

A guideline for the strategic implementation of social media messaging within a marketing communication context

ABSTRACT

Marketing communication practitioners lack a guideline for implementing social media strategically. In the light of this, the authors of this article explored the strategic implementation of social media within a marketing communication context. A grounded theory process was firstly followed in order to compile a list of social media messaging categories. This list was then paired with the disciplines of the marketing communication mix, based on their inherent similarities. To demonstrate the practical relevance of the pairings thereafter, the authors followed a process of action research as a way of analysing an organisation's existing social media messaging plan,

Ewoudt Cloete is currently employed as 'Head of Digital' at a Public Relations agency, Epic MSLGROUP, overseeing the agency's digital revenue streams and strategic digital projects. He has more than six years of professional marketing communication brand experience and has been actively involved in the entire digital marketing communication offering: client pitches, client liaison, campaign planning and execution, social media strategy, content creation, social media page management, response handling, Online Reputation Management and more. His current academic focus is a Ph.D. in Communication Studies, with a thesis entitled 'Exploring the organisational positioning of professional social media within a modern marketing communications context.' He has completed a M.A. Communications degree with a dissertation entitled 'The strategic impementation of social media within a marketing communications context.' He has also been previously employed as a part-time lecturer at Boston Media House, teaching Public Relations as well as Communication theory. Dr Lida Holtzhausen has been involved in higher education and research for the past 18 years. She teaches in marketing management, marketing communication, corporate communication and speech communication. Her research focuses on corporate branding, identity, image and reputation management in both the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors. Holtzhausen has read numerous national and international conference papers, published nationally and internationally and serves on review boards of academic journals. She currently supervises numerous M.A. and Ph.D. students. She is involved in various community projects and has served as a guest speaker on several occasions. She is an active member of the South African Communication Association (SACOMM), a senior member of the Academy of World Business, Marketing and Management Development (AWBMAMD), a TAU (Teaching Advancement at University) fellow, and is registered as a Chartered Public Relations Practitioner with the Public Relations Institute of South Africa (PRISA). She hold the degrees Ph.D. (NWU), M.Com. (PU for CHE) and B.Com. Komm. (PU for CHE).

referencing the strategic considerations that the pairing process inferred. By doing so, the authors established that the pairing and action research process explored could be used as a strategic guideline for social media managers to improve the degree to which an organisation's social media messaging is conducive to the reaching of specific marketing communication objectives.

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Some of the benefits of social media as a business discipline include more accurate measurement of marketing communication activities, the enablement of unobtrusive advertising and the opportunity for increased positive brand sentiment (cf. DeMers, 2014; Donlan & Crowther, 2014; Qualman, 2013). With these benefits in mind, it becomes clear that a strong presence on social media platforms is becoming a strategic necessity for businesses. Organisational stakeholders expect companies to interact with them in the social media arena as these platforms are regarded as official marketing communication channels.

Even though many companies have activated a social media presence for their brands and services, they do so without in-depth knowledge or an understanding of how to use these platforms strategically (Nelson-Field & Klose, 2012). Fang (2010) does, however, warn that if social media services are not used soundly, it can damage a business' reputation and image severely, as is the case with any channel or platform that is used for marketing communication purposes.

Social media practitioners therefore require a carefully crafted strategy or guideline that informs the utilisation of social media platforms for marketing communication purposes. Utilising social media strategically, in conjunction with traditional marketing communication channels, is a proven method of achieving real business results (Clapperton, 2010). However, for such a strategic approach to social media to be viable, an understanding of the different types or categories of messaging (aligned with marketing communication objectives) that can be disseminated via social media is required. Due to this lack of strategic direction with regard to the range of social media messaging categories, marketing communication practitioners find it difficult to use social media as a professional business discipline that drives marketing communication objectives. Against this background, the following research problem statement was defined:

Marketing communication practitioners find it challenging to use social media platforms strategically, due to the lack of clear differentiation between the different social media messaging categories and the degree to which each is conducive to the reaching of specific marketing communication objectives.

From the above, the main research question was defined as:

How can a pairing between social media messaging categories and marketing communication mix disciplines be used as a reference for the strategic implementation of social media within a marketing communication context?

In order to address this research question, the following specific objectives were identified:

1. To single out and categorise, by means of grounded theory, a list of messaging categories (paired with marketing communication mix disciplines) that can be used by marketing communication practitioners to plan a brand's social media messaging.
2. To formulate, by means of action research, a guideline by which social media messaging can be strategically planned and implemented within a marketing communication context.

As a solution to the main research problem, the relevancy of categorising social media messaging and then contextualising these categories within a marketing communication framework were investigated. This approach is rationalised based on the viewpoint that contextualising social media into terms relevant to traditional marketing communication practice, could assist in alleviating the confusion that exists regarding how to strategically implement social media.

However, for it to be possible to segment social media messaging into meaningful categories, it would need to be contextualised within a framework that can accommodate both traditional and modern marketing communication techniques. Through this process, it would be possible to align social media messaging with the objectives and traits of more traditional marketing communication counterparts, which should provide social media practitioners with a tangible reference on how to implement professional social media strategically. The research's chosen theoretical framework is now discussed:

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Fill's (2011) marketing communication mix disciplines were shown to be a dependable reference for analysing social media activities, as it classifies marketing and communication activities by means of a structured, consistent and theoretical framework that is independent of the changing nature of social media platforms.

1.1 Marketing communication and the five disciplines of the marketing communication mix

Despite the initial widespread support behind the 4P model of marketing, many marketing authors (Dixon & Blois, 1983; Rafiq & Ahmed, 1992) started to express their reservations regarding the model. Two of the models created in opposition to the original 4P model were the 4 C's consumer-orientated model of marketing (Lauterborn, 1990) and the 7 C's Compass model (Shimizu, 2009). According to Fill (2006), the movement of marketing communication acknowledges the value in a system that categorises marketing disciplines, and can be defined as a:

...management process through which an organisation engages with its various audiences. By understanding an audience's communications environment, organisations seek to develop and present messages for its identified stakeholder groups, before evaluating and acting upon responses (Fill, 2006:17).

Fill's (2011) marketing communication mix sprouts from the overarching umbrella term known as marketing communication and central to this categorisation is the realisation that an organisation has a specific set of disciplines that can be used in various combinations and different degrees of intensity to communicate strategically with targeted audiences (Fill, 2011). The marketing communication mix focuses on actual and specific forms of marketing disciplines available to marketers for promoting products and services. These five disciplines are advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, public relations and direct marketing (Fill, 2011). Other authors (Belch & Belch, 2001; Duncan, 2002; Goi, Fu, Ting, Goh, & Chin, 2013; Kerin, Hartley, & Rudelius, 2013; Lane & Russell, 2001; Shrimp, 2003; Smith, 1998; Smith & Taylor, 2004) similarly defined the disciplines of the marketing communication mix.

There are, however, authors who have different views on which list of disciplines constitutes the marketing communication mix. Marketing communication theorists, such as Smith and Taylor (2004) and Smith (1998), position sponsorship as a completely separate discipline of the marketing communication mix. As propagated by Robinson (2006) however, sponsorship can still be regarded as a division of public relations.

The marketing communication mix disciplines referenced by Koekemoer (2014) also include individual consideration for more modern marketing communication disciplines, such as digital media marketing and alternative communication channels. It is noted that the digital marketing disciplines suggested by Koekemoer (2014) 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 the research was 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 that the research aims to consider the role of social media within the context of marketing communication mix disciplines, 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.

1.2 General and strategic considerations when implementing the marketing communication mix

Fill (2011) states that the marketing communication mix disciplines can be used in various combinations and varying levels of intensity in order to communicate strategically with a targeted audience. It is important to understand the considerations that need to be taken into account when deciding on the combination of marketing communication mix disciplines when planning and strategising marketing initiatives.

The most prominent considerations that influence the choice and combination of marketing communication mix disciplines are the key characteristics of each discipline, namely product

complexity; the influence of each discipline on the decision-making process for consumers; and the objectives of marketing initiatives (Doyle & Stern, 2006; Fill, 2011; Kim & Hyun, 2011). Marketing practitioners need to understand the attributes of each marketing communication mix discipline in depth so as to ensure the right combination and intensity are used to tackle each marketing objective appropriately. More specifically, the study at hand focused on the degree to which objectives influenced the informed choice of marketing communication disciplines.

An example of how the objectives of marketing communication initiatives influence the choice of marketing communication mix disciplines is provided as an illustration of the influence of one of the considerations that marketers need to take into account: if a company's objective is to increase awareness in the market, then advertising would be a suitable discipline, but if an immediate boost in sales is crucial, then a sales promotion could deliver better results (Doyle & Stern, 2006).

Considering this, the authors argue that, if social media messaging categories can be paired with marketing communication disciplines, it would be possible to identify the specific combination and intensity of social media messaging categories necessary to reach specific marketing communication objectives. This notion was highlighted as being the driving force that dictated how the study's empirical research phase was undertaken.

2. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

2.1 Overarching research philosophy: qualitative research

Traditional and more quantitative research approaches (in contrast to the qualitative tradition), propose "a non-biased, non-observed researcher studying objects in a controlled environment" (Dalkir, 2010:27). However, the traditional stance appears too limited to investigate the use of marketing communication in the social media context, due to the intrinsic complexity of organisations and the people that they engage with. The metrics analysed in this research include emotional responses, established from verbal cues of social media audience members – merely one example of a type of variable that is commonly examined via a qualitative research approach (Gallagher & Sorensen, 2006). This therefore accentuates the need for a research method based on qualitative properties for this research.

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

2.2 Research method 1: Grounded theory

Grounded theory was born from the 'constant comparative' method, as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and places emphasis on the creation of new theory, as is the case with qualitative research methods (Coleman & O'Connor, 2007). The essence of the grounded theory methodology is a three-phase coding procedure that aims to increase the validity of results by analysing considerable segments of data in a thorough manner (Carmines & Zeller, 1979).

The steps are as follows (Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and were implemented on the social media-messaging plan used as the research's sampling data:

1. The first step in this coding process (open coding) involves identifying preliminary categories from textual data.
2. The second step in the coding process, referred to as axial coding, involves a process of declaring relationships between the different categories identified during the first step of open coding.
3. During the final coding step, namely selective coding, the researcher groups interrelated messaging categories into theoretical categories.

2.3 Research method 2: Action research

The term 'action research' was introduced by Kurt Lewin (1946) and was defined as a pioneering approach toward social research which combined generation of theory with changing the social research system through the researcher acting on or in the social system. Corey (1953), as cited by Mitchell, Reily, & Logue (2009) defines action research broadly as a process through which practitioners study their own practice to solve problems embedded in their day-to-day practice. As suggested by the name, action research refers to a research method where interventions are an accepted part of the research process (Potter, Blaufuss, & Acheampong, 2012).

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

In the context of this research, the above-mentioned planned interventions were implemented on the social media-messaging plan used as the research's sampling data.

2.4 Sampling data

The social media initiatives of Acer, a global supplier of digital device technology, was chosen as the sampling focus for this research. The main sampling source used for the purpose of

this research was the social media messaging updates implemented by Acer on the Acer Africa Facebook and Acer Africa Twitter social media accounts. More specifically, actions performed during a specific social media campaign time period, namely 15 March 2012 to 15 April 2012 during the Acer Africa social media campaign entitled the 'Space Renewed Challenge', were presented and analysed. The campaign was scrutinised with regard to the social media strategy implemented on the Acer Africa Facebook page and Acer Africa Twitter account. Identifying a specific social media campaign to analyse allowed the unique objectives, concept, execution and the results of the campaign to be considered when coding and categorising the data.

2.5 Research process

After the literary exploration, the empirical process commenced. Firstly, a grounded theory process was undertaken.

Following that, each individual social media message or update forming part of the study's sample data was paired with one of the five disciplines of the marketing communication mix, proposing broad messaging categories and relationships between different messaging categories and corresponding marketing communication mix disciplines. These pairings were based on the observation of theoretical and characteristic-based similarities between the social media messaging categories identified during the grounded theory process and each of the five disciplines of the marketing communication mix.

With the social media messaging categories paired with the five disciplines of the marketing communication mix, a process of action research commenced in order to assess the practical applicability of the pairings created during the grounded theory process. This final part of the research process involved applying the pairing methodology detailed in the grounded theory process to the original sampling data, with the objective of assessing if a balance between marketing communication mix disciplines had been achieved during the campaign. It was furthermore also required to assess if this combination was aligned with the strategic objectives of the organisation from which the social media sampling source was extracted. Next, these suggestions were applied to a new sampling source, with the intention of illustrating that the pairings defined and the action research process utilised could provide strategic suggestions on how to plan and implement social media messaging.

3. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

3.1 The categorisation and sub-categorisation of typical social media messaging

During the process of grounded theory that involved different levels of coding of the sample data (Carmines & Zeller, 1979), a list of main social media messaging categories were identified. The different levels of coding also accentuated the need for secondary messaging categories, resulting in a representative classification of typical social media messaging

categories. This section presents the main and sub categories of social media messaging that were identified during the study's grounded theory process. As this section merely introduces the preliminary messaging categories (without attempting to link the categories with marketing communication mix disciplines based on theoretical similarities), there are no references back to the study's literature review.

Campaign messaging

The main category of 'campaign' messaging engages social media subscribers with respect to a campaign being run by the brand within a specific time period. During the grounded theory process, the following sub- or secondary categories were identified:

The first sub-category, identified as 'Promotional' messaging, directly relates to the promotion of a campaign currently being run on the brand's social media platform or another digital or traditional platform that is owned by the brand. The second sub-category, 'Administrative' messaging, helps guide users regarding a campaign's progression by highlighting certain key information or changes in a campaign's timeline that should be taken note of by the brand's target audience. The next sub-category, classified as 'Pre and post' messaging, is messaging related to a campaign that is transmitted before a campaign is implemented or after it has ended. 'Pre and post' messaging therefore either introduces a campaign or concludes it in the hope of leveraging the campaign's talkability for the brand's behalf. The sub-category 'External messaging' introduces, promotes or describes one of the brand's campaigns on another marketing communication platform, whether it is another social media platform, another digital platform, broadcasting or print etc. The next messaging sub-category of 'Tie-in' messaging does not emphasise the campaign at first, but goes on to create a connection with the campaign or its elements. With 'Tie-in' messaging, the campaign is directly mentioned, but is not part of the initial focus of the messaging. Finally, the last sub-category of 'Indirect' messaging relates to a message that is not directly relevant to the campaign, but on closer inspection includes an indirect reference to the campaign. Here, the campaign is not directly mentioned but a connection can be inferred.

Product and service

The next main category of social media messaging, namely 'Product and service' messaging as well as all of its sub-categories, relate to the deliverables of the brand and could include a reference to features, new offerings, price descriptions or any other aspect related to the brand's products and services. The sub-categories of messaging identified that form part of this main category are as follows: 'Promotional' messaging, which directly relates to the promotion of a product or service of the brand; 'Supportive' messaging, that is intended to support existing customers after they have purchased products and services from the brand; 'Third-party' messaging, which is product and service messaging that does not originate from the brand itself but rather from another entity; 'Tie-in' messaging, that does not relate to a product or service at first, but later on creates an indirect connection with the brand's outputs

and finally, 'Indirect' messaging, that is not directly relevant to a product or service offering of the brand, but on closer inspection includes an indirect reference to one of these elements. In the case of 'Indirect messaging', the product or service is not directly mentioned but a connection can be inferred.

Brand messaging

The third category of main social media messaging, namely 'Brand' messaging, can be communicated during a campaign period or outside of campaign periods on social media platforms. What distinguishes this category of messaging from those already identified is that these messages do not make reference to a brand's campaigns or products, but rather focus on promoting the intrinsic qualities of the brand itself. Upon closer inspection, the following sub-categories of 'Brand' sub-messaging were identified: The first type, 'Brand identity' messaging refers to the brand in a general sense, its values or its personality and can therefore be regarded as fulfilling a brand positioning function. In contrast to this, 'Internal' messaging highlights or refers to the human capital of the organisation, which could include the organisation's staff, operations or management. The next sub-category of brand messaging identified was 'Partnerships and sponsorships' messaging and is distinguished in that it directly references an influential stakeholder group of the brand that is represented as being associated with the brand, which includes partnerships and sponsorships. In this case, the sponsor or partner can either be directly or indirectly incorporated into the message. The next sub-category of 'Cross platform' messaging introduces, promotes or describes one of the brand's other platforms, whether it is another social media platform, another digital platform, broadcasting or print, etc. Finally, the last 3 sub-categories of 'Brand' messaging identified (i.e. 'Third-party', 'Tie-in' and 'Indirect' messaging) align to the final three sub-categories identified as part of 'Product & service' messaging and all relate to 'Brand' messaging in the same way as they do to 'Product and service' messaging.

Unrelated messaging

The next identified main category of social media messaging is labelled as 'Unrelated' messaging due to these messages having no observable direct or indirect relevance to the brand, its products or a campaign that is being run by the brand. Nevertheless, they are still noteworthy because of their ability to apply additional value to a social media messaging plan, depending on the specific sub-category that the messaging falls under. The following sub-categories were identified: 'Informative' messages, that add value by relaying some sort of educational or informative message to the social media subscriber not related to the brand; 'Member-centric' messaging, that is intended to give recognition to social media fans in the form of praise or direct acknowledgement; 'Timely' messaging, that utilises the timeliness of an event not directly related to the brand in order to generate social media engagement; 'Engaging' messaging, that encourages social media audience interaction via their open-ended nature and finally, 'Sponsored' messaging, which are social media messages that form part of an arrangement by the brand to promote a third party's brand or campaign.

Advertised messaging

'Advertised' messaging as the next identified main category of social media messaging refers to any type of planned messaging that is channelled through a paid mechanism on a social media platform in order to increase the reach of that message. Examples of these are Facebook page post advertisements and promoted tweets on Twitter.

Hybrid messaging

The final main category of social media messaging is used to classify any messaging that cannot be clearly defined as belonging to a specific category of either 'Campaign', 'Product and service', 'Unrelated' or 'Brand' messaging. These are messages that usually have more than one focus and therefore include attributes characteristic of more than one of the main social media messaging categories identified. Messages belonging to this category can be a combination of 'Brand' and 'Product and service' messaging; 'Campaign' and 'Product and service' messaging, or 'Campaign' and 'Brand' messaging.

The completed grounded theory process produced a non-exhaustive list of typical social media messaging categories available to marketing communication practitioners.

3.2 Pairing of social media messaging and marketing communication mix disciplines

With a list of typical social media messaging categories identified, an attempt was made to pair these messaging categories with each of the five disciplines of the marketing communication mix (Fill, 2011), as to ultimately infer that social media messaging categories can be aligned with modern marketing communication theories and principles. To ensure the trustworthiness of the pairing process, these pairings were based on the tangible traits of each of the marketing communication mix disciplines, as identified via the study's theoretical exploration. Therefore, to justify the pairings made, the following section refers back to the study's foundational literature review. The following pairings were identified:

Campaign messaging and the sales promotion discipline of the marketing communication mix

The sales promotion discipline is divided into two broad categories of 'Value increasing' and 'Value adding' sales promotions (Fill, 2011). In the case of the sample data, the campaign was an ideal example of how organisations would typically run a competition on a business' social media page. Taking this into consideration, a direct connection can be observed between campaign messaging on social media platforms and the sales promotion discipline of the marketing communication mix.

From this newly established pairing, a more detailed description of the 'Campaign' messaging category of social media messaging was proposed. It was also suggested that 'Campaign'

messaging be referred to as 'Promotional' messaging, as non-promotional campaigns are excluded from this category:

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

Product and service messaging and the direct marketing discipline of the marketing communication mix

Direct marketing actions are personalised, data-driven, interactive marketing communication activities that promote a specific offering by means of a strong call to action, supporting the nurturing of intimate consumer relationships (Scovotti & Spiller 2006). With this description taken into consideration, an obvious connection between 'Product and service' messaging on social media platforms and the direct marketing discipline of the marketing communication mix exists, namely that both are focused on delivering messages regarding the organisation's deliverables.

With this taken into account, a definition of 'Product and service' messaging on social media platforms was proposed:

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

Brand messaging and the public relations discipline of the marketing communication mix

Three of the main roles of public relations within a marketing communication context are the achievement of increased positive brand image, increased organisational visibility and the nurturing of honest stakeholder interest (Fill, 2011). The role of increased positive brand image and organisational visibility signifies the public relations disciplines of the marketing communication mix's inherent link with the main social media messaging category of 'Brand' messaging on social media platforms. It is noted that 'Brand' messaging is not intended to promote any product or service of the organisation, but rather a specific element of the organisation's brand or the brand image in its entirety.

Taking the above pairing into consideration, a description of social media brand messaging was proposed:

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

Unrelated messaging and the public relations discipline of the marketing communication mix

Whilst public relations' roles of heightened brand visibility and the nurturing of honest stakeholder interest can be achieved on social media platforms by means of 'Brand' social media messaging, another crucial element of public relations that cannot be accommodated by the social media category of 'Brand' messaging exists. The public relations discipline of the marketing communication mix also helps to build a general sense of goodwill between the organisation and its stakeholders (Fill, 2011).

Seeing that the main social media messaging category of 'Unrelated messaging' on social media platforms does not relate to brand or product deliverables, it cannot achieve heightened brand visibility or promote products and services. However, it does help to nurture a sense of goodwill between the organisation and its social media subscribers as these messages usually have a positive, emotional link that could potentially resonate with a social media account subscriber. Taking the above into consideration, a pairing of the public relations discipline of the marketing communication mix with 'Unrelated' social media messaging is propagated as a stand-alone pairing from public relations and 'Brand' messaging on social media.

Taking the above into account, a definition of unrelated social media messaging was proposed:

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

Advertised messaging and the advertising discipline of the marketing communication mix

Two important distinctions of this marketing communication discipline, namely the fact that it is a paid medium and that it is the most visible of the marketing communication mix disciplines, signify the pairing of this discipline with the main social media messaging category of 'Advertised' messaging (Belch & Belch, 2001; Buil, De Chernatony & Martinez, 2013). 'Advertised' messaging on social media platforms is paid for messaging by the organisation and is by far the most visible form of messaging as it dramatically increases the

reach of messaging, which includes users on the social media account who are not currently subscribed to the brand's social media pages.

Using this pairing rationale, it was possible to define a description of 'Advertised' social media messaging:

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

Unplanned messaging and the personal selling discipline of the marketing communication mix

It is noted that personal selling is an interpersonal communication discipline that involves face-to-face interactions undertaken by individuals in order to inform, persuade or remind and individual or group to take appropriate action (Fill, 2011). The interpersonal nature of personal selling creates an immediate connection with the highly personal, conversational nature of social media messaging, signifying the need to incorporate this highly effective marketing communication discipline into the categories of social media messaging previously defined. The personal nature of personal selling interactions between a consumer and an organisational representative, however, take place in real-time, making it difficult to script or plan these conversations.

With respect to social media messaging, this means that personal selling conversations are not typically included in the social media messaging plan designed by social media community managers, in contrast with the other social media messaging categories previously identified in this research. Considering this, an additional social media messaging category was proposed:

'Direct' messaging is one-on-one conversational social media message threads between a brand's social media page representative and an existing or potential customer. During these message threads, a customer that has initiated a conversation with the brand is persuaded or informed with respect to the product and service offerings of the brand. These messaging instances can also be utilised to strengthen and support other social media messaging categories, such as 'Brand' and 'Promotional campaigns'. Personal message threads regarding customer complaint resolution and other customer service functions are excluded from this category as their primary role is not marketing.

Hybrid messaging and the marketing communication mix disciplines

Provision was made for the possibility that it might not be possible to clearly define which category of social media messaging a specific message belongs to. This occurs when a message contains distinguishing attributes characteristic of more than one social media messaging category, usually observable in complex social media messages where it is difficult to determine the main focus of the communication. Because of this phenomenon, one can expect these message categories to also display characteristics of different marketing communication mix disciplines as each separate social media message category has been shown to represent a certain marketing communication mix discipline.

This conflict concerning the category in which a message belongs can be resolved by categorising it as a hybrid form of social media messaging. Noting this theoretical pairing, the following expanded definition of hybrid social media messaging was proposed:

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

This process of pairing marketing communication disciplines with the identified main categories of social media messaging categories increased the trustworthiness of the social media categories defined as they were shown to include direct parallels with modern marketing communication theory and practice.

In order to visually demonstrate the results of the pairing process that has been undertaken, a summarised view of the adapted main social media messaging categories (including sub-categories), paired with each of the five disciplines of the marketing communication mix, is now presented. This diagram is presented in order to highlight the relationships that the pairing process have established in a succinct and logical format. This diagram is also referenced at the end of the paper in order to show how the study's results can be used as part of a strategic guideline that informs a marketing practitioner's approach to social media messaging planning for a brand. Note that the following colour codes are used in the diagram to identify different elements thereof: grey blocks represent the five disciplines of the marketing communication mix, whilst white blocks represent each of the main (as well as sub-) categories of social media messaging identified:

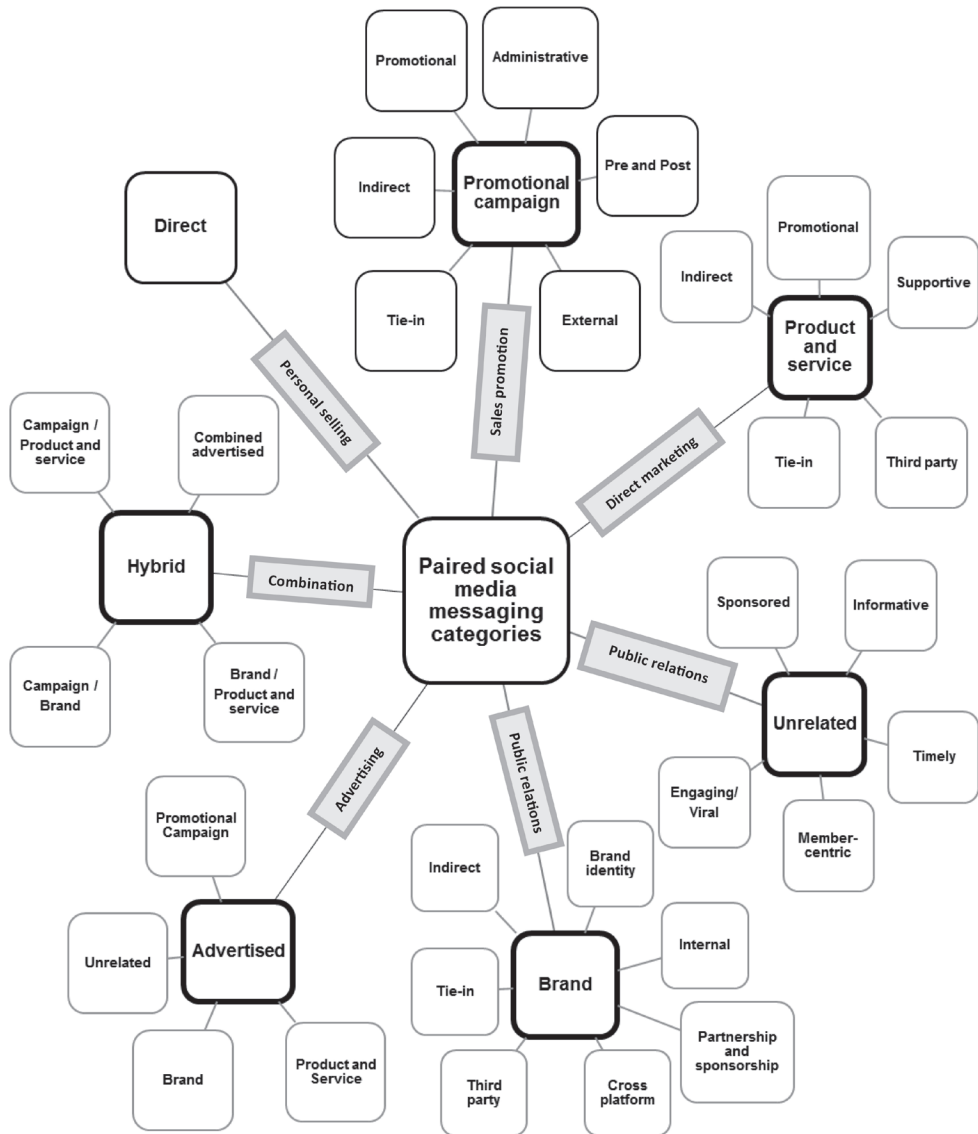


Figure 1: The identified categories of social media messaging, paired with the five disciplines of the marketing communication mix

3.3 Evaluation of social media messaging based on paired messaging categories

With a link between social media and the five disciplines of the marketing communication mix established via a process of theoretical pairing, the empirical process commenced a process of action research in order to explore the applicability of social media as a marketing communication tool by assessing the strategic implications of the theoretical pairing between marketing communication disciplines and social media messaging categories undertaken. Assessing the strategic relevance of the pairings was a crucial requirement, as it was needed to demonstrate how the pairing could be used as a reference point by which to implement social media initiatives, thus ultimately answering the main research problem.

To accomplish this, the proposed pairing rationale was first applied to the original sampling data of the study, assessing to which degree each social media messaging category identified was represented in the sampling source. With this implemented, it was possible to infer which marketing communication disciplines were represented within the sample data by referencing the pairing between social media messaging categories and marketing communication mix disciplines. With a grasp of the degree to which different marketing communication mix disciplines were represented in the sampling source now established, the authors could evaluate the degree to which the specific combination of marketing communication mix disciplines identified in the sampling source was conducive to achieving the objectives that the campaign was intended to achieve. This was done by referencing the theoretical traits of each of the marketing communication mix disciplines, as identified in the study's literature review. Based on this analysis of the degree to which the specific combination of marketing communication disciplines were conducive to reaching the campaign's intended objectives, a series of suggestions for the strategic implementation of future social media messaging plans for the brand was proposed.

A specific example of the evaluative process applied to the sample data described above is now provided as a demonstration of how this process was undertaken.

When analysing the social media messaging in the sample data, it was observed that there was a lack of representation of the social media messaging type of 'Brand' messaging. It was possible to make this conclusion by labelling each of the individual social media messages and noting the volume of each type of main social media messaging category represented in the sample data. After this labelling was done, it was noted that 'Brand' messaging was not represented as strongly as the other main categories of social media messaging.

This observation also inferred that the marketing communication mix discipline of public relations was poorly represented in the sampling data as social media brand messaging was paired with public relations during the research's grounded theory process. Referencing the global strategy of the brand from which the sampling source was extracted, it was noted that an increase in public relations messaging would support the global brand strategy of increasing a sense of positive brand image. This was based on referencing the study's literature review,

where it was shown that public relations can contribute to an increase in positive brand image (Fill, 2011). Based on this, it was concluded that future social media messaging plans for the brand should include a higher quantity of social media messaging belonging to the main category of 'Brand' messaging in relation to other social media messaging categories.

Similar evaluations were conducted with regard to each category of main social media messaging categories, referencing in each case the study's literature review in order to substantiate the evaluations made. This process culminated in a revised social media messaging plan for the brand. This plan detailed the degree to which each main category of social media should be represented in terms of overall quantity in relation to the other categories of social media messaging in order to reach the brand's intended objectives, as well as other strategic considerations.

The following table represents the revised social media messaging plan for the brand (covering 7 weeks) that was formulated as a result of the changes to the brand's social media messaging plan, as informed by the evaluative process discussed in this section. What the plan aims to show is how each category of social media messaging should ideally be represented in terms of the frequency of individual social media messages. In the table, these individual social media messages are labelled as per the specific sub-category of messaging they relate to. Their relation to main categories of social media messaging is indicated by means of a colour-coding system, appearing in a smaller table underneath the main table.

The plan below intends to ensure that the brand's social media messaging plan is more conducive to reaching the brand's intended marketing communication objectives:

Table 1: The suggested structuring of the social media messaging plan for the client's social media campaign

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7
Monday		1 October	8 October	15 October	22 October	29 October	5 November
		Tie-in	Promotional	Indirect	Promotional	Promotional	Tie-in
		Tie-in	Third party	Indirect	Brand identity	Engaging/viral	Brand identity
Tuesday		2 October	9 October	16 October	23 October	30 October	6 November
		Informative	Engaging/viral	Promotional	Indirect	Partnership	Post
		Brand identity	Cross platform	Partnership	Sponsored	Promotional	Informative
Wednesday	26 September	3 October	10 October	17 October	24 October	31 October	
	Pre	Brand/product	Supportive	Member-centric	Promotional	Timely	
	Promotional	Promotional	Product/Campaign	Promotional	Third party	Tie-in	
Thursday	27 September	4 October	11 October	18 October	25 October	1 November	
	Brand identity	Timely	Partnership	Brand/product	Indirect	Product/Campaign	
	Pre	Partnership	Sponsored	Tie-in	Partnership	Supportive	
Friday	28 September	5 October	12 October	19 October	26 October	2 November	
	Third party	Member-centric	Indirect	Brand identity	Product/Campaign	Indirect	
	Internal	Promotional	Tie-in	Indirect	Third party	Indirect	

Main category of social media messaging	Colour code
Brand	
Unrelated	
Promotional Campaign	
Hybrid	
Product/Service	

This revised social media messaging plan detailed above was then implemented and based on the relevance and strategic effectiveness of the plan proposed, it was possible for the authors to assess the value of the research's proposed pairing of social media messaging

categories with marketing communication disciplines in implementing professional social media strategically. This messaging plan is an example of how the research's findings can be used by a marketing communication practitioner to strategically plan social media messaging. The main observations regarding the pairing processes' practical implementation are as follows:

From a planning perspective, the general observation was made that the pairing process served as a useful benchmark for the formulation of a strategically balanced social media messaging plan. This, due to the fact that it allowed for the structuring of social media messaging via distinct categories, whereof the frequency in relation to others could be substantiated by referencing the specific objectives that a brand is attempting to achieve.

Furthermore, because the new messaging plan was regarded as an adaptable messaging framework, any brand messaging that was not initially planned could be added to the social media messaging plan without any concerns from the brand or the social media manager himself. The fact that the social media messaging was structured according to a dependable reference point of strategic considerations, ensured that sudden necessary changes did not affect the strategic value of the messaging plan. If changes were made, the framework necessitated inventory be rebalanced in order to ensure the messaging plan was still aligned with strategic imperatives. For example, if the social media manager was being pressured by internal stakeholders to increase the frequency of 'Product & Service' social media messaging, the frequency of other social media messaging categories (such as 'Brand' messaging) could also be increased in order to reinstate the balance inferred by the strategic considerations at play. With the role of the proposed pairing process explored, the final segment details the general conclusions drawn from the research process.

4. CONCLUSION

The study addressed the main research question of establishing a pairing method or process that can be used to define different social media messaging categories that each relate back to the reaching of specific marketing communication objectives. To accomplish this, the study's proposed pairing of social media messaging categories and marketing communication mix disciplines was detailed and practically tested in a real-world marketing communication context.

Taking into consideration that the suggested pairing of marketing communication mix disciplines and social media messaging categories was recognised to be a useful reference for the planning of a brand's social media messaging, it is recommended that the merit of the study's pairing and action research process as a strategic guideline for social media messaging planning be considered.

The pairing and action research process' relevance as a strategic guideline for social media planning is furthermore endorsed by the observation that it contextualises the developing field within the framework of trusted marketing communication theory. This allows social media managers within organisations to translate their social media efforts to their superiors into terms

that are aligned to traditional marketing communication practice. Also, the process of categorising typical social media messages into discernible categories and sub-categories makes social media managers more aware of the social media messaging inventory available to them, which in turn means that they can make more insightful decisions when planning social media messaging in the future.

Utilising the paired social media messaging categories defined via grounded theory and reflecting the action research process described in this study, the following step-by-step strategic guideline is proposed for social media managers to assess the degree to which their current social media messaging plan is conducive to the reaching of specific marketing communication objectives:

Step 1: Identification of current social media messaging category representation

Social media managers must firstly analyse their current social media messaging plan according to the degree of representation of each social media messaging category. Each individual social media message's relevance to a specific messaging category can be determined by referencing the descriptions of each category noted in this study.

Step 2: Infer the current representation of each marketing communication mix discipline

Once the representation of each social media messaging category has been determined, the social media manager will then be able to infer how the messaging plan represents each discipline of the marketing communication mix (see figure 1) that demonstrates the relationship between social media messaging categories and the disciplines of the marketing communication mix.

Step 3: Assess the strategic relevance of the current representation of marketing communication mix disciplines

With the representation levels of each marketing communication mix discipline now determined, social media managers must assess the degree to which this representation is conducive to the reaching of predefined and desired marketing communication objectives, according to the main strategic considerations of each marketing communication mix discipline.

Step 4: Implementation of informed revised social media messaging plan

Social media managers can then use this assessment as a reference that informs the implementation of a series of alterations to the social media messaging plan of the brand, which should (based on the strategic considerations highlighted in the previous step), ensure that the brand's social media messaging plan is more conducive to the brand reaching its desired marketing communication objectives via social media messaging.

Step 5: Monitoring and optimisation of social media messaging plan

Finally, the alterations implemented must be monitored and then possibly adapted according to the results observed, and whether the revised plan is indeed ensuring higher alignment between the brand's social media presence and the desired marketing communication objectives the brand intends to reach.

However, it is stressed that the above outlined process should only be used as an adaptable guideline by which to strategically align an organisation's social media messaging with marketing communication objectives. The guideline should not be applied so rigidly that it limits the creative possibilities of social media marketing communication or hampers the duties of the social media team members of an organisation.

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