoints regarding if the agency model is more expensive than hiring internal resources, in my experience, I do definitely believe that enlisting agency support has the potential to be much more affordable than the alternative. Especially if you consider the agency's expertise, which could help clients save even more on their investment, as they can rely on the agency's experience for more informed strategic decisions, preventing potential costly mistakes.

Agencies are also a source of additional information and ideas that can be used by clients to improve their social media offering. Because agencies need to ensure that they stay competitive compared to other agencies, it is extremely important that they keep abreast of all the latest trends in the social media space. Enlisting the support of an agency therefore gives a client access to these benefits, which can be highly beneficial for the organisation.

## **6. Describe the general disadvantages of an organisation enlisting the support of an external agency with regards to social media services**

The loss or dilution of a brand's voice can be a result of an external approach to social media. Because there is a naturally lower degree of proximity between the agency and the client, it is difficult to ensure that agency resources grasp the brand voice and personality. Another issue that complicates this is the fact most agency resources are working on multiple clients, which means they are constantly jumping around between different tones and personalities, which means they might not have the time needed to craft and perfect a specific brand's voice, as well as an internal custodian could.

Agency resources are not directly employed by the clients that the agency services and because of that, there isn't always a strong sense of accountability for the work they do for a specific client. Also, because they aren't directly part of the company for which they are doing social media work, they might not have the same level of passion or commitment to seeing the organisation flourish, as would an internal social media resource.

Community management (in the form of customer service) is very difficult to effectively manage on behalf of a client, especially for brands that receive a very high volume of service related requests and queries from customers via their social media platforms. Due to the proximity issue noted earlier, agency resources can't get answers to customers' queries as quickly as an internal resource could, which leads to delays and many times, unhappy customers.

Although external support can give a client access to more time, it can also be a highly time consuming aspect in other respects: Because of the need to constantly update and keep external resources informed, the internal custodians of social media need to spend a considerable amount of time ensuring that agency resources have the latest information about the brand and its services.

## **7. What are the most important requirements or considerations for the successful external management of an organisation's social media presence (both from an agency and client perspective)?**

From an agency side, agency resources really do need to invest a lot of time in understanding the brands they manage and all of its related intricacies. Because of the low proximity handicap between an agency resource and the clients they support, agencies need to research their clients proactively as extensively as possible.

It's very important that there is complete transparency and visibility regarding what a client is paying for and what they aren't. This, is in order to protect the agency, as well as the client when there are disputes regarding when something is potentially 'out-of-scope'.

Senior agency resources need to make sure that certain clients do not get preferential treatment if the client's retainer does not justify it. Certain clients can be extremely time consuming due to the degree of reverts and relationship management required to effectively manage the account. It is important that certain clients don't get less of the agency's time, simply because other clients makes more of a 'noise'.

Agencies need to make sure they are continuously identifying new opportunities for their clients in order to ensure their ongoing indispensability. As soon as someone internally can perform the role that the agency is currently performing, then the agency's role is in jeopardy.

For an external approach to social media to work, the agency needs to build a relationship based on mutual respect with their direct clients. Although the actual social media output being delivered is very important, the agency also needs to ensure that they build and maintain strong relationships with their clients.

The quality of social media output delivered by the agency needs to attest to a consistent degree of excellence.

Clients and agency resources alike need to have a clear grasp of where the responsibilities of their agency starts and ends. Any potential confusion or misperceptions needs to be cleared up and addressed as soon as possible. This is very important for managing the relationship between agency and client effectively.

Clients and agency resources alike need to be agile and timely in their feedback to one another. For example, it does not help if an agency is expected to deliver certain output within a specific timeframe, but then the client does not adhere to the agreed upon approval timelines. Sticking to timelines are even more necessary in the social media space due the need for a high degree of timeliness with social media content, which helps to make content more relevant to its intended audience.

**8. What do you believe sets your agency apart from other agencies that deliver similar social media services to clients?**

I think my agency's grasp of the business-to-business market and how an understanding of this market should inform a brand's approach to social media is one of our key market differentiators.

We also strive to provide clients with an all-inclusive service offering, which means we can provide a broad variety of marketing communication services to clients at highly competitive rates.

Our agency's understanding of how public relations and public relations objectives can be fulfilled in the digital realm is another key market differentiator for the agency.

## **9. What are the unique challenges of managing another organisation's social media channels on their behalf?**

A lack of access to internal information can be a massive challenge for an agency. If the agency isn't constantly provided with up-to-date information about the organisation, its products and services, then we cannot effectively fulfil our roles to clients.

Because agency resources and clients have different experience levels and perspectives of how to approach social media, it is very likely that a certain level of disagreement will creep in between a client and the agency that services them. The ability to manage this disagreement in a respectful way is one of the most challenging aspects of managing a brand's social media presence on their behalf.

Agency resources can be juggling the needs and responsibilities of various different clients all at once, at any given time. Because clients don't usually have a view of the agency's workload related to other clients, they do not always show an understanding for the timelines set out by agency resources for certain deliverables.

Ensuring that certain clients aren't over-serviced and others under-serviced is a challenging balancing act that requires constant attention and management.

The constant expectation to innovate and find new opportunities for clients can be taxing and stressful on agency resources.

## **10. Describe the typical objectives that the agency aims to fulfil for their social media clients and to which degree this typically aligns to the expectations set by clients**

The objectives that we suggest to clients depends on a variety of variables that could differ dramatically from client to client. Because of this, it is extremely important that we don't take a 'one solution fits all' approach when advising clients on their objectives for social media. It is very important that we analyse and understand the business and its needs and how this informs a particular set of objectives and corresponding metrics.

Due to the nature of social media, it is sometimes extremely difficult to equate social media activities to specific broader business objectives that show tangible value to clients. The agency therefore takes great care in devising ways of show showing the business worth of the social media activities suggested to clients, as this is many times the only way to ensure the long term relevance of the agency in the client's world.

In saying that, clients do often want the agency to push certain objectives via social media platforms that do not align to the strategic suggestions of the agency. It is very important that we as an agency advise against the client's suggestions in these cases, as to protect the best interests of both the client and the agency.