THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS MANAGEMENT BY NGOs IN THE WESTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA

by

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DECLARATION

I, **Corinne Guillaine BISSILA KILONDA**, hereby declare that the contents of this dissertation represent my own unaided work, and that the dissertation has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

	May 2014
Signed	**Date**

ABSTRACT

This study sought to understand how Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the Western Cape use social media to communicate with their stakeholders (from a dialogic, interactive and relational perspective). The secondary objective of the study was to explore how social media are being integrated into organisations' stakeholder relations management strategies in order to nurture and sustain relations. The literature review explores the relationship between social media and public relations as well as stakeholder relationship approach. The theoretical frame of the study is derived from Grunig and Hunt's (1984) two-way symmetrical model and Freire's (1970) dialogical communication. This is predominantly a qualitative study employing a two-stage design consisting of in-depth interviews and qualitative content analysis. The findings of the research revealed that the sampled NGOs are using social media in different ways to build and sustain stakeholder relations. NGOs are communicating dialogically and in a two-way manner with their stakeholders. They are using social media to pursue their strategic goals which centre on the creation of public value. The study also revealed that NGOs have integrated social media into their communication strategies. Social media platforms present an immediate and real-time contact point for NGOs and other social media users. They are used to communicate, nurture and sustain stakeholders' relations. It is also clear that social media are allowing stakeholders to connect online (establishing relationships). This creates dialogue online between NGOs and their stakeholders. The study proposes a working model of integrating social media within the ambit of NGOs communication strategies. The findings of this research show that social media channels are useful tools, however, a higher level of intelligent creator-generated input is needed to stimulate and steer conversations about desired topics, as well as monitor any user-generated content and comments. In terms of recommendations, this study argues that for social media to work there is need for integration of the management of online conversations and strategic communication

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DEDICATION

For my Grandparents

The late **PROSPER MASSENGO** and **BERNADETTE LOUISE LOUMPANGOU**

And my Dad,

The late **ANTOINE ALAIN BISSILA**

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GLOSSARY

Terms/Acronyms/Abbreviations	Definition/Explanation
BC	Before Christ
Brand	A differentiator which can increase the competitive advantage of product. The brand needs to deliver upon the brand promise in order to increase the company's market performance (Webster & Keller, 2004).
Communication	A process by which information is transmitted between individuals and/or organisations so that an understanding response results from the receiver of the communication (Little, 1973).
Dialogic communication	Forms of two-way communication where participants support their own positions with justification and actively listen to other positions with the goal of mutual understanding (Habermas, 1984).
IABC	International Association of Business Communicators
ICT	Information Communication Technology
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPO	Non-Profit Organisation
PR	Public Relations
Publics	A group of people who share a common interest in a specific subject.
Public relations	The management, through communication, of the perceptions and strategic relationships between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholders (PRISA, 2000).
Reputation	The sum value that stakeholders attribute to a company based on their perceptions and interpretations of the image that the company communicates over time (Dalton, 2005).
SANGONET	Southern African NGO Network
Social media	Variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers who are intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Social networking sites	Web 2.0 applications (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and LinkedIn, etc.), which allow users to build personal websites that are accessible to other users for the exchange of personal content and communication (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009).
Stakeholder	Any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives (Freeman, 1984).
Stakeholder relationships	The state which exists between an organisation and its key publics in which the actions of either the entity impacts on the economic, social, political, and/or cultural well-being of the other entity (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998).
Traditional media	Television, radio, newspapers, magazines, newsletters, and other print publications
Two-way symmetrical models	Forms of two-way communication, which use communication to negotiate with publics, resolve conflict, and promote mutual understanding and respect between the organisation and its publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1   INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Globalisation and increased competition within the capitalist system, as well as the advent of the Internet have revolutionised the way in which people and organisations communicate. The Internet has not only facilitated communication and empowered individuals but is now encouraging more dialogue between organisations and their stakeholders (Castells, 2009; Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009). For communication scholars, the advent of the Internet and new media and communication technologies has spawned novel ways of fostering stakeholder engagement between organisations and their stakeholders.

Before the advent of new media technologies, traditional media used to be the dominant vehicle for corporate communication. However, ever since the proliferation of new media technologies, social media's technical capabilities have 'democratised' communication by placing publishing in the hands of ordinary people, thereby making it possible for anyone across space and time to distribute information, interact and share opinions. As a result of these capabilities and latent potential, social media have been hailed as powerful tools for stakeholder engagement.

Kinross+Render (2009) argue that social media have a real impact on the way stakeholders relate to brands and the way organisations do business. Not surprisingly, corporates and non-profit organisations have begun to actively use social media to reach out to their publics. These organisations have been drawn to social media platforms by reaching their publics, especially using Facebook and Twitter, the two most important networking sites in the world today. Despite having been launched relatively recently only in 2004, Facebook is the largest networking site in the world today. Recent statistics about Facebook show that the platform has an estimated user population of around 800 million worldwide. On the other hand, Twitter was launched in June 2006 and by July 2011 it had attracted an estimated user population of more than 200 million users (Fuseware, 2012)

1.1.1   Social media in South Africa

The first social media classmates.com appeared in 1995 alongside the Internet. Since then, social media have gained increased popularity and importance, and many people are now part of them in some way or another. Presently there are more than 200 social networking sites and this number is increasing daily. The number of social network

users around the world will rise from 1.47 billion in 2012 to 1.73 billion this year, whereas Internet population is estimated to be over 2.7 billion (eMarketer, 2013). By 2017, the global social network audience will total 2.55 billion (eMarketer, 2013). Figure 1.1 below illustrates the timeline of social media development.
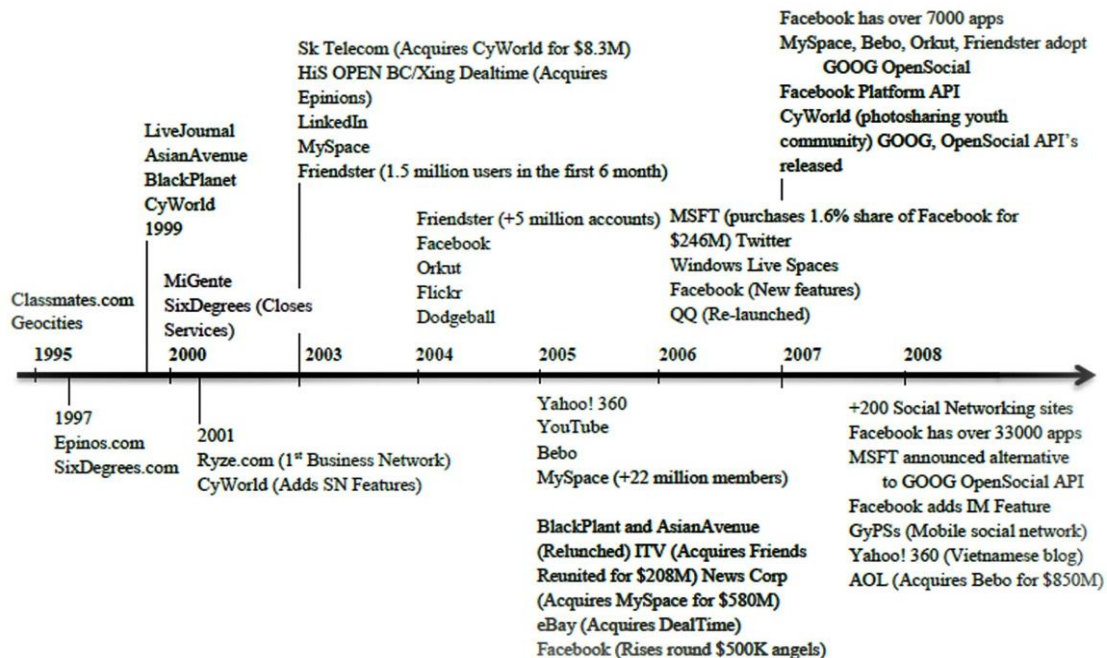
Figure 1.1: Social media development from 1995 to 2008 (Trebnick, 2008)

In the African context, South Africa is viewed as the technological leader. Currently, there are 5 352 900 Facebook users in the country. Of these users, 80.5% access the Facebook platform via mobile phone (Fuseware, 2012). South Africa falls in the top 10 ranking of mobile Facebook penetration (80.5%) in the world. Up to 93% of South Africa's total population of 45 million have access to mobile Internet (Fuseware, 2012), with 39% of urban and 27% of rural phone consumers aged 16 and older now accessing the Internet from their cellular phones. By implication, this translates to at least six million South Africans currently using mobile internets. The increased access to mobile Internet in South Africa has already had a profound impact on many facets of the population's social fabric and media consumption trends (UNICEF, 2011).

1.1.2 Research gap on social media use in stakeholder relationships management

There is paucity of research both at a global and local level focusing on the use of social media from a stakeholder relations management perspective. As Waters, Burnett, Lamm and Lucas (2009) point out, the public relations scholarship has discussed relationship development on traditional websites and blogs, but very little

research has been published on social networking sites. Similarly, Naudè (1998) notes that, most studies on social media have not been undertaken from a relationship management perspective, focusing on the adoption of social media in developing countries. It is worth noting that studies on the usefulness of social networking sites rather often focus on the information which is distributed (Crespo, 2007).

Within South Africa, there has been very little research on the use of social media by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) for stakeholder relationships management; hence there are few guidelines on how to use social media effectively and integrate them with existing traditional communication channels (Minocha, 2009). This research has focused on what social media is, how it is structured and how it exists (Van Zyl, 2009). In South Africa, significant work has been done by Naudè, Foreman and Atwood (2004) that focuses on the interactive nature of the Internet by applying the two-way symmetrical model of communication to the websites of 10 South African NGOs that work in the development sphere. This was a qualitative study which used semi-structured interviews and content analysis as the primary research method. This study seeks to understand the way in which NGOs use social media to nurture and maintain relationships with their external stakeholders.

1.1.3 The use of social media in communication

Organisations such as NGOs manifest an online presence and use social media to reach a large number of people (Kim, Jeong & Lee, 2009). From a public relations perspective, social media bring value to the conversations and relationships by connecting with people online (establishing relationships); creating dialogue and having conversations online with stakeholders from the beginning, incorporate into corporate culture and being consistent with content across all platforms of social media, as well as in the traditional media outlets. According to Morgan and Hunt (1994) building relationships with stakeholders is important to the extent that it supports the establishment, development and maintenance of relationships between exchange partners. In addition, building long-term relationships with stakeholders is the key to stakeholder relationship management and organisational success (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998).

Smith (2009) proffers that the smartest and most efficient way of communicating with the target audience is by talking less and listening more to what the target audience is talking about, through social media. Smith (2009) further argues that organisations which do not listen to social initiatives will lag behind and those that respond will enjoy the benefits of building long-term supporters of their brands. From a stakeholder

relations perspective, social media provide a platform for organisations and publics to communicate interactively by reducing communicative gaps and smoothing relationships with the stakeholders. Communication within a relational perspective is conceived as a strategic tool, which is used to help organisations to achieve relationship goals (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Relationships are the foundation of social networking sites, which means that social media are communication-enabling tools which assist Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) to nurture stakeholder relationships (Waters *et al.*, 2009).

The purpose of social media is to enable people and communities to engage in discussions, based on interaction and open system (Owyang, 2009). NPOs may use social media to interact with volunteers and donors and to educate others about their programs and services (Waters *et al.*, 2009). Modern organisations that engage stakeholders by using social media have complemented and brought enormous success to their communication strategies (Moshman, 2009).

Technological developments have completely changed communication, with the Internet revolutionising nearly all aspects of people's private and working lives (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Most individuals and organisations have joined and continue to join social networking platforms, creating public or semi-public profiles to communicate with other people. From a public relations perspective, it is important to note that social media have enabled organisations to communicate with stakeholders in a variety of new ways (Brown, 2009). They have affected organisational communication and public relations immensely, such that communication managers now rely on them to interact with their stakeholders.

Social media facilitate interaction, collaboration and the sharing of content (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009). This enables organisations to meet the needs of stakeholders, which helps to nurture and maintain relationships. Organisations should therefore be in a position to successfully manage their social media profiles in order to competitively and effectively share information with their stakeholders and by so doing, maximise the full benefits of social media.

The aforementioned benefits are largely difficult to realise, especially in organisations which operate in the developing world where information about how social media could be used effectively, remains limited. In light of the aforesaid benefits, Moshman (2009) notes that social media and online networking have become a popular communication tool in NGOs. They enable users to quickly share photos, videos and communicate with stakeholders through various social networking sites such Facebook, Twitter,

YouTube, LinkedIn and Blogger. It is clearly apparent that social media have brought enormous benefits to organisations' communication strategies and ultimately play an important role in nurturing and sustaining stakeholder relationships.

1.2   RESEARCH PROBLEM

Before the introduction of the Internet and social media, communication practitioners predominantly used traditional communication methods and tools to manage their relationships with stakeholders, despite the fact that such media are not largely amenable to two-way dialogic communication. Newland and White (2000) note that traditional media were largely employed in stakeholder relations as a tool for generating positive press coverage by organisations. Consequently, controlled messages were sent to the stakeholders through newsletters, annual reports, brochures and other vehicles written by communication professionals in organisations (Newland & White, 2000).

The advent of social media has revolutionised communication in organisations by introducing dialogical, interactive and relational properties, which make it possible for organisations and their publics to engage in continuous dialogue which is the key in stakeholder relationships management (Grunig, 2009). It is of concern, however, that although most organisations have adopted social media as part of their communication strategy, communication practitioners still tend to use social media in a one-way communication, monologic manner (Grunig, 2009). This linear approach is described as telling without listening and is devoid of the two-way connection (relationships) which is critical in completing a holistic story (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The one-way communication approach manipulates publics through press releases and other propaganda.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have recognised the rapid expansion of the social networking phenomenon and its vast potential in communication (Waters *et al.,* 2009). Therefore NGOs are now using different types of social media to engage in conversation across the Internet, as well as building and sustaining relationships. Moreover, scholarly and professional understandings of why and how non-profits adopt such technologies is sparse, not only due to the unique qualities of NGOs (Lewis, 2005), but also the lack of organisational-level research on social media implementation and use. This observation provides the basis on which this study explored the way in which Public relations (PR) practitioners working in the NGO sector in the Western Cape have utilised the potential and opportunities which are offered by social media as an enabler for two-way dialogic communication. In the context of

stakeholder relationships management, two-way dialogic communication is critical in negotiating with publics, resolving conflict and promoting mutual understanding and respect between the organisation and its stakeholders.

1.2.1 Social media in the world

Studies conducted on social media and NGOs have focused on aspects such as connecting with publics and raising awareness (Kanter & Fine, 2010) on the advantage of social media (Curtis, Edwards, Fraser, Gudelsky, Holmquist, Thornton & Sweetser, 2010). In a study conducted in Switzerland, Ingenhoff and Koelling (2009) found that fundraising use social media efficiently to serve the information needs of current and potential donors. They go further and say that for the benefits social media can have in terms of reaching publics, as well as the ability of building and fostering relationships with the donors that the organisations depend on in regards to funding. Although the research was done on Swiss NGOs, Ingenhoff and Koelling (2009) comments and suggestions can be relevant for NGOs around Europe and worldwide since their structures are alike.

In the United Kingdom, Nordström (2012) found that environmental NGOs seem to be making use of social media for communication purposes but not using their features for two-way symmetric communication to their full potential. A research conducted in the United States of America by Scherer (2010) has shown that non-profit organisations use Facebook to increase outreach and maintain relationships with their audiences.

1.2.2 Social media in the South African context

There are currently 478 Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) in the Western Cape that are registered on the Prodder database, the most comprehensive online directory about NGOs and other development organisations in South Africa. Out of these 478 NGOs, 233 are based in Cape Town. However, research on the Prodder database shows that out of the 233 only 60 NGOs make use of social media. Effectively, the three NGOs investigated in the study represent a sample size of 5% of the available study population. As an observation, the majority of NGOs in Cape Town do not use social media as part of their communication strategy and more particularly, for stakeholder relationships management.

Social media are relatively new forms of technology which will take time to be fully adopted by NGOs. Non-traditional social media such as Facebook and Twitter are proving to be the most popular platforms if an NGO's primary engagement is within the business-to-customer field, while the business-to-business field would probably use

business-orientated resources such as LinkedIn to build relationships because they offer access to the decision-makers of a variety of organisations.

Current research shows that Facebook is the second most visited site in South Africa (after Google) and has received plenty of attention from organisations and their publics (Fuseware, 2012). There are great opportunities to engage with one's publics on Facebook, although the site is not largely suitable for all businesses. However, the platform has worked better for organisations with a large number of online customers which already have a dedicated following (Fuseware, 2012).

In this light, Facebook offers numerous possibilities for NGOs to increase their visibility through engagement with their publics in the Western Cape. For instance, creating a social media page enables an organisation to interact with its stakeholders. According to Barnard (2009), when the Facebook "fan-page" is updated, users are notified on their "wall", which allows them to "like" what the NGOs have posted or directly engage with the NGOs. As observed earlier, the NGOs in the Western Cape usually establish a user base for publics within a few weeks. The success of the social media fan-page depends on the NGO's engagement with the online public, whether the number of fans increases progressively.

Other than Facebook, Twitter has 2 435 528 visits from South Africans, making it an absolutely huge platform where organisations can engage their publics (Fuseware, 2012). Twitter provides NGOs with two important tools. Firstly, it allows NGOs interaction with their communities and, secondly, it enables NGOs to measure their reputation using tools such as HootSuite and CoTweet which allow people to execute a Corporate Online Reputation Management Strategy (Barnard, 2009). When an organisation has something to communicate, they use Twitter as one of the prioritised channels for conveying messages as the platform allows people to engage and dialogue with customers and the community regionally (depending on the social media strategy), with little or no planning. Furthermore, Twitter allows customers and the broader community to be kept in the loop, and more importantly, to engage in dialogue with NGOs (Barnard, 2009). In addition to this, the big social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, Blogger and News 24 blogs have taken off with thousands of South Africans wanting to be heard online (Fuseware, 2012).

Given the above context and background, the study was guided by the following objectives and questions.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

1.3.1 Primary objective

▪ To investigate how NGOs in the Western Cape use social media to communicate with their stakeholders (from a dialogic, interactive and relational perspective).

1.3.2 Secondary objectives

▪ To explore how social media is being integrated into the broader stakeholder relations management strategy of organisations.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.4.1 Main question

▪ How do NGOs in the Western Cape use social media to communicate with their stakeholders?

1.4.2 Sub-questions

▪ How have social media been integrated into the larger stakeholder relationship management strategies of organisations?
▪ How best can social media be used to nurture and sustain relations with stakeholders?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

Although social media are still relatively new, there is need for a nuanced understanding of how organisations use them to communicate with their stakeholders (from a dialogic, interactive and relational perspective). This study seeks to discuss the implications this may have on stakeholder communication and on the sustainability of stakeholder relationships. As a result, the findings will enable both PR scholars and practitioners to gain a better understanding of the use of social media as communication tools and how they can be used to nurture and sustain stakeholder relationships.

In terms of practice, the study will offer both organisations and practitioners new insight and knowledge regarding social media use in stakeholder relationship management by providing a framework for using social media. The study contributes towards understanding the current use of social media by NGOs in nurturing and sustaining relations with stakeholders. The study will also contribute towards understanding how social media can be used to complement traditional media in stakeholder relations

management. Finally, the study will contribute towards the building of theory on the use of social media in stakeholder relations management. It extends the understanding of social networking sites as online relationship-building tools in organisational public relations efforts within the reflective paradigm.

1.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The research was based on case analysis of three Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) located in the Western Cape, South Africa. The analysis was delimited to one single sector to obtain as many similar cases as possible for comparison reasons. These NGOs were purposively and conveniently selected based on financial constraints, thematic and sampling reasons. The results of the study are limited to NGO participants as the sample used was too small. The study did not seek to generalise results but to understand peculiarities related to social media use in the NGO sector in the Western Cape.

1.7 ORGANISATION USED FOR THE RESEARCH

This research examined the use of social media in three NGOs in the Western Cape, but for ethical reasons the names of the organisations were kept anonymous.

The first organisation studied was founded in 2000; the mission of NGO X is to identify pupils who need remedial support, being second-language speakers of English in schools. The organisation was founded after realising that school and particularly second-language speakers would benefit greatly from the structure through early intervention using educational support. NGO X has a social media presence on Facebook, YouTube, and manages its own blog site. The organisation started using Facebook in April 2010 and at the time of writing the organisation had 1012 subscribers on Facebook. NGO X was purposively and conveniently selected because of its location in Cape Town, as well as its active social media presence.

The second organisation studied was created in 1928. The mission of NGO Y is to facilitate the allocation of donations to qualified entities by using sound business practices and good governance to achieve a positive impact in the community. NGO Y supports more than 520 vulnerable communities and development organisations with an annual spending of close to R20 million. NGO Y has a social media presence on both Facebook and Twitter. NGO Y started using these social media platforms in April 2010 and at the time of writing the organisation had 873 subscribers on Facebook and 1280 Twitter subscribers. NGO Y was purposively and conveniently selected because it is located in Cape Town and has an active presence on social media platforms.

NGO Z is a community based organisation which was established in order to reduce the incidence of heart disease and stroke among South Africans by providing education and supporting research around the diseases. NGO Z has a social media presence on both Facebook and Twitter. It started using Facebook in 2010. At the time of writing, the organisation had 599 subscribers. The organisation was purposively and conveniently selected based on the criterion that it is situated in Cape Town and is actively using social media platforms.

1.8   SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

This study is divided into six chapters:

Chapter One provides an introduction and background on the use of social media in stakeholder relations management by NGOs globally, and more particularly in South Africa. With a specific focus on social media and stakeholder relationships, the chapter also states the research objectives, questions and problem. Further to this, the significance of the study to public relations research and practice, as well as the limitations of the study, is discussed.

Chapter Two reviews literature on social media and stakeholder relationships management in public relations. This framework forms the analytical basis for the research findings on use of social media in stakeholder relationship management by NGOs in the Western Cape.

Chapter Three presents the conceptual framework in relation to the study. The framework for this study will focus on Grunig's (1984) two-way communication and Freire's (1970) dialogic communication.

Chapter Four discusses the research methodology used in the study. The research outlines and discusses the qualitative research methodology, as well as the multiple case study approach. It discusses the data collection methods as well as the manner in which they were used. To this end, in-depth interviews and qualitative content analysis are examined. The process of data analysis used in the study is discussed as well as the sampling procedure employed.

Chapter Five analyses and discusses the research findings in light of the literature review and the theoretical framework. It also sets up a framework for using social media in stakeholder relationship management.

Chapter Six provides a conclusion to the study with respect to the research problem and objectives stated. It also offers recommendations for further research on the use of social media in stakeholder relationships management and public relations in general.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews relevant literature on the use of social media in stakeholder relationship management in public relations. The chapter also discusses the debates and gaps on use of social media in stakeholder relationship management in public relations from a dialogic, interactive and relational perspective.

2.2   HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Baruah (2012) argues that when people think of social media, they usually have in mind Facebook and Twitter but in reality the concept is much broader. The original ways to communicate were most likely audio and picture (Baruah, 2012). Ancient society such as China, Egypt and Greece used to communicate with smoke signals during the day and fire on top of hills by night. Drums were used across the world to prolong the range of the human voice for communication as well. In 550 BC, the seeds of social media were sown, when the first postal system started in Iran, in those days' horsemen and carriages transported mail. Generally, mail consisted of governmental dispatches sent everywhere (Baruah, 2012). Figure 2.1 depicts the evolution of social media.
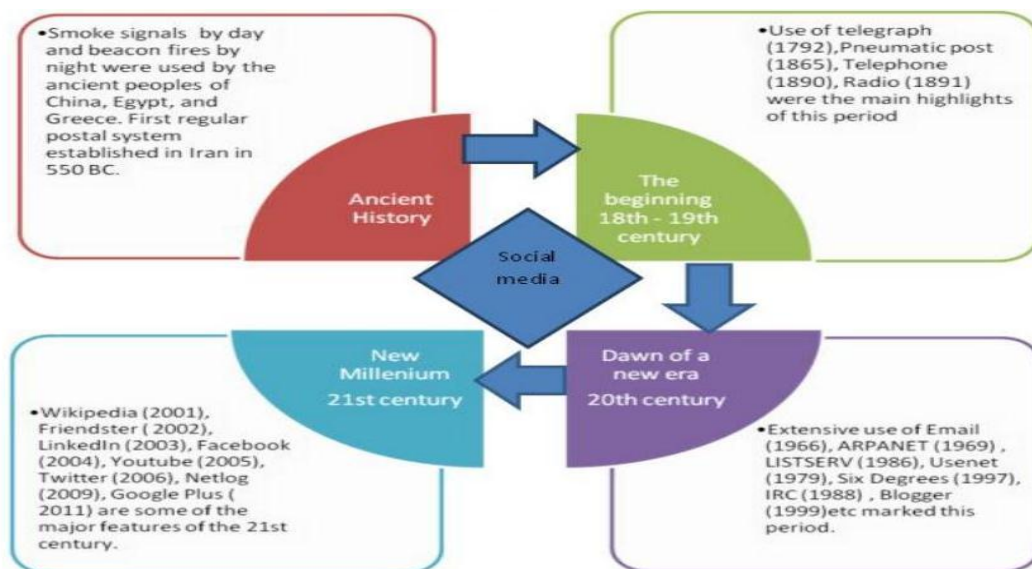
Figure 2.1: The evolutional history of social media (Baruah, 2012)

The term social media refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue (Baruah, 2012). Social media come in many different forms including magazines, forums, weblogs, blogs, micro-blogging, wikis, podcasts, pictures, video, rating sites and bookmarking. With the universe in the midst of a social media revolution, it is more than evident that social media such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube and Skype etcetera, are now being used extensively to communicate (Baruah, 2012).

Contemporary scholars have observed that most businesses and non-profit organisations now engage social media in promoting their products and services (Baruah, 2012). Very often, business managers try to sustain good relationships with their publics. In this regard, social networking sites are now seen as a capable means of publicity which every 'brand' must embrace. Social media as a medium of promotion contributes, through its immediacy, to healthy and direct relationships between brands and their publics in an online environment (Baruah, 2012).

2.3   SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media consist of a wide-range of online, word-of-mouth forums, blogs, house-sponsored discussion boards and chat rooms, consumer-to-consumer e-mail, consumer product or service ratings websites and forums, online discussion boards as well as forums and micro blogs (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Social media play an important role in society's everyday life, as well as in business. Furthermore, social media have become more ingrained in the public's daily life, and have been adopted by a diverse audience across age, culture, lifestyle and socio-economic status (Waters *et al.*, 2009). Internet-mediated social networks are therefore offering people a rich array of facilities and content (Phillips, 2008). Each social media site has become richer in content and interactivity and each has brought more mechanisms for self-expression and provided an ability to display members' opinions to groups of people who may share similar interests.

Social networking sites also allow organisations to create profiles and become active members. Consequently, organisations have incorporated these tools into their public relations programmes. An illustration of social media's popularity is shown by the April 2006 example where more than 4,000 organisations joined Facebook within two weeks when the web expanded its registration (Waters *et al.,* 2009). In this light, social media tools offer organisations unprecedented new opportunities to establish and cultivate relationships and engage (Kelleher & Sweetser, 2012). They provide a new set of tools

to people and to organisations to influence each other in a way which has never occurred before (Pearce, 2010).

For corporations, social media allow conversations that were never possible before as well as encourage, promote and monetise this dialogue (Safko & Brake, 2009). Past communication methods between organisation and stakeholder, and business and business, have been replaced and improved by a more robust, multidimensional method collectively called social media. Instead, with the rise of social media there is currently a paradigm shift from organisations and brands controlling the flow of information to publics being in control (Qualman, 2009). Social media platforms are open to feedback and participation. They encourage comment and the sharing of information. There are no barriers in accessing and making use of contents as social media are open to everyone (Phillips & Young, 2009). Nearly all Internet content is user-generated and the medium stimulates interactive, many-to-many modes of communication. According to Flew (2008) user-generated content refers specifically to the ways in which users as both re-mediators and direct producers of [social] media content engage in new forms of large-scale participation in digital media space (Flew, 2008).

As per Newland and White (2000), before the advent of social media in public relations, controlled messages were distributed via newsletters, annual reports, brochures and other vehicles that were written by Public Relations (PR) practitioners in organisations. Advertising was the only way to send controlled messages to mass audiences through mass mediums (Newland & White, 2000). However, social media have changed the structure of social capital by allowing a greater number of relational exchanges to take place between social actors. On the other hand, the web offers a unique opportunity for organisations to interactively reach multiple publics without using large sums of money (Choi, Kiousis & Yeon, 2005).

By embracing web 2.0 technologies to connect with their publics, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are making intelligent decisions to use social networking sites as places to not only remain connected to current stakeholders, but to also gain new partners (Fine, 2009). NGOs can therefore possibly become leaders in utilising social technologies in order to grow and strengthen their networks. Since NGOs are relationship-driven organisations, online communities and social media offer new dialogues and interactive ways of harnessing existing loyalty and passion (Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009). Accordingly, social media are rapidly becoming the core channels to disseminate information while their interactive features allow two-way

communication and enable instantaneous feedback and speedy communication. Further to this, Barker (2009) notes that social media can also offer a unified communication platform where users have the ability to interact with others on an instantaneous basis.

2.3.1 Defining social media

Social media can be defined as online places where people with common interests can gather to discuss issues (Weber, 2009). They consist of social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and branded web destinations such as Amazone.com and Ebay.com. Palmer and Koenig-Lewis, (2009:165) also define social media as online application platforms and media whose aim is to facilitate interactions, collaborations, and sharing of content. Solis (2007) has described social media as online tools that people use to share opinions, ideas, insights, experiences and perspectives.

It is important to note that social media come in many forms such as virtual social networks, personal journals (Blog), services (Blogger, Word Press), instant micro-blogging (Twitter), virtual worlds (Second Life), social photo-video and audio sharing websites (YouTube, MySpace) and message or conversation boards (Mustonen, 2009). In order to provide an outline of existing social media and their functions and abilities, Mustonen (2009) provides a two-dimensional matrix to categorise social media tools based on their ability to facilitate the sharing of information and enhance social commitment. Table 2.1 below shows Mustonen's matrix.

Table 2.1: Social media tools matrix (Mustonen, 2009)

Strong need for sharing information	Photo-, audio- and video-sharing Wikis	Discussion forums
Weak need for sharing information	Virtual worlds	Social networking sites
	Weak need for social commitment	Strong need for social commitment

As Table 2.1 illustrates, a strong need for sharing information is stressed by photo, audio and video sharing tools (MySpace), as well as wikis. These tools nevertheless exhibit a weak need for social commitment. Virtual worlds (Second Life) on the other hand, display a weak need for both information sharing and social commitment. However, discussion forums exhibit strong information sharing and social commitment

needs, and social networking (Facebook) stresses social commitment. However, it places little emphasis on information sharing (Mustonen, 2009).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) identified and described six types of social media (illustrated in Figure 2.2), collaborative projects such as Wikipedia, blogs and micro blogs such as Twitter, content communities such as YouTube, social network services such as Facebook, virtual game worlds such as World of Warcraft and virtual social worlds such as Second Life.
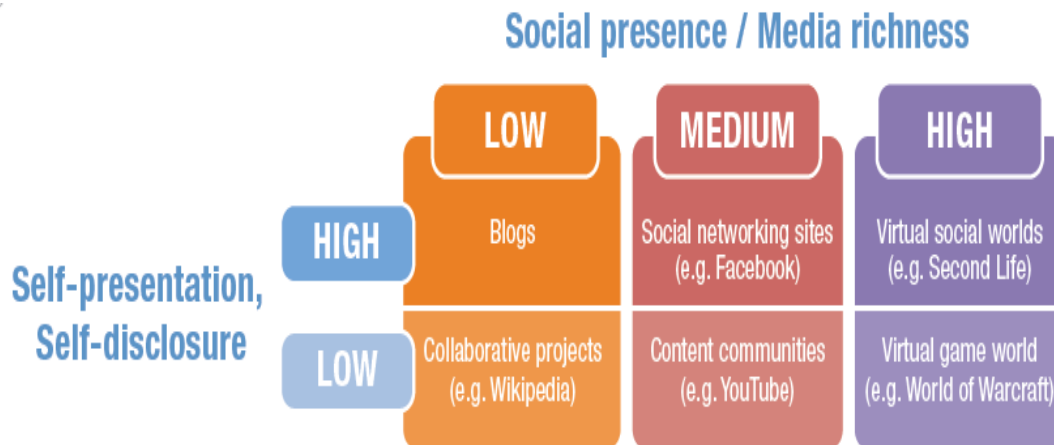
Figure 2.2: Classification of social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)

Collaborative projects are social media tools that allow the joint and immediate creation of content by many end-users. Blogs are an earliest form of social media and can be viewed as types of websites that usually show date-stamped entries in reverse chronological order, while micro blogs are much shorter types of blogs, limited to 140 characters (two short sentences). The main objective of content communities is the sharing of media content between users. Social networking sites are platforms that allow users to connect by creating personal detail profiles, inviting acquaintances and workmates to have access to those profiles, and conveying e-mails and instantaneous messages between each other. Virtual game worlds are applications that replicate a three dimensional environment in which users look in the form of customised avatars and mingle with each other as they would in real life; and virtual communities, often referred to as virtual social worlds, allow people to choose their behaviour more freely and essentially live virtual life in ways that are similar to their real life (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Palmer and Koenig-Lewis (2009) have divided social media into the following categories: Blogs: comprising individuals or firms' online journals that are often

combined with audio or video podcasts; Social networks: applications that allow users to build personal websites that are accessible to other users for exchange of personal content and communication; Content communities: websites which seek to organise and share particular types of content; Forum/bulletin board: sites seeking to exchange ideas and information usually around special interests; and Content aggregators: applications that allow users to completely customise the web content that they wish to access.

2.4   TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

2.4.1   Blogs

Weber (2009) defines a blog as an online journal that can be personal or corporate, where people can post ideas, images and links to others websites. However, Zarrella (2010) describes blogs in a comparable way and claims that they are online personal journals with thoughts, comments and often hyperlinks that are provided by the writer. Micro blogging is also defined by Zarrella (2010) as a form of blogging that limits the size of each post. An example of this is Twitter which requires little time to compose the message and allows its users to send and receive messages, which are known as tweets, with maximum of 140 characters.

2.4.2   Social networks

Social networks are applications where people with common interest or concern come together, to meet, express themselves and communicate (Weber, 2009). Additionally, Boyd and Ellison (2008) define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, view and traverse their list of contacts and those made by others inside the network.

2.4.3   Virtual world

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) posit that virtual social worlds allow people to choose behaviour more freely and to live (in the form of avatars) in a virtual world similar to their real life. An example is Second Life.

2.4.4   Collaborative project

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) are of the opinion that collaborative projects enable the joint and simultaneous creation of content by many users. Examples include various 'wikis', such as Wikipedia. Some of these sites allow users to add, remove and change content; others are a form of 'social bookmarking', in that they allow the group-based collection and rating of Internet links or media content.

2.4.5   Media sharing (content community)

Media-sharing sites are websites that allow users to create and upload multimedia content of their own choice (Zarrella, 2010). With the uptake of cheap, easy-to-use cameras and camcorders and the increase of high-speed Internet connections, media-sharing sites have become popular. YouTube is currently the largest video-sharing website and the third most visited site on the Internet that enables everyone to create and distribute their own content.

2.4.6   Virtual games world

Research conducted by Kaplan and Haenlein, (2010) further indicates that virtual game worlds are platforms that replicate a three-dimensional environment in which users appear in the form of personalised avatars and interact according to the rules of the game. They have gained popularity with the support of devices such as Microsoft's XBox and Sony's PlayStation. Virtual game worlds, such as World of Warcraft, are online meeting platforms where users can interact. It offers a way to connect with existing communities that belong to offline communities like social and professional groups.

2.5   THE PURPOSE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The purposes of social media in an organisation are infinite. Social media enable organisations to connect with publics online, thereby establishing and nurturing mutually beneficial relationships (Freberg, 2009). Social media enable organisations to conduct research (qualitative and quantitative). They also allow organisations to launch events and create awareness on issues that might occur (Freberg, 2009). Furthermore, social media can also be used for media relations practices, as a means of reaching both traditional and non-traditional media. This enables organisations to easily engage with their publics in dialogue. Social media also permit organisations to communicate with audiences through online channels and consequently help them manage their communication, reputation and crises (Freberg, 2009).

Brogan (2007) argues that the extent of what social media can do for businesses is endless. For instance, he posits that they encourage collaboration, conversations, sharing and creation of information. The advent of social media has also helped organisations to improve comprehension of their stakeholders and to reach many people in ways that organisations have previously not been able to do. Social media platforms have enabled organisations to converse with stakeholders in an array of new ways (Brown, 2009). For instance, Webster and Keller (2004) argue that social media

as online media present opportunities for fostering two-way communication with audiences, which subsequently builds trust between organisations and their publics. Social media also allow everyone to publish and contribute to online conversations (Weber, 2009) something which facilitates interactions, collaborations and the sharing of content (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009).

Social media are therefore a critical means that an organisation can use to listen to stakeholders such as volunteers and donors, among others. They have an inert capacity to enhance stakeholder relationships and drive stakeholders' awareness on organisation activities thereby, enhancing interaction (Dugan, 2007). Through social media, organisations can ensure that publics are kept aware of their activities and interact dialogically. Dialogic communication fosters mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics. Social media tools can make networking and stakeholder engagement simple and powerful, facilitate research, identify influencers in useful micro-niches, provide tools to fight bad publicity, and measure public opinions to help inform public policy (Drapeau, 2009). Social networking sites are also influencing the purchasing choices of a meaningful percentage of Internet users who visit them, and most organisations do not want to miss this opportunity. The purpose of social media is to enable people to engage in discussions based on interaction through this open system. However, social media measurement is difficult but not impossible (Owyang, 2009).

2.6   SOCIAL MEDIA MEASUREMENT

Scholars and practitioners argue that, like traditional media, social media can also be measured. Haven and Vittal (2008) point out that organisations should be measuring social media by looking at the four I's of engagement: Involvement, Interaction, Intimacy and Influence. Engagement measurement incorporates the quantitative and qualitative metrics gathered from both online and offline channels. It comprises concrete individual metrics from store visits and online purchases to the softer, aggregated insights from brand awareness studies, sentiment, loyalty, and advocacy. Table 2.2 below illustrates the four components of engagement.

Table 2.2: The four components of engagement (Haven, Bernoff & Glass, 2008)

INVOLVEMENT	INTERACTION	INTIMACY	INFLUENCE
What To Track			
• Site visits • Time spent • Pages viewed • Search keywords • Navigation paths • Site logins	• Contributed comments to blogs • Quantity/frequency of written reviews, blog comments, forum discussions, and UGC	• Sentiment tracking on third-party sites (blogs, reviews, forums, etc.) • Sentiment tracking of internal customer contributions • Opinions expressed in customer service calls	• Net Promoter (NP) score • Product/service satisfaction ratings • Brand affinity • Content forwarded to friends • Posts on high-profile blogs
How To Track			
• Web analytics	• eCommerce platforms • Social media platforms	• Brand monitoring • Customer service calls • Surveys	• Brand monitoring • Customer service calls • Surveys

Involvement: It can be understood as the most fundamental measurement of engagement that displays the measurable attributes of individuals' relationships with an organisation or its brand. Metrics comprise website visitors, time spent per page, physical store visits, and impressions from mass media advertising, data sources including web analytics and store traffic reports (Haven *et al.*, 2007).

Interaction: It provides the deepness that involvement alone lacks, by measuring occasions in which the individual contributes content about the brand, request extra information, and provides contact information, or purchases product or service. Metrics comprise click-through, online transactions, in-store purchases, uploaded photos or videos, and so on. Data sources include e-Commerce platforms, POS systems, and social media platforms (Haven *et al.*, 2007).

Intimacy: It goes beyond communication to measure the fondness or sentiment that an individual holds for their brand. Metrics include affection measurement in blog posts, contents, comments, discussion forums and customer service call sentiments. Data sources include brand monitoring services, survey responses and customer service call centres (Haven *et al.,* 2007).

Influence: It looks beyond even sentiment to determine an individual's likelihood to encourage fellow customers to consider or buy a brand, product or service. Metrics encompass brand awareness, fidelity, affinity, repurchases, net promoters, satisfaction

ratings and forwarded content. Data sources include market research services, brand monitoring, customer service call centres and surveys (Haven *et al.*, 2007).

The impact of social media can also be measured by free sites for online tracking and measurement such as People Browsr, SM2, Google Insights, Samepoint and Social Mention. These sites can provide organisations with comprehensive insight of what is being said and the real investment wanted which is time. Other paid sites such as Radian6, CustomScoop, Viral Heat, Nielson Buzzlogics and Cision Social Media can be used to track the so-called buzz around one's brand (Kelly, 2010).

2.7   STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS

It is important to understand that communication relationships are a natural outcome of communication (Steyn & Puth, 2000). A relationship can be defined as the state which exists between an organisation and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact on the economic, social, political and cultural well-being of the another entity (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Grunig and Hon (1999) suggest that relationships are complex and consist of various indicators fundamental to specific types of relationships.

Stakeholders can therefore be understood as any groups or individuals with whom the organisation interrelates or has interdependencies, and any individuals or groups that affect or are affected by the actions, decisions, policies, practices or goals of the organisation (Conner, cited in Gibson, 2000). This statement clearly shows that stakeholders have a direct influence on organisations. Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2002) refer to stakeholders as key publics and distinguish between six major groups: employees, investors or shareholders, the media, customers, government institutions and members of associations, and the community. To function effectively and successfully, an organisation should determine its stakeholders. Grunig and Hon (1999) observe that effective organisations achieve suitable goals by developing and nurturing stakeholder relationships. Dialogic communication is based on two-way communication. It is centred on relationships building and based on the principles of reciprocity, mutuality, involvement and openness (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

2.7.1   Stakeholder approach

Stakeholder consideration has been discussed broadly in general management literature since Freeman (1984) formally introduced stakeholder theory to the corporate world. Since then, Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) have asserted that the stakeholder approach to understanding the firm in its environment has been a powerful heuristic

device, which is aimed at broadening management's vision beyond the narrow focus of its stockholders and profit maximisation to include the interests and claims of non-stockholding groups.

Stakeholders can be categorised according to their potential impact on the organisation, as well as on their possible reaction to issues. Although there are many definitions of stakeholders as noted by Carroll (1998), Spence, Coles and Harris (2001), Phillips (2004) and Freeman (1984) define a stakeholder as any group or individual who can influence or is influenced by the activities, decisions, strategies, practices, or goals of the organisation. To sort out this profusion of definitions, Mitchell *et al*. (1997) propose a comprehensive typology that classifies stakeholders based on possession of one, two or all three of the following attributes: the stakeholder's power to influence the firm, the legitimacy of the stakeholder's relationship with the firm, and the urgency of the stakeholder's claim on the firm.

Stakeholder power is triggered by conditions that are manifest in legitimacy and urgency attributes of the relationships. Power itself does not guarantee high salience in a stakeholder/manager relationship (Mitchell *et al*., 1997).

Legitimacy is a dynamic attribute in the stakeholder/manager relationship. It may be present or may be absent. Also, like power, the contribution of legitimacy to stakeholder salience depends upon interaction with two other attributes: power and urgency (Mitchell *et al*., 1997).

Finally **urgency** is not a steady-state attribute but varies across the stakeholder/manager relationship or within a single relationship over time. Urgency is a socially constructed perceptual phenomenon and may be perceived correctly or falsely by the stakeholders, managers or others in the firm's milieu (Mitchell *et al*., 1997).

2.7.2 Stakeholder identification

Steyn and Puth (2000) state that it is important to identify stakeholder groups and determine the amount of power they have (different groups have different degrees of power, depending on the dependency on the stakeholder group). They further point out that the practical tool for profiling stakeholders is stakeholder mapping. This tool helps to identify and assess people and organisations that can be affected by organisational activities or can be influenced by the organisation.

Organisations should therefore define and clarify the classes of stakeholders and determine their power in order for managers to deal with them appropriately (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997). Thus, it is necessary to identify the various stakeholders and to classify them into groups with similar values, issues and concerns (Steyn & Puth, 2000). Mitchell *et al.* (1997) argue that different stakeholder groups exhibit different salience based on their perceived power, legitimacy and urgency. This view does not allege any superiority to the managerial view, but rather complements it, and suggests that equivalent interest should be paid to both institutional contexts and managerial discretions in corporate accountability and social accounting discourses. Stakeholder salience is based on the fact that it is core to the understanding and pursuit of stakeholder accountability. Until now, the social accounting literature has presented decision-making on stakeholder salience as something that is solely internal to the firm and under managerial perception and bounded rationality (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997).

Mitchell *et al.* (1997) suggest that managers should distinguish between stakeholders based on their views of stakeholders' relative levels of perceived power, legitimacy, and urgency. Their analysis shows that stakeholders have power when managers perceive them to have an ability to impose their willpower on the organisation. Stakeholders have legitimacy when managers perceive their actions or claims to be proper and appropriate, and relative to the prevailing standards of the institutional environment within which they both operate. Finally, stakeholders have urgency when their claims on organisational attention are both time sensitive and critical to them (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997).

The model below (Figure 2.3) describes three classes of stakeholders, depending on their possession of one, two or three of the following three attributes: power, legitimacy and urgency. The three classes are as follows: **Latent stakeholder:** has a lower salience to an organisation because they only have one attribute. They are identified as dormant, discretionary, and demanding. **Expectant stakeholder:** possesses two attributes and are organised into dominant, dependent, and dangerous stakeholders. **Definitive stakeholder:** possesses all three attributes.
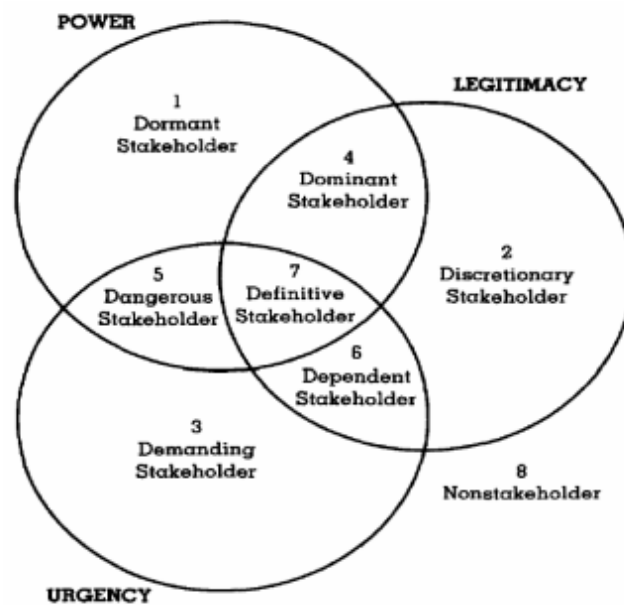
Figure 2.3: Stakeholder typology (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997)

Dormant stakeholder: Such stakeholders possess power to impose their will on the organisation. However, by not having a legitimate relationship or an urgent claim, dormant stakeholder power remains unused. An example of dormant stakeholder is an employee fired by an organisation (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997).

Discretionary stakeholder: Have the attributes of legitimacy, but without the power to influence the organisation and no urgent claims on the organisation. There is no pressure on managers to engage discretionary stakeholders in an active relationship. Such discretionary stakeholders include non-profit organisations, school, and hospitals receiving donations as well as volunteers (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997).

Demanding stakeholder: In this instance, the relevant characteristic is urgency. Demanding stakeholders have urgent claims but without neither power nor legitimacy. They are therefore noisy and annoy managers but are not dangerous (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997).

Dominant stakeholder: Have a formal agreement that acknowledges their importance. For example, boards of directors, owners, big creditors, community leaders, investors, human resources (employees) and public affairs (government). They receive reports, annual reports, proxy statements, and social and environmental reports (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997).

Dependent stakeholder: Have urgent, legitimate claims based on their dependency. There is no mutual relationship and the relationship involves advocacy or guardianship of other stakeholder, for example local residents and the natural environment (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997).

Dangerous stakeholder: These have urgency and power, but no legitimacy. They can use coercive power and violence, sabotage, terrorism, bombing, kidnapping and shooting to gain attention outside the bounds of legitimacy (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997).

Definitive stakeholder: These have the three stakeholder attributes: power, legitimacy and urgency. Definitive stakeholders are perceived by managers to be present.

Non-stakeholder: These have none of the three attributes of power, legitimacy and urgency (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997). The classification of key stakeholders can be achieved by analysing strategic linkages that are crucial for an organisation to survive. This research focuses on external stakeholders such as volunteers, communities and patrons. Figure 2.4 below illustrates the strategic linkages of organisations.
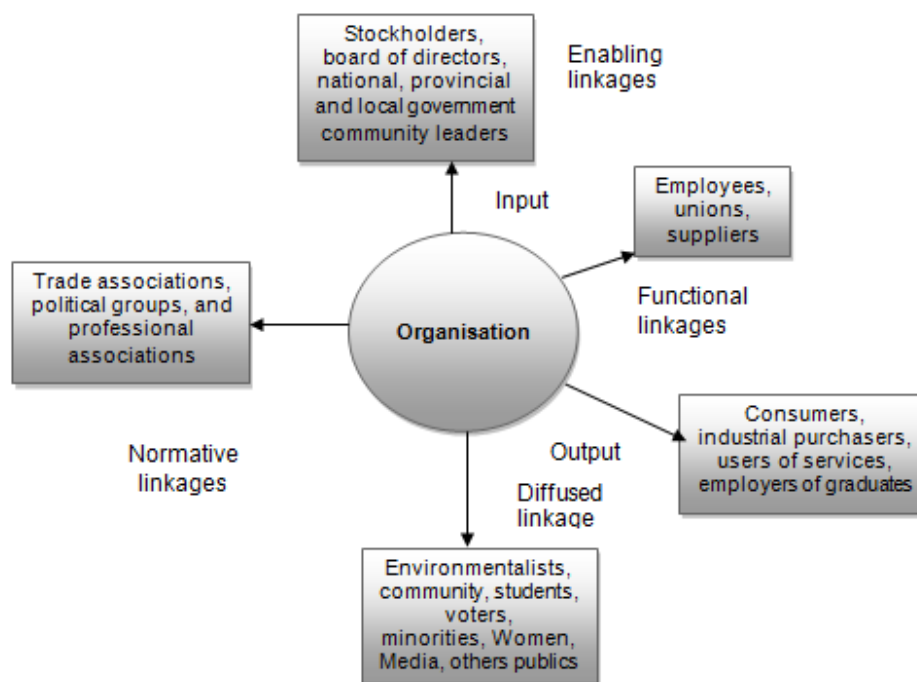
Figure 2.4: Organisation strategic linkages (Steyn & Puth, 2000)

Enabling linkages: represent groups that provide authority to the organisation and control its resources, for example, government regulators, and stockholders, board of directors and donors (Steyn & Puth, 2000).

Functional linkages: refer to groups that provide inputs to the organisation (for example, employees and unions) and use their outputs, for example, consumers and graduates (Steyn & Puth, 2000).

Normative linkages: refer to professional or industry associations. These linkages provide connections to similar organisations that can assist in problem solving (Steyn & Puth, 2000).

Diffused linkages: refer to a connection of groups of individuals who are not part of the organisation. Minority relations are organisational attempts to manage linkages with diffused groups (Steyn & Puth, 2000).

2.7.3 Effects of stakeholders on an organisation's reputation

The concept of reputation is defined as stakeholders' perceptions of an organisation's ability to create value, which is relative to competitors and which influences stakeholders' economic choices (Deephouse, 2000). Dalton (2005) contends that reputation is the sum value that stakeholders attribute to a company, based on their perceptions and interpretations of the image that the company communicates over time. This assertion clearly shows that it is crucial for any organisation to work on strengthening its image and reputation. Consequently, failure to pay attention to the relevant stakeholder may bring an organisation to its knees, as this may have a negative impact on its reputation. It is worth noting that even if only one stakeholder has a negative perception of the organisation, this will impact on the organisation (Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2004).

Since the corporate image is concerned with the public's perceptions of an organisation, the way in which an organisation interacts with stakeholders is important, as every encounter has the ability to affect an organisation's image (Balmer, 1998). To make sure that the brand platform created by the organisation is reinforced appropriately, an organisation should be well informed on how to deal with stakeholders. Gray and Balmer (1998) illustrate the importance of consistently reinforcing the brand platform by showing that corporate reputation indicates a value judgement about the company's attributes and evolves over time as a result of consistent performance, which is reinforced by effective communication. Furthermore, if an organisation's mission is to survive, it should listen to its stakeholders. Building better relations with primary stakeholders such as employees, customers, suppliers, and communities could lead to increased financial returns by helping firms to develop

intangible but priceless assets, which can be foundations of competitive advantage (Freeman, 1984). Consequently, investing in stakeholder relations can lead to stakeholder loyalty, reduced turnover among workers and improved firm reputation.

Bernstein (cited in Steyn, De Beer, Steyn & Schreiner, 2004) states that most management failures result from or are highlighted by failure to communicate. Since the ability to communicate has itself become a key factor which determines a company's reputation, openness and transparency have simultaneously become watchwords to re-build trust in business (Laurence, 2004). In this regard, building healthier relations with key stakeholders such as workers, clients, suppliers, and communities can lead to augmented shareholder wealth, thereby helping firms to increase intangible, valuable assets, which can be sources of competitive advantage to an extent that stakeholders will be more willing to give the organisation the benefit of the doubt (Rayner, 2004).

Reputation might play an essential role in determining the readiness of others to enter into an exchange with a particular actor (Hill, 1990). It can be expected that actors will try to avoid entering into an exchange with other actors who have a dubious reputation. Therefore, success and indeed survival of every business depends on either obtaining support or neutralising the attacks of key actors in its environment. Organisations need keen insight into the behaviour of those actors who affect their fate (Yavitz & Newman, 1990). It has been suggested that people live in a reputation society where social networks and shared experiences take central stage (Luoma-aho, 2005). Organisational survival in a reputation society necessitates enhanced understanding of stakeholders, as well as new strategies to deal with stakeholder emotions. Stakeholder assessments affect organisational reputation, and these assessments contribute to organisational legitimacy (Deephouse & Carter, 2005).

The opinions of publics have always been significant in public relations, as they shape the interaction that takes place between the organisation and its publics (Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). Stakeholder opinions enhance social capital which helps the organisation to build and maintain relationships in order to achieve desirable goals (Kennan & Hazleton, 2006). Therefore, stakeholders' views of the organisation can positively benefit the organisation in numerous ways. For instance, stakeholders will recommend the services and products to others, stakeholders are willing to pay a higher price and ignore minor problems and are devoted to collaboration and development (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007).

A corporate communication manager is required to undertake continuous research on stakeholders or publics, because without a thorough understanding of adversarial groups, the organisation is at their mercy (Steyn & Puth, 2000). Corporate communication practitioners can play a significant role in preventing or resolving fundamental conflicts with stakeholder groups. For example, corporate communication practitioners could monitor and scan their environment for upcoming trends and opinion. They can exacerbate or reduce problems which organisations face when they are pressured by external constituencies. In this light, social media offer additional opportunities for public relations practitioners to create and cultivate relationships as well as engage their stakeholders.

2.8   SOCIAL MEDIA AND STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS

The global world is no longer a shareholder but a stakeholder world. As result, organisations need to be everywhere, engaging everyone and communicating through a range of channels (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2010).

Social media allow people to connect, share information and ideas with others through the Internet. The interactive nature of social media helps with relationship-building. Social media allow all publics to publish and to contribute to online conversations (Weber, 2009). Online social networking has also become a popular work tool among NGOs (non-profits, charities, civil society organisations). Consequently, marketers, politicians and job recruiters for organisations and NGOs are creating personal profiles on sites such as Facebook (Wong, 2008). In this light, social media present an incredible opportunity for organisations to meet the challenges of contacting stakeholders their through networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook.

Jo and Kim (2003) argue that interactivity is considered essential if organisations want to develop relationships with their stakeholders. As an interactive media, social media help organisations to deliver services to their clients, to conduct advocacy campaigns, to encourage involvement in community programs, and web-based fund raising (Spigelman & Evans, 2004). Social media fundamentally allow for two-way communication. Two-way communication helps organisations to engage people or the public by connecting with them online, thereby building relationships. As interactive tools, social media facilitate two-way dialogue between organisations and their stakeholders, engaging them in an active, interactive, equal and continuous communication.

Social media can also provide organisations with an outstanding opportunity to establish, sustain and build relationships with various stakeholders such as employees, departments, related organisations, customers and suppliers (Altes, 2009). Social media provide organisations, like the NGOs in this case study, with opportunities to dialogically communicate with their stakeholders such as communities, volunteers and donors. The key goal of social media is the development of stakeholder relationships, improvement of reputation and driving awareness on the organisation's activities in order to gain/achieve mutual understanding with stakeholders.

Unlike traditional media, social media comprise of dialogical, interactive, relational, and global attributes that make them amenable and perfectly suited to a strategic management paradigm of communication (Grunig, 2009). As a result, many organisations have developed two-way, interactive, and dialogical communication programmes using digital media, such as blogs and micro blogs like Twitter (Phillips, 2009).

Social media have not only potentially terminated the age of one-way messaging, but have also placed pressure on businesses to engage their constituents in unprecedented ways (Gillin, 2009). Kelleher (2006) encourages practitioners to use the Internet and social networking sites to advocate their organisation's causes. He however cautions practitioners to be transparent in their online communication activities. Hallahan (2003) suggests five 'antecedent' factors to consider before establishing an online relationship:

- **Prior knowledge:** focus on the information usability, whether or not the content serves the needs of stakeholders.
- **Attitudes:** degree to which individuals share information about their experience.
- **Other communication activities:** importance of integrating different forms of communication such as interactive promotion, news clips, editorial contents and user feedback.
- **Personalities:** adoption of routine behaviours that benefit the organisation (user).
- Achieve stakeholders' goals.

NGOs also use social media to make their management functions more efficient, interacting with volunteers and supporters and edifying stakeholders regarding their activities and services (Waters, 2009). It is therefore important for organisations to use new media as tools for building relationships rather than just a way of getting

information across to stakeholders (Spigelman & Evans, 2004). Consequently, interactive blogs, discussion lists, bulletin boards, real-time consultation, online training, virtual conferences, personalised intranets and extranets and social networking software can play an important role in reinforcing relationships, building trust and communicating strategically with stakeholders. Moshman (2009) identifies the following advantages of using online social networks:

- Social networks are great for marketing and finding volunteers, workers and followers from different backgrounds and groups;
- Professional networking sites such as LinkedIn, allow NGOs to build professional credibility;
- Social networks help similar NGOs to connect and work together;
- Blogging websites such as Twitter can tell people what the day-to-day operations of the NGO are, as well as what major events will be taking place.

2.9 SOCIAL MEDIA AS A DISRUPTIVE INNOVATION TOOL OF COMMUNICATION

Disruptive technologies can be conceptualised as innovations that disrupt established products and markets, changing existing organisation process and values (Garisson, 2009). From a public relations perspective, social media can be understood as a disruptive innovation that establishes new forms of relationships with stakeholders. Indeed, social media discussions around products and organisations show that disruption has already occurred and the nature of the relationships of organisation stakeholders is practically altered (Quinn-Allan, 2010). As a disruptive technology, social media have not only changed public relation practice but also transformed organisational values and processes. For example, social media offer a unified platform where users have the ability to interact with others on a real-time basis (Barnes & Barnes, 2009). Social media are also leading Public Relation (PR) practitioners to shape stakeholder discussions in a manner that is consistent with the organisation's mission and goals (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

2.10 SOCIAL MEDIA AND PUBLIC RELATIONS: A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP

Social media have exploded in terms of their usage and ubiquity, and now significantly influence communication in organisations around the world. The advent of new media has helped resolve the challenge of strengthening corporate reputation and building trust among stakeholders which had plagued the pre-digital era and proven to be a challenge for professional communicators (Pearce, 2010). Undoubtedly, the most significant changes have happened most recently, through the introduction of social

media such as blogs, Facebook and Twitter which have altered the relationship between organisations and their different publics; a process that for decades went one-way in a top-down manner, usually resembling a monologue, now typifies a dialogue.

In this regard, social media are reinventing the public relations playbook and bringing with them vast potentials to raise the profile of the public relations profession. Social media have been so incorporated into the daily life of practitioners that it is normal for them to use social media for public relation activities. However, some scholars claim that this is leading to the death of public relations (Kanter & Fine, 2010). On the contrary, the Internet is really helping to enhance the effectiveness of the profession.

Within Africa, especially amongst investor relations circles, the practice of supplementing some traditional media with social media is not widespread. However, as new media thrive, some organisations have begun to add certain functions, such as the disclosure of material news, thereby adopting social media channels as key communication tools. The most popular networking platforms adopted are: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and corporate blogging. These platforms have become crucial vehicles for enhancing stakeholder relations and improving the bottom line. Daily, millions of people are sharing data and thoughts on organisations, products and brands. By merely tapping into and monitoring conversations online, organisations are able to identify the key influencers and opinion-shapers with whom they need to engage and incorporate into their public relations programmes. Instead of relying on financial reports, organisations are now building stronger relationships with old and new stakeholders on social media platforms. The advantage of using social media is that it may help organisations to initiate conversations in a way that strengthens existing relationships.

Grunig (2009) offers a clear analysis of and adds substantial value to discussions on public relations and its dialectical relationship with social media. He argues that, social media have the potential to make the public relations profession more global, strategic, two-way symmetrical or dialogical, interactive and socially responsible. However, Grunig cautions practitioners against "dumping messages" on social media platforms in the old linear way. Grunig (2009) posits that professionals need to interact with stakeholders and bring information from the environment into organisational decision-making process. It is therefore important to note that social media have enabled organisations to communicate with stakeholders in a variety of new ways, both linear and dialogical (Brown, 2009). They facilitate interaction; collaboration and the sharing

of content with stakeholders in a way that help organisations understand the needs of stakeholders (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009).

2.10.1 Implications of social media on the practice of public relations

Social media have accelerated the rise of distinct cultures and sub-cultures and led to the segmentation of stakeholders (Pearce, 2010). Public segmentation helps practitioners to develop strategies for problem solving and relationship building with publics. Furthermore, via segmentation organisations can classify their broad category of stakeholders in specific subgroups (Kim, 2011). Moreover, the rise of social media has made the practice of segmentation more demanding. The range of stakeholders, their concerns and needs, makes practitioners' jobs more challenging and increases the importance. Based on the supposition that practitioners are the stakeholder relationship experts, social media have provided the profession with an opportunity to progress its constant battle to secure a more strategic role within organisations. This development emphasises the need for practitioners to be aptly educated at a tactical and strategic level. The excessive use of social media by stakeholders has placed a huge burden on practitioners. The technical distinction and proper social behaviour for each social medium requires prodigious knowledge, as well as technique and abilities for practitioners using social media, suggesting that the world has no room for self-satisfied public relation operatives (Pearce, 2010).

2.10.2 The conversation: public relations and social media

In the broader perspective, there is a little difference between traditional media and social media. In traditional media, practitioners connect and build relationships with reporters and editors to get stakeholder news disseminated. In social media, practitioners connect and build relationships with powerful participants to get stakeholder news distributed. It is, however, more difficult in social media because there are more participants and less clarity in determining who are the key actors (Horton, 2009).

Furthermore, over time, influential participants will coalesce within social media and practitioners will have a clearer view on where to go if only the past is a guide. Although this is happening, there are still large areas of social media practice that are still open to investigation. Another dimension is that social media existence is built on an approach that benefits community or society. Thought management plays a significant role in this dialectic. Corporate social responsibility is extremely similar to it (Pearce, 2010). All of these elements go back to Grunig's two-way communication

model, which sees public relations as an activity that allows organisations and stakeholders to reach an understanding.

2.10.3 Controlling target audiences

As Phillips and Young (2009) argue, organisations have little control over stakeholders' thoughts and behaviours. This view concurs with Grunig (2009) who argues that the presumed control of messages and influence has always been an impression rather than a reality in public relations practice. Some organisations and professionals continue to find this reality difficult to comprehend (Pearce, 2010). The only way to influence stakeholders is to engage. This means that communication needs to be conversational and two-way symmetrical rather than one-way. This also implies behavioural change for organisations as well as stakeholders. Communication research has discredited one-way linear and publicity notion of public relations which is premised on the assumption that control of stakeholders is feasible. Stakeholders have always controlled the messages to which they are exposed. According to Grunig (2009), the best practice of public relations is when communicators are participants in organisational decision-making rather than conveyors of messages about decisions after they are made by other managers.

Grunig (2009) does note that with the introduction of digital media, neither public relations practitioners nor journalists are able to control the flow of information. The point here is that stakeholders can now be communicators who talk freely to each other about organisations, making information widely available to everyone at little cost and effort. Grunig's (2009) point, however, is that the assumed control and influence of publics through media messages has always been an illusion rather than a reality of public relations practice. This illusion of control is inherited from a traditional paradigm of public relations that viewed public relations as a messaging, publicity, informational and media relations function.

Practitioners within this paradigm emphasise publications, news, communication campaigns, and media contacts in their work. They define public relations as a marketing communication function that supports marketing through media publicity or by combining publicity with advertising in a programme of integrated marketing communication. Practitioners within this paradigm generally believe that they can regulate messages to which publics are exposed (Grunig, 2009). Often public relations practitioners describe the recipients as audiences, rather than publics, which further suggests an illusion of control. These practitioners naturally believe that organisations can define, or even create their publics and target them. Practitioners also consider

that publics can be persuaded, for example cognitions, attitudes or behaviours can be influenced through asymmetrical communication designed to promote organisation interests with little or no concern of the publics' interest (Grunig, 2009).

It is integral to note that contrary to the above assumption, social media features (dialogical, interactive, relational, and global) have made them perfectly suitable for a strategic management and relational paradigm of public relations. A study by the IABC Research Foundation and Buck Consultants (2009) showed the widespread use of digital media for employee communication programmes. Social media (used frequently or occasionally by 80% of survey participants), emails (75%), intranet (88%), websites (76%), virtual meetings (55%), and podcasts (20%) are superseding traditional media (IABC Research Foundation & Buck Consultants, 2009). Digital media are also being extensively used for media relations, customer relations, financial relations, community relations, member relations for Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) donor relations, alumni relations for colleges and universities, public affairs and political public relations, and many other programmes which are designed to cultivate relationships with publics (IABC Research Foundation & Buck Consultants, 2009).

However, it is also critical to note that despite having the aforementioned properties, digital media are still being used extensively for communication programmes that are one-way and asymmetrical (Phillips, 2009). Nevertheless, many organisations have started to create two-way, interactive, and dialogical communication programmes through digital media, such as blogs, micro-blogs and social networking. Public relations practitioners can now segment stakeholders and publics using the content of digital media as a database. Digital media features are also ideal tool for environmental scanning, and there are many tools available to scan the cyberspace for problems, publics, and issues. Digital media such as websites and blogs can also be used for issues and crisis management in communication programmes (Coombs, 2008).

According to Dugan (2007), public relations-oriented blogs and trade publications have promoted social networking sites as relationships building tools. Therefore, organisations cannot continue to neglect the social media phenomenon. This is because communicating by logging on to social media sites has become a daily activity that goes along with email checking (Kim *et al.*, 2009). According to Smith (2009) smart and efficient ways of communicating with audiences is by talking less and listening more to the audience through social media. Social networking sites can offer a unified communications platform where users can interact with others on a real-time basis (Baker, 2009).

Relationships are the foundation for social networking sites, which means that social media enable communication that may assist non-profit organisations to nurture stakeholder relationships (Waters *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore, virtual networks can be organised around various groups of interest or content, and are becoming a big part of daily conversations in post-modern society (Simmons, 2008). In this regards, social media provide organisations with an excellent opportunity to establish and maintain relationships with various stakeholders (Altes, 2009). Through social media interactions, organisations develop relationships with stakeholders (Waters *et al.*, 2009). By engaging in conversations that are already taking place in the public sphere, practitioners are giving organisations a chance to respond and shape their perceptions (Altes, 2009).

By subsidising social networking sites, and branding it after the company, organisations can engage and allow audience to partake in a very close conversation with one's organisation (Breakenridge, 2009). However, it is important to note that social media do not spell the end of traditional media. They are simply further channels of communication, albeit those that are growing in importance and offer a unique opportunity to interactively reach multiple publics without using an immense sum of money (Choi *et al.,* 2005).

Social media have become a powerful additional communication means that businesses and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) can use to market their products and services, as well as to manage their customer and stakeholders relations. Organisations can use social media to promote themselves in order to make themselves more visible to the general public (Kim *et al.*, 2009). Smith (2009) also claims that whenever people are online, they are actively engaged and communicate with each other by using social media. However, it is important to understand that the power of social networks is engagement rather than sheer dollar numbers (Wong, 2008).

2.11   SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE NGO SECTOR IN SOUTH AFRICA

Since social networking sites (such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube) began allowing organisations to create dynamic profiles, organisations have also begun to integrate sites into their public relations programming (Waters *et al.*, 2009). A study conducted by Waters *et al.* (2009) reveals that Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) are using social networking sites to support their public relations activities. Nevertheless, very little is known about exactly how NPOs are taking full advantage of the potential of social

network rise and their popularity. Waters *et.al* (2009) found that having a social network profile will not in itself boost awareness or activate a flood of participation on organisations' profiles.

However, the significance of social media for South African NGOs has been proven by the 5th Annual SANGONET (ICTs) for Civil Society conference (Barnard, 2009). The conference introduced the concepts such as Twitter, Facebook and Second Life, as well as the vast opportunities presented by cell phones in reinforcing the work of NGOs. Networking sites proved to be providing vast opportunities for sharing experiences, networking and conceptualising new ideas for future implementation.

The preliminary findings of the 2009 "state of ICTs in the South Africa NGOs sector" research project were released during the opening plenary session. World Wide Worx implemented the project on behalf of SANGONET and surveyed more than 800 NGOs throughout South Africa. The study established that South African NGOs are in the process of leveraging technology, but not realising its full potential. The study also focused on social media trends, especially in the NGO sector. The study posits that although many people working in the NGO sector are already utilising social media personally, most NGOs have not yet integrated use of social media in support of their core actions including stakeholder relations management (Barnard, 2009). The study also revealed that Facebook is the most popular social media tool, with only 5% of the population using blogs and 1% utilising Twitter. Nevertheless, given the global explosion of social media tools, the uptake of social media tools in the South African NGO sector has experienced significant growth and expansion in the last few years despite continued challenges on how to derive maximum benefits from social media channels (Barnard, 2009).

2.12   SUMMARY

This chapter dealt with the theory and the literature that guides this thesis. It presented various arguments on what social media are and specifically on how they are used by organisations to communicate with publics. It also dealt with literature on stakeholder relationship management and controversies surrounding stakeholder relationships.

CHAPTER THREE
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

3.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided in three sections. The first section presents Grunig and Hunt's (1984) two-way symmetrical communications (dialogue). The second section discusses the criticality of dialogue in stakeholder relationships management. The third section presents Freire's (1970) dialogic communication.

3.2   TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL COMMUNICATION

To better understand the use of communication in public relations activities in organisations, there is the need to examine the four models of public relations practice put forward by Grunig and Hunt (1984).

The press agentry model

The press agentry model is characterised by one-way communication. It reflects the predominant use of the mass media to distribute information that may be exaggerated, distorted, or even incomplete, to "hype" a cause, product or service. The model is used as a way of persuading and manipulating desired publics to act as the organisation wishes. The press agentry model describes public relations programmes whose sole aim is to seek favourable publicity for an organisation using the mass media (Hunt & Grunig, 1994). Within the model research is not a requirement therefore the truth is not a priority.

The public information model

The public information model is characterised by one-way spreading of information, but not essentially with a persuasive intent. The model is used as a way of disseminating information relying on very little research and no feedback from the public. The one-way, public information model is developed as an answer to assault on corporations and government agencies by muckraking reporters. Leaders of such organisations realise the need for more than propaganda of press agents to counteract the attacks in the media (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). As a response, organisations started hiring in house journalists as public relations practitioners to write press hangouts explaining organisational behaviour (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). Practitioners located within the model, choose to write only good things about the organisation. The information is generally truthful and accurate.

It is however important to note that both the press agentry and public information models are one-way linear models of public communication, which describe communication programmes that are based on research and strategic planning (Hunt & Grunig, 1994). The press agentry and public information models are asymmetrical or imbalanced models in that they both try to change the behaviour of the publics without trying to alter the organisational behaviour as well (Hunt & Grunig, 1994).

The one-way asymmetrical model

The purpose of the one-way asymmetrical model is to provide solicited information from stakeholders; the information is used to manipulate and influence stakeholders to accept organisational views and behave in a way which is optimal for the organisation. It produces messages that will create attitudes and behaviours desired by the organisation with the organisation not mandated to change. This is a selfish model, because the organisation that uses it believes that any change needed to resolve a conflict must come from the public and not from the organisation (Hunt & Grunig, 1994). The model does not use research to find out how stakeholders feel about the organisation. It employs social science to create persuasion and generally focuses on achieving short-term behaviour change by incorporating stakeholders' feedback to create understanding rather than changing its policies or opinions.

The two-way symmetrical model

The two-way symmetrical communication model uses research, listening and dialogue to manage conflict and to nurture relationships with strategic publics (internal and external). It is a form of two-way communication which uses communication to negotiate with publics, resolve conflict and support mutual understanding and respect between the organisation and its publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Within this model, each side is considered to be neither inherently correct nor morally right. However, the process of exchange can reveal the interests of both sides so that they can achieve a win-win, integrative outcome based on collaborative decision making (Heath, 2006).

Unlike in one-way asymmetrical communication, where information is disseminated through a monologic manner, two-way communication is characterised by exchange of information through dialogue (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). The two-way symmetrical communication model attempts to achieve balance by adjusting the relationship between organisations and publics by focusing more on dispute resolution to negotiate mutually beneficial outcomes (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995). The two-way symmetrical model is not only the most ethical communication approach to public

relations, but also the most effective model for meeting organisational goals (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). By providing a framework for ethical communication, Dozier *et al.* (1995) assert that the two-way symmetrical model gives communicators an ability to adjust the "behaviours of the dominant coalition, thus bringing publics and dominant coalitions closer together".

It is therefore important for organisations to use social media in a two-way communication manner in order to interact with their stakeholders. This approach will be used to evaluate theoretical assumptions that underpin the use of social media in nurturing and sustaining stakeholder relationships by NGOs. Grunig and Hunt (1984) argue that although digital media do not change the public relations theories needed to guide practice, new media technologies help the use of the principles and, in future, will make it hard for practitioners around world not to incorporate principles of two-way symmetrical communication. Public relations practitioners who are versed in two-way symmetrical communication skills and are knowledgeable of the organisation and its publics should be capable of practising this type of excellent public relations, thereby allowing the weblog to reach its full dialogic potential in online relationship-building and management (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007).

3.3 CRITICALITY OF DIALOGUE IN STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Creating dialogue and collaborating to resolve problems and misunderstandings by using symmetrical communication concepts helps to develop positive public relationships for organisation by building openness, trust, and understanding (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999). Strelow (1992) argues that two-way communication helps address community concerns and media interests. These concerns and interests can be identified and addressed in their early stages, rather than after some crisis has erupted. Paluszek (2007) further asserts that public relations practitioners at their "fullest and finest" must first listen to their audiences and gather information before communicating. This position is also reiterated by Heath (2006) and other scholars like Strelow (1992) and Dozier *et al.* (1995) who state that two-way dialogue can help corporations to identify opportunities as well as problems, achieve corporate social responsibility and maintain credibility.

3.4 CONCEPTUALISING DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION

The conceptual framework of the study also borrows extensively from Freire's dialogic communication. Freire (1970) contributed immensely towards the conceptualisation of dialogic communication. Freire posits that human nature is dialogic and communication

plays a leading role in people lives. Human beings are continuously in dialogue with others, and it is in that process that they create and recreate themselves. Furthermore Freire (1970) defines dialogue as "the encounter between men in order to name the world. People who have been deprived of their primordial right to speak must first regain it and prevent the continuation of this act of exclusion". He further states that for dialogic communication to happen, someone should articulate the process.

This catalyst is typically a person, internal or external to the community, acting to facilitate the dialogue. Freire argues that the objective of the catalyst is not only to offer pertinent solutions to pre-define problems through simply publishing information from the informed to the uninformed in a non-participatory way, but rather to engage in dialogue whereby group problem identification and problem solving takes places (Freire, 1970). Dialogic discourse therefore defines forms of two-way communication where participants maintain their own opinions with good reason and actively pay attention to other opinions with the goal of mutual understanding (Habermas, 1984).

The nature of dialogue and communication and its role in the meaning-making process is central to understanding how discourse facilitates the development of enduring understandings for use in future problem solving (Innes, 2007). Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009) posit that dialogic communication refers to two-way communication, where the process and its outputs are open-ended and the scope explores issues and generates new knowledge and solutions, rather than merely transmit information.

Different from other communication model Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009) conceptualised multi-track approach which selects and combines different communication approaches into a combined grand approach. The dissimilarities between the two modalities, however, remain substantial. The monologic mode can be considered as a close-ended linear communication flow. The dialogic mode instead can be considered a circular, open-ended process. The Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009) multi-track model divides its approaches to communication into two basic categories: monologic and dialogic communication. Monologic communication refers to one-way communication approaches. Table 3.1 below shows the main features of monologic and dialogic communication models.

Table 3.1: Main features of communication modes (Tufte & Mefalopulos, 2009)

	MONOLOGIC (communication)		DIALOGIC (two-way communication)	
	Communication to Inform	Communication to Persuade	Communication to Explore	Communication to Empower
Main purpose	Raise awareness, increase knowledge	Promote attitude and behaviour change	Assess, probe and analyse issues, prevent conflicts	Build capacities, involve stakeholders
Main model of reference	One way (monologic)	One way (monologic)	Two-way (dialogic)	Two-way (dialogic)
Preferred methods and media	Predominant use of mass media	Predominant use of media	Heavy use of interpersonal methods	Use of dialogue to promote participation

The dialogic model should be conceptualised as the guiding principle and framework for the use of social media in stakeholder relationships management, since in any investigation key stakeholders need to build trust and seek solutions jointly with organisations (Tufte & Mefalopulos, 2009). In this regard, dialogue and two-way communication become necessary in reconciling different perceptions, positions and to define the priorities for development and communication initiatives. Moreover, the dialogic model can be considered as an open-ended process, where the objectives are usually not specifically defined, and even when they are, they can be changed according to the output of the investigation. As a result, the primary goal of the two-way communication process is not to persuade audiences to adopt a predefined change, but rather to engage stakeholders to explore the situation and define the required change (Tufte & Mefalopulos, 2009).

3.5   SUMMARY

This chapter presented the conceptual framework for analysing the use of social media in stakeholder relationship management. The framework discussed two-way symmetrical communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) and dialogic communication (Freire, 1970). This framework has been used as a guide to assess whether NGOs are using social media to nurture and sustain stakeholder relationships.

CHAPTER FOUR
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

4.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the research methodology and methods used to conduct this study. Silverman (2009) defines a research methodology as a general approach to studying research topics. The methodological approach for this study was mainly qualitative. Qualitative research produces descriptive data through the study of attitudes and behaviours best understood within their natural settings. It also allows the researcher to understand the perspectives of social actors, retrieve experiences from the past, and to gain expert insight or information on issues being studied (Silverman, 2009).

According to Babbie and Mouton (2009) qualitative research is suited to the study of social processes over time and the aim of most qualitative researchers is to blend in and become participant observers. This research is predominantly a multiple case study which focuses on three Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Cape Town, Western Cape. The study used purposive and convenience sampling to identify organisations and recruit respondents. In terms of data collection techniques, in-depth interviews and qualitative content analysis were used in the study. This research design allowed inferences drawn from one data collection tool to supplement findings from other research techniques used.

4.2   QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There are two types of research approaches that can be used, quantitative and qualitative. Compared to the quantitative method where the focus is on being able to measure the collected data in numbers and answer the question what, when and where, the qualitative method emphasises words, text and symbols aiming to answer the question "why" something is the way it is (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Hence, qualitative research is suitable to the study of social processes over time and the aim of most qualitative researchers is to blend in and become participant observers (Babbie & Mouton 2009).

Qualitative research methodology is the most appropriate for this study because it enables the researcher to study how NGOs are using social media to nurture and sustain stakeholder relations. As Brynard and Hanekon (2008) point out, qualitative

research is suitable to promoting in-depth understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed by the research participants. It allows one to understand social phenomena from the perspective of social actors, to retrieve experiences from the past, and to gain insight into the everyday practices of social actors (Babbie & Mouton, 2009). Qualitative studies start from the assumption that in studying people, researchers are examining a creative process whereby humans produce and maintain forms of life and systems of meaning in society.

The creative ability of human beings rests in their capacity to build cultural forms from symbols. Qualitative research involves a range of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode and translate terms that occur in a social situation (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2006). Marshall and Rossman (1995) claim that a qualitative study delves into complexities and processes on little-known phenomena; on unstructured processes in organisations; that cannot be done experimentally for practical reasons; and for which relevant variables have yet to be identified.

4.2.1   The advantages and disadvantages of qualitative research

Qualitative research collects data from natural settings as researchers believe in the merit of studying a phenomenon from where it happens as opposed to subjecting it to laboratory settings (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994). It is also appropriate for cases where processes are more important than results and where the main aim is to comprehend processes. Probing phenomena in their natural settings suggests that researchers avoid changing the natural settings in which processes naturally take place and it considers that people engage in activities that make sense to them and constantly create meaning. The emphasis of observing methods in qualitative research also speaks to the importance of viewing phenomena as dynamic processes and allocating enough time understanding them (Babbie & Mouton, 2009).

Qualitative research also emphasises "thick description" which can be understood as detailed description of the phenomenon under study. Bryman (1988) elaborates on this:

> This emphasis on description entails attending to mundane detail; the apparently superficial, trivia and minutiae of everyday life are worthy of examination because of their capacity to help us understand what is going on in a particular context and to provide clues and pointers to other layers of reality.

4.2.1.1 Advantages of qualitative research

As a research methodology, qualitative research does have advantages which inform the research choice. The strength of qualitative research is that it allows one to gain an in-depth understanding of the research problem (Babbie & Mouton, 2009), by

uncovering more about people's experiences (why things may be the way they are). Since qualitative research focuses on small groups, it is generally less expensive than quantitative research which usually requires large groups of participants and expensive measurement tools. Additionally, qualitative researchers are concerned with the "processes as well as products". As a result, researchers concentrate and pay special attention to how the respondents answer questions, as well as the meaning that they give to some words and actions to get the full picture (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Moreover, qualitative research is more flexible because it allows one to change the collected data as the study progresses (Welman *et al.*, 2006) which increases the validity of the findings (Babbie & Mouton, 2009).

4.2.1.2 Disadvantages of qualitative research

The researcher is aware of the disadvantages of qualitative research. Qualitative research methods collect data about what one's selected group of participants feel or think, or how they behave. Thus one cannot necessarily use this data to make assumptions and generalisations beyond the specific group of participants. The qualitative method is not a research methodology that conveniently allows for the collection of statistical data. Adopting a mixed methods approach is one way of overcoming this problem. A lot of data can be generated by using this method and, therefore, analysing the data can be a real challenge. Moreover, because of the sheer bulk of data that can be generated, this strategy often employs relatively small samples, hence the findings cannot be generalised beyond the sample. Seeing that validity in qualitative research is often ignored, there may arise a problem of not adequately analysing and interpreting results, thereby giving rise to anecdotal evidence instead (Silverman, 2009).

The results of qualitative research also depend on the interpretation of the researcher and thus make it prone to bias. This can make results more subjective rather than objective, which makes generalisation of findings impossible (Babbie & Mouton, 2009). Furthermore, qualitative research is more interpretative and therefore requires someone who has good communication and analytical skills to report the social phenomenon in more objectives ways (Babbie & Mouton, 2009). With the above advantages and disadvantages in mind, qualitative methodology was deemed to be the most appropriate method to use to investigate areas to gain in-depth insight, using a small sample of public relations practitioners and their external stakeholders.

4.3   RESEARCH DESIGN

The qualitative approach is based on interpretation of non-numerical data such as words. The study and the nature of the data to be collected dictates the methodology to be used (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Textual data tends to be more amenable to the use of the qualitative methodology (Leedy, 1993). Given that the data obtained from this study was not numerical, qualitative methodology was applied. The purpose of qualitative research is to capture the normal flow of events (Du Plooy, 1995).

The aim of this research was to understand the use of social media in nurturing and sustaining stakeholder relationships in the NGO sector in Cape Town as part of their public relations strategy in the era of new media. The study is therefore exploratory, owing to the fact that the research sought to gain a better understanding of a problem that has not been broadly researched. Christensen (1997) defines a research design as the outline, plan or strategy, which specifies the procedure that was used to seek answer to the research questions. It specifies how data was collected and analysed. Cooper and Emory (1995) state that a research design constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data to achieved fore stated objectives. It is the plan and structure of the empirical investigation to obtain answers to research questions, and provides a framework for specifying the relationship between the study's variables (Cooper & Emory, 1995).

4.3.1   The case study approach

A case study can be defined as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2003). It gives the story behind the results by capturing what happened to bring it about, and can be a good opportunity to highlight the success of a project, or to bring attention to a particular challenge or difficulty in a project. Due to the fact that the research is investigating a contemporary event in a real life context, a case study is considered to be appropriate for this study.

The difference between a single case study and a multiple case study design is that a single case study is often used when it represents a critical case or alternatively, an extreme or unique case (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). According to Yin (2003), when more than one case is used in a study it has to be a multiple case study design. Multiple case studies have distinct advantages and disadvantages but often the evidence from multiple cases tends to be stronger (Yin, 2003). The researcher therefore decided to use a multiple case study approach, using three cases. As the research was looking at more than one NGO, the multiple-case study was considered to be appropriate.

4.3.2   Sampling procedure

The basic idea in sampling is extrapolate from the part to the whole - from "the sample" to "the population" (Lewis-Beck, Bryman & Liao, 2004). The population is a specified aggregation of the research element from which the sample is chosen (Babbie & Mouton, 2009). Small sample sizes were drawn from the population sizes of selected NGOs for the purpose of understanding how NGOs use social media, as well as stakeholders' perceptions of social media communication. For the purposes of this study, the researcher employed both purposive and convenience sampling techniques. These sampling techniques were used due to financial, thematic and sampling reasons. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher (Babbie & Mouton, 2009). The subjects were selected because they were easy to recruit and the researcher did not consider selecting subjects that were necessarily representative of the entire population.

In-depth interviews were conducted with PR practitioners, drawing from their experiences in terms of opinions and knowledge. Purposive sampling represents a group of different non-probability sampling techniques. Also known as judgmental, selective or subjective sampling, purposive sampling relies on the judgment of the researcher when it comes to selecting the units studied such as people, cases, organisations and events, pieces of data (Babbie & Mouton, 2009). Usually, the sample investigated is quite small, especially when compared with probability sampling techniques. Participating NGOs were purposively and conveniently chosen on the basis that they were located in Cape Town and were using social media in stakeholder relationship management (social media presence).

Due to the limitation of time and the budget constraint, the study population comprised three NGOs and one online external stakeholder of each NGO. A list of NGOs was obtained from the SANGONET Prodder Directory. Once the names of the organisations were selected from the list, the researcher made contact with three NGOs in Cape Town visited their websites and social media platforms.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select the NGOs for the research. The researcher only selected NGOs practising in the Western Cape and using social media tools to communicate. The technique is inexpensive and less time-consuming than other non-probability sampling techniques. The sampling units were easily accessible and gave unlimited cooperation.

4.4   DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

The research instruments used in the study include in depth-interviews and qualitative content analysis. These research methods are commonly used by qualitative researchers. These techniques were used to understand whether NGOs in the Western Cape use social media to communicate with their stakeholders from a dialogic, interactive and relational perspective. The data collection techniques used in this study are described as follows:

4.4.1   In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews are defined as a procedure of obtaining detailed data on how and why interviewees construct meaning on a particular idea, program or situation (Babbie & Mouton, 2009). The researcher used in-depth interviews in this study to explore and describe the perceptions and experiences of NGO communicators and external stakeholders. The interview questions were semi-structured, which allowed the researcher to collect the data and make small amendments to the questions regarding the respondents' attitudes, beliefs and emotions (Hair, Bush & Ortianu, 2006).

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews in order to get 'thick descriptions' about communicators' use of social media within the three sampled NGOs. Interviews also afforded the researcher an opportunity to collect diverse views which were used as the "main road to multiple realities" (Stake, 1995:64). Furthermore, interviews were used to attempt to uncover underlying motivations, prejudices and attitudes toward sensitive issues (Dillon, Madden & Firtle, 1990) and also were used because they involve asking questions, listening, showing enthusiasm and genuine interest, and at the same time recording what is said or taking notes of the topic during the interview session.

The purpose of data collection through in-depth individual interviews in this study was to get detailed descriptions of first-hand experiences from the interviewees on the phenomenon being researched (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The in-depth individual interview owes its genesis to the qualitative research philosophy as an extension of ordinary conversation. As an extension of ordinary conversation, an interview is invented anew each time it occurs. The interviewer determines the next question as the talk flows (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Even though they are costly and time consuming, in-depth interviews can explore the research problem in detail and have proven to be a good method to use to gain insight into a specific population. For example, the interviewer may encourage the interviewee to express his/her feelings about the topic that is discussed.

The researcher used open-ended questions to understand the nature of communication between NGOs and their external stakeholders. According to (Babbie, 2010), open-ended questions are questions for which participants are asked to provide their own answers. In-depth qualitative interviewing relies completely on open-ended questions. Kotler (1991) captures the advantage of in-depth interviews as follows: "open-ended questions are especially useful in the exploratory stage of the research where the research is looking for insight into how people think". This was useful in exploring how NGOs are using social media to nurture and sustain stakeholder relations in the Western Cape.

A total of six interviews were done and the research interviewed six people. Three NGOs' Public relations (PR) practitioners and three external stakeholders of the selected NGOs; these interviews were done face-to-face and each lasted approximately 20 minutes. Interviews were conducted within a period of one month, depending on the schedule of the interviewee. The purpose of interviewing PR practitioners was to understand how NGOs are using social media to build and sustain stakeholder relationships. The PR practitioners had a good understanding of the topic and were able to enlighten the researcher on the subject. External stakeholders of the selected NGOs were interviewed to gather their opinions and experiences on the ways in which NGOs are using social media to communicate with them.

The interview method was selected because it is flexible, does not limit participants and creates a platform for them to express themselves. The presence of the interviewer minimised the number of "Don't know" and "No" answers (Babbie & Mouton, 2009). For this study semi-structured interviews were used. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to probe the respondents to clarify vague answers, thus the method proved to be a flexible way of collecting data (Welman *et al.,* 2006). The advantages of using semi-structured interviews are that they enable the researcher to maintain consistency during the interviews and to be in control of the interview process (Spasford & Jupp, 2006).

Before conducting the interviews, the researcher explained the objectives to the respondents and arranged suitable times for the interviews. In order to guarantee the participants anonymity, each participant was provided with an informed consent form outlining the aims of the study and stating that the respondents would remain anonymous at all times. Interviews were tape-recorded for quality assurance purposes and to avoid any misrepresentation or misunderstanding in the reproduction of the ideas. The average times for personal interviews was estimated at 20 minutes each.

The researcher began each interview by explaining the aim of the study to respondents, as well as the procedure to be followed. In total six individual in-depth interviews were conducted, divided into two sets, and were conducted during July 2011. The first interviews were conducted with the NGOs' communication practitioners. The second rounds of interviews were conducted with external stakeholders of each NGO.

4.4.2 Qualitative content analysis

Content analysis may be defined as a method which helps researchers analyse the content of documents. Mainly, it is a method used with any text, whether it is in the form of writing, sounds or pictures, as a technique of quantifying the contents of that text (Denscombe, 2007). Qualitative content analysis was used for gathering and analysing the content of texts that were posted on social media platforms (Deacon, Golding, Murdock & Pickering, 1999). The researcher employed qualitative content analysis because it allows for subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Through content analysis, the researcher analysed interview transcripts and documents of collected data.

This was crucial as this study sought to investigate how NGOs in the Western Cape use social media to communicate with their stakeholders (from a dialogic, interactive and relational perspective). Furthermore, the study sought to explore how social media is being integrated into the stakeholder relations management strategies of the organisations.

According to Mayring (2000) qualitative content analysis is not only concerned with the manifest content of material but also emphasises the study of other formal aspects as one of its principal aims. Krippendorff (2004) defines content analysis as the use of replicable and valid methods for making specific inferences from text to other states or properties or properties of its source. Content analysis embraces an interpretive method that seeks to explore the ways in which language and images are utilised in a complementary fashion. This involves exploring the meanings that are embedded in the representations (Mayring, 2000). Furthermore, Neuman (1997) also contends that qualitative content analysis enables the reader to probe into and discover content in a different way from the ordinary way of reading a book or watching a television programme.

However, there are a number of procedures that should be followed in qualitative content analysis, among them the inductive category development and the deductive application. The step model of inductive category development seeks to formulate a criterion of definition which is derived from the theoretical framework and the research question. These aspects define the aspects of the written material to be taken into account in the analysis.

It is important to note that qualitative content analysis is one of the most common ways to analyse data (Richards, 2005). Qualitative content analysis can be used to analyse various types of data, but generally the data should be transformed into written text before the analysis can begin, and if the data comes from existing texts, the choice of the content must be justified by what the researcher seeks to know (Patton, 2002). Text-based documents are used by researchers because aspects of the social world can be traced or read through them (Mason, 2002).

In this research, results from content analysis were triangulated with data collected from in-depth interviews to accurately gather evidence from interviewees concerning the research objectives. In this study, qualitative content analysis referred mostly to social media profiles content such as communication campaigns, videos and photos. The advantage is that qualitative content analysis is unobtrusive and inexpensive to conduct and allows the investigator to "mine" existing agency documents and databases; hence it is amenable for use with large volumes of data.

However, the greatest disadvantage of content analysis relates to the methodology inability to tap into individual words, expression events or what is commonly known as the manifest content. Another disadvantage of qualitative content analysis is that like archival research, it relies on material that already exists and therefore prevents the researcher from controlling extraneous variables. Unlike experiments, content analysis cannot be used to demonstrate cause and effect.

Qualitative content analysis was used because it is a research method that is designed to condense raw data into themes based on valid inference and interpretation. For this research, the interview transcripts, documents and visual communication products served as the primary sources of data for content analysis. This data was triangulated. Interview transcripts, documents and communication products were read before themes were developed according to the study's objectives. After this, explanations were generated to understand motivations for NGOs' use of social media as means of nurturing and sustaining stakeholder relations.

4.5   RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Given that the study used non-probability samples, the research findings can only be applicable to PR practitioners who work in the NGO sector and their external stakeholders. Furthermore, all the results represented in Chapter Four should be seen as exploratory. The results depict how the three sampled NGOs located in Cape Town, use social media to nurture stakeholder relationships. Although there are various social media tools, the study only focus on Facebook and Twitter. Therefore, findings of this qualitative studied cannot be generalised to the broader NGO sector.

4.6   SUMMARY

This chapter outlined the methodology that was employed in this study to answer the research questions. The study surveyed three NGOs in Cape Town. This is a qualitative study that employed a two-stage design consisting of in-depth interviews and qualitative content analysis. These two methods were used to identify the role that social media play in stakeholder relations communication. The research findings are further discussed in Chapter Four and recommendations made in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE
PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

5.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings and analysis of the study. The study sought to understand how Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the Western Cape use social media to communicate with their stakeholders (from a dialogic, interactive and relational perspective). The study also sought to explore how social media are being integrated into NGOs' stakeholder relations management strategies. It examined how social media are being used by organisations to nurture and sustain relationships with their stakeholders. The analysis is based on a combination of data obtained through in-depth interviews and content analysis, and will be conducted in tandem with the objectives of the study outlined above. The analysis is informed by theoretical constructs such as Grunig and Hunt's (1984) two-way symmetrical model and Freire's (1970) dialogical communication model, as well as literature on the relationship between social media and stakeholder relationship management.

The analysis of the findings is presented in narrative form using quotations, summaries and paraphrases gathered from the above-mentioned data sources. Responses from interviewees are quoted; the researcher's observations and paraphrased notes are presented. This chapter discusses and analyses responses from the communications professionals interviewed in the three sampled NGOs. The study further discusses and presents the views of the three external stakeholders who were interviewed, on the way NGOs are using social media especially Facebook and Twitter. The findings are broken down into two thematic sections, namely: use of social media in stakeholder relations management and integration of social media into the communication strategies of the organisations.

5.2   THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS
MANAGEMENT

The research findings indicated that the three selected sampled NGOs (NGO X, NGO Y and NGO Z) all use social media to communicate with their stakeholders. Content analyses of the sampled NGOs show that these NGOs have linked their websites to their social media pages. In so doing, these organisations are advising their publics and stakeholders to follow them on respective social media platforms. Information gathered from the NGOs' websites revealed that Facebook was the most-used platform, followed by Twitter and YouTube.

Interviews with respondents from the sampled NGOs revealed that social media were seen as a global communication tool and were used to keep in touch with publics worldwide. The findings indicated that the respondents use more than one social media platform. Facebook emerged as the platform where all three sampled NGOs had an account. The reason was Facebook is popular and very active. This confirms research conducted by SANGONET (2009) which concluded that Facebook is the most popular social networking site within the South African market. The findings also revealed that NGO X had a YouTube account, as well as having its own Blog to communicate, while NGO Y and NGO Z were using Twitter to communicate. The external stakeholders to NGO X, NGO Y and NGO Z acknowledged using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube for the purpose of communicating and keeping themselves updated on what is happening in cyber space.

The findings indicated that PR practitioners in the sampled NGOs were using social media as communication tools to engage with stakeholders. This was illustrated by the fact that the sampled NGOs were practising the two-way symmetrical model of public relations (Grunig, 1984). These findings are supported by similar studies on the use of social media in stakeholder relations management, conducted in the American and European context (Curtis *et al.*, 2010; Grunig, 2009). The aforesaid studies are of the opinion that social media tools are becoming beneficial methods of communication for public relations practitioners. It is further shown that social media have changed communication by allowing NGOs or stakeholders to initiate conversations. They are now able to ask questions and have those questions answered immediately. This is confirmed by Castells (2009) who states that the development of Web 2.0 has allowed stakeholders to become message initiators. The statement demonstrates that social media are becoming beneficial methods of communication for PR practitioners in the NGO sector.

It was evident that organisations with fully-fledged public relations departments were likely to adopt social media and use them to achieve their organisational goals. All three sampled NGOs had entered the social media arena in 2010. They perceived social media as tools which enabled them to share information as well as to reach the public. Findings indicated that these NGOs communicate to stakeholders through social media because these platforms enabled them to communicate directly with stakeholders using two-way symmetrical model (Grunig, 1984) and dialogical communication (Freire, 1970).

Responding to the question "Which social media platforms do NGOs seem to prefer and why?" the respondent in NGO X explains:

> The organisation prefers Facebook because it allows it to maintain a dialogical relationship with their stakeholders when compared to Twitter which tends to promote followership without two-way communication. Facebook is a great way of connecting and interacting dialogically with their internal and external publics and getting feedback. Unfortunately, Twitter has not been effective for their stakeholder relations management.

Interviewees indicated that stakeholders/organisations use social media for peer-to-peer communication in a communal way. Content analysis of NGOs' accounts indicated that social media allow for one-to-one, many-to-one and many-to-many models of communication. This shows that social media communication is being used in a two-way and dialogic fashion, enabling a connection that creates relationships between stakeholders and the organisation.

Social media have attracted attention from NGOs as innovative communication tools that supplement the traditional website (Nonprofit Technology Network, 2011). Findings indicated that Facebook and Twitter offer opportunities for the brand to engage with stakeholders and allow stakeholders to communicate with representatives of the brand. This engagement is done through sharing of contents and comments made by social media users, which indicates communication interaction is taking place. Taylor, Kent and White (2001) maintain relationships are not established in one-contact communication interactions. Relationship-building needs time, trust and a variety of other relational maintenance strategies that can only occur with frequent contacts.

The findings indicated that all three NGOs are using social media platforms to communicate with their stakeholders in two-way communication. NGOs are encouraging stakeholders to comment on their social media walls and the NGOs maintain their presence on the website by replying by to stakeholders' comments and questions posted. This suggests that dialogue, participation and interaction are happening on social media pages, further building stakeholder relationships. This is in line with Grunig and Hunt (1984) who state that an organisation's efforts to understand its stakeholders is the first and key step in forming a lasting relationship with its publics. For instance, on Facebook, sampled NGOs had attracted stakeholder attention by generating relevant information such as notes, event, photographs, as well as clarifying information about the NGOs' activities/causes. On the other hand, stakeholders and publics generate content such as enquiries on various NGO activities, while some comments are complimentary but others are complaints. On Twitter, NGO Y and NGO

Z were assisting publics with queries, problems and complaints. This is proof that NGOs are creating an environment that is conducive to dialogic communication.

Although the majority of posts and comments are originated by social media users, findings revealed that the NGOs maintained a visible presence on their sites by replying to users' comments and questions. This involvement by NGOs is very beneficial to the brand and the organisation's reputation as it verifies that NGOs are in touch with the needs of their stakeholders. For the sampled NGOs it was found that social media are essential for their communication, as well as sustaining and fostering stakeholder relations. They indicated that stakeholders' comments had influenced their communication methods as well as to assist in receiving stakeholders' opinions. Findings indicated that social media are used as tools to stimulate conversations on the organisations' causes and activities, and obtaining feedback on running programmes from a wide spectrum of stakeholders. Feedback can be seen as two-way communication which is very effective (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). Grunig and Grunig (1992) further explain that two-way communication establishes a dialogue between the sender and the receiver. Literature on social media and NGOs indicates that the horizontal and non-hierarchical nature of social media allows dialogic communication (Flew, 2008).

The respondent from NGO Y notes:

> In order to nurture and sustain their stakeholder relations, the NGO ensures that their stakeholders are provided with updated information. Essentially the NGO keeps the stakeholder in the loop as far as the organisation's work is concerned. It further publishes stories about the organisation's successes and challenges. Furthermore, as social media favour interaction, the NGO interacts directly with their public through social media tool.

NGO Z respondent stated as follows:

> The NGO social media page is their voice to the community. The organisation publishes information related to their activities and also makes concerted efforts to ensure that the organisation responds to questions from their connected external stakeholders.

Corroborating the above statement from NGOs, an external stakeholder's interviewee made several statements that could be linked to the practising of two-way communication by NGO on social media platforms such as:

> The most exciting thing about NGO Y Facebook page is that it has enabled stakeholders to chat directly with the organisation.

The second external stakeholder responded that:

> Via NGO Y Facebook, me as a community member was so happy to receive answers to my query instantly. It is obvious that stakeholders are being heard.

Furthermore, the third external stakeholder declared that:

> Looking at the way communication is happening on the NGO's Facebook and Twitter pages, today stakeholders are receiving and experiencing two-way communication, and not just getting fed messages from organisation.

It is clear from the above that social media platforms are valued for their ability to stimulate horizontal or peer-to-peer communication, as distinct from vertical or top-down communication (Flew, 2008). This is facilitated through the interaction and participation by users of social media platforms by engaging in conversations around a topic. For example, NGO X is promoting education by helping children to read, the organisation is recruiting volunteers via Facebook, while NGO Z is promoting health by advising people on heart, healthy lifestyle and helping them to make healthy food choices. Social media profiles encourage users (external stakeholders and organisations) to participate in the content that members upload, as well as encouraging user-generated content. On social media, organisations afford contingency interactivity, which is actually two-way and dialogic communication.

Findings revealed that social media are used by the NGOs in order to maintain relationships with external stakeholders. According to NGOs, social media are important communication channels, particularly when dealing with external stakeholders. The NGOs stressed that they were participating, building relationships and learning from their followers (external stakeholder) via social media platforms. Grunig (2009) notes that on a daily basis public relations communicators distribute announcements of conferences, seminars, online dialogues, publications, books, websites, and blogs.

The findings of the study confirm that the sampled NGOs maintained a visible and constructive presence on their social media platforms by initiating conversations, interacting with stakeholders and also replying to user comments and questions. All three NGO respondents indicated that they try as much as possible to take advantage of social media and ensure that content updates will capture stakeholder attention and one NGO stated:

> Our social media accounts are updated approximately twice a week and incoming messages are answered timeously. We aim to keep a lively dialogue, hence our regular page administration.

However, some respondents disagreed that social media platforms are essential for stakeholder relations management. Far from building and nurturing stakeholder relationships, social media were seen as a divergence from the real practice of public relations. This view was captured by one respondent as follows:

> The use of social media does not really nurture and sustain stakeholder relations. Given our target beneficiaries, we have realised that they lack access to new media technologies and therefore it is pointless to invest heavily on social media as the core of our communication strategy.

5.2.1 Communication and information dissemination

The findings reveal that as a news-generating tool, social media enable NGOs to provide stakeholders with useful information, whilst at the same facilitating interactive communication with their publics. Taylor, Kent and White (2001) identified that the effectiveness of information on a website is necessary for dialogic relationship-building, because home pages often target a variety of publics and attempt to provide information of interest to each targeted group. The involvement of NGOs and their stakeholders in social media proves that NGOs are genuinely trying to build and nurture stakeholder relationships. This involvement is a clear attempt to create two-way symmetrical and dialogical communication.

Analysis of the NGOs' respective social media platforms showed that organisations were communicating and disseminating useful information to publics. Within social media NGOs talk about themselves, their causes and activities. For example, on its blog NGO X has extensive information on education and is engaging people regarding education issues. On YouTube, the organisation has published a video to advertise and promote their activities. NGO Y and NGO Z are using Facebook and Twitter to communicate, as well as distributing useful information to publics on their respective causes and activities. NGO Y tweets inform followers of the latest information on health issues and upcoming campaigns, events, activities and organisation involvement. NGO Z tweets focus on promoting education and reading, as well as their upcoming campaigns, events and activities.

5.2.2 Practising of dialogue, two-way communication

Analysis of the three NGOs' social media pages displayed characteristics that would be conducive to the practising of interactivity and dialogic communication principles as the interactive possibilities of social media encourage stakeholder engagement and two-way communication (Ingenhoff & Koelling, 2009). Content analysis of the NGOs' social media platforms indicated that they were connecting, engaging and interacting with their online public through their respective social media pages. This has a deep implication for the establishment of a two-way symmetrical relationship (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). For example, on Facebook, NGO Z had created a chat room and was having one-hour live discussions with their external stakeholders.

Findings reveal that the sampled NGOs were monitoring information that reached them directly. This implies that the NGOs are now personalised and adjusting their responses according to trends and subjects that occur on the web. Monitoring through social media was perceived to be an important benefit of engaging. Furthermore, for group members' social media monitoring was considered an effective and cost-effective way to share group members' thoughts. NGO Y explained that social media monitoring had been extremely important for their organisation. When external stakeholders communicated with the sampled NGOs through these tools, they were able to respond quickly to comments or complaints before the situation deteriorated. NGO Z also stressed the importance of monitoring, expressing its view as follows:

> Social media require constant management. Therefore the organisation needs to monitor what is being said about us so that we can respond to it fast.

On the other hand, through the NGOs' social media pages, external stakeholders were able to communicate among themselves. This statement is supported by the response below received from stakeholders interviewed:

> Through social media, I have been able to talk with other group members of the organisation that I am following online.

> I have been able to download and use content shared by other group members following the same organisation like me. I have also been able to speak with them whenever I needed.

The sampled NGOs are establishing relationships through social media to encourage external stakeholders to attend and participate in various events which they organised. For example, NGO Y indicated that they are using social media for fundraising activities. It pointed out that the initiative has so far yielded significant outputs because some of their stakeholders came on board and supported their organisational objectives. The interview extract below is insightful:

> As a result of the promotion of this event, there were stakeholders' comments about their previous experience of participation. We managed to get some donations through this initiative.

Social media were perceived by the sampled NGOs to be a useful means to communicate with stakeholders. These tools were therefore used to build relationships and reputation. The NGOs considered that communities are generally interested in them, their causes and activities. Hence promoting fundraising or other activities through social media has helped these NGOs in getting people to participate and become involved. Analysis of the sampled NGOs' social media pages underlined that NGOs generated the content, but users participated and interacted with one another or posted their own personal opinions. This shows that social media pages do achieve the desired two-way communication.

It is evident from the content analysis findings that over the last three years the sampled NGOs had promoted their major events hosted in the past on their respective social media pages. For example, NGO X had received an incredible response from their stakeholders after promoting a Spring Braai Fundraising and its Annual Fundraising Dinner. Data on NGO Y shows that the organisation had used social media to promote previous events hosted such as Cap of Gratitude, its annual Carnival and Twilight running team. The events proved to be very successful with many people participating in the events. The past events promoted on social media by NGO Z were Heritage Day Unity Festival 2010, the Red Heart, and more recently, the 8 Weeks Healthy Challenge which will end 1st September, 2013.

The findings revealed that the three sampled NGOs are trying to make the necessary commitment to best utilise their social media pages. This includes speedy responses to queries, updating pages regularly, ensuring online conversations feed into their programmatic work and monitoring and evaluation efforts. This indicates interactive dialogical communication of public relations within social media platforms. Contents displayed on social media pages showed that all three NGOs were working hard to maintain traffic on their pages through pro-active communication strategies. For example, through social media the sampled NGOs were talking and listening to their respective publics and vice versa. Hence they are practising the dialogic and two-way communication crucial for developing long-lasting relationships (Kent & Taylor, 2002). This implies that communication occurring on social media pages should be considered dialogic.

Content analysis illustrated that the three NGOs have embraced the principles of the dialogic and two-way communication offered by social media to establish relationships. This shows that the NGOs have grabbed the opportunity offered by social media to foster and sustain stakeholder relations. For example, comments displayed on the NGOs' social media pages show that conversation is communal and that through social media, dialogical and two-way communications were happening. This view is confirmed by several statements made by interviewees of the NGOs and the statements below could be directly linked to practice and the creation of dialogic two-way communication:

> We have acknowledged that messaging through social media is a useful feature because it allows us to have dialogic communication with group members either on the wall or via inbox.

> We use Facebook and Twitter to engage with stakeholders directly, immediately and in a conversational manner. We use social media tools to create conversations.

An important advantage of social media usage for public relations (PR) is that it allows the creation of instant dialogic and two-way communication with public.

Because of our adoption of social media, we are now able to converse with our stakeholders on a daily basis. Our dedicated team makes sure queries on social media page are answered immediately

The above statements are supported by the following statements from the external stakeholders' interviews:

Comments posted on NGO Y social media wall have helped me and other stakeholders understand the organisation and its causes. Also, social media had enabled group members to communicate.

Facebook and Twitter walls have given me the opportunity to not only have direct conversation with the organisation followed but as well as with other members of the group.

I welcome social media as an opportunity to create conversations as I can send and receive message to the organisation that I followed.

The findings revealed that the sampled NGOs were using social media platforms to genuinely engage and interact with their external stakeholders. This was described as allowing various stakeholders to voice their opinions, reach out to others, and above all, nurture both new and existing relationships. Additionally, the sampled NGOs realised the potential of social media for disseminating information faster than traditional media. While messages posted on social media are visible to their 'public' friends, messages on traditional media are only available to members of the public who happen to come across them. This practice is noted by Hoadley, Xu, Lee and Rosson (2010) who claim that social media offer new settings which have made information posted on sites visible to the public.

It is also evident from the findings that interviewees share the opinion that the most important feature of social media is horizontal communication which promotes Grunig's (1984) two-way symmetrical communication. This concurs with the argument of Barnes and Barnes (2009) that social media can offer a unified communications board where users have the capacity to interact with others on an instantaneous basis. Similarly, social media are communication platforms that allow users to make connections with other users in order to facilitate participation, interactivity, collaborative learning and to establish social relationships (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Breakenridge, 2009). Stakeholders interviewed acknowledged communicating not only with the organisation but also interacting with other group members on the respective social media pages. This shows that social media are being creatively used to strengthen relationships and build new relationships and is in line with the statement of

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) that organisations have to be active if they want to develop relationships with their stakeholders.

Content analysis revealed that NGOs embedded several photos and videos, encouraging comments, on their social media pages, so two-way communication is achieved. From the accumulated comments in these photos and videos it is evident that user-generated conversation is achieved. NGOs generated the content but users participated and interacted with one another or posted their own personal opinion. By generating content NGOs succeed in initiating two-way communication and dialogic communication, as they allow users to participate and interact with other users. Additionally, many of the comments on the social media pages follow upon each other like conversations as users post their personal experiences. This assists in solving problems or answers questions posed by co-users.

It is evident from analysis that social media platforms of NGOs contain content which is relevant to users looking for more information on their causes. While the majority of wall posts and comments are authored by the social media users, NGOs maintain a visible and constructive presence on the site by replying to user comments and questions. This shows that NGOs, via their social media platforms, succeed in initiating two-way symmetrical and dialogic communication.

Findings show that social media offered evidence of all principles of online dialogic communication. They also succeeded in initiating the creation of two-way symmetrical, transparent communication between organisations and their publics. NGOs' social media pages are a channel specially created for their publics, displaying the ideal element of PR 2.0 – communication through the creation of two-way symmetrical and dialogical communication. This proves that NGOs are creating an environment which encourages dialogic communication.

5.3   INTEGRATING SOCIAL MEDIA INTO ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

One of the goals of this research was to explore the way in which social media are being integrated into the stakeholder relations management strategies of organisations. NGOs have recognised the rapid expansion of the social networking phenomenon and its vast potential for stakeholder relationship management (Waters *et al.*, 2009). NGOs which have realised the important role that social media platforms play in stakeholder relationship management, have created social media pages and integrated them within their mainstream communication strategies. For instance, most NGOs routinely post

news releases to their websites/social media pages without abandoning traditional methods of issuing releases, such as newsletters.

The findings from the study indicate that the sampled NGOs were actively trying to integrate social media into their communication strategy. This approach entails using social media as a complementary strategy to traditional media and echoes the views offered by the respondents in this study. Social media have not replaced traditional ways of organisational communication, but rather have amplified them. For instance, the sampled NGOs are adopting and managing multiple social media such as Facebook, Twitter YouTube and blog accounts to communicate more frequently with their external publics. As one respondent pointed out:

> We use social media platforms in addition to traditional communication techniques. We are aware that we have different target audiences and therefore try to make sure that we accommodate them.

The research findings show that the sampled NGOs are still using traditional media such as print media and broadcast media to convey messages. These remain powerful mediums for NGOs to advertise, inform and educate the community and other potential stakeholders about their activities and causes. With the advent of social media, traditional media purposes were to drive the public to the organisation social media pages to obtain more information. This clearly shows that social media are complementing traditional media as channels for communication and stakeholder relations management.

The sampled NGOs were aware that social media platforms serve as a watchdog for traditional mainstream media. Social media have made communication so rapid, to the extent that organisations can respond immediately to public comments and hence social media platforms, combined with traditional media forms are being used for communication and to improve stakeholder relations management. This implies that Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are being integrated by the sampled NGOs into their communication strategies. By using social media conversations as a monitoring tool, NGOs were able to monitor social media and provide timely responses to stakeholder comments on the channels.

The combining of social media with traditional media such as broadcast and print, shows that social media are complementing traditional media channels for communication and stakeholder relations management. There is an emerging public relations communication ecology which comprises both offline and online communications as tools for stakeholder engagement and dialogue. This has been

described as PR 2.0 which provides extra tools for practitioners to reach their publics. Although it does not necessarily completely replace traditional media, PR 2.0 is an alternative and complements traditional media. The three sampled NGOs still rely on the press and broadcast media for communication. In fact, the press remains the most versatile and resilient of all mass communication media and includes regional, national and international newspapers and magazines. For example, the sampled NGOs continue to use in-house newsletters and pamphlets and other communication tools to reach their diverse audiences. In doing so, the aim of the NGOs is to increase the reach and impact of public relations activities.

Communication through social media is quite demanding, although the sampled NGOs have learned to negotiate the world of social media effectively. They are limited by small staff complements, low budgets and lack of experience in using social media, to meet their organisational goals. This confirms findings from a similar study conducted by Nah and Saxton (2012) which concluded that organisational strategies, capacities, governance features and external pressures all play a part in social media adoption and utilisation outcomes. The three sampled NGOs recognised that social media are generally used as a supplement for traditional communication techniques, but not as a replacement. For example, NGO X promoted their Spring Braai fundraising event and annual fundraising dinner in newspapers and on their Facebook page, blog and YouTube. NGO Y promoted its Annual Carnival on their social media sites and using print media, while NGO Z promoted their Red Heart campaign using both traditional and social media. The above examples imply that all three sampled NGOs are using social media tools as additional communication channels. The interview extract below captures this view:

> The two media (social media and traditional media) complement each other, for example they promote their social networks in their traditional media. This enables them to target their various stakeholders who consume different media genres.

Social media are perceived by all interviewees as a more effective way of spreading information about events than traditional means of promotion. One respondent stated that:

> Their target audience might not make use of only one of the type of media to communicate; therefore an organisation needs to make use of both media (social media and traditional media).

It is clear from the foregoing that the sampled NGOs use social media as information-dissemination tools and regard social media as a core element of their communications strategy. Ignoring the traditional media in place of social media may side-line traditional stakeholders who do not have access to social media and can only be reached by

means of traditional methods such as radio, internal newsletters, newspapers, e-mail and direct mail. Thus, social media provide numerous ways to reach communities and complement message sharing through older media channels such as newspapers, radio, television and billboards. This view is supported by Mangold and Faulds (2009) who claim that social media need to be integrated with offline components. Furthermore, findings of the study show that the sampled NGOs are publishing the same message in both traditional media and on the social media channels. This is confirmed by the following extract from a stakeholder's interview:

> They (organisations) need to ensure that all marketing messages are consistent and that their tools are communicating the same messages, whilst adapting to their audiences.

Social media, as a means of promotion, help NGOs to save money by shrinking costs in marketing and advertising. This underscores the importance of social media as part of the overall communication strategy in enabling cost-effective communication with publics. The following extract from an interview with a stakeholder confirms this:

> Social media are more accessible and are an inexpensive marketing tool for the organisation. They have found it useful to integrate them into our organisational communication strategy.

The above statement is confirmed by Palmer and Koenig-Lewis (2009) who argue that marketing through social media is a low-cost alternative that enables organisations to reach out to thousands of stakeholders. Although social media effectiveness is not easily measurable, the use of social media as a means of promotion has ultimately helped the sampled NGOs to focus better on conversing with their stakeholder publics. Similarly, Webster and Keller (2004) add that brand communication should be used in multiple channels to reinforce the brand strategy, and no other viable tool can enable much conversation with the same ease as social media, which complement traditional channels. The findings of the study suggest that NGOs have incorporated social media into their communication strategies, as one respondent explains:

> Social media allow them (organisations) to get to know their target market based on their virtual interactions. People can be bold enough to be honest; as the communication is not face-to-face, so social media remove an element of self-censorship.

In this regard, the integration of social media into the communication strategies of NGOs was done to enhance interactivity and lower communication costs. This is supported by McKee (2010) who states that social media should be used to supplement traditional business activities rather than replace them. Likewise, Semple (2009) posits that companies should learn to integrate both formal and informal communication channels in their efforts to manage their reputation. Social media were

seen as ensuring a more personalised response message. One respondent pointed out that:

> Social media are an important part of our communication strategy because they are quick to reach audiences all over the world and fairly inexpensive.

This research proves that the NGOs' social media initiatives are integrated with other relevant strategies. What can be seen is that the successful initiatives were all part of well-managed communication strategies. For example, the sampled NGOs are using traditional media and practising public relations together with their social media. The way that information is published in these media remains the same and this is supported by external stakeholders. The congruence of contents published on both social media and traditional media is due to the organisations' aims of supporting their overall communication strategies. This is echoed by Mangold and Faulds (2009) who advise organisations to integrate social media and traditional media opinion, and is also supported by responses from the NGOs and stakeholders interviewed.

The sampled NGOs have embedded social media links to their websites and this enlightens people that these organisations are connected on social media. By linking social media pages and their home websites, NGOs inform the public of the fact that they may be followed on social media. Through this strategic communication approach, these NGOs are starting to utilise their main websites as a primary centre of communication that links campaigns, events and others activities onto their social media page (for example blogs, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter).

Although the main emphasis of communication in organisations is still placed completely on traditional media, the research findings drawn from interviews and content analysis indicate that participant NGOs are using both traditional and social media in a way that they complement one another. Furthermore, NGOs recognise social media as an important part of their overall communication strategy. As Grunig (2009) points out, social media will certainly make public relations practice more global, strategic, dialogic and socially responsible. In other words, the dialogical communication enabled by social media has presented public relations with an opportunity to not only reach audiences through media gatekeepers, but to also use online channels to publish and share information more directly and genuinely (Solis, 2007).

5.3 TOWARDS A WORKING MODEL FOR USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS MANAGEMENT WITHIN THE NGO SECTOR

In the previous section the study highlighted concerted efforts by participant NGOs to integrate social media within their organisational communication. This section offers a working model for using social media within the NGO sector. This answers one of the secondary objectives of the research which seeks to provide a framework for the use of social media in stakeholder relations management. It maps out the key issues integral in successful leveraging of social media in public relations practice. The argument is that the features of social media (connectedness, collaboration and community) place organisations in a position to genuinely engage in two-way communication with their various stakeholders.

Consequently, as already mentioned above, social media potentially provide a voice to both organisations and stakeholders, as well as help them to interact with one another. Regarding the way in which the three sampled NGOs are using social media to communicate, the research attempts to present a framework on how social media could be used to build stakeholder relationships. In order to encourage NGOs to take full advantage of social media, a basis framework for the use of social media by NGOs was formulated. Figure 5.1 illustrates the proposed framework which has seven components: objective, platform identification, establish governance, communication strategy, monitor, measure and refine, dissemination of information and engaging in dialogue.
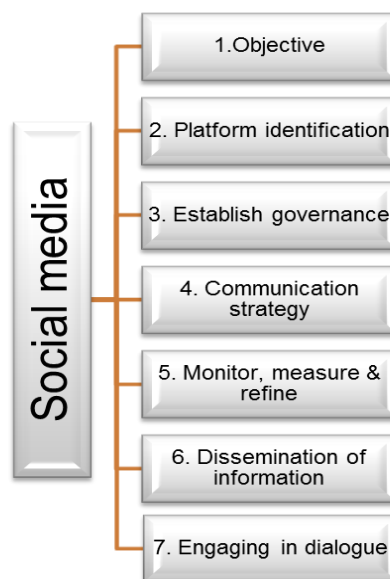

Figure 5.1: Framework for the use of social media in stakeholder relationships management (researcher's own design)

1.   Objective

The objective of using social media should not only be to publish information, but also initiate stakeholder engagement for meaningful stakeholder participation. This helps to foster as well as maintain relationships. As observed in the study, the sampled NGOs are using social media platforms to communicate. However, social media can also be used to support an organisation's communication strategy by building stakeholder relationships and enhancing dialogue with external stakeholders.

2.   Platform identification

The study also notes that there is a myriad of social media platforms currently available but it is essential to identify the significant platforms from which the organisation may begin to communicate and engage with stakeholders. NGOs can decide to create personal communication platforms, but it is apparent that there is much to gain from utilising established and popular platforms like YouTube, Twitter and Facebook, because people are already there and know how to use them.

3.   Establish governance

Social media are a real-time platform and represent an official page of the organisation; hence some measure of control must be exercised in the use of such mediums. Some rules and regulations must be created when using social media, in order to identify opportunities and risks. It is therefore important to create rules and strategies for engaging with social media in line with the organisation's overall communication strategy.

4.   Communication strategy

Social media, like any other communication channels, need an operational strategy to support and fulfil the organisation's objectives such as the development of good relationships with key stakeholders as well as the organisation's overall communication plans. A key aspect of social media communication strategy is integrating social media into an organisation's daily communication routine. The organisation's public relations person should link social media with other existing networks. Also, the organisation should share the same content across sites and should promote their social media through traditional media techniques.

5.   Monitor, measure and refine

Like traditional media, social media can be used to monitor, measure and refine communication objectives previously established in the organisation by using the

techniques such as search engine alerts, tracking environments to measure real trends, conduct research and measure influencers.

6.   Dissemination of information

Social media, like print media and other online media, can be used as a communication channel that conveys communication messages. There is a need to publish attractive information regularly, that people need to check and elicit responses. However, the important fact is that messages disseminated on social media should be the same as those on traditional media, particularly when launching or promoting an organisation's activities.

7.   Engaging in dialogue

Social media, unlike traditional media (print, broadcast media), can be used as a communication platform to promote symmetrical and dialogic communications between an organisation and its public. Through interaction between social media users and organisations, particularly on networking boards, engagement in dialogue can occur in a dialogic or two-way communication way (this could be short-lived or endless). Social media may also be used to converse dialogically and participate regularly with stakeholders to stimulate interaction. Participation in dialogue can occur by listening and reacting quickly to stakeholder comments and not remaining a silent observer.

5.4   SUMMARY

From this chapter it can be noted that social media are being used by NGOs for public relations purposes. The results are consistent with Webster and Keller's (2004) observation that online medium tools such Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr and others, present opportunities to foster dialogic communication with stakeholders. Findings indicate that the most commonly used social platforms are Facebook and Twitter. These two platforms present an immediate and real-time contact point for NGOs and social media users. They are used to communicate, nurture and sustain stakeholder relationships. It is also clear that social media allow people to connect online (establishing relationships), by creating dialogue through online channels. Social media therefore enable NGOs to inform their stakeholders of the latest campaigns and activities and also allow stakeholders to enquire about NGOs activities and their implementation.

This chapter has proposed a working model of integrating social media within the sphere of NGOs communication strategies. Although the sampled NGOs indicated that they do closely monitor their social media platforms, they acknowledged that

monitoring of social media platforms can be difficult due to staff shortages, budget constraints and lack of skills.

Finally this chapter presented a framework for the use of social media in stakeholder relationship management. The framework is based on the research findings and manner in which participant NGOs were using social media. Its purpose is to help organisations understand the importance of social media, as well as the need to use social media in stakeholder relationship management by reaching out to stakeholders, understanding their concerns and hearing their voices.

CHAPTER SIX
RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1   INTRODUCTION

Based on the findings and discussion, this chapter draws a conclusion to the research. The main objective of this study was to understand how Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) in the Western Cape use social media to communicate with their stakeholders from a dialogic, interactive and relational perspective. The study further examined how social media are being integrated into the larger stakeholder relations management strategies of organisations. The research provided insight into how social media are being used to nurture and sustain relations between stakeholders and NGOs in the Western Cape. Because of the limited scope of the study which mainly focused on three NGOs in Cape Town, the study highlights areas for further studies within the broader ambit of public relations and social media. The theoretical framework of the study was informed by Grunig and Hunt's (1984) two-way symmetrical communication model and Freire's (1970) dialogical communication model. The literature on social media and stakeholder relations management was also used. The main findings of the study are summarised. Suggestions are proposed regarding further research within the field and recommendations are made on the integration of social media in stakeholder relation management.

6.2   SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study investigated the use of social media in stakeholder relations management by NGOs in the Western Cape. The aim of the study was to provide insight into how the three sampled NGOs use social media to communicate with their stakeholders (from a dialogic, interactive and relational perspective). It also examined how social media are being integrated into the stakeholder relations management strategies of organisations to nurture and sustain relations with stakeholders.

The research revealed that the three sampled NGOs are using social media to communicate with their stakeholders. NGOs are using social media to pursue their strategic goals which centres on the creation of public value. As means of communication, social media such as Facebook and Twitter have enabled NGOs to communicate and engage with stakeholders in dialogue and two-way communications.

Furthermore, the research findings indicated that NGOs have recognised the significance and potential of social media in stakeholder relationship management.

Thus social media are being integrated into the NGOs broader communication strategy. This study highlighted that active social media were found to be important dialogue channels to create and maintain stakeholder relationships. The study findings correlate with Topper (2009) who states that an active social media with exciting information is key in engaging and keeping stakeholders interested in company.

The findings also indicated that social media channels are useful tools, but a level of intelligent creator-generated input is needed to encourage and steer dialogues on desired topics, as well as monitor any user-generated content and comments.

6.3   RECOMMENDATIONS

From the research conducted, further recommendations are made on how NGOs can leverage social media for stakeholder relationship management. The six recommendations are categorised as follows:

6.3.1   Communication tool

Regardless of their nature, social media enable stakeholders to give input and to become active participants in the communication process. It is thus advisable for organisations to establish social media pages, where they will provide their stakeholders with regular updates on the latest news, as well as creating an open environment for dialogue, thereby permitting stakeholders to communicate.

6.3.2   Sharing tool

The social media world is densely populated and is growing rapidly. Considering the ability of social media to reach a large number of people almost instantly, ideally, social media should become a powerful force in the way organisations reach, attract and engage their stakeholders.

6.3.3   Monitoring

Organisations should never underestimate the speed of social media where information spreads within seconds. It is thus important that organisations monitor social media platforms closely and respond immediately to any queries from the publics. This will enable organisations to be aware of every change that may be required and proactively make appropriate amendments to their communication strategy

6.3.4   Dialogic communication

Social media have revolutionised communication and enable stakeholders to become active participants in the communication process. Therefore, to nurture and sustain

stakeholder relationships through social media, communicators need to rethink their relationships with stakeholders. It is important for organisations to take advantage of the capacity of social media and focus on dialogic communication rather than one-way communication. Dialogic communication encourages involvement by stakeholders and helps organisations to build and foster stakeholder relationships.

6.3.5   Communication strategy

Social media have become a critical part of the communication strategy of organisations and are greatly impacting on communication. Communicators must be aware that considerable input is required from them in terms of ensuring consistent updating and prompt response to enquiries directed at them through their social media pages.

6.3.6   Integration in the communication strategy

Considering the fact that social media are becoming part of NGOs communication strategies, there is a need for organisations to adopt an integrated approach to ensure consistency in messaging and brand communication. Ideally, organisations should engage social media as part of their regular external communications and build relationships through a structural organic process.

6.4   AREAS OF FURTHER RESEARCH

This study is predominantly qualitative. A quantitative study which surveys a number of NGOs' social media adoption and utilisation practices could be conducted. This study was conducted using small sample but further investigation could seek to test these research findings on a larger sample through quantitative or even mixed research methods. The study perspective and focus was on the NGO sector and their external stakeholders, omitting internal stakeholders. However, further research on stakeholder relationship management and internal stakeholders would be rational.

Theoretically, further studies could deploy the strategic management approach, the organisational capacities of the resource mobilisation and organisation studies frameworks. The research could focus on how the application of social media public relations techniques contributes towards boosting fund-raising. Another fruitful research enquiry could focus on the use of both traditional media and social media within an NGO, to elucidate how the two feed into and off each other in the era of PR 2.0. Furthermore, since this study was limited to Cape Town in the Western Cape, it would be interesting to explore whether the results of this study would correlate with the results of similar studies if conducted in broader areas across the country.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Letter to NGOs

Dear Sir/ Madam

My name is CORINNE GUILLAINE BISSILA (Student No. 208107045), and I am an M-Tech student Public Relations Management, Faculty of Informatics and Design at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Cape Town Campus. As part of the requirements for my study, I need to conduct a MINI THESIS dissertation titled: **The use of social media in stakeholder relations management by NGOs in the Western Cape, SOUTH AFRICA**

I am focusing my primary research for this Master's thesis on how social media is used to nurture and sustain stakeholder relations in the NGO sector in Cape Town. The research will be executed by means of interviews and content analysis. I will appreciate accessing your organisation's corporate communication division. This letter serves to address the issues of ethical concerns and my commitment to respect any information gathered from your organisation.

I will also appreciate it if this letter can serve as a means of introducing me and the study to your organisation.

I am confident that this study is in the interest of all corporate communication divisions in various organisations and companies. The findings will be constructive and improve understanding on the use of social media in stakeholder management relationships in organisations such as yours.

Thank you

Yours faithfully,

Miss Corinne Guillaine Bissila Kilonda

APPENDIX B: Interview with NGO's communicators

Interview guide 1

1. Which social media platforms do NGOs seem to prefer, and why?

2. For what kind of information do you use social media? In what online social media activities do you engage?

3. How do you handle enquiries and concerns from stakeholders on your social media platforms?

4. What do you see as the main benefits of communicating through social media?

5. To what extent have you embraced social media in your daily relationship-building activities?

6. What is the role of social media in the overall communication strategy?

7. In what way have social media influenced your management of stakeholder relationships?

8. Is it important to use traditional media together with social media? How is this done?

9. In your opinion, how should social media platforms be used to sustain stakeholder relations?

10. How important is the interaction between stakeholder and NGOs regarding social media networking?

Thank you for your participation

APPENDIX C: Interview with external stakeholder

Interview guide 2

1. Why do you use social media? Why do you follow NGOs on social media?

2. What do you think of the current use of social media by NGOs?

3. What do you think NGOs try to achieve by using social media? What perception do you have?

4. What kind of content do NGOs publish on their social media page(s)? How do you feel about this content?

5. How do you feel about the interaction between you and NGOs whose social media pages you follow?

6. Do other stakeholders' comments and messages alter your view of the NGOs you follow?

7. Do you receive essential additional information about NGOs from the comments posted by other stakeholder in social media?

8. What is you impression regarding the extent to which NGOs are using social media as a part of their communication strategy?

9. Do you believe that NGOs use social media platforms to their full potential?

10. What recommendations would you make to NGOs regarding the way in which, they use social media?

APPENDIX D: Letter from grammarian

28 Jan Baard Crescent
Jacobsbaai
West Coast
Western Cape

19 MAY 2014

EDITING & PROOFREADING

Cheryl M. Thomson

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to confirm that the Master's Thesis of CORINNE GUILLAINE BISSILA KILONDA, (Student No. 208107045), at the CAPE PENINSULA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, was proof-read, technically edited for formatting and layout, and language-edited by Cheryl Thomson after the examiner's recommended minor revisions had been effected

Yours faithfully

CHERYL THOMSON

E-mail: cherylthomson2@gmail.com