AN INVESTIGATION OF THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA NEWS RELEASES TO CREATE DIALOGUE AROUND BRANDS

BY

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Magister Artium in Applied Media Studies in the Faculty of Arts at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University

APRIL 2010

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to provide South African public relations professionals with insights into the use of the Social Media News Release (SMNR) as a PR 2.0 tool that has the potential to elicit consumer-driven dialogue in social media channels about information, a brand, product or service advocated by the particular social media news release.

Drawing on literature from fields such as public relations, new media studies, marketing, and consumer studies, an analysis of two South African SMNR case studies was conducted including the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR and the Standard Bank Pro20 2008 and 2009 SMNRs. An in-depth content analysis applying limited designations analysis and detailed assertions analysis techniques was performed on selected content from the dedicated social media platforms linked to in the SMNRs to determine the origins, tone and thematic nature of communications on the platforms. A total of 2071 messages was analysed by means of content analysis across six social media platforms in the two case studies. In order to triangulate and support data, an online survey was conducted with 43 social media users as respondents in order to determine social media users' interactions with the social media platforms and SMNRs.

The study found that the social media platforms linked to the SMNRs in the two case studies largely successfully elicited and hosted social media user-generated conversations about the themes advocated by the SMNR. The Blog, Facebook and YouTube platforms proved to be most successful in generating social media conversation, while the Flickr, Twitter and Delicious platforms were less effective among South African consumers.

It was found that social media news releases are likely to elicit consumer-driven dialogue on the dedicated social media platforms linked to by the SMNRs if the platforms are managed correctly. Factors that were identified as important management considerations include ensuring the relevancy and timeliness of content on the social media platforms, the involvement by the platform creator in stimulating and encouraging participation from social media users where necessary, as well as the swift response to user comments, deleting of spam comments and pro-active management of negative perceptions that may arise from user comments on the platforms.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

1.1 Introduction

The British Institute of Public Opinion defines public relations (PR) as "the deliberate, planned, and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics" (Wilcox & Cameron 2006:6).

While still fulfilling the objectives of the aforementioned definition, the development of "PR 2.0" and the subsequent public relations tactics that capitalise on Web 2.0 platforms have changed the way public relations practitioners reach, communicate with, and elicit attitudinal and behavioural responses from their target audiences.

One of the more recent PR 2.0 developments in terms of communication tools is the social media news release (SMNR), also known as the Social Media Press Release or Social Release. The creation of the social media news release template in 2006 (Defren 2006a) has provided an integrated communications tool that harnesses a collection of key Web 2.0 components - with its primary driver being social media channels and their subsequent networks - to disseminate information to journalists and directly to consumers.

Although there is no single accepted definition of a social media news release (SMNR), a literature review of leading researchers and developers in the field such as Solis (2007a, 2007c), Breakenridge (2008), Foremski (2006b) and Defren (SHIFT Communications 2006) allows for a summarised definition. For the purpose of this study, a social media news release will be defined as:

- a corporate communication tool distributed through the online environment, that
- provides summarised information to the reader about a particular topic
- provides links to photographs and company graphics, audio, videos, and related websites
- provides an interactive forum or commentary space on the topic
- provides links to online and mobile social media publishing and networking sites, and

- can be shared with users on social media networking sites through mechanisms such as tagging, bookmarking, linking and rating.

Considering the nature of the traditional press release as a document primarily issued directly to journalists and occasionally posted on corporate websites, the SMNR in contrast, is designed to be spread virally through social media links. Viral marketing can be defined as "a marketing phenomenon that facilitates and encourages people to pass along a marketing message voluntarily" (Breakenridge 2008:22). Breakenridge calls viral marketing "the 'Word of Mouth' of the Internet" (2008:22). Packaging the SMNR with the tools needed to facilitate quick and easy viral distribution among consumers on social media networking sites can subsequently help elicit dialogue on these social networking sites around the information, brand, product, or service advocated in the SMNR.

It is important that the SMNR must thus not only be seen as a structural tool which merely provides new ways of presenting and organising information, but as a tool that can potentially create a sustained conversation about a brand through social media networks, thus adding value as a public relations tool.

As the SMNR is still a relatively new and constantly evolving concept both internationally and specifically in the South African public relations context, it is necessary to explore the social media strategies employed in an SMNR and to determine the extent to which the SMNR succeeds in creating dialogue about its information, brand, product or service, amongst consumers on its targeted social media channels.

This analysis will provide public relations practitioners with a South African perspective on the dynamics of the SMNR as a tool to create consumer-driven dialogue about a brand within our unique new media environment where online and mobile applications compete for user attention.

1.2 Technology and the changing face of PR

The social media news release is but one of the many tools currently available to public relations practitioners as part of the so-called "PR 2.0"-movement (Defren 2005b, 2006c;

Getgood 2006; SHIFT Communications 2007; Breakenridge 2008; Woolf 2008; Solis 2008b). Both the assertion of PR 2.0 as an era in public relations and the creation of the SMNR all point to the definite impact that technological shifts and the resulting changes in people's communication habits has had on the landscape of public relations. When public communication habits change, so too must public relations practitioners' attempts to communicate with those publics.

Hunt and Grunig in 1984 drew attention to the importance of two-way communication in creating mutual understanding between organisations and its various internal and external publics. Their Two-way Symmetrical model of public relations was rooted in the writings of public relations practitioners such as Ivy Lee, Edward Bernays and John Hill (Grunig 1992:289) who first hinted at the potential importance of dialogue between an organisation and its publics. Since then, much of public relations' core focus became the creation, through communication, of this relationship of understanding. As a result of the striving towards the creation of mutual understanding through communication, public relations practitioners developed various communication tools to assist them in delivering accurate, targeted messages to publics (Grunig 1992; Wilcox and Cameron 2006:340.

Over time, the practice of public relations has had to adapt to the constant evolution of the nature of communication and communication channels, which resulted in the development and adoption of new communication tools and in some cases the phasing out or replacement of more traditional communication tools used in the industry.

With the advent and increasing popularity of the Internet through what has been called the "Web Infancy" (Breakenridge 2008:16) and "Web 1.0" (Developed by Sir Tim Berners-Lee in 1989 as the World Wide Web, Flew 2008:6) phases, public relations witnessed the rise of "PR 1.0". PR 1.0, which Breakenridge describes as the stabilising time after the dot-com crash of the 1990s (2008:17) allowed public relations practitioners to use Internet-based applications for research, distributing communications and forging closer relationships with key stakeholders.

Breakenridge (2008:17-19) lists three main reasons why PR 1.0 was beneficial to public relations professionals:

- "A Two-Way Highway": instant response by PR professional to stakeholder query
- "Easier Editorial Coverage": provision of targeted, complete information to journalists
- "Longer, Stronger Relationships": building and nurturing of relationships with journalists.

Each of these aspects were eased by the development of tools using Internet technology such as e-mails, websites, web newsrooms, e-newsletters and more which allowed public relations practitioners to provide information to stakeholders (especially journalists) much quicker than before.

However, Solis approaches the concept of PR 1.0 by focusing on the attitude towards the practice of the profession during Web 1.0, rather than distinguishing it based on the tools used during the PR 1.0 phase as Breakenridge does. Solis calls PR 1.0 the "publicity and spin machine" (Solis 2008a:xviii) that was characterised by "hype, spin, hyperbole, and buzzwords". In contrast, PR 2.0 according to Solis, ushers in an era of putting the "public back into Public Relations" (Solis 2008a:xx) by allowing participation and two-way symmetrical communication between organisations and stakeholders, without the excessive spin commonly seen in PR 1.0. Solis (Solis 2008a:xix) chooses to view PR 2.0 as a philosophy that changes the approach to public relations as a practice rather than focusing on the Web tools that facilitate communication.

"PR 2.0", a term coined by Brian Solis in the late 1990s (Solis 2008d), has received a significant amount of praise and criticism, especially from thought leaders and industry specialists on Web platforms such as weblogs (blogs). Used by Solis to describe

> how the Web and multimedia was redefining PR and marketing communications, while also building the toolkit to reinvent how companies communicate with influencers and directly with people (Solis 2008a:xix),

"PR 2.0" has often been called a hype-term or buzzword in itself.

Many thought leaders dismiss PR 2.0 as a new term to describe the unchanged core concept of public relations, namely the engagement of publics through two-way communication. Bruce (2006a and 2006b), and Young (2006) criticise PR 2.0 as little more than another new term to describe what PR professionals have been doing since the beginning of the profession, while Solis (2008d), Breakenridge (2009) and Woolf (2008) view it as a notable step forward towards the ideal model of two-way symmetrical communication proposed by Hunt and Grunig in 1984 (Grunig 1992).

In essence, what PR 2.0 offers public relations practitioners which its predecessors did not, is a collection of advanced tools powered by the Internet that allows practitioners to identify, research, reach and communicate with a much a wider audience than before. Wright and Hinson's (2008, 2009) extensive three-year research of the impact of technology and social media on the practice of corporate public relations supports this statement as they have found "the development of various new technologies has significantly empowered a wide variety of strategic publics by giving them dynamic new media many are using to communicate effectively with a variety of internal and external audiences" (Wright & Hinson 2008:1-2).

The development of these PR 2.0 tools is largely based on the principles of "Web 2.0". The term "Web 2.0" was popularised during a conference between O'Reilly Media and MediaLive International in 2004 (O'Reilly 2005:1) based on an understanding of "the Web as a platform" (O'Reilly 2005:1). It included core principles such as:
- Services, not packaged software,
- Architecture of participation,
- Cost-effective scalability,
- Remixable data-source and data transformation,
- Software above the level of a single device, and
- Harnessing collective intelligence (O'Reilly 2005:1).

PR 2.0 provides tools that display many of these principles such as Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds, multimedia tags, wikis, forums/chat walls/discussion boards, ratings, consumer reviews (collective intelligence), social media networks and channels (architecture of participation), SMNRs (cost-effective scalability, remixable data-source and data transformation) and others.

According to SHIFT Communications (2007:5), RSS feeds are content aggregators used by websites and weblogs that allow users to subscribe to online content that they are interested in. The RSS feed will then filter and organise the news activity on these sites and feed it to the user in real-time so that the user can stay abreast of the latest development in the field. Multimedia tags are described as descriptors or keywords that web users assign to online contents and that act like a subject or category used to organise webpages or weblog contents (SHIFT communications 2007:17). Wikis, are often used for collaborative writing as it refers to a website on which anyone who visits the site can edit or add to the site contents, usually after registering their user details (SHIFT communications 2007:22). In this way, many people across the Web can contribute to an ongoing body of knowledge about a particular topic, as is exemplified by the encyclopaedia-inspired wiki site, Wikipedia.

Tools like RSS Feeds, multimedia tags and wikis among many others thus display many of the collaborative characteristics of Web 2.0 and provide new tools for communication. It must be kept in mind, however, that much like a shift in technology and communication styles does not replace the technology that came before it (consider that we still use regular mail, fax machines, landlines and copiers even though we have e-mail, Instant Messaging, cell phones and scanners), PR 2.0 provides additional tools for public relations practitioners to reach publics; it does not necessarily completely replace the tools that came before it. Instead, PR 2.0 tools provide an alternative or compliment to existing public relations and communication tools.

1.3 Death of the press release – the advent of the SMNR

Over the past 100 years the press release has become a primary communication tool used by public relations professionals to disseminate information to key media. Nel defines press releases as

> […] a formal printed announcement or notice by an organisation about its activities that is written in the form of a news article and given to the media to generate or encourage publicity. When appropriate, photographs, video and audio clips, and other graphic materials are sent out along with written statements (Nel 2005: 35).

The press release, which is also known as a news release or media release depending on the type of media the release is distributed to (Van Hoepen & Marchesi 2007:137), was originally distributed as a hard copy document or as part of a press kit delivered directly to a specific journalist or editor. With the advent of new media technologies such as the Internet, the distribution of digital press releases via e-mail, and the inclusion of URLs, e-mail addresses and digital content such as photographs and logos became standard practice. While these technologies enhanced the content and distribution of press releases, it did not result in a significant progression of, or deviation from the traditional press release format.

Van Hoepen and Marchesi summarise the nature of the press release as being

> brief, specific and to the point so that the journalist or editor can read and understand the main ideas and facts quickly. It is prepared and presented in a standardised format and should have enough news value to be turned into a news story (2007:137).

During the PR 1.0 "spin machine" period, the press release provided the primary space for "hype, spin, hyperbole, and buzzwords" which according to Solis (Solis 2008a:xviii) characterised PR 1.0. As such press releases lost much of its credibility and value causing it to be ignored by journalists, more often than not (Foremski 2006a, 2006b; Woolf 2008; Miller 2009).

The debate about the press release reached a notable climax with Tom Foremski's call for the "death" of the press release (Foremski 2006a) and his proposition of a multimedia alternative to the traditional press release. Foremski's blog post is widely accepted by social media thought leaders to be the impetus for the introduction of the social media news release (SMNR) by Todd Defren of SHIFT Communications on 23 May 2006. In the SMNR (SHIFT Communications 2006) it is also stated that "[t]he next-generation press release format was inspired by Tom Foremski of Silicon Valley Watcher".

The SMNR which summarised, categorised and tagged information into relevant groups within the release and contained multimedia links to photographs, logos, and attachments provided a new online alternative to the traditional press release. As the

SMNR was introduced in a downloadable and adaptable format, public relations practitioners are constantly improvising and enhancing the SMNR format proposed by Defren and SHIFT Communications by adding relevant additional multimedia and social media elements to suit their needs. The addition of videos, Podcasts, RSS feeds, links to Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, blogs and other social media elements are common in SMNRs currently being released.

It is especially the inclusion of what Defren called "purpose-built" sites and pages on social networks (Defren in SHIFT Communications 2006) that allows SMNRs to transgress the traditional boundaries of the press release to reach consumers directly through social media platforms, and allow these consumers to share the message of the SMNR with acquaintances at the click of a button. The "purpose-built" sites allow a space for consumers to converse about the brand or message contained in the SMNR and as such has the ability to create what Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) and Kozinets (1999) describe as "brand communities" -

> a specific subgroup of virtual communities that explicitly center upon consumption-related interests. They can be defined as affiliative groups whose online interactions are based upon shared enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, a specific consumption activity or related group of activities (Kozinets 1999:254).

In the case of brand communities, the shared interest among consumers is a common brand, product or service around which a sense of communality is built through communication and interaction, either in favour of or against the brand in question.

1.4 Social media news release in South Africa

Since its introduction by SHIFT communications in 2006, the social media news release format has gained popularity internationally.   Numerous examples of corporate SMNRs exist including:

- SHIFT in the News, issued by SHIFT Communications (SHIFT Communications 2006),
- Second Life Reforestation Project Qualifies as a Finalist in American Express Members Project, issued by Converseon (Converseon 2007),

- IABC social media news releases (collection of SMNRs), issued by IABC (IABC Social Media News Releases),
- Cisco Connected Life Contest, issued by Cisco (Cisco 2007),
- Coca-Cola launches Competition to Design Online "Virtual Thirst" Coke Machine, issued by The Coca-Cola Company (The Coca-Cola Company 2007),
- Ford social media news releases (collection of SMNRs), issued by Ford (Ford Motor Company 2008), to name but a few.

In South Africa, however, the use of the social media news release has been slow in comparison. At the time of compiling this study, a total of ten SMNRs released in the South African public relations arena could be traced online, with the first SMNR being released in 2008 two years after the SMNR-format was released internationally. Other examples may exist, but are not prominently listed in online searches using Google and Yahoo search engines. It is worth noting, however, that four of the ten SMNRs were released in short concession during the June to August 2009 period. The ten South African SMNRs include:

- "We got the Kaboom", issued by Standard Bank on 9 April 2008 (Standard Bank 2008),
- "Samsung Omnia i900 social media news release", issued by Samsung South Africa on 8 November 2008 (Samsung 2008),
- "Justrade social media news release", issued by Justrade (Justrade),
- "Shine 2010 social media news release", issued by First National Bank (First National Bank),
- "M-Net's Seduction 101 social media news release", issued by M-Net (M-Net),
- "Standard Bank Pro20 Rocking Summer Tour", issued by Standard Bank on 12 January 2009. Please note this is the 2009-version of the first Standard Bank SMNR and has replaced the "We got the Kaboom" SMNR issued in 2008. (Standard Bank 2009a),
- "An Agenda for Progress at a Time of Global Crisis: A Call for African Leadership", issued by Africa Progress Panel on 10 June 2009 (Africa Progress Panel 2009),
- "Standard Bank's first global campaign to support growth in emerging markets", issued by Standard Bank on 24 July 2009 (Standard Bank 2009b),

- "Seacom goes live: Undersea fibre-optic network ready to deliver capacity and connectivity to Africa", issued by Seacom on 24 July 2009 (Seacom 2009),
- "Vodacom launches Betavine: An open community for local mobile application", issued by Vodacom South Africa in August 2009 (Vodacom South Africa 2009).

The leading firm in the distribution of SMNRs in South Africa is Brandsh Communication who compiled the very first SMNR for distribution in South Africa namely the Standard Bank "We got the Kaboom" SMNR released on 9 April 2008. Since then, Brandsh Communication has been responsible for the compilation of another six of the ten SMNRs released in South Africa thus far. The Cerebra agency has issued two SMNRs, while the remaining SMNR developers are not named.

1.5 Justification and significance of the study

As a relatively new public relations tool in the South African public relations context, it has been found that few examples of social media news releases have been utilised in South Africa. Research into the use of the social media news release in the South African public relations context is, consequently, an underrepresented field of study.

Researchers of the development of the SMNR such as Solis (2007a and 2007c), Glaser (2008) and Breakenridge (2008) have highlighted one of the SMNR's most unique features as being its use of social media to distribute information and initiate dialogue about a topic.

The social media links in the SMNRs allow consumers, journalists and all interested parties to click through to "purpose-built" pages and sites for SMNRs as discussed earlier in this chapter. These social media pages may include things like a dedicated Facebook group or Facebook Fan page, a dedicated Twitter profile, topical blogs about the brand, company, product, service or information, a Youtube channel for the brand, a Flickr photostream for the brand, Technorati and Delicious (formerly deli.cio.us) site pages tracking the development of the topic and more. All of these tools provide an opportunity for the brand to engage with consumers through social media channels and in turn, allows consumers to converse with representatives of the brand and with each other.

As a PR 2.0 tool relying primarily on social media to achieve its goals of providing information to key stakeholders and initiating dialogue among the public, it is important to determine firstly, whether or not the SMNR succeeds in its goal of creating conversation on social media networks about the brand it advocates, and secondly, to provide insight on how successful strategies could be employed to initiate this type of consumer-driven dialogue as a public relations tool.

As a result of this study, South African public relations and corporate communication practitioners working within the PR 2.0 field will gain a better understanding of the use of the SMNR as a public relations tool, with specific insight into the way in which the social media channels used in conjunction with the SMNR can be used to draw and host consumer-driven conversation about the brand, information, product or service advocated by the social media news release.

1.6 Problem statement

To what extent do social media network links in a social media news release elicit consumer-driven dialogue about the brand, information, product or service advocated by the social media news release?

1.7 Research aim

To determine the effectiveness of the social media network links in a social media news release in eliciting consumer-driven dialogue about the brand, information, product or service advocated by the social media news release.

1.8 Research objectives

- To identify the SMNR social media network strategies used in the Standard Bank Pro20 and Samsung Omnia i900 SMNRs
- To determine the thematic nature of the communication content generated about the brand on these social media networks

- To identify the brand disposition of the communication generated about the brand on these social media networks
- To identify the extent to which the communication generated on these social media networks is consumer-driven or synthesised by the primary message distributor (the organisation)
- To test whether the communication generated on these social networks is linked to the consumption of the SMNR by social media consumers

1.9 Research design and methods

This research study took an interpretivist approach focusing on qualitative research by constructing two case studies of existing SMNRs in the South African public relations context. The two case studies, which include the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR and the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR, were analysed using a thematic content analysis of communication presented by the SMNRs as well as on the dedicated social media platforms linked to by the SMNRs. To supplement the data found on the social media platforms, an online survey was conducted among social media users who are subscribed to the social media platforms presented by the SMNRs. The survey yielded both quantitative and qualitative data with closed and open-ended questions.

A more detailed description of the research design and methods applied in this study can be found in Chapter 3 of this treatise.

1.10 Delimitations of study

The study of the social media news release is not a particularly well represented field, potentially due to the SMNR being introduced internationally only three years ago. As a result, most of the research available on this topic is in an online format and is primarily limited to the weblogs (blogs) and discussions of thought leaders on the topic. Notable researchers and developers into this field include Todd Defren, Brian Solis, Deirdre Breakenridge, Chris Heuer, and Shel Holtz. Solis and Breakenridge provide the majority of the limited printed research on this topic.

This study was delimited to the analysis of three social media news releases released in South Africa and the brand communities that have developed in association with these releases. These SMNRs are the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR (both the original 2008 version and the updated 2009 issue) and the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR. Although these three SMNRs represent two different industries, they are the most closely comparable in terms of format, structure and features of SMNRs released in South Africa. The diverse industries represented may also provide insight into the opportunities and potential challenges to overcome when adapting the SMNR for brands within respective industries.

As the study is based on the research of a communication phenomenon in the online environment, the majority of the data for research was gathered online. Internet access was required in order to complete the survey, but the sampling criteria make provision for this. Due to issuing the survey online, however, a larger threat of a non-response bias existed due to potential respondents ignoring the survey, or respondents choosing not to answer a question or not having an opinion on certain questions in the survey questionnaire. Du Plooy (2007:171) adds that this type of survey provides difficulty in drawing a representative sample, and does not allow the researcher to pose follow-up questions.

In addition, respondents must be affiliated with one or more of the identified social media channel platforms that will be researched in order to provide greater accuracy of results. The research for this study was conducted in a limited time span therefore the sampling size of the target audience was adjusted accordingly.

The research was based primarily on a qualitative design, which according to Du Plooy (2007:83) is rooted in observations, questions and deductions based on assumptions and may run the risk of being based on subjective reasoning. In order to limit faulty assumptions, an extensive literature review of existing research on the topic is provided.

1.11 Definition of terms

The following terms relating to this study will be defined in order to avoid possible misunderstanding:

1.11.1 Brand

Using Kapferer's (2008:9-13) definition of brands, a brand will be defined as the physical attributes and defining qualities of a particular product, service or set of products or services, as well as the cognitive associations held in the mind of consumers that add to the perceived value of the particular product, service or set of products or services.

1.11.2 Brand community

Brand community will be defined as "a specific subgroup of virtual communities that explicitly center upon consumption-related interests. They can be defined as affiliative groups whose online interactions are based upon shared enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, a specific consumption activity or related group of activities" (Kozinets 1999:254).

1.11.3 Dialogue/Conversation

The mutual exchange of opinions, ideas, and comments about a particular topic between two or more parties.

1.11.4 PR 2.0

Adapting and converging the definitions by Solis (2008d) and Breakenridge (2009), PR 2.0 will be defined as the philosophy and practice of public relations within a Web 2.0 environment in which the focus falls on reaching and engaging with audiences directly and stimulating two-way conversations by making use of the tools, principles and strategies available in addition to traditional public relations processes. These tools and strategies are primarily web-based and inspired by social media.

1.10.5 Press Release

A press release may be defined as "a formal printed announcement or notice by an organisation about its activities that is written in the form of a news article and given to the media to generate or encourage publicity. When appropriate, photographs, video and audio clips, and other graphic materials are sent out along with written statements". (Nel 2005: 35)

1.10.6 Public Relations

Public Relations can be defined as "the deliberate, planned, and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics" (Wilcox & Cameron 2006:6). Various other definitions of public relations exist, but as Wilcox and Cameron (2006:6) point out, core defining principles are present in most theorists' definitions. These include public relations as being:

- Deliberate: Intentional activity
- Planned: Organised activity
- Performance: Based on policies and performance
- Public interest: Mutually beneficial to organisation and its publics
- Two-way communication: Dialogue and feedback is crucial
- Management function: Integral part of organisational strategy and management

(adapted from Wilcox & Cameron 2006:6).

1.10.7 Social media

Drawing from definitions provided by Boyd & Ellison (2007:Social Networking Sites: A Definition) and Flew (2008:17), social media will be defined as a web-based communications infrastructure that allows users to construct profiles or register as users within a bounded system, make connections with other users and view the activities of these connections within the system in order to facilitate participation, interactivity, collaborative learning and establishing social relationships.

1.10.8 Social media channel

Social media channels (used interchangeably with social media sites) will refer to any constructed web-based social media system for social media activities to take place in. Flew (2008:17) provides examples of social media channels such as "the photography site *Flickr*, the online encyclopaedia *Wikipedia*, the online user-generated video site *YouTube*, aggregated Web log (blog) sites such as *Blogger*, *Livejournal* and *Technorati*, and the various personalised Web space sites such as *MySpace*, *Facebook*, *Friendster* and *Bebo*".

1.10.9 Social media link

A link embedded on the Internet which, when clicked on, redirects to a page on a social media channel.

1.10.10   Social media network

Social media network refers to the network of connections that develop on a social media channel when social media users connect with other users on the same channel or, in some instances, connect with users across various social media channels.

1.10.11   Social media news release

Also known as social media press release, social media release, new media release or hRelease. For the purpose of this study, a social media news release will be defined as:

- a corporate communication tool distributed through the online environment, that
- provides summarised information to the reader about a particular topic
- provides links to photographs and company graphics, audio, videos, and related websites
- provides the opportunity to host an interactive forum or commentary space on the topic
- provides links to online and mobile social media publishing and networking sites, and

- can be shared with users on social media networking sites through mechanisms such as sharing, tagging, bookmarking, linking and rating.

1.10.12   Web 2.0

"Web 2.0 is a set of economic, social, and technology trends that collectively form the basis for the next generation of the Internet – a more mature, distinctive medium characterized by user participation, openness, and network effects" (Musser & O'Reilly 2006).

1.11 Conclusion

The following chapter will provide an overview and analysis of the available literature related to the topic of this research, with a specific focus on the way in which technology has impacted the practice of public relations as a communications activity. This includes an overview of the Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 developments and its role in the creation of PR 1.0 and PR 2.0, as well as a discussion of the communication influence of social media and the online conversations that drive it. Finally, the manifestation of these influences on public relations in the form of the social media news release will be examined.

CHAPTER 2: PUBLIC RELATIONS AND NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES

2.1 Introduction

Academic research into the development and use of the social media news release (SMNR) is a very limited field. As such, the theoretical framework for this research study does not centre on the understanding or application of one significant theory or model. Instead, an understanding of key developments and concepts that shaped the practice of public relations within a new media environment, and directly or indirectly influenced the creation and use of the SMNR is necessary.

The following chapter introduces key concepts related to this study through the discussion of existing literature in the fields of public relations, new media studies, marketing, and consumer studies. By drawing on the collection of literature from researchers, developers and thought-leaders within these fields, this chapter attempts to provide an overview of the evolving practice of public relations in the Web 2.0 technology landscape. As such, the chapter contextualises the creation of the SMNR and provides a cognitive framework for the analysis of the SMNR as a public relations tool.

Firstly the concept of public relations as a form of communication will be discussed. Through the discussion of the four-model typology of public relations proposed by Hunt and Grunig in 1984 (Grunig 1992) attention will be given to the way in which practitioners' approach to the public relations communication process has changed and modern public relations is witnessing a shift of communication power from the organisation into the hands of the publics.

As a notable catalyst in the movement towards public relations as a two-way symmetrical process, the impact of the creation of the Web on public relations will be discussed. An overview of the emergence of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 will be provided, with a specific focus on how these communications revolutions initiated and influenced the development of PR 1.0 and PR 2.0.

Social media, as the most significant platform in PR 2.0 and an integral feature of the social media news release will then be discussed. Clarification of core terms, characteristics and principles of social media will be provided. Furthermore, the role of social media as a type of participatory media will be discussed in relation to the concepts of participatory media and public consumption, the creation of dialogue, the dynamics of brand communities and the potential for viral marketing through social media networks.

Finally, the application of these developments in communication and public relations through the creation of the social media news release will be reviewed. The history and development of the social media news release (SMNR) will be discussed, including its introduction internationally and its use in the South African public relations industry. In conclusion, the characteristics of the SMNR in comparison to the traditional press release will be reviewed and the SMNR's display of social media and PR 2.0 principles will be discussed.

2.2 The big PR: Defining Public Relations

Public relations as a field has seen the development and adaptation of various definitions of the term "public relations" in an attempt to capture the core qualities of this broad field. Public relations according to The British Institute of Public Opinion can be described as "the deliberate, planned, and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics" (Wilcox & Cameron 2006:6). The Institute for Public Relations and Communication Management of Southern Africa (PRISA) defines it as "the management, through communication, of the perceptions and strategic relationships between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholders" (PRISA 1998:1).

More recently the term "corporate communication" as an alternative to public relations began gaining popularity (Puth & Steyn 2000; Van Riel & Fombrun 2008; Wilcox & Cameron 2006). With its description as corporate communication, Van Riel and Fombrun (2008:22) define this communication management function as "a coherent approach to the development of communications in organisations" that encompasses marketing communications, organisational communications and management communications.

Regardless of the terms used to describe the collection of activities that make up public relations, Wilcox and Cameron (2006:6) point out core defining principles which present public relations as being:

- Deliberate: Intentional activity
- Planned: Organised activity
- Performance: Based on policies and performance
- Public interest: Mutually beneficial to an organisation and its publics
- Two-way communication: Dialogue and feedback is crucial
- Management function: Integral part of organisational strategy and management

(adapted from Wilcox & Cameron 2006:6).

2.3 Sender, message, receiver: Modelling PR communication

As is seen from the many definitions of public relations it is a communication activity at its core. As such, public relations displays comparable characteristics to models of mass communication such as the Shannon and Weaver information theory model (1949), Westley and MacLean transmission model of mass communication (1957) and George Gerbner's cultivation model (1967) (Fourie *et al* 2001:223-228).

Each of these models, with varying degrees of sophistication, represents elements at play during communication. At the core of each of these models are three important elements namely the communicator or sender, the message, and the audience or receiver. While Shannon and Weaver's model acknowledged the role of "noise" or interference in communication, Westley and MacLean's model goes further by placing emphasis on feedback. It proposes that

> mass communication is a self-regulating process guided by the interests and demands of an audience that is known only by its selections and responses to what is offered and is thus shaped by feedback from the audience (Fourie 2001:227).

Gerbner's model focuses on the influence of contextual factors on the interpretation of the message by both the sender and the receiver.

While public relations can also be traced using the elements of these models such as a sender, message, receiver, noise, context and in ideal instances feedback, it is the dynamics and balance of power between these elements according to Grunig and Hunt (1984) that reveal which dimension of public relations is practiced by an organisation.

2.3.1 The four-model typology of public relations

Grunig and Hunt in 1984 proposed four models of public relations that mark the development of communication styles in public relations over time (Grunig 1992:285). The model, also known as the four-model typology of public relations (Wilcox & Cameron 2006:63), the Hunt-Grunig model of public relations and the Excellence theory details four basic models that describe the way in which public relations practitioners can view the communication process of public relations. Although it is based on a progression of the profession through different eras from the Press Agentry to the Public Information, Two-way Asymmetrical and the Two-way Symmetrical model, many public relations practitioners and organisations have not yet adopted the principles of two-way symmetrical communication as the public relations ideal. While the Two-way Symmetrical model is now considered the ideal model for public relations, it is important to note that elements from each model are often used by organisations when appropriate, even though the organisation's overall communication strategy may be predominantly based in two-way symmetrical communication.

2.3.1.1 Press Agentry/Publicity model

Hunt and Grunig identified the first model in the four-model typology of public relations as the Press Agentry or Publicity model. The framework for the model is drawn from the way in which the press agents of the mid-19th century used the printing press to promote and gain publicity for their clients through propaganda-like message dissemination (Grunig 1992:287).

The Press Agentry model, according to Grunig (1992:303) is most often used in sports, theatre and product promotion and aims at garnering publicity through widespread media placement. Mutual communication between the organisation and its publics are

not sought and instead, the organisation tries to convince the public to support their cause through widespread media promotion and bombarding one-sided messages.

2.3.1.2 Public Information model

The second model identified by Hunt and Grunig was the Public Information model of the early 20th century (Grunig 1992:288). This model notes a change in public relations practice, headed by practitioners such as Ivy Lee, which was primarily caused by journalists' attacks on organisations in the corporate sector in the media. Organisations now needed more than propagandist messages to gain public favour so they began issuing their own press releases and information pieces "explaining their actions" (Grunig 1992:288) to the public. Grunig (1992:288) acknowledges that while these information pieces were usually basking the organisation in a positive light, the information it contained was generally truthful and accurate.

In this way, the Public Information model represents a slight movement towards the understanding of the public as an active decision maker about the merits of an organisation. Although public relations practice within this framework still did not attempt two-way dialogue between an organisation and its publics, it represented a somewhat more ethical approach to public relations than the Press Agentry model.

2.3.1.3 Two-way Asymmetrical model

The Two-way Asymmetrical model of public relations signalled the start of the social science's influence on public relations. Notably associated with practitioners such as Edward Bernays, Grunig (1992:288) explains that the Two-way Asymmetrical model represented the practice of seeking information from and giving information to an organisation's publics. The information sought and provided, however, was aimed at advancing the organisation's mission through manipulation. According to Grunig (1992:288) information was sought in order to "identify the messages most likely to produce the attitudes and behaviours desired by an organization", even if these attitudes and behaviours were not in the best interest of the public.

The power relations between the organisation and the publics were thus asymmetrical as the organisation held the most power as communicator. The result of the two-way communication was used by the organisations to gain more persuasive power over the publics in future communication.

2.3.1.4 Two-way Symmetrical model

Finally, the fourth model of public relations was identified as the Two-way Symmetrical model. In this model, communication is meant to be open, truthful and facilitate mutual understanding between organisations and their publics. While the model also uses audience and message research like the Two-way Asymmetrical model, the research is used to facilitate understanding and communication rather than being used for persuasion (Grunig 1992:289). Grunig (1992:289) states that "in the symmetrical model, understanding is the principle objective of public relations rather than persuasion".

Through the Two-way Symmetrical model, the organisation and public thus become equal players in the communication process. This type of communication relationship embodied by the Two-way Symmetrical model is seen as the ideal model for the practice of modern public relations. The organisation relies on the feedback from publics in order to evaluate and adapt their communication activities. Publics thus gain power as an active part of the communication process and as such much of the focus of public relations moves away from the organisation and its sole interests to the interest of the publics, their motives, attitudes, and behaviour.

2.3.1.5 Web 2.0: The two-way communication highway

In no other time has this role of the empowered publics as presented by the Two-way Symmetrical model of public relations been more apparent than during the advent of the Internet and what has become known as Web 2.0. The principles of Web 2.0 have changed large parts of traditional public relations audiences into highly connected, networked individuals with the power and knowledge to add to Web contents and stimulate and partake in conversations across multiple platforms. Web 2.0 platforms have thus allowed and necessitated public relations practitioners to connect with their key publics directly using Web 2.0 applications such as social media. Solis (2009a)

goes as far as suggesting that a revised model of public relations must be created to account for the radical changes in communication brought about by social media and to take into account the "complex and elaborate two-way layers of traditional and new influencers and the communities that form around them and the ideas they represent".

To an extent, what we encounter today as "PR 2.0" is a step towards this new media model of public relations suggested by Solis (2009a), but it also echoes the principles of Hunt and Grunig's Two-way Symmetrical or Excellence model. In order to contextualise the practice of public relations in a Web 2.0 world, it is necessary to trace the impetus for its evolution, namely the development and progression of the Web from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 and its significant impact on the practice of public relations.

2.4 The journey from 1.0 to 2.0: Public Relations and Communication Revolutions

Throughout the past century, public relations has had to adapt to various significant communication evolutions, the most significant of which is undoubtedly the creation of the World Wide Web and its subsequent development into Web 2.0.

The following section aims to provide an overview of Web 1.0 and its evolution into Web 2.0, as well as its consequent impact on public relations spurring the rise of what is today known as PR 1.0 and PR 2.0.

2.4.1   The birth of the Web: Web 1.0

The creation of Web 1.0 or the "World Wide Web" by Sir Tim Berners-Lee in 1989 brought about a notable shift in the way people communicated. Castells (2002:52) and Van Dijk (2006:6) site the introduction of the "Information Age" as an "Information Technology Revolution" and a "Communication Revolution of the modern age" respectively, while Flew (2008:6) describes it as the catalyst for the Internet's rise into a public and global communications media.

Although Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) and the basic foundations of the Internet already existed by 1989 (Castells 2002:28-51), it was the creation of the World Wide Web (also referred to as the Web) as a type of Internet "interface" that spurred the

mainstream adoption of the Internet as a communication, information and entertainment medium accessible to a much larger section of the population than ever before.

Flew (2008:7) and Castells (2002:50-51) describe four unique features of the World Wide Web which initiated its rise to popularity during the 1990's:

- it introduced multimedia capability to the Internet. Video, audio, graphics and text could be integrated into webpages and viewed through web browsers.
- it was based on hypertext principles which allowed extensive networks of information to be created across the Internet. Castells (2002:50) notes this as one of the key factors of the World Wide Web as users could navigate Internet sites based on the information contained on the sites, rather than the location of the sites.
- Hypertext principles gave rise to the creation of web browsers which gave users easy access to wide databases of information. Castells (2002:51) sites the creation of web browsers such as Marc Andreessen and Eric Bina's Mosaic and Netscape's Netscape Navigator as the forerunners of modern web browsers such as Google and Yahoo!.
- The creation of Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) and Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) allowed reasonably simplified methods to write source code for the World Wide Web. Castells (2002:51) adds the creation of the Uniform Resource Locater (URL), or what is today known as a website address, as another breakthrough of the World Wide Web.

<div align="right">(Flew 2008:7-8, with additions from Castells 2002).</div>

As the popularity of the World Wide Web grew, new communication channels known as Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) such as e-mail, Instant Messaging (IM), and websites gradually became part of people's daily communication routines. The Web's influence on communication however extended beyond one-to-one communication through the introduction of message and discussion boards which created a platform for public debate. Participants on these boards – which had essentially become the "town square" of virtual communities – could engage in public debate. Not only could these discussions simulate near instantaneous conversation, but spatial limits applicable to traditional mass mediums such as newspapers, radio and television did not apply.

Some users also used newfound communication technology to engage in virtual text-based computer games based in part on the fantasy role-playing game Dungeons and Dragons. These text-based games called Multi-User Domains or Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs) act as "virtual spaces in which you are able to navigate, converse, and build" (Turkle 1997:11). Turkle's research which focuses in particular on the dynamics of identity construction and development within MUDs and its consequent impact on "Real Life" identity, culture and community, views MUDs as a new form of communication (within the Web 1.0 context) and a type of virtual community construction, much of which can today be traced in concepts such as fan sites and social networking media.

By the mid to late 1990's there was an insurgence in the number of people and businesses online. Internet evangelists (Negroponte 1984, 1995; Rheingold in 1993 (2000)) predicted the rise of the digital society while others such as Van Dijk in 1991 (2006) and Castells in 1996 (2000) described the creation of a network society engaged and enabled by multiple social, political, cultural and economic networks. Internet hosts recorded an annual growth of 188.5% worldwide in 1995, making the Internet the fastest growing medium ever recorded (Flew 2008:8).

The golden years of the Internet however dipped by 2000/2001 when online businesses and many investors in Internet technologies and Web-based interfaces suffered under the so-called "dot.com crash". To many researchers the dot.com crashes signalled the end of the Web 1.0 era (O'Reilly 2005; Flew 2008:19; Breakenridge 2008:15). The subsequent restructuring of the Web ushered in an era that is today known as Web 2.0.

2.4.2 The democratisation of the Web: Web 2.0

According to Flew (2008:16) "the concept of Web 2.0 is centrally important to understanding new media in the 21st century". The development and evolution of Web 2.0 following the dot.com crash of 2000/2001 has not only changed the way individuals and organisations use the Internet, but has also significantly impacted the way in which public relations practitioners reach those individuals and represent those organisations.

Although the term Web 2.0 was popularised by Tim O'Reilly from O'Reilly Media thanks to a Web 2.0 Conference between O'Reilly Media and MediaLive International in 2004 (O'Reilly 2005:1), it is believed to have been coined by Darcy DiNucci in 1999 in an article she wrote for *PRINT Magazine*, an American design magazine. In the article entitled "Fragmented Future", DiNucci describes the rise of a new Web, where universally accessible interactive content is fragmented and yet interconnected on countless platforms:

> The Web we know now, which loads into a browser window in essentially static screenfuls, is only an embryo of the Web to come. The first glimmerings of Web 2.0 are beginning to appear, and we are just starting to see how that embryo might develop. […] The Web will be understood not as screenfuls of text and graphics, but as a transport mechanism, the ether through which interactivity happens (DiNucci 1999).

The Web 2.0 described by DiNucci in 1999 echoes much of the characteristics that define Web 2.0 according to the findings of the O'Reilly Media Web 2.0 Seminar held in 2004. O'Reilly (2005) defines Web 2.0 as the approach to the Internet as a decentralised platform in which the user controls his or her own data and contributes to the collective intelligence through user participation. Figure 1 below summarises the core principles first associated with Web 2.0 by O'Reilly Media, and which are today still valid as characteristic of Web 2.0.
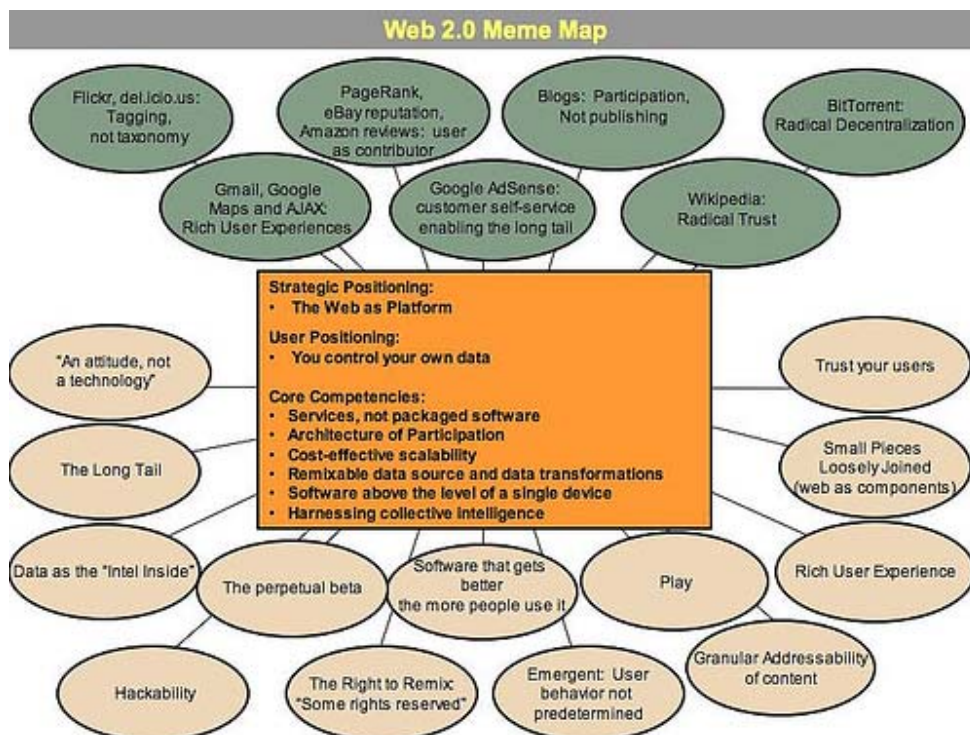
Web 2.0 Meme Map

(Fig. 1: Web 2.0 Meme Map. Source: O'Reilly 2005)

These primary characteristics of Web 2.0 listed during the Web 2.0 Conference in 2004 included the concepts of collective intelligence, open source software, Creative Commons, multi-device use of software, perpetual Beta testing and rich user experiences (O'Reilly 2005). What is significant about these characteristics is that the end-user of the Internet played a central role in each of them.

- Collective intelligence in this context referred to the continuous improvement of content based on the large-scale ongoing participation of Internet users.
- Open source software referred to the democratisation of access to software for all Internet users through the production of free software alternatives to existing market software.
- Creative Commons was based on the ownership of data on the Internet and the way in which Web 2.0 encouraged the redevelopment and exchange of data by multiple users in order to improve services.
- Multi-device use of software encouraged the production of software and applications that could be accessed and used by Internet users on multiple

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Internet-enabled devices such as computers, cell phones, Personal Digital Assistants and more.

- Perpetual Beta testing was based on the incremental release of software and the continuous improvement of the software based on user feedback.
- Rich user experiences referred to Internet experiences in which the user is immersed in interactive content

(O'Reilly 2005).

During these early days of defining and developing Web 2.0, the concept faced criticism as sceptics damned it as marketing term instead of a new, noteworthy shift in the way we interact with the Web. Notably both Vinton Cerf, credited as being one of the founding fathers of the Internet (technology) and the so-called father of the World Wide Web, Sir Tim Berners-Lee refer to Web 2.0 as hype. Berners-Lee states that

> Web 1.0 was all about connecting people. It was an interactive space, and I think Web 2.0 is, of course, a piece of jargon, nobody even knows what it means. If Web 2.0 for you is blogs and wikis, then that is people to people. But that was what the Web was supposed to be all along (IBM developerWorks Interviews 2006),

while Cerf (In Flew 2008:17) says "the term [Web 2.0] is more marketing hype than real". Both researchers, however, admit that the technologies and opportunities that the term has come to present do pose significant opportunities for the ongoing improvement of the Web.

In the five years since O'Reilly Media first attempted to define the nature of Web 2.0 (O'Reilly 2005), many other researchers have added their views of the Web 2.0 concept, while O'Reilly (Musser & O'Reilly 2006; O'Reilly & Battelle 2009) continues to play a significant role in refining the definition of the concept.

Musser & O'Reilly (2006) provide a holistic definition of Web 2.0 that is most reflective of its nature today, and will be used as the core definition of Web 2.0 for the purpose of this treatise. According to Musser & O'Reilly (2006):

Web 2.0 is a set of economic, social, and technology trends that collectively form the basis for the next generation of the Internet – a more mature, distinctive medium characterized by user participation, openness, and network effects (Musser & O'Reilly 2006).

Flew (2008:17), using O'Reilly (2005) and Musser & O'Reilly (2006) as guidance, adds that Web 2.0 has popularised the Web as a communications infrastructure with the "scope for participation, interactivity, collaborative learning, and social networking". He draws attention to the fact that some of the fastest growing websites in the 2000s are based on Web 2.0 principles, and attributes it to the fact that these and other Web 2.0 sites and software are "many-to-many in their connectivity, decentralised in terms of control, user-focused and easy for new users to use, open in terms of their technology standards and their Applications Programming Interface (API), relatively simple and 'lightweight' in their design, their administrative requirements and their start-up and ongoing development costs, [and] expected to evolve and change over times, as users make new modifications to the sites" (Flew 2008:17).

Importantly, Flew (2008:17) also notes that Web 2.0 is used interchangeably with the term Social Networking Media. Although social media makes up a significant part of Web 2.0 websites, it is inaccurate to refer to Web 2.0 in its entirety as Social Networking Media. For the purpose of this research, Web 2.0, Social Networks and Social Media will thus be approached as related, yet individual concepts.

From the initial definitions of Web 2.0 (O'Reilly 2005) to more recent definitions by Musser & O'Reilly (2006), Flew (2008) and O'Reilly & Battelle (2009), it is clear that much of Web 2.0 differentiating qualities is centered on the changing position of the Web user. In contrast to Web 1.0, the Web 2.0 user is more knowledgeable of developing applications, more comfortable with experimentation on the Web, more empowered to contribute to the mass of information on the Web, and importantly, more likely to ignore information that they feel is irrelevant. Web 2.0 has decentralised the control of Web content by "distributing" the power of communication creation and distribution among users and giving them a channel for feedback. The value of Web 2.0, as Musser & O'Reilly (2006) suggest is thus "facilitated by the software, but [is] co-created by and for the community of connected users".

While the technology of Web 1.0 stimulated the creation of PR 1.0, it is this philosophy of Web 2.0's "democratization of content and the wisdom of the crowds" (Solis 2009a) which can be described as the major impetus guiding public relations to reinvent itself as PR 2.0.

2.4.3   Web 1.0 = technology = PR 1.0, Web 2.0 = philosophy = PR 2.0

The creation of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 had a notable impact on the public relations industry. Individual and organisations' communication habits were greatly influenced by the speed, accessibility and unique new networking possibilities of the Internet. Public relations, being a profession integrally linked to the nature of public communication, consequently needed to adapt to the changes brought first brought about by Web 1.0 and later by Web 2.0.

Firstly, there was the adaptation of public relations to meet the demands of the Web 1.0 world. Literature suggests that these adaptations, of which the collection of tools and techniques accumulatively became known as PR 1.0, were a result of three major factors:

- People communicated in new ways, through new channels: the Internet and Web 1.0 changed the demographics of publics as more people moved online in search of information and entertainment. In order to reach these audiences, PR practitioners needed to direct their efforts through these new communication channels.
- New technology made the PR professional's job easier: technological developments in the Web 1.0 era brought new tools to the PR toolbox allowing practitioners to create targeted databases for specific publics, do online research, swiftly compose and distribute rich information, and provide feedback to publics within a much shorter turnaround time.
- Lower levels of content mediation: the Internet made the compilation and distribution of information much easier, which posed both advantages and disadvantages to public relations. With Web 1.0, PR messages could easily be distributed from organisations directly to publics without mediation by traditional

media, however publics and competitors could as easily distribute harmful information about an organisation across the Internet network. Public relations practitioners thus had to become more vigilant in managing the organisation's image on Internet-enabled communication channels

(Adapted from Breakenridge 2008:15-26 and Wilcox & Cameron 2006:329-338).

Although PR 1.0 introduced a range of new tools to the practice of public relations, its core philosophy did not deviate significantly from public relations as it had been practiced before. Solis (2008a:xviii) calls PR 1.0 the "publicity and spin machine" that was characterised by "hype, spin, hyperbole, and buzzwords".

By contextualising these characteristics within Web 1.0's feedback, online research and web publishing platform it could be argued that PR 1.0 could be evaluated as a move towards Two-way Asymmetric communication. While the messages distributed through public relations campaigns remained advertising and marketing centred, the role of the public within the communication cycle became enhanced. Firstly, Web 1.0 platforms gave individuals with the relevant knowledge and means to the technology the opportunity to give feedback to public relations practitioners nearly instantaneously, and secondly, the Internet as a new media channel catered for a wide selection of niche audiences, thus giving consumers a much greater range of choice in terms of their mass media consumption habits. Consumers could thus not be targeted as easily and homogenously as before through newspapers, magazines, television, and radio channels. As a result, practitioners had to undertake more research in order to understand the changing communication habits of publics and more effectively reach these key publics.

By the mid 2000s, however, practitioners had to adapt to yet another notable communication shift namely Web 2.0 and the rise of social media which as Solis (2008:xviii) describes it "forces PR to stop broadcasting and start connecting". In response to Web 2.0's democratising power through which the Internet user became an active part of the constant evolution of this communication channel, public relations thought leaders called for the establishment of a new audience-focused approach to public relations.

Coined by Brian Solis in the 1990s (Solis 2008d), PR 2.0 was initially introduced to explain the way in which the Web was influencing public relations as a profession and changing the tools that practitioners used to reach their audiences (Solis 2008a:xix). PR 2.0 according to Solis, ushers in an era of putting the "public back into Public Relations" (Solis 2008a:xx) by allowing participation and two-way symmetrical communication between organisations and stakeholders, based on the premise of transparency and without the excessive spin of PR 1.0.

Many practitioners in the marketing and public relations fields, especially those blogging about the field, criticised PR 2.0 as a hype-term aimed at capitalising on the -2.0 suffix made popular by Web 2.0. Bruce (2006a and 2006b), Getgood (2006) and Young (2006) criticise PR 2.0 as being a new term to describe the unchanged core concept of public relations, namely the engagement of publics through two-way communication and maintain that PR professionals are continuing to do what they have been doing since the beginning of the profession.

PR 2.0 supporters such as Solis (2008d), Breakenridge (2008; 2009) and Holtz (2009b) however acknowledge the fact that PR 2.0 remains true to the public relations principles of fostering relationships. What distinguishes PR 2.0 from its predecessors is instead the way in which the strategies and tools enabled by Web 2.0 enhance the relationships created by public relations, as well as the ways in which Web 2.0 and social media are making these relationships more transparent.

Breakenridge's (2009) definition of PR 2.0 is largely centred on the impact of social media on public relations practice. She explains that "PR 2.0 uses a combination of social media tools that are available to communications professionals to reach and better communicate with influencers and consumer audiences directly" (Breakenridge 2009).

Defren (2006d), focuses on the connections between publics and the shift in power relations between publics and organisations, stating that "the 'one-to-many' approach to PR had become a *virtuous loop* between brands, consumers, and new/old media; [as] each stakeholder is now *interconnected,* and (for the first time) *equally impactful*".

Solis (Solis 2008a:xix; 2009a) shares Breakenridge and Defren's view but goes further by advocating PR 2.0 as a philosophy intended to change the way public relations is being practiced. The change needed according to Solis (2008d) is a mental shift required by practitioners from viewing public relations as a publicity machine to viewing it as transparent relationship building based on two-way conversations. In doing so, PR 2.0 must become a notable step forward towards the ideal model of two-way symmetrical communication proposed by Hunt and Grunig in 1984 (Grunig 1992).

In general, PR 2.0 supporters such as Defren (2006e), Holtz; Breakenridge (2008:274), and Solis (2008d), all point to the notion that the value of PR 2.0 is neither centred in nor limited to the -2.0 suffix. Instead, its impact is based in encouraging public relations practitioners to re-evaluate the way in which they view and engage with stakeholders, as well as the honesty, integrity and quality they display in practicing the profession.

While this philosophy of transparent engagement and quality relationship building is central to PR 2.0, the significant impact of Web 2.0 tools in facilitating the two-way conversations between organisations and stakeholders cannot be ignored. PR 2.0 provides a variety of communication tools utilising Web 2.0 principles such as blogs, RSS feeds, memes and multimedia tags for social bookmarking, wikis, forums/chat walls/discussion boards, ratings, consumer reviews, social media networks and channels, SMNRs and others. These tools can be used in conjunction with traditional public relations tools and media channels to enhance the reach and impact of public relations activities.

Of the tools used for PR 2.0, this research will focus on the social media news release and its use of social media links to facilitate dialogue about brands. In order to contextualise the creation of the social media news release and analyse its use of social media, it is therefore necessary to provide an overview of the definition and dynamics of social media.

2.5 Being social: The dynamics of social media

2.5.1 Defining social media

Social media has become one of the greatest features and identifying factors of the Web 2.0 context and has taken a central position in the toolkit of PR 2.0 practitioners. Various definitions and terms exist that describe and attempt to classify the nature of social media. These definitions are primarily divided into technologically orientated and user-orientated descriptions. Essentially, technology orientated definitions focus on the technology and technological design that enables the creation of social networks, while user-orientated definitions place emphasis on the user as enabler of social media.

Boyd & Ellison (2007:Social Networking Sites: A Definition) provide a technically focused definition of social network media as

> web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.

Breakenridge (2008:71) places the user as participant and content creator centrally in her definition, stating that "[s]ocial media encompasses all the online technologies that people collaborate on, including their opinions and experiences as well as sharing different perspectives."

A research report by Ofcom (2008), the United Kingdom's Office of Communications, echoes the definition provided by Boyd & Ellison (2007:Social Networking Sites: A Definition), defining a social networking site as "[a] site which allows users to create a personal page or profile and construct and display a social network of their online contacts" (Ofcom 2008:65). However, in the report, this definition is extended to include the central role of the user:

> At the most basic level social networking sites are sites which allow users to set up online profiles or personal homepages, and develop an online social network. The profile page

functions as the user's own webpage and includes profile information ranging from their date of birth, gender, religion, politics and hometown, to their favourite films, books quotes and what they like doing in their spare time. In addition to profile information, users can design the appearance of their page, and add content such as photos, video clips and music files (Ofcom 2008:10).

While both the technology-focused and user-focused definitions of social media have merit, a combination of these definitions provides the most accurate definition of social media for the context of this research document. Drawing from definitions provided by Boyd & Ellison (2007:Social Networking Sites: A Definition), Breakenridge (2008) and Flew (2008:17), social media will be defined as a web-based communications infrastructure that allows users to construct profiles or register as users within a bounded system, make connections with other users and view the activities of these connections within the system in order to facilitate participation, interactivity, collaborative learning and establish social relationships.

As is seen in Boyd & Ellison (2007), Breakenridge (2008), Flew (2008), Solis (2009c) and Wright & Hinson (2008, 2009), various terms are used to describe the phenomenon of social media. Wright & Hinson (2008, 2009), Solis (2009c) and Breakenridge (2008) speak of social media, Boyd & Ellison (2007) refer to social network sites, Flew (2008:80) terms it social networking media, and in some instances Solis (2009c) uses the term socialised media. Each of these definitions is based on subtle semantic differences, but social media is largely the most popular umbrella term and will also be used in this study.

2.5.2   Types of social media

Within the umbrella term of social media it is necessary to distinguish between the different types of social media available. Like most other aspects related to social media, debates exist over which media channels can be classified as social media or falling within the scope of social media and which not. As the social media world is vastly populated, constantly evolving, and new channels are added at regular intervals it is not possible to provide a complete list of all social media channels at any time. Solis and Thomas (Solis 2009c) in August 2008 introduced *The Conversation Prism* as an attempt to provide an evolving visual representation of social media and the

conversations that drive it. A revised version, known as *The Conversation Prism v2.0* was released in March 2009. The Prism categorises and lists various social media channels and attempts to provide a model for the utilisation of social media channels to create brand value through social media conversations. Solis and Thomas' *Conversation Prism v2.0* (Solis 2009c) and an additional overview of literature (Boyd & Ellison 2007:Social Networking Sites: A Definition, Wright & Hinson 2008, 2009, Breakenridge 2008, Flew 2008, SHIFT Communication 2007) provides a level of consistency as to which mediums can be classified as social media. Some mediums overlap between social media categories. These broadly include, but are in no way limited to:

- **Blogging** (which Solis and Thomas (Solis 2009c) further categorises into Blog Communities, Blogs/Conversations, and Blog Platforms): such as *Blogs.com*, *Shyftr*, *blogcatalog*, *VOX*, *xanga*; *backtype*, *blogpulse*, *technorati*; and *tumblr*, *Wordpress* and *Typepad*, along with the many individual blogs available.
- **Social tagging and social bookmarking**: such as *technorati*, *Delicious* (formerly *del.icio.us*), *Stumbleupon*, *magnolia* and *furl*.
- **Crowdsourced content** and **memes**: such as *Digg*, *Reddit*, *Newsvine*, and *Techmeme*.
- **Wikis**: such as *Wikipedia* and *Socialtext*.
- **Lifestreams**: such as *Friendfeed*, *Swurl*, and *Ping.fm*.
- **LiveCasting** (audio and video casts): such as *Blogtalkradio*, and *kyte*.
- **Micromedia**: such as *Twitter*, *Mxit*, *Yonkly* and *yammer*. (Note: *Twitter* submedia which Solis and Thomas (Solis 2009c) calls "*Twitter* Ecosystems" have subsequently developed including channels such as *Twitpic* and *Tweetscan*.)
- **Social networks** (including niche interest sites): such as *Facebook*, *Friendster*, *Myspace*, *Bebo*, *LinkedIn*, *Hives*, and *Iamtri.com*.
- **Purpose-specific social sharing sites**: such as *Flickr* (photo sharing), *Youtube* (video sharing), *Last.fm* (Online radio, music sharing), *iLike* (music sharing), *Scribd* (document sharing), *Tripadvisor* (travel information sharing).

Although each of these social media channels have its own set of unique characteristics, basic principles of contacts, networks and sharing is central to each of them. These principles are also the key elements which make social media advantageous to public

relations professionals. Used within the public relations and PR 2.0 context, these social media channels can be used as tools to facilitate and sustain conversations about brands.

2.5.3   Social media principles: Contacts, networks and sharing

Essentially, social media is "social" by the very nature that it promotes the creation of relationships between its users and the establishment of networks through these relationships. Within these networks and between these relationships, information is shared which ultimately informs, entertains, empowers individuals within the network, and strengthens the network itself. Known in Networking analysis as Metcalfe's Law proposed by Robert Metcalfe in 1973 (Van Dijk 2006:59, Castells 2000:71), the value of a network increases as the number of users in the network increases. This is a central element of social media, as a social media site's value increases as the amount of users, and the connections between these users increase. The denser the network, the more valuable it becomes within the social media landscape.

Boyd & Ellison (2007) however emphasise that users on social media networks most often connect with other users within the system that already share some form of an "offline" connection with them. This may be friends, acquaintances, work colleagues, friends of friends, or even strangers who share some sort of mutual interest or characteristic with the user. Only in few instances do users create connections with strangers who share no common interests or characteristics with them.

On most social media sites, these connections between users are referred to as "Friends", "Contacts", "Fans" or "Followers" (Boyd & Ellison 2007), "Connections" or "Subscribers" depending on the site and the nature of the relationship between users The user's collection of "Friends", "Contacts", "Fans", "Followers", "Connections" or "Subscribers" is generally called the user's personal network, and other users who share a direct or indirect connection with the user may be listed as an extended network.

An overview of major social media sites such as *Facebook*, *LinkedIn*, *Twitter*, *Flickr*, and *MySpace* reveals that users of social media sites can often find other users in the system who share a direct or indirect connection with them based on four main

principles, namely: 1) their direct connections' connections (such as "friends-of-friends" on *Facebook*, "two-degree and three-degree connections" on *LinkedIn*, "Followers lists" on *Twitter*), 2) shared locations or affiliations (such as Country or Institution Networks on *Facebook*), 3) shared interests (hyperlinked in the user profiles' "Info" section on *Facebook*, Blogrolls or Blogfeeds on Weblogs like *Typepad*'s people lists), or 4) shared voluntarily joined groups or fan pages (such as *Facebook* groups or Fan Pages, *MySpace* Fan Pages, *LinkedIn* groups, and *Flickr* groups).

In terms of public relations, brands that have an active social media presence on sites also represent users. Other users may thus choose to connect with the brand following this same pattern of offline connection as they do for friends described by Boyd & Ellison (2007), or based on one or more of the four principles of connection. Users are more likely to connect with brands, either as "Friends", "Contacts", "Fans", "Followers", "Connections" or "Subscribers", if they are already familiar with the brand in an offline setting. Where public relations and marketing professionals can capitalise on social media is through the expanse of users' networks. The larger the network of the user that connects with the brand, the larger the brand's potential or extended network becomes. This network principle is most clearly seen on the business service social network *LinkedIn*. As users of *LinkedIn* begin to connect with other users, the size of their own network increases based on the number of connections that the users they connect with have. The user is then informed of the expanse of their network based on direct connections, connections that are two degrees away and connections that are three degrees away (*LinkedIn* Network Statistics 2009).

In essence, each user that connects with the brand on the social media site brings with it a potential secondary public that can be targeted through the user that connects directly with the brand. Although most social media sites prohibit third party sharing of information such as allowing brands or private users to limitlessly access contact details of their connections' networks, brands can access these secondary markets by convincing their direct connections to act as brand ambassadors and spread information through what Meerman Scott calls "word-of-mouse" (Meerman Scott 2008).

Much of social media's power is held in this "word-of-mouse" (Meerman Scott 2008) "sharing" function which allows users to quickly share information with other users in

their network. Sharing can take place in various ways based on the design of the social media site. This may include status updates, sharing links to webpages, videos, photographs, music, notes or applications on the site, sending invitations or recommendations to your connections to join groups, networks or connect with other users, tagging and bookmarking contents, and uploading new content, among others. If other users find the link shared by their contacts of interest they can proceed to share it among their network, thus expanding the reach cycle of the information and imitating the marketing phenomenon known as word-of-mouth or viral marketing (Kapferer 2008:159, Meerman Scott 2008, Breakenridge 2008:22-24, 125).

The perceived effects of this sharing utility through social media has also spurred on many non-social media sites to activate this social media sharing power through the inclusion of a "'Share this' Universal bookmark widget" (Defren 2008a) which allows visitors to share the webpage through their preferred social media channel.

The three principles of social media discussed here, namely contacts, networks and sharing, are fundamental elements of participatory media in the Web 2.0 context. It is in this vein that social media and its connection, network and sharing power becomes a crucial part of PR 2.0. For communication practitioners, especially those who embrace PR 2.0 principles, participation equates conversation and conversation equates useful data that reflect attitudes, behaviours and knowledge directly from stakeholder audiences. It is thus necessary to reflect on social media's function as a participatory media form, and discuss the way in which participatory media (with specific reference to social media) can be used to advance a brand and public relations activities within an online environment.

2.6 Talk about it: Social media as participatory media

According to Flew (2008:106) "[t]he scope of new media to be more participatory arose from its apparent structural differences from the forms of *mass communication* that had been predominant media models in 20th-century societies." Whereas traditional transmission models of mass communication (such as Westley and MacLean's (1957) model, Fourie 2001:225-227) primarily saw the conveyance of information from senders to receivers with relatively minimal feedback, new media allowed greater participation in

communication (especially political communication) from audiences, and allowed more people to become media producers, distributors and consumers (Flew 2008:107).

Flew (2008:107-108) lists six characteristics of new media identified by authors as enabling factors that allow new media to democratise participation from audiences in political communication and engagement. Although these characteristics are cited in the context of political citizenship, it is also clearly applicable to the overall participatory nature of new media applications such as social media. These characteristics include:

1) The scope for horizontal or peer-to-peer communication, as distinct from vertical or top-down communication,
2) The capacity for users to access, share, and verify information from a wide range of global sources,
3) The lack of government controls over the Internet as a global communications medium, as compared to more territorially based media,
4) The ability to form virtual communities or online communities of interest, that are unconstrained by geography,
5) The capacity to disseminate, debate, and deliberate on current issues, and to challenge professional and official positions, and
6) The potential for *political disintermediation*, or communication that is not filtered by political organisations, 'spin doctors', or the established news media
<div style="text-align:right">(Flew 2008:107-108).</div>

Most of these points listed by Flew (2008), such as the scope for horizontal peer-to-peer communication, the capacity for users to access, share, and verify information, the ability to form virtual communities or online communities of interest, and to disseminate, debate, and deliberate on current issues, are clearly manifested in social media. Inextricably linked to these elements are the resulting conversations which occur as part of the participation process. Whether the conversations occur as verbal user-to-user conversations or through the implicit non-verbal conversation created through uploading or linking to content, these conversations that take place on social media channels are of particular importance to public relations practitioners.

2.6.1 P(a)R(ticipation): The value of online conversations

Conversations between consumers and between consumers and a brand have long been an important part of marketing and public relations. With the rise of Web 2.0 and social media, these conversations could involve more participants, across more channels and locations, more immediately than before. In an attempt to provide an understanding of the value of conversations to public relations, Brian Solis and Jesse Thomas in August 2008 introduced a simplistic graphic representation of the conversations that occur through social media called *The Conversation Prism*. By March 2009 it was developed into a full-scale model named *The Conversation Prism v2.0* mapping the principles involved in social media conversations and the way in which communication professionals can identify, and engage social media as a part of an organisation's Customer Relationship Management strategy (Solis 2009c).

While Solis and Thomas' *Conversation Prism v2.0* (Solis 2009c) provides a theoretical model to engage social media in communication practice, it is necessary to understand why these conversations represented by Solis and Thomas' *Conversation Prism v2.0* are indeed significant within the public relations perspective. From a literature review of key authors it can be argued that online conversations are important for four primary reasons:

Firstly, online conversations reveal information about the nature of the audience and their disposition towards a brand. Breakenridge (2008:71-84) draws attention to the ability to use social media and the conversations that take place within social media networks as monitoring tools for a brand. She suggests that by tracking the conversations on these sites, public relations practitioners can determine what the audience's perceptions of a brand is, as well as their attitude towards communication issued by the brand. This in turn allows communications professionals to gauge audience reactions to both the message issued by the organisation and the communication by consumers that follows, and respond to it as needed (Breakenridge 2008:74-75). Wright & Hinson (2008) also places emphasis on the use of social media conversations as a monitoring tool, as they found that public relations practitioners and organisations are able, and to a degree obliged, to monitor social media and provide timely responses to consumer comments on social media channels.

Kapferer (2008:158-159) describes the movement towards conversations that occur online between brands and brand consumers as the best way for brands and consumers to become more familiar with each other. However, Kapferer (2008:159) points out that it also signals the end of the monopoly on communication once held by brands. Instead, conversations and word-of-mouth now have "a weapon of mass diffusion" (Kapferer 2008:159) thanks to the Web and social media.

This points to the second reason that online conversations are of importance to public relations professionals, namely its ability to spread information virally across an expansive network and various media platforms. Meerman Scott (2008) calls this concept "word-of-mouse" viral marketing where people share useful and memorable content on the Web with their network of contacts, often via social media sites. Web content can be said to become "viral" if this sharing process is continued in large numbers for a prolonged time, thus passing the information from one person to the next like a word-of-mouth chain reaction. The more the content is distributed, the higher its popularity escalates, and as a result its distribution circles out even wider (Meerman Scott 2008).

Meerman Scott (2008) however highlights that online viral marketing is driven by the conversations of consumers and cannot be controlled by organisations. Kapferer (2008:159) echoes this point, attributing it to interactivity and collaboration rooted in the fact that consumers are increasingly intent on being active members of the communication process – both in terms of providing their own opinion and seeking the opinions of others.

Jenkins (2006) also draws attention to the media consumer as an active participant in the media cycle as the convergence of traditional and new media leads to new audiences and new channels, and essentially new environments through which audiences can engage in conversation with each other and share their collective insights and information.

From this perspective of an interactive and influential audience, Solis (2009a) calls conversations "markets – within vertical segments", as these online conversations

"directly and indirectly influence the decisions of [individuals'] peers in the real world and through their extended communities online."

This influential capability of conversations is the third key characteristic of online conversations that must be acknowledged. Firstly, Solis (2009a) notes that it is important to realise that online conversations are not new:

> Social Media didn't 'invent' conversations and it did not unearth online conversations either; nor did it provide, for the first time, platforms for consumers to share their thoughts, opinions, and advice. Online groups and opinion sites existed since Web 1.0. And, before that, bulletin boards and forums hosted online discussions (Solis 2009a).

Long before the Internet, conversations were present as face-to-face meetings, rumours, gossip, letters, or whatever preferred medium was used to convey the dialogue. In public relations the concept of conversations as an influential factor is clearly manifested in dimensions such as the study of public opinion and persuasion, and the identification of opinion leaders and segmentation of key publics (Wilcox & Cameron 2006:219, Puth & Steyn 2005:199).

Social media and Web 2.0 have placed a renewed emphasis on conversations as key influencers, especially with regards to the way in which conversations can influence opinions among consumers, and influence coverage in traditional mainstream media. Numerous studies on the influence of social media on consumer decision making point towards conversations on social media as a significant persuader in consumer behaviour (Yeomans 2009; Pike 2008; Morissey 2008; Ad-o-logy 2008; Society for New Communications Research 2008), while it has also been found that these conversations generate more coverage in traditional media (Wright & Hinson 2008, 2009; Text 100 Blogger Survey 2009; Holtz 2009c; Foremski 2006b; Bizcommunity Africa 2007).

Much of social media's influential capabilities, and the fourth important quality of social media, lay in its potential to create online brand communities for consumers to interact with likeminded people and the brand itself.

The concept of online brand communities has its roots in what Rheingold (2000) in 1993 termed "virtual communities" – "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (2000:xx). Considering that Rheingold's definition of virtual communities was greatly based on text-based Multi-User Dungeons which can be considered as some of the very first online communities, it is no surprise that conversations or "public discussions" are central to his definition. Although virtual communities nowadays are often more sophisticated thanks to the various social media applications available, its core driver still remains conversations.

Dholakia, Bagozzi & Klein Pearo (2003) suggest that consumers often seek out the conversations of virtual communities, and their participation in the virtual community is driven by five values. These include purposive value (including informational value and instrumental value obtained from giving and receiving information from the community), self-discovery (which can confirm and influence personal tastes and preferences), maintaining interpersonal connectivity (the need to communicate with others), social enhancement (gaining acceptance as a member of the community and the elevation of status as a knowledgeable community member), and entertainment value (for the fun and relaxation derived from interactions with the community).

Shortly after Rheingold's definition of virtual communities, Kozinets (1999) applied the concept to marketing by introducing the idea of "virtual communities of consumption". Kozinets (1999) defines virtual communities of consumption as

> a specific subgroup of virtual communities that explicitly center upon consumption-related interests. They can be defined as affiliative groups whose online interactions are based upon shared enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, a specific consumption activity or related group of activities (Kozinets 1999:254).

The consumption communities created through social media can be evaluated as a virtual community of consumption according to Kozinets's definition, but also share the characteristics of "brand communities" as introduced by Muniz & O'Guinn (2000). A brand community can be defined as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand"

(Muniz & O'Guinn 2000). Muniz & O'Guinn (2000) found that brand communities share three traditional markers of community, namely shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility towards the community.

These three markers of community find substantiation in Algesheimer, Dholakia & Hermann (2005)'s research on the social influence of brand communities as they found that identification with brand communities lead to higher community engagement, but may also lead to normative group pressure on participants. Interestingly, their research suggested that customers who were very knowledgeable about the brand were more susceptible to the perceived social influence exerted by the brand community than novice customers were (Algesheimer, Dholakia & Hermann 2005).

For brands, this potential creation of a brand community on social media platforms is thus very important. A recent study (Ostrow 2009) confirms Dholakia, Bagozzi & Klein Pearo's (2003) suggestion that consumers actively seek out the virtual community of a brand or connect with brands via social media through suggestions from their friends, website links or other advertising. Of the study participants, 52% had connected with a brand through social media while 42% had said something positive about the brand on the social media platform and only 23% said something negative towards the brand. The study thus points towards the potential for brands to connect with consumers through social media as well as the potential for user engagement and conversation between social media users about the brand.

The conversations that take place online, particularly on social media channels, are therefore important for public relations practitioners to consider. These conversations – including new posts (whether it is messages, photographs, videos, links) and the conversations that occur around these posts – not only provide practitioners with valuable information about the audience, but can also be driven by consumers across widespread networks, build consumption communities and influence consumer behaviour. Solis (2008b) however reminds public relations practitioners to take note of the conversations that occur around specific social media posts in the form of comments, tags and feedback on original social media posts, rather than only focus on the originally produced post itself. When these conversations are not tracked and organised correctly, they could become highly irrelevant to the topic of the original social media post.

Tracking and controlling conversations on social media is thus becoming increasingly difficult as conversations are fragmented across multiple platforms. Public relations practitioners as content creators should be aware that hosting conversations and staying connected to the conversations surrounding their content requires "a fragmented, proactive process of tracking down and responding to feedback" (Solis 2008e).

2.7   Social media news release

The preceding discussions of Web developments and its impact on the practice of public relations, as well as the characteristics and value of social media for communications professionals has helped to provide a holistic context within which the social media news release can be understood and analysed in this study.

2.7.1   Social media news release: Origins

The social media news release (SMNR) (RealWire 2009), also known as the Social Media Press Release (SMPR) (Defren 2006a; Solis 2006), Social Media Release (SMR) (Breakenridge 2008:103-121), hRelease (hRelease 2006), and New Media Release (Heuer 2006; Holtz 2007) was first introduced in 2006. For the purpose of this study, the term social media news release is preferred, however the various terms will be used as appropriate in the literature review of the topic.

In 2005, significant debate arose between bloggers about whether or not the traditional press release should be phased out as a public relations tool (Holtz 2005; Lark 2005; Rubel 2005; Murphy 2005; Gahran 2005a, 2005b; Defren 2005a). However, the most significant motivation for the creation of the SMNR format was Silicon Valley financial journalist Tom Foremski's call for the death of the press release (Foremski 2006a). In response to Foremski's blog post, Todd Defren from SHIFT Communications introduced the multimedia alternative to the traditional press release calling it the Social Media Press Release v1.0 (Defren 2006a) on 23 May 2006. Released by SHIFT Communications under the Creative Commons license to encourage adaptations and additions to the original SMPR format by other PR professionals, RealWire (formerly known as *webitpr*) soon introduced their own version of the template called the social media news release (RealWire 2009). In January of 2008, another adaptation of the

SMNR format was suggested by Social Media Group (2008), after which the original creators of the Social Media Press Release, SHIFT Communications, released an updated version of the original template (Defren 2008a).

2.7.2 Social media news release: Definitions

As has been described, the social media news release is known by many other names such as the Social Media Press Release, Social Media Release, New Media Release, and hRelease. The lack of agreement between practitioners and researchers on a single standard name for the tool also extends to its definition.

Originally released by Todd Defren and SHIFT Communications, Defren described what he called the Social Media Press Release as a tool that

> merely facilitates [journalists and bloggers'] research by using the latest tools (social bookmarking, RSS, etc.) to provide background data, context and on-going updates to clients' news. The 'Social Media Press Release' is also distinctive for tying together various multimedia elements in one place, enabling the journalist to view and/or 're-mix' media elements (Defren 2006a).

Importantly, Defren emphasised that "[t]he Social Media Press Release merely amplifies prospective source materials; it does not replace a well-crafted, customized pitch nor replace the need to provide basic, factual news to the media" (Defren 2006a).

RealWire which as *webitpr* was one of the first public relations companies to adopt and develop the SMNR format defines the SMNR as

> a press release designed specifically with the online media in mind. It does not include the 'spin' of the traditional press release, but provides multimedia content in an accessible format that can easily be repurposed and shared on blogs, websites and social networks including MySpace and Facebook (RealWire 2009).

Like Defren, RealWire is also mindful of underlining that the SMNR is not "[a] secondary afterthought to traditional news distribution"; "[a] tool used instead of conventional PR methods"; nor "[t]he shiny new thing that will change bad PR practice" (RealWire 2009).

Solis (2007c) focuses on the social media qualities of the SMNR in his definition, stating that "[s]ocial media releases are designed to get the conversation going, providing readers with the ability to disseminate information and multimedia, bookmark and share the content, and in turn, spark threads". However, Solis (2007c) also cautions that the SMNR "is most effective when combined with a strategic arsenal of relevant company blog posts, traditional releases, relationships, and an emerging category of press releases that tell a story (written by people for people using SEO to reach them)".

Holtz (2009b) provides useful insight into the intended goals of creating and using the SMNR, namely that the SMNR if applied correctly helps to provide greater online coverage of an organisation's message by providing the news in a multimedia format to bloggers and site owners who produce content to satisfy the interests of their audience.

From Holtz's (2009b) observations it can thus be argued that the SMNR may lead to issued media such as official videos, images, statistics, graphics, PowerPoint slides, PDF documents, quotes and text content being used in its original issued format in various online posts. In this way it functions much the same way as when issued content from traditional press releases is used in traditional media reports. The SMNR may thus increase the probability of having issued media (therefore essentially approved messages) appear as "editorial" in blog posts and online news reports.

In terms of its physical characteristics, Glaser (2008) describes the SMNR as "more than just long-form text", instead he lists its core features as having "[c]ontact information prominently displayed up top, [a] list of basic facts, [a] series of quotes, [c]ompany logos and photo headshots, [r]elated audio or video, [s]ocial bookmarking or sharing links to sites such as Digg and del.icio.us, RSS feeds, [and] [c]omments". RealWire (2009) adds that the SMNR featured by RealWire also includes the ability to domain map the release to the client's company website URL in order to improve the Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) statistics of the release.

For the purpose of this study, a social media news release will be defined as:
- a corporate communication tool distributed through the online environment, that
- provides summarised information to the reader about a particular topic

- provides links to photographs and company graphics, audio, videos, and related websites

- provides the opportunity to host an interactive forum or commentary space on the topic

- provides links to online and mobile social media publishing and networking sites, and

- can be shared with users on social media networking sites through mechanisms such as sharing, tagging, bookmarking, linking and rating.

2.7.3 Social media news release: Reaction and Debates

After being released in 2006, the social media news release received a significant amount of attention both form social media evangelists, critics and public relations practitioners in general. Leading the group of carefully enthusiastic SMNR supporters were bloggers, researchers and practitioners such as Chris Heuer, Brian Solis, Shel Holtz, Mark Glaser, Todd Defren, and Tom Foremski, while major critics of the development included Stowe Boyd and Robert Scoble.

Defren (2006c) initially proposed the SMNR as being a more useful version of the traditional press release in the online environment, primarily due to its remixable content and mini webpage format. Heuer (2006) agreed with Defren's sentiments and headed the effort to provide an industry standard for the SMNR (which he termed the "hRelease") by creating the Social Text *hRelease* working group. Although part of Heuer's effort to create an accepted standard for the SMNR, Solis (2007a) and Holtz (2007) emphasised that the SMNR should not entirely replace the traditional press release, but must instead complement traditional releases .

One of the major debates about the SMNR stemmed from its ability to be distributed directly to consumers. Solis (2007a, 2007c) and Glaser (2008) pointed out the SMNR's direct distribution nature as one of its key characteristics as organisations could reach consumers directly without mediation by journalists. However, the very direct nature of the SMNR that made it unique as a press release was also one of its main points of criticism. Glaser (2008) argued that SMNRs' Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) copy and online wire distribution could result in higher search results, but may cause readers

to mistake company releases for independent news articles. Foremski (2006b) defended the SMNR as a tool that helped ease the job of the journalist by providing core facts and contextual information in a converged format, without the spin of traditional press releases. Solis (2008c) pointed out that cutting journalists and bloggers out of the news cycle through the SMNR could be troublesome, however he suggested an "embargoed" approach through which bloggers and journalists receive the SMNR before it is released through the wires to consumers.

Notably, bloggers and journalists' use and stance towards SMNRs have over the past year seemed to grow more favourable. Recent research by Text 100 (2009) and RealWire (2009) reveals that social media news releases are gaining ground on traditional releases in terms of preference and coverage. The Text 100 survey in which 441 bloggers participated indicated that a large percentage of participating bloggers have used and intend to use information from SMNRs as part of their blog posts. RealWire's research in which 997 news releases issued between December 2008 and May 2009 were analysed, revealed that the 71 SMNRs issued during the time received significantly more coverage in both mainstream media and the blogosphere.

Although its potential to cut media gatekeepers out of the news cycle spurred debate about the SMNR, the greatest dispute between supporters and critics of the SMNR arose from the definition and labelling of the new release as a social media news release. Stowe Boyd (2007) lead the critique against the SMNR which he likened to a push marketing version of a blog that does not acknowledge social media users and bloggers as individuals, but rather clusters them as an inactive "audience". Boyd also argued that the SMNR is not social in nature and should therefore not be called a social media news release. Robert Scoble (2007) agreed with Boyd's sentiments urging for the death of the SMNR, reminiscent of Foremski's call for the death of the traditional press release (2006a) that provided the original impetus for the SMNR's development.

Holtz (2007) Solis (2007b), and Heuer (2007) defended the SMNR as a tool intended for distribution via Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds on blogs to help companies relay there messages factually, transparently and coherently. Holtz (2007) in turn highlighted the social nature of the SMNR which incorporates elements such as quick indexing with social bookmarks, tagging, the ability to add comments, social media optimisation (SMO)

that allows it to be found more easily online and the breakdown of information into smaller multimedia chunks. The SMNR according to Holtz, Solis and Heuer should be understood as both a technological format and an attempt to bring the press release closer to what it was intended to be – the distribution of official, newsworthy information through a targeted channel to a specific target group in a useful and consistent manner.

It is thus clear that the merits of the SMNR has been and continues to be a highly disputed topic. Regardless of the arguments for and against the SMNR, more organisations are beginning to use SMNRs to distribute their messages as a complement to their traditional public relations efforts. In order to analyse the SMNR as an alternative or progressive version of the traditional press release, it is necessary to provide a brief comparison of the SMNR and traditional press release based on its format, content and distribution qualities.

2.7.4   Press Releases: Traditional versus Social Media

The press release has over the past 100 years gained popularity as one of the most widely used public relations tools to disseminate information to key media. While originally being distributed as a hard copy document or as part of a press kit delivered directly to a specific journalist or editor, new media technologies have prompted the distribution of digital press releases via e-mail, as well as the inclusion of URLs, e-mail addresses and digital content such as photographs and logos within modern press releases. While these technologies enhanced the content and distribution of press releases, it did significantly affect the format of the traditional press release.

Van Hoepen and Marchesi summarise the nature of the press release as being

> brief, specific and to the point so that the journalist or editor can read and understand the main ideas and facts quickly. It is prepared and presented in a standardised format and should have enough news value to be turned into a news story (2007:137).

This "standardised format" referred to by Van Hoepen and Marchesi can be seen as the press release's primary defining characteristic, as it immediately and clearly distinguishes a written piece as a press release for consumption by journalists.

Largely due to its target audience, the press release format has remained relatively constant. The press release is designed as a tool to disseminate information to the media where after the media act as gatekeepers between the sender and the receivers (media consumers). Although organisations now publish press releases on their websites or send them to newswire services, a press release rejected by media practitioners often remains unseen by the public.

The introduction of the social media news release provided a comprehensive, cohesive and converged digital alternative to the traditional press release and its static format. Although the SMNR was initially released as a converged digital alternative to the traditional press release, various authors (Defren 2006c; Solis 2007c; Holtz 2009b; Breakenridge 2008) have noted that it should be used in conjunction with traditional press releases rather than as a substitute for it.

Primarily, the SMNR has been viewed as a change in format of the traditional press release, yet authors such as Solis (2007a and 2007c) and Glaser (2008) find that the changing target audience facilitated by the SMNR is one of its greatest advantages. Solis (2007c) highlights three important qualities of the SMNR: it can capture a press kit in one multimedia page, it is directly available to be read by consumers on the Internet, without mediation by journalists in traditional media, and it can provide a high level of interaction between consumers and a brand.

Also primarily characterising the SMNR as a structural tool to ease and enrich communication between a brand and the media, Breakenridge, however also acknowledges the SMNR as being

> a consumer tool that makes it easier for the public to identify and share interesting content in their social networking communities. The social media template enables your brand to communicate directly to consumers *so that they will continue to talk among themselves, to further promote your news and information in their forums* (Breakenridge 2008:106, emphasis added).

The SMNR can thus be seen as a formalised attempt to capitalise on this potential power of reaching consumers directly, and in turn spark conversation among consumers, by harnessing the dynamics of social media through one conglomerated communication instrument. In addition, the SMNR also allows online influencers such as bloggers and journalists to receive news content in a compact multimedia format in order to easily incorporate it into a blog post or online news article.

Although the SMNR's format and content holds significant potential to target messages to both journalists, bloggers and consumers, its distribution has faced challenges in the past three years of its development. Shortly after the release of the SMNR format, Defren (2006f) expressed concern about online news wire services' apparent inability to distribute SMNRs, as well as the exceedingly high prices of distributing the releases through wire services. In 2008, Defren (2008b) even suggested that organisations do not send SMNRs through wire services at all, but instead host the SMNR as part of their online newsroom and include a link to it in traditional releases distributed to media. Since then, many wire services such as RealWire, PRWeb, PRNewswire, PRXbuilder, Pitchengine, and Marketwire have improved their technological capabilities and include SMNRs as an option for their clients. Some authors (Defren 2007a, 2007b; Holtz 2009b; Solis 2008c) feel that wire services are still not an effective channel through which to issue SMNR exclusively, and that it should instead be targeted directly to key influencers and relevant social media platforms, or hosted as part of an online social media newsroom.

2.7.4.1 Content, Format, Context and Distribution

While many different factors influence the dynamics between the social media news release and traditional press releases, an earlier analysis by the researcher (Barnard 2008) of the two press release types offer comparative insights based on four interdependent and convergent release characteristics, namely content, format, context and distribution.

2.7.4.1.1 Content

Fuller (1996) describes three news biases that influence the selection of information as news by the media. These include the bias of immediacy, the bias of audience interest, and the bias of significance. As a form of news dissemination, public relations practitioners would traditionally create content for press releases that fulfil these news biases in order to make it relevant for use by journalists.

Van Hoepen and Marchesi (2008) list three models for the creation of content for press releases including the 5Ws and H, SOLAADS, and NIBSS models. The 5Ws and H mimics the style news reporters use to craft stories by addressing the questions "who, what, where, when, why, and how?". SOLAADS requires details of the subject, organisation, location, advantages, applications, details, and source of the topic for the press release, whereas NIBSS requires new information, interesting facts, background, selling points and superfluities. The information being conveyed in a press release using these structures is presented as a completed, tailored news article that can be printed as is.

The social media news release designed according to Defren's (2006a) format does not present its text content as a stylised news article, but displays the adherence to core news biases as a traditional press release does. The SMNR presents its content as four to six core news facts, preferably in bullet point format that should answer the 5Ws and H as succinctly as possible while demonstrating its value in terms of immediacy, audience interest, and significance to both journalists and consumers.

Considering that international SMNR efforts are focused at media practitioners as its primary target audience, the lack of stylised content in a news article format may function as both an attribute and weakness of the SMNR. Invariably, the SMNR is designed to highlight core news facts; however this requires the journalist to craft an article from the given facts without being able to publish the release as is.

2.7.4.1.2 Format

The most notable difference between a traditional press release and a SMNR is its format. Format not only refers to the structural layout of the document, but also to the systematic organising of its contents.

The correct formatting of a traditional press release includes the organisation of content using the inverted pyramid or champagne glass structure (Van Hoepen and Marchesi 2008; Nel 2005; and Wilcox and Cameron 2006). A boilerplate paragraph also known as a "notes to the editors" paragraph is placed at the end of the document to provide additional context for the media practitioner.

With regards to the document layout, Van Hoepen and Marchesi (2008) advise that the traditional press release is formatted for and printed on white, international A4 sized paper with margins of at least 40mm. The release of no longer than two pages must be clearly identified with the words "media release", "news release" or "press release", and include the date, as well as the date on which the information must be printed. The document must be formatted using double spacing with additional spaces between paragraphs and if the document spans over two pages, the word "more" must be placed at the bottom of the first page. The word "end" indicates the end of the press release's printable text, and must be followed by the public relations practitioner's contact details and the boilerplate paragraph.

When analysing the SMPR template created by Defren (2006a), it is clear that the SMNR, when designed according to this template, follows a notably different structure by presenting the contents of the release as clustered groups of related information. In the SMNR, nine primary information clusters can be identified namely core facts, quotes, boilerplate statements, relevant coverage, multimedia elements, related links, tags and social bookmarking, RSS feeds, and comments. These nine information clusters provide a foundation for the creation of a SMNR and direct the structural format of the release. Each cluster of information is visually compartmentalised to give the release an organised appearance. Multimedia content is embedded within the release to ease viewing and downloading of multimedia items. The public relations practitioner and organisation's contact details appear at the top of the release, directly under the release

headline and date. The SMNR clearly separates and simplifies the elements integrated in a traditional press release such as facts, quotes, and additional information in order to make the SMNR a succinct document that is ideal for quick referencing.

A significant quality of the SMNR is its flexibility to suit the needs of the public relations practitioner, the organisation, or the nature of the information being conveyed. Other than the traditional press release format, the SMNR is designed to be adaptable and evolutionary in nature, thus creating a press release model that can transform itself at the pace required by public relations practitioners of the time.

2.7.4.1.3 Context

The traditional press release's provision of contextual information for a news article is limited. Public relations practitioners are often required to assemble press kits in hard copy to provide contextual information for a news story. These press kits are used at the media practitioners' discretion and information provided as contextual background becomes stagnant once distributed.

The social media news release, in contrast, provides a wealth of contextualised information packaged in a single multimedia page. As is seen in Defren's (2006a) Social Media Press Release structure, the format of the SMNR allows for the standard inclusion of photographs, audio files, graphics and video files relating to the information contained in the release to be sent to media practitioners as a single document. These multimedia opportunities makes the SMNR a flexible option for the distribution of information to various news channels as it caters for print, online and broadcasting media.
As the SMNR is open to later content additions by the issuing public relations practitioner, provides an opportunity for feedback through a comments section, and allows interested parties to subscribe to a Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feed for daily content aggregation and immediate updates relating to the feed topic, the contextual boundaries of the SMNR becomes fluid. The SMNR's contextual information evolves over time and acts as a traceable body of information history that continues to contextualise the event as it grows denser over time.

While this convergence and evolution of contextual information and attachments makes the SMNR a functional tool for the dissemination of various information formats to a range of media distributors, it may also act as an obstacle to its mainstream adoption in the South African public relations arena. Due to the large volume of information packaged in the SMNR, it may put pressure on media practitioners' and consumers' Internet connections, especially when accessing video content.

2.7.4.1.4 Distribution

The changes in the nature of communication within businesses and industries such as the media have prompted a natural progression in the characteristics of the modern press release. For the press release, the adoption of communications channels such as e-mail and the use of websites and digital content have most notably affected its methods of distribution.

The distribution of press releases via e-mail is often preferred above that of hard copy press release distribution. This can be explained by drawing from four inherent characteristics of digital communication defined and examined in various ways and contexts by researchers such as Castells (2002), Wilcox and Cameron (2006), Hanson and Kalyanam (2007), and Flew (2008). The first two of these characteristics are rooted in the ability of digital communication to allow the mass distribution of messages at a low cost to the sender, and usually also the receiver. Thirdly, the distribution of information using digital channels allows for the immediate relaying of information regardless of the traditional geographic and time zone challenges posed with intercontinental trading and networking. Finally, and likely the most important characteristic for press releases, is the ability to duplicate, manipulate and converge various types of digital content with little effort.

The SMNR is distributed in three ways. It can be sent via e-mail as a converged one page document with active content, it can be promoted as a link with its own URL address, or it can be sent directly to consumers as a viral marketing link through social media networks. In most cases, a combination of these three distribution methods is used. While taking advantage of the four key characteristics of digital communication mentioned earlier, the SMNR's use of social media networks as a distribution channel

that directly reaches consumers adds a fifth dimension to digital communication – the ability to generate and harness social hype to drive the viral distribution of a message through digital channels.

These four identified areas of difference – content, format, context and distribution – provides some insight into the similarities and differences between the traditional press release and the SMNR. The SMNR remains a news distribution tool, albeit a more media-rich version. Public relations practitioners practicing within the framework of Web 2.0 and social media may thus use the SMNR as a complement to their social media or online public relations strategies.

2.7.5   Corporate adoption of the SMNR (International and in South Africa)

Amidst the ongoing debates about the definitions and characteristics of the social media news release, many organisations have already incorporated the SMNR format as a tool in their public relations activities. Internationally, the SMNR has become a popular tool with large organisations such as The Coca-Cola Company (2007), Cisco (2007), Ford Motor Company (2008), Hewlett-Packard (2007), Vauxhall (2007), General Motors Europe (2009) and many others issuing SMNRs as part of their public relations tactics.

In South Africa, the adoption of SMNRs was slow. Standard Bank issued the very first South African SMNR on 9 April 2008 (Standard Bank 2008) as part of their social media strategy for the Standard Bank Pro20 Cricket 2008/2009 season. South Africa's first SMNR was thus released a full two years after the SMNR debuted internationally. By late February 2009, six SMNRs were released in South Africa, including SMNRs for Justrade (2009), M-Net (2009), Standard Bank (2009a), First National Bank (2009), and Samsung (2008). In the period of June to August 2009, an additional four SMNRs were released for Africa Progress Panel (2009), Standard Bank (2009b), Seacom (2009), and Vodacom South Africa (2009).

Indications of the future use of SMNRs internationally have been provided in research such as the Text 100 bloggers survey (2009) and RealWire's comparitative analysis of traditional releases and SMNRs (2009). The Text 100 survey showed that bloggers are using and will continue to use SMNRs as a preferred tool for receiving information from

organisations, while RealWire's analysis indicated that SMNRs were resulting in nearly double the editorial and blog coverage of traditional press releases. Research results such as these suggest that the SMNR will likely remain popular as part of a social media strategy for organisations across the globe.

2.8 Conclusion

The literature review presented in this chapter attempted to provide the contextual background from within which the social media news release can be understood and analysed. It is clear that the development of the Web from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 has prompted significant changes in the way public relations is practiced, and the introduction of social media plays a noteworthy part in this development. With PR 2.0 and the conversational nature of social media we have moved considerably closer to the elusive Two-way Symmetrical model of public relations (Grunig 1992). Organisations, media producers and consumers are traversing the social web as equal producers and participants resulting in new approaches and tools being sought for the dissemination of news, and the creation of support for an organisation.

The social media news release is one of these new tools following an approach guided by the principles of social media and Web 2.0. With its use of social media elements such as multimedia tagging, bookmarking, rating, user comments and discussion forums, SMNRs have the potential to create their own hype by driving audiences to their content, allowing sharing of content and sparking debates. These conversations that occur in conjunction with the SMNR across the social Web are of particular importance to organisations and brands. However, if the communication taking place within these social media networks on the social media channels presented by the SMNR, does not in some way relate to the conversation participants' experience with the brand, product or services of the advocated brand or their interpretation of the messages presented in the SMNR, it could be detrimental to and defeat the efforts of an organisation's social media public relations efforts.

From the recent rapid release of SMNRs in South Africa, it can be argued that SMNRs are quickly becoming more popular as public relations tools in South Africa. It is thus important for South African public relations practitioners to gain a solid understanding of

the dynamics of the SMNR, the social media channels it uses, the social media networks it is distributed and discussed in, and the communities who drive the discussions.

This study attempts to provide insights into the use of the SMNR in South Africa in order to assist public relations practitioners in assessing the potential application and value of SMNRs for their organisations in the future. In the following chapter, a detailed description of the research design and methods that were applied in this study will be discussed.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

3.1 Introduction

The following chapter describes the research framework used in this study. The research, which was primarily empirical in nature, featured the analysis of two case studies within the South African public relations context. The case studies were constructed using three examples of the SMNR in South Africa and analysing the communication on social media channels presented by the SMNRs. In order to provide additional insights, a survey was conducted of social media users who subscribe to these social media channels presented by the SMNR.

3.2 Research framework

In this section, the research framework of this study will be introduced including an explanation of the research question, aim and objectives addressed by the study, the data analysed to answer the research questions, as well as a brief summary of the context chosen to justify the analysis of the data.

3.2.1   Research question

This study aimed to provide perspectives that could help answer the following research question:

"To what extent do social media network links in a social media news release elicit consumer-driven dialogue about the brand, information, product or service advocated by the social media news release?"

3.2.2   Aim and Objectives of the study

The research aim and objectives that the study sought to answer are as follows:

3.2.2.1 Aim

To determine the effectiveness of the social media network links in a social media news release in eliciting consumer-driven dialogue about the brand, information, product or service advocated by the social media news release.

3.2.2.2 Objectives

- To identify the SMNR social media strategies used in the Standard Bank Pro20 and Samsung Omnia i900 SMNRs
- To determine the thematic nature of the communication content about the brand generated on the social media platforms advocated in the Standard Bank Pro20 and Samsung Omnia i900 SMNRs
- To identify the brand disposition of the communication about the brand generated on these social media platforms
- To identify the extent to which the communication generated on these social media platforms is consumer-driven or synthesised by the primary message distributor (the organisation)
- To test whether the communication generated on these social media platforms is linked to the consumption of the SMNR by social media users

3.2.3 Texts analysed in study

During this study, two case studies were constructed representing three South African examples of social media news releases used as a public relations tool. These two case studies included the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR (including the 2008 and 2009 versions) and the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR. The case studies were constructed by sourcing data from both the SMNRs and the dedicated social media platforms introduced by the SMNRs, as well as the results of a survey conducted among subscribing members of the dedicated social media platforms advocated in the SMNRs.

The texts sourced from the SMNRs and dedicated social media platforms were used to conduct a content analysis with the aim of answering the research questions posed in

the study, while the results of the survey were used as part of a data triangulation method aimed to assist in verifying the inferences drawn from the content analysis.

As the dedicated social media channels contained a very large amount of texts, some which are irrelevant to the study, sampling methods were used to delimitate the number of texts to a manageable amount, as well as avoid data overload due to irrelevant texts.

The texts that were analysed as part of the content analysis include:

Technique (As described by Krippendorff 2004:45)	Purpose	Social media platform presented by both SMNRs	Texts used from social media platform
Limited designations analysis	To determine the frequency and ratio of topic-specific dialogue by creators and users of dedicated social media platforms presented in the SMNRs.	Facebook	Fan page wall posts, links posted, photos and videos posted by creators and users on fan page within a specific time frame.
		Youtube	Videos uploaded by the creator, comments left by viewers of videos within a specific time frame.
		Blogs	All blogs and comments posted by creator and users within a specific time frame.
		Twitter	All tweets by creator within a specific time frame.
		Flickr	All photos uploaded by creator, and comments made by users on these photos within a specific time frame.
		Delicious	All bookmarks by creator and subsequent bookmarking by users within a specific time frame.
Assertions analysis	To determine the frequency with which a subject is represented in a certain way in dialogue by users of	Facebook	Topic-relevant wall posts, links posted, photos and videos posted by users on fan page within a specific time frame.

		Youtube	Topic-relevant comments left by viewers of videos uploaded by the creator within a specific time frame.
	dedicated social media platforms presented in the SMNRs, in order to determine the attitudes of users towards the subject, as well as the themes in the communication.	Blogs	Topic-relevant blogs and comments posted by users within a specific time frame.
		Twitter	User comments not available, thus excluding platform from analysis.
		Flickr	No user comments made, thus excluding platform from analysis.

Table 1: A breakdown of texts analysed by means of content analysis during the research study

A detailed description of the sampling process used to determine which texts will be used in the content analysis can be found in section 3.3.1.1 of this chapter.

The texts analysed as part of the survey analysis consist of the answers that respondents provided to one of two surveys – one with reference to the Standard Bank Pro20 social media platforms and one with reference to the Samsung Omnia i900 social media platforms. In some instances it may be possible that a respondent answered both surveys, however, this does not affect the outcome of the results as each survey pertains to the specific dedicated social media platforms and SMNRs.

3.2.4   The analysis context

The context within which the analysis of texts was performed was informed by knowledge of social media, computer mediated communications, Web 1.0 and 2.0 principles, PR 2.0 tactics, brand communities and the SMNR as a communications tool. The knowledge of these communication trends and influencers includes knowledge obtained through theory as is reflected by the literature review presented in Chapter 2 of this treatise, as well as extensive practical use of social media which informed plausible propositions.

This includes, but is not limited to, the following important considerations:

- The popularity of a particular social media channel within a particular geographical location or community may influence the likelihood of users within the location or community to join the channel, and may also influence the frequency with which users visit the social media channel.
- Participation on social media platforms is a voluntary activity, joining a social media platform does not guarantee interaction.
- Users of social media sites interact with one another through various methods including commenting on, approving or disapproving posts, replying to messages, sharing images, audio or video clips, sharing links or forwarding posts.
- Through interaction between social media users on a particular platform, dialogue or a narrative can be created around a specific topic. This dialogue could be short-lived or continue over a number of days or even years.
- The dialogue can exist between two or more social media users and other social media users may be able to join this dialogue at any time, though may not necessarily want to follow the development of the dialogue over time.
- Social media users can gain status on a particular platform based on the nature and frequency of their communications, as well as the other users' reactions towards their communications.
- Over time, with the active inputs of both creators and social media users, a social media platform can serve as a host to a community of users interested in the particular subject advocated by the social media platform. The users as a group may then begin to display characteristics similar to that of a brand community as described by Muniz & O'Guinn (2000).
- The users on a social media platform may post communication that reflects a positive, negative or neutral attitude about the particular subject advocated in the social media platform.
- The attitudes displayed by regular users of a particular social media platform may be likely to influence the attitudes of other users toward the subject in question.
- Social media platforms are increasingly susceptible to spam – thus irrelevant and unsolicited messages that market products, services or websites, or subject other users to verbal abuse.

- The social media platforms linked to in a social media news release should provide an opportunity for users to connect to information about the brand (which may manifest itself in various ways) and should in some way aid the promotion of the brand.

- Social media, like print, broadcast or other online media, can be used as a communication tool between senders and receivers and can therefore be analysed as a communication channel that conveys communication messages. Media and communication theory, within the scope of the Web 2.0 context, can thus be used as a supplement to analysis of communication transmitted through social media.

- The SMNRs and social media platforms analysed in this study was analysed using international perspectives, but the study particularly aims to provide insights into the use of these tools within a South African public relations perspective.

3.3 Research design and methods

This study took an interpretivist approach, with the primary data being obtained through qualitative methods. However, in order to address the objectives of the study, a mixed methods approach was used. A case study was built around the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR and Samsung Omnia i900 SMNRs respectively. In order to analyse the information collected as part of the case study, the research design used in this study included the undertaking of a qualitative content analysis of relevant texts found on the social media channels introduced by the case study SMNRs as well as the supplementation and verification of the content analysis inferences by means of a survey among social media users.

This section aims to provide insights into the selection and sampling of texts for content analysis as well as the sampling of the population for the conducting of the survey, and the coding process.

3.3.1 Selecting and sampling texts

3.3.1.1 Case study and content analysis

Driven by a research question, the study used a problem-driven analysis (Krippendorff 2004:340) in which texts for content analysis were selected using multi-stage relevance sampling (Krippendorff 2004:118-119) or what Du Plooy (2002:114) calls purposive sampling.

According to Krippendorff (2004:119) relevance sampling allows the analyst to reduce the number of units that need to be considered for analysis by following a systematic hierarchy. This effect is that

> the resulting units of text are not meant to be representative of a population of texts; rather, they are the population of relevant texts, excluding the textual units that do not possess relevant information (Krippendorff 2004:119).

Firstly, the case studies were chosen. The Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs and Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR were selected as case studies of social media news releases within the South African public relations industry as they represent three of only ten SMNRs released within South Africa to date, as discussed in Chapter 2 of this treatise. At the time of undertaking this study, only five SMNRs had been released, while an additional five SMNRs were released during the final half of the study. Of the five SMNRs that were released by the time the study was initiated, all displayed a structural adherence to the principles of the SMNR as first introduced by Defren (2006a). The Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs and Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR, however, most clearly demonstrated the potential application of the SMNR as a PR 2.0 tool that can be used to engage a social media audience in conversation about information, a brand, product or service. Unlike the other SMNRs, the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs and the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR provided integrated social media links to social media platforms specifically introduced to provide a virtual space for *consumer-driven* conversation about the information, event, brand and product being advocated in the SMNR.

It was then necessary to build case studies around these three social media news releases. In order to answer the research question posed by the study, it required studying communications on social media channels that held dedicated social media platforms for the Standard Bank Pro20 and Samsung Omnia i900 brands respectively, and that were linked to the SMNRs. This narrowed the study of social media communications to eight specific social media channels including Facebook, Youtube, Blogs, Flickr, Twitter, Mxit, delicious.com, and RSS feeds. However, each of these channels required further consideration before analysis could take place.

For categorisation purposes, the social media channels involved in this study were divided based on whether they were an online (computer-based) or mobile application and whether primarily image or text-driven communication takes place on the social media channel. It is important to note that many social media sites that originated as online sites have now become very popular as mobile sites thanks to mobile technology (Facebook for example), while others that were originally introduced as mobile applications have become popular as online social media sites (Twitter for example).

Although most online channels have a combination of text and image-based material, some channels showed a dominant type of content based on its purpose. A descriptive breakdown of social network links used in the SMNRs is given below:

	Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR	**Samsung Omnia i900 SNMR**
Facebook	http://www.facebook.com/standardbankcricket Online (now also mobile), text	http://www.facebook.com/SamsungFanClub Online (now also mobile), text
Blog	http://blog.standardbankpro20.co.za/ (2008 only – currently unavailable) Online, text and visual and http://blog.standardbankcricket.com (2009) Online, text and visual	http://www.samsungblog.co.za/ Online, text and visual
Youtube	http://www.youtube.com/pro20cricket Online, visual	http://www.youtube.com/user/samsungcorporate Online, visual
Flickr	http://www.flickr.com/photos/25007999@N04/ Online, visual	http://www.flickr.com/photos/samsungblog/ Online, visual
Mxit	User-specific application Mobile, text	Not used in SMNR
Twitter	http://twitter.com/pro20 (2008 only – currently unavailable) and	Not used SMNR, however a Samsung Twitter feed is linked to on the Samsung

	http://twitter.com/mylesthebutler and http://twitter.com/StdBankCricket Mobile (now also online), text	Blog: http://twitter.com/SamsungBlogSA Mobile (now also online), text
Delicious	Not used in SMNR	http://delicious.com/tags/Samsung_blog Online, text
RSS Feeds	http://v61.standardbank.smpr.co.za/feeds/full/Pro20 Online, text	http://samsung.socialmediarelease.co.za/frontpage/feed Online, text

Table 2: A breakdown of social media platforms linked to by the SMNRs

While these social media platforms were used in the social media news releases, not all social media platforms provided texts that could be used for analysis. Mxit, for instance does not provide an accessible digital trail of communication in the public domain that can be analysed as part of the content analysis, thus no communication between the organisation and social media users that took place on Mxit could be accessed for the content analysis in this study. The RSS feeds used in the SMNRs were also excluded from the analysis as the RSS feeds simply provide users with alerts when content within the SMNR itself is updated, rather than providing a space for users to converse about the contents of the SMNR, the brand or the product or service.

The Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR social media links also provided a number of unusable social media platforms. The Twitter account used for providing updates during the 2008 and 2009 season was deleted once the campaigns came to an end. The account is therefore no longer valid and is being used by a different entity. As a result, all Twitter updates made during the campaigns were destroyed and are thus not available for analysis. The Twitter account now used by Standard Bank Pro20 also hosts content about Standard Bank international cricket. Similarly, the blog account for Standard Bank Pro20 was also deleted after the campaigns and merged with the Standard Bank Cricket blog. It is assumed that all blog entries from the Standard Bank Pro20 blog account have been transferred to the new Standard Bank Cricket account as these old blog entries are available on the new blog site. In addition, the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR for the 2008 season has been removed from the Internet, thus it is unavailable for analysis. However, the researcher had previously conducted an in-depth content analysis of the 2008 SMNR (Barnard 2008), the results of which were used to supplement the research conducted in this treatise where necessary.

Furthermore, a comparative analysis was sought between the two case studies. In order to provide accurate insights into the way in which social media channels could be used within an SMNR, it was deemed necessary to focus on the channels that both SMNRs display. This was done in order to demonstrate the differences and similarities between the two SMNRs' uses of identical social media channels. This further reduced the population of texts for an in-depth content analysis to Facebook, Youtube, Blogs, and Flickr. The remaining social media channels were, however, considered during the conducting of a limited designations analysis in order to determine the frequency and ratio of topic-specific dialogue by creators and users of dedicated social media platforms presented in the SMNRs. An in-depth assertions analysis was however only performed using selected texts from the mutually used social media channels.

Next, the texts used for the detailed thematic analysis (assertions analysis) were selected. Texts were sourced from the platforms of mutually used social media channels Facebook, Youtube, Blogs and Flickr. The texts contained in the dedicated social media channels were vast in number and in some instances completely irrelevant to the subject matter. It is important to note that one of the objectives of the thematic analysis was to determine the frequency with which a subject is represented in a certain way in dialogue by users of dedicated social media platforms presented in the SMNRs, with the goal of determining the attitudes of users towards the subject. Therefore, in order to obtain a population of relevant texts, the following exclusion criteria were used:

a) only communications relating to the subject matter,
b) that was posted by users of the dedicated social media platform (thus excluding communications created by the administrators or creators of the dedicated social media platforms),
c) on either the Facebook, Youtube, Blogs or Flickr platforms dedicated to Standard Bank Pro20 or Samsung Omnia i900, and
d) that have been linked to in the social media news releases

were included as texts for the detailed thematic analysis.

To provide concrete data unbiased by researcher participation for the content analysis, unobtrusive methods were used to source the digital messages left in the predetermined sectors of the selected social media channels.

3.3.1.2 Survey of social media users

The data obtained through content analysis was supplemented by survey research conducted among the target audience subscribing to the Standard Bank Pro20 and Samsung social media feeds on the selected social media network channels. When determining the sample size for the survey, the varying levels of user involvement in the social media communities were considered as well as the fluctuating nature of social media community sizes. Since users who are subscribed to the dedicated Standard Bank Pro20 and Samsung social media channels may have varying levels of involvement with the social media channel or the particular brand community, the sample size was determined by the number of subscribers at the time of undertaking the study, as well as the limited timeframe in which the research was completed.

A voluntary sample was drawn by providing a link to the questionnaires on the particular social media channels, however, as less engaged consumers may not necessarily check the social media channels regularly, consumers were encouraged to participate in the survey through professional request as approved by the Research Ethics Committee (Human) of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. To qualify for the study, respondents had to be subscribed to the particular dedicated space for discussion of the brand, product or service displayed as a social media link by the SMNR. In the terminology used on the social media channels, respondents were thus required to be:

	Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR	Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR
Facebook	Fan of Standard Bank Cricket 1,839 fans at 20:41 on 2 March 2009 2,124 fans at 16:52 on 8 September 2009	Fan of Samsung Fan Club 519 fans at 20:42 on 2 March 2009 906 fans at 16:52 on 8 September 2009
Blog	Subscribed to the Standard Bank Pro20 blog and Standard Bank Cricket blog	Subscribed to the Samsung Blog
Youtube	Subscribed to Pro20Cricket's channel 9 subscribers at 20:45 on 2	Subscribed to Samsungcorporate's channel 11 subscribers at 20:46 on 2

	March 2009	March 2009
	1,112 views	968 views
	11 subscribers at 16:53 on 8 September 2009	13 subscribers at 16:51 on 8 September 2009
	2,001 views	1,051 views
Flickr	Views determined per photograph and may be anonymous. Communication is based on photos uploaded by organisation and by comments from viewers.	Views determined per photograph and may be anonymous. Communication is based on photos uploaded by organisation and by comments from viewers.
Mxit	Contact with Pro20 Cricket based on user initiation of contact, no access to set database of contacts, research therefore not feasible on this channel	Not used
Twitter	Follower of Pro20 106 Followers at 20:53 on 2 March 2009 – account deleted soon after. Follower of StdBankCricket 666 Followers at 16:48 on 8 September 2009 Follower of MylestheButler 88 Followers at 20:52 on 2 March 2009 218 Followers at 16:50 on 8 September 2009	Follower of SamsungBlogSA 284 Followers at 16:46 on 8 September 2009. (Twitter account opened on 22 June 2009).
Delicious	Not used	Subscribed to SamsungBlogSA feeds by having added them to their network on Delicious. By 8 September 2009 SamsungBlogSA was not connected to any contacts.

Table 3: A breakdown of social media users' subscription to the social media platforms used in the SMNRs

3.3.2 Application of content analysis and survey

3.3.2.1 Indices

The content analysis applied in this study and the interpretation of its results was in part influenced by four major indices as described by Krippendorff (2004:59) including:

- "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 the messages.

- "The *numbers of favourable* and *unfavourable characteristics* attributed to a symbol, idea, or reference are taken to indicate the *attitudes* held by the writers, the readers, or their common culture toward the object named or indicated.

- "The kinds of *qualifications* – adjectives or hedges – used in statements about a symbol, idea, or reference are taken to indicate the *intensity*, *strength*, or *uncertainty* associated with the *beliefs*, *convictions*, and *motivations* that the symbol, idea or reference signifies.

- "The frequency of co-occurrence of two concepts (excluding those that have grammatical or collocational explanations) is taken to indicate the *strength of associations* between those concepts in the minds of the members of a population of authors, readers, or audiences."

3.3.2.2 Content analysis procedure

In order to complete the content analysis, the selected texts were read to identify themes and common statements both within the particular social media channel and across the selected social media channels. Common assertions in the texts were listed as patterns determined through quotation or paraphrasing. Relative variables which relate to the patterns were identified and categorised according to the pattern it resembles.

Informed by the four indices mentioned in section 3.3.2.1 of this treatise, the categories pertained to the mentioning of certain elements of the particular subject, as well as the disposition represented by communications. This included whether the descriptions used to communicate about the subject matter suggested a positive, negative or neutral attitude towards the subject matter.

From the content analysis, the following information could be identified:

1. Ratio of user commentary about the particular subject on the social media platform as apposed to other subjects (the popularity of the subject among users)

2. Whether the majority of communications on the social media platform is generated by social media users or the platform creators/administrators (is the subject stimulating consumer-generated conversation)
3. The thematic nature of communications about the subject (which aspect of the subject are they talking about)
4. The attitudes of the users towards the subject based on their communication (how do users feel about the subject)

In addition, the case study analysis provided insights into the social media strategies used by Standard Bank and Samsung respectively for the release of each of the SMNRs.

3.3.2.3 Survey structure and analysis

The survey intended to help determine the use and interaction habits of social media consumers on the dedicated social media platforms presented by the SMNRs, as well as determine the levels of correlation between social media users' consumption of the SMNRs and their use of the dedicated social media platforms. The survey took on the format of an electronic survey which respondents were asked to complete online between 11 August 2009 and 31 October 2009.

The survey, in which respondents' answers remained anonymous, was divided into three sections. In the first section respondents were informed of the purpose and scope of the study and were required to their consent for their participation in the study. The second section of the survey (using closed-ended questions) measured respondents' social media habits and their interaction with the Standard Bank Pro20 cricket and Samsung brands through the social media links presented in the SMNRs. In the final section of the survey respondents were asked to provide answers to open-ended questions relating to their motivations for connecting with the brands through the social media platforms, as well as their interaction with the SMNRs released by either of the brands.

Responses to the online survey were anonymous to protect the privacy of respondents and did not require the divulgence of personal information other than the respondents' age and gender for statistical purposes. All information recorded in the survey will be

kept anonymous throughout the study and was not revealed to third parties at any stage of the research process. As respondents remained anonymous throughout the study, respondents were assigned either a number ranging from 1 onwards or a letter of the alphabet ranging from A onwards. This alphabetic labelling was used to distinguish between responses where necessary.

The results of the closed-ended questions in the survey were tabulated and counted to provide a statistical representation of respondents' answers, while open-ended questions were subjected to a similar thematic analysis procedure as described in section 3.3.2.2 of this chapter. This allowed the identification of social media users' reasons for joining dedicated social media platforms, where they heard about the platforms and their attitudes towards marketers using social media to provide information to them.

The results of the survey was cross referenced with that of the content analysis to identify correlations between social media users' use of the dedicated social media platforms and the communication that took place on these social media channels.

3.4 Ethical considerations

This study in no way attempted to infringe the rights of its participants. The following ethical considerations were taken into account:

3.4.1   Ethics: Content analysis

As data for the content analysis was obtained from the sourcing of communication by both the organisation and social media users on the relevant social media platforms, the partial identity of social media consumers may be revealed on the social media sites. However, the communications posted by the consumers were placed within the public domain as the communication took place on the public comments, public discussion board or public message area of the particular social media platforms. The elements of the social media users' identities that were revealed had no relevance on this study and did not affect the study in any way. The social media users' profile names were not revealed to third parties at any stage of the research process and will not be revealed in

this treatise in order to protect their privacy. Instead, a number ranging from 1 or a letter ranging from A onwards was assigned to the social media users in order to distinguish between users if necessary.

The social media users who posted content to the public comments, public discussion board or public message area of the particular social media platforms were not informed of this research as the communication on these social media platforms were analysed as public media texts. According to Krippendorff (2004:31) the chances of contamination of texts used by the content analyst is most reduced when "[the sources] are unaware of how their texts are being analyzed, or when communication to the analyst is one-way without feedback". Informing users of the study would have risked a potential change in their communication behaviours which may have influenced the accuracy of the data and the validity of the study. The primary investigator was not actively involved in the communication process on these social media platforms as observational methods were used to minimise the primary investigator's influence on the communication phenomenon. The communication that took place on these social media platforms were thus analysed as a media text in which participants engaged in social dialogue within the public domain.

3.4.2   Ethics: Survey

Survey respondents volunteered to be part of the study and were informed of its nature and purpose, as well as the dissemination of the research results before the study commenced. Respondents were given the option to stop their participation in the study at any time without any repercussions or steps being taken against them. While responses to the online survey remained anonymous, responses will be assigned a number ranging from 1 onwards or a letter of the alphabet ranging from A onwards, in order to distinguish between responses in the analysis of the study.

This study did not require the divulgence of sensitive information and all personal information gathered was used solely for an evaluation of representivity and to provide insights into the data collected. All personal information was kept confidential.

Ethical clearance for this study was approved by the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University RTI Higher Degrees sub-committee of the Faculty of Arts Research, Technology and Innovation Committee. The ethics clearance reference number for this study is H/09/ART/JMS-001.

3.5 Conclusion

The data from the survey along with the conclusions reached from the thematic analysis of communication on the social media platforms and overall case studies assisted in determining the extent to which the social media network links in a social media news release elicit consumer-driven dialogue about the brand, information, product or service advocated by the SMNR. In addition, it helped to provide a perspective on the nature of communications taking place within the brand communities as well as the consumers' disposition towards the brand, information, service or product being advocated by the SMNR.

In the next chapter, a detailed report on the findings of this study will be provided. The data analysis points South African public relations professionals towards a better understanding of the SMNR as a potential tool to create valued consumer-driven dialogue among social media communities about a particular brand.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the research findings of this study will be reported and interpreted in an attempt to provide insights into the use of the Social Media News Release (SMNR) as a potential tool to stimulate conversations about a brand or topic on social media platforms.

The research findings were obtained through conducting a limited designations analysis and detailed assertions analysis on selected texts sourced from the respective dedicated social media platforms introduced by the Samsung Omnia i900 (Samsung 2008) and Standard Bank Pro20 2008 (Standard Bank 2008) and 2009 (Standard Bank 2009a) social media news releases, as well as through a survey of social media users used to supplement and verify the content analysis inferences.

The content analysis provided insights into the types of conversations taking place on these social media platforms including the subject and themes of communication, the tone of communication, and the categorisation of the message as user generated or creator generated communication. From the research results conclusions could be drawn about which social media platform is most valuable to the brand in terms of the consumer communication taking place on the platform, as well as the potential impressions created by the communication on the platform and the effect it could have on the image or reputation of the brand linked to it by means of a social media news release.

The survey helped to determine which social media platforms consumers were most comfortable with to interact with Samsung and Standard Bank Cricket respectively, as well as determine in which way they interact with the brands on the social media platforms. In addition, it provided the opportunity to determine whether a correlation exists between the reading of the issued social media news releases and the users' activity on the social media platform, and helped to identify the users' motivations for joining the platforms and attitudes towards it.

The findings presented in this chapter is thus an interpretation of raw data collected through content analysis and survey research as described in Chapter 3 of this treatise.

4.2 Structure of research findings report

The research methodology applied in this study allows for two primary sections of research data, namely the case study of the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR, and the case study of the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs.

To further ease the presentation of the research findings, each case study has been subdivided to present the data obtained through content analysis and through survey research. The case studies are structured as follows:

   I.   Social media strategy
  II.   Social media news release content
 III.   Social media links and content
  IV.   Social media conversations (per channel):
      A) Message ratio
      B) Message origins
      C) Message tone
      D) Message themes
   V.   Survey
      A) Biographical information
      B) General social media usage patterns
      C) Brand-specific social media interaction patterns
      D) Motivation for brand-specific social media interaction
      E) Perception of content
      F) SMNR correlation
  VI.   Case study summary and recommendations

It is necessary to note that the case studies were compiled through extensive research, data accumulation and analysis from various public channels. Although the intended social media strategies were not provided by the organisations due to disclosure policies and strategic competitiveness, information suggesting these strategies was accumulated

and analysed to provide insights into the social media strategies employed as part of the Samsung Omnia i900 and Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs respectively.

4.3 Research findings

4.3.1   Theoretical and contextual considerations and structure details

The following theoretical and contextual considerations were applied to each research subsection represented in the research structure of both case studies:

I.   Social media strategy

The social media strategy detailed in this subsection of the research describes the main elements of the strategy and tactics applied by Samsung and Standard Bank Cricket respectively in the production and release of the Samsung Omnia i900 and Standard Bank Pro20 social media news releases. The purpose of noting the social media strategy used by the organisations is to provide additional context for the analysis of the social media news releases and to provide a comparative view of the similarities and differences in approach to social media and the issuing of a social media news release.

II.   Social media news release content

For each case study a short summary of the contents of the social media news release is provided. This serves as a base for comparative analysis to establish whether or not the social media links in the SMNRs succeed in hosting topic-relevant conversations about the brand, product or service advocated by the SMNR. If the dedicated social media platforms display a significant lack of conversation about the topic or elements highlighted in the SMNR, the social media links provide little support or functional use to the particular SMNRs. However, it should be noted that in some instances a brand-related social media platform may still serve as a touchpoint between consumers and the organisation in general – even when it is incorrectly and irrelevantly linked to a SMNR.

III.   Social media links and content

In this section of the research report structure the social media links incorporated in the particular social media news release is provided. Each of these social media links provide access to a dedicated social media platform which is meant to host conversations around the brand, product or service being advocated by the particular social media news release. A detailed summary of the content analysed from each of the dedicated social media platforms is also provided in this section of the research report structure, while a brief description of the research methodology and rationale is also provided.

IV.   Social media conversations (per channel):

 A) Message Ratio and Statistics

Message ratio can help indicate the popularity of a particular topic within a social media platform (Krippendorff, 2004:59), which in this case takes on the form of texts on a social media platform. When analysing the messages on a social media platform dedicated to a brand and specifically linked to as a platform for conversation about a topic in an officially issued social media news release, one can expect the ratio of messages about the topic advocated by the SMNR to be high. When the ratio of messages about the topic presented in the SMNR is significantly low on the social media platform, the particular platform serves no purpose to advance conversations about the desired topic and therefore should have its inclusion as a dedicated social media platform in the SMNR reconsidered. Alternatively, the communicators who issued the SMNR should actively work to stimulate conversation about the desired topic on the social media platform to make it relevant to readers of the SMNR.

This presumption applies to both case studies analysed and thus applies to the particular dedicated social media platforms assigned to the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR and the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs.

Within the context of the social media news releases, each platform linked to by either of the SMNRs is geared towards creating general conversations about the brands or

organisations represented in the SMNRs. In the case of the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR this would be conversation about Samsung mobile products, while in the case of the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs the expected conversation would be about Standard Bank Cricket. The content of these dedicated social media platforms may thus be irrelevant to readers looking for specific information about the Samsung Omnia i900 phone or the Standard Bank Pro20 series. As Krippendorff (2004:59) proposes,

> "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 the messages".

Considering then that both the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR and the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs position their social media platforms as spaces where consumers can converse about the mobile product or the cricket series, one would expect to find a high ratio of conversation around the Samsung Omnia i900 and the Standard Bank Pro20 cricket as topics. Therefore, the ratio with which messages that relate to the Samsung Omnia i900 handset or the Standard Bank Pro20 appears in the stream of communication on these specific dedicated social media platforms stand to indicate a degree of success or failure of the social media links to stimulate conversation about the contents advocated in the SMNRs.

B) Message origins

Social media, as has been described in Chapter 2 of this treatise, is valued for its ability to stimulate "horizontal or peer-to-peer communication, as distinct from vertical or top-down communication" (Flew 2008:107). This is facilitated through the interaction and participation by users of a social media platform by engaging in conversations around a topic. Social media has become associated with the empowerment of the user as content creator and the minimal interference or filtering of communication on these channels by traditional message creators such as journalists, public relations practitioners, organisations or even the government (Flew 2008:108). Within a dedicated social media platform, the conversations created by the social media users themselves can thus be considered to be of a higher value to communications

practitioners and other readers than those messages produced by the communicators of the organisation, brand or product to which the social media platform is dedicated.

While the messages created by the users of the social media platform can be analysed to determine the attitudes and opinions of the users towards a particular brand or product, it is as important to consider the messages created by the brand or product's official communicators. The reasons here are twofold: firstly, it helps to determine the correlation or differences between the desired messages as distributed by the organisation and those messages disseminated by the social media users subscribed to the dedicated platform, and secondly, it reveals the organisation's reaction time and management approach towards compliments, complaints, issues or queries raised by users about the product, service or brand. Other social media users may evaluate the response by the organisation on the social media platforms as a measure of their competency, involvement and consideration for their customers or potential customers' interests. As Wright & Hinson (2008) suggest, social media can be used as a monitoring tool for both the organisation and its customers as the organisation becomes obliged to monitor the conversations on social media platforms and provide timely responses to consumer comments on these platforms. If the organisation's communicators neglect to demonstrate this level of involvement and competency, it may reflect negatively on the organisation.

C) Message tone

The tone of communication reveals important information about the attitudes and brand disposition of the message creator towards the topic in question (Krippendorff, 2004:59). Simultaneously, communication effects theory suggests that tone can have a great impact on the interpretation of a message by some readers. For the purpose of this study, the focus falls on the information revealed through content analysis of existing messages rather than the prediction of message effects. Where the tone of messages in the social media platforms gains an additional dimension in this study is through the overall impressions created by the messages and the subsequent reflection on the organisation that created the dedicated social media platform. These elements are of importance to public relations practitioners as they have the potential to influence either

positively or negatively the credibility of the organisation, the organisation's reputation and the merits of the product or service in the minds of the reader.

In order to identify the tone of messages in the dedicated social media channels analysed as part of this study, elements of the five indices proposed by Krippendorff (2004:59) was applied. Here the number of favourable and unfavourable associations given to the topic was considered while the types of qualifiers used were also analysed in the overall context of the message. Importantly, tone is extracted not only from words and sentences but also the messages and communication as a whole.

    D) Message themes

Through the application of detailed assertions analysis, the selected contents of the social media platforms linked to in each of the case studies was analysed. Through this analysis, the thematic nature of communication generated on the social media platforms was identified and a set of themes was extrapolated.

The themes identified through the analysis were compared to the set of themes identified in the contents of the corresponding social media news release to determine whether or not conversation that was generated on the social media platform is thematically aligned to the desired communication of the SMNR. Where the communication on the social media platforms are positively aligned in theme and tone to the communication content of the SMNR, the social media platform succeeds in providing affirmation and credibility to the messages conveyed by the SMNR. If the communication themes differ significantly it reveals that social media users' attention was focused on a different aspect of the topic. Public relations practitioners should take note of these message correlation differences as they may be indicative of potential problems, dissatisfactions or concerns among consumers about the particular topic, or when positive in nature, reveal new communication angles and useful topic features to highlight in future communication about the topic. If these differences are noticed in good time, public relations practitioners may be able to guide the direction of the communication on the social media platforms or shift the focus of the organisation's marketing communications to target the key audiences more effectively.

The essential goal is for the communication on the dedicated social media platforms to support the content presented by the social media news release, thus the degree to which this occurs indicates a degree of successful application and integration of social media within the social media news release.

V.   Survey

Two identical surveys were conducted, one applying to the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR and one applying to the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs.

Although the number of responses to the surveys was low, it is not significantly problematic to the study as the survey was conducted as a voluntary survey posted on the relevant social media platforms used by the Samsung Omnia i900 and Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs. Not all users of the social media platforms would have visited the platforms during the research period nor would all have responded to the surveys. Social media users subscribed to the platforms were also invited directly to participate in the survey according to the ethics stipulations for the study in order to increase the probability of a sufficient number of responses. The responses gained through the surveys were used as triangulation data rather than the core focus of the research and provided useful insights into social media users' application of and attitudes towards social media platforms.

For each of the surveys, the following information was identified:

A) Biographical information

The survey respondents remained anonymous throughout the survey, however, they were asked to voluntarily indicate their gender and age for statistical purposes. Due to ethical considerations, all participants in the survey were required to be over 21 years of age; therefore this biographical information is used to verify the legitimacy of participants according to exclusion criteria. The indication of respondents' gender is for statistical purposes only.

B) General social media usage patterns

In this section of the survey, respondents were asked to indicate their frequency of use of the major social media channels used in the two social media news releases studied. This included their frequency of use of Facebook, YouTube, Blogs, Mxit and Twitter.

C) Brand-specific social media interaction patterns

This section of the survey revealed which of the dedicated social media platforms the respondents used to engage with either Samsung Mobile or Standard Bank Pro20 cricket, as well as their interaction patterns on these social media platforms. This included whether or not they have commented on an aspect of the topic on the social media platforms, whether they have uploaded content such as videos, links or photographs to the social media platforms, whether they have entered discussions about the topic with other users of the social media platform, whether they are more inclined to comment positively or negatively about an aspect of the topic, and whether they have spoken about topics other than the Samsung Omnia i900 or Standard Bank Pro20 cricket on the dedicated social media platform.

D) Motivation for brand-specific social media interaction

This section of the research report reveals respondents' motivations for joining the dedicated social media platforms as has been linked to by the SMNRs. This includes insights about what influence elements such as community and brand involvement, the activities of friends, the potential to make new friends, knowledge acquirement and entertainment have on the respondents' decisions to join the dedicated social media platforms.

E) Perception of content

The perception of content relates to respondents' perception of the credibility and accuracy of the communication on the social media platforms as well as whether or not

they would prefer to receive information directly from the organisation. In addition, it also provides insights about the likelihood of respondents to distribute the information found on the social media platforms and the likelihood that they would invite their friends to join the platforms.

F) SMNR correlation

In this section of the research report, the correlation between the reading of the SMNR by respondents and their joining of the dedicated social media platforms is scrutinised. This helps to determine whether or not the respondents have read the SMNR and whether they joined the dedicated social media platforms through the links provided in the SMNR. For the study at large, this helps to indicate whether the SMNRs in the case studies were distributed to and read by the sample of users subscribed to the dedicated social media platforms, and whether their reading or not reading the SMNR influences their likelihood of joining the dedicated social media platforms promoted in the SMNR. In addition, it also helps indicate whether the content of the social media platform can be directly associated with the content of the social media news release.

Following from the correlation between the SMNR and the respondents' likelihood to join the dedicated social media platforms linked to by the SMNRs, this section reveals also where the respondents heard about the social media platforms. This indicates the important communication channels through which the social media platforms are being promoted, whether this is being driven directly by Samsung Mobile and Standard Bank Cricket or not.

Finally, respondents were questioned about their attitudes towards marketing through social media channels. Their answers to this section of the survey helped to provide direction to the organisations and public relations practitioners in general about future attempts to use social media as a marketing tool.

VI.   *Case study summary and recommendations*

The research report subsection detailing message interpretations provides an overview of the impressions created by the total communication within the research time frame on

each dedicated social media platform linked to by the social media news releases. This includes a discussion about the effectiveness of the platform in eliciting consumer-driven dialogue about the brand, information, product or service advocated by the social media news release, as well as a discussion about the successful and unsuccessful applications of the platform by the organisation. By highlighting these successful and unsuccessful tactics, recommendations can be made to improve the efficiency of the social media platform, improve the value of the social media news release and create a more sound integrated social media strategy for future distribution of social media news releases.

4.3.2 Case study: Samsung Omnia i900

4.3.2.1 Social media strategy

The Samsung Omnia i900 social media news release was issued early in November 2008 to promote the release of the new Samsung Omnia i900 touch screen cell phone. The SMNR was created and issued by Cerebra Communications – the social media agency also responsible for the creation of the Samsung Blog (2009) which was introduced in May 2007 (Cerebra 2009).

Although the social media strategy used by Samsung Mobile South Africa was not obtained directly from the organisation due to their disclosure policies, a project profile on the SMNR creators Cerebra Communications' website (Cerebra 2009) provided insights into the rationale and strategy that drove the creation of the SMNR and its social media platforms.

According to Cerebra (2009), Samsung Mobile South Africa wanted to enrich their brand through social media and the creation of a blog (which was initially called Sam's World) helped establish this point of contact between users and Samsung. The blog in its current format

> was created to showcase the latest Samsung handsets and engage the online blogging community as well as mobile mavens on mobile technology news and information and how it relates specifically to the South African cellphone user (Cerebra 2009).

As a result, the "platform has helped Samsung engage a niche, high-quality segment of it's [sic] market in a way not possible with traditional marketing channels," according to Cerebra (2009).

With regards to the target audience of the SMNR, one can safely assume that it correlates to a great extent with the target audience of the Samsung Blog. Considering that the blog is one of the social media platforms linked to in the SMNR, a correlation is likely to exist between the target audience of the SMNR and the blog, although the SMNR may also directly target journalists. From the project profile listed by Cerebra (2009), the Samsung Blog was created "to engage Samsung handset owners, potential customers and the mobile community at large" by creating a Samsung mobile-centric space where new Samsung handsets could be introduced and mobile technology topics be posted. A similar objective can be assumed of the other social media platforms linked to by the SMNR.

The blog has been fairly effective in attracting readers and Samsung Mobile South Africa together with Cerebra employed various tactics to ensure that readers stay engaged in the blog. This included hosting competitions and encouraging participation in the blog by assigning points to users based on their participation on the blog. These points could then be traded for Samsung Mobile merchandise. Extending from the Samsung Blog, a YouTube channel was created to spread Samsung Mobile's social media reach. An existing corporate YouTube channel for Samsung was also used as part of the social media channels integrated in the Samsung Omnia i900 social media news release, but was not created specifically for this particular social media strategy.

A clear attempt to create a two-way communication platform and a sense of a brand community is evident in the project profile created by Cerebra as it is stated that the site allows

> Samsung handset owners to direct their queries to a credible, authoritative site where they feel that they are part and parcel of the communication. [Through the blog] the divide between customer and company has been diminished to a large extent (Cerebra 2009).

According to Cerebra (2009) "the idea is that [social media users] will have conversations around Samsung Mobile products between themselves and Samsung itself" thus creating a two-way communication community in essence sustained through user-generated conversations about Samsung Mobile products.

The Samsung Omnia i900 social media news release linked to the Samsung Blog and YouTube channels, as well as a Samsung Fan Club for Nigeria on Facebook (Samsung Fan Club 2009) which was created by a member of Insight Communications in Nigeria (Insight Communications 2009), a Samsung Delicious profile (Samsung Delicious 2009) and a Samsung Blog Flickr profile (Samsung Flickr 2009). Each of these channels in their own way also provide users with an opportunity to engage in conversations both between themselves and with Samsung, though some channels can be considered to be more effective in this regard than others.

In theory, the social media strategy employed by Samsung Mobile South Africa thus resonates the hypothesis suggested in this treatise that the social media links in the social media news release could be used to elicit consumer-driven dialogue about the brand, information, product or service advocated by the social media news release.

4.3.2.2 Social media news release content

The Samsung Omnia i900 social media news release introduces the Samsung Omnia i900 phone as a new handset in the Samsung Mobile range. The release lists its main features and presents the phone as a sleek, modern, multimedia touch screen phone that has been compared favourably with the Apple iPhone and HTC Diamond.

The features focused on in the release include the phone's Microsoft Windows Mobile 6.1 operating system, its TouchWiz interface, its 3.2 inch WQVGA LCD screen, and its onboard memory and memory card capacity.

In the release, links are provided to "join the conversation" by visiting various websites and social media sites including the Samsung Omnia and Samsung model demonstration websites, and the Samsung Blog, YouTube, Facebook, Delicious and a WAP site as social media sites. The embedding of photographs from the Samsung

Blog's Flickr photostream also provides an additional social media channel through which the user can interact with the Samsung Mobile brand.

Throughout the release the Samsung Omnia i900 is presented in a very positive tone rich with adjectives and expressions such as "makes text entry a breeze", "customize the phone to his/her hearts content", "take useability to new levels", "unparalelled clarity", "powerful platform for multimedia", "dynamic, stylish, and easy to use" , "revolutionary design and innovative features", "amazing high quality", "excellent audio capabilities", "generous 16Gb of memory", "the perfect accessory", and "more than just a phone it is sensational stylish technology".

Overall, the social media news release is used to promote the cell phone and entice the reader to purchase it or at the very least find out more about the phone. Thanks to the social media links provided by the social media news release, researching the phone and users' opinions of it is simplified. By reading the conversations on the social media channels as presented in the social media news release, one can obtain a general idea of the phone's reception among mobile users and can find more information about its features. It is at this point where the content of these social media channels becomes an important influencer in the reader's perception of the product. If the content of the social media channels are predominantly positive, a reader may be more likely to have a positive opinion of the phone, relay positive information as "word of mouth" or even purchase the phone. It is therefore necessary to analyse the nature of communication on the proposed social media platforms as presented in the social media news release to determine whether or not the social media platforms adds value or detracts value from the message advocated by the social media news release.

4.3.2.3 Social media links and content

The social media links presented in the Samsung Omnia i900 social media news release and the content of which was analysed by means of content analysis include:

	Content analysed	Total posts	Posts in research window	Omnia posts in research window	Total relevant posts analysed
Samsung	Blog posts	970	528	103	40

Blog	Comments	NA	NA	NA	583
Facebook	Wall posts	129	63	8	55
	Links	27	17	2	6
Flickr	Photographs	232	232	3	3
	Comments	0	0	0	0
YouTube	Video 1 comments	141	136	120	120
	Video 2 comments	344	340	326	326
	Video 3 comments	251	249	237	237
Delicious	Bookmarks	12	0	4	4

Table 4: A breakdown of social media content analysed in the Samsung Omnia i900 case study

These posts were subjected to a limited designations analysis in order to determine the ratio with which the Samsung Omnia i900 was referred to either directly or indirectly in the collection of posts. This helped to determine whether the social media links that readers of the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR were encouraged to join in order to "join the conversation" (Samsung 2008) about the Samsung Omnia i900 do, in fact, host conversations about the product.

Furthermore, a detailed assertions analysis was conducted on the relevant messages within the research time frame in order to determine "the frequency with which certain objects are characterized in a particular way" (Krippendorff 2004:45), thus determining a collection of themes in the communication on the social media platforms. From these themes the tone relayed by the number of favourable and unfavourable characteristics assigned to the topic was determined in order to reveal details of social media users' attitudes towards the topic, while the type of qualifications were analysed to determine the intensity of the users' opinions expressed in the communication.

The themes identified in the communication may also help guide future communication about the product or the Samsung brand as it provides insight into the aspects of the topic that social media users were most vocal about.

The research time frame for this case study stretched from 8 November 2008, shortly after the Samsung Omnia i900 was released, to 11 August 2009, the research deadline for the study due to time constraints and manageability of data sizes.

4.3.2.4 Social media conversations (per channel)

A) Message ratio and statistics

In the following section, the message ratio on each of the dedicated social media platforms linked to by the Samsung Omnia i900 will be discussed:

- Samsung Blog

The Samsung Blog is the most active social media platform linked to by the Samsung Omnia i900 social media news release. On average the blog is updated at least once a week either by Samsung or by blog users, but generally posts are made three times or more during a single week. Comments are frequent and can often run over years per topic thus extending conversation about the topic as a new users search for subjects and comment on it.

The Samsung Blog was created in 2007 (Cerebra 2009) with the first post being made on 25 May 2007. Since the inception of the blog to 11 August 2009, 970 blog posts were created with thousands of comments made on these posts. During the research period of 8 November 2008 to 11 August 2009, 528 blogs were created.

A search of "Omnia", "i900" and "SGH i900" (the model code of the Samsung Omnia i900) search terms returned a total of 103 blog entries mentioning the Samsung Omnia i900. Out of all the blog posts on the Samsung Blog, over 19.5% are thus related to the Samsung Omnia i900 in some way. Of these 103 blog entries, 58 fall within the research time frame. Statistically this means that over half (56.3%) of the blogs relating to the Samsung Omnia i900 were created after the release of the Samsung Omnia i900 social media news release. Further search refinements revealed that 40 of these 58 blog posts featured the Samsung Omnia i900 as a central topic, while the remaining 18 blog entries made mention of the Samsung Omnia i900 either within the blog or the comments listed in response to the blog, or geotagged under the category of "Omnia i900" on the Samsung Blog.

These 40 blog posts were thus deemed the most relevant to the research analysis based on its subject matter and its position within the research time frame. These blog posts and the total of 583 comments made on these posts were subjected to a detailed assertions analysis.

Based on the ratio of Samsung Omnia i900-related blog posts, it is clear that the Samsung Omnia i900 is a very popular mobile device in the Samsung Mobile range. As a social media platform linked to the Samsung Omnia i900 social media news release, the Samsung Blog very successfully stimulates conversation about the topic advocated by the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR and indeed allows users "join the conversation" (Samsung 2008) about the Samsung Omnia i900 handset.

- YouTube

Samsung's YouTube presence is represented by various channels such as the *SamsungCorporate* channel and the *SamsungBlog* channel as well as various Omnia i900 reviews on YouTube. For the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR, the *SamsungCorporate* channel was the chosen YouTube social media platform for users to interact with the Samsung Omnia i900 handset, while three videos were embedded in the SMNR for readers to watch.

By the end of the official research time frame on 11 August 2009, the three videos embedded in the SMNR included a video entitled "Samsung Omnia" uploaded by *mobilitytoday* (referred to as Video 1, 2008), a video entitled "Samsung SGH-i900 Omnia Review" uploaded by *NextWindowsMobile* (referred to as Video 2, 2008) and a video entitled "Hands on: Samsung Omnia" uploaded by *mobilecrunch* (referred to as Video 3, 2008). These three videos and its comments were analysed as it was regarded as the videos chosen by Samsung to represent the Samsung Omnia i900 on YouTube, hence its embedding within the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR. These three videos also served as the first touchpoint between the SMNR reader and the Samsung Omnia i900 through video material.

After analysis, it was found that these three videos did not present a good impression of the Samsung Omnia i900. A later visit to the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR on 18

November 2009 while in the process of refining the research, revealed that these three videos had been substituted by three different videos about the Samsung Omnia i900 which portrayed the product in a much more positive light. Due to time constraints, these three new videos were not analysed, but serve as evidence and verification of the conclusions made by the researcher after the analysis of the initial three videos embedded in the SMNR.

Alongside the three videos embedded in the SMNR, the *SamsungCorporate* YouTube channel was listed as the dedicated social media platform for users to interact with Samsung and the Samsung Omnia i900 handset. This channel however held only three videos, none of which were in any way related to the Samsung Omnia i900. The message ratio related to the Samsung Omnia i900 on the *SamsungCorporate* YouTube channel was thus 0%. In contrast, the three videos embedded in the SMNR were all directly related to the Samsung Omnia i900 and therefore had a clear link with the contents of the SMNR.

Of the three videos initially analysed as part of the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR, the following findings were made:

Video name	Number of views	Number of comments in research period	Number of Omnia-relevant comments in research period	Relevancy ratio of comments (Samsung Omnia i900 versus other topics)
Video 1	152 708	136	120	88.2%
Video 2	875 111	340	326	95.8%
Video 3	426 744	249	237	95.1%

Table 5: A breakdown of view and comments ratio on YouTube videos embedded in the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR

The three videos embedded in the Samsung Omnia i900 thus all demonstrated a clear relevancy to the Samsung Omnia i900 product which was discussed on the Samsung Omnia i900 social media news release. The comments generated in response to these videos were also highly relevant to the conversation about the Samsung Omnia i900, which indicates that YouTube as a social media platform provides an opportunity for conversation around the Samsung Omnia i900 brand introduced by the SMNR.

However, under the "join the conversation" (Samsung 2008) heading of the SMNR, the *SamsungCorporate* YouTube channel was linked to as the dedicated social media platform, and as was found in the analysis, this channel provided no relevant content to the SMNR.

The high number of views of each of these three videos also demonstrates the stimulation of interest or curiosity in users to motivate them to watch the videos.

- Facebook

The Samsung Fan Club on Facebook linked to by the Samsung Omnia i900 was created as a Samsung Fan Club for Nigeria and was established by a member of Insight Communications (an integrated marketing company) in Nigeria (Insight Communications 2009). This affiliation is not explicitly expressed on the Facebook dedicated social media platform.

The channel was already in existence as the largest Samsung Fan Club on Facebook (Samsung Fan Club 2009) when the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR was released, which may explain its use as a dedicated social media platform linked to in the SMNR inviting readers to "join the conversation" about the Samsung Omnia i900. By 2 March 2009 the platform had 519 fans, which escalated to 906 by 8 September 2009.

The Samsung Fan Club contains a total of 129 wall posts and 20 links ranging between 20 May 2008 and the end of the research time frame on 11 August 2009. Of these wall posts, 15 related to the Samsung Omnia i900, while only 2 links related to the handset.

Sixty-three of these wall posts and 17 links fall within the time frame for the research of this case study, however 10 wall posts and 11 links were classified as spam or foreign language posts and therefore were excluded from analysis. Of the remaining 55 wall posts and 6 links, a total of 8 wall posts and 2 links were related to the Samsung Omnia i900.

Statistically, 11.6% of all wall posts and 7.4% of all links on the Samsung Fan Club social media platform relate to the Samsung Omnia i900, while of the relevant posts and links in the designated research time frame the ratio increases to 14.5% of wall posts and 33.3% of links being relevant to the Samsung Omnia i900.

These figures are not particularly high, nor is the quality or depth of the messages related to the Samsung Omnia i900. The Samsung Fan Club on Facebook is thus not the ideal platform for conversation about the handset advocated by the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR and may be seen as irrelevant by readers.

- Delicious

The Delicious bookmarks created by Samsung range from 5 October 2007 to 28 August 2008 and therefore fall out of the research time frame assigned to this case study. A basic analysis was however conducted and 12 bookmarks were listed by Samsung, four of which relate to the Samsung Omnia i900. This results in a ratio of 33.3% of the bookmarks posted by Samsung on Delicious relating directly to the Samsung Omnia i900. These four bookmarks were further bookmarked two, seven, 96 and 169 times respectively.

Although Delicious provides a useful platform for the geotagging and bookmarking of content, it does not provide a truly interactive space for the stimulation of conversations about a particular topic. It may rather be used as a tool to drive interest to the particular web pages that host conversations about the topic, and help organisations to stay in tune with the conversations that occur on the Internet about their products, brands or services.

- Flickr

In the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR, the publicity photographs of the Samsung Omnia i900 as well as Samsung brand photographs are hosted on the photo-sharing social media channel Flickr. The dedicated social media space introduced by the SMNR for Flickr is the *SamsungBlogSA* photostream which contains a total of 200 photographs and another two sets of photographs containing three and 29 photographs respectively. Of these 232 photographs in total, only three photographs apply to the Samsung Omnia i900. These are three promotional photographs of the handset. This means only 1.29% of the dedicated Flickr platform contains relevant content to users looking for more information or visuals of the Samsung Omnia i900. As the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR links to this platform it should have been an important step to ensure that there are a number of Samsung Omnia i900-relevent visuals on the platform in order to make it a relevant site for readers of the SMNR to visit. This step was overlooked when the SMNR

was issued and as a result, Flickr is an overwhelmingly irrelevant social media platform for the Samsung Omnia i900.

Potentially due in part to the lack of Samsung Omnia i900-related content on the Flickr platform, no comments have been recorded on any of the Samsung items on the *SamsungBlogSA* Flickr photostream.

B) Message Origins

From the content analysis performed on the contents of the dedicated social media platforms linked to by the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR the following conclusions were drawn with regards to the message origins:

- Samsung Blog

Both the relevant blog posts and user comments on these blogs that fall within the research time frame were analysed to determine whether the messages were created by Samsung and its representatives or by general social media users.

Of the 40 blog posts analysed by means of assertions analysis, a total of only eight posts were created by Samsung, while the remaining 32 blog posts were created by social media users actively engaging in community participation on the Samsung Blog. Most of the messages created by the social media users were calls for advice on certain aspects of the Samsung Omnia i900 handsets or the dissemination of information that they deem relevant to other Samsung Omnia i900 users. In terms of the comments left by users on these 40 blog posts, a total of 508 out of 583 comments were created by users, while the remaining 75 were responses to comments by Samsung or its affiliate communicators.

Overall, this indicates a clear community involvement by the users of the Samsung Blog as the vast majority of blog posts and comments are created by the users. In addition, many of the comments to the blog posts follow upon each other like conversations as users pool their collective intelligence to solve problems or questions posed by co-users of the site. This is reminiscent of the virtual communities described by Dholakia, Bagozzi & Klein Pearo (2003), where consumers participate in virtual communities in order to

gain knowledge through the receiving and imparting of knowledge in the community, or to be seen as a knowledgeable member of the community. Similarly, the social media users on the Samsung Blog display characteristics of what Kozinets (1999) described as virtual communities of consumption "whose online interactions are based upon shared enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, a specific consumption activity" which in this case relates to the ownership, usage or knowledge of the Samsung Omnia i900 mobile phone. By being part of a community of Samsung Omnia i900 owners or enthusiasts, the social media users who engage on the Samsung Blog platform create virtual relationships with other users and tap into a resource of shared knowledge about the product which they otherwise may not have had access to.

While the majority of blog posts and comments are authored by social media users, Samsung maintains a visible yet unobtrusive presence on the site by replying to user comments and questions posted through the blog posts or comments. This mid-level involvement by Samsung is very beneficial to the brand and the blog site's reputation as it creates the impression that Samsung is in touch with the needs of its customers. Simultaneously, it succeeds in creating an impression of involvement and initiative without suggesting asymmetrical communication channels which would position Samsung as the major controlling force of communication on the blog. The Samsung Blog thus comes across as a channel specially created *for* Samsung consumers displaying the ideal element of PR 2.0 – the democratisation of communication through the creation of two-way symmetrical, transparent communication between an organisation and its publics.

- YouTube

The Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR presented two sets of potential information on YouTube with its release after which an additional third set of information was added after the research time frame for this case study drew to a close.

Firstly, the three videos embedded in the SMNR present the Samsung Omnia i900 phone to the readers. These three videos were each created by users on YouTube who specialise in presenting reviews of mobile technology and it can be assumed that none of these three videos were commissioned or controlled by Samsung. It may however be

possible that the creation of the videos were enabled by Samsung's provision of the Samsung Omnia i900 for review to the video creators. One can thus argue that these three videos are largely user-created as it is not directly commissioned by Samsung.

In contrast the videos on the proposed dedicated social media platform for YouTube, namely the *SamsungCorporate* YouTube channel are all commissioned and issued by Samsung. These three videos, though not related in topic to the Samsung Omnia i900, are thus all corporate creator synthesised videos advancing Samsung's official point of view.

Later on by November 2009, the videos embedded in the Samsung Omnia i900 social media news release were updated to contain two new videos, the first and most watched of which was commissioned by Samsung, while the second was created by *MobiFrance*, (the channel for a French technology magazine) at the official launch of the Samsung Omnia i900 in Singapore. These videos, in contrast to the previous two videos embedded in the SMNR provided Samsung with much more control over the content and tone of the videos, but only the first video can be considered to be wholly Samsung-generated.

The comments on the videos initially embedded in the SMNR can be evaluated as being solely user-generated. The majority of posts were created by one-time posters, while ten or less users per video commented on the video more than once.

In terms of its message origins, YouTube thus provides an opportunity for both Samsung as an organisation and social media users in general to create videos about the Samsung Omnia i900, but the comments that flow from these videos are primarily user-generated. The comments thus provide the greatest insights into the opinions, views and concerns of existing and potential Samsung Omnia i900 owners.

- Facebook

Both wall posts and links were analysed as part of the communication content from the Samsung Fan Club on Facebook. As the Samsung Fan Club was created by a member of the Insight Communications group on behalf of Samsung in Nigeria, posts and links by

the particular user and his administrator is considered as Samsung-controlled messaging.

Of the 129 wall posts and 27 links in total on the dedicated social media platform by the end of the research time frame, 31 wall posts and eight links were created by a Samsung representative, thus totalling 25% of the communication on the Facebook platform. This number is significantly lower at 11.4% for communication created during the research time frame as only five wall posts out of 55 and two links out of six were posted by a Samsung representative.

The Facebook dedicated social media platform in the shape of the Samsung Fan Club thus provides ample space for user-generated content, but the platform does not convincingly engage its users. When compared to the Samsung Blog and even Samsung's YouTube presence, Facebook provides much greater interaction opportunities through its potential for users to upload wall posts, links, photographs, videos and engage in discussions, yet the platform does not display the levels of participation that the previously mentioned social media platforms do. This may in part be due to the fact that the Samsung Blog stimulates and provides incentives for interaction on a regular basis, whereas the Facebook platform is left unattended to for extensive periods of time.

When comparing it to other Facebook groups and fan pages such as the Standard Bank Cricket fan page, it appears that the more active and engaged the creator of the Facebook group is in keeping the content of the group or page updated, the more involved members of the group or fan page becomes. Inherent to Facebook's design, the updating of the group or fan page by the creator or users pushes the group or fan page into the "recently updated" category of a user's list of groups and fan pages that they are a member of. A regularly updated group thus has a higher chance of being noticed by a Facebook user due to its rankings on their groups and fan page lists when applying a group filter view, which may in turn encourage them to participate in the group of fan page.

The Samsung Fan Page's lack of user participation could thus be addressed by higher levels of engagement from the creator of the group in order to keep the group top of mind for the users who are subscribed to it.

- Delicious

As the Delicious site provides the space for a user to bookmark content on their profile, the list of bookmarks on a users' profile is inherently generated by the user him- or herself. Although the contents of the bookmarks itself is not necessarily created by the user, the user makes the decision to endorse the contents by bookmarking it, thus expressing an awareness of the particular web content.

In the case of the Samsung Delicious profile linked to by the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR, all bookmarks have been listed by Samsung as a corporate entity. Some of these bookmarks list Samsung-created content while others were created by independent entities. The decision to bookmark the particular content however remains in the hands of the communicator responsible for the Samsung Delicious profile. From these Samsung-listed bookmarks, other users can share the bookmarks that have been listed by Samsung on their Delicious profile by also geotagging or bookmarking the particular web contents onto their own profile.

In total, Samsung has listed 12 bookmarks, thus these bookmarks count as Samsung-generated content in the overall scope and context of Delicious as a social media platform. Four of the bookmarks posted by Samsung were subsequently bookmarked by other users a total of 274 times.

- Flickr

Much like Delicious and a YouTube channel created by a user, Flickr also hosts a user profile which displays the content uploaded by the particular Flickr user him- or herself. The Flickr photostream for *SamsungBlogSA* as linked to by the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR thus displays the content uploaded by Samsung as a corporate entity and Flickr user. All photographs on the relevant Samsung photostream are thus Samsung-generated content, whereas comments made on the photographs by other social media

users using the Flickr channel or subscribing to the Flickr dedicated social media platform would be classified as social media user-generated content.

In terms of the Flickr dedicated social media platform, 232 photographs are Samsung-generated content while no social media user-generated content exists as there are no comments on any of the 232 uploaded photographs.

Flickr as a dedicated social media platform thus performs the poorest in terms of its engagement of social media users to participate in conversation about the Samsung Omnia i900. Not only does the platform display only three photographs related to the Samsung Omnia i900, but these three photographs were also unable to draw any user comments.

Nonetheless, Flickr remains a useful public relations tool for the hosting of high resolution photographs for press purposes, but the platform was used incorrectly with the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR as the photographs linked to by the SMNR are completely irrelevant to the topic of the release. Rather than being a tool to assist journalists and consumers in finding visuals of the Samsung Omnia i900 phone, it becomes a trivial social media link with largely irrelevant content.

C) Message tone

An analysis of all relevant content from the social media platforms revealed the following dominant message tones for each of the Samsung Omnia i900 dedicated social media platforms:

- Samsung Blog

Of the 40 blogs analysed which fall into the research time frame, are related to the Samsung Omnia i900 and exclude spam and foreign language posts, a total of 14 blog posts displayed a positive tone towards the Samsung Omnia i900 handset and/or Samsung Mobile, while six blog posts displayed a negative tone, eight blog posts a neutral tone and 12 blog posts a mixed tone towards the Samsung Omnia i900 handset and/or Samsung Mobile. Those posts that displayed a mixed tone were primarily

positive about the handset and Samsung Mobile with minor issues being addressed, although not in such a manner that the overall inclination of the message appeared negative in nature.

Some of the positive attributes associated with the Samsung Omnia i900 include the phone being "an incredible machine", "simply genial", "magnificent", "a stunner", "an awesome phone", "absolutely brilliant" and "a fantastic phone" among others, while others expressed their "love" for the phone and that the Omnia is worth its name as it has "everything".

In contrast, those blog posts that associated negative descriptions with the phone, its features or the service provided by Samsung Mobile and cellular networks listed it as being "messed up", "non-functional", "full of tons of glitches and bugs", "seriously frustrating", having "stupid design issues" and "bizarre" memory programming, and "providing no answers or resolve for [the respondent's] efforts", among others.

The true value of the message tones on the Samsung Blog as a dedicated social media platform, however, is found in the tone of the many comments posted in response to the 40 blogs analysed. A total of 508 user comments were posted in response to these blogs, with an overwhelming 193 comments displaying a primarily negative tone. Only 50 comments displayed a largely positive tone, while 184 comments were neutral in its disposition and 80 displayed mixed tones. Here, like in the blog post analysis, mixed tone mostly featured positive aspects of the phone combined with the negative or problematic aspects of the phone.

A huge proportion totalling 37.9% of all comments on these 40 Samsung Omnia i900-related blogs were negative in its disposition and many featured high levels of intensity in its disapproval. Some of the descriptions and comments included (all phrases quoted directly and unaltered):

- "It is UNACCEPTABLE that a phone is released onto the market with such a major flaw! I will NEVER again buy a samsung phone – whih means that I will throw out the 2 I already have"
- "I think it is pathetic that there is no downloadable firmware for the Samsung Omnia in SA. The phone is an abortion. It was useless out of the box"
- "My advice to possible victims of Samsung is to please rather buy the iPhone"

- "I'm also sick and tired of waiting. Is it Samsung's fault or Vodacom for putting the crap vodafone live nonsense on it!"
- "Allow me to add my answer/ANGER AND FRUSTRATION to this wonderfull piece of NO-NO from SAMSUNG"
- "I DON'T KNOW WHY WE ARE WASTING OUR ENERGY AND TIME ON THIS BLOG, IT LEADS TO NOTHING. SAMSUNG South Africa doesn't even know their own products"
- "The Omnia is a very dissapointing phone and hugely unreliable"
- "I am surely displeased with this and will never again get a samsung phone or recommend it to someone. It is so lame that they brought out a product in South Africa and don't have the support that goes along with it."
- "But serious you guys (Mobi you included - if you are part of Samsung) are damaging the Samsung Mobile image in SA - and serious defnitely that of a superb Omnia. Please wake up Samsung!"
- "Sorry but Samsung is killing it's own iPhone (Omnia) in South Africa - what a tragedy!"
- "I have recently purchased the Omnia and find it very disappointing that a phone perceived to be a high tech phone lacks in many regards."
- "All I can say is that I never had this kind of trouble with sony"

(Samsung Blog 2009).

While these comments and their clear intensity display a negative attitude towards the Samsung Omnia i900 and Samsung Mobile, the impressions collectively created by these comments could influence other consumers' likelihood to buy the Samsung Omnia i900 or Samsung products in general. A number of comments by social media users on the Samsung Blog support this suggestion such as this feverous comment left by a Samsung Blog user on Monday, 12 January 2009:

- "Hi chaps...man, I don't even have the phone yet and I'm already feeling your pain!I'm almost elgible for my phone upgrade and have been doing the whole review & research task for the best unit out there for the last few months. Specs-wise, yes the Omnia is a MacGyver phone, but I'll be damned if I get a phone that can't even make a bloody phonecall/or be left on for that matter, without there being some 'freeze' or crazy issue, or where the battery lasts less than PURPORTED on the specs!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

  "AND I will only get the phone if all these issues in these blogs are resolved...word of mouth is a powerful thing if you haven't noticed...and actually, surely you guys at Samsung would have gotten the Omnia YOURSELVES? Right? Don't YOU want these corrections done as much or MORE so than the subscribers? Or do you not even walk-the-walk for your own product"

(Samsung Blog 2009).

Similarly, the positive, swift and efficient response by a representative from Samsung Mobile to concerns raised by a social media user can be argued to have positively influenced his decision to purchase the Samsung Omnia i900 as is demonstrated in the following communication (social media user identity removed to protect their privacy):

- Submitted by A (not verified) on Wed, 2009-01-14 12:59: "Any word on the firmware? I am considering this phone, but now I am not so sure..."

- Submitted by mobi on Wed, 2009-01-14 13:59:

  "Hi A, The update will be available to download in about 2 or 3 weeks. We'll make an announcement when it's available."

- Submitted by A (not verified) on Thu, 2009-01-15 09:26.

  "On the basis of your reply I think that I will take this phone on my upgrade. I will be waiting for the firmware. I don't care if it takes four weeks as long as we can get the latest firmware, which should sort out some problems. How can I make sure I will be notified when the firmware is available?"

  (Samsung Blog 2009).

While the 50 positive comments totalling 9.8% of all comments to the 40 Samsung Omnia i900 blog posts portray a positive image of the Samsung Omnia i900 and Samsung Mobile, it is greatly outweighed by the proportion and intensity of negative comments on the Samsung Blog.

The Samsung Blog as a social media platform thus provides a significant space for social media users to converse about the Samsung Omnia i900 – which social media users do utilise – but the comments left by social media users may be damaging to the reputation of Samsung Mobile and the Samsung Omnia i900 if left unattended to.

- YouTube

The three videos initially linked to by the Samsung Omnia i900 received a large number of relevant responses within the allowed research time frame totalling 120, 326 and 237 comments respectively.

Responses to the first video where primarily neutral (59 of 120) to positive (31 of 120) in tone with regards to messages related to the Samsung Omnia i900 handset, while a positive review of the video was also given six times. Negative comments about the Samsung Omnia i900 phone were very low with only seven negative comments being made about the phone, however this number was slightly higher at 13 negative comments towards the video. A total of 12 mixed comments were posted expressing both positive and negative attitudes towards the phone and the video. In addition, 13 comments that contained abusive contents towards the creator of the video (in this case

mobilitytoday) or towards other users of the social media platform were made. This reflects negatively on Samsung Mobile, although it cannot be controlled by Samsung as the video was not created by them and therefore does not appear on Samsung's YouTube channel.

Some of the positive references made in the comments to this video include the description of the Samsung Omnia i900 as an "amazing phone", "so kool", and "really good", while users expressed their desire and excitement for the phone through phrases like "I love the phone", "I want the phone soooo bad", "I can't wait", and "I love Samsung, i think it is wonderful" (Samsung Video 1 2008)

Negative comments were mainly directed at the video itself and included statements such as "You sound like a crack addict that is forced to do this video review by gun point", "This guy needs to get his facts right and he should have used it before he reviewed it", "This dumbass doesn't seem to do his homework", and "this is BY FAR the worst review of the Omnia I have seen".

Users viewing the second video embedded in the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR were more equally divided in their attitudes toward the Samsung Omnia i900 handset. Out of 326 comments, 41 comments were positive towards the phone while a small amount more (45 comments) were negative towards the phone. Their opinions about the video, however, were clear as 37 negative comments were made about the video compared to only four positive comments. Nearly half (142 or 43.8%) of all comments left by users displayed a neutral stance towards both the phone and the video, while eight comments were undecided with mixed reviews about the phone and video. Like the first video, this review of the Samsung Omnia i900 also suffered from abusive comments towards the creator of the video and other users of the platform as 44 abusive comments were made.

A recurring theme in the comments on all Samsung Omnia i900 dedicated social media platforms was also present in the comments on the second video as the phone was once again described in ways such as "Amazing phone", "This phone is great. Kicks the iPhone out the door", "cool! I'm getting one right away", "mee want :DDDDD" and "i have this phone it ROCKS" (Samsung Video 2 2008).

Negativity towards the phone came in the form of comments such as "They are shit, dont get one, all the apps are shit and dont work either. Possibly the WORST phone iv owned", "the touch screen is so unresponsive and innaccurate its a joke. Slow as fuck, apps are expensive as hell and most of the apps it comes with are buggy", "its really bad! I was really disappointed", "this phone is a big-time crap" and "Crapy phone... its terrible" (Samsung Video 2 2008). A strong negativity was detected towards the video with comments such as "what the hell kind of review is this", "HOw is this supposed to be a review?", "Is this supposed to be a REVIEW!? Dude, looks like a bad cut-scene from a fantasy game", "Wow, if this is a review.. it's pathetic", "CRAP NO OTHER WORDS 4 THIS REVIEW", "For part two, why not take the phone for a long walk on the beach and watch the sunset. This isn't a review, its a tampon commercial" and "this is terrible".

Finally, the third video embedded in the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR showed similar statistics in terms of its message tones with more users reacting positively towards the phone (56 of 237) than negatively towards the phone (39 of 237) and the video (2 of 237). The overwhelming majority of users commented neutrally on the phone and the video (123 of 237), while another 11 comments had mixed reviews of the phone and video.

Here users once again reacted positively to the phone with comments such as "this fone has everything what i want!", "The best cellphone in the world", "got this phone, and i really love it!", and "im gonna get this tomorrow actually today can't wait..", although the conviction in the positive comments seem much stronger than the positive comments posted about the phone on the previously discussed videos.

Negative comments included elements such as "Samsung just don't get it. Design is still like a compacted brick. OS respond nothing much to impress", "i had this phone it sucks i repeat IT SUCKS u better luck buying a little 20 dollar flip phone then this", "It does COMPLETELY suck, but it comes as close as any phone can on the suckability register", and "this phone sucks... get an iphone.... no really... i had one... crap".

When evaluating the tone of the communication content represented by the comments left to these three videos embedded in the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR, it is clear that the videos are not the ideal choice for visual material to be embedded in the social

media news release. Many of the comments are very negative towards the product and two of the three videos were criticised as being exceptionally bad reviews of the phone. If Samsung wished to promote a positive first user experience of the Samsung Omnia i900 through the YouTube channel, it would have been more beneficial to carefully choose well-crafted videos that have accumulated neutral to positive responses. The abusive comments left to these videos also create a negative association with the product regardless of whether it Samsung can control these comments.

While Samsung may view the embedding of videos from third party independent sources in the SMNR as a positive move to demonstrate impartiality towards the product and suggest that there is public interest in the product, it has elicited more negative feedback than is advisable.

- Facebook

The tone of the wall posts and links falling within the designated research time frame on the Samsung Fan Club on Facebook are generally positive or neutral in nature. Of the 50 wall posts created by social media users (thus excluding Samsung-generated wall posts) and falling within the research time frame a total of 18 wall posts were positive in tone, while another 19 were neutral in tone. Only four wall posts reflected negatively on Samsung Mobile, while three wall posts portrayed a mixed tone. In terms of the six links posted on the Samsung Fan Club within the research time frame, three links were positive in tone, while two were neutral and one mixed in tone.

It is important to note that only eight wall posts in the time frame are directly related to the Samsung Omnia i900 and of these eight posts, seven were created by social media users. Four of these seven posts were positive in nature, with two being neutral in tone and one reflecting a mixed tone. No messages were created that displays a negative tone towards the Samsung Omnia i900. On the contrary, the phone was described as being "an excellent Symbian touchscreen phone", "very nice!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!", and "the best phone in whole wide world".

While the Facebook dedicated social media platform thus contains messages that are mostly positive in tone, the use of the platform is not sufficient to gain optimum

advantage from this positive tone. The interaction between Samsung and the subscribers of the Samsung Fan Page is neither fluid nor convincing and the platform does not display the clear elements of two-way communication as is present in the Samsung Blog. Due to the low and infrequent levels of participation by users of the social media platform, the positive effects of the message tones on the platform become lost.

- Delicious

As Delicious is designed to be a creator-generated channel, the messages bookmarked by Samsung on their profile are inherently positive in nature. The channel is not used as a platform for conversation between the social media users and the organisation and did not display any contents within the research time frame, therefore Delicious was not analysed as a social media platform that may reveal the attitudes of social media users through the tone of their user-created messages.

- Flickr

Similar to Delicious, Flickr is designed to be a creator-generated photostream displaying content posted by the author of the photostream. Flickr does provide an opportunity for other users to comment on the content that has been uploaded by the photostream author, but no comments were made on the photographs contained in *SamsungBlogSA*'s photostream. No social media user comments were thus available for tone analysis.

D) Message themes

A detailed assertions analysis was performed on selected content from the social media platforms linked to by the Samsung Omnia i900 social media news release. The criteria included that the messages on the social media platforms must have been created within the research time frame of 8 November 2008 to 11 August 2009, must be user generated, thus created by subscribers to the dedicated social media platforms, and must not include foreign language or spam contents. Due to the particularly large number of posts and comments on the Samsung Blog, an additional criterion was

introduced namely that only blog posts directly related to the Samsung Omnia i900 was analysed, as well as the comments to these blog posts.

These criteria narrowed the contents used for the assertions analysis to posts from the Samsung Blog, the three videos from YouTube embedded in the social media news release and the wall posts and links from the Samsung Fan Club on Facebook.

After a detailed analysis was performed on the selected contents from each of the social media channels, sets of themes were identified in the communication. These themes were compared across all three social media channels and the comparison revealed three broad themes that resonate across all communication by social media users on the dedicated social media platforms for the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR. These themes are: "Samsung Omnia i900 features", the "position of the Samsung Omnia i900 within the smartphone mobile category", and the "support services provided for the Samsung Omnia i900". Each of these themes and the subthemes that have been identified on each social media platform will be discussed in this section of the research report.

Theme 1: Samsung Omnia i900 features

One of the most prevalent themes across all user generated communication on all three the analysed social media platforms is the features of the Samsung Omnia i900 mobile phone. Messages created by social media users on the platforms included asking questions about which features the phone has, how certain features work, asking for advice on problems experienced with certain features, and complimenting certain features of the phone.

The responses to the Samsung Blog and the YouTube videos showed the most communication by social media users about the phone's features, whereas Samsung Fan Club users on Facebook were significantly less likely to communicate according to this theme.

On the Samsung Blog all the blog posts analysed were related to the features of the Samsung Omnia i900. Consequently, a large portion of the comments to these blogs also related to the features of the phone, however many of these comments also related

to the position of the Samsung Omnia i900 within the smartphone mobile category, and the support services provided for the Samsung Omnia i900.

The subthemes of the blog posts can be categorised as follows:

Feature type	Number of blogs
Omnia Firmware/ROMS	14
Windows Mobile Operating System	3
Omnia Garmin feature	2
Omnia Widgets	2
Omnia Bluetooth feature	2
Miscellaneous Omnia features	17

Table 6: Subthemes within communication theme 1 from the Samsung Blog

Proportionally, the comments created on the blog posts showed that the social media users had the greatest interest in the issue of the Omnia Firmware/ROMS, the Windows Mobile Operating System used in the Omnia i900 and a collection of other feature issues.

With regards to the Omnia Firmware/ROMS theme, the most prevalent subthemes were questions about the release of new Omnia Firmware/ROMS by Samsung Mobile South Africa. This included a significant amount of negative comments about delayed release dates of the Samsung Omnia i900 firmware, problems experienced with the download and installation of the firmware, complaints about the firmware being dysfunctional and ridden with bugs thus causing operating failures on the phone, issues experienced with the release of Microsoft Vista and Microsoft XP compatible firmware, the geographical limitation of firmware releases, cellular network interference with the firmware, and worries about voiding the warranty of the cell phone if the users downloaded the firmware from the Samsung Blog site. In addition, comments were also made by users who successfully upgraded their Samsung Omnia i900 firmware detailing the subsequent improvements to the phone and guiding other users on the correct installation procedures to be used with the firmware. Debates were also held about the desirability of using "cooked" (thus unofficial user-modified) ROMS in the Samsung Omnia i900 phone.

Although related to the release of Samsung Omnia i900 ROMS, the conversation about the Windows Mobile Operating System used in the Samsung Omnia i900 mostly centered on the question of whether or not the handset would be upgradeable to the Windows Mobile 6.5 version and where this download could be obtained.

Additional features that enjoyed attention in the Samsung Blog comments include problems with battery life, low memory/storage space, screen blackouts or freezing, and applications being rendered unusable.

In contrast to the conversations on the Samsung Blog, users viewing the YouTube videos that were embedded in the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR focused their conversations on different aspects of the phone's features, although the Windows Mobile Operating System remained a popular topic for conversation on two of the three videos.

Users that commented on the first video were most concerned about the phone's optical mouse and stylus features. A debate was created about the merits of the optical mouse and whether or not the stylus is a useful, well-designed inclusion to the product, while closely following this debate was the question about weather or not the phone is suitable for texting. Rounding off the top three topics of conversation in the comments of the first video was the debate about the Windows Mobile Operating System used in the Samsung Omnia i900 phone. Some users claimed that the operating system was a cause for concern on the phone while others found it a useful feature with which they were quickly acquainted.

Comments to the second video set forth the trend among social media users to converse about the Microsoft Windows Operating System used in the phone however most comments in this regard were negative toward the operating system. Users who viewed this video were also interested in four additional elements of the phone's features namely the processing speed of the phone, the quality of the camera, the quality and responsiveness of the screen and the size of the "menu", "Ok" and "exit" buttons.

The last of the three YouTube videos revealed responses from social media users who were most interested in the set-up of certain features on the Samsung Omnia i900, as

well as the quality of the technology and features displayed by the phone due to its origins as a Korean product.

Social media users subscribed to the Samsung Fan Club on Facebook showed the lowest level of conversations about the features of the Samsung Omnia i900 phone, with the only features being mentioned being the games on the phone, and issues with the memory of the phone. Instead, users of the Facebook social media platform posted much more incoherent messages supporting Samsung as an organisation in general, but not specifically focusing on the Samsung Omnia i900 phone.

When reflecting on the overall representation of the theme relating to the features of the Samsung Omnia i900, there is a clear correlation between the elements highlighted in the SMNR and the elements discussed by social media users on the dedicated social media platforms as part of this theme. The SMNR highlighted the phone's Microsoft Windows Mobile 6.1 operating system, its TouchWiz interface, the 3.2 inch WQVGA LCD screen, and its onboard memory and memory card capacity. Users of the social media platforms focused on two of the four key elements highlighted by the SMNR, namely the operating system and the screen, although each of the social media platforms also had some communication about the phone's memory capacities. Only approximately four comments in total across all platforms acknowledged the TouchWiz interface highlighted in the SMNR.

Theme 2: Position of Samsung Omnia i900 within the smartphone mobile category

The second theme most commonly found across the communication in the three social media platforms relates to the positioning of the Samsung Omnia i900 within the smartphone mobile category. The biggest discussion centering on this theme is the positioning of the Samsung Omnia i900 versus the Apple iPhone. The debate of which is the better phone within the smartphone mobile category raised significant interest from both Samsung Omnia i900 and Apple iPhone supporters and in some instances escalated to derogatory terms being used against each other in the midst of the debating. Other phones that were compared to the Samsung Omnia i900 are the HTC Diamond, HTC TouchPro and Nokia phones in general.

Users of the Samsung Blog were less interested in the debate about which phone leads the smartphone mobile category. No blogs paid attention to the debate, and only 11 comments made mention of the position and merits of the phone within the smartphone category. It is worth noting, however, that only two of the eleven comments placed the Samsung Omnia i900 positively against its competitors. The remaining nine comments all shunned the Samsung Omnia i900 and expressed the regret that they chose this phone above either the Apple iPhone, HTC Diamond, HTC TouchPro or Nokia phones.

The positive comments included the statement that the user

> truly belive[s] [the Samsung Omnia i900 is] the best of the best of the best. None of the annoying , irritating quirks of HTC phones (I gave back my touch pro, and annulled my HD order to get this baby), or the limitations and failures of iPhone (Samsung Blog 2009).

In the other positive comment, the user expressed his belief that "this [Samsung Omnia i900] is far ahead of the iPhone".

Some of the negative comments made by users towards the Samsung Omnia i900 includes that the user "should have sticked with Nokia.....or the iPhone", "would have been better going for the iPhone… better yet, just sticking with [their] trusty Nokia", and that one user would "be getting rid of my Omnia for a HTC Touch Pro before [they] end up throwing this thing against a wall" (Samsung Blog 2009).

Social media users viewing the three YouTube videos embedded in the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR were much more vocal about their opinions on the smartphone debate. Users who commented on the first video put their support behind the Samsung Omnia i900 with more than double as many comments being made in favour of the Samsung Omnia i900 than in favour of the Apple Iphone. Some of the comments from the first video in favour of the Samsung Omnia i900 include "it`s better than the iphone", "I recommend the phone to anyone looking to upgrade from your Iphone", "really nice phone really an ipod Killer!! I meant Iphone killer" and "i love this phone than the iphone because its got better everything compared to the iphone, the iphone is just a flashy phone" (Samsung Video 1 2008). Those users who expressed their preference towards

other phones, especially the iPhone made comments such as "Iphone, SonyEricsson Xperia, Nokia's is better than Samsung", "this phone would replace a B-Berry, not Iphone" and even crude comments such as "this round goes to iphone baby if u have omnia please sit on it and put on vibration" (Samsung Video 1 2008). In overview, more Apple iPhone supporters used crude and derogatory comments in their debate than those users who defended the Samsung Omnia i900.

Tempers flared even more dramatically between users who commented on the second video as a significant number of derogatory remarks were made to such an extent that comments veered away from the topic to become personal attacks on fellow social media users.

One such interaction that illustrates the levels of sensitivity about the topic is provided below (user names withheld):

- "there's an application for the iphone where you can just let the iphone listen to about 10 seconds of a song and it will let you know what that song is." Posted by B (1 year ago)

- "give it up you fuckin apple ass kisser. you can get that program free on most phones. the iphone sucks balls." Posted by C (1 year ago)

- "u stupid bitch. I never said I prefer the iphone over this." Posted by B (1 year ago)   (Samsung Video 2 2008).

A total of 42 comments which encompasses 12.8% of all relevant comments were dedicated to the debate of whether or not the Samsung Omnia i900 is superior to the Apple iPhone and other phones in the smartphone category, with opinions being divided relatively equally about which phone performs better. Most comments against the Omnia i900 was due to its Microsoft Windows Mobile operating system, while most comments counting in favour of the Samsung Omnia i900 listed its array of features for its price as its superior quality, simultaneously calling the Apple iPhone an "over-rated", "overhyped and overmarketed" phone.

The comments made in response to the third YouTube video embedded in the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR most prominently displayed the theme of the positioning of the Samsung Omnia i900 within the smartphone mobile category. An overwhelming 49.3%

totalling 117 comments of the 237 relevant comments within the research time frame related to this debate, with an additional 34 comments being made by users who are weighing up the Samsung Omnia i900 against other smartphones before deciding which of the phones to purchase. Interestingly, users commenting on this video more frequently weighed the Samsung Omnia i900 against other Samsung phones such as the Samsung Omnia HD, the Samsung Behold and the Samsung Tocco than against the iPhone. Two other popular choices being weighed up against the Samsung Omnia i900 among users were the HTC Touch HD, HTC Diamond and BlackBerry Storm.

A positive indication for Samsung Mobile is that the majority of users defended the Samsung Omnia i900 as the better phone in the smartphone category, while nearly 21% fewer comments were made positioning the Samsung Omnia i900 as an inferior phone.

Samsung Fan Club users in contrast to the users of the YouTube platform were almost completely uninterested in this debate, which may also have contributed to the wide variety of topics in the wall posts and links of the Samsung Fan Club. The users of the platform commented about 24 different Samsung phones, although the Samsung Omnia i900 was the most popular phone in their conversations. The Samsung SGH-F480 was compared to the iPhone more regularly than the Omnia i900 was and in nearly each case the Samsung was judged the better phone. This may also be attributed to the fact that the platform is presented as a "Samsung Fan Club". From the name of the platform the users are expected to be Samsung enthusiasts.

These comparisons between the Samsung Omnia i900 and other phones in the conversations across the dedicated social media platforms not only reveal the attitudes and loyalties of users towards the phone, but also indicate how users mentally categorise the phone. By categorising the phone with other high-selling popular smartphones, it indicates that users consider the phone to be competition to these popular smartphones. This not only helps public relations practitioners to determine whether or not the marketing for the phone is creating the correct impressions and reaching the correct target audience, but it also provides guidance for the identification of themes and target audiences for future campaigns. From the user-generated communication across the three social media platforms, it appears as though the Samsung Omnia i900 has reached the point of being either loved or hated by users.

Those who like the phone will defend it in the social media domain, but those who dislike it will also criticise it extensively in the social media domain.

While the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR has set the topic in motion with its suggestion that the Samsung Omnia i900 "always come[s] out on top" in comparisons to the Apple iPhone and HTC Diamond, it is clear that social media consumers will make their own conclusions about the phone in the public spaces of social media.

Theme 3: Support services provided for the Samsung Omnia i900

The final theme identified as a major thread in the communication across all three social media platforms linked to the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR is the discussion about support services provided for the Samsung Omnia i900, both in South Africa and internationally. Of the three social media platforms, the users of the Samsung Blog communicated most actively about this topic with regards to the support provided by Samsung South Africa, while users commenting on the three embedded YouTube videos focused their comments on the support provided for the phone by cellular networks. Facebook users subscribed to the Samsung Fan Club were again less involved in this topic, but expressed significant appreciation for Samsung as a brand.

Samsung Blog users expressed their dissatisfaction with Samsung Mobile in South Africa citing the lack of support by technical and helpdesk staff and the delayed release of firmware for the Samsung Omnia i900 among some of their biggest grievances. Reflecting more negatively on Samsung's image was the accusations that Samsung Mobile in South Africa acts dishonestly towards their customers and disregards the needs of their customers.

Some of the comments made by users about Samsung Mobile's support include:
- "how long must we be patient. Samsung doesn't even answer their helpdesk emails???????"
- "This smacks of the worst kind of suppport I have ever experienced with a phone. As a IT consultant I have been pushing Samsung products as a good purchase for m customers, but SAMSUNG South Africa will have to get with the proramme! We are tired

of being orced to use sub standard goods and service which do not pass muster overseas"

- "I called Samsung-mobile today, asked the chap about the battery-life issue and whether there was any news on future fixes for this...he says " we are not aware of that problem, therefore there are no fixes/news for it" - is this typical? How brain-dead to not even know your flagship product and news/issues surrounding it - I think the training manager etc. should be fired along with the support team who know nothing anyway.Such a pity."
- "It's pathetic that we have to resort to measures such as these to compensate for the shoddy support from SA. I'm still waiting for a reply to my wi-fi problems from months ago!!! Samsung SA's support is a disgrace"
- "What about being honest for a change SAMSUNG?"
- "Come on Samsung, get your act together - the OMNIA has SO much to offer, but is being let down by bad support in SA!"

(Samsung Blog 2009).

Those users who were happy with the support and service provided by Samsung also added their views to the platform by complimenting and thanking Samsung. User comments directed towards Samsung include phrases such as:

- "Shot guys, keep up the good work and keep improving my Omnia"
- "Thank Mobi.. I greatly appreciate you prompt response"
- "Fist and foremost I would like to thank Pieter Pretorius and anyone else who was involved with the process of making this Happen. Once again thanks for the effort guys I now have my moneys worth in my hand and will be enjoying it."
- "Thanx alot guys :) It is much appreciated!!!"

(Samsung Blog 2009).

While Samsung's support services was the main focus for users of the Samsung Blog, users commenting on the YouTube videos were more concerned about the support provided for the phone by cellular network providers. This included which networks offered the Samsung Omnia i900, which features of the phone these networks would support, as well as the pricing and data package details provided by the networks. A total of 30 comments out of 120 for Video 1 related to this theme, while 30 of 326 comments on Video 2 and 25 of 237 comments followed this theme on Video 3. Statistically, 12.4% of all analysed comments on the YouTube platform related to the support provided by networks for this phone. It is worth noting, however, that the

majority of users who commented on these videos appear to reside outside of South Africa, whereas most users of the Samsung Blog may be recognised as living in South Africa.

As has been discussed previously in this chapter, subscribers to the Samsung Fan Club were notably less engaged in conversations about the Samsung Omnia i900 than other social media platforms. Consequently, the discussions on the Samsung Fan Club are not directly related to the third theme of support provided for the Samsung Omnia i900, however it did create the impression that users were happy with Samsung and its products. This conclusion was reached through the consideration of terms used to describe users' experiences of Samsung phones and the brand in general. Most users who posted on the wall simply stated that they "love" their Samsung phone. Reflecting the attitude towards Samsung as a brand user comments were very positive and included statements such as:

- "I live in a SAMSUNG world...My SAMSUNG room have a dvd, tv, stereo, woofer, cell phone by SAMSUNG"
- "I love all of Samsung's products"
- "Samsung is the brand of the new generation!!!"
- "Samsung is my company maan. I wanted an iPhone, but I have a Blackjack 2..and its Samsung.. and.. i think im just going to stay loyal and get a Samsung Eternity"

(Samsung Fan Club 2009).

From the user wall posts by subscribers to the Samsung Fan Club as well as the comments by viewers of the YouTube videos and users of the Samsung Blog, it is clear that support services is a very important element of the mobile phone experience for consumers. Social media consumers use the social media platforms to voice both their satisfaction and dissatisfaction with this element of their mobile phone usage. If the amount and intensity of the negative comments about this aspect of a user's mobile phone experience is notably more than the positive comments it may have a negative impact on the perceptions of the phone and the company. In order to help manage this risk, it is advisable for Samsung to monitor the social media platforms that they have linked to in the SMNR to ensure a swift and accurate response to customer grievances. Even though social media channels are not classified as a space to log official complaints about a product or service, companies cannot overlook the fact that social

media platforms are used in this way. The solution to this potential threat is thus held in the efficient monitoring of social media platforms and the swift and pro-active management of and response to customer complaints. Public relations practitioners should see this communication area as an opportunity to develop positive relationships with their target audience, rather than a blatant threat to the image of organisation.

4.3.3   Survey: Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR

To substantiate the data collected and analysed in the case study of the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR, an online survey was conducted among social media users subscribed to one or more of the Samsung Omnia i900 dedicated social media channels. Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous and respondents were required to be over 21 years of age and subscribed to one or more of the dedicated social media platforms linked to by the SMNR. Due to the relatively small sample size, the survey results do not intend to provide data that can be generalised across the broader population, but provide valuable insights into the use of the social media platforms by consumers and substantiates the data collected through content analysis.

A total of 27 respondents partook in the survey within the period of 11 August 2009 to 31 October 2009, but only 20 of the survey responses were valid for analysis due to incomplete survey responses.

A breakdown and analysis of responses will be provided in the following section including details on respondents' answers for the categories of:
   A) Biographical information
   B) General social media usage patterns
   C) Brand-specific social media interaction patterns
   D) Motivation for brand-specific social media interaction
   E) Perception of content
   F) SMNR correlation
   G) Awareness of brand-specific social media platform, and
   H) Attitudes towards social media marketing.

4.3.3.1 Samsung Omnia i900 survey responses

A) Biographical information

Of the 20 valid responses received to this survey, a balanced representation of male and female respondents was achieved. All respondents were within the required age group with respondents ranging between 21 and 30 years of age. The majority of respondents (5 of 20) are 23 years of age. These results are in line with a study conducted by Rapleaf (2008) in which it was found that the 18 – 30 age group is the most active social network user demographic.

Gender	Number of responses
Male	9
Female	10
Not indicated	1
Total	**20**

Table 7: Breakdown of Samsung Omnia i900 survey respondents' gender

Age	Number of responses
21 years	3
22 years	2
23 years	5
24 years	3
25 years	1
26 years	1
27 years	2
29 years	2
30 years	1
Total	**20**

Table 8: Breakdown of Samsung Omnia i900 survey respondents' age

B) General social media usage patterns

In this section of the survey, respondents were asked to indicate their usage of particular social media channels. These channels correspond with social media channels used in the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR along with one popular South African social media channel used in the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR for comparative analysis.

How often do you use the following social media (Please tick the answer that is closest to your usage pattern):

	Daily	2 to 4 times a week	Once a week	Once every two weeks	Once a month	Never	Number of Respondents
Facebook	75% (15)	15% (3)	5% (1)	0% (0)	5% (1)	0% (0)	20
Mxit	61% (11)	11% (2)	0% (0)	0% (0)	5% (1)	22% (4)	18
Twitter	5% (1)	5% (1)	5% (1)	20% (4)	0% (0)	65% (13)	20
Blogs	5% (1)	20% (4)	10% (2)	25% (5)	20% (4)	20% (4)	20
YouTube	10% (2)	10% (2)	25% (5)	25% (5)	15% (3)	15% (3)	20
					Number of Respondents		*20*
				Number or respondents who skipped this question			*0*

Table 9: Samsung Omnia i900 survey respondents' social media usage patterns

From the responses it is clear that Facebook is the most popular of the five indicated social media channels as all respondents use the channel at least once a month, with a total of 15 (75%) of 20 respondents using it daily. Mxit, a mobile channel, is the second most popular channel as 11 (61%) of the 18 respondents who replied to this subsection of the question use it daily, though four (22%) of the respondents indicated that they never use the channel. The respondents who indicated that they never use the channel, along with the two respondents who did not reveal their use of Mxit as a social media channel were all above 25 years of age. Among respondents, Twitter was the least popular social media channel with 13 of the 20 respondents (65%) never using the channel.

C) Brand-specific social media interaction patterns

This section of the survey aimed to determine which of the Samsung dedicated social media platforms respondents are using to interact with the Samsung Mobile brand, as well as to determine their levels of participation on the platforms. Pre-set social media channels as linked to by the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR were indicated, while users

could also indicate other social media platforms used to interact with the Samsung Mobile brand.

Which of the following social media sites do you use to interact with Samsung Mobile?		% of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Facebook		90.00%	18
Twitter		5.00%	1
YouTube		5.00%	1
Flickr		0.00%	0
Blogs		45.00%	9
Modaco		5.00%	1
	Number of respondents		*20*
	Number or respondents who skipped this question		*0*

Table 10: Samsung Omnia i900 survey respondents' usage of Samsung dedicated social media platforms

In line with the responses detailed in section B above, most users (18 of 20) interact with the Samsung Mobile brand through Facebook, while another 9 of 20 use the Samsung Blog to interact with the Samsung Mobile brand. Interestingly, no users subscribed to the Flickr platform, while an additional social media channel namely Modaco was indicated by one user as a social media site used to interact with the Samsung brand. According to the Modaco website (Modaco 2009), the site provides a forum for conversation about smartphones and Pocket PCs. As the Samsung Omnia i900 is classified as a smartphone, this may provide a useful space for conversation about the Samsung Omnia i900 and should be considered for use by Samsung as a social media channel for future social media strategies.

Once the usage of the social media platforms was determined it was necessary to investigate respondents' participation activities on these platforms.

From the results of this section of the survey it was found that slightly over half of all respondents (12 of 20) have not commented on an aspect of the Samsung Omnia i900 or Samsung products, not engaged in conversation about these products with fellow consumers on the dedicated social media platforms that they subscribe to. A positive

indication for Samsung Mobile is that the same proportion of respondents indicated that if they would comment on a dedicated social media platform, their comments would generally be likely to be positive while only two respondents indicated that their comments would be likely to be negative. Six respondents were uncertain about the likely tone of their comments.

Slightly less (11 of 20) respondents indicated that they have never uploaded content such as photographs or videos to a Samsung dedicated social media platform, but the same proportion of respondents answered that they have spoken about a topic other than the Samsung Omnia i900 or other Samsung products on the Samsung dedicated social media platforms that they subscribe to.

Participation on Samsung dedicated social media platforms:

	Yes	No	Uncertain	Number of Respondents
I have commented on an aspect of the Samsung Omnia i900 or Samsung products on dedicated social media channels	40% (8)	60% (12)	0% (0)	20
I have not uploaded any Samsung-related content such as photographs or videos to a dedicated social media channel	45% (9)	55% (11)	0% (0)	20
I have not entered a discussion about the Samsung Omnia i900 or Samsung products with fellow users on a dedicated social media channel	40% (8)	60% (12)	0% (0)	20
If I comment about the Samsung Omnia i900 or Samsung in general on a dedicated social media channel my comments are usually positive	60% (12)	10% (2)	30% (6)	20
I have spoken about topics other than the Samsung Omnia i900 on a dedicated social media channel	45% (9)	50% (10)	5% (1)	20
			Number of Respondents	*20*
			Number or respondents who skipped this question	*0*

Table 11: Samsung Omnia i900 survey respondents' participation on Samsung dedicated social media platforms

The results from this section of the survey resonates with the research indices discussed in chapter 3 of this treatise including the suggestion that the popularity of a particular social media channel may influence the frequency with which users visit the social media channel, and that participation on social media platforms is a voluntary activity. As such joining a social media platform does not guarantee interaction. From the responses in

the survey, it appears that most of the respondents are what Kozinets (1999:255) calls "tourists" to virtual consumption communities. According to Kozinets these users "lack strong social ties to the group, and maintain only a superficial or passing interest in the consumption activity" (1999:255). While these users are thus subscribed to the social media platforms, they may prefer to observe the interaction of other users rather than engage in interaction themselves.

D) Motivation for brand-specific social media interaction

From the responses to this section of the survey, conclusions can be drawn about aspects of the social media consumers' motivation for joining the Samsung dedicated social media channels.

Motivation for participation on social media channel:

	Yes	No	Maybe	Number of Respondents
Being part of the Samsung dedicated social media channel makes me feel more involved with the Samsung brand	80% (16)	5% (1)	15% (3)	20
None of my friends subscribe to Samsung dedicated social media channels	10% (2)	65% (13)	25% (5)	20
I have not made new friends on the Samsung dedicated social media channels	50% (10)	50% (10)	0% (0)	20
I browse content on Samsung dedicated social media channels to learn more about the brand or Samsung products	95% (19)	5% (1)	0% (0)	20
I browse content on Samsung dedicated social media channels for entertainment	60% (12)	35% (7)	5% (1)	20
			Number of Respondents	*20*
			Number or respondents who skipped this question	*0*

Table 12: Samsung Omnia i900 survey respondents' response to motivational factors for joining the dedicated social media platforms

Based on the responses by social media users, the Samsung dedicated social media platforms succeeds in making social media users feel more involved with the brand through their interactions with the brand on social media channels. When considering the levels of active participation by users on the platforms the suggestion can be made that the feelings of involvement elicited by the subscription to the Samsung dedicated

social media platforms is not linked to the users' active participation on the platforms. Even when users do not explicitly contribute to the conversations on these platforms, they still feel more involved with the brand simply by means of becoming a member of the brand community on these social media platforms.

This observation may be linked to the activity of the respondents' friends on the social media platforms. More than half (13 of 20) of the respondents stated that their friends were also subscribed to a dedicated social media platform, while another five respondents indicated that their friends might be subscribed to the platforms. Respondents were divided equally over whether or not they had made new friends through the social media platforms.

Education appears to be a major driving force for respondents' subscription to the social media platforms as nearly all the respondents (19 of 20) revealed that they browse content on these platforms to learn more about the Samsung brand or Samsung products. In contrast, only 12 of the 20 respondents stated that they browse the content of the dedicated platforms for entertainment purposes.

These results are substantiated by respondents' answers to the open-ended questions in section 2 of the survey. Nine respondents' answers directly related their decision to join the Samsung dedicated social media platforms to a search for information, while another five respondents indicated that they owned or were interested in buying a Samsung phone. Although these five respondents did not explicitly state that they are looking for information about their phones from the platforms, there is a high likelihood that this could be a contributing factor for their subscription to the platforms. Responses to the question of "Why did you join the Samsung dedicated social media channel?" indicating a desire for education included:

- "To learn more about Samsung products and their features."
- "To find out what the fuss is about and what the phone is capable of."
- "To get help with my Samsung phone and to find out if there's new stuff available for it."
- "To find info for my mom's Samsung"
- "I was researching for buying a new phone and it seemed like the best place to get information from those who already have this model"

- "To receive more information on upgrades for my phone."
- "The blog gives me a good insight into what people are saying about the brand and the phones -I'm due for an upgrade soon"
- "At one stage I had a Samsung phone - gave information about applications for phone and capabilities."
- "Wanted to learn more about Samsung products because I'm looking to buy a new phone. It helps to see what problems people are having with the phones and what support there is available if I would want to know something about a phone."

Another user in their additional comments about the social media platforms highlighted that they "actually learned a lot from the samsung dedicated social media channels!"

These observations about brand and product education through social media platforms resonates with the message themes identified in the content analysis of communication on the Samsung dedicated social media platforms. Consumer conversations centered on discussions about the features of the Samsung Omnia i900 phone, the position of the Samsung Omnia i900 within the smartphone mobile category, and the support services provided for the Samsung Omnia i900. All of these themes served as informative discussions that revealed both the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of users with the Samsung Omnia i900 and Samsung Mobile in general. Even users who do not own Samsung Omnia i900 handsets may consider the conversations on these sites indicative of the type of support and service provided by Samsung Mobile, as well as evidence of the quality of their products.

E) Perception of content

Respondents were asked to rate aspects of their interaction with the content on the dedicated social media platforms for the Samsung brand. From the answers provided, the majority of social media users (18 of 20) trust the accuracy of the information provided on the Samsung dedicated social media channels. This may have both positive and negative influences on Samsung Mobile's image in the mind of the social media users as both positive and vindictive or inaccurate information added by social media users may likely be considered accurate or truthful by other users. The contents of the platforms may also then be shared further by users of the platforms as 68% (13 of 19) respondents stated they would invite their friends to join the social media platforms

and an overwhelming 89% (17 of 19) respondents to this question indicated that they would share content found on a dedicated Samsung social media channel with their friends.

Despite the high levels of confidence in the accuracy of information on the social media platforms, well over half of all respondents (14 of 20) indicated that they would prefer to receive information directly from the Samsung organisation.

Content of social media channel:

	Yes	No	Uncertain	Number of Respondents
I trust the accuracy of information provided on the Samsung dedicated social media channels	90% (18)	0% (0)	10% (2)	20
I prefer receiving information about the Samsung Omnia i900 and Samsung directly from the company	70% (14)	15% (3)	15% (3)	20
I would invite my friends to join dedicated Samsung social media channels	68% (13)	10% (2)	21% (4)	19
I would share content found on dedicated Samsung social media channels with my friends	89% (17)	5% (1)	5% (1)	19

Number of Respondents	*20*
Number or respondents who skipped this question	*0*

Table 13: Samsung Omnia i900 survey respondents' perceptions and use of content on dedicated social media platforms

F) SMNR correlation

From the content analysis and survey responses the message origins, tones and themes of the communication on the Samsung dedicated social media channels were identified along with social media users' participation behaviour, motivation for joining social media platforms and attitudes towards social media content. The data showed that the dedicated social media channels experienced varying levels of success in creating, hosting and sustaining user-generated conversation about the Samsung Omnia i900 and Samsung Mobile in general. It was also found that much of the themes highlighted in the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR were central to the conversations on these platforms.

While these social media platforms both contributed to and adversely affected the message portrayed by the SMNR, it was necessary to determine where social media

users subscribed to the platforms heard about the particular platforms. A section of the survey therefore aimed to help determined whether social media users who read the SMNR joined the social media platforms through the links in the SMNR, and if they did not, to determine through which channels they first became aware of the Samsung dedicated social media platforms.

Of the respondents to the survey who answered this question, just under half (8 of 18) read the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR, but only three social media users joined the dedicated platforms through the links in the SMNR.

Have you read the Samsung Omnia i900 Social Media Press Release available on http://samsung.socialmediarelease.co.za/omnia?	% of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Yes	44.44%	8
No	55.56%	10
Number of respondents		18
Number or respondents who skipped this question		2

Table 14: Ratio of Samsung Omnia i900 survey respondents who have read the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR
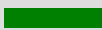
If you **have** read the Samsung Omnia i900 Social Media Press Release, did you join the dedicated Samsung social media channel(s) by following the links provided in the Social Media Press Release?	% of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Yes	16.67%	3
No	83.33%	15
Number of respondents		18
Number or respondents who skipped this question		2

Table 15: Ratio of Samsung Omnia i900 survey respondents who joined the Samsung dedicated social media platforms through the SMNR

Although most respondents did not join the social media platforms through the links in the SMNR, a positive conclusion can be made about the notable level of message distribution through word of mouth among social media users. Eight of 18 respondents indicated that they joined the platforms after being told about it by a friend or seeing it on their friends' profiles on one of the relevant social media channels. However, the most popular place social media users heard about the profiles was through searches on the particular social media sites, the Internet in general and the Samsung Mobile site. This indicates that consumers are actively looking for points of contact with the Samsung

brand through social media, thus making Samsung's social media presence a useful investment for potential two-way communication between consumers and the brand.

Respondents also confirmed this conclusion through their responses to the question of how they feel about organisational marketing through social media channels. Fifteen of 18 respondents agreed that they are open to companies using social media as a channel to provide information however a number of general conditions were identified, namely:

- The information provided must be relevant to the consumer's interests,
- The consumer must sign up for the provision of information by the communication,
- The consumer must be able to opt out of the marketing at any time, and
- The consumer must be able to control how regularly information is sent.

If these basic terms are kept in consideration when designing social media strategies, these types of dedicated social media platforms as has been linked to through the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR can provide excellent contact opportunities between the organisation and its consumer target audiences.

4.3.4   Case study summary: Samsung Omnia i900

The Samsung Omnia i900 social media news release featured links to various dedicated social media platforms providing the space for social media users to converse about the Samsung Omnia i900 phone and Samsung Mobile in general. From a content analysis of relevant texts on these platforms it was found that the selection and use of social media platforms by Samsung Mobile was not entirely successful.

The Samsung Blog is the most successful of all the social media platforms linked to by the SMNR as most conversation took place on this channel. Although the blog posts and the comments left on the blog posts were negative in a number of cases, Samsung's involvement on the blog helped to steer and neutralise negative commentary to a great extent. Their allowance of negative commentary on the blog creates the impression of a willingness to acknowledge and listen to customer complaints. Social media users demonstrate a clear involvement in the creation of the content for the blog thus making it

democratised space where users feel involved with the brand. This platform is one of the most valuable resources for Samsung Mobile in the social media spectrum and should be nurtured for future social media campaigns.

In contrast, the three YouTube videos embedded in the SMNR do not create a positive impression of the Samsung Omnia i900. The majority of comments were negative and in some instances derogatory thus reflecting unfavourably on both the product and Samsung as an organisation. Unlike the Samsung Blog, Samsung had no presence on any of the YouTube video platforms. As a result, negative perceptions were allowed to grow in size and intensity all the while being embedded in the social media news release that introduces the Samsung Omnia i900 to media and consumers. It should be kept in consideration that Samsung could not foresee or predict the tone of the commentary that would follow on the videos, and the videos were later on substituted by videos that were more positive in its disposition towards the phone and Samsung. However, this substitution was made too late which shows the lack of monitoring of the social media platforms by Samsung's assigned public relations practitioners. Action should have been taken swiftly to avoid the lasting negative impression created by the comments to the videos. In the future, consistent social media monitoring should be included in the strategy for social media news release creation and distribution to avoid a similar incident.

The Facebook platform in the form of the Samsung Fan Club was also of little positive use to the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR. Although positive messages were left about the Samsung brand in general, the amount of conversation relevant to the Samsung Omnia i900 was low. It is clear that Facebook is a very useful and widely used channel and thus has significant opportunities for marketing, but the Samsung Fan Club was not utilised effectively to add value to the SMNR. The platform was believed to be added to the SMNR as a dedicated platform because it was the largest Samsung Fan Club on Facebook at the time of the SMNR's release. It may have been more beneficial to the message being conveyed by the SMNR if a Samsung Omnia i900 group or fan page was created and linked to in the SMNR. This would have increased the ratio of conversation about the Samsung Omnia i900 rather than other Samsung phones and may have helped to generate support for or identify issues with the handset.

The Delicious and Flickr platforms were also less successful due to the lack of interaction potential between the organisation and social media users, as well as a low level of relevant content on the platforms. The Delicious platform did help to share positive information about the organisation and the Samsung Omnia i900 handset, but updates should be more frequent and as a basic distribution tool should have included a bookmark to the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR itself. The Flickr platform had only three relevant photographs on the entire platform which is not adequate. Flickr remains a useful platform for the hosting of high resolution print-ready photographs, but with only three photographs relating to the Samsung Omnia i900 it loses its functionality to media linking to it from the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR. In order to share more Samsung-related content and generate more responses to the photographs, creative photographs using the Samsung Omnia i900 could have been loaded or used as a competition for other Flickr users to generate interest about the handset.

In summary, it has been found that most of the social media links in the Samsung Omnia i900 social media news release did stimulate user-generated conversations about the Samsung Omnia i900 and the Samsung brand, however, closer monitoring of the social media platforms was needed. The original creation of certain platforms and content for platforms such as a Samsung Omnia i900 Facebook fan page and a Samsung Omnia i900 walkthrough or promotional YouTube video would have been more beneficial to the SMNR. Social media channels and social media news releases are thus useful tools, but a level of intelligent creator-generated input is needed where necessary to stimulate and steer conversations about desired topics.

4.3.3   Case study: Standard Bank Pro20 Cricket

The Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR case study was compiled through the analysis of the two Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs released on 9 April 2008 and 12 January 2009, along with the social media conversations that took place on the relevant social media platforms linked to by the releases within the research time frame of 9 April 2008 and 11 August 2009.

Due to the fact that the SMNRs follow upon each other and are linked through its theme, topic and social media construction, the conversations on the social media platforms will be evaluated as a whole per platform rather than being evaluated per SMNR.

A distinction will be made between the two releases by referring to it as the Standard Bank Pro20 2008 or 2009 release.

4.3.3.1 Social media strategy

The first Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR was issued on 9 April 2008 as the "*We got the Kaboom – Standard Bank goes social, Pro20 style*" SMNR (Standard Bank 2008) introducing the Standard Bank Pro20 Cricket 2008 season. This was the very first social media news release to be issued in South Africa and was created and issued by Brandsh Communications (Brandsh Communications 2008; Attree 2008). Following the first Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR, a second Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR was released on 12 January 2009 for the 2009-Pro20 Cricket season, this time entitled "*Standard Bank Pro20 Rocking Summer Tour*" (Standard Bank 2009a) and again released by Brandsh Communications.

The first Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR released in 2008 created a public relations benchmark for South Africa and was a key tool in Standard Bank's move towards harnessing the marketing potential of online and mobile communication channels. According to the release (Standard Bank 2008), the aim of the distribution of the SMNR was to "facilitate[…] the rapid and widespread sharing of information, images, audio and video" and to "encourage[…] supporters to actively get involved and create content using social media channels like blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Mxit and YouTube". The intended goal of the SMNR is thus clear – to create a single multimedia platform through and from which information could be shared, and to maximise supporter engagement with the series and the Standard Bank Pro20 cricket brand through social media.

With the release of the second social media news release in 2009, this aim was reiterated with the updating of their dedicated social media platforms and introduction of the new Standard Bank Cricket website. All of the social media platforms used exclusively for the Standard Bank Pro20 series in the previous season were integrated

into the umbrella body of Standard Bank Cricket which increased the functionality of the platforms for the brand. Through this move, content was streamlined and the platforms could be updated more regularly based on which cricket matches were being played.

According to the 2009 SMNR, the integrated social media campaign for the series created in 2008 was set forth in 2009 "with updated social media platforms set to deliver speedy and smart content to encourage maximum supporter participation" (Standard Bank 2009a). In the 2009 campaign, the SMNR once again served as a platform to deliver communication to target audiences but also linked to the social media platforms used to support the SMNR and engage supporters in conversation about the series. In the SMNR insight is provided into the purpose of the links as

> Fan-created content is linked to dedicated spaces on Facebook, the Standard Bank blog, http://www.thunda.com/, Standard Bank's dedicated YouTube channel, and Flickr, allowing sharing of opinion and uploading or downloading videos and pictures with prizes on offer for participants and contributors (Standard Bank 2009a).

Twitter was used as a social media platform to keep Standard Bank Pro20 fans updated on the cricket games as they take place, while bloggers were stationed at each stadium to "integrate the cricket and broadcast experience for both in-stadia spectators and TV viewers across South Africa" (Standard Bank 2009a). Flickr was used as a photo-sharing platform for the first time in the 2009-series. The social media reach was also extended to Mxit and a custom created WAP site for fans to stay in touch with the games as they were being played.

In essence the two SMNRs were targeted towards journalists and Pro20 cricket supporters, although the first SMNR's content focused more on the achievement of releasing the SMNR than on the series itself. The second SMNR was largely more balanced in its target audience focus as it relayed important and useful information about the set-up and features of the 2009 series in a way that was accessible to both journalists and fans. Easy active links to the social media platforms for the Standard Bank Pro20 2009 series allowed increased accessibility and motivation to join the platforms to converse about the series.

An important aspect of the motivation to use the SMNRs as part of the Standard Bank Pro20 cricket social media strategy is revealed by Kate Johns, the Group Sponsorships PR Manger for Standard Bank. According to Johns (Standard Bank 2009a) they feel that the SMNR "facilitates two-way dialogue with [Standard Bank's] key partners, allowing for feedback in the online forums". This suggests that the SMNRs were used with the aim of enabling two-way communication between the organisation and stakeholders and that the communication on the social media platforms is valued as feedback from consumers. This approach is in line with the view of the SMNR as a PR 2.0 tool that can stimulate conversations about a brand and can reveal useful attitudes, beliefs and opinions held by the consumer audience.

4.3.3.2 Social media news release content

The Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR released in April 2008 contained relatively little content about the cricket series itself and focused more on the introduction of the social media strategy used to promote the series. The primary focus of the SMNR was on the release as a new tool to be used in South Africa, as well as on the social media platforms that were created and linked to in the SMNR to promote the series.

The major themes addressed in the 2008-SMNR was that of Standard Bank as a marketing innovator in South Africa, the engagement of audiences through social media, and the increased accessibility to the series through the social media platforms.

In contrast, the SMNR released in January of 2009 focused its content more on providing information about the series and its new features while integrating the promotion of the dedicated social media platforms in its message contents. The SMNR's contents was categorised into 20 bullet points, each addressing a different piece of information. The information in these bullet points can be categorised into three main themes including series features, in-stadium marketing features, and social media features.

Among the topics relating to the theme of series features is the introduction of the new series format with its "'best of three' semifinal round" (Standard Bank 2009a), the chance for high performing teams to participate in the Champions League Twenty20 competition

and the affordable pricing of tickets to the games. Topics relating to in-stadium marketing features include the Achiever Box initiative, the updating of the Standard Bank Hard Hat design, the introduction of a 5-meter high "Rockstar stage", the "Kaboom slide", "Mega Dunk Tank", the series mascot Hardy the Duck, and the new 15-man Dugout and kit for players. Finally, the topics relating to the social media features of the series includes the description of the SMNR, the creation of social media platforms on Facebook, Mxit, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, blogs, Thunda and a WAP site used in the series' marketing, the introduction of the new Standard Bank Cricket website, and the Fantasy League competition hosted on the site.

Overall, the SMNR portrays the Standard Bank Pro20 cricket series as exciting, affordable entertainment for the entire family, while positioning Standard Bank as a leader and innovator in the "sportainment" (Standard Bank 2009a) field.

4.3.3.3 Social media links and content

The social media links presented in the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR social media news releases issued in 2008 and 2009 and the content analysed by means of content analysis from each of the platforms include:

	Content analysed	Total posts	Posts in research window	Standard Bank Pro20 posts in research window	Total relevant posts analysed
Standard Bank Cricket Blog	Blog posts	372	360	260	260
	Comments	NA	195	52	52
Facebook	Wall posts	204	204	156	156
Flickr	Photographs	219	219	219	219
	Comments	0	0	0	0
YouTube	Videos posted	10	10	10	10
	Video comments	0	0	0	0
Twitter	Standard Bank Cricket Tweets	800	800	0	0
	Myles the Butler Tweets	323	86	0	0

Table 16: A breakdown of social media content analysed in the Standard Bank Pro20 case study

The relevant posts from each of the social media channels were subjected to a limited designations analysis in order to determine the ratio with which the Standard Bank Pro20 series was referred to either directly or indirectly in the collection of posts, and in turn determine the degree to which the social media platforms elicited consumer-driven dialogue about the series.

Similar to the method applied to the case study data of the Samsung Omnia i900 case study, a detailed assertions analysis was conducted on the relevant messages within the research time frame to determine the themes, tones and intensity of user opinions expressed in the communication on the social media platforms. While these themes help reveal correlations between the content advocated by the SMNRs and the content produced by consumers on the social media platforms, it also helps to identify potential themes for future public relations campaigns related to the series.

The rich data for the content analysis of this case study came from the Standard Bank Cricket Blog and the Standard Bank Cricket Facebook channel. Both channels were during the release of the SMNRs dedicated to Standard Bank Pro20 cricket only, but were integrated into the Standard Bank Cricket Blog and Facebook platforms in June of this year. All content previously created for both the platforms were transferred to the new platforms therefore none of the research data for this study was impacted.

In contrast, the Twitter channel linked to by the two SMNRs which was previously hosted on www.twitter.com/pro20 for the Standard Bank Pro20 2008 and 2009 series was taken over by another user since the merging of the Standard Bank Pro20 Twitter profile with that of Standard Bank Cricket.   All previous posts relating to the Standard Bank Pro20 series have been removed from the old Twitter profile. As a result, the Twitter feed of the 2008 and 2009 series was not available for analysis. The new posts on the Standard Bank Cricket Twitter profile was scrutinised and it was found that no posts relate to the Standard Bank Pro20 series. It is believed that the profile will again be used for the Standard Bank Pro20 series of the 2010-season. A second Twitter profile linked to by the 2009-SMNR was also analysed, namely that of the Standard Bank Achiever Club representative "Myles the Butler". Of the tweets on the Myles the Butler

profile none related to the Standard Bank Pro20 cricket during the designated time frame, thus excluding the platform from the assertions analysis.

Although the Flickr and YouTube channels each contained posts by Standard Bank related to the Standard Bank Pro20 series, no comments by social media users were made on either of these platforms. As no communication by social media users was thus available for analysis, the Flickr and YouTube channels were did not yield enough data for a detailed assertions analysis of the platforms.

The research time frame for the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR case study was from the date of release of the first Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR on 9 April 2008, until 11 August 2009, thus also encompassing the release date of the second Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR on 12 January 2009. The 11th of August was chosen as a research deadline for the study in order to ensure that the data size is manageable and the study conducted in good time.

4.3.3.4 Social media conversations (per channel)

Please note that the messages analysed in this section of the research were analysed in bulk per platform linked to by the Standard Bank Pro20 2008 and 2009 SMNRs rather than being categorised per SMNR.

A) Message ratio and statistics

In the following section, the message ratio on each of the dedicated social media platforms linked to by the two Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs will be discussed.

- Standard Bank Cricket Blog

The Standard Bank Cricket Blog is a joint platform for supporters of South African cricket to converse about the teams, matches, players, series' and tournaments being played by cricket players in South Africa on a domestic and international level. It is important to consider that Standard Bank sponsors the South African Proteas cricket team as well as the Standard Bank Pro20 series, while MTN is the sponsor for the South African

domestic limited over series (MTN 2009). While the formats, marketing and sponsorship differ, the teams that participate in the Standard Bank Pro20 series and MTN Domestic Limited Overs series are the same, thereby linking the series in some way in the minds of supporters. Visitors to the Standard Bank Cricket Blog are encouraged to converse about the domestic Standard Bank Pro20 series and the matches played by the Proteas, but may also refer to matches played or player performances relating to the MTN Domestic Limited Overs series.

In order to add value to the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs, the Standard Bank Cricket Blog as a dedicated social media platform linked to by the SMNRs should show a higher ratio of content related to the Standard Bank Pro20 2008 and 2009 series than to other topics.

From a limited designations analysis of all content on the Standard Bank Cricket Blog it was found that content relating to the Standard Bank Pro20 series during the research time frame is more than double that of the content related to other topics. In total 69.8% of all blog posts (260 of 372) on the platform related directly to either the 2008 or 2009 Standard Bank Pro20 series', while the remaining 30.2% (112 of 372) related to Standard Bank international cricket. Significantly more blog posts were dedicated to the 2008 series than to the 2009 series with the ratio at 170 blog posts for the 2008 series to 90 for the 2009 series.

These high levels of Standard Bank Pro20 content may in part be due to the recruitment of a live blogging team tasked with providing updates about the Standard Bank Pro20 cricket matches as they take place at stadiums around the country. Blog posts by these bloggers are thus commissioned to relate to the Standard Bank Pro20 series in contrast to those blog posts created by independent cricket supporters who visit the blog.

An interesting conclusion can be made when comparing the ratio of comments about the Standard Bank Pro20 cricket series to the ratio of Standard Bank Pro20-related blog posts. While the blog posts indicate a high level of interest in the Standard Bank Pro20 cricket series which may be due to the commissioning of bloggers to report about the series, the comments by independent social media users visiting the blog overwhelmingly relate to Standard Bank international cricket rather than the Pro20

series'. Of the 195 comments made during the research time frame, over 74% (143 of 195) were made in response to blog posts about Standard Bank international cricket. Only 52 comments where made in response to 260 blog posts about the Standard Bank Pro20 series of both 2008 and 2009, with 40 comments being made in response to the 2008 Standard Bank Pro20 season and only 12 comments in response to the 2009 series.

Considering then that the comments to the blog posts are primarily made by independent social media users rather than members of a commissioned blogging team, it is clear that Standard Bank Cricket had a role in the manipulation of content on this social media platform so as to represent the Standard Bank Pro20 series'. Although Standard Bank Cricket may not have influenced the message content or tone of the blog posts by the blogging team, their efforts to secure a high level of relevant Standard Bank Pro20-related blog posts is revealed through the careful analysis of the platform's content. It is worth noting that most readers would not subject the social media content to such levels of scrutiny, and since the bloggers are not clearly identified as members of the blogging team, the majority of readers may not necessarily notice this manipulation of content on the platform.

- Facebook

Of the five social media channels analysed in the research for this case study, the Standard Bank Cricket fan page on Facebook demonstrates the highest level of interaction between the series and cricket supporters. In comparison to posts about Standard Bank international cricket, social media users commented significantly more about the Standard Bank Pro20 series' than about other topics.

A total of 204 wall posts were made in the research time frame of which an overwhelming 156 posts relate directly to the Standard Bank Pro20 2008 or 2009 series'. Although only one comment of the 14 comments made during the research period relates to the Standard Bank Pro20 series, this may be due to the very recent introduction of the "comment" and "like" features on Facebook. These features allow users to comment directly in reply to a post made by a user, and express their approval of a post by clicking on the "like" button beneath a post. Of the remaining 48 posts made

during the research period 44 related to Standard Bank international cricket while four was evaluated as spam as it was a promotion of other cricket groups on Facebook.

Other than the Standard Bank Cricket Blog, the Standard Bank Cricket fan page on Facebook is a good reflection of social media users' feelings about the series as the wall posts are primarily made by social media users, rather than individuals tasked by Standard Bank to write about the series. The size and growth of the group is also worth noting as 1 839 social media users were subscribed to the platform by 2 March 2009, while this figure grew to 2 124 by 8 September 2009.

From the high levels of conversation about the series by cricket supporters, it is clear that the Standard Bank Cricket fan page is a popular tool for social media users to interact with the series and that they are more likely to contribute to conversations on this platform than on any of the other channels analysed.

- YouTube

A total of 10 videos relating to the Standard Bank Pro20 series were uploaded onto the Standard Bank Pro20 channel on YouTube within the designated research framework, thus making all the videos on the channel relevant for analysis. Although the videos on the Standard Bank Pro20 channel were all watched more than once by social media users, none of the videos drew any commentary from social media users. As a platform to engage users in conversation about the Standard Bank Pro20 series', YouTube was not successful in eliciting consumer-driven dialogue about the series, but it did succeed in drawing viewers. In the context of the two Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs, YouTube thus functioned as a promotional platform, rather than a conversational platform, and therefore still holds value as a tool to create awareness about the series among social media users. As the Standard Bank Pro20 series is a sports entertainment product, it is likely that the videos in their YouTube format will be shared on other social media platforms making it a valuable element of these particular SMNRs.

The high level of views achieved by the videos on the Standard Bank Pro20 series is very encouraging to the series as it indicates that there is a significant interest in the

series among social media consumers. In total the 10 videos loaded onto the Standard Bank Pro20 series in 2008 and 2009 drew 5 727 views.

	Title/Topic	Number of views	Number of comments in research period	Relevancy ratio of comments (SB Pro20 versus other topics)
Video 1	Pro20 - Action from the Lions vs Eagles game at the Wanderers	409	0	N.A.
Video 2	Pro20 hard hat test	287	0	N.A.
Video 3	Pro20 Montage	433	0	N.A.
Video 4	The nailbiting last 3 balls of the CT semi-final	2 393	0	N.A.
Video 5	An entire Pro20 game in 3 minutes	747	0	N.A.
Video 6	Lions vs Zim - Crowd goes Wild	302	0	N.A.
Video 7	Lions vs Zim - Drop Catch	330	0	N.A.
Video 8	Go Lions!	107	0	N.A.
Video 9	Zim Rox	486	0	N.A.
Video 10	Lions Fans	233	0	N.A.

Table 17: Breakdown of views for videos on Standard Bank Pro20 YouTube channel

The YouTube platform, while not eliciting conversation about the series directly on the platform, is widely used and should therefore be preserved and applied in marketing efforts for the series. Consumer participation on the platform could be encouraged by engagement activities such as competitions.

- Twitter

Due to the merging of the Standard Bank Pro20 Twitter profile with that of the Standard Bank Cricket Twitter profile in June 2009, tweets made before the merger date were lost. This eliminated a great deal of data for the Twitter channel. The 800 tweets on the Standard Bank Cricket Twitter profile was analysed and it was found that none of the

tweets within the research time frame relate to Standard Bank Pro20 cricket. This may be due to the time at which the new profile was activated, as the activation occurred well after the 2009 Standard Bank Pro20 series was completed.

The second Twitter profile linked to by the 2009 Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR is that of "Myles the Butler", the Standard Bank Achiever Club representative on Twitter. The 86 tweets by Myles the Butler within the research period bore no relation to the Standard Bank Pro20 series, thus making the profile irrelevant to the cricket games itself. Many of the tweets did relate to finance, banking and the Standard Bank Achiever Club accounts, and thus link to the Standard Bank Achiever Club initiative that was linked to the Standard Bank Pro20 cricket series for the first time in 2009.

The Twitter channel does not allow users other than the profile creator to track the number of direct messages, retweets and @-tweets assigned to the Standard Bank Cricket platform. It also does not allow the space for users to comment or converse with each other or the brand directly on the dedicated Standard Bank Cricket platform. Potential conversation about the series among social media consumers can therefore not be traced for analysis in this study.

- Flickr

The Flickr Standard Bank Pro20 platform featured a total of 219 photographs relating to the Standard Bank Pro20 series' during the research time frame. Much like the YouTube platform, all the content on the Flickr platform was relevant to the series, but none of the content could draw any commentary from social media users. The relevancy ratio of the creator-generated content on the platforms is thus 100%, but the level of social media user-generated content on this platform is at 0%.

The Flickr platform remains a useful tool for the hosting of high resolution images for publication and should be included as a platform with pre-approved visuals that can be used by the media for publicity photographs. The photographs displaying the atmosphere and fan support during the games which may be full of character but not necessarily appropriate for traditional media publication can then be placed on the

Facebook platform as the Facebook platform clearly receives more attention from social media users than the Flickr platform does.

B) Message origins

From the content analysis performed on the contents of the dedicated social media platforms linked to by the two Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs the following conclusions were drawn with regards to the message origins:

- Standard Bank Cricket Blog

As was described in the above message ratio and statistics section of the case study, the Standard Bank Cricket Blog served as a space for fans of the Standard Bank Pro20 cricket series to converse about their views and favourite aspects of the Pro20 series, and later about Standard Bank Cricket in general, as the games unfolded. Visitors to the blog are encouraged to register and produce their own blog posts about Standard Bank international cricket or Standard Bank Pro20 cricket or read and comment on the blog posts by other social media users and Standard Bank Cricket representatives.

For both the 2008 and 2009 seasons, a Standard Bank Pro20 live blogger team was recruited to report about the games live from the stadiums around the country as the games were being played. According to the Standard Bank Pro20 2008 SMNR, the live bloggers were responsible for "[l]ive blogging […] at each Standard Bank Pro20 Series match to boost supporter conversation and involve a wider audience" (Standard Bank 2008), while the 2009-SMNR suggests that the "live blogging from every match will integrate the cricket and broadcast experience for both in-stadia spectators and TV viewers across South Africa" (Standard Bank 2009a). The messages produced by the bloggers were thus intended to create excitement about the series, provide up to date information about the games and encourage fans to go and watch the games live at the stadiums around the country.

This Standard Bank Pro20 live blogger team can be evaluated as intermediaries between the Standard Bank brand and cricket supporters as they are regular people who have been given the opportunity to become involved in the series and share their

experiences with cricket supporters. Essentially, the reader expects the bloggers to provide independent views about the series, thus lending an element of believability and trust to the contents created by these bloggers. Although the individuals recruited to be a part of this team were not necessarily employed by Standard Bank before the series', the content they produced while part of the Standard Bank Pro20 live blogging team was moderated and commissioned by Standard Bank. The content created by these bloggers can thus not be fully evaluated as user-generated content. In addition, not all bloggers declared their association as part of the recruited live blogging team, however the majority of these bloggers were identified as members of the live blogging team through suggestions and assertions in their blog posts.

The contents produced by the team of bloggers were subjected to a moderation process similar to the moderation process any other supporter wishing to create a blog on the site is subjected to. Standard Bank thus remains in control of the content created on the platform, even when not explicitly producing the texts under the Standard Bank Cricket profile.

From the content analysis of the communication on the Standard Bank Cricket Blog it was determined that a total of 34 of the 260 blogs relating to the Standard Bank Pro20 2008 and 2009 series' were created by clearly identifiable representatives of Standard Bank Cricket. An additional 204 blog posts (78.4%) were created by nine bloggers strongly believed to be part of the Standard Bank Pro20 dedicated live blogging team. Of these nine bloggers, four had participated in blogging about the games during the 2008 and 2009 seasons. The remaining 22 blog posts about the Standard Bank Pro20 during the research time frame were created by five bloggers who cannot be directly linked to the Standard Bank Pro20 live blogging team.

In terms of the comments made in response to the blog posts about the Standard Bank Pro20 series' on the platform, 43 of the 52 comments were made by social media users while seven comments were made by one of the nine bloggers associated with the live blogging team and two comments by one of the five bloggers who could not be directly linked to the blogging team. The comments to the blog posts are thus more representative of social media users' conversations about the brand than the blog posts itself due to the influence of the Standard Bank Pro20 live blogging team.

- Facebook

Around the same time of the merging of the Standard Bank Pro20 Blog and Twitter streams with the Standard Bank Cricket platforms, the Standard Bank Pro20 Facebook fan page merged with the Standard Bank Cricket fan page on the channel. All posts from the previous Pro20 fan page were carried across to the current Standard Bank Cricket platform.

The posts on the Standard Bank Cricket fan page were analysed to determine the message origins of the communication content on the platform. Of the 204 wall posts in the research period, 52 were clearly identifiable as being created by Standard Bank Cricket, while another 14 posts were made by users who can be associated with Standard Bank Cricket in some way. Some of these users included users who were identified as members of the Standard Bank Pro20 live blogging team from the Standard Bank Cricket Blog. The majority of the wall posts totalling 138 of the 204 posts were made by independent social media users who could not be linked to Standard Bank Cricket. Social media users as fans of Standard Bank Cricket were thus actively involved in the creation of messages on the Standard Bank Cricket fan page, and in particular the creation of messages about Standard Bank Pro20 cricket as 81.8% (113 of the 138 posts) of social media users' commentary on the fan page related to Standard Bank Pro20 cricket.

This again highlights that the Facebook platform used in the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR successfully stimulated and provided a space for conversation among social media users about the topics being advocated by the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs.

- YouTube

The YouTube videos on the Standard Bank Pro20 YouTube platform all represent creator-generated content created by Standard Bank. Two videos from the platform were embedded in each of the Standard Bank Pro20 2008 and 2009 SMNRs. The content of the videos on the platform and embedded in the SMNR is controlled by Standard Bank Cricket giving them the ability not only to disseminate their desired

message about the series through the videos, but also to control the comments that follow upon the videos.

Despite high viewer rates averaging at approximately 572 views per video for each of the 10 videos on the platform, social media consumers were not moved to comment on the videos on the channel. It may be possible that the videos were shared on other social media channels by the users, but not communication was created by social media user on the Standard Bank Pro20 YouTube platform itself. This detracts from the videos as positive comments to the videos may increase the videos ratings, thereby making it even more popular amongst social media users. In addition, positive comments may serve as motivation for users to interact with, attend, follow or learn about the series. The lack of commentary to the YouTube videos is however still more advantageous to the brand and the series than negative commentary would be.

- Twitter

Twitter as a micro-blogging platform only hosts creator-generated messages on the created profile. This means that communication content on both the Standard Bank Cricket and Myles the Butler profiles are created by communicators acting as representatives of Standard Bank Cricket or Myles the Butler. Both the Standard Bank Cricket and Myles the Butler Twitter profiles thus consist exclusively of communication generated by Standard Bank. No social media user-generated content is found on either of the profiles on this platform

- Flickr

Flickr is a platform for profile creators to upload photographs. All of the 219 photographs uploaded onto the Standard Bank Pro20 photostream can be viewed as creator-generated content as it was created and uploaded by representatives of Standard Bank Pro20. Since the platform elicited no user-generated commentary from other social media users, all of the messages on the channel originated from Standard Bank Pro20 as the creators of the platform. The Flickr platform as linked to in the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs did not succeed in stimulating user-generated conversation about the topics advocated in the SMNR, but must not be rejected as a social media platform. By

correctly managing the platform and approaching the platform creatively, organisations can stimulate user participation on the platform.

In the case of the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs, a potential solution to this challenge would be to create a group with a pool of user-submitted photographs relevant to the Standard Bank Pro20 series. Flickr users can then contribute their Standard Bank Pro20 photographs from their photostreams to the Standard Bank Pro20 pool of photographs. This tactic which uses available tools on Flickr may help increase the levels of engagement between social media users and the Standard Bank Pro20 brand. The traditional Standard Bank Pro20 photostream currently being used in the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs can continue to host high resolution pre-approved photographs for media publication, while Standard Bank Pro20 supporters can add their experiences and memories of the series (essentially captured as photographs) to the pool of photographs in the Standard Bank Pro20 group.

C) Message tone

An analysis of all relevant content from the social media platforms revealed the following dominant message tones for each of the Standard Bank Pro20 dedicated social media platforms:

- Standard Bank Cricket Blog

Of the 260 blog posts created on the Standard Bank Cricket Blog relating to the Standard Bank Pro20 series, approximately 104 blog posts were positive in tone towards the Standard Bank Pro20 series, while 139 blog posts were neutral to positive in tone. Only 17 blog posts were mixed in tone as both positive and negative attitudes towards the series were displayed, while no comments solely negative in tone were made.

Similar statistics were evident in the comments made to the blog posts as a total of 28 positive comments were made about the series, while 18 neutral and one mixed tone comment was made. The amount of negative comments was higher than the blog posts, but still relatively low at only five negative comments being made.

Bloggers whose blog posts displayed a positive attitude towards the Standard Bank Pro20 series described the series as "an awesome series" with "an amazing atmosphere at every match", "exciting cricket", and "epic" among others.

Many of the blogs described the atmosphere at the stadiums as well as their experiences of the games in the series. Some of the descriptions, quoted here directly from the blog, included:

- "I had a blast at every single game I attended, and I know that the crowd at Kingsmead, also loved every ball of every game."
- "It's going to be a cracker…"
- "The atmosphere in the stadium is electric, groups of spectators chanting, kids searching for autographs on a wonderful summers evening in Cape Town, could there be a better place in the world to watch cricket?"
- "never before have I ever seen such atmosphere at a cricket ground"
- "Tonight I think think there was KABOOM. And I'm pretty sure the other 10000 people in the stadium felt the same!"

(Standard Bank Cricket Blog 2009).

Comments of a similar positive tone were mostly about the performance of players, the atmosphere at the grounds and experience of the games, and the social media initiatives being used in the promotion of the Standard Bank Pro20 series. The players and teams were complimented on their performances, while many users described the fun experience of attending the cricket live. A number of users also commended Standard Bank for the social media strategy used in the promotion of the series as it helped to make the Pro20 experience more interactive.   Positive comments per topic included:

Performance of players:
- "As a proud fan of the defending pro20 Champs, I would like to extend my vote of confidence to Justin Ontong and his team ahead of our match with the dolphins tomorrow. GO HIGHVELD LIONS!!!"
- "I have a daughter (18) who is crazy about him, does he have a "blog". she would really like to meet in him. Hopefully at the final @ Newlands. Oh yes we are from Cape Town"
- "Too bad the Dolphins lost but hey, well played Titans. U lucky Titans: we neva had POLLY! I'm so keen 4 next season!"

Atmosphere at the grounds and game experiences:

- "We were at the stadium last night. A great atmosphere. It's the first time we went as a family - and I must say - we will be back."
- "Friday, 25 April was the best cricket jol eva I've experienced with all my best mates being there."
- "Thank you Standard Bank 4 making this Pro20 season our most enjoyable one ever! Looking forward to next season, we will be back! LOUDER, BIGGER AND BETTER!!!!"
- "I like cricket"
- "It's going to be so awesome."
- "Pro20 cricket is the biggest and the best jol in the world!"

Social media initiatives:

- "I must say I really enjoy reading Michael's blog! Informative and says exactly what you need to hear!"
- "Nice to see some live blogging here. Keep up the good work"
- "Great to see standard bank getting the Pro20 online & trying to be more interactive"
- "The live blog is a cool idea and it makes watching cricket truly an interactive experience. PS: I also like the Twitter initiative... Keep it up!"

<div align="right">(Standard Bank Cricket Blog 2009).</div>

The amount and intensity of negative comments was significantly lower than the positive comments and most negative comments were directed at the performance of the teams or logistics issues with the games. Only one comment displayed a clearly negative tone towards the series after a game had been cancelled due to rain. The user stated that they got their "friends together, we drive 70km OUT OF CAPE TOWN to a match that is canceled. Thanks for nothing! 140km worth of petrol wasted!". Although Standard Bank cannot be held responsible for the weather conditions that caused the match to be cancelled, it does create the impression that user was treated unfairly by not receiving compensation for their ticket.

Overall the Standard Bank Cricket Blog displays a positive image of the series through its communication tone. The recruitment of a blogging team as well as the moderation of content may have assisted in securing the primarily neutral to positive tone of the blog posts and comments on the platform.

- Facebook

The Facebook platform linked to by the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs displayed communication that was mostly positive or neutral in tone. Only two posts out of 156 wall posts relating to the Standard Bank Pro20 series made within the research time frame were negative in tone. Twelve wall posts in total were mixed in tone, eight being made by social media users and four being made by representatives of Standard Bank. Social media users clearly had a positive disposition towards the Standard Bank Pro20 2008 and 2009 series as a total of 70 positive wall posts were made in relation to the 33 neutral posts. Standard Bank Cricket also contributed to the conversations on the platform by creating six positive and 42 neutral wall posts, allowing them to remain engaged in the conversation without appearing to be leading the tone of the communication on the platform.

As Facebook is the most active platform for social media users to interact with the Standard Bank Pro20 series on, the generally positive tone of user comments adds significant value to the platform. Since many users interact with the series through the platform, the positive tone of the comments may help to motivate users to follow or support the series. Considering also that the majority of the comments were made by independent social media users rather than Standard Bank Cricket, the wall posts gain an element of truth and accuracy not usually associated with content generated by an organisation itself.

- YouTube

Although the YouTube platform allows users to comment on the videos uploaded by users, the videos on the Standard Bank Pro20 YouTube channel did not elicit any comments from social media users, despite the high number of views per video. The message tone of the videos posted by Standard Bank Pro20 are all positive in tone towards the Standard Bank Pro20 series, however this content does not qualify as user-generated content as the videos were moderated by Standard Bank. No social media user-generated contents could thus be analysed to determine users of this platform's tone towards the Standard Bank Pro20 series.

- Twitter

As Twitter operates as a creator-generated channel, the tweets on the Standard Bank Cricket and Myles the Butler profiles are expectedly positive or neutral in nature. The platform is not intended to host conversation between the social media users and the organisation directly on the creator's profile and therefore does not display any messages potentially directed at Standard Bank Cricket or Myles the Butler on the platform. In addition, none of the communication content on either of the profiles related to the Standard Bank Pro20 series, therefore the tone of messages on the Twitter channel could not be analysed as a social media platform that may reveal the attitudes of social media users towards the Standard Bank Pro20 series.

- Flickr

Similarly, Flickr is also a creator-generated channel. For the social media strategy employed as part of the release of the Standard Bank Pro20 2008 and 2009 SMNRs, Standard Bank Pro20 only created a Standard Bank Pro20 photostream displaying pre-approved content relating to the Standard Bank Pro20 series. Although users who visited this profile could post comments on the photographs uploaded by Standard Bank Pro20, no comments were made. The Standard Bank Pro20 Flickr platform thus did not successfully engage users in conversation about the series on the platform itself and as such does not provide social media user comments for tone analysis purposes.

D) Message themes

In order to determine the thematic nature of the communication content on the dedicated social media platforms linked to by the Standard Bank Pro20 social media news releases, a detailed assertions analysis was performed on selected content from the platforms. Content was selected for analysis based on its meeting of the inclusion criteria as detailed in the Samsung Omnia i900 case study. These criteria include a) that messages on the social media platforms must have been created within the research time frame for this case study of 9 April 2008 to 11 August 2009, b) must be user generated, thus created by subscribers to the dedicated social media platforms, and c)

must not include foreign language or spam contents. As was experienced with the content on the Samsung Blog, the large amount of content on the Standard Bank Cricket Blog required the inclusion of an additional criterion which stated that only blog posts and comments directly related to the Standard Bank Pro20 series were considered for analysis.

After applying these inclusion criteria to the content of the dedicated social media platforms linked to by the two social media news releases, the content used for the assertions analysis was identified as the Standard Bank Pro20 posts from the Standard Bank Cricket Blog, and the wall posts from the Standard Bank Cricket fan page on Facebook. The Standard Bank Pro20 posts from the Blog were included as user-generated content to be analysed as the bloggers, whether part of the blogging team or not, expressed their opinions and interpretation of the matches in the series and were subjected to a uniform moderation process. Although Standard Bank may have had a more significant hand in the content of the blog posts by the blogging team, they are intermediaries between the brand and the supporters, rather than fully employed representatives from Standard Bank. The bloggers thus retain a level of autonomy in their reporting.

A detailed assertions analysis of the content from the two social media platforms revealed a number of themes which were then compared across the two platforms to determine correlations in themes across the two platforms. Four themes were consequently identified as overarching communication themes in the content across the two platforms namely "Standard Bank Pro20 games", "Players and Teams", "Standard Bank/Pro20 brand", and "Social media initiatives".

Each of the four identified themes and its subthemes on the two Standard Bank Pro20 social media platforms will be discussed in this section of the research report.

Theme 1: Standard Bank Pro20 games

The theme relating to the Standard Bank Pro20 games was especially prominent on the Standard Bank Cricket Blog. Each of the Standard Bank Pro20-related blogs featured this theme primarily due to the fact that the majority of blogs on the site were created by

the Standard Bank Pro20 live blogging team tasked with reporting on the games. While the Standard Bank Cricket Facebook fan page content displayed this team slightly less than the Standard Bank Cricket Blog, the theme still resonated clearly in the social media user-generated content.

On the Standard Bank Cricket Blog, conversation around this theme was mentioned explicitly 99 times in blog posts in the 2009 season and 139 times in blog posts in the 2008 season, apart from those blogs reporting on scores directly from the games. Blog posts relating to this theme featured eight subthemes including dialogue about the entertaining nature of the games (45 of 238), the atmosphere at the grounds (29 of 238), the tension and excitement created by the games (20 of 238), the crowds at the stadiums (78 of 238), the marketing used in the stadiums (26 of 238), the weather (42 of 238), technical problems experienced including cancelled games (8 of 238), and boredom at games (9 of 238). A number of these subthemes were often mentioned together in blog posts.

From the blog posts relating to this theme it is clear that the subthemes are in many cases inextricably linked as topics for the blogs. Bloggers often described the atmosphere, crowds, weather and marketing at the stadiums along with the tension and excitement created by the games as the elements that cause the Standard Bank Pro20 series to be entertaining. Although the series is though to be about the results of the cricket games being played, the blog posts highlight that there is much more to the Standard Bank Pro20 series in the mind of the supporters than simply the score to the games. Each of these eight elements plays a role in determining how the supporters experience the games and the series as a whole. In the blog posts as well as the comments these elements were primarily approached in a positive way with the Standard Bank Pro20 matches being described as highly entertaining. By highlighting some of the comments in the blog posts it is possible to trace the link between these eight elements and demonstrate how these elements are together considered as a measure of the social media users' experience of the series. Some of the comments illustrating these subthemes as an integrated unit include:

- "The crowd wasn't big, but the vibe in the stadium was still great!"

- "The atmosphere is electric, and the DJ & dancers are keeping us going. Castle Corner is flowing out the beer to the masses, and the smell of boerie rolls is thick in the air."
- "Out come the dancers, up goes the crowds arms, and SuperSport Park has come alive!"
- "The crowd tonight were fantastic, and there was a great atmosphere around the ground"
- "It's sunny, the stadium is packed and the mood is great!"
- "the vibe is certainly an enthusiastic one, with pumping tunes, hot dancers and hundreds of shiny blue hardhats all adding to the fun-filled mix that is Pro20 cricket!"
- "After an exhilirating 1st over, the heavens opened and it rained for about 20 minutes. Thankfully it's stopped and the ground staff are pulling off the covers. […] The crowd have been pretty relaxed and are ready for action. Yay! The game is back on in 3 minutes and no overs have been lost!"
- "Despite the lack of play, the crowd has been kept entertained by Hardy the mascot, as well as the Pro20 DJ"
- "Due to the rain, the game has been called off, which is a disappointment. The highlight of the wait were the streakers who managed to outrun the security,to the huge roar of support of the crowd who remained"
- "When the weather's like that, you have to KNOW that it's going to be a good night for cricket at Newlands"
- "The weather is perfect, and the vibe is as cheerful as ever. This crowd has full faith in the Cobras"

(Standard Bank Cricket Blog 2009).

The Standard Bank Cricket Facebook fan page displays the theme of the Standard Bank Pro20 games slightly less than the content on the Standard Bank Cricket Blog. Of the 156 wall posts about the Standard Bank Pro20 series, 28 wall posts related to the excitement and anticipation of social media users for the games, social media users' favourite moments from the games, the marketing of the games and the disappointment of having games cancelled due to weather or technical problems.

From the wall posts it is clear that the social media users who commented on the Facebook fan page are very involved with the series as they describe their excitement and joy over teams winning, their anticipation for games, their love for the teams, their enjoyment of the games and choose and debate about their favourite moments with other users.

User comments about the Standard Bank Pro20 series on the Standard Bank Cricket fan page which related to the theme and subthemes of "Standard Bank Pro20 games" in some instances also referred to subthemes identified in the blog posts on the Standard Bank Cricket blog such as the weather and the crowds, and included statements such as:

- "that [the game] was so hot!"
- "My Favorite moment was not being beaten by the Eagles but BEATING them in the Semi Final! When it trully matters!"
- "Was @ Kingsmead last week to watch the Dolphins in action in da semis were dey whipped da eagles BUTT. We went as 3 but ended up meeting frends and became a group of 20 as we cheered da dolphins on... we had a good consumption of 5 jugs of beer... which helped us entertain da crowd around us.."
- "Brian Jerling getting hit in in the 'nuts' of the Jacques Rudolf sweep!Eagles vs Titans"
- "My favourite KABOOM moment was the Highveld Lions home victory over Zimbabwe. To Robert Mugabe and ZANU PF: KAAABOOOM!!!"
- "Although the Brian Jerling 'ball hitting ball' was something not seen everyday, but, my decision on the best moment of the Pro 20 series was difficult. I was playing "eeny meeney miny mo" between the hat - tricks by Ethy Mbhalathi and Charl Langeveldt, AND the 10 wicket win of the eagles against the Dolphins; because all three of those moments were absolutely awesome! But, I guess the final decision would be the stance of Jacques Rudolph and loots Bosman."
- "Of course the best memory is yeat to come when the Dolphins lift the trophy in Durban on Fridya night! Look out for me in the crowd!"
- "The entire series has been an absolute joy to watch! There has been everything in terms of entertainment and excitement"
- "Umpire brain jerling's painful field expidition is a memory that wont b forgotten 2 soon...."
- "Great game today, stressed the hell outta me!"
- "According to Weather - 24.com; Cape Town, Sunday, Sunny, 13°C - 19°C. Game is ON BABY! :) I'm still praying though!"

<div align="right">(Standard Bank Cricket Facebook 2009).</div>

From the content on the Standard Bank Cricket Blog and the Standard Bank Cricket Facebook fan page, social media users had a high tendency to converse about the games in the series and their experiences of the different elements of these games. This may be due to the fact that the games provide a common touchpoint for all social media users who follow the series to converse about as most users who watched or

attended the games will have knowledge of or be aware of the points raised or reminisced about by the user who posts something on the wall. Social media users through their support of the series thus share a level of common understanding around the topic.

When comparing the content of the social media platforms to that of the Standard Bank Pro20 social media news releases, it is clear that these elements of excitement, anticipation, marketing, and stadium crowds were also considered as important topics in the SMNRs. The theme of the Standard Bank Pro20 games in the social media content resonates with the two themes of series features and in-stadium marketing features identified in the SMNRs. Both social media platforms thus successfully elicit conversations among social media consumers about these two elements of the social media news releases, thereby supporting and supplementing the messages of the SMNR.

Theme 2: Players and Teams

From the communication on the Standard Bank Cricket Blog and Standard Bank Cricket Facebook fan page, it is clear that social media users had a particular interest in the performance of players and teams in the Standard Bank Pro20 series. Being a sports series support for and rivalry between teams became a major theme in communication as social media users expressed their approval or disapproval of players and teams' performances and urged their favourite teams on. These types of messages are essentially positioned within a greater conversational context as each user who expresses their support for a particular team positions their support against the rest of the teams. This type of friendly rivalry encourages debate and escalates levels of engagement on the social media platform. The Standard Bank Cricket Facebook fan page is a particularly useful example of this engagement as users were very vocal about their support for their favourite teams and at the same time expressed their hope that the other teams would lose the matches or series.

This theme of "Players and Teams" was the most prevalent content theme on the Facebook platform. Single wall posts often made mention of players and teams thus totalling 157 mentions of either Standard Bank Pro20 players or teams in only 113 wall

posts created by social media users and relating to the Standard Bank Pro20 series during the research period. Social media users conversed overwhelmingly more about the teams than about individual players as 143 of the 157 comments were made about the teams participating in the Standard Bank Pro20 2008 and 2009 seasons in relation to only 14 comments made about individual players.

Of the 143 comments made about teams participating in the Standard Bank Pro20 2008 and 2009 series', supporters of the Nashua Dolphins, Nashua Titans and Nashua Cape Cobras are the most vocal in their support on the platform. These three teams constituted 39, 35 and 32 of the 143 comments each, with the Bizhub Highveld Lions, Gestetner Diamond Eagles, Chevrolet Warriors and Zimbabwe lagging behind with 17, 11, seven and two comments each. According to the Standard Bank Cricket website (Standard Bank Pro20 2009), the Nashua Dolphins and Nashua Cape Cobras finished the 2009 season in first and second place respectively, while the Nashua Titans ended the series at the bottom of the log. The Nashua Cape Cobras won the 2009 series in the final match. The excellent results of the Dolphins and Cape Cobras teams may have contributed to their popularity among social media users, while the Nashua Titans came into the 2009 season as the defending champions after winning the 2008 series, thus making them a popular choice among supporters.

Social media users expressed their support and admiration for the teams in the series with intensely emotional expressions such as "WE STILL LOVE YOU!!!", "i love the titans!!!", "hope u all love the cobras as much as i do", "Dolphins and Cobras for LIFE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!", and "Dolphins forever!!!". Other users indicated that their favourite teams should be the winners of the series or are the best team with expressions such as "Dolphins rule!!!!!", "Cobras rule Big time!!!", "LIONS RULEEEEEEEEE", "WaRrIoRs RULE!", "THE LIONS ARE THE BEST", "COBBBRAAAAAASSSSSSSSSS ! TOP THE POPS !" and "Dolphins are going to b Pro20 champions. Go Dolphins!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" (Standard Bank Cricket Facebook 2009).

Assertions that were also popular on the Facebook platform was the expression of which team will be superior against another team in a particular match or the series as a whole. Users were particularly enthusiastic in their support for their favourite teams as well as their criticism of other teams and their supporters with statements such as "Dolphins are

going to beat the lions tonite go dolphins!!!!!!!!!!!!!", "Cobras people!!!!...WE GNA WIN NO MATTER WHAT!!!!...Titans and warriors can go play in the sand..." and "NA ITS gona be the dubz boys who r gona fucking distroy the titans!!!!!!!!!!!!! hahahaha sowi titans fans hahah losers!!!" (Standard Bank Cricket Facebook 2009).

The contents of the Standard Bank Cricket Blog in contrast, also featured a high number of posts related to the topic of "Players and Teams", but the primary focus here was on the quality of performance by the players and teams in the series. A total of 63 blog posts mentioned the excellent performance by individuals or teams in the series while 33 blog posts highlighted the poor performance by players or teams during the matches in the 2008 or 2009 season. The intensity of emotions surrounding this theme as displayed by social media users on the Facebook platform was not seen in the Standard Bank Cricket Blog posts. Bloggers approached the topic in a much more restrained manner, providing commentary and analysis rather than enthusiastic support for a particular player or team. This may be attributed to the majority of the bloggers' status as members of the live blogging team, which could have influenced them to take a more neutral stance towards the games and teams than they would necessarily have had if they were blogging independently as social media users.

Essentially the commentary provided through the Standard Bank Cricket Blog took on the style of reporting on a sporting event, whereas the Facebook platform provided the opportunity for supporters to exuberantly and spontaneously voice their support for their teams. Both platforms succeeded in stimulating conversation about the latent theme of the SMNRs, namely the Standard Bank Pro20 matches, and in addition the Standard Bank Cricket Facebook platform succeeded in encouraging excitement and support among cricket fans which remains one of the major goals of the SMNR and related social media marketing of the series.

Theme 3: Standard Bank/Pro20 brand

An expected theme that manifested on the Standard Bank Cricket Blog is that of conversation around Standard Bank as the brand sponsor for the Pro20 series. Social media users expressed their thanks and appreciation towards Standard Bank for the series and its various features as well as the new media initiatives used in the series.

While the Standard Bank Cricket Blog displayed this theme prevalently the Standard Bank Cricket Facebook fan page featured little commentary on this aspect. This may in part be due to the posts by bloggers who were part of the Standard Bank Pro20 live blogging team as they thanked Standard Bank for the opportunity to be a part of the series. In addition to the gratitude expressed for being invited to blog from the matches, the bloggers also commended Standard Bank on their efforts to bring the series closer to cricket supporters through social media initiatives. These posts are very closely linked to the fourth identified theme in the communications, namely the social media initiatives used by Standard Bank in the two Standard Bank Pro20 series'. Blog posts featuring such messages of thanks and compliment towards Standard Bank include:

- "In this regard Standard Bank are true legends for accommodating such an awesome series and should be congratulated for supplying the fans with an amazing atmosphere at every match. Thank You Very Much!"
- "A big thanks to the guys at Standard Bank for the most awesome opportunity to blog & tweet the games."
- "Seeing the game from the Standard Bank Achiever box, has been unbelievable. A big big thanks to Standard Bank for the opportunity to blog the game from here."
- "Thank you Standard Bank 4 making this Pro20 season our most enjoyable one ever!"
- "A big thanks to the guys at Standard Bank for the most awesome opportunity to blog & tweet the games."

(Standard Bank Cricket Blog 2009).

As can be seen by the content of the above messages, the social media initiatives used by Standard Bank in the Pro20 series' are an important component of the services and opportunities provided by Standard Bank that social media users are thanking the company for. This constitutes the fourth theme identified in the communication.

Theme 4: Social media initiatives

Theme four of the communication on the social media platforms closely correlates to a very important theme in both the 2008 and 2009 Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs, namely the launch and application of social media initiatives in the marketing and promotion of the Standard Bank Pro20 series.

As was seen in theme three discussed above, the social media initiatives used in the campaign drew significant attention both from the members of the live blogging teams and from other social media users on both platforms. This topic was most popular on the Standard Bank Cricket Blog drawing 52 comments in blog posts. While the live blogging team thanked Standard Bank for allowing them the opportunity to use social media to interact with other supporters live from the matches, social media consumers who commented on the Standard Bank Cricket Blog expressed their compliments to Standard Bank for taking the initiative to use social media in their campaign. The new social media initiatives were also mentioned by Facebook platform users, although they did not express their comments about the platforms itself, rather displaying an awareness of the platforms as opposed to explicit approval of the platforms.

What is important to note with regards to this theme is that both users with affiliations to Standard Bank as well as independent social media users complimented and conversed about this topic on both platforms. Apart from thanking Standard Bank for the opportunity to blog and tweet from the matches as was seen in the discussion on theme three in this section of the research report, bloggers on the Standard Bank Cricket Blog also called the use of social media by Standard Bank "exciting features" and "admirable efforts at leveraging social media platforms to maximise interest in the Pro20 Series". This admiration for Standard Bank as a market-leading innovator is most clearly captured in the following blog post by a member of the live blogging team:

> It has been a ground-breaking season of the Pro20 this year, with Standard Bank going all out for the fans, and treading on turf no other sport sponsor has ever been. Standard Bank has gone social, with the inclusion of a [Facebook group](#), [YouTube channel](#), [Twitter feeds](#), [Flickr](#), MXit as well as this blog. And have released the first [Social Media Press Release](#) (Standard Bank Cricket Blog 2009).

Social media users on the Facebook platform though not expressing admiration or thanks to Standard Bank about the social media initiatives took note of the social media campaign which was used in the series as the following wall posts reflect:

- "Can anyone tell me how to load Standard Bank Pro20 onto mixit? You need a cell number and now I am cinfused.... Thanks"

- "When does the youtube/video competition finish? I can't see any dates on the stadard bank site..."
- "http://blog.standardbankpro20.co.za/heidi-schneigansz/2008/04/and-crowd-goes-wild THAT'S ME!!! AMISH!!! LEADING THAT WARCRY!!! WELL DONE DOLPHINS!!! WE STILL LOVE YOU!!! D.H.S. FOREVER!!!"

<div align="right">(Standard Bank Cricket Facebook 2009).</div>

Two social media users commenting on the blog posts made on the Standard Bank Cricket Blog also revealed awareness and an intention to interact with the series through the social media platforms as they queried about the Mxit platform. Other social media users were however more encouraging in their evaluation of the social media platforms complimenting the initiative to blog live from the game and increase interactivity through social media channels:

- "The live blog is a cool idea and it makes watching cricket truly an interactive experience. PS: I also like the Twitter initiative... Keep it up!"
- "Great to see standard bank getting the Pro20 online & trying to be more interactive."
- "I think your blog is class and why aren't you in India"
- "Enjoying the Blogging? What about that hatrick from Langeveldt"
- "Nice to see some live blogging here. Keep up the good work."
- "I must say I really enjoy reading Michael's blog! Informative and says exactly what you need to hear!"

<div align="right">(Standard Bank Cricket Blog 2009).</div>

In overview, both the Standard Bank Cricket Blog and the Standard Bank Cricket Facebook platform succeeded in creating awareness and drawing conversation among social media users about the social media initiatives being used by Standard Bank in the promotion of the Standard Bank Pro20 series of 2008 and 2009. Through its link to the SMNR, these platforms thus helped support the message of the social media news releases by activating its contents on the social media platforms. The positive feedback garnered on the Standard Bank Cricket Blog illustrates that Standard Bank's move towards the integration of social media in its promotional campaign was noticed and appreciated by social media users.

Regardless of the communication content generated by social media users on the platforms, the very fact that supporters joined and subscribed to the social media channels serve as proof that the channels are being used by supporters. Through the social media channels linked to the two Standard Bank Pro20 social media news releases, including the Standard Bank Cricket Blog, Standard Bank Cricket Facebook fan page, Standard Bank Cricket Twitter feed, Myles the Butler Twitter feed, Standard Bank Pro20 Flickr photostream, and Standard Bank Pro20 YouTube channel, well over 8739 supporters have interacted with the Standard Bank Pro20 brand through social media (based on the breakdown of subscribers per platform as indicated in Chapter 3 of this treatise).

4.3.4   Survey: Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs

To substantiate the data collected and analysed in the case study of the two Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs, an online survey was conducted among social media users subscribed to one or more of the Standard Bank Pro20 dedicated social media channels. Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous and respondents were required to be over 21 years of age and subscribed to one or more of the dedicated social media platforms linked to by the SMNR. Due to the relatively small sample size, the survey results do not intend to provide data that can be generalised across the broader population, but provide valuable insights into the use of the social media platforms by consumers and substantiates the data collected through content analysis.

A total of 28 respondents partook in the survey within the period of 11 August 2009 to 31 October 2009, but only 23 of the survey responses were valid for analysis due to incomplete survey responses.

A breakdown and analysis of responses will be provided in the following section including details on respondents' answers for the categories of:
   A) Biographical information
   B) General social media usage patterns
   C) Brand-specific social media interaction patterns
   D) Motivation for brand-specific social media interaction
   E) Perception of content

F) SMNR correlation

G) Awareness of brand-specific social media platform, and

H) Attitudes towards social media marketing.

4.3.4.1 Standard Bank Pro20 survey responses

A) Biographical details

To protect the privacy of respondents, the survey was conducted in such a way that respondents would remain anonymous at all times. Respondents were asked to voluntarily provide indicate their gender and age for statistical purposes.   Of the 23 respondents, 12 respondents were female while 11 were male.

Gender	Number of responses
Male	11
Female	12
Total	**23**

Table 18: Breakdown of respondents' gender in Standard Bank Pro20 survey

In terms of respondents' age, a wide range of respondents answered the survey with ages ranging between 21 and 52 years, with the majority of respondents (6 of 23) being 22 years of age. This indicates the wide appeal of the Standard Bank Pro20 series to people of all ages, as well as the ability of social media to reach people across the spectrum in South Africa.

Age	Number of responses
21 years	2
22 years	6
23 years	2
24 years	4
25 years	2
26 years	1
27 years	1
29 years	1

31 years	1
33 years	1
40 years	1
52 years	1
Total	**23**

Table 19: Breakdown of respondents' age in Standard Bank Pro20 survey

B) General social media usage patterns

Respondents were asked to indicate their general usage patterns of particular social media channels corresponding to the social media platforms used in the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs. From the results of this section of the survey, the popularity of certain social media channels among social media users in South Africa could be determined for the future creation of social media strategies in the South African public relations industry.

How often do you use the following social media (Please tick the answer that is closest to your usage pattern):

	Daily	2 to 4 times a week	Once a week	Once every two weeks	Once a month	Never	Number of Respondents
Facebook	78% (18)	8% (2)	0% (0)	0% (0)	8% (2)	4% (1)	23
Mxit	36% (8)	18% (4)	0% (0)	0% (0)	4% (1)	40% (9)	22
Twitter	9% (2)	0% (0)	13% (3)	13% (3)	4% (1)	59% (13)	22
Blogs	4% (1)	13% (3)	4% (1)	18% (4)	13% (3)	45% (10)	22
YouTube	13% (3)	13% (3)	18% (4)	9% (2)	31% (7)	13% (3)	22

Number of Respondents	***23***
Number or respondents who skipped this question	***0***

Table 20: Standard Bank Pro20 survey respondents' social media usage patterns

Like the results of the Samsung Omnia i900 survey revealed, the Standard Bank Pro20 survey respondents' usage patterns of the indicated social media channels shows that Facebook is the clear favourite social media channel among users. A total of 22 of the 23 respondents indicated that they use the channel, with 18 users accessing the channel on a daily basis. Based on the total number of users who use the channel (20 of 22 respondents to this question), YouTube is the second most popular channel among users, although Mxit is very popular as a social media channel accessed daily. Eight of

the 22 respondents who answered this section of the question indicated that they use Mxit daily, whereas only three respondents used YouTube on a daily basis.

Echoing the results of the Samsung Omnia i900 survey, Twitter was again the least used social media channel with only nine of 22 respondents to this section of the question indicating that they make use of the channel.

C) Brand-specific social media interaction patterns

This section of the survey aimed to determine which Standard Bank Pro20 dedicated social media platforms respondents are using to interact with the Standard Bank Pro20 series, as well as to determine their levels of participation on the platforms. For the purpose of the case study, pre-set social media channels representative of those platforms linked to by the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs were indicated while social media users could also provide details about other social media channels used to interact with the Standard Bank Pro20 series.

Which of the following social media sites do you use to interact with Standard Bank Pro20 Cricket?	% of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Facebook	95.45%	21
Twitter	13.63%	3
YouTube	27.27%	6
Flickr	4.54%	1
Blogs	13.63%	3
Mxit	13.63%	3
Number of respondents		*22*
Number or respondents who skipped this question		*1*

Table 21: Standard Bank Pro20 survey respondents' usage of Standard Bank Pro20 dedicated social media platforms

As was seen in section B, the majority of social media users made use of the Facebook channel, thus it is no surprise that over 95% of respondents (21 of 22) said they interact with the Standard Bank Pro20 series through the Standard Bank Cricket Facebook fan page. YouTube was the second most used social media platform to interact with the Standard Bank Pro20 series which is in line with the analysis of the 10 YouTube videos

on the Standard Bank Pro20 channel which received a large total of 5 270 views. The Standard Bank Cricket Blog, the Standard Bank Cricket and Myles the Butler Twitter feeds and the Standard Bank Pro20 contact on the Mxit mobile platform garnered equal support, while only one user interacted with the series through Flickr.

In terms of respondents' participation on these social media platforms it was found that 31% (7 of 22) respondents have commented on an aspect of the Standard Bank Pro20 series on social media channels, while 8 of 22 respondents also uploaded relevant content such as videos, photographs or links to a Standard Bank Pro20 social media platform. Of those users who have commented about an aspect of the Standard Bank Pro20 series on a dedicated social media platform, six users indicated that they have entered into a discussion with other supporters about the series on one of the dedicated Standard Bank Pro20 social media platforms.   Although only seven social media users had commented about the series on a social media platform, a total of 16 of 22 respondents said they would likely comment positively about the series if they were to make a comment on a social media platform. Three respondents showed a negative disposition towards the series saying their comments about the series would likely be negative, while another three users were uncertain about what the likely tone of their comments about the series would be.

When asked whether or not they have spoken about a topic other than the Standard Bank Pro20 series on one of the dedicated social media platform, a total of five users of 22 responded that they had spoken about a topic other than the Standard Bank Pro20 series. This may be linked to the merging of the Standard Bank Pro20 platform with the Standard Bank Cricket platform as the same single platform now serves as a space for conversation about both the Pro20 series and Standard Bank international cricket. A total of 18 wall posts were made about Standard Bank international cricket on the Standard Bank Cricket Facebook platform during the research period, while this topic was conversed about in 112 blog posts and 143 comments on the Standard Bank Cricket Blog in the research period.

Please answer the following questions:

	Yes	No	Uncertain	Number of Respondents
I have commented on an aspect of Standard Bank Pro20 cricket on a dedicated social media channel	31% (7)	68% (15)	0% (0)	22
I have not uploaded any Standard Bank Pro20-related content such as photographs or videos to a dedicated social media channel	36% (8)	59% (13)	4% (1)	22
I have not entered a discussion about Standard Bank Pro20 cricket with fellow users on a dedicated social media channel	27% (6)	72% (16)	0% (0)	22
If I comment about Standard Bank Pro20 on a dedicated social media channel my comments are usually positive	72% (16)	13% (3)	13% (3)	22
I have spoken about topics other than Standard Bank Pro20 cricket on a dedicated social media channel	22% (5)	72% (16)	4% (1)	22

Number of Respondents	*22*
Number or respondents who skipped this question	*1*

Table 22: Standard Bank Pro20 survey respondents' participation on Standard Bank Pro20 dedicated social media platforms

From the results in this section of the survey it is clear that the majority of respondents also fit the usage profile of "tourists" on virtual communities (Kozinets 1999:255). Although users are subscribed to the platforms or use the channels to interact with the Standard Bank Pro20 series, the interaction is not necessarily explicit, nor two-way. A large portion of the users had never actively participated in the generation of content on the social media platforms in the guise of conversations or comments, or other uploaded content. While the users thus join the platforms and in some instances may browse the content on the platforms, the majority of them choose to be latent members of the platforms rather than social media community leaders.

D) Motivation for brand-specific social media interaction

From the responses to this section of the survey, conclusions can be drawn about aspects of the social media consumers' motivation for joining the Standard Bank Pro20 dedicated social media channels.

Motivation for participation on social media channel:

	Yes	No	Maybe	Number of Respondents
Being part of the Standard Bank Pro20 cricket dedicated social media channel makes me feel more involved with the game	68% (15)	18% (4)	13% (3)	22
None of my friends are part of the Standard Bank Pro20 cricket dedicated social media channels	22% (5)	63% (14)	13% (3)	22
I have not made new friends on the Standard Bank Pro20 cricket dedicated social media channels	45% (10)	54% (12)	0% (0)	22
I browse content on Standard Back Pro20 dedicated social media channels to learn more about the game	71% (15)	23% (5)	4% (1)	21
I browse content on Standard Back Pro20 dedicated social media channels for entertainment	77% (17)	22% (5)	0% (0)	22

Number of Respondents	*22*
Number or respondents who skipped this question	*1*

Table 23: Standard Bank Pro20 survey respondents' response to motivational factors for joining the dedicated social media platforms

The respondents' answers to this section of the survey reveals information about their motivations for joining the social media platform based on three main factors, namely the needs fulfilled by the social media content, the feelings of community and involvement, and the influence of friends. The most popular motivational factor for joining the Standard Bank Pro20 social media platforms related to the browsing of content for entertainment purposes, as indicated by 17 of 22 respondents. Slightly less respondents (15 of 21) stated that they browse content of the Standard Bank Pro20 social media platforms to learn more about the game, but these two factors may still be considered as two major motivational factors for respondents to join the platforms.

A ratio of 68% of respondents (15 of 22) stated that their use of the Standard Bank Pro20 dedicated social media platforms made them feel more involved with the series. Only four participants stated that the social media channels did not make them feel more involved with the series, while three other respondents stated that they were unsure whether or not the social media platforms help them feel more involved with the series. In overview, this indicates that the social media links in the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR are largely successful in creating a space for involvement with the Standard Bank Pro20 brand as users feel notably more involved with the series through their participation on

the dedicated social media platforms used to promote the series. Although not all participants actively engage in the creation of new content on the platforms, their browsing of content still contributes to their feelings of involvement with the brand. This may be contributed to the functioning of the social media platforms as a touchpoint for potential contact between social media users and the brand itself, as well as the respondents' frequency of social media usage. A total of 78% of respondents indicated that they use Facebook on a daily basis and 36% use Mxit on a daily basis, therefore the addition of the Standard Bank Pro20 social media platforms to these channels may significantly increase their exposure to the brand during their daily communication routine.

The final motivational factor examined the influence of friends on the respondents' likelihood to join the social media platforms. Well over half of the respondents (14 of 22) indicated that their friends were also subscribed to the Standard Bank Pro20 dedicated social media platforms, while 12 of 22 respondents indicated that they had made new friends on the platforms. These results indicate that an activity by one respondent on a social media channel may motivate their connections on the channel to behave in a similar way, thus creating a trend of behaviour within a particular community of social media users. A comment by one of the respondents supports this suggestion of community behaviour on social media:

> "I primarily signed up for the information aspect of the cricket - not for any other fancy reason. Other Face book friends joined also after I have joined. I generally follow cricket using a whole range of news channels so social media is yet another information source for me."

From the additional comments and answers to the open-ended question in section 2 of the survey, it was found that entertainment and information were equal in motivational strength for respondents to join the Standard Bank Pro20 social media channels. Communication with other supporters and the activities of friends on social media channels were also cited as motivational factors. Four respondents said they joined the platforms solely to get more information about the series or learn more about the game, while four respondents stated factors relating to entertainment and their love for the game as motivation for joining the platforms. Another two respondents cited a

combination of entertainment, information seeking as their motivation, while two respondents suggested entertainment and the opportunity to interact with other supporters as motivation to join the platforms. One respondent said that they joined the platform due to its opportunity to interact with other supporters while two other respondents said their friends had encouraged them to join the Standard Bank Pro20 dedicated social media platforms.

Seven of the sixteen respondents who answered this question indicated that their motivation for joining the Standard Bank Pro20 social media channels was because they "love" or "like" the series. Responses along this theme included:

- "I love cricket"
- "Because I am a big cricket/sports fan."
- "I liked last year's series and am looking forward to this year's series. Hoping that it will give me a bit more information on when the games are happening etc."
- "I love the game and feel more involved being able to talk about it with other enthusiasts"
- "I am a fan of cricket..love the game!"
- "To learn more about cricket and because I love Pro20."
- "I love cricket. Nothing like going to a game live."

This is in line with the themes revealed through content analysis of Standard Bank Pro20 social media content in which respondents where very clear about their love and passion for the sport, the series, the teams and the players. This love and passion for the game are thus driving factors for the social media users to search for and join the platforms created for the series on social media channels.

E) Perception of content

Determining social media users' perception of content on the Standard Bank Pro20 social media platforms helped to reveal whether or not respondents trust the content on social media platforms and would share it with friends or invite their friends to join the channel, or whether they would prefer to receive information about the series directly from the event organisers.

Respondents indicated a high degree of trust of the content on the social media platforms with 81% (18 of 22) stating that they trust the information relayed on the Standard Bank Pro20 platforms, while only two respondents indicated that they do not trust the content and another two were unsure about their trust of the content found on the social media platforms. An identical ratio of respondents indicated that they would share content found on the social media platforms with their friends, while slightly fewer yet an encouraging number of respondents (15 of 18) said they would invite their friends to join the platforms.

Regardless of the high levels of trust for the content of the social media platforms, the majority of respondents (15 of 22) said they would prefer to receive information about the series directly from the Standard Bank Pro20 organisers. This may also be due to the view of social media as "an additional information source" as one respondent replied, rather than the preferred official communication channel of the series.

Content of social media channel:

	Yes	No	Uncertain	Number of Respondents
I trust the accuracy of information provided on the dedicated Standard Bank Pro20 Cricket social media channels	81% (18)	9% (2)	9% (2)	22
I prefer receiving information about the Standard Bank Pro20 cricket directly from the organisers of the series	68% (15)	27% (6)	4% (1)	22
I would invite my friends to join the dedicated Standard Bank Pro20 social media channels	68% (15)	22% (5)	9% (2)	22
I would share content found on dedicated Standard Bank Pro20 social media channels with my friends	81% (18)	13% (3)	4% (1)	22
			Number of Respondents	*22*
			Number or respondents who skipped this question	*1*

Table 24: Standard Bank Pro20 survey respondents' perceptions and use of content on dedicated social media platforms

F) SMNR correlation

From the content analysis and survey responses the message origins, tones and themes of the communication on the Standard Bank Pro20 dedicated social media channels were identified along with social media users' participation behaviour, motivation for

joining social media platforms and attitudes towards social media content. The analyses showed that the Standard Bank Cricket Blog, Standard Bank Cricket Facebook fan page and Standard Bank Pro20 YouTube channels were the most successful in stimulating social media users' interest, while the Standard Bank Cricket Facebook fan page was the most popular platform used by supporters to engage with the Standard Bank Pro20 series. The conversations on the Standard Bank Cricket Blog and Standard Bank Cricket Facebook fan page also reflected the themes identified and advocated by the SMNRs. The Flickr and Twitter platforms, as well as the YouTube channel, however, were largely unsuccessful in stimulating, hosting and sustaining user-generated conversation about the series on the platforms themselves.

Although the social media users' conversations reflected the themes highlighted by the SMNRs, the correlation between the social media users' reading of the SMNRs and their participation on the social media spaces may be limited. The following section of the survey therefore aimed to help determined whether social media users who read the SMNR joined the social media platforms through the links in the SMNR, and if they did not, to determine through which channels they first became aware of the Samsung dedicated social media platforms.

The majority of respondents (11 of 18) who answered the survey question had read the Standard Bank Pro20 2009 SMNR, however, only two respondents of 15 had joined the dedicated social media platforms through the links provided in the SMNR.

Have you read the Standard Bank Pro20 Cricket Social Media Press Release available on http://v61.standardbank.smpr.co.za/?	% of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Yes	61.11%	11
No	38.89%	7
Number of respondents		*18*
Number or respondents who skipped this question		*5*

Table 25: Ratio of Standard Bank Pro20 survey respondents who have read the Standard Bank Pro20 2009 SMNR

If you <u>have</u> read the Standard Bank Pro20 Cricket Social Media Press Release, did you join the dedicated Standard Bank Pro20 social media channel(s) by following the links provided in the Social Media Press Release?	% of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Yes	13.33%	2
No	86.67%	13
	Number of respondents	*15*
	Number or respondents who skipped this question	*8*

Table 26: Ratio of Standard Bank Pro20 survey respondents who joined the dedicated social media platforms through the Standard Bank Pro20 2009 SMNR

While only two users joined the social media platforms through the links in the SMNR, an overwhelming amount of respondents had joined the platforms after being told about it by a friend. Of the 16 respondents who answered this question, 14 indicated that they had heard about the particular platforms from friends or by seeing it on a friend's profile page on one of the social media channels. The most popular social media channel on which respondents heard about the platforms was Facebook. Both users who had joined platforms from the links in the SMNR also heard about it from friends, thus joining some platforms through friends and some platforms through the SMNR. Another three users also indicated in their answers that they had heard about the platforms through searches on the social media channels themselves.

The Standard Bank Pro20 series thus appears to have a strong following among social users and a type of referral system has been created through which social media users spread awareness of the dedicated platforms among their friends through their social media activities.

In addition, respondents were also very receptive to the prospects of contact from a brand through social media. All respondents who answered this section of the survey indicated that they would be open to organisations using social media to send them information they are interested in, although basic principles of consideration should be adhered to. These included that:

- The respondent must opt-in to the reception of information by the company,
- The user must be allowed to specify which information is sent and how frequently they receive communication from the company, and

- The user must have the option to opt-out quickly and easily from all marketing by the organisation.

These terms indicated by respondents of the Standard Bank Pro20 survey are parallel to the terms listed by respondents to the Samsung Omnia i900 survey, thus revealing that South African social media users are relatively uniform in their preferences with regards to the distribution of marketing material by organisations through social media. If public relations practitioners keep these terms in mind when designing communication strategies utilising social media, it will help ensure that social media platforms remain a useful communication tool between social media users and the organisation by avoiding the alienation of social media users through unsolicited or unwanted marketing.

4.3.5   Case study summary: Standard Bank Pro20 Cricket

The Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs used five primary social media channels to engage cricket supporters in conversation about the Standard Bank Pro20 series and support the information advocated in the SMNR. Whereas the 2008-release introduced the launch of the social media strategy to be used in the promotion of the series, the 2009 release focused its content on a balance of series features and social media promotion.

A content analysis of the texts on the Standard Bank Cricket Blog, the Standard Bank Cricket Facebook fan page, the Standard Bank Cricket and Myles the Butler Twitter profiles, the Standard Bank Pro20 Flickr photostream and the Standard Bank Pro20 YouTube channel revealed that the platforms each enjoyed varying levels of success in its hosting of user-generated conversation in its content. The Standard Bank Cricket Blog and the Standard Bank Cricket Facebook fan page where the most successful platforms in terms of its ability to drive user-generated conversation, however the YouTube, Flickr and Twitter platforms each played an important role in the integrated social media strategy used by Standard Bank Cricket.

The primary weakness identified on these less successful channels, especially Flickr and YouTube, was the weak promotion of the platforms and the lack of incentive for social media users to actively engage about the series on the platforms. In order to gain maximum benefits from these channels, Standard Bank Cricket should have undertaken

to actively engage with participants and spur conversation on the platforms. Simply placing content on the platforms thus does not allow Standard Bank Cricket to capitalise on the social nature of social media as the conversations generated by supporters on these platforms add an additional value dimension. The more social media users talk about the series across platforms, the wider the series may be promoted across the Web 2.0 social media context. Standard Bank Cricket should thus have closely monitored the platforms to determine whether or not conversation is taking place and where necessary, actively participate in order to stimulate conversations on stagnant platforms.

In overview, the Standard Bank Cricket Blog provided a useful space for the promotion of the series by bloggers, though the large number of blog posts by the live blogging team reduces the potential for the platform to serve as a dedicated space for Standard Bank Pro20 supporters to add their views about the series. The channel can be seen as a Standard Bank Cricket-moderated platform, rather than a meeting and debating space for supporters of Standard Bank Pro20 cricket.

The Standard Bank Cricket Facebook fan page, however, proves to be the opposite in terms of its engagement of regular Standard Bank Pro20 supporters. Supporters were open and enthusiastic about adding their support for their favourite teams and players on the platform, while the Standard Bank Cricket-generated content was less apparent or intrusive.

On the Standard Bank Pro20 YouTube channel, over 5 000 viewers watched the 10 videos uploaded on the channel, however none of them felt moved to comment on the posts. It may have been beneficial to the stimulation of conversation about these videos and the consequent popularity of the videos if Standard Bank Cricket had promoted these videos on its other platforms more aggressively, while also linking a competition or debate to the videos. The same tactic could have been applied to the Flickr photostream and Twitter platforms to help increase supporters' interaction with the brand through these platforms. In addition, a Standard Bank Pro20-themed Flickr group could have been created alongside the Standard Bank Pro20 photostream to which users could submit their Standard Bank Pro20-themed photographs. This would help increase the potential for user engagement on the platform from merely commenting on official content uploaded by Standard Bank Pro20 to the contribution of their own content to the

group. Once again and incentive could help to encourage users to participate in this activity, while cross-platform promotions could help increase awareness of the other channels. The Standard Bank Pro20 Flickr photostream could thus serve as a platform for media to source official high resolution pre-approved photographs for publication, while the Standard Bank Pro20 Flickr group would serve as a space for supporters to share their personal photographs of their experiences at the series with both the organisers and other Standard Bank Pro20 supporters.

In summary, it has been found that most of the social media links in the Standard Bank Pro20 social media news releases did result in engagement of social media users with the series, though only two platforms were suitably successful in stimulating user-generated conversations about the series. The social media platforms used by Standard Bank Cricket to promote the Standard Bank Pro20 series in the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs are thus clearly very useful tools, but more refinement is needed to the strategy for the brand to extract the maximum benefits from of social media conversations.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

Concluding the research study, this chapter provides an overview of the research findings including the limitations encountered during the study, the primary conclusions drawn from the data analysis and the recommendations that can be made based on these conclusions. Recognising that the research conducted in this study reflects only a small portion of the potential research within the field of social media and public relations, additional areas for future research is highlighted.

5.2 Limitations encountered during the study

Minor limitations were encountered during the study however these limitations were not of such a nature that it severely affected the course of the research. Limitations encountered related to both the content analysis and survey includes:

- The unpredictable nature of the availability of online texts resulted in some web pages being unavailable for study during some phases of the research. This problem was addressed by contacting the web hosts for the web pages and explaining the need to gain access to the pages for research purposes. The web hosts swiftly activated all web pages they were authorised to. Only one web page was not re-activated, namely the Standard Bank Pro20 2008 SMNR. This did not hinder the research as the researcher had archived a recent copy of the SMNR during a previous study on the topic less than six months before the commencement of this study. Other web pages that were intermittently offline were all accessed and analysed by the end of the research period.

- The merging and conversion of Standard Bank Pro20 dedicated social media platforms to Standard Bank Cricket platforms five months after the release of the 2009 Standard Bank Pro20 SMNR resulted in the transfer of data between platforms and the increase of communication about topics other than the Standard Bank Pro20 on these newly organised platforms. One channel, namely the Standard Bank Pro20 Twitter channel was deleted by the organisation thus resulting on all communication on the channel created during the activation

periods of the 2008 and 2009 Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs being deleted and therefore unavailable for analysis.

- As responses to the surveys were voluntary, it was particularly challenging to reach a suitable number of respondents. Respondents were invited to complete the questionnaire on the social media platforms and in order to increase the potential for response randomly selected social media users subscribed to the channels were invited to complete the survey in line with the ethics requirements set out by the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University's RTI committee. The researcher was not able to see whether or not these individuals responded to the invitations thus ensuring an anonymous response to the survey for all respondents. Although the recommended total of 50 respondents was not reached, only slightly fewer responses suitable for analysis were received at 43 responses. In addition, the survey was not a central design to the study acting instead as a support and triangulation method for data collected through content analysis. While the survey results are not generalised to the greater population, it does provide useful insights into social media users' use of the dedicated social media platforms, as well as their motivations for joining the platforms and their attitudes towards its content.

Each of these limitations was managed and effectively did not significantly affect the course of the research or the results thereof.

5.3 Summary of research

This study provided insights into a field of academic public relations research that is underrepresented not only in South Africa but also internationally. Investigating the use of the Social Media News Release (SMNR) as a tool to stimulate social media conversations about a brand, product or service, the study focused its research on the degree to which the social media links in SMNRs succeeded in stimulating and hosting user-generated conversations about the brand, product or service advocated by the SMNR on these particular dedicated social media platforms.

The study aimed to provide insights into the way in which South African social media users interact with the social media platforms created as part of social media strategies used to drive and activate the social media-element of SMNRs. To address this research aim a set of research objectives were devised which helped guide the development of the research. These research objectives addressed in the study include:

- To identify the SMNR social media strategies used in the Standard Bank Pro20 and Samsung Omnia i900 SMNRs
- To determine the thematic nature of the communication content about the brand generated on the social media platforms advocated in the Standard Bank Pro20 and Samsung Omnia i900 SMNRs
- To identify the brand disposition of the communication about the brand generated on these social media platforms
- To identify the extent to which the communication generated on these social media platforms is consumer-driven or synthesised by the primary message distributor (the organisation)
- To test whether the communication generated on these social media platforms is linked to the consumption of the SMNR by social media users.

In order to fulfil these research objectives and answer the research question, two case studies were compiled reflecting three of the ten SMNRs released thus far in South Africa. These included the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR which was analysed as one case study, and the Standard Bank Pro20 2008 and 2009 SMNRs which were together analysed in the second case study. The case studies consisted of the results of the content analysis performed on the contents of the dedicated social media platforms identified as part of the SMNRs as well as the results of a research survey conducted among users of the dedicated social media platforms identified in the two case studies.

5.4 Research conclusions and recommendations

From the literature review and results of the case studies compiled and analysed during this study, a number of conclusions and recommendations were made which may help guide public relations practitioners in South Africa on the future use of social media news releases and social media strategies as a whole. A number of correlations were found

between the two case studies and foundational findings were identified relating to communications professionals' application of SMNRs and social media platforms in South Africa. These recommendations are discussed below:

5.4.1 Social media news releases and social media conversations

Social media news releases when supported by well designed and managed social media platforms can be a useful tool for the stimulation of conversations among social media users, however, the effective distribution of the releases and monitoring of the social media platforms is crucial.

Approximately half of the social media platforms linked to by the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR and the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs succeeded in hosting topic-relevant user-driven conversations about the brands, products and services advocated by the releases. In addition, the conversations on the social media platforms linked to by the SMNR strongly echoed the communication themes introduced by the SMNRs. The Blogs, Facebook and YouTube platforms were the most successful in hosting user-generated conversation, whereas the Flickr, Twitter and Delicious platforms showed the least contact between social media users and the organisations. Although the Flickr, Twitter and Delicious platforms showed low levels of engagement between the organisation and the social media users, it does not warrant the dismissal of the channels as each of these platforms have the potential to be used advantageously in a social media strategy if applied and managed correctly.

While the conversations on the social media platforms for the two case studies may have been in line with the topic or themes advocated by the relevant SMNRs, the tone and disposition of the conversations were not positive in all cases. The Samsung Omnia i900 dedicated social media platforms in particular suffered from negative commentary by social media users which reflected poorly on both Samsung as a mobile producer and the Samsung Omnia i900 as a mobile handset. This was especially true on the YouTube platform embedded in the SMNR as well as the Samsung Blog platform. In contrast to the management of the Samsung Blog platform, the organisation did not respond to or manage the comments left in response to the YouTube videos embedded

in the SMNR which had the potential to negatively influence social media users' perception of the brand and the product.

The Standard Bank Pro20 dedicated social media platforms linked to by both the 2008 and 2009 Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs reflected mostly positive conversation about the brand and the series, although some of the platforms, including YouTube, Flickr and Twitter could not succeed in generating traceable conversations about the brand by social media users on the platforms. These platforms, if not used for the creation of two-way democratised communication among social media users, remain important tools for marketing of the Standard Bank Pro20 series. Minor changes to the management of the platforms may help increase social media users' activity on the platforms.

From the high ratio of social media usage on both the Samsung Omnia i900 and Standard Bank Pro20 dedicated social media platforms, it is clear that the social media spaces are being utilised by social media users and provide an opportunity for contact between the organisation and their potential customers. It was also found that social media users actively search for platforms to connect with the organisations on social media channels thus indicating a demand for these platforms among users. Many of the respondents to both the Samsung Omnia i900 survey and the Standard Bank Pro20 survey indicated that they heard about the platforms from friends, which shows a high propensity among social media users to share the information about the platforms, or follow the example of their friends on social media channels in joining the platforms.

Although the content analysis of the content on the social media platforms revealed many correlations to the desired messages communicated in the SMNRs, the survey among social media users subscribed to the platforms revealed that few respondents joined the platforms directly through the links in the SMNR. Approximately half of the total number of respondents for each survey had read the relevant SMNR. Distribution of the SMNR is a cause for concern as many of the users did not read the SMNR, however, the word of mouth marketing of the platforms and the active searches for the platforms by respondents to the surveys ensures the growth of the platforms among social media users.

In overview, the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR's social media links were the least advantageous to the content of the release as the Facebook and Flickr platforms provided irrelevant content, while the YouTube videos garnered significant negative responses to the product. The Samsung Blog was the most successful platform as positive and negative responses were balanced and negative responses were quickly mitigated by appropriate responses from Samsung Mobile. The involvement by Samsung Mobile on the blog helped to stimulate and steer the direction of communication on the blog and helped to create the impression that blog-users' comments were noted and valued by the Samsung Mobile team. It would have been in Samsung's best interest to manage the other dedicated social media platforms in a similar way to their management of the Samsung Blog.

The Standard Bank Pro20 social media platforms in contrast provided a primarily positive to neutral view of the series with the Standard Bank Cricket Blog and Standard Bank Cricket Facebook fan page being the most popular spaces for social media users' comments. The creation of a dedicated live blogging team to generate content on the Standard Bank Cricket Blog succeeded in generating relevant contents for social media users to read, but did not help to encourage supporters to interact through the blog by posting their own views and opinions. The Standard Bank Cricket Facebook fan page on the other hand encouraged followers of the series to show their passion and support for their teams and players and attracted a high level of user interaction with the series. The YouTube and Flickr channels did not generate conversation on the platforms but the YouTube channel still proved popular among social media users. Amendments to the promotion and design of the platforms in future campaigns may help generate more interest among social media users on these channels.

5.4.2 Recommendations per social media channel

From the research conducted, further recommendations can be made relating to each of the social media platforms used in the social media strategies supporting the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR and the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs.

- Blogs

Blogs as a social media platform was most effectively used by Samsung and social media users subscribed to the Samsung Blog. The Samsung Blog was updated regularly to ensure fresh content and responses to social media users' comments were adequate. A clear sense of consumption community was achieved through the blog as users discussed issues with each other and provided advice to each other about problems or questions experienced with regards to the Samsung Omnia i900.

The Standard Bank Cricket Blog was highly relevant in its content, though the recruiting of the live blogging team without the clear disclosure of the identity of the blog members is unwanted. In addition, the many posts by the live blogging team did not aid the encouragement of social media users to create their own blog posts about the series and did not stimulate enough comments from social media users to reflect supporters' views of the series.

When using a blog as a platform linked to in a social media news release communication practitioners should thus take note of the levels of involvement from Samsung on the Samsung Blog as well as their points system to help motivate user participation on the blog. The application of the Standard Bank Cricket blog as a channel to provide up to date information about the Standard Bank Pro20 series to supporters should be noted, but systems for encouraging user-participation should be introduced as was seen in the Samsung Blog.

- Facebook

Facebook was found to be the most popular social media tool among respondents to the survey and provides an ideal space for the hosting of both creator and social media users' contents. Text, links, photographs and videos can all be merged on a single platform, but the channel is vulnerable to spam. Communicators should thus be diligent in the removal of spam posts from a dedicated Facebook platform and should help stimulate conversations on the platform if the platform becomes stagnant. By regularly updating useful and relevant content on the platform, it will help the platform feature more prominently in social media users' feeds when using the channel.

As was found in the case studies, the Standard Bank Cricket Facebook fan page had enough regular activity to stimulate social media users' use of the platform, while the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR had a misguided fan page with irrelevant content to the topic of the SMNR. The Samsung Fan Club Facebook page seems neglected, whereas the Standard Bank Cricket fan page is effectively kept dynamic through competition and active engagement with the audience.

- YouTube

YouTube was also rated as one of the most popular social media channels, but this channel primarily functions as a marketing tool with results that are difficult to predict. YouTube is particularly useful in that it can be shared on other social media channels and provides the opportunity for rich content promotion through video, but the videos used in an SMNR and uploaded onto a dedicated YouTube channel must be carefully selected and the commentary to these videos must be monitored. When comments to a video become negative, more negative comments are likely to arise which may make the particular video damaging to the brand rather than a positive communication tool. Communicators should bear in mind that the embedding of third party videos within an SMNR (thus those videos created by a user other than the organisation as was seen in the Samsung Omnia i900 case study) does not guarantee the conveyance of sincerity and confidence in your product to your target audience. Instead it places the communication content dangerously out of your control within an official release by your organisation. It will be more beneficial to the organisation to link to neutral to positive videos created by the organisation about the product or service in order to retain a degree of control of the SMNRs contents if the videos would incite primarily negative commentary.

- Flickr

Flickr is undoubtedly a useful channel to host high resolution media photographs, but is not yet very efficient as a social media platform in South Africa. South African users do not like engaging with the channel, and are more likely to upload their relevant photographs to an active platform such as Facebook. Here, the organisation can also

share and use the photographs uploaded by users easily and widely for a greater amount of applications than on the Flickr channel. However, creative use of the Flickr channel by communications practitioners could encourage more users to engage with it by creating a Flickr group or pool of pictures where users can submit their photographs, instead of only having a profile with creator-generated photographs for users to comment on.

- Delicious

The Delicious channel used in the Samsung Omnia i900 SMNR provides a useful platform to link to relevant press coverage and material which like Flickr is very functional for distribution to members of the media. Delicious can also be used to promote content about a particular product, service or brand to social media users, but among South African social media users this is not a particularly popular channel. A similar service for South African social media users could be used as a substitute in a South African social media strategy namely Muti (2009) or Blik (2009) among others.

The use of a social bookmarking site may help increase the search engine rankings of a particular bookmarked web page.

- Twitter

The Twitter channel as used by in the Standard Bank Pro20 SMNRs provided the opportunity for Standard Bank Cricket to keep supporters updated about the developments in the Standard Bank Pro20 series matches as the games were being played. In essence, Twitter as a micro-blogging channel provides the space for communicators to share brief bits of information multiple times per day. These updates known as "Tweets" can be shared across a global network of Twitter users through functions such as "Trending Topics" and "Re-Tweeting". While social media users in South Africa are slowly becoming more comfortable with Twitter as a social media channel, communicators should remember that Twitter is unlikely to be successful as a tool unless it is supported by other social media channels as part of an integrated social media strategy. Twitter is particularly useful to promote other content such as web pages, blog entries, YouTube videos or competitions across social media channels, but

does not provide a space to host conversation about a topic on the organisation's profile. Communication between the organisation and the social media users on Twitter is thus spread across a network of messages making it more difficult to trace and analyse communication trends. Twitter however, does provide the space for direct contact between social media users and a representative of the organisation therefore communicators should be aware that Twitter requires significant input from the communicator in order to ensure consistently updated tweets and prompt responses to enquiries directed through Twitter.

Public relations practitioners using multiple social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook may find management tools such as TweetDeck (2009) useful for the coordination of social media content across multiple platforms.

In the case of all of the above mentioned social media channels, basic considerations should be kept in mind when using the channels as platforms for the interaction between an organisation and social media users, namely:

- Organisations should use social media to connect with consumers only if the consumer has given their consent,
- The content of communication on social media platforms should be relevant and up to date,
- When using social media to contact consumers directly, consumers should be given the opportunity to control the frequency and types of content received, and
- Consumers should retain the right to opt-out of any communication from an organisation on social media channels at any time without repercussions against them.

5.5 Opportunities for further research

The field of social media and the Web is constantly changing and public relations must adapt their approach to and use of these tools in order to efficiently interact with their target audiences. This study looked at one of the many social media communications tools available to public relations practitioners, but the research needed to understand

and evaluate both the social media news release and social media at large as PR 2.0 tools reaches much wider.

The study provided an overview of the use of the social media news release in South Africa as well as an in-depth look at the use of the social media links in an SMNR to stimulate and host conversation about a brand, product or service. It is acknowledged that while the research provides a useful perspective on the functioning of these PR 2.0 tools in a South African context, further research in the field is required. This may include, but is not limited to:

- An analysis of the use of social media news releases by journalists in South Africa,
- A study of the perceptions of South African public relations professionals towards the social media news release as a communications tool,
- An analysis of the appeal of social media news releases to consumers in South Africa,
- An examination of the potential use of the social media news release as a viral marketing tool in South Africa,
- A comparative analysis of consumer perceptions of brand communication in traditional versus social media channels, and
- A study of the use of social media in organisational communication in selected organisations in South Africa.

5.6. Conclusion of study

This study has examined an aspect of the thus far limited use of the social media news release in South Africa with encouraging results for public relations practitioners. The results of the study revealed that social media news releases can be useful tools in the communication strategies of organisations and provides a functional alternative to the traditional press release. Unfortunately, some organisations' urge to join the conversations on social media channels result in a lack of efficient research on behalf of the organisation as well as the use of convenience platforms rather than the design of well-planned and managed new platforms. Similarly, some communicators do not realise that the creation of a platform on a social media channel is but the start of the

interaction process. Social media, even more than other types of communication channels, requires dedicated, watchful, intelligent and pre-emptive management by knowledgeable communication practitioners who understand the philosophy of social media and where it fits into the scope of public relations.

The use of social media both as part of a social media news release or an integrated social media strategy is and will continue to be a fluid and ever-changing concept with no tangible rules, however, basic guidelines can be followed to maximise the benefits of social media conversation for the organisation and simultaneously make the communication between the organisation and social media user a valuable and desired resource.

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ADDENDA

Addendum A: Ethics clearance
Addendum B1: Survey design – Samsung Omnia i900
Addendum B2: Survey design – Standard Bank Pro20

NORTH CAMPUS
FACULTY OF ARTS
Tel . +27 (0)41 5043252   Fax. +27 (0)41 5049252
Jannet.Nxati@nmmu.ac.za

Ref: H/09/ART/JMS-001   Student number: 205013023

13 August 2009

Ms MH Barnard
[Address deleted for privacy reasons]

Dear Ms Barnard

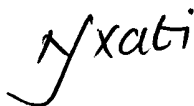**AN INVESTIGATION OF THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PRESS RELEASES TO CREATE DIALOGUE AROUND BRANDS**

Your above-entitled application for ethics approval served at the RTI Higher Degrees sub-committee of the Faculty of Arts Research, Technology and Innovation Committee.

We take pleasure in informing you that the application was approved by the Committee.

The Ethics clearance reference number is **H/09/ART/JMS-001**, and is valid for three years, from 13 August 2009 -13 August 2011. Please inform the RTI-HDC, via your supervisor, if any changes (particularly in the methodology) occur during this time. An annual affirmation to the effect that the protocols in use are still those for which approval was granted, will be required from you. You will be reminded timeously of this responsibility.

We wish you well with the project.

Yours sincerely

Nxati

Ms Jannet Nxati
FACULTY OFFICER

cc: Promoter/Supervisor
        HoD
        School Representative: Faculty RTI

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ADDENDUM B1

Samsung Omnia i900 Social Media Press Release survey	
Answers marked with a * are required.	

1. Social Media Release Survey (b)

Welcome to the survey investigating the use of social media in the Samsung Omnia i900 Social Media Press Release. On the following page you will find details on the purpose, terms of participation and data use of this survey. The survey questions follow thereafter.

Thank you for your participation!

Kind regards,
Marieka Barnard (Primary Investigator)
MA Applied Media Studies student at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa
E-mail: resmetho@gmail.com

Purpose:

Your participation in this survey will help the Primary Investigator (Marieka Barnard) to investigate the use of social media channels* in Social Media Press Releases (SMPR)** as a brand dialogue tool between a company and social media users.

The social media press release being studied in this survey is the Samsung Omnia i900 SMPR available on http://samsung.socialmediarelease.co.za/frontpage/wap.za.samsungmobile.com.

Terms of participation:

To take part in this survey, you must be over 21 years of age and subscribe to one or more of the following social media channels dedicated to Samsung Omnia i900 or Samsung Mobile:

Facebook: Samsung Fan Club Fan Page (http://www.facebook.com/SamsungFanClub)
Twitter: Samsung Blog SA (http://twitter.com/SamsungBlogSA)
YouTube: Samsung Corporate's feed (http://www.youtube.com/samsungcorporate)
Flickr: Samsung Blog SA's photostream (http://www.flickr.com/photos/samsungblog)
Blogs: A reader of Samsung Blog SA blog (http://www.samsungblog.co.za/)

Participation in this survey is voluntary and anonymous and you may opt out of the survey at any time without any repercussions against you.

Data use:

The data obtained in this survey will be used in a research treatise in partial fulfilment of the Magister Artium degree in Applied Media Studies at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, and may form part of an accredited journal article(s).

Personal details are for statistical purposes only and will NOT be made available to third parties. You will not be named in the final research treatise and/or journal article(s). Data will be kept by the Primary Investigator for three (3) years for reference purposes.

Note on terminolgy:

For the purpose of this study:

*Social media channels will refer to all those social media sites and channels used to sustain social

networking activities such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr and Blogs. A dedicated social media channel will refer to these fan pages, groups and profiles created on the various social media sites specifically for Samsung Omnia i900 or Samsung Mobile.

**Social Media Press Releases (SMPR) will be defined as a communication tool distributed through the online environment, that provides summarised information to the reader about a particular topic, provides links to photographs and company graphics, audio, video, and related websites, provides an interactive forum orcommentary space on the topic, provides links to online and mobile social media publishing and networking sites, and can be shared with users on social media sites through mechanisms such as tagging, sharing links, bookmarking, and rating.

Quit

Next

2. CONSENT BY PARTICIPANT

By completing this survey, I hereby acknowledge that I have read, and understand the Purpose, Data use and Terms of Participation of this study and that I, to the best of my knowledge, meet the requirements for participation in this survey. I also consent to the Primary Investigator's (Marieka Barnard) analysis of the information given by me in this survey for use in a research treatise in partial fulfillment of the MA Applied Media Studies degree, and/or research journal article(s) in accredited journals.

I understand that my participation in this survey is voluntary and that I may opt out of the study at any point, without any repercussions against me.

Do you understand and agree to the terms and conditions of completing this survey? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

Quit

Back   Next

3. SECTION 1

Please answer the following questions:

Please provide the following details about yourself:

Age	
Gender	

How often do you use the following social media (Please tick the answer that is closest to your usage pattern):

	Daily	2 to 4 times a week	Once a week	Once every two weeks	Once a month	Never
Facebook	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Mxit	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Twitter	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Blogs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
YouTube	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please refer to the social media channel you use to engage with Samsung. Note that "a dedicated social media channel" refers to a social media space dedicated to Samsung, or the Samsung Omnia i900.

Which of the following social media sites do you use to interact with Samsung Mobile?

☐ Facebook

☐ Twitter

☐ YouTube

☐ Flickr

☐ Blogs

☐ Other (Please Specify)

Please answer the following questions:

	Yes	No	Uncertain
I have commented on an aspect of the Samsung Omnia i900 or Samsung products on dedicated social media channels	☐	☐	☐
I have not uploaded any Samsung-related	☐	☐	☐

c

content such as photographs or videos to a dedicated social media channel			
I have not entered a discussion about the Samsung Omnia i900 or Samsung products with fellow users on a dedicated social media channel	⟳	⟳	⟳
If I comment about the Samsung Omnia i900 or Samsung in general on a dedicated social media channel my comments are usually positive	⟳	⟳	⟳
I have spoken about topics other than the Samsung Omnia i900 on a dedicated social media channel	⟳	⟳	⟳

Motivation for participation on social media channel:

	Yes	No	Maybe
Being part of the Samsung dedicated social media channel makes me feel more involved with the Samsung brand	⟳	⟳	⟳
None of my friends subscribe to Samsung dedicated social media channels	⟳	⟳	⟳
I have not made new friends on the Samsung dedicated social media channels	⟳	⟳	⟳
I browse content on Samsung dedicated social media channels to learn more about the brand or Samsung products	⟳	⟳	⟳
I browse content on Samsung dedicated social media channels for entertainment	⟳	⟳	⟳

d

Content of social media channel:

	Yes	No	Uncertain
I trust the accuracy of information provided on the Samsung dedicated social media channels	☐	☐	☐
I prefer receiving information about the Samsung Omnia i900 and Samsung directly from the company	☐	☐	☐
I would invite my friends to join dedicated Samsung social media channels	☐	☐	☐
I would share content found on dedicated Samsung social media channels with my friends	☐	☐	☐

Any additional comments can be added below:

Quit

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4. SECTION 2

Please answer the following questions about the Samsung Omnia i900 Social Media Press Release and its dedicated social media channels. Please note that there are no correct or incorrect answers.

Why did you join the Samsung dedicated social media channel?

e

[text area]

Have you read the Samsung Omnia i900 Social Media Press Release available onhttp://samsung.socialmediarelease.co.za/omnia?

○ Yes

○ No

If you have read the Samsung Omnia i900 Social Media Press Release, did you join the dedicated Samsung social media channel(s) by following the links provided in the Social Media Press Release?

○ Yes

○ No

Where did you hear about the dedicated Samsung social media channels?

[text area]

How do you feel about companies sending you information that you are interested in via opt-in dedicated social media channels?

[text area]

f

ADDENDUM B2

<table>
<tr><td>Standard Bank Pro20 Social Media Press Release survey</td></tr>
<tr><td>Answers marked with a * are required.</td></tr>
</table>

1. SOCIAL MEDIA RELEASE SURVEY

Welcome to the survey investigating the use of social media in the Standard Bank Pro20 Social Media Press Release. On the following page you will find details on the purpose, terms of participation and data use of this survey. The survey questions follow thereafter.

Thank you for your participation!

Kind regards,

Marieka Barnard (Primary Investigator)
MA Applied Media Studies student at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa
E-mail: resmetho@gmail.com

Purpose:

Your participation in this survey will help the Primary Investigator (Marieka Barnard) to investigate the use of social media channels* in Social Media Press Releases (SMPR)** as a brand dialogue tool between a company and social media users.

The social media press release being studied in this survey is the Standard Bank Pro20 Cricket SMPR available on http://v61.standardbank.smpr.co.za/.

Terms of participation:

To take part in this survey, you must be over 21 years of age and subscribe to one or more of the following social media channels dedicated to Standard Bank Pro20 Cricket or Standard Bank Cricket:

Facebook: Standard Bank Cricket Fan Page (http://www.facebook.com/standardbankcricket)
Twitter: Standard Bank Cricket (http://twitter.com/StdBankCricket) OR/AND Myles the Butler (http://twitter.com/mylesthebutler)
YouTube: Standard Bank Cricket's feed (http://www.youtube.com/pro20cricket)
Flickr: Standard Bank Cricket's photostream (http://www.flickr.com/photos/25007999@N04/)
Blogs: A reader of Standard Bank Cricket's blog (http://blog.standardbankcricket.com/) OR/AND Standard Bank Pro20 Cricket's blog (http://blog.standardbankpro20.co.za/)

Participation in this survey is voluntary and anonymous and you may opt out of the survey at any time without any repercussions against you.

Data use:

The data obtained in this survey will be used in a research treatise in partial fulfilment of the Magister Artium degree in Applied Media Studies at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, and may form part of an accredited journal article(s).

Personal details are for statistical purposes only and will NOT be made available to third parties. You will not be named in the final research treatise and/or journal article(s). Data will be kept by the Primary Investigator for three (3) years for reference purposes.

Note on terminolgy:

For the purpose of this study:

*Social media channels will refer to all those social media sites and channels used to sustain social networking activities such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr and Blogs. A dedicated social media channel will refer to these fan pages, groups and profiles created on the various social media sites specifically for Standard Bank Pro20 Cricket.

**Social Media Press Releases (SMPR) will be defined as a communication tool distributed through the online environment, that provides summarised information to the reader about a particular topic, provides links to photographs and company graphics, audio, video, and related websites, provides an interactive forum orcommentary space on the topic, provides links to online and mobile social media publishing and networking sites, and can be shared with users on social media sites through mechanisms such as tagging, sharing links, bookmarking, and rating.

| Quit | | Next |

Standard Bank Pro20 Social Media Press Release survey
Answers marked with a * are required.

2. CONSENT BY PARTICIPANT

By completing this survey, I hereby acknowledge that I have read, and understand the Purpose, Data use and Terms of Participation of this study and that I, to the best of my knowledge, meet the requirements for participation in this survey. I also consent to the Primary Investigator's (Marieka Barnard) analysis of the information given by me in this survey for use in a research treatise in partial fulfillment of the MA Applied Media Studies degree, and/or research journal article(s) in accredited journals.

I understand that my participation in this survey is voluntary and that I may opt out of the study at any point, without any repercussions against me.

Do you understand and agree to the terms and conditions of completing this survey? *

◯ Yes

◯ No

| Quit | | Back | Next |

3. SECTION 1

Please answer the following questions:

Please provide the following details about yourself:

Age	
Gender	

How often do you use the following social media (Please tick the answer that is closest to your usage pattern):

	Daily	2 to 4 times a week	Once a week	Once every two weeks	Once a month	Never
Facebook	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Mxit	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Twitter	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Blogs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
YouTube	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please refer to the social media channel you use to engage with Standard Bank Pro20 Cricket. Note that "a dedicated social media channel" refers to a social media space dedicated to Standard Bank Pro20 Cricket.

Which of the following social media sites do you use to interact with Standard Bank Pro20 Cricket?

☐ Facebook

☐ Twitter

☐ YouTube

☐ Flickr

☐ Blogs

☐ Other (Please Specify)

Please answer the following questions:

	Yes	No	Uncertain
I have commented on an aspect of Standard	☐	☐	☐

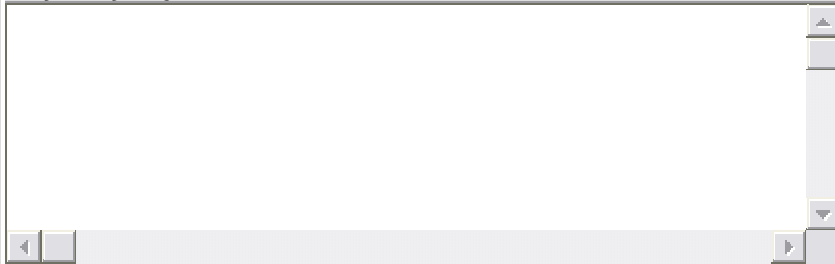| Bank Pro20 cricket on a dedicated social media channel			
I have not uploaded any Standard Bank Pro20-related content such as photographs or videos to a dedicated social media channel	⊡	⊡	⊡
I have not entered a discussion about Standard Bank Pro20 cricket with fellow users on a dedicated social media channel	⊡	⊡	⊡
If I comment about Standard Bank Pro20 on a dedicated social media channel my comments are usually positive	⊡	⊡	⊡
I have spoken about topics other than Standard Bank Pro20 cricket on a dedicated social media channel	⊡	⊡	⊡

Motivation for participation on social media channel:			
	Yes	No	Maybe
Being part of the Standard Bank Pro20 cricket dedicated social media channel makes me feel more involved with the game	⊡	⊡	⊡
None of my friends are part of the Standard Bank Pro20 cricket dedicated social media channels	⊡	⊡	⊡
I have not made new friends on the Standard Bank Pro20 cricket dedicated social media channels	⊡	⊡	⊡
I browse content on Standard Back Pro20 dedicated social media channels to learn more about the game	⊡	⊡	⊡

I browse content on Standard Back Pro20 dedicated social media channels for entertainment	☐	☐	☐

Content of social media channel:

	Yes	No	Uncertain
I trust the accuracy of information provided on the dedicated Standard Bank Pro20 Cricket social media channels	☐	☐	☐
I prefer receiving information about the Standard Bank Pro20 cricket directly from the organisers of the series	☐	☐	☐
I would invite my friends to join the dedicated Standard Bank Pro20 social media channels	☐	☐	☐
I would share content found on dedicated Standard Bank Pro20 social media channels with my friends	☐	☐	☐

Any additional comments can be added below:

Quit   Back   Next

4. SECTION 2

Please answer the following questions about the Standard Bank Pro20 Social Media Press Release and its dedicated social media channels. Please note that there are no correct or incorrect answers.

k

Why did you join the Standard Bank Pro20 dedicated social media channel?

Have you read the Standard Bank Pro20 Cricket Social Media Press Release available on http://v61.standardbank.smpr.co.za/?
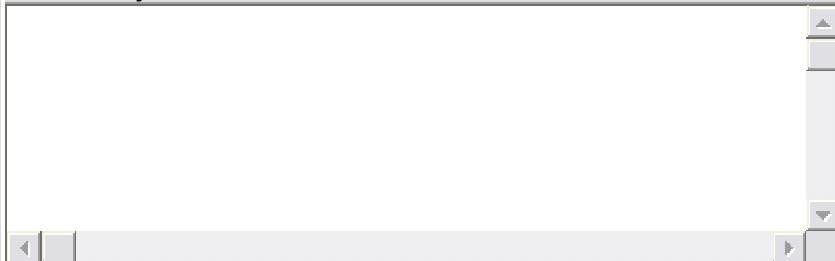
⬚ Yes

⬚ No

If you have read the Standard Bank Pro20 Cricket Social Media Press Release, did you join the dedicated Standard Bank Pro20 social media channel(s) by following the links provided in the Social Media Press Release?
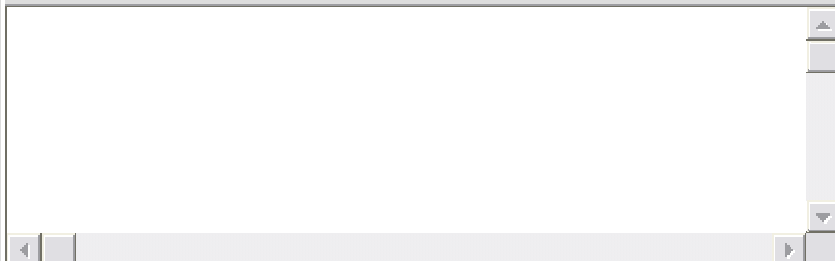
⬚ Yes

⬚ No

Where did you hear about the Standard Bank Pro20 Cricket dedicated social media channels?

How do you feel about companies sending you information that you are interested in via opt-in dedicated social media channels?