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The Impact of social media on Corporate Reputation Management Strategies in South Africa

BY

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This Research report is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Business Administration in the Faculty of Commerce, Law, and Management, University of the Witwatersrand

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DECLARATION

This research report is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Business Administration degree in the Faculty of Commerce, Law, and Management, University of the Witwatersrand

In addition, I declare that:

I Ramathetje Phaladi; I affirm that this research report is solely my own work and has not been previously submitted for any other academic qualification or assessment at any other institution.

RM Phaladi

26 March 2024

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To say that this report was solely the result of my efforts overstates the case; rather, it is a collective achievement that would not exist without the support and dedication of others and mainly Almighty God.

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ABSTRACT

Initially, social media was perceived as a luxury rather than a necessary tool for companies when it comes to reputation management. However, with South Africa's growing social media landscape reportedly reaching 25.8 million users by 2024 and the increasing demand for consumer attention, it has become crucial for organisations to find ways to effectively manage their reputations on social media. This is particularly evident with the recent surge of real-time interaction between consumers and organisations on social media platforms, where the former freely express their experiences with brands and provide feedback on after-sales service.

Guided by the literature reviewed in this study, the research report aims to investigate the impact of social media on corporate reputation management strategies in South Africa. It recognises the significance of corporate reputation in attracting and retaining customers, investors, and employees. The advent of social media has brought about both new opportunities and challenges in reputation management. While social media platforms offer a powerful tool for creating desired brand images and reputations, they also pose potential threats to corporate reputation due to their uncontrollable nature.

To achieve the objective of the study, three organisations, namely Shoprite, Clicks, and Tiger Brands, were selected as subjects for analysis. Data was collected from the social media platform X (formerly known as Twitter) to analyse the sentiment towards these organisations. .

The key finding of this study is that social media has a significant impact on corporate reputation. The findings offer significant theoretical and practical contributions. Firstly, they demonstrate the efficacy of organisations leveraging the use of social media listening tools to manage consumer perception. Secondly, they highlight the value of investing in social media listening tools to inform corporate reputation management strategies. The study recommends that South African organisations utilise social media listening tools to effectively manage the reputation of their organisations.

Keywords*: Corporate reputation, Online Reputation Management, social media listening tools, and stakeholder engagement.*

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CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction and Background of the Study

Corporate reputation is a crucial asset for businesses worldwide, as it profoundly influences their ability to attract and retain customers, investors, and employees (Barnett & Kimmel, 2013). The advent of social media has changed the way companies manage their reputations, presenting both new opportunities and challenges. In South Africa, where platforms like X (formerly known as Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram are gaining popularity (Statista, 2021), with an estimated 25.8 million active on the sites, translating to 42.8 percent of the population (Statista, 2023) it is essential to understand the impact of social media on corporate reputation management strategies. Social media (SM) has emerged as a dynamic and rapidly evolving channel of interpersonal communication, posing significant challenges for managers in the realm of corporate reputation management (Tandoc et al., 2018). With its unique features such as interactivity, mass reach, speed, and global connectivity, social media presents both opportunities and threats in the realm of reputation building and protection. On one hand, social media platforms offer a powerful tool for creating desired images and reputations by fostering interactive relationships with diverse stakeholders, including customers, employees, investors, and business partners (Li & Bernoff, 2015).

On the other hand, the uncontrollable nature of social media, coupled with the difficulties in its effective regulation (Pierce, 2017) poses serious threats to corporate reputation. A single negative submission or comment about a company or its products on the internet can trigger an unstoppable avalanche that damages carefully crafted images and undermines reputations built over the years (Etter, 2013). Unfortunately, the negative aspects of social media seem to have dominated thus far, with widespread coverage of company and product image crises, hacker attacks, data breaches, and the like, overshadowing success stories of reputation building. Examples from the South Africa market illustrate this phenomenon.

For instance, Shoprite faced a backlash in 2020 for the recall of Pilchards cans which posed food safety risks to their broad customer base (News24,2020). The crisis sparked an outcry on the possibility of health hazard those who have consumed the canned fish might already be facing. All this outcry was on social media platforms including Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, (News24, 2020). Another example involves Clicks, a large pharmaceutical retailer, which was embroiled in

allegations of racism resulting from an advert of one of its hair products. The issue became so controversial that it resulted in widespread criticism and subsequently, protests across several Clicks stores, with a number of them being vandalised by protesters (Zuzile, 2020). Clicks' ill-conceived commercial had labelled ethnic African hair as "frizzy and damaged" and Caucasian hair as "normal". Black people swiftly responded, prompting the company to take down the commercial (Daily Maverick, 2020) and establish a Hair Advisory Board.

Given the widespread popularity and prevalence of social media in interpersonal communication, companies can no longer underestimate or ignore its influence but must incorporate social media into their strategic programs and plans. Research on this topic has been limited, with existing studies primarily focused on developed economies such as the United States and Europe (Michaelidou et al., 2011). However, the South African context is unique, characterised by its distinct culture, political landscape, and economic challenges. Moreover, owing to its resistance and liberation struggle history, South Africa is defined by a culture of social and political activism. As mechanisms of activism evolve, social media is playing a powerful role in shaping public opinion and highlighting issues of social justice and accountability (McDaniel, 2023). Given this backdrop, there is a compelling need to investigate how South African companies utilise social media to manage their reputations, identify best practices, and uncover potential areas for improvement. This study aims to fill this knowledge gap using a qualitative analysis to gauge the impact of social media on corporate reputation management strategies. Additionally, it provides insights into how South African companies can leverage social media to enhance their reputation management strategies.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Social media has evolved into an important medium for people all over the world to communicate and interact with one another. According to Statista (2023), South Africa has a total of 43.48 million internet users, 25.8 million of whom actively use social media. According to Shewale (2024), there are around 4.95 billion social media users globally. The rapidity with which users can connect with loved ones, offer and receive feedback from businesses, and express their opinions on media topics or events in various organisations has contributed to an increase in social media usage; therefore, understanding the impact of these interactions has become critical.

Several studies have investigated the impact of social media users' freedom to communicate with organisations on social media platforms (Rukhlia et al., 2023). The distinction lies in the shift from organisations relying solely on traditional media outlets such as newspapers, magazines, television, and radio to share business updates and news, to the emergence of social media as a platform that allows direct interaction between organisations and various social media users, including customers, investors, and employees. The findings show that there is growing evidence that organisations' conventional control over brand reputation concerns is being challenged by the rise of social media, which allows customers to contact with organisations. Another study examined whether organisations have developed adequate strategies and instruments to handle the problems posed by the usage of social media by both consumers and businesses (Diggity, 2023). According to the findings, many organisations continue to rely on manual reporting and social network searches to track brand mentions. Furthermore, the findings show that these businesses can benefit from employing social media listening technologies to track their brand mentions in real time, allowing them to handle reputation-related concerns on time.

Despite these issues and social media's growing prominence, scholars have given little attention to the impact of social media on organsations' reputations. As a result, the current study aims to close the gap by investigating the influence of social media in shaping corporate reputation management strategies utilising sentiment analysis via social media listening tools. The study focuses on three brands: Shoprite, Clicks, and Tiger. The three are consumer-facing retailers who have suffered crises triggered by social media. This study's scholarly significance stems not only from its ability to fill a knowledge gap on the impact of social media on corporate reputation management strategies, but also from its comprehensive analysis of the social landscape, which informs the complex ways in which consumers interact with organisations in the digital age.

1.4 Research Aim and Objectives

Aim

The aim of this study is to analyse the impact of social media on corporate reputation and to assess the efficacy of reputation management strategies on South African organisations.

1.4.1. Objectives

This study has three related objectives.

- To examine the current use and challenges of social media in reputation management

- Identifying opportunities for organisations to improve on developing corporate reputation management strategies.
- To investigate the impact of social media conversations on sentiment.

1.4.2 Questions

To understand the impact of social media and opportunities for improvement for organisations in South Africa, and to address the outlined objectives, the following research questions guide the study:

1. What have been the primary challenges faced by companies in attempting to manage their reputation through social media?
2. What opportunities exist for South African companies to improve their reputation management strategies via social media?

The analysis conducted in this study answers these two questions in specific ways. Firstly, it provides an overview of the evolution of reputation management in the digital age. Secondly, it centres a multitude of stakeholders in the discourse on brand reputation, particularly consumers. This is a significant departure from the traditional approach where brands were merely reactive rather than engaging on ongoing reputation monitoring, as argued by Brandfundi (2023).

1.5 Rationale and significance of the study

Literature demonstrates that many organisations are starting to prioritise social media as an area to invest in to guard their reputations (Ott & Theunissen, 2015; Drenik, 2021). One study by Chua et al. (2019) examined the impact of social media on corporate reputation management in Asia-Pacific countries and South Africa and found that social media has made it easier for stakeholders to voice their opinions and criticisms, making reputation management more challenging yet crucial. The study highlighted the need for companies to proactively manage their online reputation through regular monitoring and engagement with stakeholders on social media platforms.

Another study by (Chen & Li, 2020) found that social media can be a useful tool for companies in crisis situations to manage their reputation. The study reviewed the effectiveness of various social media strategies for reputation management during crisis events and focused on the importance of real-time communication, transparency, and effective engagement between the company and its

stakeholders. Specific to South Africa, a study by (Anguah & Joseph, 2018) examined the use of social media by South African companies for customer engagement and found social media to be a critical tool for improving brand reputation and customer relationships.

This study aims to contribute to this ongoing discourse on the necessity of social media in reputation management, as well as to address existing knowledge gaps by examining the current use and challenges of social media in reputation management. Additionally, it aims to identify opportunities for improvement. This could aid corporate South Africa in developing reputation management strategies that address the concerns of stakeholders, including customers and investors, to better position their reputation.

1.6 Delimitations of the study

According to Ploy-Cilliers et al., (2014), delimitations refer to the specific parameters that define and restrict the scope of a study, outlining its boundaries and contextualising its findings. These characteristics may encompass elements such as the size of the sample, the geographical location or setting in which the study is conducted, and the traits of the population under investigation. By establishing delimitations, researchers can establish clear parameters for their study, ensuring that the findings are applicable within the defined boundaries.
Since this study uses sentiment analysis that is derived from public data, it was limited to one social media platform, Twitter as it allows for social media listening and reporting with a focus on large corporate businesses in South Africa. Facebook and LinkedIn have restrictions in obtaining public data through the social media listening tools.

1.7 Limitations of the study

The impact of social media on the management of corporate reputation is a noteworthy subject in today's digital age. Sekaran and Bougie (2010) have pointed out that study restrictions might have a significant impact on the accuracy of findings. When examining the impact of social media on reputation management, it is essential to acknowledge and address any possible constraints to maintain the accuracy and reliability of the research. An inherent constraint in this study is the dependence on publicly accessible data sourced from social media platforms for sentiment analysis, which may not comprehensively encompass all consumer viewpoints, particularly from individuals who are not engaged on social media platforms. To overcome this constraint, two

separate social media monitoring systems, namely Meltwater and Data EQ, have been employed to acquire and analyse data in a thorough manner. The purpose of integrating these tools in simultaneously was to maintain methodological consistency and validate the accuracy of their findings by cross-checking them across numerous platforms. This methodological improvement increases the strength and thoroughness of the investigation by reducing the limitations caused by relying on a limited amount of publicly accessible data.

1.8 Outline of the research report

The research report is structured into six chapters, A brief overview of each chapter is provided below:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the study, offering background information and context. It encompasses the problem statement, aim, and objectives of the research, as well as the rationale for conducting the study. The scope of the research, delimitations are also discussed.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of existing literature relevant to the theoretical background of the study. The emphasis is placed on exploring the impact of social media on corporate reputation management strategies. Theoretical frameworks and relevant theories concerning the impact of social media on corporate reputation management are discussed.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter details the research design employed in the study, including the research approach and the target instruments. The sampling strategy and research design are explained, with specific attention given to how the data will be analysed. The data collection methods, data analysis techniques, as well as validity, reliability, and trustworthiness considerations are outlined. Ethical considerations related to the research are also discussed.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

This chapter presents the research findings and results, which are derived through the utilisation of social media listening tool analysis.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter summarises the main conclusions drawn from the study. It offers recommendations based on the research findings.

Chapter 6: Overall conclusions and Contributions

The concluding chapter of this study presents the key findings, followed by the discussion of the theoretical and practical contributions of the study. Finally, suggestions for future research are provided.

1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a comprehensive summary of the present investigation. Initially, the problem statement, purpose of the research, research objectives and study justification were presented. In addition, the research methodology and design are presented. Thereafter, significance and contribution of the study are discussed. Subsequently, ethical considerations and delimitations pertaining research were discussed. The following chapter provides an account of the South African research context, including a discussion of the impact of social media on corporate reputation management globally and in South Africa.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter investigates the theoretical frameworks and literature that underpin the study. The emergence of social media has presented a multitude of challenges for organisations, particularly in the domain of reputation management (Technologies,2023). (Simplilearn, 2022). observed that individuals now possess the ability to generate, modify, and disseminate content to a vast audience, thereby posing a substantial threat to companies. Customers, empowered by social media, have assumed an active role in the market and can swiftly spread rumours or grievances about organisations (Impact Group Marketing, 2023). To establish a solid foundation for the study, the Agenda Setting theory is introduced and discussed. This theory has been selected as the basis for the study due to its ability to explain the influence of social media on corporate reputation. The subsequent section provides a comprehensive review of the existing literature on the constructs of corporate reputation and sentiment, thus facilitating the development of the study's conceptual framework.

2.1.2 The emergence of social media

Different definitions of social media are presented in the existing literature. Social media sites refer to highly interactive online platforms that promote the sharing, co-creation, discussion, and modification of user-generated content among individuals and communities, (Hettler,2010). Further, social media provides the press, as well as individuals, with an avenue to express and disseminate their opinions, (Constantides & Fountain, 2008). Consequently, this influence of social media leads to a notable sense of consumer empowerment, coinciding with the diminishing control that companies have over user-to-user communication. As a result, organisations are increasingly vulnerable to reputation challenges, necessitating the development of proficient strategies to effectively manage them, (Schulich, 2011; Leonard, 2018).

Along with their many advantages, the emergence of social media has also exposed organisations to potential threats that can harm their reputation (Dowling, 2016). The existing literature largely emphasises the dangers and negative effects of reputation damage caused by social media (Baccarella et al., 2018). Potential consequences include loss of market share, decreased sales and stock prices, reduced purchase intentions, and strained relationships between (organisations and stakeholders, (Cowan and Guzman 2020).

2.1.3 The importance of corporate reputation management

Corporate reputation management is a multifaceted process that involves creating, building, maintaining, and managing a positive image and brand for an organisation (Vig et al., 2017). It encompasses both internal and external communication efforts, aiming to shape public perception and demonstrate the organisation's values and behaviour (Harker, 2019). Reputational factors, such as market sector and country of origin, significantly influence how an organisation is perceived (Vig et al., 2017). A positive corporate reputation is crucial for organisations, particularly in service and business management sectors (Welch, 2020). External stakeholders' positive views of the organisation and the alignment of internal stakeholders' perceptions contribute to a strong reputation that fosters growth and identification (Harker, 2019). Consequently, organisations carefully safeguard their reputation to avoid reputational risk, ensure financial viability, and establish a positive identity (Schultz & Werner, 2003; Adeosun, 2013).Failure to manage corporate reputation effectively can lead to a tarnished image and a lack of sustainably attracting customers (Van Riel & Baumann, 2020) As a result, organisations employ various strategies, including social media, television advertisements, and print media, to enhance and maintain their corporate reputation (Aula & Mantere, 2022).

However, with the emergence of social media which has helped corporates create owned content to build a desired image and reputation, the challenges social media presents are equally undesired, (Szamrowski & Pawlewicz, 2015). The exponential growth of social media has significantly impacted communication practices in organisations, altering how they engage with both internal and external stakeholders. While organisations utilise social media as an additional marketing channel, its potential threats to reputation, brand, and image should not be overlooked (Li & Bernoff, 2015). Thus, organisations need to leverage social media beyond conventional marketing uses to build and maintain their corporate reputation (Etter, 2013).

2.1.4 The concept of corporate reputation

Corporate reputation is a concept that has been defined by numerous researchers. (Bronn ,2015; Pires et al, 2018; Campbell, 2023; Diggity, 2023) asserts that while reputation can be interpreted in various ways, it is commonly understood as an intangible asset that can confer a competitive advantage upon a firm. This advantage arises from the fact that a good reputation is both valuable and rare, rendering it irreplaceable. Moreover, Kircova (2018) argues that corporate reputation can be defined as the overall assessment of a company's performance by its stakeholders over an

extended period. This assessment is shaped by multiple stakeholders' perceptions of the organisation's effectiveness. Companies that possess a strong reputation are more likely to enjoy a competitive edge and exert influence over customer behaviour and attitudes. Smitha (2010) further emphasises the significance of brand associations in shaping corporate image and reputation. A positive brand image can enhance consumer confidence, impact decision-making processes, and foster loyalty. Consequently, organisations devote considerable effort to managing their brand image, recognising it as a valuable source of value. In sum, there is a consensus among scholars that corporate reputation is determined by stakeholders, serves as an intangible asset that confers a competitive advantage, and holds significant value for organisations. Consequently, negative reviews or damaging actions can have severe repercussions for an organisation.

2.14 The Benefits and challenges of social media on corporate reputation management

Academic research has explored the relationship between social media and corporate reputation management, identifying the benefits and challenges associated with its use. One of its benefits is its ability to facilitate transparency and authenticity in communication. Organisations can readily share their values, ethical practices, and corporate social responsibility initiatives, creating positive associations with their brand (Fuchs,2017). Social media also enables organisations to directly engage with stakeholders, leading to increased brand trust and credibility (Johannes, 2013).

However, the rapid nature and wide reach of social media also pose challenges for reputation management. False information and negative sentiment can spread quickly, amplifying reputational risks for organisations (Johannes, 2013). In South Africa's context, where social media discussions often become polarised due to societal issues and diverse cultural backgrounds, the impact on corporate reputation management becomes more significant (Johannes, 2013).To effectively manage reputation on social media in South Africa, organisations need to understand the dynamics of agenda-setting theory. This theory asserts that media, including social media, sets the public agenda and shapes public opinion by determining what topics are salient (McCombs et al., 1972; Carroll & McCombs, 2003). Consequently, organisations can identify key concerns and tailor their communication strategies to address salient issues on social media platforms. Analysing influential attributes and their associations on social media agendas can further aid in crafting targeted messages that resonate with the audience. Further literature reviewed on social media also reveals that it has transformed how corporate companies communicate with their stakeholders and achieve public relations. Before the invention of social media, communicators in corporate companies relied on media publications to disseminate information about their company, shaping

the public perception of the corporation. (Mair & Harty, 2014).

According to (Barnes& Mattson,2017), social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn have given corporations the platform to communicate directly with their stakeholders, including customers and prospective employees, to build their reputation. However, these platforms also create challenges and risks for reputation management, as stakeholders can publish conversations and user-generated content on social media that can negatively impact a corporation's reputation (Gruzd et al., 2017).

(Barnes& Mattson,2017), examined the risk and opportunity factors that social media presents corporations concerning their reputation management and argues that social media has fundamentally changed how companies communicate with their stakeholders, making it necessary to adopt a new approach to reputation management by actively engaging with stakeholders and monitoring their online presence. Further, the authors emphasise the need for corporations to establish transparency, responsiveness, and accountability for reputation management strategies effectively.

The two authors based their argument on how reviews on customers feedback on social media platforms or a video can quickly escalate to a crisis. This view is supported by the study conducted by (Kwak et al., 2019) which provided a look at how Domino's Pizza, an American Multinational pizza restaurant chain suffered major reputational damage after a video depicting two employees in what looked like an unhygienic food preparation practice. The video was re-shared across multiple social media platforms and resulted in negative publicity and consumer backlash, severely harming the company's reputation (Kwak et al., 2019). Such events highlight the risks social media poses to corporations. However, in the case of Domino's Pizza, researchers overlooked the emphasis on employee advocacy, an area which could aid corporations to prevent video material from leaking from companies during an internal conflict or staff members behaving in a way that could harm the brand. Despite these risks, the authors reiterate the opportunities social media offers companies to strengthen their brand reputation.

Therefore, whether there are risks associated with companies using social media as a tool to directly communicate with their stakeholders directly, literature reviewed supports the continued use while suggesting that companies should also strengthen the development of their social media strategies for both external and external stakeholders. Leonard, (2018) argues the vulnerability of the corporations on social media has exposed businesses to a range of reputational risks, such as negative consumer feedback, privacy breaches, and viral scandals that can harm a company's

reputation and suggests that businesses need to be vigilant about monitoring social media and proactively managing their online reputation. This could be the way they craft their key messages, educate their employees about social media use through social media policies. Leonard, (2018) asserts that transparency and honesty in the way companies handle crises and avoid spinning could benefit the business to enhance trust and loyalty. In essence, Leonard's analysis highlights the importance of taking a strategic approach to social media management to mitigate risks, and use proactivity and transparency build stronger relationships with consumers.

2.1.5 Literature gaps in social media and corporate reputation management

Despite the increasing attention paid to the impact of social media on corporate reputation management in recent years, there are still gaps in the literature that need to be addressed. For example, according to Mustafa &Tourky (2019), corporate reputation strategies differ according to various factors such as business objectives, geographic location, industry, local culture, and business models. Understanding how each of these factors can influence the results on corporate reputation management might aid corporations to strengthen their corporate reputation strategies. Looking at business models for example, some businesses in South Africa do not have social media platforms to engage their stakeholders, therefore when there are conversations appearing on social media, there is usually no response from the business. The lack of attention to the importance of social media) as observed by Harker (2019) can result in reputational harm as the business might not be able to respond timeously during a crisis.

Further, recent research has also highlighted the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the negative impact of social media on corporate reputation management (Kim and Sung, 2019). Specifically, the literature often overlooks the risks associated with social media usage, such as negative feedback, cyberbullying, or misuse of social media by employees, which can damage corporate reputation. Jordan & Smith (2013) assert that organisations should not overlook the risk associated with social media as they would need to prepare and prevent the potential damages it poses to their organisations.

The significant gap in the existing literature is in how companies can leverage the power of social media listening tools to manage their reputation online. Across the world, content analysis through the social media tools has been widely adopted (Lee et al., 2020). According to Bi & Data Analytics (2023) more than 82% of the organisations in South Africa believe that social listening

is now a key element in managing their strategies and online reputation. Additionally, the understanding that sentiment analysis is crucial to understanding perception and informing organisations' social media engagement strategy is a consensus a month the organisations surveyed. Despite the data, research on how many of these companies are using tools has not been fully explored (Lee et al., 2020).

The current state of research in measuring reputation and exploring the impact of social media conversations on reputation continues to be a topic of interest among scholars. However, it appears that the causal relationship between conversations on social media and reputation is often assumed without rigorous testing or examination in most literature. Many recent scholars have found that the social media listening tools have become critical partners for measuring reputation for organisations online (Turban et al., 2018). These tools allow companies to respond timeously and monitor conversations about their brands in real-time.

2.1.6 The Impact of social media on corporate reputation – South Africa

Several studies have emphasised the significance of social media in shaping corporate reputation and encouraging corporations to use social media platforms but take a strategic approach to leverage the platforms to forge stronger relationships with stakeholders (Holsapple et al., 2014). In South Africa, many organisations' reputations have been threatened by conversations or adverts that were created for social media consumption by companies but resulted in a crisis. This observation is supported by (Chen &Chen,2018) who found that social media had a significant impact on corporate reputation, particularly in the case of crises. Similarly, (Ulrich, Saravanamuthu &Newell,2018) argue that social media has the potential to magnify the impact of negative events and cause reputational damage.

In South Africa, in 2019, Clicks, a retail pharmacy chain, published an advert for Tresemme that featured four hair types, labelling ethnic African hair as "frizzy and dull" and White people's hair as "normal hair" (Reuters, 2020). The advert was picked up by a social media user who shared it on social media, and it resulted in a widespread backlash, with many accusing the Clicks of promoting racist and discriminatory attitudes towards natural African hair (Heiberg, 2020) The outrage continued to escalate, leading to protests, boycotts, and a call to fire executives involved in the creation of the advert (Gobler, 2020). To mitigate the risks, Clicks issued multiple apologies

and suspended the sale of Tresemme products in their stores. It also suspended all the employees involved in the advertising campaign and accepted the resignation of a senior executive over the matter (Gobler, 2020). Additionally, the organisation further announced that all staff would undergo diversity, equity, and inclusion training (Maphanga, 2020). The organisation also established a Hair Advisory Board that comprised of respected activists, scholars and hair salon owners. However, the damage to their reputation was already done, amplified by the resignation of one of its prominent board members, Nonkululeko Gobodo, the first Black accountant in South Africa (Buthelezi, 2020). The incident highlighted the power of social media in magnifying the crisis and in this case, it was the way the corporate message, which was intended to promote a profitable product, harmed the reputation.

In the case of Clicks, Hainsworth (2011) asserts that due to the dual opportunity of social media, one being an opportunity and another posing risk, companies must develop strategies that can be used to effectively manage their reputation. In his analysis, Hainsworth also highlights some of the potential risks associated with social media reputation management, such as the spread of fake news or negative comments by disgruntled stakeholders and suggests that companies should be prepared to respond quickly and appropriately to any negative feedback and should take steps to address any issues raised by stakeholders.This case is particularly a suitable example in this study as it highlights the importance of social media monitoring tools which aid organisations to pick up topics that threaten the reputation of their organisations. Many social media users were publishing content relating to this topic, and this trend proving the negative impact social media can have on an organisations' reptation. The considerations by Kaul et al., (2015) that crises that arise from social media should inspire organisations to recognise the risk the lack of attention to social media can bring and adopt to the use of social media listening to react quicker in their response to crises.

For Shoprite, in 2020, a crisis unfolded at Checkers in Bayside Mall, Tableview, as around 20 employees tested positive for COVID-19, leading to the temporary closure of the store. Tragically, two employees lost their lives, sparking concerns and challenges that would rock Shoprite's corporate reputation on social media, (Daily Maverick, 2020). Employees from disadvantaged communities like Dunoon and Atlantis faced a dilemma when asked to provide documentation of their coronavirus status for retesting, which they couldn't afford. This situation led to fear of losing their jobs due to the financial burden of private testing. Daniel, a worker, took to social media to express how he felt betrayed by the situation, highlighting the emotional and financial strain imposed by the no-work-no-pay rule. The inability to afford retesting added to the workers'

distress, with livelihoods at stake, (IOL,2020). Despite these challenges, Shoprite's response to the allegations was met with silence, further fuelling discontent and criticism on social media platforms. The company's commitment to government guidelines was questioned as employees felt unsupported and unfairly treated during a time of crisis. The incident at Checkers not only raised concerns about employee welfare and corporate responsibility but also shed light on the importance of effective crisis management and communication strategies in safeguarding corporate reputation in the face of social media scrutiny. As the story unfolded online, Shoprite faced a significant challenge in managing its reputation and restoring trust among its stakeholders.

In the case of Tiger Brands, conversations stemming from social media also challenged how the company handled a food safety crisis in 2018, a conversation that still lingers on the brand. Tiger Brands found itself at the center of a severe brand erosion crisis during the listeriosis outbreak, highlighting the significant impact of social media on corporate reputation management strategies (News24,2018). The company's response to the unfolding crisis, influenced by social media dynamics, played a crucial role in shaping public perception and trust in the brand. The crisis began when the National Institute for Communicable Diseases linked the listeriosis outbreak to one of Tiger Brands' meat processing plants, specifically the Enterprise Foods facility. As social media became a primary channel for information dissemination and public discourse, Tiger Brands faced intense scrutiny and backlash for its handling of the situation, exacerbating the negative impact on its corporate reputation.

Tiger Brands' missteps in crisis management, such as delayed responses, limited engagement, and lack of compassion, were amplified through social media platforms, reaching a wide audience and fuelling negative sentiment towards the brand, (BizCommunity,2018) . The company's failure to address public concerns effectively and transparently further damaged its reputation in the digital sphere, where news spreads rapidly and public opinion can sway perceptions of corporate responsibility. The crisis underscores the interconnected nature of social media and corporate reputation, highlighting the need for a strategic and integrated approach to crisis management in the digital age.

2.1.7 A brief overview of the companies in review

1. Shoprite Group of Companies

The Shoprite group of companies began operations in 1979 when the Rogut family, who owned the company's headquarters in Cape Town, acquired eight supermarkets located in the Cape

(Shoprite, 2023). Its current yearly turnover is R103 billion (Shoprite, 2022). Shoprite Holdings Ltd. currently operates in every province in South Africa. It has also extended to South Africa's black townships. It mainly caters for the middle and low-income 60 segments of the population and it mainly acts as the price leader (Shoprite, 2023).

Under brand names such Shoprite (supermarkets), Checkers, OK Furniture, OK Foods, OK Grocer, Sixty60 and Shoprite X and Buying Partners, the business operates a broad variety of retail formats. The retailer chain's extraordinary growth has mostly come from its acquisition and buyout of smaller retail outlets. Shoprite sources and distributes its products through its distribution centers in Gauteng and Cape Town, South Africa. Products are imported and distributed to retailers in South Africa and other African nations via the DCs. For fresh fruit and vegetables, Shoprite uses Freshmark, its own fresh-produce procurement company, which operates as 9 Central purchasing centres for supermarkets (BusinessTech, 2023). The study selected Shoprite as one of the companies to review as it is active in social media engagement and its customers and other stakeholders mainly engage with the brand on social media relating to concerns, queries and complains.

2. Clicks

Clicks is a pharmaceutical, health, and beauty retailer in South Africa, boasting total of 880 locations including 710 in-store pharmacies (Clicks, 2023). They have targets customers in the middle to upper-income segments (LSM 6-10). It boosts about 10.4 million active customers and are positioning themselves as a preferred pharmacy, health, and beauty retailer for customers in South Africa.The organisation is a consumer facing retailer and have a presence on social media. In 2020, Clicks was embroiled in a social media reputation crisis following a contentious advertisement showcasing Black hair which resulted in its competition such as Pick N Pay, Woolworths, and Dischem to recall the TRESemmé goods from their inventory. Clicks was the company responsible for initially releasing the advertisement. A question about the advertisement was posed to Clicks on social media and Clicks delayed the response to explain why the retailer labelled the black hair “dull and frizzy” (Daily Maverick, 2020).

3.Tiger brands

Tiger Oats Limited was established in 1921 by Jacob Frankel and Joffe Marks. Tiger Brands Limited, previously named Tiger Oats Limited, originated as a familial enterprise (Tiger Brands, 2023). Tiger Brand, formerly known as Tiger Oats, initially introduced Jungle Oats as its inaugural breakfast oatmeal product. The brand continues to manufacture Jungle Oats. The company sells

its goods under many brand names such as Purity, Oros, Tastic, Cresta, Ice Cap, Koo, Jungle Oats, and Fizz Pop. The company also offers product solutions for food service and business to distributors, franchised restaurant groups, hotel groups, catering companies, airlines, and institutions. In 2018, the company had to recall their cold meat product after a listeriosis breakout. The company is included in this review as the crisis, which was widely discussed and reported on social media still surfaces on social media due to the way they managed their reputation at the time (BusinessTech, 2021).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study aims to assess the impact of social media on corporate reputation management in South Africa. It relies on the Theory of Agenda Setting to describe the association between social media and corporate reputation management. According to the theory, Agenda setting refers to the power of the media to shape and influence what issues and topics are considered important in society (McCombs, 2004). In the past, the mass media held significant control over the public agenda, as there were only a few media outlets that could reach a large audience. However, with the rise of social media and the fragmentation of media sources, the ability of the mass media to shape the public agenda has been challenged, (Alemneh & Alemu ,2021).

Audience fragmentation refers to the shift from mass broadcasting to niche media, where individuals can tailor their media consumption to their specific interests. This change in the media landscape has led to a more diverse range of media sources and has made it harder for the mass media to reach and inform a broad audience. This fragmentation has also led to the decline of a shared common agenda among the public Liu et al. (2022), as different individuals are exposed to different media sources and have different priorities and interests.

The rise of social media has further complicated the study of agenda setting. While social media platforms allow for the sharing and dissemination of news, (Alemneh & Alemu, 2021). the abundance of media choice and individual selectivity pose challenges to understanding the impact of social media on agenda setting. One way in which social media can contribute to agenda setting is through the social sharing of news. When individuals share news articles or stories on their social media platforms, they can extend the reach and influence of these stories beyond their direct audience. This social filtering of information can help to distribute the mass media agenda to a broader public, (Batorski, 2015). reaching individuals who may not have been exposed to political news otherwise.

Another way social media has impacted agenda setting is through incidental exposure to information regarding corporates. Incidental exposure refers to the exposure to information that occurs as a by-product of individuals seeking entertainment or engaging with other content on social media (Loader et al., 2014). However, the personalised nature of social media feeds and user-curated content can lead to decreased exposure to incidental organisational information. This reduction in exposure not only leads to lower levels of knowledge and participation but also poses a threat to the traditional agenda-setting power of the mass media.

2.2.1 Agenda setting theory through social media.

When examining the impact of social media on corporate reputation management, understanding agenda setting is crucial (Hainsworth, 2011). Social media platforms have become an increasingly important channel for individuals to share their opinions and experiences with companies and brands. These platforms can shape public perceptions and influence the agenda surrounding corporate reputations (Khan, 2018). Through social media, customers and stakeholders can share positive or negative experiences, express their opinions about specific companies, and potentially influence the wider public's perception of a company's reputation. The spread of information through social media can have a significant impact on a company's image and the public's perception of its values, practices, and overall trustworthiness. Moreover, social media allows for direct communication between companies and stakeholders, providing opportunities for companies to manage their reputations in real-time. By monitoring and engaging with social media conversations, companies can address concerns or issues promptly, demonstrate transparency, (Kaul& Desai, 2015) and attempt to shape the agenda surrounding their reputation.

However, the fragmented nature of social media and the ability of individuals to selectively engage with content pose challenges to corporate reputation management. Companies need to navigate different social media platforms, monitor multiple conversations, and respond to various stakeholders effectively (Hall, 2018). Additionally, the personalised nature of social media feeds means that individuals may only be exposed to certain perspectives or opinions about a company, potentially influencing their perceptions without considering a broader context. Therefore, the importance of agenda setting to this study is crucial. The ability of social media to distribute the mass media agenda and shape public perceptions can have significant implications for companies

seeking to manage their reputations effectively (Langer & Gruber, 2021). Understanding the dynamics of agenda setting in the context of social media is essential to develop strategies that align with the changing media landscape and meet the expectations and concerns of stakeholders (Kobayashi & Ichifuji,2015).

2.2.2 Topics emerging in debates, advocacy, and discovery from the literature.

Traditionally, Agenda-setting has been understood as a two-step flow, where mass media messages are filtered through opinion leaders before reaching the public (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). However, the rise of social media has brought about new dynamics in the dissemination of information and potential agenda-setting effects. A debate has emerged regarding the applicability of the two-step flow theory in the digital media environment. Bennett & Manheim (2006) argue that the sharing of mass media through opinion leaders is less prominent today due to factors such as declining membership in social clubs and organisations. This raises questions about whether the mass media's agenda can extend beyond the attentive public to reach the inattentive members of society.

However, recent research suggests that social media may still play a significant role in agenda-setting. While social media users may not primarily use platforms for seeking information about organisations, most users are exposed to news incidentally while engaging in other online activities (Nordin, 2021)This incidental exposure to news-quality information on social media challenges the notion that agenda-setting is limited to hard news interested individuals. The content shared on social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter, also overlaps with traditional news sources. Analysis shows that a considerable amount of "hard content," featuring national news, politics, and world affairs, is shared on the platform (Bakshy et al., 2015). This suggests that users scrolling through their News Feed are likely to come across news articles alongside personal updates from their network. Notably, social media users tend to share stories related to popular mass media topics, potentially reflecting the agenda of traditional news sources (Trilling et al., 2016)

Contrary to concerns about social media contributing to echo spaces, where individuals are exposed only to like-minded viewpoints, the information shared on social media is diverse (O'Regan, 2021). This means that even incidental exposure to organisational related information through social media has the potential to shape users' agendas in alignment with the mass media.

The emergence of social media as a platform for agenda-setting raises several advocacy arguments. First, it suggests a need to expand the definition of news consumers beyond just those who actively seek the information. The incidental exposure to news on social media necessitates a broader understanding of who is influenced by media agendas.There is also a question of whether social media platforms have the responsibility to curate content in a way that promotes diverse perspectives and issues. The observed focus on a few dominant issues on Facebook compared to Twitter highlights the influence of platform design on the agenda-setting potential of social media (Trilling et al., 2016). Advocates argue for the importance of algorithms and platform features that promote exposure to a broader range of news topics.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

2.3.1 Theoretical Underpinnings: The Impact of social media on Corporate Reputation Management Strategies

Social media is a two-way street that enables corporations to listen, engage, and respond to stakeholders' needs and assists businesses in aligning their operations and communications with public stakeholder values (Turban et al., 2018). Additionally, social media gives a broader range of opinions across society space that make it essential for building strong and resilient reputations in the transparent and technologically advanced era. The application of the agenda-setting theory in South Africa has been utilised in recent literature to analyse how social media shape's public opinion and influence public perception of institutions. (Plessis and Visser,2018) demonstrated that social media content produces connected effects on public opinion, which is one of the key findings confirming the applicability of agenda-setting theory on shaping public opinions in a South African context. The study established that social media opinion is a vital input for agenda-setting compared to traditional mediums where definitive cognitive effects were found.

Therefore, existing literature's theoretical underpinnings on the impact of social media on corporate reputation management strategies in South Africa depend on the agenda-Setting model. The agenda-Setting approach provides a useful lens for understanding how social media affects perceptions and what organisational activities are required to maintain a positive reputation.
Other contemporary theories relevant to this study include Reputation Management Theory. This is defined as "a proposed set of principles for how an individual or organisation can use social media, search engine optimization, and other online platforms to manage their reputation on the web" (Wilcher, 2022). The underlying assertion of the Reputation Management Theory is that organisations (and individuals) want to manage their reputation online. Significantly, they want to

curate a social media presence that makes them not only likeable but also trustworthy. Wilcher (*ibid*) contends that achieving this is wholly dependent on reputation management.

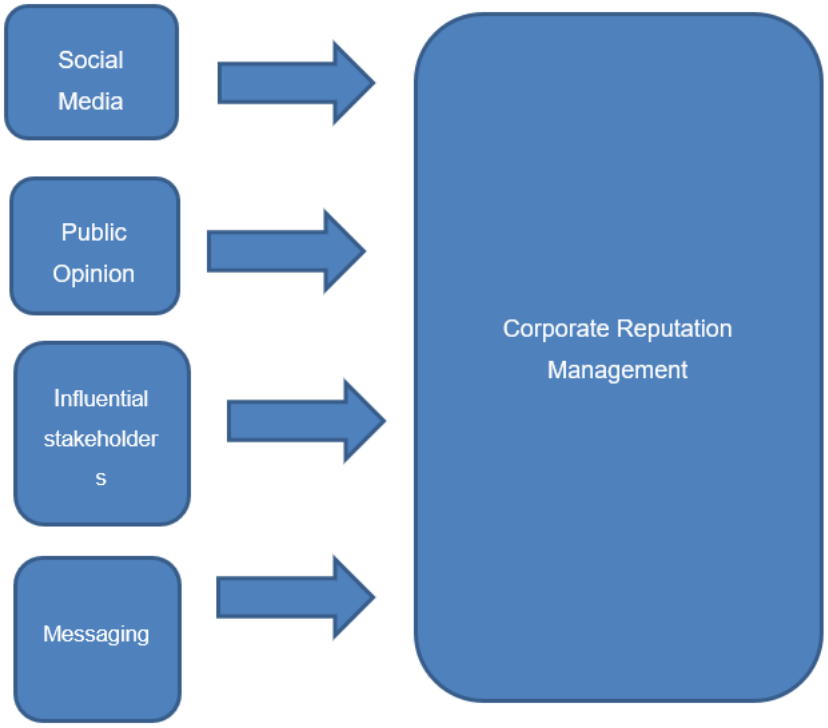
Table 1 summarises main elements found in the literature about how social media affects corporate reputation management strategies. The table classifies themes based on the number of articles that have studied each subject and highlights research gaps that require more examination.
One prominent theme is the utilisation of social media for reputation management, with four articles dedicated to this topic. More research is needed to identify the precise social media strategies that are beneficial for reputation management in various industries and organisations. Another important theme is the influence of social media on reputation management methods in developing nations, with five articles specifically addressing this topic. The table highlights a research gap in this area, underscoring the necessity for further studies to explore the impact of social media on business reputation initiatives in developing countries.

Eight papers delve into the impact of social media misinformation on company reputation, highlighting the need for more research on how social media platforms influence the dissemination and management of disinformation. Organisations are advised to effectively navigate these areas to protect their reputations. Five articles discuss employee advocacy on social media and highlight the need of exploring how employees' social media activity influences corporate reputation. It is essential for organisations to comprehend how employees can have a beneficial impact on reputation management efforts. Six articles examine the incorporation of social media into communication methods for reputation management. The table highlights the significance of integrating social media with other communication channels to efficiently handle organisational reputations within a comprehensive business plan. Ultimately, the table offers a thorough summary of important issues concerning how social media affects business reputation management strategies, pointing out areas that warrant additional inquiry and investigation. This information can provide a solid basis for examining the complex connection between social media and corporate reputation in the current digital era.

Table 1: Synthesis of research report of themes that emerged from literature.

Themes	Number of articles	Research Gaps	References (working on this)
Social media as a tool for reputation management	4	Further examination of the specific social media strategies that are effective for reputation management for different industries and organisations.	(Njuka & Phiri, 2021)
The impact of social media on reputation management strategies in developing countries	5	The lack of research on the impact of social media on corporate reputation strategies in developing countries.	(Langer & Gruber, 2021).
The impact of social media misinformation on corporate reputation	3	Further exploration of the role of social media platforms in spreading and controlling misinformation, and how organisations can effectively navigate these spaces to maintain their reputations.	(Lee et al., 2020).
Strengthening employee advocacy	5	Explore the role of employee social media usage on the impact of social media on corporate reputation	Blumberg et al. (2014)
Integrating social media in the overall communication strategy for reputation management	6	Examination of how organisations can effectively integrate social media with other communication tools to manage their reputations as an overall business strategy.	(De Jager & Lubbe, 2022; Krog et al., 2018).

Figure 1: *The relationship between corporate reputation management and social media*



As depicted in the **(Figure 1),** the framework is centered on the dependent variable of corporate reputation, which refers to the general perception people hold about a corporation based on its actions and interactions on social media (De Jager & Lubbe, 2022; Krog et al., 2018). The framework depicts that social media, as the independent variable, comprises the various social media platforms employed by corporations to manage their reputation on the internet, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter (De Jager & Lubbe, 2022). The agenda-setting theory has been utilised as the theoretical framework for this study, which is represented through the arrows that show how social media prioritises certain issues over others, resulting in the shaping of public opinion around specific issues (De Jager & Lubbe, 2022; Krog et al., 2018). Moreover, stakeholder groups whose opinions and agenda influence corporate reputation management strategies have been included as an intermediary, and communication plays a vital role in aligning opinions with stakeholder interests concerning corporate activities (De Jager & Lubbe, 2022; Krog et al., 2018).

Social media communication involves identification, segmentation, and targeting using multiple messaging platforms and monitoring, all of which are used to align opinions with stakeholder interest concerning corporate activities (De Jager & Lubbe, 2022). In this study, public opinion has been used to represent the perception of stakeholders concerning corporate reputation outcomes influenced by the nature of the corporate messages distributed through social media platforms (De Jager & Lubbe, 2022; Krog et al., 2018).

Therefore, this conceptual framework summarises the study's relationship between the different constructs and contributes to the understanding of the impact of social media on corporate reputation management strategies in South Africa.

2.3.2 Linking social media with corporate reputation management strategies.

The research proposes the use of constructs in the table below to demonstrate the direct impact of these constructs to corporate reputation management which according to Kim and Kang, (2019) can be both negative and positive depending on the organisations' willingness to adapt to the fast-paced nature of social media.

Table 2: Direct impact of constructs to corporate reputation management

Construct	**Interpretation**	**Measures**	**References**
Social Media	The use of online platforms and tools for sharing information, ideas, and opinions among individuals and groups	Number of social media accounts, frequency of posts, engagement rate, sentiment analysis	Brown (2019).
Corporate Reputation Management strategies	The set of activities and processes used by companies to maintain and enhance their reputation among stakeholders | Reputation audits, crisis communication planning, stakeholder engagement	Reputation audits, crisis communication planning, stakeholder engagement programs, social responsibility initiatives	Dowling, G.R. (1986).

	programs, social responsibility initiatives		
Public Opinion	The perception of stakeholders regarding corporate reputation outcomes	Perception of stakeholders about corporate reputation outcomes influenced by the nature of corporate messages distributed through social media platforms	De Jager & Lubbe, 2022; Krog et al., 2018
Influential stakeholders	Different stakeholders that contribute to shaping corporate reputation management strategies|	Identification, segmentation, targeting, and messaging platforms used to align opinion with stakeholder interest concerning corporate activities|	Phipps & Gruber, 2021

2.4 Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present the research context of this study. This chapter began with an overview of the social media and corporate reputation management to get a view of how reputation management is viewed globally and locally. Thereafter, the South African reputation management context was discussed in detail. There was also a segment on the positives and disadvantages of social media. Thereafter, a section which detailed the theoretical underpinnings was presented. The subsequent chapter (chapter three) presents the research design and methodology for the current study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology employed in the current study to support the proposed conceptual model. It offers a comprehensive discussion on the research strategy, research philosophy, sampling technique, data collection method, and statistical analysis utilized. In a nutshell, the justification for the chosen methods is provided.

3.2 Research design

According to Creswell (2015), research design refers to the detailed outline of the forms of inquiry within quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches, providing guidance on specific measures in research design. Sekaran and Bougie (2016) describe research design as a plan or blueprint for the measurement, collection, and analysis of data to answer research questions. Wilson (2014) states that research design is a plan that guides the arrangement of data collection and analysis, ensuring that the research is conducted in a manner that addresses all research questions. Creswell and Clark (2014) posit that research design is a process for evaluating, gathering, reporting, and understanding information in research studies. The main function of research design, according to Creswell (2014), is to enable the researcher to plan a research process that maximises the validity of the eventual results.

There are two types of research approaches commonly used for data collection: quantitative and qualitative. The third approach is known as a mixed methods approach and comprises of the triangulation of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Maree (2016) defines quantitative research as a method that aims to test theories, forecast results, establish relationships between variables, and determine facts. For this study, a qualitative research method was employed. Qualitative research is an approach intended to develop theories and provide an understanding of phenomena (Maree, 2016). The aim of this study is to analyse the impact of social media on corporate reputation management and to assess the efficacy of reputation management strategies on South African organisations. In this regard, the study sought to understand the way consumers engage with brands and organisations online, and the impact of this engagement on the reputation of these entities. This secondary data was obtained from online discourse, with individual

consumer conversations in the public domain used as a basis for data. The data was collected from the social media platform X (formerly known as Twitter) to analyse the sentiment towards the three organisations that are the units of analysis, namely Clicks, Shoprite and Tiger Brands. The search parameters for the data included reputational risks/challenges and reputation management strategies of the said organisations. The data was stored in a CSV file and analysed using two social media listening tools, namely, Meltwater and Data EQ (formerly known as BrandsEye).

3.2.1 Defining qualitative approach.

Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault (2016) contend that qualitative research is a combination of rational and exploratory research that involves gathering information, analysing, and interpreting data through the examination of individuals' own written or spoken words and observable behaviour. Furthermore, (Yin,2014) highlights that qualitative research is appealing because it allows researchers to select preferred areas of interest for their study, as other research approaches may limit data collection. The common thread in literature is that qualitative research can be defined as an essential descriptive design used in investigations among individuals or groups selected to participate in the study.

3.3 Research Strategies

According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009), the research strategy is defined as the "general plan of how the researcher will go about answering the research question. They identify various research strategies that can be employed in conducting exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory research, including experiment, survey, case study, action research, grounded theory, ethnography, and archival research. *Table 3* provides an overview of the key characteristics of these research strategies, and a rationale is presented for the Utilisation of the survey method.

Table 3: Summary of key features of research strategies

Strategy	Characteristics
Survey	The survey strategy is frequently associated with the deductive approach and is widely used in business and management research. It is well-suited for addressing questions related to who, what, where, how much, and how many.
Grounded theory	Grounded theory is particularly useful for predicting and explaining behaviour. It involves theory building through a combination of induction and deduction, with theories derived from data generated through systematic observations.
Ethnography	Ethnography is commonly employed in the inductive approach, aiming to describe and explain the social world as research participants themselves would. It provides an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives.
Experiment	The experiment strategy aims to study causal relationships, examining whether changes in one independent variable lead to changes in another. Complex experiments consider the magnitude of change and the relative importance of two or more independent variables.
Archival	The archival strategy relies on administrative documents and records as the primary sources of data. It is particularly suitable for answering research questions that focus on past events and changes over time. This strategy is well-suited for explanatory, exploratory, and descriptive research designs.
Action research	In action research, the researcher is an active participant within the organisation where the research and change process occur. This approach differs from traditional research, as employees, for instance, are not merely subjects but actively involved in the study.

Source : Saunders et al. (2009)

3.5 Data Collection

Data collection, as defined by (Weimer,2012), involves the systematic collection of information and measurement of targeted variables according to a recognized plan. This allows participants to provide appropriate answers to questions and evaluate the outcomes. According to (Roger,2014) there are two types of data collection methods: quantitative data and qualitative data. Qualitative data is characterised using words and descriptions, while quantitative data is expressed through numbers and can be categorised. For this study, a qualitative method was employed, specifically using thematic analysis. The analysis will involve examining and interpreting the social media data from customers and users who interact with the three brands. The data was collected through a social media listening tool called the Meltwater tool to measure the sentiment of the customers and public opinion towards the brand.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis is an essential component in identifying patterns, developing explanations, and testing hypotheses (Saunders et al., 2012). In this study, qualitative data analysis was employed, which involves transforming raw numerical data into meaningful insights through the application of rational thinking (Saunders et al., 2012). While data analysis encompasses various approaches, the Meltwater social media tool was utilized to Analyse the collected data. The data was stored in a CSV file and visually presented through charts, tables, and graphs to facilitate the identification of themes and measurement of sentiment across the three brands. Thematic analysis, as defined by Creswell (2015), was employed as a method for identifying and analyzing data, providing a comprehensive categorization and detailed explanation of the findings.

3.7 Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

Reliability refers to the extent to which research results are consistent and can be replicated (Bezzina & Saunders, 2014). Blumberg et al. (2014) emphasise that reliability in research involves careful planning and minimizing imbalances or inaccuracies. Reliable tools provide assurance that situational and temporary dynamics do not unduly influence the findings Blumberg et al. (2014) Furthermore, Blumberg, Cooper, and Schindler (2014) note that reliable instruments demonstrate consistent performance across different situations and timeframes. Additionally, Laura and Bernaur (2014) assert that reliability refers to the extent to which the measurement process is free

from random errors and allows for the generalisability of obtained scores across various measuring situations. In this study, reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, mentions of the brands in the reviews were deliberately excluded from sentiment and volume calculations to prevent potential bias and skewed results.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct the study was approved by the Wits Business School ethics committee. The study did not require permission from the social media users to collect data as it is publicly viewable data. Ethical considerations and guidelines relevant to this study were adhered to. They are as follows:

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is the cornerstone of basic principles of ethics in research and is one of the crucial ways in which participants can be protected. According to Polonski (2004), confidentiality means that even when the participants are known to the researcher, their identities must not be revealed in any way in the research report. Despite the obtained data being publicly viewable, the identities of the individuals who posted the comments is withheld to ensure confidentiality.

Data protection

The study collected data from the social media platform X (formerly known as Twitter) to analyse the sentiment towards these organisations. The data was stored in a CSV file and analysed using two social media listening tools, namely, Meltwater and Data EQ (formerly known as BrandsEye). This data was protected from use by anyone other than the researcher and was used solely for scholarly purposes.

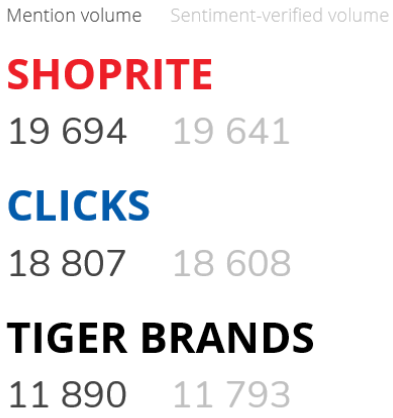
3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the research design employed for the study. The different research strategies were discussed, as well as justification for utilising a qualitative method. The research approach adopted for the current study was then examined. Additionally, the chapter outlined the research design, including discussions on data collection and data analysis. Ethical considerations pertaining to the study were also outlined. The subsequent chapter will present the findings derived from this research.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter presents the results from the analysis. It begins with descriptive statistics of the sample used in the study and further provides descriptive analysis of the outcome on how the use of social media tools can aid organisations to respond to their customers timeously to address issues that might harm their reputation. Thereafter using the conversations extracted using the social media listening tools, it analyses the overall engagement between social media users and companies. Lastly, it looks at the conversations that mentions the brand and their contribution to the negative sentiment during the reporting period.

Figure 2: The number of mentions retrieved per brand and mentions for each received sentiment verification.



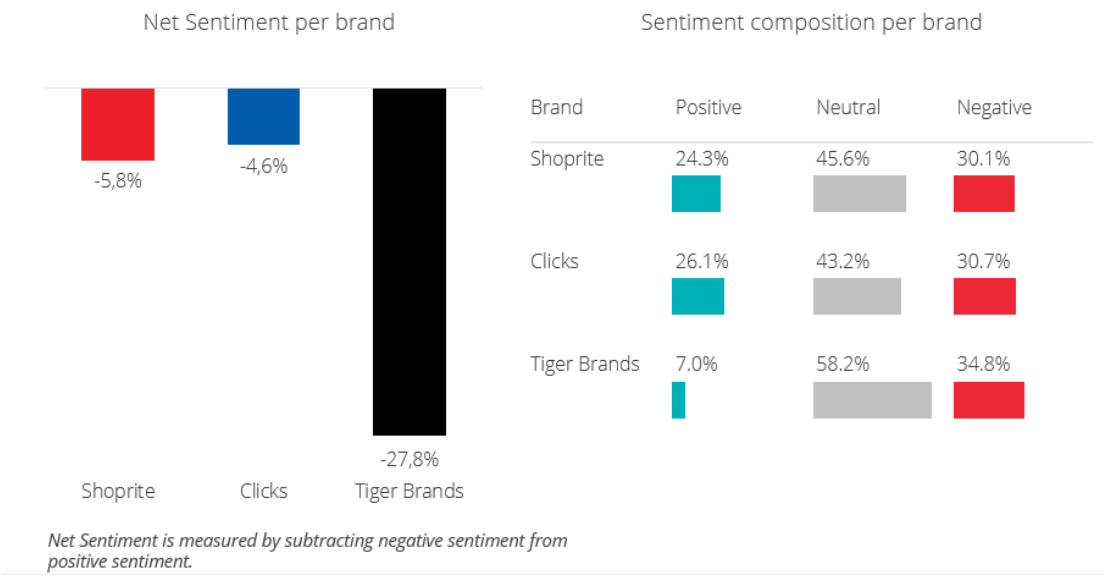
4.2 The Sample

A total of 50 391 non-brand mentions about Shoprite, Clicks and Tiger Brands were obtained for this study. However, the sample was restricted for the period of 1 January 2023 – 12 December 2023 due to the data restriction on the tool – which can only retrieve data for 365 days. The sample obtained only at publicly viewable conversation from X (formerly Twitter) to ensure a like-for-like analysis. X was specifically selected due to its significant popularity in South Africa and its real-time engagement with a wide range of topics. Due to its focus on short-form content and real-time updates, X has emerged as the most influential social media platform in a South Africa where the news cycle is fast and constantly evolving. Despite

Facebook having a greater share of subscribers, Twitter is the more "vibrant and fast-paced atmosphere that attracts world leaders, journalists, and politicians" (Davies, 2024) The figures shown here represent a sample of each brand's total conversation volume on the X platform. An artificial intelligence, with very minimal human refinement was carried out to verify sentiment.

4.3 Brand Comparison

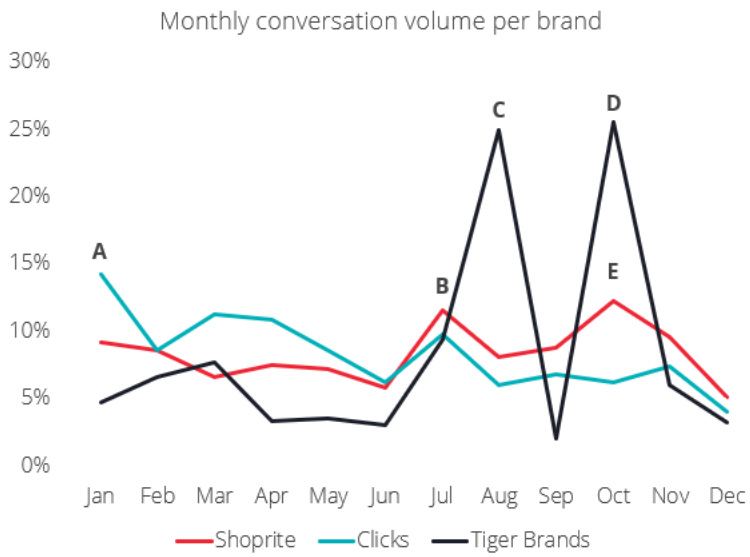
Figure 3: Brand comparison and Sentiment analysis per brand



Sentiment for all three analysed brands was more negative than positive. Shoprite and Clicks saw very similar Net Sentiment scores in 2023, resulting from similar proportions of positive, neutral, and negative conversation. Meanwhile, Tiger Brands scored a significantly lower Net Sentiment. Despite the company seeing a similar percentage of negative mentions to Shoprite and Clicks, it received less than a third of the positive sentiment than these two and a higher proportion of neutral mentions.

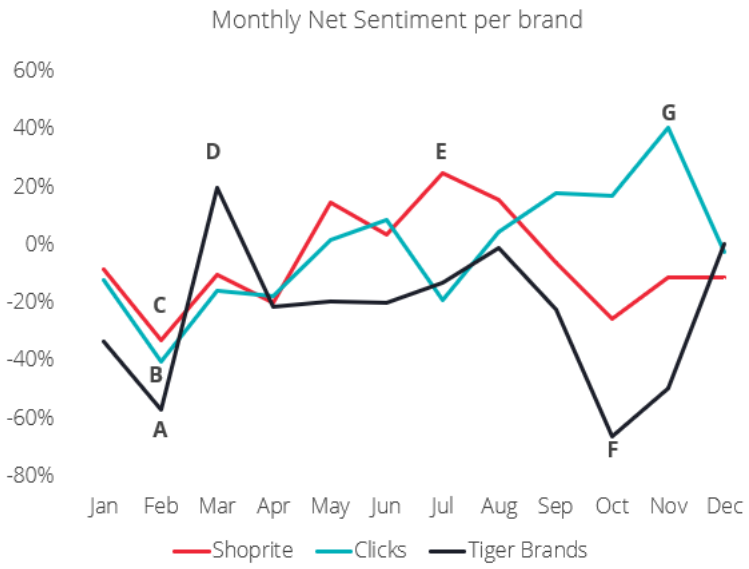
4.3 Online conversations impacting sentiment on brands.

Figure 4: Discussion around counterfeit and expired goods saw conversation about Tiger Brands spike in October.



A. Consumers engaged with a post of a photo of a Clicks branch closed during loadshedding.
B. Consumers reacted to news that MoFaya, the first black-owned energy drink in South Africa, , would be distributed by Shoprite Checkers.
C. Consumers engaged with a post naming some companies, including Tiger Brands, which had recently exited the Nigerian market. The author of the original post blamed the All-Progressives Congress party and the country's exchange rate challenges.
D. Discussion around the selling of counterfeit and expired goods drove increased volume for Tiger Brands. Some consumers blamed informal shops ran by foreign nationals, while others called for greater corporate intervention.
E. Consumers reshared a post deriding an average Shoprite cashier

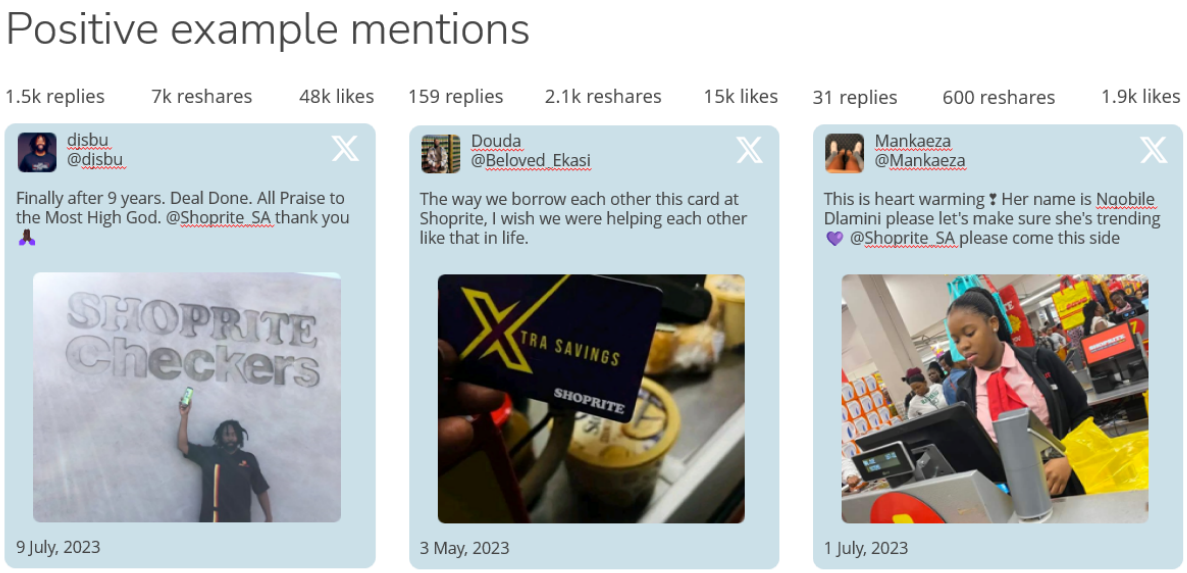
Figure 5: Concerns about Tiger Brands' link to listeriosis resurfaced in February 2023.



A. Tiger Brands Net Sentiment dipped in February. Negativity centred on a post by an attorney who claimed his client's child had contracted listeriosis in the womb after the client ate contaminated polony produced and distributed by Tiger Brands.
B. A former employee claimed to have worked as a pharmacist for Clicks for more than eight years without a contract and accused the retailer of unconstitutional interference during a disciplinary hearing.
C. In February, a post criticising Nigerian foreign nationals for 'thinking Shoprite is a luxury brand' impacted Net Sentiment for the retailer.
D. A giveaway of a food hamper in partnership with MoreThanFood magazine drove positivity for Tiger Brands in March.
E. News that Shoprite Checkers would stock MoFaya energy drink largely drove positivity for the retailer in July.
F. Discussion around counterfeit and expired food items drove another low in Net Sentiment for Tiger Brands in October.
G. A post encouraging consumer to shop at Clicks instead of Dischem saw the former's Net Sentiment peak in November. The author encouraged others to boycott Dischem given its CEO alleged support of Israel Apartheid.

Figure 6: Shoprite: Positivity around MoFaya energy drink highlighted opportunity for further collaboration with the influencer





In figure 6: it is observed that news that Shoprite Checkers would stock MoFaya, the country's first black-owned energy drink, was the leading driver of positive sentiment for Shoprite. Most of this positivity stemmed from engagement with a post by the drink's co-founder announcing the deal, nine years since the product first launched. A post highlighting the practice of borrowing each other's Shoprite Extra Savings card was another key driver of positive sentiment.

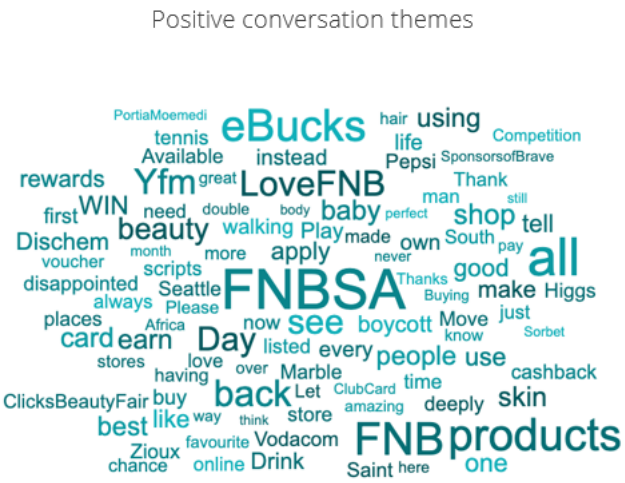
Figure 7: Negative conversation about Shoprite evidenced poor perception of the brand.



Please note brand names and handles have been removed to allow other themes to surface.

Figure 7: Further shows that the economy was the most salient theme in negative conversation about Shoprite. This theme was largely driven by a post criticising Nigerian foreign nationals for 'thinking Shoprite is a luxury brand'. The post suggested a perception of the Shoprite brand as inferior.Competitors Pick n Pay and Woolworths were also salient negative themes. This included a post claiming escaped convict Thabo Bester and criminally charged Dr Nandipha Magudumana had been caught because of their affinity for luxury, such as shopping at Woolworths instead of Shoprite. Meanwhile, another notable post came from a consumer who noted the key to her success had been not being choosy over jobs, which included Shoprite. Both posts further evidenced a poor perception of the brand.

Figure 8: Clicks: Clicks relied on brand partnerships to drive positivity.



Please note brand names and handles have been removed to allow other themes to surface.

Clicks eBucks partnership with FNB was the brand's main driver of positive sentiment in 2023. Rewards for baby products received the most engagement, with the bank offering 8% cashback when shopping for baby items at Clicks. Another key partner for the retailer was radio station YFM, which Clicks collaborated with to promote its annual Beauty Fair. While Clicks has just over 250k followers on X, the radio station is followed by over 1.3M people on this platform, likely amplifying the reach of Clicks' promotional efforts. Most engagement around the sale event was driven by a giveaway offering followers the chance to win R2 500 in ClubCard cashback. Other notable brand collaborations included Vodacom's #ScoreMore Rugby World Cup campaign, which offered consumers the chance to win Clicks vouchers, and a Valentine's Day Clicks gift card giveaway in partnership with Claire's.

However, not all positivity came from Clicks' promotional efforts. Adcock ingram's Sponsors of Brave campaign in partnership with the Espresso Show drove organic positive feedback about Clicks' pharmacists via a R1 000 cash giveaway.

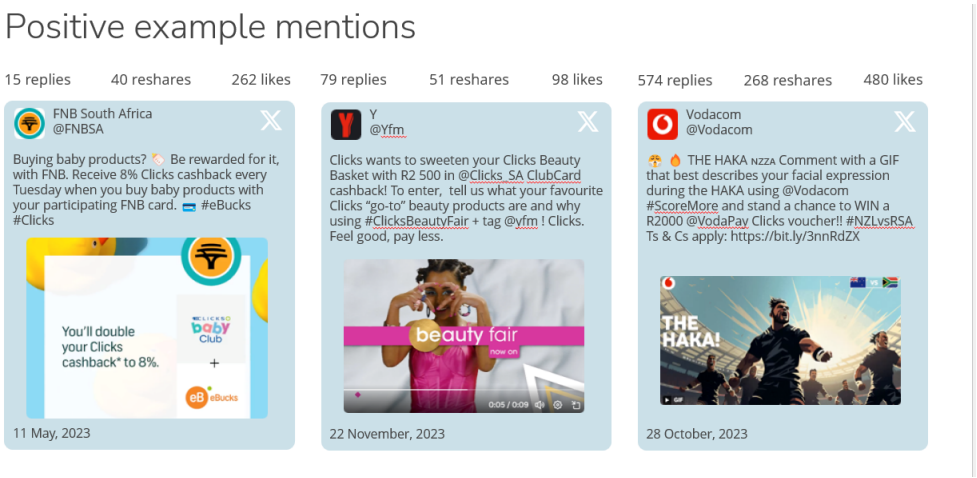


Figure 9: Three years after the hair ad crisis, discrimination remained a common theme in negative conversation about Clicks.



Please note brand names and handles have been removed to allow other themes to surface.

Issues of unfair labour practice and discrimination drove the most negativity for Clicks in 2023. In October 2022, an individual claimed on X having worked as a pharmacist for the retailer for eight years without a contract and that Clicks refused to provide him with one. Clicks immediately reached out via the same platform and promised to forward the complaint to the relevant department. However, over the following year, the author publicly accused the brand of unfair suspension, discrimination, and unethical behaviour.

Another driver of negative sentiments about Clicks centred on news about a South African Revenue Service (SARS) employee who'd been dismissed after taking sick leave to attend a protest at a Clicks branch in 2021. The protest was prompted by a racially offensive hair advertisement, elaborated in previous chapters. Another key theme in negative conversation was Clicks' use of metal cages for medication purchases when paying cash. This theme was driven the argument that this qualified this as 'a form of profiling'. However, most of the engagement with the original post disagreed with the author and believed the practice was necessary and harmless.

Another post accusing Clicks of racial profiling came from a customer who claimed having been subjected to a handbag search, while three other women before her hadn't.

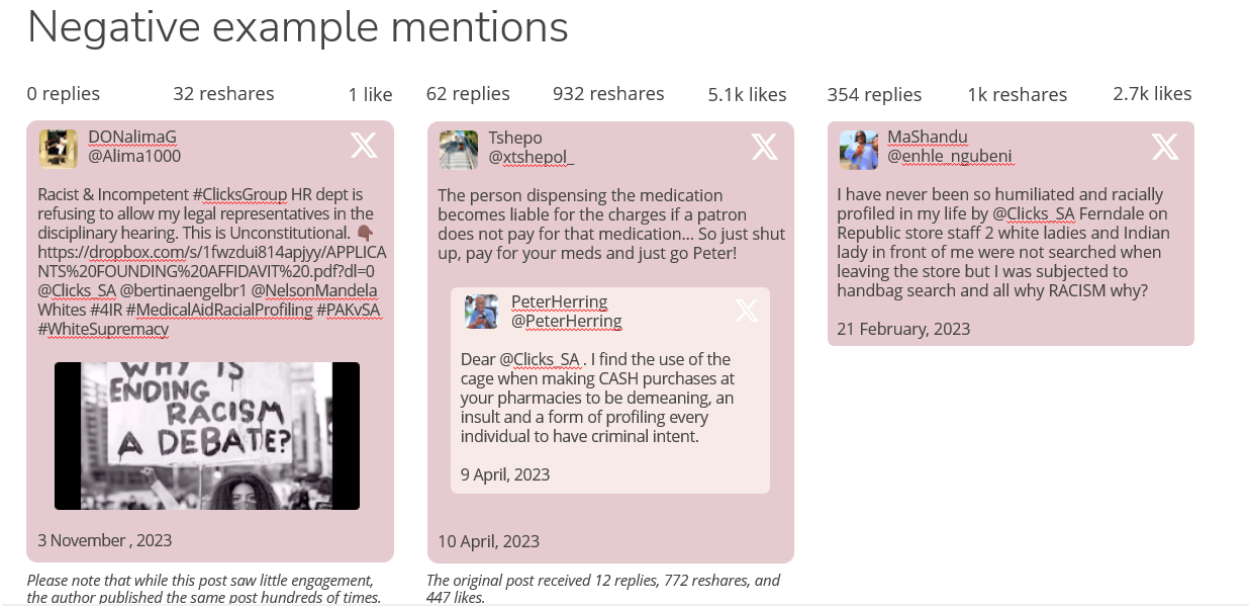
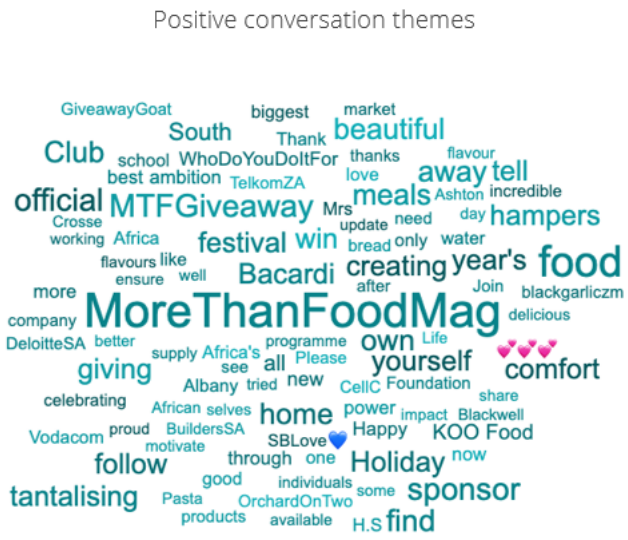


Figure 10: Tiger brands: Sponsorships, brand ambassadors, and CSI initiatives among the drivers of positivity for Tiger Brands



Please note brand names and handles have been removed to allow other themes to surface.

Tiger Brands' sponsorship of the Bacardi Holiday Club was the most salient theme in positive conversation. Most engagement was driven by a food hamper giveaway held by More Than Food magazine. Another notable driver of positivity was Standard Bank's #WhoDoYouDoItFor campaign. The bank tagged multiple brands, including Tiger Brands, and encouraged them to share who motivated them to be their best selves. However, this was a missed opportunity. Unlike Telkom, Vodacom, and Builders, who used this chance to speak to their commitment to the community, Tiger Brands did not engage with the post. Tiger Brand's partnership with Zambian food blogger Black Garlic also featured widely in positive conversation, as the influential author shared various recipes featuring Tiger Brands products. News that Tiger Brands was working with municipalities to mitigate the impact of rolling blackouts also yielded some positive sentiment. Smaller themes included Tiger Brand's new range of Tastic Rice Chips, as well as corporate social investment (CSI) initiatives like the In-School Breakfast Programme and the Edu Plant programme.

Figure 11: Positive examples of mentions

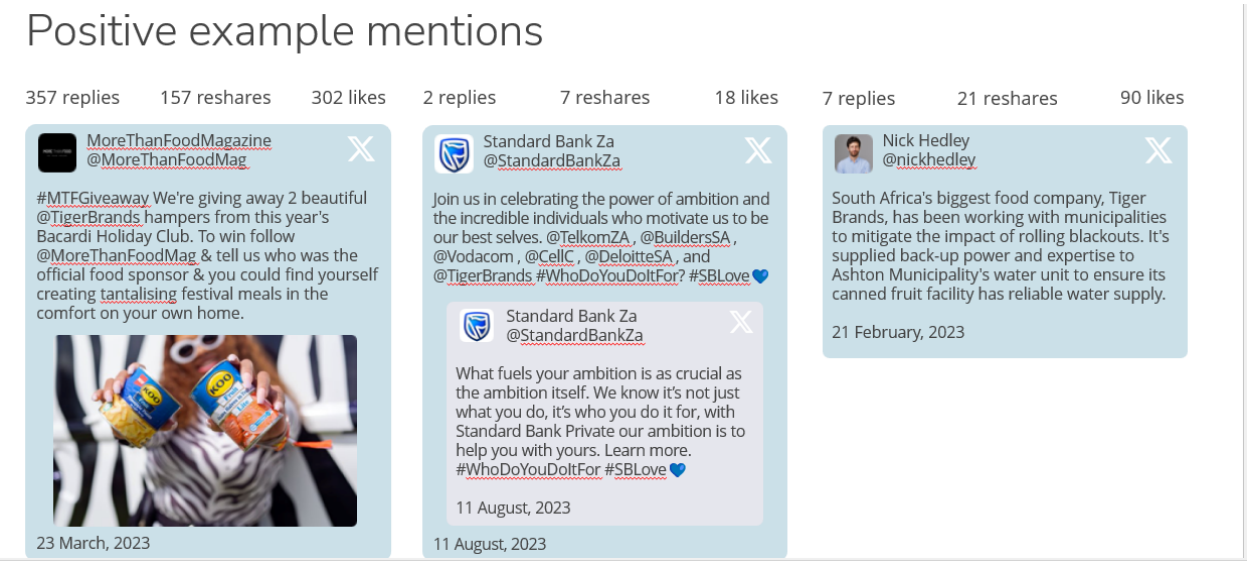
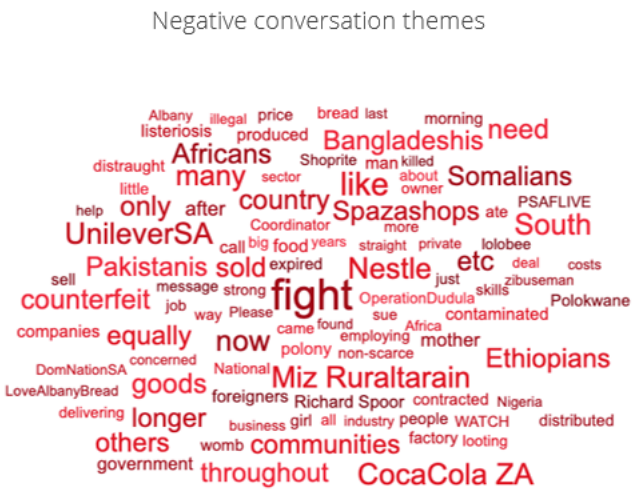


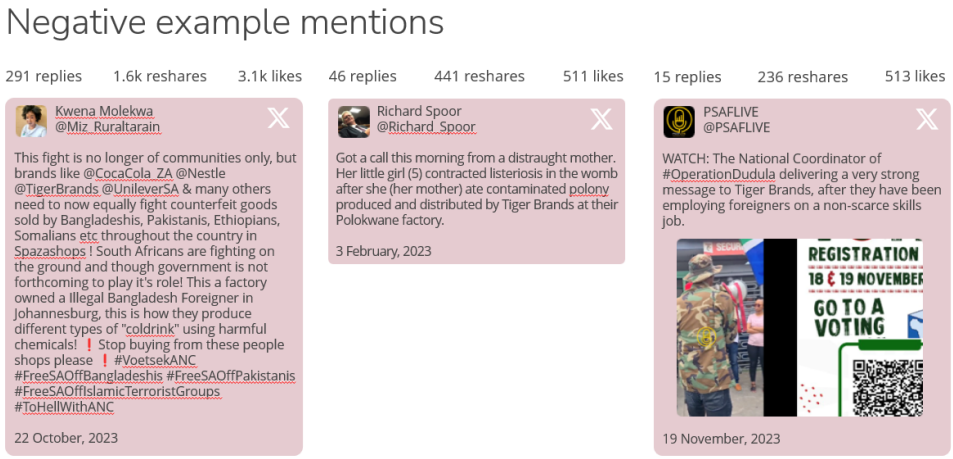
Figure 12: Concerns over the illegal sale of counterfeit and expired goods dominated Tiger Brands' negative conversation.



Negative sentiment was largely dictated by concerns over the illegal sale of counterfeit and expired goods. This included a post calling for greater engagement from corporates, including Tiger Brands, in the fight against counterfeit food items. The post had strong xenophobic sentiment and blamed foreign-national-owned spaza shops for selling these adulterated goods.

A post suggesting companies like Tiger Brands sold close-to-expire food to undocumented foreigners to increase profit was another key driver of negativity. A third highly engaging post suggested the government was also implicated in the trade of counterfeit food by accepting bribes from undocumented shop owners.

Figure 13: Negative Examples of mentions



Chapter summary

This chapter provides results derived from the data collection process, outlining engagements on the social media platform X (formerly known as Twitter) that have driven both negative and positive sentiments about the organisations under study, namely Shoprite, Clicks and Tiger Brands. These results provide a lens through which we can understand the impact of sentiments on brands, and how this could inform and influence reputation management strategies that are not reactive but proactive and dynamic. This primary data serves as the basis for the discussion that will be outlined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter offers an analysis of the research results that were presented in the previous chapter (chapter four). Chapter five introduces the primary themes that were deduced from the outcomes namely the disassociation of organisations from the consumer, a key stakeholder; the glacial pace of transformation for corporate brands like Clicks; the challenges and significance of consistent engagement, the failure of sentiment capitalisation and the impact of political developments on organisational reputation.

Outline of master themes

Four significant master themes emerged from the results of this study. These themes were derived using thematic analysis, a qualitative research method that is used by researchers to systematically organise and analyse complex data sets. According to Dawadi (2020:62) thematic analysis is fundamentally "a search for themes that can capture the narratives available in the account of data sets". The master themes that emerged from the results of this study are outlined below:

1. Disassociation of brands/organisations from the consumer

The results of this study demonstrate that a brand/organisation's reputation can often be severely impacted by its disassociation with the consumer or what may be called a failure to "read the room". History is littered with many examples where brands failed to read the room and were boycotted as a result, in a version of cancel culture that is largely driven by social media (Husain, 2024). An example of this disassociation and failure to read the room can be gleaned in the Clicks hair advert in which Black ethnic hair was described using negative connotations. In a South Africa where Black people constitute most of the population, at 81.4% of the total population (Statistics SA, 2023) it is irresponsible to alienate Black consumers in the manner that Clicks did. It demonstrates a lack of sociological imagination which is crucial in how a brand/organisation must position itself. Studies by scholars such as Jungblut and Johnen (2021) demonstrate the catastrophic effect that this can have on brands, contending that brands engaging in communication with political sentiments risk being boycotted by consumers.

2. Glacial pace of brand/organisational transformation

Results of this study indicate that there is increasing focus on the question of transformation on the part of consumers. This is driven significantly by social media and specifically, platforms

like X (formerly known as Twitter) where conversations are shaped in real-time. This is evidenced in the response to the Clicks hair advert describing African hair in negative connotations. This response has been linked to discomfort around the slow pace of transformation in the beauty industry and corporate South Africa broadly. A senior lecturer of Economic History at the University of KwaZulu Natal captured this in her analysis of the advert, contending that: "The advert does not only depict the Clicks company flaws of sanctioning racist marketing pictures using black and white women's hair but, it elucidates the deep-seated problems aligned with the defiance of some institutions, organisations and companies to adhere to the transformation programme set forth by our government" (Kgari-Masondo, 2020). This demonstrates that organisation reputation is not only about responding to incidents and events as they arise but is also fundamentally about being engaged in transformative processes that reflect the changing landscape of South Africa as a democratic country.

3. The challenges and importance of continuous engagement with the consumer

The necessity for continuous engagement with the consumer is also a theme that emerged from the results of this study. As indicated in the previous chapter, labour relations issues played a significant role in driving negative sentiments about Clicks and Tiger Brands. With regard to the former, a former employee accused the retailer of having failed to provide him with a work contract for eight years during which he had worked for the organisation as a pharmacist. Clicks immediately reached out via the same platform and promised to forward the complaint to the relevant department. However, over the following year, the author publicly accused the brand of unfair suspension, discrimination, and unethical behaviour. At the heart of this was the failure by Clicks to engage the individual continuously beyond the public acknowledgment of the complaint. Another example can be gleaned in the failure by Tiger Brands to continuously engage consumers on developments following the listeriosis outbreak. Not only was Tiger Brands slow to communicate with consumers, waiting a day to announce a recall of its contaminated products despite the Minister of Health having announced that the brand had been issued with recall notices, but the brand also failed to continuously engage stakeholders (Struweg, 2018). The impact of this was not only that Tiger Brands suffered reputational damage but also that there were deaths of at least 218 people by the time the outbreak was officially declared over in September 2018 (Pilet, 2022), causing irreparable harm to consumer trust.

4. The impact of political developments on brand/organisational identity

Existing literature on the impact of politics on brands/organisations largely focuses on the issue of government policies and a country's regulations. While there is consensus that politics have an enormous impact on brands/organisations (Boyles, 2022; Zahn, 2022; Kestenbaum, 2022) studies on how brands or organisations in themselves shape the socio-political climate are scant. Scholars such as Boyles (2022) contend that the success of brands/organisations in the modern age depends greatly on understanding and responding to politics. In this study, it was demonstrated that the political climate of South Africa has influenced brand/organisational identities. This is evidenced in the uproar over the racist TRESemme advert that influenced the posture of Clicks, which had to establish diversity forums internally, as well as establish a Hair Advisory Board to help not only with the repair of its damaged reputation but also, its evolving identity.

5. The failure of sentiment capitalisation

The results of this study indicate that the reputation of Shoprite as a brand/organisation is not driven by its own commissions but rather, by the perception that consumers have about it. The perception that the brand is of inferior value has driven negative sentiments about it. However, this could have been mitigated by a proactive public relations and communications campaign in which Shoprite could have used this perception to assert its image as a brand that is deeply invested in issues such as food security and poverty alleviation. Capitalising on this would have shifted the narrative, positioning Shoprite not as inferior but rather, as pro-poor. This could have helped the brand communicate its pro-poor initiatives such as campaigns to end food insecurity (Shoprite, 2023). This failure to capitalise on social media perceptions demonstrates the dangers that brands/organisations can face when they do not have proactive reputation management strategies.

5.1.1. The value for organisations to effectively use social media

The analysis also identified specific events and posts that influenced the net sentiment of each brand. For Tiger Brands, a significant dip in net sentiment occurred in February due to a post by an attorney claiming that his client's child contracted listeriosis from consuming contaminated polony produced by Tiger Brands. This event highlights the importance of effectively managing and responding to crises on social media to mitigate reputational damage. Similarly, Clicks faced negative sentiment in February when a post by a militant author accused the retailer of unconstitutional interference during a disciplinary hearing. This incident emphasises the need for brands to address allegations and concerns promptly and transparently to maintain a positive

reputation. Positive sentiment spikes were observed for Tiger Brands in March when they partnered with MoreThanFood magazine for a food hamper giveaway, and for Shoprite in July when they announced stocking DJ Sbu's energy drink. These instances demonstrate the potential for brands to leverage positive events and partnerships to enhance their reputation and generate positive sentiment on social media. On the other hand, negative sentiment for Tiger Brands increased in October due to discussions around counterfeit and expired food items. This finding highlights the importance of maintaining product quality and addressing any concerns related to product safety to protect corporate reputation. In November, Clicks experienced a peak in net sentiment when a post encouraged consumers to shop at Clicks instead of Dischem, citing the latter's CEO's alleged support of Israel Apartheid. This event demonstrates the impact of social and political issues on brand reputation and the need for brands to navigate such sensitive topics carefully. These findings support the central argument of the report that social media has a profound impact on corporate reputation management strategies. The analysis of the South African brands' social media conversations highlights the significance of effectively managing crises, addressing concerns promptly, leveraging positive events, and maintaining product quality to safeguard corporate reputation in the digital age.

This study contributes to the existing literature by applying the Agenda Setting Theory to the context of social media and reputation management. As previously indicated, Agenda setting theory was first coined by (McCombs &Shaw 1972). This theory elucidates the ability of the news media to shape the importance of subjects on the public agenda. Another scholar, (McCombs & Guo,2014) defines agenda setting theory as a framework in which mass media vehicles strategically emphasise certain themes over others through their presenting strategies, hence influencing and shaping the public opinion agenda. Literature (Wohn & Bowe, 2014), and results of this study indicate that the same is happening with the advent of social media. Social media has been increasingly popular, surpassing traditional media that is now shape its own agenda and influence the agenda of other social groups by offering personalised spaces to its users. The quick dissemination of social media can transform an event or concept into a significant topic on the social agenda. When information or expertise is given on Facebook, it can be immediately liked, retweeted, or added to favourites, allowing for rapid distribution among users.

Platforms such as Twitter can establish its original agenda through its "top trend lists" as it facilitates speedy message circulation among its members (Rahim & Picheta, 2020). Users can engage in discussions or provide comments on a popular and trending topic without necessarily adhering to it. If this subject is highly appealing, it can be disseminated rapidly, even if it lacks

news value. If this subject possesses newsworthiness, individuals can peruse this subject in the national press or even in the international media. In contrast, news articles published by national press can be disseminated on Twitter, potentially shaping the daily agenda of the virtual realm.

Further, the findings from this study emphasise the critical role of social media in shaping corporate reputation management strategies. The analysis of social media conversations about Shoprite, Clicks, and Tiger Brands in South Africa reveals the impact of various events and posts on brand reputation and highlights the need for effective reputation management strategies in the digital age. Understanding the mechanisms through which social media influences reputation management strategies is crucial for corporations to effectively handle crises and safeguard their reputations.

Chapter summary

This chapter provided a discussion on the results detailed in the previous chapter. These results, derived from secondary data including excerpts from the social media platform X (formerly known as Twitter) which helped to answer the research questions. The discussion was anchored on the master themes that were derived from the results, namely the disassociation of organisations from the consumer, a key stakeholder; the glacial pace of transformation for corporate brands like Clicks; the challenges and significance of consistent engagement, the failure of sentiment capitalisation and the impact of political developments on organisational reputation.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The study's findings were discussed in the preceding chapter, number five. Presently, chapter six serves five objectives. It first aims to offer findings for the primary conclusions drawn from the research report. Thirdly, it provides this research report's theoretical and conceptual contributions. It offers guidance, which is its fourth feature, or potential or future research, considering the limitations of the study. Fourth a comprehensive chapter synopsis is given.

6.2 Overview of Study Objectives

The primary aim of the present study was outlined in the introductory chapter (Chapter one).

The specific objectives of the study are listed:

- To address these gaps by examining the current use and challenges of social media in reputation management
- Identifying opportunities for organisations to improve on developing corporate reputation management strategies.
- To investigate the impact of social media conversations on sentiment.

6.3 Conclusion of main findings

Then study was concerned with investigating the impact of social media on corporate reputation management strategies in South Africa. The study looked at Shoprite, Tiger brands and Clicks as they are organisations that have recently managed their crises arising on social media. The conclusions are based on the sentiment analysis conducted through a social media listening tools with the support of empirical literature and how companies can leverage these tools to manage their social media effectively. Overall, this study concludes that social media has a significant impact on corporate reputation management strategies and the overall perception of the organisations. The sample consisted of 50 391 online conversations which provided clear indication that the public opinion is influenced by what customers, users see on social media about the brand or an organisation.

6.3.1 Addressing the knowledge gaps by examining the current use and challenges of social media in reputation management.

The first objective was to address the gaps that exist between current use and challenges of social media in reputation management. The present study found that there is still a significant gap between the current use of social media and how organisation develop their corporate reputation management strategies. These findings, coupled with the existing literature (Boyles, 2022; Zahn, 2022; Kestenbaum, 2022) indicate that organisations in South Africa still need to explore different social media listening tools to assess ones that can help them monitor their social media effectively.

6.3.2 Identifying opportunities for organisations to improve on developing corporate reputation management strategies.

The current study found that the organisations in review are aware of the impact of social media on their corporate reputation management strategies, this is evidenced by their active responses to customers and other stakeholders online. The gap lies in the lack of measurement in their response rate and the consistency of their responses to customers. One study examined in the research discovered that companies often disregard consistency because they assume that online conversations will eventually disappear. However, (Ming-Hui and Chekitan ,2020; Kübler et al. 2020) found that not responding effectively and promptly to customers and social media users when addressing a reputation-worthy issue can damage the organisation's reputation.

6.3.3 To investigate the impact of social media conversations through sentiment analysis on the South African organisations.

The third objective was to investigate the impact of social media conversations through sentiment analysis on the South African organisations. The findings of this study found that sentiment analysis can indeed help companies measure the perceptions customers and stakeholders have towards their organisation. The findings are supported by the existing literature (Penta, 2021; Repustate,2021) that for organisations to develop strategies for managing social media effectively, the results of the sentiment analysis should guide their corporate management strategies.

According to the data analysed, there were more unfavourable than positive comments on social media for each of the three businesses. This according to (Repustate,2021) suggests that maintaining their company reputations may be difficult. Even a balanced sentiment, though, can be difficult to control because unfavourable sentiment can intensify quickly and harm a brand's reputation if it is not addressed right away.

However, from the findings, it is evident that unfavourable incidents, such as the contamination allegations against Tiger Brands and the charges of unconstitutional interference against Clicks, had a significant negative impact on their online sentiment. These examples show how important it is for businesses to respond to accusations and complaints in a timely and open manner to preserve their good name. Conversely, good events and collaborations, including Tiger Brands' food hamper giveaway and Shoprite's stocking of DJ Sbu's energy drink, produced upsurges in favourable mood. These examples show how brands may use positive initiatives to improve their reputation and create a favourable social media vibe.

The results also highlight how crucial product safety and quality are to reputation management. Tiger Brands' online sentiment suffered because of conversations about tainted and expired food products. This underscores the necessity for brands to put product quality first and respond quickly to any safety-related issues. Additionally, the investigation demonstrated how political and social issues affect a company reputation. The message urging customers to shop at Clicks rather than Dischem because of purported support for Israel Apartheid shows how brands must handle such delicate subjects with caution and have productive conversations with their audience. Overall, the results are consistent with the study's main argument, which holds that social media significantly influences business reputation management tactics. The study emphasises how important it is to handle problems quickly, leverage good things that happen, manage crises well, and maintain product quality to protect a company's reputation in the digital age.

6.4 Contributions

The study has two contributions, namely practical and theoretical. The subsequent discussion discusses the contributions in detail.

6.4.1 Practical contribution

Then study contributes to the organisations in South Africa to investigate how an investment in social media tools can help them track mentions, and conversations about their brand effectively. The study analysed public mentions that showed negative sentiment towards their brands due to

- Delayed response rate
- Lack of consistency in engaging the social media users or grievances about their companies.
- Not using the sentiment analysis report to inform the development of their reputation management strategies.

Previous studies (Lee et al., 2020). on the importance of analysing reputation management have investigated generic look into the significance of the use of social media tools but have not used companies in the countries the studies were conducted in. the findings revealed the growing significance of social media in influencing company reputation. The study highlights the global trend of businesses utilising social media channels to interact with stakeholders, handle emergencies, and improve their brand reputation. This discovery implies that South African companies might gain advantages by actively employing social media as a strategic instrument for managing their reputation, considering the extensive acceptance and impact of social media in the country. Further study explored how organisations' use of social media told can help them respond promptly to reputation related issues. The findings indicate that timeous responses with the aid of social media listening tools' ability to track brand mentions promptly are essential elements in managing reputation on social media.

6.4.2 Theoretical contribution

In summary, this study offers a critical theoretical contribution to the literature about consumer perception, social media listening, reputation management in the future, and the impact of social media on consumers. It achieves this by demonstrating that the fast-evolving social landscape in South Africa, anchored on the wide use of social media, shape the reputation of brands and organisations. The study demonstrates the connection between social media and stakeholder and consumer behaviour, demonstrating to organisations that managing their reputation requires considering the importance of existing perceptions as well as the resources available to help them reach a wide audience.

6.5 Limitations and further research

The organisations analysed in the literature reviewed demonstrated a tendency to either terminate their social media efforts, disregard customer grievances, or issue insights into proactive corporate response techniques for handling social media dangers, companies seem to lack an adequate understanding of how to engage effectively in proactive social media management. Organisations are advised to actively pursue information and skills in using social media as a corporate entity. This can be done by leveraging the power of social media listening tools demonstrated in this research to help create internal capabilities for effective social media management.

Recognising the constraints of the literature examined is crucial. The empirical cases utilized to substantiate and augment current scholarly works are not comprehensive and may depict extraordinary situations. Furthermore, it should be noted that the social media risks and corporate response methods outlined in Figure 1 may not be universally applicable to all firms. This is because many factors, such as industry disparities or limited financial resources for investing in social media endeavours, can impact their efficacy. Moreover, most of the examined research publications largely concentrated on the social media activities of organisations that engage in business-to-consumer (B2C) transactions. Hence, future studies must investigate the applicability of these social media dangers and corporate response tactics within the realm of business-to-business (B2B) enterprises. It is reasonable to anticipate and justify the need for additional research on the variations in how individual and business clients express their complaints through social media platforms. These recommendations outlined above aim to enhance corporate reputation management strategies in the age of social media. By proactively monitoring social media, developing a crisis management plan, engaging with the audience, leveraging positive events, ensuring product quality and safety, being sensitive to social and political issues, and continuously monitoring and evaluating reputation, brands can effectively navigate social media platforms, address concerns promptly, and safeguard their reputation. These recommendations provide a roadmap for brands to build and maintain a positive brand image, foster consumer trust, and differentiate themselves in today's competitive digital landscape.

6.6 Overall Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of social media on s corporate reputation Management strategies in South Africa. The study investigated the findings through the search in books, website, journal review to discover gaps and strategies organisations can use to manage their reputation effectively. Drawing from literature a conceptual framework was developed and successively data was collected through a social media listening tool Meltwater and EQ, which sampled 50 391 online conversations relating to three organisations in South Africa, namely, Shoprite, Clicks and Tiger Brands. The study found that social media conversation does have a significant impact on corporate reputation, as evidenced in the Results chapter that demonstrate how online conversations have impacted brand and organisational reputations and by extension, their bottom line. and suggest that organisations leverage ethe social media listening tools to monitor their social media as these tools provides accurate sentiment analysis towards their brands.

Another interesting discovery was that the tools are even able to pick conversations that are off-page – this means without the social media user tagging the company, through the social media listening tool, the company can pick the conversations and respond to clarify the convers or complaint the customer might have.

6.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter aimed to present comprehensive findings for the research report. Initially, an overview of the study's objectives was outlined. The findings of this chapter provide insights into the impact of social media on corporate reputation management strategies. This result could be beneficial for organisations in South Africa and beyond that are investing in managing their brand or organisational reputation. The conceptual, theoretical reputation management contributions were presented. The chapter also highlighted the constraints of the research and provides a clear roadmap for further investigations.

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