AN ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF VISUAL STORYTELLING BY SOUTH AFRICAN BRANDS TO PROMOTE BRAND ENGAGEMENT ON SOCIAL NETWORKS

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF VISUAL STORYTELLING BY SOUTH AFRICAN BRANDS TO PROMOTE BRAND ENGAGEMENT ON SOCIAL NETWORKS

By

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DECLARATION

I, Tsitsi Gwatiringa (210247444), hereby declare that the dissertation for Magister Artium in Media Studies (Coursework) is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment or completion of any postgraduate qualification to another University or for another qualification.

ABSTRACT

Stories have the ability to evoke feelings and emotions in humans and have since been used by brands as part of corporate communication, communicating their vision and values. However, the growing technological trends have not only shifted the platforms for communication but also changed the techniques of communication as audiences on social media expect two-way communication instead of the traditionally used one-way communication. This is exacerbated by the power of word-of-mouth on social media as well as the presence of digital natives who are increasingly visual in their understanding and are immersed in their lives online. This has given rise to the use of visual storytelling as a corporate communication strategy as brands are using it to connect, transmit and receive messages from their audiences. This study examines the ways in which South African brands are making use of visual storytelling on social media and aims to determine the extent to which the use of visual storytelling promotes brand-audience engagement. The study is based on the philosophical assumptions of the Visual Rhetoric framework, which is concerned with the symbolic processes by which images perform communication. The hermeneutic – interpretive research method design is applied to justify knowledge produced by this study. A content analysis of six social media pages was conducted, looking at the visual content posted as well as interpretation of comments and interactions by fans of the selected brand pages. Overall, South African brands make use of visual storytelling to promote brand-audience engagement but they are not utilising the communication strategy to its fullest extent.

Keywords: Social Media, Visual Storytelling, Brand Engagement, Corporate Communication

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1 CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND

1.1 Background and Context of Research

Traditionally, the written word has been accepted as the best medium of distributing compelling content but with the rapid changes in technology and the introduction of social media networks, public relations experts are quickly catching on to the trend of visual communication taking over from written communication in powerfully informing, persuading or educating individuals (Clear PR 2013; Kamath 2012). Whilst most of the world's leading brands quickly adapted to the new trend of communicating with their audiences on social media, it is not an unproblematic system.

Brands across the African continent are faced with a notable lack of information on the use of visual storytelling as a communication strategy (IDG Connect 2013). As Stopforth (2013) explains, there are three ways in which social media can be used for corporate communication; as an infrastructure, as a platform to connect with strategic stakeholders, and as a firewall for businesses. He further points out that South African brands are making headway on using social media as a platform but, they are still lagging behind on the other two uses. Similarly, IDG Connect (2013) states that African brands are making use of social media for special offers, vouchers and discounts for their audiences. Other brands in the global market, are using a 'Content Marketing' approach and use social media to engage strategic stakeholders in wider 'brand values'. The Content Marketing Survey by IMN (2013), reveals that 51% of the respondents have indicated that social media is currently the most effective platform for implementing 'content marketing' (IDG Connect 2013).

On the one hand, whilst there are a lot of advantages for using social media for brands, there is also a lot of uncertainty as organisations are used to communicating with their audiences in a particular way (Bizcommunity 2014). South African brands are faced with such a dilemma. This study investigated the ways in which South African brands are using visual storytelling on social media. In addition, the study endeavoured to highlight the extent to which the use of visual storytelling, by South African brands, promotes brand-audience engagement on social media. Countless works of literature discuss the concept of visual storytelling as part of a

brand's communication strategy, these however, do not seem to offer viable strategies that can be adapted by African brands for their environments.

1.2 Emerging Technological Trends

Recent research conducted by organisations such as the 3M Company, an American multinational corporation, reflect that audiences are quicker to relate to pictures as compared to written text and that the mobile generation often requires the immediacy of image. 3M highlighted that human beings process visuals 66 000 times faster than text and that 65% of people are visual learners (Boddy 2013). Research by ROI Inc (2013) also reveals that 44% of social media users are more likely to engage with a brand that posts photos versus any other form of media. Furthermore, Simply Measured (2013) highlight that only a month after an introduction of timelines for brands on Facebook(www.facebook.com), visual content saw 65% increase in engagement. The implication of these statistics is that brands would need to look at the use of visual storytelling.

The use of the internet has rapidly increased over the years and digital natives are increasingly immersing themselves in life online. Prensky (2001) describes digital natives as people born into an innate 'new culture' of interaction. Digital natives, also known as 'Generation Y' or 'Millennials' belong to a generation of people born during or after the introduction of digital technologies, 1980s and after, and have mixed preferences for media use in personal and professional lives (Science Direct 2013). These people have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, videogames, digital music players, cell phones and all other tools of the digital age and as such, they are increasingly visual in their understanding and generally have a high level of visual literacy (Prensky 2001). Social media is the best place to engage with digital natives as they can multi-task and are well versed on the type of media used.

Visual storytelling as a public relations strategy was previously regarded as a separate aspect of a brand's strategy but the rising influence of this trend suggests that public relations practitioners need to evolve into the principle driver of a brand's visual development (Walter 2013). This rising influence of visual communication is further evidenced by the increase in use of infographics for example, as well as the increasing popularity of social media networks such as Pinterest (http://www.pinterest.com/), Tumblr (https://www.tumblr.com/), Google+

(https://plus.google.com/) and social media applications such as Instagram (http://instagram.com/) that allow users to upload, share and edit images (Ballad 2012).

Recent research (Walter 2013) indicates the growing popularity of visual storytelling in new media but these studies do not highlight the extent to which visual storytelling promotes engagement. There are compelling statistics that suggest that visual communication does promote engagement better than text but these studies do not show how the users feel about visual communication and if, through the way they react to the visual communication, it actually does promote engagement. This study will seek to investigate this aspect of the relationship between visual storytelling and brand engagement.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The study is significant to society and the public relations profession in South Africa for the following reasons:

- Firstly, the study reveals the importance of visual communication in corporate communication. Public relations practitioners can therefore benefit and in turn improve the ways they engage with their audiences on social media networks.
- A viable public relations industry is beneficial to the South African society as organisations/brands will perform better in the market, subsequently reaching more audiences. This could also create job opportunities as organisations can hire people responsible for managing corporate communication on social networks.
- This research might be significant in terms of bringing in new ideas to help South African public relations practitioners improve engagement between their brands and target audiences.
- This study also provides literary reference in the area of "visual communication in South Africa", which might be vital for further research as most literature currently available is based on first world environments. More knowledge will be gained on the subject of visual communication, especially its use as a communication strategy for social media.

1.4 Problem Statement

Recent research has shown that there is a rise in the use of visual communication by organisations on social media networks to communicate to and interact with their stakeholders. However, despite boasting the increased use of visuals as a communication strategy on social networks, studies do not explicitly address the extent to which visuals promote user engagement with the brand. The primary problem to be addressed in this study is therefore the extent to which visual storytelling can be applied as a communication strategy that influences engagement between brands and their audiences on social media networks.

1.5 Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following research question:

How has visual storytelling redefined the level of interaction and engagement between a brand and its target stakeholders?

Sub questions:

a) How is visual storytelling being used by brands to interact with their audiences?
b) How much has visual storytelling promoted engagement as compared to other strategies being implemented for communication on social media?

1.6 Research Aim and Objectives

The primary focus of this study is expressed through the research aim and objectives. The research aim is an indicator of the overall purpose or focus of a research project. Research objectives are derived from the research aim, these are statements that indicate the specific or key issues a research project will focus on (Thomas and Hodges 2010).

Primary Research Aim

The aim of this study is to determine if visual storytelling promotes brand-audience engagement on social media.

Secondary Research Objectives

a) The study also aimed to examine and identify the ways in which visual storytelling is used as a communication tool by selected South African brands (Kalahari, Takealot and Bidorbuy during the period 01 February – 01 March 2014)

b) To establish the extent to which visual storytelling promotes engagement on the selected brand pages.

Clearly outlined research aims and objectives help in determining the appropriate research design and methods for the study. The research design and methods should be able to directly address the key issues highlighted in the research objectives.

1.7 Research Design and Methods

The research design and methods used in this study are reviewed in this section.

1.7.1 Research Design

In order to adequately analyse the use of visual storytelling by selected brands on social media, an interpretivist approach was employed for the study, with primary focus on qualitative data. However, in order to address all objectives of the study, a mixed methods approach was used. In research, a mixed methods approach is generally used when a second approach (quantitative or qualitative) is added to the research design because one method is considered to be inadequate in explicitly addressing the study's problem, purpose and questions (Morse and Niehaus 2009).

According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), a strand is a component of a study that encompasses the basic process of conducting qualitative or quantitative research, which includes posing a question, collecting data, analysing data and interpreting results based on that data. This study depicted a mixed methods approach starting with a qualitative strand and then conducting a quantitative strand for the following reasons:

- The qualitative strand was implemented to address the primary research question: how visual storytelling is being used by South African brands to interact with their audiences.

- The quantitative strand sought out to address the secondary research question: the extent to which storytelling promotes engagement as compared to other strategies being implemented for communication on social media.
- Results from both approaches are used for an overall interpretation.
- The two strands are mixed during data collection, connecting the results as one strand will build to the collection of the second strand.

The use of a mixed methods approach was appropriate for this study as it sought to extend the range of qualitative inquiry by also using quantitative inquiry to address the different inquiry components of the study.

The primary aims of an interpretivist approach focus on an understanding and reconstruction of experience and knowledge. As such, the research design will be based on the hermeneutic philosophy. According to Kvale (1996), hermeneutics is the study of human cultural activity as texts, with the aim of interpretation to find intended or expressed meanings. Texts, in Heidegger's (1927; 1962) opinion, include things such as written or verbal communication, visual arts and music. This process of interpretation can be achieved through a hermeneutic cycle. A hermeneutic cycle moves from the parts of experience, to the whole of experience and back and forth again and again to increase the depth of engagement with and the understanding of texts (Annells 1996; Polkinghorne 1983).

Issues involving the validity or reliability and quality of this type of research have been addressed through the examination of credibility, rigor, trustworthiness and authenticity (Beck 1993; Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Hall and Stevens 1991). These have been addressed through the choice of research methods used in the study.

1.7.2 Research Methods
The research methods used for data collection and analysis are explained below.

1.7.1.1 Sampling Procedure
Sampling in research is important in ensuring the selected group of participants are representative of the target population relevant to the study. The choice of sampling technique, number of recruited participants and the composition of participation groups have great implications on the reliability and outcome of a study. For this study, two sampling techniques were employed. Purposive sampling was used to identify the brands that form

part of the units of analysis for the study. These brands were selected on the basis that they are South African brands and have their own brand pages on social networking sites. Within the selected brands, random sampling will be utilised in selecting the type of content to be analysed. This technique will be applied because it will allow the researcher to select visual communication content posted by the selected brands.

1.7.1.2 Data Collection

The data collection procedures and inclusion criteria for the population are explained in this section.

Document Analysis of Visual Content

In research, document analysis is a research method that is used to collect data that will be coded and interpreted through content analysis. This research method is discussed in section 3.4.3 of this study. Following a close analysis of the use of visual storytelling on social media sites, a brief analysis of media posted on two social media channels (Facebook and Twitter) was conducted in order to examine and identify the use of visual storytelling on social media by the selected brands. For the purposes of this study, analysis was done on visual content that was available over a period of 1 month (February – March 2014). In March 2013, Facebook introduced the new timeline to pages for brands. The changes Facebook made gave brands more tools to use in creating engagement through compelling content, with greater emphasis on visual storytelling (Digital Marketing 2013). The document analysis will include textual interpretation of the actual comments and interactions by users on the selected brands' social media pages, as well as visual semiotics.

Inclusion Criteria

An inclusion criteria is a way of establishing characteristics that subjects must have in order for them to be included in a study. In planning a research study, an inclusion criterion is important for replication or reproduction of the method in a similar study (Meline 2006). The inclusion criteria for this study are highlighted below.

Social Networks:

- Facebook was chosen for this study because it is the biggest social network in South Africa (World Wide Worx 2013), with 9.4 million users as of September 2013.

- Twitter follows closely to Facebook and research also indicates that 85% of users access Twitter. (World Wide Worx 2013).
- These two platforms are also favourites with South African brands, with 95% of major brands having some form of social media strategy in place, centred on Facebook (51%) and Twitter (33%) (World Wide Worx 2012).

Brands:

- Data relating to this study will also be obtained from three brand choices, namely Bidorbuy, Takealot and Kalahari.com. These brands were selected for this study on the basis that they fall in the category of online shopping. In order to specialise the focus of this study, all specialised online shopping brands were not considered.
- Out of a possible six non-specialised online shopping South African brands, only three (50% of the total target population) were selected. While the other half of the target population makes use of visual communication on Facebook and Twitter, majority of them either did not have a large number of users enough for the sample or they did not employ as much visual storytelling in their interactions.
- The criteria for the three subjects were as follows:
  (1) The brand must have a minimum of 20 000 'likes' on Facebook and 4 000 'followers' on Twitter.
  (2) The brand must fall in the 'non-specialised online shopping' category.
  (3) The brand must be active on both Facebook and Twitter.
  (4) The brand must make use of one or more types of visual storytelling on their brand pages during the time period selected.

  The following are the statistics for the selected brand pages on the two social media platforms (as of 26.04.2014):

Brand	Facebook Likes	Twitter Followers
Bidorbuy	211, 432	5, 006
Takealot	83, 059	5, 624
Kalahari.com	81, 561	6, 275

Table 1.1 Social Media Statistics *(Source: Researcher's Own)*

1.7.1.3 Data Analysis

This research made use of content analysis as the data analysis procedure. Data collected was both quantitative and qualitative. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005:1278), content analysis is 'a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns'. This method is discussed in detail in section 3.5.1 of this study. Content analysis consisted of an examination of visual content posted on the selected brand pages on Facebook and Twitter, taking note of what participants said or did in response to the visual content shared. Through content analysis, main themes were identified and discussed as outlined in chapter four of this study. This was followed by a discussion of the findings in order to rationalise the findings and implications thereof.

1.8 Ethical Considerations

In the process of collecting data, some minor ethical issues arise. Creswell (1998) provides a list of potential ethical issues the researcher must take into consideration when collecting data. These are listed below:

- How the study will protect the anonymity of individuals, roles, and incidents in the project

- Storage of analysed data

- Ownership of collected and analysed data

- Providing an accurate account of the data

The researcher has considered all the above mentioned issues as well as the following considerations:

- The research posed no risk of harm, embarrassment or offence, however slightly or temporary to the participant, third parties or to the community at large.

No property, personal or cultural, was collected in the course of the research project. Primary and secondary data was collected from online archives and as such, no information was obtained from any subjects, third parties or communities.

1.9 Validity and Reliability of the Methodology

In research, reliability estimates the extent to which a data collection tool will yield consistent findings, provide similar observations and conclusions reached by other researchers or provide a clear sense of how data was collected. On the other hand, validity estimates the extent to which data collection methods used provide accurate measurement guides for what they intended to measure, as well as the degree to which they measure what they are supposed to (Saunders *et al.* 2009).

The intention of this study is to make use of valid and reliable data collection methods. Drawing on data collected from the document analysis, data analysis allowed the research to formulate a logical argumentation in the write up of the report. The methodology used in this research is valid and reliable as the findings are replicable as other researchers can conduct similar studies.

1.10   Delimitations of the study

The scope of this study was limited to user engagement on social media, with specific focus on how organisations/brands are interacting with their customers. The geographical restrictions limit the study to South Africa as only three South African brands were considered. The three selected brands are representative of 'non-specialised online shopping' South African brands that communicate via Facebook and Twitter.

 Two social networks were used as a sample and these are representative of the social media networks that allow use of visual storytelling. This already delineates the study as other social networks that do not allow use of visual communication are not considered in the present study. The content analysis was done in relation to the types of visual communication used by selected brands and the amount of responses received. This study did not discuss all content posted on the selected brand pages during the time period selected.

1.11 Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following key terms will be defined.

1.11.1 Social Media

A wide range of online, word-of-mouth forums, including blogs, company sponsored discussion boards and chat rooms, consumer-to-consumer boards and forums and social networking websites (Mangold and Faulds 2009).

1.11.2 Corporate Social Media (a subset of social media)

A variety of new and emerging sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities and issues (Blackshaw and Nazzaro 2006).

1.11.3 Engagement

Engagement in the social media context refers to the ability for consumers and brands to reach out to and interact on a brand-to-consumer and consumer-to-brand level (Social Media Today 2011).

1.11.4 Visual storytelling

A way of communicating or telling a story visually in forms that can be read or looked upon, such as photography, illustration or videos and can be enhanced with graphics and audio (Brain Pickings 2011).

1.11.5 Brand

A brand can be defined as a product, service or concept that is publicly distinguished from other similar services, products or concepts so that it can be easily communicated, marketed and identified (Computing Fundamentals 1999).

2   CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter on the literature review is divided into sections, each serving the purpose of exploring the various issues and concepts raised in Chapter One. Concepts of corporate storytelling and visual storytelling will be explored within the public relations context. There is need to explore the concept of 'storytelling' so as to find out what public relations practitioners think of when they hear the words 'storytelling' and 'visual storytelling'. This section of the chapter leads on to the specific area of interest, 'visual storytelling and engagement on social media'. This section offers a link between the rise of visual storytelling and social media, discussing how the two influence engagement between brands and their audiences. The chapter ends with an examination of the visual rhetoric theory which forms the theoretical framework that will be used for the analysis of data gathered for this study.

The reviewing of relevant literature has served a number of purposes for this study. Through the literature review, it has been possible to expand on the content and background of the study. For example, the study has been able to examine in detail the concept of visual storytelling as it specifically pertains to public relations. Apart from expanding the content and background of the study, the reviewing of literature has also proved important in deciding the research methods used in the research. Lastly, the literature review also serves to support the conclusions and recommendations made in Chapter Five.

2.2 Storytelling as a Public Relations (PR) Strategy

There are various ways in which public relations practitioners can incorporate storytelling as part of their public relations strategy. This section highlights some of the ways storytelling can be used in public relations.

2.2.1 Storytelling as Brand Personalization

Storytelling has existed over the years as a form of entertainment, with fairy tales and comics being the most popular forms of stories. It is also a familiar approach in corporate communication as it is used as a communication strategy by public relations practitioners. However, with the recent growth of digital communication, storytelling has moved to the

digital space and has grown into corporate communication for brands. Scientific research reveals an understanding of storytelling as 'a clear aid to memory, as a means of making sense of the world, as a way to make and strengthen emotional connections, and as a way of recognizing and identifying with brands of any type' (Herskovitz and Crystal 2010:21). Herskovitz and Crystal (2010) believe that persona-focused storytelling is of particular importance to branding, it is the persona that serves as an emotional link between brands and their audiences. Similarly, Denning (2006) refers to corporate storytelling as a narrative approach to making information real and appealing to the audiences. These definitions imply that storytelling is an important element to successful branding as it is essentially the sum of corporate behaviours and corporate communication, which inform customers' experiences with a particular brand. Through corporate storytelling, brands use pedagogical and psychological techniques to create a lasting impression on their audiences, or as McLellan (2006:19) puts it, corporate storytelling is used for 'framing information so that it is understandable, meaningful and memorable'. When corporate communication is used in this way, it creates an abstract value, where the emotions of the audiences are evoked by mere association with the brand, and this in turn, has a positive effect on the relationships created between the brand and its audiences (Wolstonholme 2008).

2.2.2 Storytelling Creates Deeper Understanding of Audiences

Storytelling is claimed by several researchers (McLellan 2006, Shankar *et al*. 2001) to be a powerful communication tool that is an essential element of human imagination and intelligence, and it can be used for engaging audiences. The power of corporate communication, as McLellan (2006) puts it, lies in its ability to require active listening from the audiences and the fact that storytelling, unlike other communication strategies, provides mechanisms that place emphasis on feeling and meaning. Furthermore, McLellan (2006) asserts that empowering a speaker; negotiating differences and creating bonds between individuals, are just a few of the many key functions stories can play in public relations. On the other hand, Shankar *et al*. (2001) provide a wider perspective on corporate storytelling. They argue that storytelling is important for audiences to make sense of their consumption experiences and how the brands form part of their lives. These insights into storytelling reveal that corporate storytelling is a powerful communication strategy that is increasingly being used by organisations and brands for their marketing and brand management.

According to Fog *et al*. (2005), storytelling communicates a brand's values to audiences in a way that they will understand, and its power lies in the emotional connection that is built with the audience. In other words, it is through corporate storytelling that a brand becomes strong as storytelling conveys the correct brand mind-set to the target audience. Furthermore, Fog *et al*. (2005) highlight that for a brand's story to have impact on the target audience, it should be written with a direct link to the values of the organisation or brand it is communicating on behalf of. Similarly, Shankar *et al*. (2001) seem to agree with this point of view. The scholars believe that it is corporate storytelling that creates emotional bonds with audiences, creating a consistent brand image.

It is quite evident that storytelling as a communication tool is increasingly important in public relations. Some scholars argue that storytelling is of great importance as customer buying decisions in the future, are highly likely to be influenced by invisible factors such as the corporate stories organisations or brands use to market themselves (Mossberg and Nissen-Johansen 2006). This point of view is discussed further by Jensen (1999), who states that though functionalities of products with practical values will still be required by customers, it is the corporate stories that will play the most important role in decision making regarding purchases. His argument continues as he also points out that consumers buy products and services to experience the product or service experience, which represent certain lifestyles. The customers value that corporate stories create value for the brands they associate with, subsequently adding value to their chosen lifestyle (Jensen 1999). This view is echoed by Shankar *et al*. (2001) who state that storytelling is the crucial element for consumers making sense of their consumption experiences.

2.2.3 Storytelling Allows Emotional Connections with Audiences

Sinclair (2005) states that storytelling can consist of high social presence and media richness. Stories that bring audiences psychologically and physically closer are regarded as demonstrating a high social presence, while exposure to a variety of media platforms creates media richness. This high social presence is relatively easy to achieve with corporate stories as the stories themselves enable recipients of the message to construct their own meaning which is in line with their ideas and goals (Sinclair 2005; Simmons 2006). It is this personal component of stories, as Hansen (2008) puts it, that achieves an understanding with audiences that statistics and data could not achieve in isolation.

The assertions by Denning (2005) and Sinclair (2005) highlight that corporate storytelling is fundamentally a deeper, natural, engaging communication strategy across a diverse audience that interpret narratives into their own experiences. Research by Gardner (2004) in the cognitive psychology field supports the use of stories in influencing and reinforcing opinions to audiences, which complements the aims and objectives of successful public relations for organisations or brands. One such objective for using storytelling in public relations is creating a new perspective for audiences, which complements opinion or behaviour of consumers by making use of narration to show a brand's past, visions of the future, social bonding as well as the brand itself (Gill 2009; Wilkins 1984; Witherspoon 1997; Kaye 1995).

2.2.4 Storytelling Increases Effectiveness of Public Relations

The rising use of storytelling by brands is enabled by the entertaining elements of stories as stories get audiences involved and engaged (Social Media Today 2013). Stories, news and conversations are described as living entities that require listening and active participation to have meaningful two-way engagement (Social Media Today 2013). It is only after meaningful engagement will shared storylines and narratives provide the brands with any return on investment (ROI).

The various literature on corporate storytelling seem to make a strong conclusion that corporate storytelling is a signification element of any public relations strategy that brands are using as stories are more than just entertainment, their use as a communication strategy relates to a change or reinforcement of values, behaviours and opinions in the audiences (Prusak 2001; Kaye 1996). Table 2.1 summarises some of the benefits of corporate storytelling in public relations, based on the literature that has been reviewed for this study.

PR Benefit of Corporate Storytelling	Author
Storytelling is an effective means of building positive relationships between brands and their strategic stakeholders.	Fog *et al*. (2006); Dowling (2006); Gill (2011); Heath and Palenchar (2009); Kaye (1995); Post (2004); Denning (2005); Sinclair (2005)

Corporate stories communicate the essence of a brand to all stakeholders, creating more engagement.	Roper and Fill (2002); Simmons (2006); Dowling (2006); Sinclair (2005); Kaye (1996); Prusak *et al.* (2005)
Information presented through storytelling is more tangible as audiences apply their own experiences into the interpretation of the information.	Hansen (2008); Dervin (1999); Simmons (2006), Kuhlthau (1993, 2004); Boje (2008); Sinclair (2005), Pitts (1995)
Effective corporate stories appeal to emotions and values, and have a life cycle relating to the brand.	Brown (1995); Fryer (2003); Prusak (2001); Denning (2005); Dowling (2006); Taliaferro and Ruggiano (); Herskovitz and Crystal (2010); Leonidou and Leonidou (2009)
Corporate storytelling is beneficial in knowledge transfer as it helps audiences to organise, remember and understand information.	Herskovitz and Crystal (2010); McLellan (2006); Morgan and Dennehy (1997); Woodside (2010); Caine and Caine (1994), Marzec (2007)

Table 2.1 PR Benefits of Using Corporate Storytelling (*Adapted from Gill 2009*)

The above table shows that there is a strong agreement among leading scholars in the field of corporate storytelling and public relations. It can be concluded that corporate storytelling creates a deeper engagement with target audiences. These theorists endorse the notion that corporate stories are a flexible communication tool that reflect an organisation/brand's position in line with the selected interests of the selected target audience it wishes to engage with.

Storytelling is important in marketing a brand because to create value, a brand must be endowed with meaning. It is the meaning — the story — that determines how that brand is perceived and the extent to which it is preferred by users over other brands. Some brands have stories that have evolved over the years and are continually refined. Other brands are new or reinvented and the story needs to be retold or developed from whole cloth but

implications suggests that brands should make full use of storytelling to promote engagement on social media sites (Bennet 2013).

2.3 The Rise of Visual Storytelling

The growth of social media has brought with it a new trend of visual storytelling for brands. Visual storytelling is defined by Griffin (2008) as a way of creating meaning through visuals, that is, information is communicated through a visual display. Lester (2005) gives a wider perspective of visual storytelling, he states that visual storytelling is an interdisciplinary communication approach, which brings together the disciplines of communication studies, anthropology, media and cultural studies, sociology, semiotics, as well as the theory and practice of visual design. Similarly, Mustafa and Hamzah (2011) echo that visual storytelling encompasses a number of disciplines and it is found in the form of animation, video, illustration, photography, television, graphic design and many other visually creative forms of communication.

As a result of visual storytelling being a multi discipline communication tool, the term is freely used to refer to a wide variety of formats. The term 'visual storytelling', in this research, is used to refer to the formats that are defined below:

Type of Visual Storytelling	Definition
Photos	A photographic image is a pictorial recording of an object, person or scene, in the form of a printout or as a slide recorded by a camera (The Free Dictionary 2014).
Videos	Videos are widely known as recordings of motion picture, which can be stored digitally for broadcast (Merriam-Webster 2014).
Infographics	Infographics are the visualisation of ideas or data that convey complex information in a manner that is easily and quickly understood by the audience (Smiciklas 2012).

Storyboards	A storyboard is essentially a graphic organiser, which one can make a consecutive set of sketches depicting the important changes in a scene and action in a series of shots (Mirriam – Webster 2014). Storyboards can either be physical or digital and they help in the visualization of sequence and interconnectedness (WhatIs 2013).
PowerPoint Presentations	Microsoft defined PowerPoint Presentations as a digital aid in the form of slides when presenting information to audiences (Russell 2014).
Memes	Schubert (2003) defines memes as ideas, behaviours, concepts or catchphrases depicted in a form of media, which is spread on the internet from person to person, often as a form of mimicry.

Table 2.2 Types of Visual Storytelling (Source: *Researcher's own*)

Though it has traditionally been assumed that information is best communicated in the written form, the rising use of visual storytelling shows that creation of meaning is no longer limited to the written form. Messages that have power, meaning and cultural importance are those that make use of a combination of text and images (Lester 2005). Easy-to-use digital technologies have rapidly expanded the role of visuals in communication, which in turn makes digital media platforms an interesting field for visual communicators.

Visual communication tools are being integrated into corporate communication because they have become more accessible due to the shift from analog to digital communication technologies. Wujec (2009), in his TED.com talk, explicates this rise in use of visual communication. He highlights that humans create meaning to visuals in three basic ways:

• Humans create meaning to images by an 'act of interrogation'

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- Images are used to clarify messages intended for recipients

- Humans make images interactive so that they can be more engaging

Communication through visual, is fundamentally based on creating meaning and making ideas clear, persistent an interactive through visualisation (Wujec 2009). The rising use of visual storytelling has also been linked with the human need for social interaction. This is as a result of the presence of digital natives on the internet. Digital natives are essentially social and have a fundamental need to communicate while they carry on with their daily activities in life (Prensky 2001). This behaviour is especially true in the case of social media. The social media platforms allow social interactions, through social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter, which have rapidly transformed the way people communicate with their friends, colleagues and families. Cowan (2011) argues that it is these social media tools that have transformed communication to 'lightweight' communication, which enables social media users to effectively and quickly 'microblog', making the information they share available, but without the need for immediate response from their audiences (Cowan 2011). Microblogging is defined by Finin *et al*. (2007:1) as 'a new form of communication which users can describe their current status in short posts distributed by instant messages, mobile phones, email or the Web'. Cowan (2011) goes on to highlight that from its introduction, Facebook has facilitated the distribution of more than thirty billion pieces of information, per month, most of which are in the form of pictures and videos. One can easily deduce from these notions that the omnipresence of visual storytelling on social media is as a result of the need for communication.

Recent research by M Booth and Simply Measured (2012) found that on Facebook's top 10 brand pages, photos and videos drive the most engagement, while videos are shared 12 times more than links and text posts combined, and photos are liked two times more than text updates. Brands that can successfully tell their story with images and visual media can engage in new ways with their existing customers and even reach a whole new audience (Walter 2013).

Furthermore, Walter (2013) points out that many brands or organisations are regarding their consumers as their biggest asset, and by telling the story of their brands visually, they can share and connect with their audience in a more meaningful way. Corporate storytelling gives

brands a more human quality and lends trust and credibility to a brand (Bulldog Reporter 2013). With the rise of social media sites such as Pinterest and Instagram, and the major changes going on with Facebook and their new Timeline layout, it is quickly becoming apparent that social media is in a major shift to a more visual space.

However, in the already cluttered social media platforms, readers want quick, bite-sized pieces of information that are easy to digest. People are already being bombarded by tons of information on every social platform they use, forcing them to better control their feeds and ignore anything that may be too time consuming (Kamath 2012).

Strong visuals allow brands to eliminate the clutter and provide their consumers/customers with quick but relevant material of what is going on with the brand, in a simple yet engaging way. A captivating photograph or infographics can tell the reader as much as an entire article, while only requiring a fraction of the time to understand (Kamath 2012).

2.4 Engagement in Social Media

Engagement in the social media has been defined by Cheung *et al*. (2011) as the level of a customer's physical, cognitive, and emotional presence in connections with a particular online social media platform. They further highlight that the feelings of vigour, absorption, dedication towards a brand on social media are driven by involvement and social interaction. Social media has revolutionised interaction for consumers (Kaplan and Haenlien 2010; Mangold and Faulds 2009), as it has allowed for dramatic influences on every stage of consumer decision-making process including information acquisition, brand awareness, purchasing behaviour, and post-purchase communication and evaluation, as well as influencing general opinions and attitudes towards a brand or service (Mangold and Faulds 2009).

Calder *et al*. (2009) examined the concept of engagement on social media and they found out that both personal and social-interactive experiences by the target audience, positively correlate with effective engagement. It is also pointed out that engagement between brands and their audiences largely depend on perception of the brand's relevance and value, as well as its influence on social identities and group norms (Zeng, Huang and Dou 2009).

The roles of audiences in brand engagement on social media has been explored in detail by Forrester Research (2010), that developed a 'Social Technographics Ladder" that shows consumer behaviours when engaging with brands online.

Figure 2.1 Forrester's Social Technographics Ladder

Figure 1 The Social Technographics Ladder Now Includes Conversationalists

Creators
24%
- Publish a blog
- Publish your own Web pages
- Upload video you created
- Upload audio/music you created
- Write articles or stories and post them

Conversationalists
33%
- Update status on a social networking site*
- Post updates on Twitter*

Critics
37%
- Post ratings/reviews of products or services
- Comment on someone else's blog
- Contribute to online forums
- Contribute to/edit articles in a wiki

Collectors
20%
- Use RSS feeds
- Vote for Web sites online
- Add "tags" to Web pages or photos

Joiners
59%
- Maintain profile on a social networking site
- Visit social networking sites

Spectators
70%
- Read blogs
- Listen to podcasts
- Watch video from other users
- Read online forums
- Read customer ratings/reviews
- Read tweets

Inactives
17%
None of the above

Groups include consumers participating in at least one of the indicated activities at least monthly.

(*Source: North American Technographics® Empowerment Online Survey, Q4 2009 (US*)

According to the 'ladder', critics for example, engage with brands through ratings and reviews, comment on related blogs, contribute to online brand forums and also contribute to articles in a wiki. It seems such activities, when monitored over a time period, can give brands an idea of the level of engagement they have with their audiences (Forrester Research 2010).

van Doom *et al*. (2010) argue that customer engagement on social media involves more than just attitude, brand motivation drivers are as a result of customers' behavioural manifestation towards the particular brand. The authors go on to state that, such behaviours by customers include word-of-mouth recommendations, review writing as well as engaging in legal action (van Doom *et al*. 2010). This is in line with Algesheimer *et al*. (2005), who also argue that brand engagement extends beyond attitudes as actual participation behaviour is required from the customer. One such motivation for brand engagement for customers is brand identification. Brand identification refers to 'the set of brand associations from which a person derives functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits' (Hughes and Ahearne 2010:15). Such a brand identification can be a positive contribution towards customer's engagement and affiliation with the brand. According to Aaker (1996), customers can also choose to engage with brands on social media because they want to live up to the brand's symbolic function. A brand's symbolic function is key to brand identity as it usually goes beyond the standard set of brand associations (Aaker 1996).

It is believed that active engagement by audiences boosts the presence of a brand through the fostering of spirited brand engagement, brand satisfaction, brand loyalty and a higher level of brand commitment (Kim *et al*. 2008). The direct link between customer commitment and customer engagement is very strong, with customers becoming vested in the successes and failures of the particular brand (Ashforth and Mael 1989). Brand engagement in a social media context goes beyond the notion of engagement in other types of media. Social media has led to a specific kind of brand-customer engagement that epitomizes an interactive relationship between brands and their audiences.

According to Mollen and Wilson (2010:5) brand engagement in a social media context refers to 'the cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the web site or other computer-mediated entities designed to communicate brand value'. For instrumental value to be obtained from these interactions, there is a need for experiential value as well (Mollen and Wilson 2010). Brodie *et al*. (2011b) reiterate that, from a customer point of view, engagement with a brand is mainly motivated by brand satisfaction, trust, brand commitment and the general relation that the customer has with the brand. From all these insights, its seems reasonable to assume that brand-audience

engagement on social media is based on the value the brand creates for the customer and it is this value that influences the engagement behaviours that the audiences choose to do.

The phenomenal up rise of social media networks in the recent years has enabled consumers to increasingly participate in the new forms of business to consumer (B2C) interaction processes. This emergence of new media has sent organisations/brands into developing ways to keep up with the communication changes and engage with consumers. For brands, social media platforms have the power to achieve great results for brand awareness, brand promotion and in generating sales, for very minimum cost and less time (Anzmac 2010). For consumers, the discussion forums, chat rooms, email, bulletin boards, blogs and social networks are just some of the tools facilitating interactive consumer experiences that may also foster the development of brand engagement (Brodie *et al*. 2011b).

Active brand engagement is considered as the strongest substantiation of brand resonance, the final stage of brand development in the consumer-based brand equity pyramid proposed by Keller (2001; 2009). Interactive marketing communications such as social media have a distinct advantage in their ability to encourage learning, teaching, and expression of commitment and observation of brand loyalty amongst consumers (Keller 2009). As Mollen and Wilson (2010) put it, some public relations practitioners refer to B2C engagement as the 'Holy Grail' in the context of online marketing. This suggests that a form of interaction between brands and consumers can be enhanced to promote brand engagement.

2.5 Social Media Engagement through Visual Storytelling

Social media has undoubtedly changed the ways brands interact with their audiences, with 73% of Internet users in the world being active on social media (Pew Research 2013). Reviewed literature shows that the most popular social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram and Google+ and these have contributed to the rapid increase in visual content for brand engagement with users (Simply Measured 2013; Beyond PR 2013; Naumann-Braun *et al*. (Eds) 2011; Social Media Today 2011). It can be concluded that the rise of visual storytelling on social media is mostly because of widespread access to high-speed internet; rapid growth of smart mobile devices such as phones and tablets; as well as the presence of digital natives on the internet (Aurrichio and Zdanowicz 2014).

Internet users between the ages of 18-29 make up 83% of people that are active on social media platforms, while 17% are made up of the elderly above the age of 50 (Pew Research 2013). Although these statistics present brands with a great opportunity for engagement, it is important that they use these engagement tools effectively in order to have a high engagement rate with their audiences. The following table shows different demographics on each social media platform. Demographics should be taken into account when creating visual content for brand engagement (Patel 2014).

Social Media Platform	Demographics
Facebook	- Women are 10% more likely to use Facebook than men - 84% of adult Internet users between the ages of 18-29 use Facebook - Between 2011- 2014, there has been a -25.3% decrease in teen users (ages 13-17), while users over the age of 55 have increased to 80.4%.
Twitter	- Virtually no gender disparity in Twitter users - Majority of users are between 18-29 years old - African-Americans are 12% more likely to use Twitter than Caucasians.
Google+	- 63% of Google+ users are male - 45% of Google+ users are between 18-24 years old - Almost half of Fortune Global 100 companies are active on Google+.
Instagram	- Women are 6% more likely to use Instagram than men - Majority of users are between 18-29 years old - African-Americans are 12% more likely to use Instagram than Caucasians.

Pinterest	- Women are four times more likely to use Pinterest than men
	- Adults under 50 dominate the site demographic
	- Very little variability in race and ethnicity of users.

Table 2.3 Social Media User Demographics (*Source: Pew Research 2013*)

This study examines use of visual storytelling, by South African brands, in promoting brand engagement on social media. The analysis is focused on how these brands are using visual storytelling or visual content to drive engagement with their audiences/customers. According to Simply Measured (2013), a brand's engagement rate is representative of its ability to engage with their social media audience. On average, top brands have a 12% engagement rate, depending on audience size.

Determining what is of interest to a brand's audience, can be of help in choice of content a brand can share. Aurrichio and Zdanowicz (2014) advise brands to gain understanding of conversations people are having about the particular brand before attempting to engage with them. However, familiarity with conversations around your brand on its own is not sufficient preparation for engagement. It is important to understand that the different social media platforms offer different kinds of engagement. Figure 2.2 highlights the types of engagement across the major social media platforms.

Figure 2.2 Types of Social Media Engagement

(*Source: Aurrichio and Zdanowicz 2014*)

Aurrichio and Zdanowicz (2014) further describe the types of social media engagement and how these can be turned into powerful strategies. The hashtags, for example, are a great strategy for branding and campaign management as they make content discoverable and increase overall reach. Mentions and tags on the other hand, empower the audiences, allowing them to be the storytellers as they endorse and create exposure for the brand (Aurrichio and Zdanowicz 2014). It seems that social media engagement is a great way of managing a brand's online reputation. Through the conversations with the audience, social media allows brands to determine useful interactions, learn ways to improve on products and services, as well as gaining insights on the brand itself.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

In research, a theoretical framework relates to the philosophical basis on which a research takes place and it acts as the link between the theoretical and practical aspects of the study undertaken. It has implications for every decision that is made in the research process (Mertens 1998). According to Crotty (1998), identifying methodologies and methods to be utilised in a research project and then justifying their choice is the starting point in developing a research proposal. He further explicates that methodologies relate to "the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods, and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes" (Crotty 1998: 3). On the other hand, research methods convey the procedures or techniques used in the collection and analysis of data related to the research question (Crotty 1998). As such, it is of importance to select a research method that is compatible with the research question under investigation (Mackay 1993).

The justification of the choice of research methodologies and methods is related to the identification of underlying assumptions about reality and understandings of human knowledge, which the researcher brings to the research, as well as the theoretical perspectives/frameworks that lie behind the methodologies used. As such, a theoretical framework can be defined as the underlying philosophical assumption about the researcher's view of the human world and the social life within, and also the philosophical basis, nature and limits of human knowledge underpinning the research (Crotty 1998).

While there are many philosophical assumptions/perspectives one can draw upon their investigation, the Visual Rhetoric perspective was of interest to this study. This theoretical framework was chosen after assessing contradictions and reviewing how and whether this framework is applicable to the type of study. Visual rhetoric is essentially the study of visual imagery within the discipline of rhetoric, where rhetoric itself, is concerned with the study of the use of symbols to communicate. It is also considered as a perspective that is concerned with the symbolic processes by which images perform communication (Foss 1994). Its main assumptions include the following:

Assumption 1 - In the use of Visual Rhetoric as a perspective, studies of images can be focused on:

a) Nature - encompassing the literal components of the visual artifact. This is the primary focus of visual rhetoric;

b) Function - representing the function an image serves for an audience; and

c) Evaluation – determining if the image serves its function (Foss 1994).

Assumption 2 - Studies of a Rhetorical Perspective, whether focused on nature, function or evaluation, assume one of the two forms:

1. Deductive Approach – This involves applying rhetorical theories and constructs to visual imagery to investigate questions about rhetoric and to contribute to existing rhetorical theories generated from the study of discourse;

2. Inductive Approach – This involves investigation of visual images themselves as a means to generate rhetorical theory that is expanded to include the visual (Foss 1994).

The focus of this study is to create an understanding of the use of visual storytelling as a communication strategy that promotes engagement between brands and their audiences. As such, this study focused on the function perspective of visual rhetoric, as focus was on determining if the types of visual storytelling used actually promote engagement. The study also used the inductive approach of visual rhetoric by applying the rhetoric theory to the visual component.

Taking into account the purpose of this research and the questions posed, this theoretical perspective is considered as appropriate to encapsulate this research study within the interpretivist approach and from a theoretical perspective of visual rhetoric.

2.7 Chapter Summary

The literature review chapter mainly focused on the link between visual storytelling and engagement on social media, the various types of visual storytelling, engagement between brands and audiences on social media as well as the visual rhetoric theoretical framework. The following chapter will delve further into the research methodology chosen for this study. The chapter also motivates the selection of the particular research strategy and methods used.

3 CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter gives a detailed account of the techniques that were used to achieve goals set out in this research. A clear and concise description of how the study was conducted is given through the research paradigm of the study also known as the "research design" that was adopted. The concepts "population and sample", sampling procedures, the research instruments that were adopted, the data collection procedures used, the types of data obtained and how the data will be presented and analysed are all described in this chapter.

In order to achieve the set objectives of a research, one has to decide how to collect and process data. Research methodology comes in as one tries to answer questions like how, when and where all the information came about. Leedy (1989) says that a methodology is an investigative framework within which facts are placed more clearly in order to depict a clearer meaning of what they represent. Barroso *et al*. (2003) also state that a methodology is a study that describes a process. One can therefore conclude that this study needs an investigative framework within which facts are placed.

3.2 Research Philosophy

When conducting research, the researcher's role and techniques to be used are prescribed by philosophical assumptions. Lewis, Saunders and Thornhill (2007) highlight epistemological and ontological assumptions as the widely used assumptions in research. Epistemological assumptions are concerned with determining if knowledge used in a field study is regarded as acceptable (Burrell and Morgan 1979), while ontological assumptions are concerned with methodologies and nature of reality in which the researcher conducts research (Morgan and Smircich 1980). Epistemological assumptions constitute the basis for the interpretive research paradigm used in this study.

3.2.1 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, according to Smith (2004) is an approach to qualitative research that is oriented towards exploring and understanding the experience of a specified phenomenon. In its own right as a methodology, the interpretive approach

involves detailed examinations of experiences of participants regarding a particular phenomenon (Smith 2004). The Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis approach was developed as a complementary approach to the more established approaches in qualitative and quantitative research and has since been further developed to have refined philosophical and theoretical underpinnings. This approach is interpretive and phenomenological in that it involves a two-stage interpretation or hermeneutic process. This two-stage interpretation process is achieved as the researcher seeks to make sense of a phenomenon that the participants of the research sample also seek to understand (Packer and Addison 1989; Palmer 1969, Smith 2007).

One of the assumptions of interpretive research is that reality is socially constructed, with the researcher being the means of revealing reality (Cavan, Delahaye and Sekaran 2001; Walsham 1995a, 1995b). It is the researcher's interpretations that play a major role in interpretive studies as they bring "such subjectivity to the fore, backed with quality arguments rather than statistical exactness" (Garcia and Quek 1997:459). This study strives to attain an understandable account of the use of visual storytelling in promoting engagement between South African brands and their audiences on social media platforms.

The Interpretive Phenomenological approach is primarily associated with qualitative research, which is highly subjective as the researcher collects open-ended data intended for theming and categorisation (Creswell 1998). Objective researches on the other hand, are associated with quantitative research and collect statistical data that is used to identify, quantify and report phenomena (Hussey and Hussey 1997). However, Cunliffe (2010) argues that the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is fading, as a result of the emergence of mixed methods being used in research. Mixed research methods are neither objective nor subjective and as such, are being applied in most research strategies.

3.2.2 Hermeneutic Philosophy

In this study, hermeneutics was used to understand the ways in which Kalahari, Bidorbuy and Takealot made use of visual storytelling on their social media pages in promoting brand – customer engagement. Situated in the interpretive paradigm, hermeneutics is essentially the science of interpretation (Crotty 1998). The origins of hermeneutics are derived from interpretation of ancient Greek texts. Bleicher (1980) similarly defined hermeneutics as the philosophy or theory of the interpretation of meaning from text and ancient cultures.

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However, hermeneutics has evolved to include interpretation of all forms of multimedia as Heidegger's theory of hermeneutics shifted from understanding linguistic communication to existential understanding (Heidegger 1927). According to Heidegger, hermeneutics is more than just a methodology for interpretation. The scholar argues that the interpretation of text inevitably reveals an understanding of the social context in which the text was formed and it is this reciprocity between text and context that creates a hermeneutic circle. (Agosta 2010; Heidegger 1927).

A premise of the hermeneutic circle is that phenomenon understood from past knowledge is the basis for grasping the phenomenon that is yet to be understood (Bontekoe 1996). In other words, previous knowledge on a phenomenon is of importance in contextualizing the present phenomenon under interpretation. Consistent with Heidegger's circle of interpretation, information gathered for this study was integrated with previous information acquired through the reviewing of related literature. As discussed in chapter two of this study, there are various ways in which brands make use of visual communication as a communication strategy and this information was integrated with new information gathered, interpreted and presented in chapter four as the study progressed to create an enlightened view of the ways the selected three brands made use of visual storytelling in promoting engagement with their audiences.

The hermeneutic nature of this study entails the use of a mixed methods approach. The use of a mixed methods approach is appropriate for this study as the quantitative inquiry will be used as an extension of the qualitative, in order to address the different inquiry components of the study.

3.3 Research Design

A research design is a model of casual inference. It is a blue print that paves way to solution of problems under study in its various stages of research (Nachmias et al. 1996). A research design is chosen depending on the type of problem, knowledge available about the problem and resources available for the study and it is also informed by the research philosophy. The present study seeks to explore the use of visual storytelling on social media by South African brands in order to be able to understand the impact visual storytelling has on engagement between brands and their audiences. This study employs the interpretivist approach, whose

aims are understanding and reconstruction of knowledge and as such, the research design for this study will also be based on the hermeneutic philosophy. Though the interpretivist approach is primarily qualitative in nature, this study also makes use of a mixed methods approach in order to adequately address all the objectives of the study. This section will discuss the mixed methods approach as this approach has been used as part of an interpretive research paradigm.

3.3.1 Mixed Methods Approach

It is the view of many researchers (Thomas 2003; Jackson 1991; Jack and Raturi 2006; Creswell 2003; Mingers and Gill 1996) that qualitative and quantitative research methods are more complementary than antipathetic. As such, use of a mixed methods approach enables an enriched understanding of phenomena through extension of knowledge, confirmation of results or through the initiation of new perspectives about a research area of interest (Bazaley 2004).

This study made use of a mixed methods approach as one data source was insufficient in adequately addressing the research objectives. Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989) noted that a mixed methods approach may be used for expansion, where the study seeks to extend the range and breadth of inquiry by using two methods for the different inquiry components. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), researchers should consider four key decisions when choosing a mixed approach:

- The level of interaction between the two methods. This is essentially the extent to which both research methods interact and also operate independently. There is an interactive level of interaction between qualitative and qualitative methods in this study as the two methods are mixed before the final interpretation.
- The relative priority of each method. The present study utilizes a qualitative priority as greater emphasis was placed on the qualitative methods while qualitative data played a secondary role.
- The timing of the research methods. Timing describes the order in which the two types of data are collected within the study. Data for the study was collected in concurrent timing as the researcher used content analysis to collect and analyse both types of data.

- The procedures for mixing the methods. Qualitative and quantitative data for this study was mixed during data collection and as such, the data analysis and final interpretation of results was based on the mixed approach.

Making use of a mixed methods approach as part of the interpretivist research paradigm was appropriate for this study as the qualitative data addressed the primary research question that seeks to determine ways in which South African brands use visual storytelling on social media. The quantitative data sought to examine the extent to which storytelling promotes engagement. According to Murphy (1990) and Creswell (2003), use of mixed methods in research is a pragmatic approach as the study does not rely on one method but rather liberally relies on both the positivistic and interpretative approaches. The use of both methods allowed the researcher to draw more interpretations from a wider range of data, without relying on just one source of data.

3.4 Data Collection

The study makes use of documentary analysis for its data collection procedures and this is discussed here.

3.4.1 Target Population

In the context of research, the concept population does not necessarily refer to 'people in a geographical area' but also refers to objects, events or observations of which the study draws conclusions from (Borg and Gall 1989). Population refers to "all members of a real or hypothetical set of people, events, objects, to which we generalize the results of our research" (Borg and Gall 1989:30). Similarly, Gay (1995:549) looks at population as "the group the research would like the results of the study to be generalisable". Distinction is also made between 'target population' and 'accessible population'. The target population generally refers to the entire group that a research study is interested in, while the accessible population is the selected population that a researcher can apply their conclusions on (Gay 1995). The distinction is important in this study since it resorts to an accessible population.

As discussed in section 1.7.1.2 of this document, an inclusion criteria was used in determining the target and accessible population. In the present study, all South African brands that interact with their stakeholders on social media comprise the target population, while those

non-specialised online shopping brands that actively engage with their stakeholders on both Facebook and Twitter make up the accessible or available population.

3.4.2 Sampling

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1989:1119) refers to a sample as "one of a number of things, or a part of a whole that can be looked at to see what the rest is like". In simpler terms, a sample is a specimen. Sampling therefore involves choosing "a number" which will be used as a 'specimen' in research reporting. In other words, this small number will be used as representative of the 'whole'. The type of sampling used in a research study is determined by the research paradigm. Probability sampling, purposive sampling, convenience sampling and mixed methods sampling are some of the sampling techniques usually suitable for an interpretive study (Teddlie and Yu 2007).

3.4.1.1 Purposive Sampling

In purposive sampling researchers build up a sample that is satisfactory for the specific needs (Cohen and Manion 1995). In other words, a purposive sampling strategy allows the researcher to deliberately select specific persons, setting or events in order to obtain the necessarily information for the study, which cannot be obtained by other sampling strategies (Maxwell 2008). In this study, the use of purposive sampling enabled the researcher to identify the brands that made up the sample. The basis for selection included proximity and ease of access, geographical location of the brands (South Africa), as well as activity on social media platforms.

3.4.1.2 Random Sampling

Teddlie and Yu (2007) note that random sampling occurs when each sampling unit within an accessible population has an equal chance of inclusion within the sample. In this study, random sampling was utilised in the selection of the type of content to be analysed.

It is suggested by Barbour (2008) that sample units in an accessible population must share at least one common characteristic. Based on this assertion, the composition of the sample for this study depended on the brand activity on social media platforms. The selected brands within the sample had to have active interaction with their stakeholders on both Facebook and Twitter social media sites.

3.4.3 Document Analysis

In qualitative research, document analysis is an analytical method used in the reviewing or evaluation of documents that range from printed and electronic (computer-generated and Internet-transmitted) documents. The procedure, like any other systematic procedures, requires data collected to be examined and interpreted before eliciting any meaning, understanding and developing empirical knowledge from it (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Rapley 2007). The process of document analysis yields data such as quotations, excerpts or entire paragraphs that is systematically organised into categories, case examples or themes through the content data analysis procedure (Labuschagne 2003).

It is common for mixed-methods research studies to make use of document analysis in data collection. For example, in this study, document analysis is used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data in order to examine and identify the use of visual storytelling on social media by the selected South African brands. Though mostly used as a complimentary method, document analysis has been used as a stand-alone research method in this study. The justification in the use of document analysis lies in the role it plays in methodological and data assessment, especially in interpretive studies as documents are the main source of data collection. However, with any technique, there are advantages and disadvantages in making use of them in research. Table 3.1 highlights some of the advantages and limitations of document analysis.

	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
DOCUMENT ANALYSIS	Efficient: Document analysis, compared to other research methods, is less time consuming and therefore considered as more efficient.	Low Irretrievability: It could be difficult to retrieve documents as sometimes documents are deliberately blocked. (Yin 1994)
	Easy availability of information: most documents are readily available for analysis as they are shared in the public domain (Merriam 1988).	Insufficient Detail: documents retrieved could have insufficient detail for the study as they are independently produced.

	Lack of Obtrusiveness and Reactivity: documents are not affected by the research processes of any current studies.	Biased Selectivity: available documents could be aligned with biases such as corporate policies and procedures or organisational agendas (Yin 1994).
	Cost Effective: Document analysis is less costly to conduct, as compared to other research strategies.	
	Stability: Documents cannot be altered by the presence of the current research study (Merriam 1988)	
	Exactness: documents can include exact references, details and names that are relevant to the research (Yin 1994).	
	Coverage: Documents can cover many settings or event, as well as span out over a long period of time (Yin 1994).	

Table 3.1. Advantages and Disadvantages of Document Analysis (*Adapted from Bowen 2009*)

3.5 Data Analysis

This study used a mixed methods approach and collected both qualitative and quantitative data. The data collected was organised logically and systematically in order for it to be analysed.

3.5.1 Content Analysis

Content analysis is a research method that may be used in the subjective interpretation of data through a systematic classification process that involves the coding and identification of major themes or patterns (Hseih and Shannon 2005). As a research method, content analysis is applicable in both qualitative and quantitative studies (Elo and Kyngas 2008). Data collected through content analysis can either be inductive or deductive. Patton (2002) describes inductive content analysis as a technique that examines the themes and categories that emerge from data. On the other hand, the deductive content analysis technique is used when

generating concepts or variables from previous theories (Berg 2001). The use of deductive content analysis is suggested for quantitative studies by Zhang and Wildermuth (2009), while Lauri and Kyngas (2005) recommend the use of inductive content analysis in qualitative studies. The present study is primarily qualitative and as such, makes use of inductive content analysis techniques. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) discuss the three inductive content analysis strategies that are used in qualitative studies, as summarized in Table 3.2 below.

Conventional Content Analysis (Inductive content analysis)
- Conventional content analysis is used when the objective of research is to provide description for a phenomenon.   - The purpose of this technique is to either validate or extend a theory/conceptual framework.   - Coding for this technique is derived from raw data (directly and inductively).
Directed Content Analysis (deductive content analysis)
- Extending existing theory or phenomenon is the main aim of this technique. Direct content analysis aims to contribute to existing research, filling in any gaps in research.   - Coding in directed content analysis begins with relevant research findings or theory.
Summative Content Analysis
- Analysis starts from a point of word count or manifest content, extending to the interpretation of underlying context (lateral meanings and themes).   - The purpose of this technique is to explore the use of words or indicators in an inductive manner.

Table 3.2 Qualitative Content Analysis Techniques (*Source Hsieh and Shannon 2005*)

The aim of this study is to create an understanding of the use of visual storytelling as a communication strategy that promotes engagement between brands and their audiences. As such, the interpretive nature of this study is best suited to the use of directed content analysis and this will influence the way the coding, theming and categorisation are done.

Due to the nature of the study making use of a mixed methods approach, the study also made use of quantitative content analysis. In quantitative content analysis, data collected include media content such as topics or issues, message ratio volumes, audience reach as well as

frequency (Macnamara 2005). Quantitative content analysis is applicable for the form of media under examination as visual media uses more semiotic systems than any other form of media. In quantitative content analysis, it is important that both the form of media and content characteristics are considered as the form characteristics are often important mediators of the content elements (Neuendorf 2002). As such, it was important for this study to collect and analyze statistical data so as to grasp some meaning from the way the selected South African brands are making use of visual storytelling.

3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter looked at the research philosophy and research design applied to this study. The different data types and data collection procedures used to collect information were also discussed, highlighting the value of using various methods and techniques in research. Random and purposive sampling techniques were used as part of the data collection procedures. The following chapter will deal with data presentation and analysis.

4   CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Three discussed the detailed research methods employed in the collection of data for this study. Chapter Four presents the research findings collated from the content analysis. An interpretation of the results will attempt to provide insights into the use of visual storytelling in promoting engagement between brands and their customers. Through the use of qualitative content analysis, the collected data was systematically organized to generate themes and categories for data analysis. Results from the content analysis will allow the researcher to draw conclusions about the extent to which the use of visual storytelling on social media platforms, promotes brand engagement. This will also help in providing recommendations and conclusions in the next chapter.

4.2 Structure of Content Analysis Report

This chapter presents findings that are directly deduced from the interpretation of primary data collected through document analysis as discussed in Chapter Three of this treatise. The structure of data presentation is obtained through the coding, theming and categorisation of data.

4.2.1 Coding, Theming and Categorisation

There are three major procedures used in identifying and developing categories and classes for content analysis, namely common classes, special classes and theoretical classes. Common classes are mostly used to record demographic information and are related to any patterns that may arise in the data analysis (Schatzman and Strauss 1973). Special classes are used to distinguish specific jargon for particular communities within the population sample (Schatzman and Strauss 1973). The theoretical classes provide a key link between all classes during content analysis. However, they are only noticeable after the researcher has thoroughly analysed the data (Schatzman and Strauss 1973).

Once content has been put into categories, there is need for a labelling strategy that can be used for easy identification and retrieval of the collected data. This is where coding comes into play. Gibbs (2007) describes two commonly used coding techniques, that is, data driven

coding and concept driven coding. He describes data driven coding as a form of open coding, where coding is inductive and is aligned with conventional content analysis. The use of data driven coding allows categories to emerge as data is analysed. Concept driven coding on the other hand, is deductive, aligns with directed content analysis and relies on previous knowledge. Categories that are derived from concept driven coding are collected from theory, existing knowledge or everyday experience (Schreier 2012).

Both concept and data driven coding are employed in this study with the aim of identifying any common new and existing information. Interpretations from the content analysis inform the recommendations and conclusions made in the following chapter. Based on deductions made from related literature, the following aspects were deemed as relevant when analysing the use of visual storytelling in promoting brand engagement (Shankar *et al*. 2001; Fog *et al*. 2005; Hansen 2008, Forrester Research 2010):

- Brand Statistics
- Visual Story Ratio
- Message
- Engagement Feedback

4.3 Research Findings

The rising influence of visual storytelling is evidenced by its inclusion in a brand's communication strategy. It is apparent that South African brands are making use of visual storytelling to engage with their strategic stakeholders. The selected brands for documentary analysis have been using a form of visual communication on their social media platforms during the period of 01 February – 01 March 2014. The content analysis structure is aligned with the objectives of this research.

4.4 KALAHARI

Established in 1998, Kalahari.com is a South African online retailer that offers a wide array of products such as books, eBooks, electronic gadgets, toys, games and many more. It is considered a market leader in e-commerce in South Africa and has grown to be an online marketplace that connects with buyers and third party sellers on one platform. The brand is also recorded as the largest local market for English and Afrikaans eBooks in South Africa. In

2011, Kalahari.com recorded a milestone for the e-tail (online retail) industry in South Africa as it reached over a million registered shoppers. (Kalahari 2014).

4.4.1 Brand Statistics

The following table summarises the overall statistics of the data analysed on the two social media platforms under investigation in this study: Facebook and Twitter.

FACEBOOK	TWITTER

o 115 482 Page Likes
 	
o 22 Visual Posts (20 photos and 2 Videos)
 	
o Types of Engagement Generated: Likes, Comments, Shares, Tags
 	
o The 22 visual posts generated:
  - 41 Comments
  - 55 shares
  - 358 Likes
  - 2 Tags
	o 9026 Page Follows
	
	o 4 Visual Posts (3 Photos and 1 Video)
	
	o Types of Engagement Generated: Retweets, Favourites
	
	o The 4 posts generated:
	  - 3 Retweets
	  - 1 Favourite

Table 4.1 Kalahari Social Media Statistics *(Source: Researcher's Own)*

Social media statistics, commonly known as social media metrics, are a way of monitoring how activity on social media affects a brand. These statistics are an indication of the volume of audience a brand has attracted through social media (Kelly 2009). It is evident that Kalahari attracted a significant number of people on both their Facebook and Twitter pages. However, the statistics in table 4.1 show that audience size on social media does not necessarily reflect the number of people who actually interact with a brand. Despite having an audience of 115 482 on Facebook, the brand received a significantly low engagement feedback from audiences through comments, likes, shares and tags. This was also the same case with their Twitter page.

The disparity between audiences who 'like/follow' a brand and those that actually engage with the brand affects how a brand can measure potential brand exposure on social media (Kissmetrics 2014). It is through measuring potential social media exposure that an organisation can evaluate brand awareness as statistics provide an

indication of the number of people a message could have reached. There is value in knowing potential audience as brands can make use of these statistics to represent potential market for sales (Social Media Examiner 2010). It is apparent that Kalahari's misalignment of potential exposure and actual exposure had an impact on the effectiveness of the visual content they shared on their social media pages.

4.4.2 Visual Story Ratio

The visual story ratio indicates how frequently any type of visual storytelling is being used by brands within a social media platform (Krippendorff 2004). If a ratio of use is low, the significance of the visual story is low. Krippendorff (2004: 59) elaborates when he claims that "The frequency with which a symbol, idea, reference or topic occurs in a stream of messages is taken to indicate the importance of, attention to, or emphasis on that symbol, idea, reference, or topic in messages".

On the Kalahari's Facebook page, twenty-two posts were generated during the period studied (February – March 2014), with an average of one photo posted per business working day. Visual related posts surpassed any other form of communication on the social media platform and formed the bulk of posts on the brand's page. The photos and videos posted by the brand allowed users to engage through likes, comments and shares. Considering the time frame of this study, Kalahari's visual story ratio was fairly high and it seems that Kalahari understood that visual storytelling is important in maintaining brand image and promoting engagement with their audiences. However, it seems that not much visual storytelling was applied on the Twitter social media platform, with the brand posting a total of four posts during the period of study. According to Williams (2012), a visual story ratio has an effect on engagement between a brand and its audiences. Brands want to create messages that are read and not just clicked on. Through the measurement of story ratios, brands are able to determine if the content they are sharing with their audiences is valuable. As Zeng, Haunge and Dou (2009) put it, perceptions of a brand's value and relevance on the audiences is one of the key factors in promoting engagement with brands. The low visual story ratio on Kalahari's Twitter page show that the brand placed low significance on use of visual storytelling to promote brand-audience engagement on that platform.

4.4.3 Message

As indicated in section 1.1 of this study, there are three commonly used methods of applying visual storytelling in communication. Visual storytelling can be used to send corporate messages; as an infrastructure, as a platform to connect with customers as well as being a firewall for business (Stopforth 2013). This section discusses the messages sent by Kalahari through the use of visual storytelling. All content generated on the social media platforms was generated by the brand. Kalahari used visual storytelling to send corporate messages as well as a platform for connecting with their audiences. An example of the types of messages communicated are illustrated in Figure 4.1 and 4.2.

Taking note of the type of message communicated through visual storytelling is important as it guides a brand in knowing the types of content that generate engagement (Kelly 2009). Visual storytelling on Facebook was used to communicate brand services, competitions, discounts, promotions and publicity or public relations messages. The responses to these forms of visual storytelling was fairly distributed amongst the type of messages but audiences responded mostly to content that communicated promotions on products, followed by content that communicated products offered by the brand. It is of interest to note that the "Will You be our Valentine" picture posted on 14 February 2014 received the highest number of 'likes', with 125 users responding to the post. This shows that a brand cannot always know what to expect from their audiences. The post neither communicated promotions or products offered but was a great example of using visual storytelling as a platform to engage with audiences. By paying attention to which visual content generated the most engagement through likes, comments and shares, brands can know what their audiences interact with and this in turn will contribute towards effective brand-audience engagement (Brodie et.al 2011b). It appears the use of visual storytelling on Kalahari's Twitter social media page is minimal. A total of only four visual storytelling posts were identified during the period of study and these also appeared to be a correlation with content posted on the other social media platforms as some photos were shared on both Facebook and Twitter on the same day. Detailed findings on engagement feedback are discussed in section 4.3.1.4 of this chapter.

Fig 4.1 Summarised Message Types: Facebook *(Source: https://www.facebook.com/kalaharicom)*
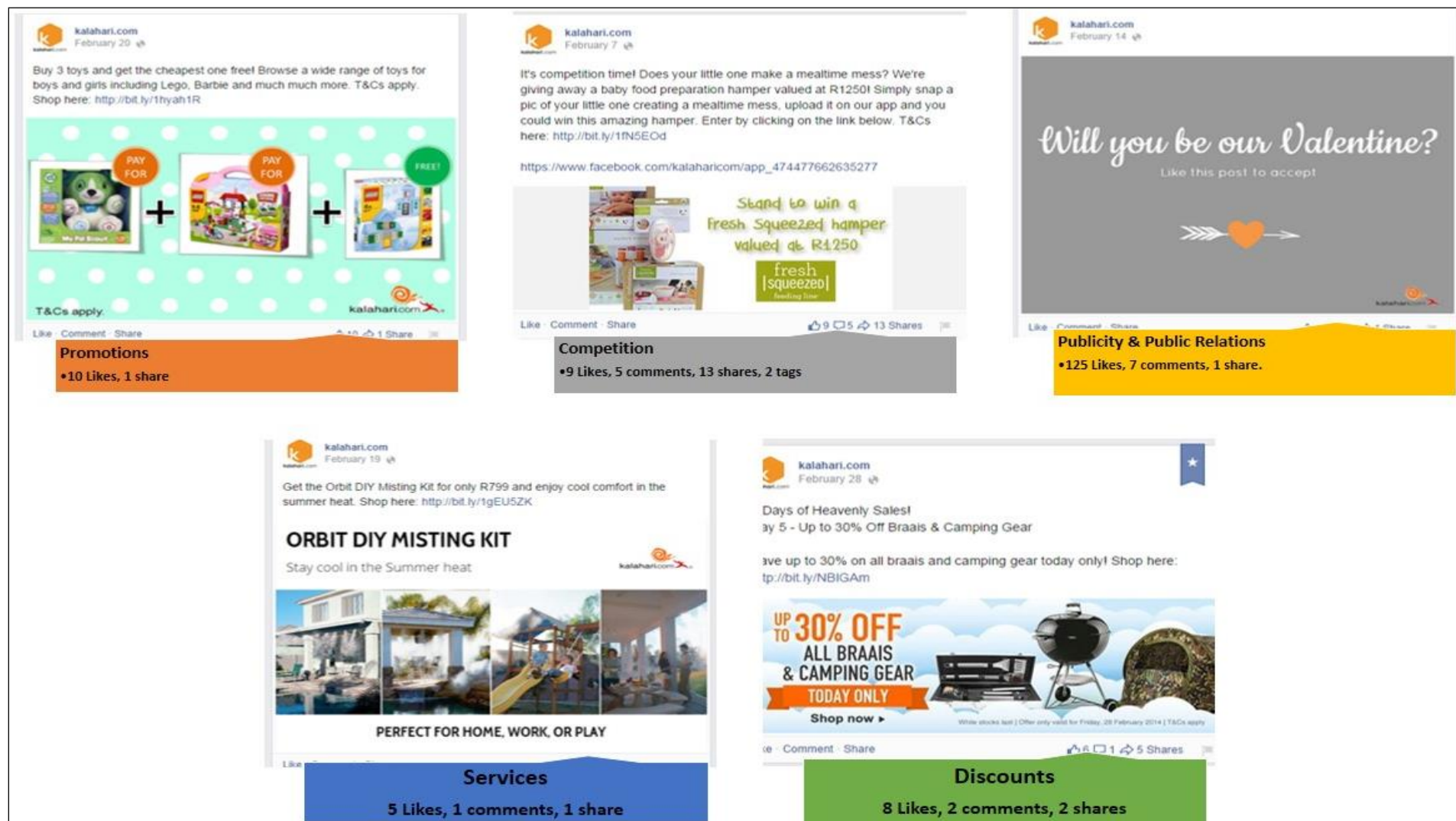
Fig 4.2 Summarised Message Types: Twitter *(Source: https://twitter.com/kalaharicom)*
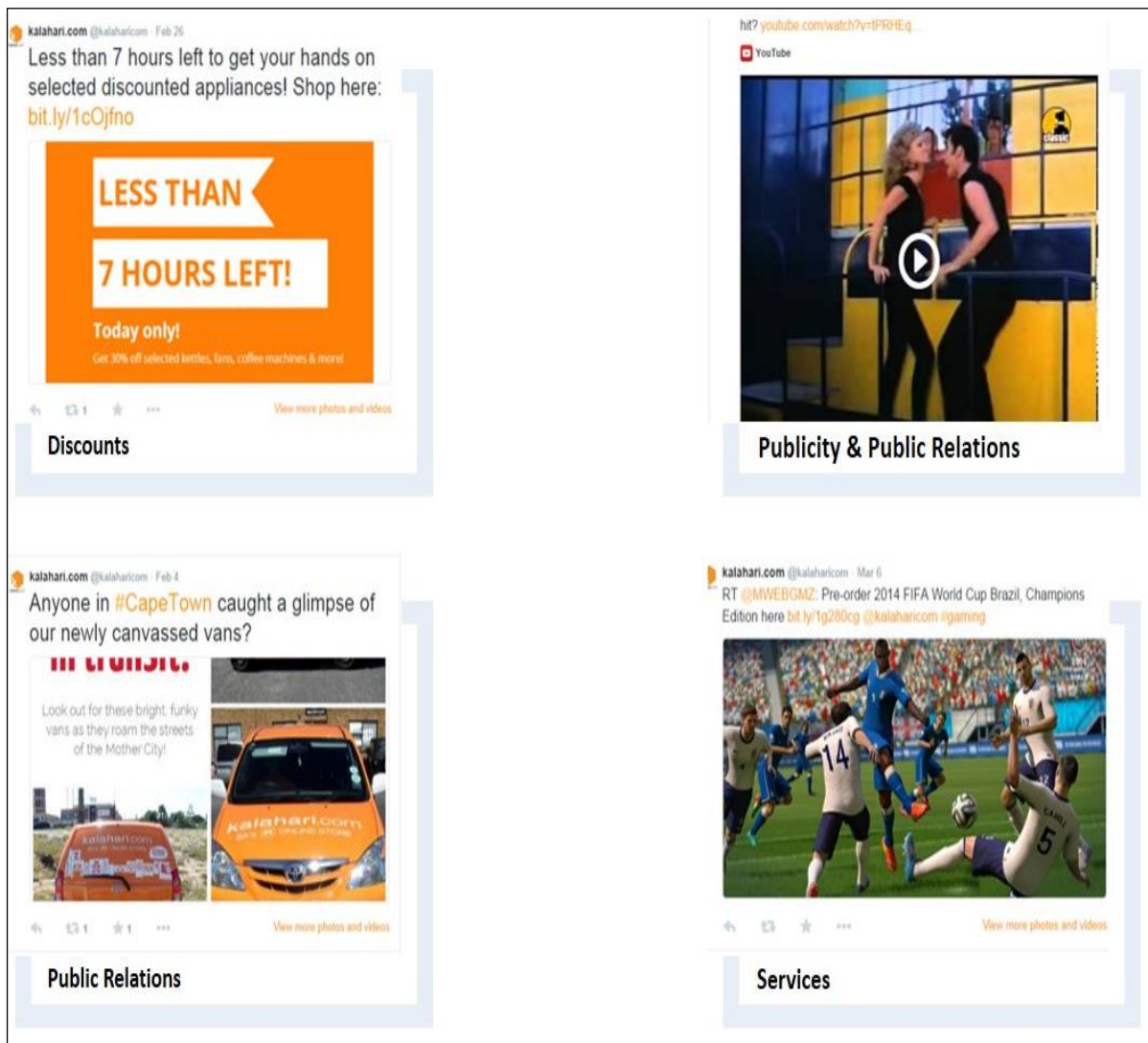
4.5 Engagement Feedback

Through engagement feedback, brands are able to measure audience influence. Audience influence is a social media metric that helps in determining the actions or conversations by the audience that a brand should pay attention to in order to assess the effectiveness of their social media communication strategies (Social Media Examiner 2010). By looking at whether feedback is positive, neutral or negative in sentiment, a brand can assess if the visual content influenced engagement with audiences in any way. As discussed in section 2.5 of this study, the types of engagement vary with social media platform. Kalahari's Facebook page makes it evident that some form of engagement takes place when there is use of visual storytelling in communication. Customers responded to the types of visual storytelling posted through likes,

comments, shares and tags. Engagement on Kalahari's Twitter page was in the form or retweets and favourites.

4.5.1 Engagement through Likes/Favourites

On Kalahari's Facebook page, visual content shared received a total of 358 likes, making this the most used type of engagement by audiences. Only one favourite was recorded on the brand's Twitter page. This type of engagement tends to be popular with audiences who are not interested in posting or re-posting any content. As such, frequency of this type of engagement or lack thereof, does not have much impact on brand engagement as it does not contribute to brand exposure. However, likes and favourites could be used to determine the types of visual content that resonates with audiences and this helps in decision making when planning social media communication strategies (Aurrichio and Zdanowicz 2014).

4.5.2 Engagement through Comments

Engagement through comments is a great indicator of direct interaction between a brand and its audience. Comments show that users are interested in the conversation with the brand and these comments are beneficial as they can range from compliments, complains, suggestions and all these contribute to the management of a brand's image and visibility. Comments are visible to both users and the brands and as such, they promote two-way communication. While all visual content was shared by Kalahari, there was significant user-generated interaction. Visual posts on Kalahari's Twitter platform did not yield any comments. The Facebook platform accumulated a total of 41 comments. The examples below have been classified into negative, neutral and brand-generated comments.

Negative sentiments:

Consumers have embraced social media as a channel for voicing out their brand dissatisfaction (Hong 2015). Reports have revealed that there are about 879 million complaints a year that are made against brands by consumers on Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms (Hong 2015). As such, it is not surprising that audiences use any chance they can get to air their complaints. Comments by the audiences on the Kalahari pages were consistent with this notion:

"I ordered my son's birthday present in November. He still hasn't got it. Nice one Kalahari!!!! you guys rock!!!! Perhaps if you drove to my house and punched my son in the face as your next move?"

"Hi, A Consultant called me in this week to confirm that you have paid my refund back into the card that was used. Please send proof of payment as this does not reflect on our end. Remember to repay the interest that I had to pay because of your late repayment, also!"

"Day 2 of complaining onsocial networks: Still waiting for my refund for over a month..."

"Me too, ▮▮▮▮! I am getting so gatvol of this nonsense! Kalahari.com has disappointed me so!"

From these comments, it shows that users do not make any reference to the content and message the brand was aiming to communicate. The audience believes that any communication from the brand is an opportunity for them to communicate their dissatisfaction with the brand.

Hong (2015) further points out that social media platforms are attractive to consumers who want to complain against brands because it provides them with a quick means of communicating with a brand. Social media platforms also allow audiences to share their experiences with friends and followers. Such consumers were present on the Kalahari Facebook page:

"Order #1001249190 Still waiting for refund, After promises of immediate settlement. Seems a common problem with this company http://hellopeter.com/search-reports?keyword=Kalahari.com..."

"hellopetercom ref 1001350428 still waiting for my refund. Gonna keep posting this message until my money is back in my account"

"Its now 48 Hours later and still no credits on my account. Once again you have failed, you stated in email that I would have my credits within 2 days... Where is it? AND NO MORE APPOLOGIES, I WANT TO SEE ACTIONS PLEASE!"

"▇▇▇▇, I am also still waiting for a refund.....since DEC......"

These four negative comments show an audience that is frustrated, demonstrated by the use of capital letters, as well as communicating their dissatisfaction on hello peter, a South African customer service online website that gives audiences a platform to complain. Consumer comments on Facebook can negatively influence the perception of a brand to potential customers. Brands should monitor their online reputations to avoid sending the wrong message to their customers and potential customers (Hang 2015).

Negative comments provide negative sentiments towards a brand and this can affect the brand's image. Negative comments do not instil feelings of brand satisfaction and brand loyalty and this directly affects brand engagement. One customer even goes further than just complaining by actively switching to another brand to prove their dissatisfaction with the Kalahari brand:

> "Kalahari.com I won't be falling for your sales and vouchers anymore,your service isn't good like it used to be, most disappointing!!! I placed/paid for an order of R350-00 or more to qualify for the R75-00 voucher, waited patiently for it to be delivered only to find out that one item has been cancelled by yous and I will be refunded R16-94 for an item that costs R58-06. What about the voucher value of R75-00? Anyways I ordered what yous couldn't fulfill and other items from ▇▇▇▇▇▇. I have full faith in them to deliver all items ordered and wow me with their great service."

This is a great example of how negative sentiments can affect brand engagement. Instead of engaging with Kalahari, the customer has shown feelings of brand satisfaction with the brand's competitor instead of the brand itself.

Enquiries/ Neutral sentiments:

Enquiries about the services offered by the brand made up the bulk of neutral sentiments on Kalahari's Facebook page. Audiences that provide neutral comments or respond to visual stories by making enquiries are what Forrester Research (2010) referred to as 'spectators'. These customers read, listen, comment but their engagement through comments does not affect a brand's reputation. Kalahari's Facebook page had such comments:

> "The app does not work for mobile users?"

"Will you be my valentine?"

"Is there an Indoor version?"

"Julle is vining met beloftes, maar uiters swak diens. Wag meer as n week vir my geld na kanselering van goedere wat geensins afgelewer is nie. Transaksie is begin van Feb gedoen en hope 24ure het verloop Treurig!!!"

"Just ordered one from you guys today. I hope it lives up to the hype."

Neutral sentiments show that users are involved in a conversation with the brand but they do not do much towards building or maintaining brand awareness and visibility. As such, it seems that visual content that received engagement through neutral comments, did not do much to promote engagement between Kalahari and its audiences on Facebook. However, it is through brand-generated comments that a brand could promote its image or visibility. By responding to enquiries, not only does the brand provide its audiences with relevant information about the brand, it is also a way of maintaining engagement with the audiences as there is two-way communication.

Brand-Generated comments:

According to Friedman (2004), brands that embrace criticism and find ways of positively managing it create transparency and authenticity and this in turn builds trusts with their audiences. Some of the responses show that Kalahari tried to positively manage criticism:

"Hi ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇, we are very sorry any inconvenience caused. Please find the below link to all our Human Resource Practitioner books:http://www.kalahari.com/s;jsessionid... We hope you have a good day further."

"Hi ▇▇▇. We sincerely apologise for this. Please send us your order ID in an inbox message and we will investigate this."

"Hi ▇▇▇. Refunds can take anywhere from 3 to 7 working days. If you still do not see the money in your account after 7 working days please let us know and we will follow up.

"Hi ▇▇▇. We're sorry to hear about this. Please let us know the order ID and we will investigate the issue further."

"Hi ███████, we are very sorry for all the inconvenience and frustration this has caused you. I see one of our agents was able to assist and ensure that your refund is refunded as soon as possible. We will request for them to please send you the proof of refund. We hope you have a lovely day further."

Through Kalahari's Facebook page, it is evident that the use of visual storytelling generated brand-audience engagement. The brand-generated comments encouraged users to not only interact with the brand, but to also provide brand feedback through their comments. Brand-generated comments were also important as they were an opportunity for the brand to respond to the negative comments and hopefully change the brand image for customers who were not happy with it.

4.5.3 Engagement through Shares/Retweets

When audiences share or retweet content posted by a brand, this results in brand exposure to new audience and it is also a vital type of engagement that helps to determine which type of content attracts the audience (van Doom et.al 2010). During the period of study, visual content fairly generated engagement through shares as Kalahari recorded 55 shares on Facebook. However, visual content on Twitter did not receive much engagement through retweets as the visual posts had only through 3 retweets. Shares and retweets are great for brand visibility, the more shares and retweets a brand receives, the higher the chances of generating more audience. The use of visual storytelling by Kalahari on both social media networks did not do much for the brand's engagement attempts.

4.5.4 Engagement through Tags

There were two tags on visual content posted on Kalahari's Facebook page. It is evident that the use of visual storytelling on Kalahari's social media platforms did not promote this type of engagement. This indicates that Kalahari needs to create visual content that is more compelling and relevant to its audiences in order to get more engagement. Tags are an important type of engagement as they are a way of endorsing the brand through the users, and as such, they there could be brand exposure to audiences who do not engage with the brand (van Doom et.al 2010).

4.6 TAKEALOT

Takealot is a South African online shopping brand whose mission is to become the most customer-centric online retail website in Africa. It was founded in 2011 and has an extensive product range which includes camping and outdoor equipment; home and kitchen products; gaming products; electronics; toys and many more. In 2010, at the E-commerce Awards, the brand was voted as South Africa's Favourite Public E-commerce Website and was the first runner up for the same award in 2012. Since its inception, Takealot has grown, expanding its warehouses in South Africa as well as the range of products offered (Takealot 2014).

4.6.1 Brand Statistics

Table 4.2 summarises the statistics of data analysed on Takealot's social media platforms.

FACEBOOK	TWITTER
o 100 000 Page Likes o 9 Visual Posts (All Photos) o Types of Engagement Generated: Likes, Comments, Shares o The 9 visual posts generated: - 484 Comments - 88 shares - 201 Likes	o 11 200 Page Follows - No Visual posts

Table 4.2 Takealot Social Media Statistics (*Source: Researcher's Own*)

For brands that communicate through social media, it is important to analyse the statistics of the brands. Social media statistics show the number of people who actually did something with the message a brand would have shared. Taking note of the volume of audience that saw content posted by a brand affects the social media metrics a brand could be tracking, such as likes, comments, engagement and negative feedback (Kim et.al 2008). Through these metrics, brands can track and report on how their visual storytelling communication strategies are performing and whether the social media engagement goals are met. It was important to look at the social media statistics for Takealot as they helped formulate discussion on the findings and assess

if the use of visual storytelling promotes brand-audience engagement. Lack of visual content on Twitter made it impossible for the study to assess the brand's use of visual storytelling on that platform. This has a direct impact on the results.

4.6.2 Visual Story Ratio

Takealot's Facebook platform recorded a low visual story ratio. For the duration of the study, only nine posts were communicated, with most of them receiving one type of engagement or response. The most common response was in the form of "likes", with one particular post generating as many as 179 likes. It is the same post that also generated 484 comments (also the only post that received comments) and also had a total of 70 shares. A low message ratio generally indicates that the level of significance of a type of communication is also low. But, it is the 'post reach' or 'page reach' that actually helps in determining the effectiveness of the communication strategy. According to Social Media Examiner (2014), 'post reach' is essentially the number of people who actually saw the brand's content in their news feed, while 'page reach' refers to the audiences who saw the brand's content during a given time frame. In the case of Takealot, the visual content posted had a high post reach as the statistics show. This could be beneficial for a brand if the communication goal is to communicate targeted individual messages. However, a low visual message ratio does not help in determining if visual storytelling promotes brand engagement.

4.6.3 Message

On the Facebook social media platform, Takealot made use of visual storytelling in communicating their brand services, competitions, advertising promotions and engaging in public relations with their strategic stakeholders. One photo in particular, posted on 24 February 2014, generated engagement in the form of 179 likes, 484 comments and 70 shares. In it, the brand communicated a chance to participate in a competition and win. It is evident that through targeted communication in this photo, Takealot achieved engagement through the use of visual storytelling. This is a great example of the importance of paying attention to messages that visual content communicates as it can help a brand communicate targeted messages and in turn, create significant engagement with its audiences. Though the visual story ratio was low during the period of study, the brand managed to communicate with its

customers. Figure 4.4 shows an example of the visual posts used by Takealot. No visual messages where communicated on the brand's Twitter page and as such, it could not be determined if the use of visual storytelling on Twitter promotes brand-audience engagement.

Fig 4.3 Summarised Message Types: Facebook *(https://www.facebook.com/Takealot)*
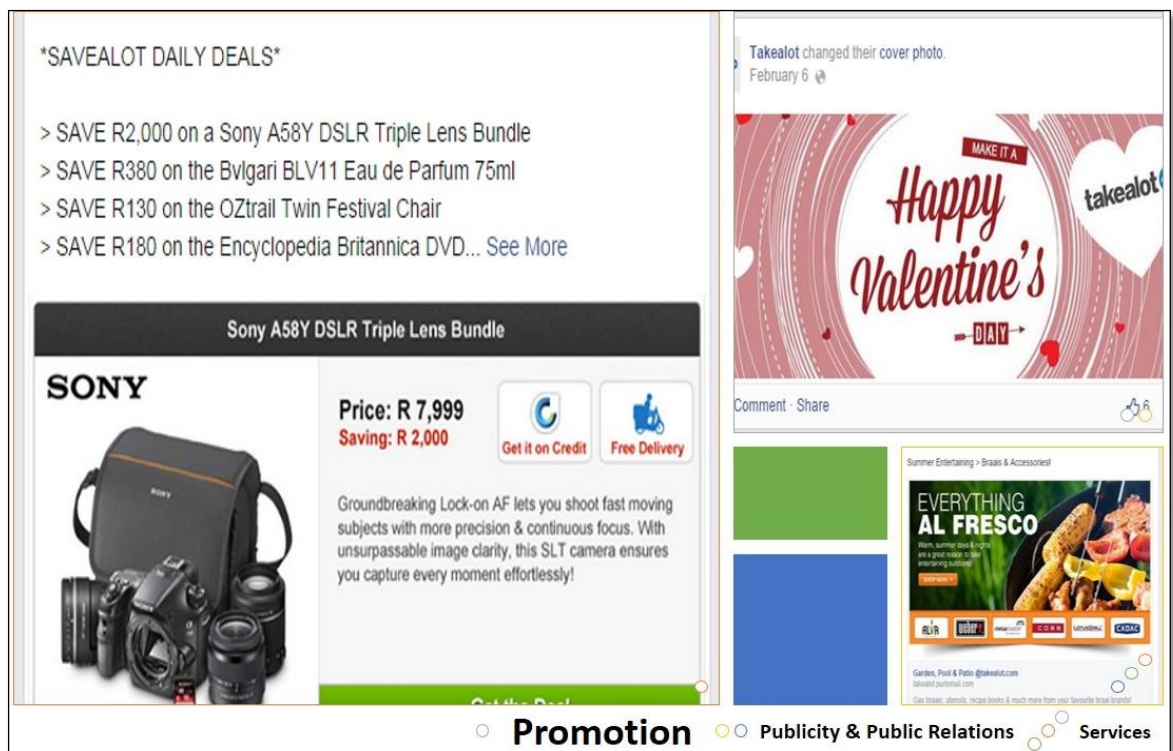
4.7 Engagement Feedback

An understanding of engagement feedback from audiences is a great way of assessing the influence by audiences who interacted with the brand. Audience influence is essentially measured by a comparison of positive, neutral and negative sentiment that a brand receives in relation to the content it shared. In order to determine if visual storytelling has a positive effect on brand engagement, this study had to look at the sentiments of the audiences. Engagement feedback is important in corporate communication as it provides the brand with a picture of the types of audiences they have and allows it to effectively engage and interact with influential users as well as the average users. Visual storytelling messages on Takealot's Facebook page received very minimal engagement feedback. With the exception of one post, all other visual

stories received less than 10 likes each, with only three posts receiving engagement in the form of shares.

4.7.1 Engagement through Likes

Some researchers (Swani, Milne and Brown 2013), state that 'likes' and 'favourites' can be regarded as endorsements of a brand. If a large number of audiences endorse a brand, this will also have an impact on the belief of shared value with the brand (Mowen and Brown 1981). Although Takealot has a low visual story ratio, this type of engagement could be beneficial in brand endorsement. With a total of 1442 likes on Facebook, it seems Takealot effectively used visual storytelling to promote this type of engagement. Depending on the communication goals of a brand, receiving a large number of likes could be beneficial for a brand's visibility.

4.7.2 Engagement through Comments

Brands must observe the kind of behaviours that audiences engage in for easier identification of communication strategies that create openness in interactions. This is according to Forrester Research (2010), who in their Social Technographics ladder, reveal the possible ways in which audiences can react to visual content on social media. Out of the 9 visual content posts that Takealot shared on their Facebook page, only one post generated engagement in the form of comments. The low message ratio already suggests that not much visual storytelling was not used to engage with audiences.

Though the message ratio for visual content was low on Takealot's Facebook page, the comments generated were a direct response to the message communicated:

"I would connect it to my TV and simply and effortlessly instead of hassling with all the cables from my Hard drive, and stream all the media content wirelessly making life so much simpler."

"I need the WD TV PLAY since my Apple TV doesn't play MKV's, AVI's or any other format for that matter. WD TV PLAY perfectly syncs with my Plex Media Server. This will save hours of trans-coding to iTunes mp4 format"

"Will literally be the next and maybe final step in the home entertainment system. Already have 3 WD My Book HDD's, totalling 8 gigs. So have the one permanently plugged into my

TV and then the 2 others as storage for movies, series and doccies that I just can't delete. My TV will definitely be able to pick up the new HDD, as it already has a wireless internet dongle. So this will. Save me every week having to download, unplug my HDD, copy stuff on and plug my HDD into my TV again. Will be so legend!!!"

"This device will be amazing, oh how great life will be with this device hooked up to the tv to stream media, goodbye normal tv and hello the future!!!!!"

"Wireless streaming means there will be no cables cluttering up the living room … But then what would I have to complain about when I feel like picking a fight with my significant other?!!"

According to Kelly (2009), active brand engagement is considered as the strongest substantiation of brand resonance, a part of brand development which shows a shared common value and engagement with the audience. These comments above show that the audience correctly interpreted the message, identified value in the message shares and this in turn contributes to brand identification.

Some of the audience engaged with the brand through comments in order to encourage other users to share the post, for example:

"Ok here we go, last chance, Share, Share Share, everyone get you mates in on the deal!!!!! Awesome Prize to win, it will revolutionize your TV!!!! So Ampt!!!!"

Such type of audience can be beneficial for promoting brand awareness. However, since there was an incentive to win a prize, this type of content may not give a true picture of whether there was effective engagement between the brand and its audiences.

Audiences also responded by commenting on how make use of the device:

"My gran has a TV without any connections to DSTV so she cannot watch movies. She's also bedridden. How awesome would it be if I could share movies with her without having to move her from the room? As well as see all the photos from her birthday she's unable to see."

"It's my birthday on the 27th and this would make an awesome gift! However since I already have a smart TV and an awesome media server powered by WD Red drives I would

donate the prize if I won it to my friend ███ who desperately needs something like this!"

"Wireless streaming means my significant other won't complain about cables cluttering the living toom!"

"Ever since I came out as a vampire in high school I've been standing at street corners dazzling people with my mirror balls – a device like this would give me reason to stay inside! (and on the plus side I would never make the poor thing play twilight, the vampire diaries or anything that should give gastro-intestinal disorders to anyone above the age of sixteen. I'd give this puppy a good home – surely that has to count for something!"

If Takealot was to measure the effectiveness of the use of visual storytelling on their social media platforms, such comments would help the brand measure influence. Measurement of engagement influence essentially involves measuring the amount of positive, negative or neutral sentiments (Social Media Examiner 2010).

However, all of the comments generated on Takealot's Facebook page were user-generated, showing that the brand did not actively engage with its audience through the use of visual content. This could have partly been contributed by the type of messages communicated in the comments:

"This will be fantastic for me. Instead of switching between the xbox, built in media player on the tv or dragging the pc to the TV. One device to play all formats! Also not needing to run the PS3 media server on the pc for streaming will be magical! Best part will be a happy wife ☺"

"Ah Yes! I will be able to watch anything without concern of converting the file format first! And my laptop just broke! NEEEEED THIS!"

"I live in a flat behind someones house and while I have free access to the dvd player in the house it will be great not to have to intrude on the house and be able to play my movies and series in my room."

"I would be able to access so much more on my tv and instantly! ☺ As well as sharing with everyone in the house."

"No more laptop in the bedroom!! ☺"

Neutral comments such as these did not seem to have any impact on engagement between the brand and its audience. The comments did not prompt any futher interaction with the brand and neither did they prompt any further engagement among the audiences themselves.

Absence of visual content on their Twitter page suggests that Takealot did not make much use of visual storytelling in promoting engagement. The comments recorded were all neutral in tone and they show that there was no ongoing engagement between the brand and its audience.

4.7.3 Engagement through Shares

According to van Doom et.al (2010), audience engagement through likes/retweets, tags and shares demonstrates an audience engagement that involves more than just attitude. It is an engagment that shows that brand motivation drivers are a direct result of the behavioural manifestations of customers towards a particular brand. Takealot recorded a total of 88 shares, with 70 of those being in response to one visual post. The lack of this type of engagement indicate that the brand did not effectively use visual storytelling to promote engagement.

It is important for brands to measure their statistics on a regular basis as they are a way of determining brand exposure or awareness levels. By looking at how many people shared, liked or commented on content, a brand can determine their social media exposure (Social Media Examiner 2010). There was no evidence of interaction between Takealot and its audiences after the initial sharing of visual content on Facebook. The results suggest that Takealot did not effectively use social media to promote engagement with their audiences.

4.8 BIDORBUY

Similar to international websites such as eBay.com, Bidorbuy is a South African online marketplace that was launched in 1999. It provides a platform for buyers and sellers to trade products through fixed price sales and auctions. Bidorbuy allows users to customise the marketing of products, with options of determining pricing, duration of product availability or auction, as well as descriptions or images of the items being sold. All purchases between buyers and sellers are facilitated by Bidorbuy (Bidorbuy 2014).

4.8.1 Brand Statistics

In social media, it is important to keep track of the statistics of how the brand and its audiences are interacting. This is especially so because all content shared can generate a type of engagement, which fulfils part or all objectives of a brand's communication strategy on social media. Content shared on social media can receive a variety of engagement (Social Media Examiner 2010). Twitter's retweets and Facebook's shares for example, are helpful forms of brand engagement as they indicate who is sharing or distributing a brand's content, while engagement through comments, replies and likes help in assess who is responding to content a brand shares on their social media pages. The social media statistics for the Bidorbuy brand are highlighted in Table 4.3.

FACEBOOK	TWITTER
o 236 925 Page Likes o 20 Visual Posts (All photos) o Types of Engagement Generated: Likes, Comments, Shares, Tags o The 20 visual posts generated: - 117 Comments - 68 shares - 1442 Likes - 1 Tag	o 5338 Page Follows o 1 Visual Post (Photo) o No engagement was generated from the post.

Table 4.3 Bidorbuy Social Media Statistics (*Source: Researcher's Own*)

Bidorbuy's social media metrics show that the use of visual storytelling generated a number of engagement types. For any brand, monitoring of social media metrics is a crucial part of assessing how communication strategies are impacting a brand's values and goals. Regular monitoring of comments, likes or shares by users can provide a picture of how audiences influence the reputation of a brand. For Bidorbuy, activity on their social media pages during the period of study, suggests that the brand utilised visual storytelling in promoting brand-audience engagement.

4.8.2 Visual Story Ratio

The frequency in which visual content was shared on social media by Bidorbuy is important in evaluating if the use of visual storytelling encouraged engagement between brands and their audiences. In order for a brand to maintain social media engagement, it has to rely on the actual interactions that happen daily with its audiences. While posting visual content is a way of communicating with audiences, brands have realised that frequently communicating their brand values and services in an engaging way is the way to maintain real conversations that will provide long term benefits (Social Media Examiner 2013). Similar to the other two brands under study, there was a higher message ratio on Facebook, compared to Twitter. Bidorbuy posted a total of 20 visual posts on its Facebook page but recorded only one post on Twitter. Due to lack of visual content on the brand's Twitter page, there was no form of engagement through visual storytelling. The brand failed to promote engagement through the use of visual storytelling but it did demonstrate through visual content on Facebook that it is aware of the benefits of using visual storytelling to engage with audiences.

4.8.3 Message

Bidorbuy's Facebook social media platform communicated; services, informational pieces, corporate social responsibility and mostly promotions. The use of visual storytelling on the Twitter page was to announce a winner of a competition. It seems that the messages communicated generated a fairly equal volume of response from the audience, with no specific type of message drawing the most engagement. This could be an indication that Bidorbuy is effectively using visual storytelling to communicate the services offered by the brand.

4.9 Engagement Feedback

Taking note of how audiences respond to visual content posted by brands is a good way of measuring the effectiveness of that communication strategy. According to Algesheimer (2005), any form of engagement from audiences, such as recommendations, reviews or sharing of content, is an indication that brand engagement can extend past attitudes and feelings of the audiences, evolving into active brand promotion by these audiences.

Visual posts on Facebook received a fair amount of engagement feedback, with users liking, commenting and sharing the posts. On average, every post received engagement in the form of a like, comment and share, with only a few posts recording no comments or shares. The photo posted on 17 February received the most volume of engagement, with 223 likes, 28 comments and 20 shares. Two other posts with similar statistics had 162 likes, 18 comments and 11 shares while the other received 148 likes, 10 comments and 8 shares. There was a significant amount of interaction between the brand and its audience as comments were both brand-generated and user-generated. The Twitter post failed to generate any conversation or engagement.

4.9.1 Engagement through Likes

Engagement through Likes was achieved for the brand as the brand recorded a total of 1442 likes. It seems that the use of visual storytelling did impact on social media engagement between Bidorbuy and its audiences.

4.9.2 Engagement through Comments

The use of visual storytelling on Bidorbuy's Facebook page generated neutral and brand-generated comments. The absence of positive sentiments suggests that there is still room for improving the use of visual storytelling. On the other hand, the absence of negative comments suggests that the use of visual content contributed in forming a generally positive sentiment towards the brand image. Visual posts on Bidorbuy's Twitter platform did not yield any comments. The Facebook platform accumulated a number of comments and examples are provided below.

Enquiries/ Neutral comments:

The bulk of user generated comments were enquiries, which demonstrated a direct relation to the content the brand had posted. Enquiries show that audiences are

engaging with a brand through the visual story shared by the brand. Such comments include the following:

"I'd love dis outfit 4 my matric dance...plz assist"

"Mmmmmmm!!!Ilove it."

"Wooow stunningoooooooo!"

"How will i get this bag?"

"Comment with a shop name"

"pls how do i get this dress pls coz i cant see my offer in my inbox…"

"Hi i love the dress bt hw cn buy it or u cn email me the bank accnt so tht i can fr the dress pls my is exlarge my email address is ███████████."

It is important for brands to respond to enquiries as these can lead to a customer purchasing the product or services that a brand is promoting. Some comments however, are of no value with regards to promoting engagement between audiences and brands. Comments from audiences such as 'wow' and 'that's so romantic' are difficult to use in measuring engagement influence as the messages do not show any brand loyalty or identification, attributes that are important in measuring brand-audience engagement.

For Bidorbuy, neutral sentiments ranged from enquiries, to compliments or general discussion about the product being offered by the brand. Below are examples:

"Nyc hey,whats the easiest way 2 get,i'd really like 2 have em.."

"i really love them pls cn i hv them pls"

"oh my oh my i really need those shoes, only if i wasn't broke, i wasn gonna get them tomorrow morning eish."

" ███████. Those are for you"

"Very nice looking"

"Got them!"

Though engagement was achieved, neutral sentiment does not do much towards identifying audience influence yet it is through audience influence that a brand can assess if its communication attempts are successful or not.

Brand-generated comments:

Hong (2015) points out reaction time is crucial in maintaining online brand reputations. For brands that address queries quickly and efficiently, there is a high chance of increased positive influence. Comments generated by Bidorbuy attempted to address all raised concerns:

"Hi ████████████ To buy please click on the get offer button and a link to the listing will be sent to your email address. Please read a more detailed how-to at http://bit.ly/14mfcwK"

"Hi ████████████. They are R279 each. To buy please click on the get offer button and a link to the listing will be sent to your email address. Please read a more detailed how-to at http://bit.ly/14mfcwK"

"Hi ██████████████████. The item will be shipped to you by the seller. To ask the seller a question open the listing and click on the Ask the seller a question link (top right). You may also want to read more about how to buy on bidorbuy here: http://bit.ly/14mfcwK"

"Hi ██████████████. bidorbuy is an online trading platform where independent sellers sell directly to buyers. (We do not sell anything.) To buy on bidorbuy, you first need to register on the site. Then browse bidorbuy and choose the item you are interested in. Do note: when you buy on bidorbuy, you choose not only the item you want to buy, but also the seller you want to buy from. Please also read: http://bit.ly/14mfcwK"

Bidorbuy's comments were delivered timeously and responded to each comment. There were instances of customers asking the same question one after the other Bidorbuy provided responses for all queries. Brand-generated comments are a great way of demonstrating clarity and transparency, giving the audiences an impression of a personal relationship with a brand.

As Ashforth and Mael (2008) put it, the brand - audience two way engagement leads to a specific kind of interaction with customers that epitomizes an interactive and personal

relationship. While majority of the brand-generated comments were similar, Bidorbuy maintained engagement by providing audiences with information. Even when different users asked the same question, Bidorbuy responded to all enquiries. This creates a great interpersonal interaction between the brand and its audience and this is beneficial in creating feelings of brand satisfaction and loyalty. Based on the findings, it seems that Bidorbuy was successful in generating two-way involvement, suggesting that the use of visual storytelling does promote engagement between brands and their audiences.

4.9.3 Engagement through Shares

Shares and retweets are great for brand visibility, the more shares and retweets a brand receives, the higher the chances of generating more audience. The use of visual storytelling by Bidorbuy on both social media networks did not do much for the brand's engagement attempts. Of the total 20 posts generated during the period of study, Bidorbuy recorded 68 shares among the 236 925 customers that 'liked' the brand's Facebook social media page. There could be many possible reasons why Bidorbuy did not receive much feedback in the form of shares. Ashforth and Mael (2008) point out that there is a direct link between customer engagement and customer commitment. Bidorbuy could have failed to generate many shares due to lack of commitment by its audiences. The low levels of interaction through shares could also mean that the bulk of the page's audiences are spectators as their engagement with the brand does not add information or share information, in turn promoting brand awareness.

4.10 Chapter Summary

Chapter four presented results from the content analysis. Data from Kalahari, Takealot and Bidorbuy was presented, highlighting the message ratios, types of messages shared as well as engagement feedback. Each brand had a summary of statistics and the use of visual storytelling was presented on both Facebook and Twitter. The following chapter will address the output of this research, discussing the recommendations and conclusions made from the literature review and data analysed.

5 CHAPTER FIVE: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide a summary of the content analysis results, deducing conclusions and recommendations. These recommendations can be applied by public relations practitioners in improving brand engagement on social media in the South African context. The chapter will also discuss limitations of the study, as well as provide suggestions for further studies.

5.2 Summary of Content Analysis Results

The analyses done on the Facebook and Twitter social media platforms showed that the three selected South African brands had more successful visual storytelling brand engagement on Facebook than on Twitter. All three brands made use of photos on their Facebook pages while only one brand made use of videos.

On Kalahari's Facebook page, 80% of brand generated posts had photos, while only 20% had videos. The 22 visual posts received engagement in the form of Likes (79%), Comments (9%), Shares (12%) and Tags (0%). The tone of comments on Kalahari's Facebook comprised of negative sentiments (53%), positive sentiments (6%), neutral sentiments (35%) and brand generated comments (6%). Kalahari was the brand to record the highest number of visual posts but it was also the only brand to receive negative sentiments through comments. Takealot made use of photos as their only form of visual storytelling on Facebook. With only 9 visual posts, Takealot received engagement feedback of Comments (62%), Likes (26%) and Shares (11%). All comments received had neutral sentiments and the brand did not record any negative or brand-generated comments.

Similarly, visual posts on Bidorbuy's Facebook page were in the form of photos. 20 photos were posted during the period of study and customers interacted with the brand through Likes (89%), Comments (7%), Shares (4%) and Tags (0%). Comments were mostly neutral (86%) with brand-generated comments making up the rest (14%).

Out of the three brands, Takealot recorded the lowest visual story ratio, while the other two brands had a fairly high ratio of visual stories on their Facebook pages. Overall, the use of

visual storytelling in promoting brand engagement was poor as all three brands mainly made use of one form of visual storytelling.

Brand engagement through visual storytelling on Twitter was unsuccessful on the brand pages for Kalahari, Takealot and Bidorbuy due to the lack of visual stories being posted. The two social media platforms demonstrated significant variations in the use of visual storytelling, suggesting that, during the period of study, South African brands preferred to use Facebook over Twitter in communicating through visuals.

5.3 Key Findings/Conclusions

An understanding of visual storytelling and the strategy behind using it for corporate communication is essential for all brands operating in the social-media driven environment (McCorkindale 2010).The social media communication platform gives brands an opportunity to leave behind the old-world marketing notion of 'fire-and forget' brand building and take the opportunity to create two-way communication, with actual interaction between the brands and their audiences or customers. As such, it was important to analyse the use of visual storytelling by the selected brands in order to determine how visual storytelling promotes brand engagement.

The following are the key findings/conclusions that were made from the data analysis:

5.3.1 South African Brands Use Visual Storytelling

South African brands recognise the value of visual storytelling as a brand engagement strategy. Visual stories were used as a way of initiating conversations with the audience. A majority of the visual posts generated some form of engagement.

5.3.2 Design of Social Media Platforms

South African brands have not redesigned their entire social media platforms to nurture visual media. None of the brands under study made use of any extra tools on their social media platforms to enhance and generate more visual content.

5.3.3 Shared Brand – Audience Value

Visual storytelling did not create a sense of shared value with the brands' stakeholders. Though members of the Facebook communities actively engaged with the brands through shares, likes and comments, the visual content did not generate

positive sentiments that suggest brand royalty or alter customer attitude and behavioural manifestations towards the brands.

5.3.4 Lack of Knowledge about Other Types of Visual Storytelling

It seems that during the period of investigation, the concept of visual storytelling was still relatively new to the brands as they mostly employed one type of visual communication on their social media platforms.

5.3.5 Indirect Response to Messages in Content Posted

Some of the audiences did not respond directly to the visual stories. Audiences took advantage of the posts to air their grievances about the general service provided by the brand.

5.3.6 Two-way Communication through Social Media

Social media allows honest two-way communication between brands and their audiences. The presence of negative comments on the social media platforms demonstrates honest two-way engagement as brands allowed their audiences to express themselves without much censoring. However, lack of negative comments on other brand pages could suggest that brands sanitize their social media sites.

5.3.7 Lack of Use of Visual Storytelling on Twitter

Brands did not make effective use of visual storytelling on Twitter. It seems that during the period of study, Twitter was mainly designed for microblogging and did not incorporate much visual storytelling.

5.3.8 Lack of Strategies in the Use of Visual Storytelling

There are limitations to using only one strategy of visual storytelling. The brands under study made use of visual storytelling solely as a platform for communication yet there are other ways of using it. In corporate storytelling, visual storytelling can also be used as an infrastructure as well as being a firewall for brands (Stopforth 2013).

5.3.9 Disparity in Social Metrics

There is a huge disparity between the number of people that 'Like' or 'Follow' a brand on social media platforms. The number of customers that interacted with the brands were far less that the total number of customers who supposedly engage with the

brands. Research has shown that only about half of users on social media platforms get to see posts posted on brand pages. The numbers also drastically reduce because some of the 'fans' that like brand pages are either fake profiles or dead profiles. Some 'fans' select the 'Hide' option on all future content from brand pages and as such, do not participate in any way (Loomer 2012).

The importance of visual storytelling in promoting brand engagement on social media has been emphasized by many scholars, as discussed in chapter two of this study. As the dynamics of communication change, visual storytelling can expand and change the way brands engage with their customers. From this study, it is clear that South African brands have incorporated visual storytelling into their corporate communication strategies. The study reflects that visual storytelling was used to communicate services offered by the brands and also as conversation starters, in turn creating engagement.

Higgins and Scholer (2009) conceptualised engagement on social media as being a state of sustained attention, characterised by involvement and full absorption of surrounding events. The two scholars observed that engagement in audiences varies with individuals, with some being more engaged that the others. Higgins and Scholer (2009) also noted that due to the varying levels of engagement, it is expected to receive both positive and negative expressions of engagement. Visual storytelling on the social media platforms for Kalahari, Bidorbuy and Takealot received a variety of engagement. Kalahari's Facebook recorded negative engagement with customers complaining about services rendered but the other two brands mostly received enquiries and neutral toned engagement.

The 'Social Technographics Ladder' by Forrester Research (2010) was useful in identifying and categorising the roles of audiences in brand engagement. The brand pages generated a set of conversationalists who, though not creating visual content themselves, commented, liked, shared and contributed to discussions on the platform. However, this study also revealed that there were many Inactives, Joiners and Spectators on the social media platforms and these contributed towards some of the limitations of this study. Results from the study suggest that visual storytelling was used by brands to promote engagement with their audiences. It seems that visual storytelling was not used to its full extent and as such, it did not receive all the possible benefits through engagement. South African brands should therefore learn more and take full advantage of this communication strategy in order to receive its full benefits.

5.4 Recommendations

The recommendations provided in this section have been extrapolated from the various literature discussed in this study, as well as the results from the data analysis. The suggested recommendations will seek to alleviate or profligate the impact of the challenges identified in section 5.3 of this chapter. These recommendations are summarised in Table 5.1, which also explicates the intent of the recommendations.

Challenge	Recommendations	Intent/Aim
South African brands have not redesigned their entire social media platforms to nurture visual media.	✓ Give careful thought to design and relevance to brand. ✓ Make your visuals fun and interesting ✓ Create add-ins on your social media page to allow you to play around with design. ✓ Use more than one image to tell a story. ✓ Familiarise with tools used for visual storytelling	The impact of visual content mostly relies on the way it presented. Creative presentation can promote engagement as audiences are drawn to content that seems fun and entertaining.
Visual storytelling did not create a sense of shared value with the brands' stakeholders.	✓ Engage back by participating in the ongoing conversations ✓ Put audiences at the centre of the message ✓ Understand how your visual content will be used by the audience. ✓ Create stories that tell key messages and initiatives the brand pushes.	Creates a lasting relationship and adds value to the brands as they know their audience better while audience identifies with brand, generating brand loyalty and satisfaction.
Lack of knowledge about other types of visual storytelling	✓ Research on developments in your area of interest.	Keeping abreast with developments in the discipline of visual storytelling makes you aware of any new trends or tips that can help you improve your use of visual storytelling.
Some of the audiences did not	✓ Give careful thought to context and timing ✓ Manage customer service paying attention to negative engagement.	Portraying your services as a problem solver/solution/desirable result

respond directly to the visual stories.	✓ Recognise that visual content must have a point.	instils emotion and creates engagement. Managing negative sentiments is more important than responding to positive ones.
Brands did not make effective use of visual storytelling on Twitter.	✓ Create visual content ✓ Share everything relating to your brand ✓ Be creative ✓ Use Hashtags campaign ✓ Post visual content frequently	Human brains process visuals faster, makes it easier for audiences to digest the content. Sharing everything about your brand creates awareness. Depending on message being communicated, frequency helps create awareness.
Lack of strategies in the use of visual storytelling.	✓ Leverage all the unique elements of visual storytelling. ✓ Participate in real time and real sharing. ✓ Be responsive and agile, creating strategies quickly.	Make full use of all types of visual storytelling to create a story around the brand's values and services as well as to widen range of engagement. Communicating events as they happen draws instils involvement. If conversations are caught in the right context, it is a chance to be relevant and stand out in the crowd.
There is a huge disparity between the numbers of people that 'Like' or 'Follow' and those that interact with a brand on social media platforms.	✓ Link your content to the rest of your communication channels – emails, website, blog etc. to create attention gravity. ✓ Create visual content that sparks curiosity in your audiences	Creating attention gravity pulls your audiences to the channels that have more information about your brand. Curiosity will make users engage so they know more about you, creating brand identification.

Table 5.1 Recommendations

5.5 Research Validity and Reliability

There are many approaches to measuring validity and reliability in research as these are widely contested terms. Validity and reliability are methodological elements that differ between qualitative and quantitative research (Sarantakos 1994). This section discusses the measures taken to address validity and reliability in this study.

5.5.1 Validity

For this study, validity was assessed through the two criteria proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1994). They propose credibility and transferability as the two key criteria in assessing validity of qualitative studies. The correct adoption of research methods establishes credibility in qualitative research (Yin 1994). The research philosophy, procedures and methods applied in this research are discussed in chapter three. The examination of previous related literature is discussed in chapter two of this research and contributed towards the credibility of the study. Transferability, also known as external validity, seeks to demonstrate the extent to which research findings of a study can be applied to other situations (Shenton 2004). The study's delimitations, discussed in chapter one, highlight that the study looked at South African online shopping brands, who actively engaged with their audiences on Facebook and Twitter during a time period of one month (February – March 2014). The prevailing context and setting of this study, if applied in a similar setting/context, should be transferable. By discussing the inclusion criteria of the brands analysed, this study was able to establish transferability.

The study also makes use of triangulation, another form of validity that analyses both qualitative and quantitative data (Silverman 2003). Triangulation was used in corroborating data collected through content analysis. By also using quantitative inquiry, the research methodology was able to address the different inquiry components of the study.

5.5.2 Reliability

Establishing reliability in qualitative research can be achieved through the use of dependability and conformability (Sarantakos 1994). Dependability is concerned with determining the liability of research findings when applied to a different time period. Dependability is similar to credibility and can be achieved by a close analysis of the research processes (Guba and Lincoln 1994). The research design and its implementation are discussed in chapter three of this study. According to Shenton (2004), conformability is concerned with ensuring the objectivity of the research findings. The researcher has to ensure that the

research findings are not formed by their characteristics and preferences but are rather formed by the results of the experiences and ideas of the targeted population. Through the use of document analysis, the researcher was able to made deductions based on the results generated and was also guided by a theoretical trail.

5.6 Limitations to the Research

Kalahari, Takealot and Bidorbuy were the three brands selected as a sample that was representative of South African brands. Though the data collected was valid, there were limitations to the study:

The study analysed brands that were in the online 'non-specialised' category and as such, the results may not be applicable to South African brands in other categories.

The time scope of the study was limited to a period of one month and as a result, the content analysis was based on visual material posted during that time period. This may pose challenges as recommendations made based on findings may not be relevant now as brands could have far surpassed in their use of visual storytelling on social media networks.

User engagement was measured through an analysis of their activity on the selected brand pages. Direct engagement between the researcher and the audiences could have likely helped in getting more knowledge on the opinion of the audiences towards visual storytelling and engagement.

The use of visual storytelling on Twitter was very poor, largely contributed by the design of the social media site. However, with the introduction of the new profile pages in April 2014, the dynamics of visual storytelling on Twitter have changed by now.

The limitations encountered in this study did not affect the research process or the results thereof but they contribute to suggestions for further studies.

5.7 Further Research

Results from this study show that use of visual storytelling in corporate communication can promote brand-audience engagement. However, the study was conducted over a limited four week period and is also a small-scale investigation as only three South African brands were analysed. The scope of the study could be extended in further research by analysing more

South African brands and over a longer period of time. This may allow for more findings that can help in determining the extent to which visual storytelling promotes engagement.

It would be of interest to see how South African brands make use of visual storytelling on other social media platforms such as Instagram as a report on the SA Social Media Landscape (World Wide Worx 2014) highlights a new found interest in Instagram by South African brands, with 67% of them planning to invest in marketing on Instagram in 2015.

Further studies should consider researching on how South African audiences use social media. Greater knowledge on user activity on social media platforms could assist public relations practitioners in making effective engagement decisions regarding the use of visual storytelling. The recommendations provided in this research also provide potential approaches to public relations practitioners in the South Africa.

5.8 Chapter Summary

Chapter Five presented conclusions and recommendations deduced from the content analysis done in chapter Four. The recommendations presented are not exhaustive as there are many strategies in using visual storytelling for corporate communication. The chapter also discussed issues of validity and credibility as well as presenting limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.

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