THE APPLICATION OF THE EXPRESSIVENESS QUOTIENT IN THE ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES TO SOCIAL MEDIA PARODY ACCOUNTS

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR TECHNOLOGIAE: STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

in the

Department of Integrated Communication

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

TSHWANE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

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January 2017
DECLARATION BY CANDIDATE

“I hereby declare that the thesis submitted for the degree Doctorate Technologiae: Strategic Communication, at Tshwane University of Technology, is my own original work and has not previously been submitted to any other institution of higher education. I further declare that all sources cited or quoted are indicated and acknowledged by means of a comprehensive list of references”.

M. Pritchard
This study is dedicated to
my daughter Morgan
and
my parents for their support
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to:

- My dearest daughter, Morgan, for everything. I would not have been able to complete my study without your support and encouragement. Thank you for not wanting me to give up when I thought I could not go on. And for celebrating small victories with me along the way.
- Thank you to my supervisor, Prof. De la Rey van der Waldt. Your words of wisdom, support and guidance were the bright light at the end of a long, occasionally happy and sometimes dark tunnel.
- My sincere appreciation goes to my co-supervisor, Prof. Pieter Conradie. Your patience, expertise and guidance taught me that Rome was not built in one day, although I wish it were possible. Without your insight, this study would not have been possible.
- A big thank you to Twitter user @6000, for persuading your thousands of followers to complete the questionnaire. Your enthusiasm and encouragement sparked a very valuable discussion about parody accounts on Twitter.
- To my friends, you know who you are. Thank you for listening to my long stories, for sharing in my enthusiasm and just for asking how the study was going. Sorry for missing out on your parties, but at least I liked your pictures on Facebook.
- A special thank you to all my colleagues at the Department of Strategic Communication at the University of Johannesburg. You were never too busy to make time to listen, to give advice, to read a few pages, to share words of encouragement and to help me figure out what to do next.
- Lastly and most importantly, thank you to everyone who participated in this study. Without your time and energy spent to complete the questionnaire and participate in the interviews, this study would not have been possible.

“Comedy is complaining done with charm.”
ABSTRACT

The ability of brand reputations to resonate emotionally with social media communities can be measured by the extent to which brands are perceived to be visible, transparent, authentic, consistent and distinct. These five measurable constructs are proposed as a stakeholder-specific measuring tool called the Expressiveness Quotient (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004) score. However, posing a reputational risk to emotionally resonant reputations, are social media accounts created by non-professional satirists as ironic imitations of the official account’s brand identities to satirise, ridicule or poke fun at a brand for comic effect. As an emerging trend in South Africa, parody accounts using cleverly-written satire provide comic relief, the shared pleasure of sharing funny content and the intense positive emotions felt when making fun of topics that communities not only care about, but are also familiar with. Mostly targeting prominent top-of-mind brands, some are intended for harmless fun, while others are intended to expose wrongdoing, or, to be malicious. Either way, parodies highjack strategic messages and subvert brand identities. Therefore, parodied brands’ official responses are problematic, since inappropriate responses may easily escalate into angry social media backlashes, especially on Twitter, known for its anti-establishment culture and antagonism towards brands. When a highly visible brand is then targeted, the social media management team is faced with a paracrisis. As such, a paracrisis is a reputational risk that may easily escalate into a full-blown crisis, considering the virality of social media and the constant scrutiny of brand responses (Coombs & Holladay, 2012:412).

The purpose of this study was to establish how the Expressiveness Quotient could be used to identify suitable paracrisis response strategies for parodied brands to maintain emotionally resonant reputations. Using a synergistic approach to mixed methods in a triangulation design drawing a purposive sample of social media experts, findings indicated that visibility was the most significant requirement for maintaining an emotionally resonant brand reputation. The paracrisis response strategies of Coombs and Holladay (2012) were revised and a model more suitable for social media managers in South Africa was recommended. The study concluded that humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter with a parody account is an appropriate paracrisis response strategy to enhance visibility when a parody is intended for harmless fun. Furthermore, emotionally resonant brand reputations require playful brand personalities that embrace parody accounts intended for harmless fun, instead of refuting and defending the brand. When reciprocating love and affection, mutually beneficial reputations are co-created while providing comic relief and intense emotional pleasure that resonate with volatile social media communities. Having then established strong emotional attachments, social media communities may more likely forgive and defend a brand during a paracrisis.
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CHAPTER 1
CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

1.1. INTRODUCTION

The rather antagonistic environment of many-to-many, peer-to-peer networks where social media management is constantly scrutinised, maintaining a brand reputation that resonates emotionally with social media communities is a challenge. A significant risk inherent in social media management is the creation of user-generated parody accounts. The latter is defined for the purpose of this study as social media accounts created by non-professional satirists as ironic imitations of the official account’s brand identities to satirise, ridicule or poke fun at a brand for comic effect on a social network. Considering the extensive resources that complex social media management teams invest to maintain emotionally resonant brand reputations, being parodied poses a reputational risk. The humorous content shared by skilfully created satirists are perceived to elicit positive emotions such as laughter, amusement, pleasure, fun and joy. Not only does satiric humour provide welcome comic relief, but it also elicits positive thoughts so that audiences tend to let down their guard and agree with the criticism expressed in parody, as concluded in related studies (Boukes, Boomgaarden, Moorman & De Vreese, 2015:739; Nabi, Moyer-Gusé & Byrne, 2007:38,40). Often then, consumers relate more to the parodied brand image that undermines a brand’s emotional branding message, as confirmed in a study Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel (2006:53,59).

As this study has established, the occurrence of social media parody accounts is an emerging trend in South Africa, hence social media managers are increasingly facing this reputational risk, more accurately called a paracrisis in the seminal text by Coombs and Holladay (2012:412). A paracrisis then differs from traditional one-way crisis communication models that neglect the reputational risks inherent in an antagonistic, highly engaging many-to-many, peer-to-peer environment of social networking. Correspondingly, a paracrisis is defined as a reputational risk and early warning sign that may easily escalate into a full-blown crisis, considering the virality of social media and the constant scrutiny of official brand responses (Coombs; 2014; Coombs & Holladay, 2012:412). Notably, a paracrisis resembles a crisis and requires a strategic response; however, a paracrisis does not justify “convening the crisis team and operating in a crisis mode” (Coombs & Holladay, 2012:408).

As such, the four paracrisis response strategies proposed by Coombs and Holladay (2012) are classified according to four constructs, namely (i) refute, (ii) implicitly admit wrongdoing, (iii) explicitly admit wrongdoing and (iv) ignore. Yet, selecting an appropriate paracrisis
response strategy is rather complex considering the governing principles of social media which imply an environment where reputation is co-created in collaborative networks outside of management’s direct control. Adding to that, the antagonistic environment of Twitter, in particular, where parody accounts mostly occur, the propensity for hating, flaming, ranting and trolling implies that paracrisis responses are vulnerable to viral social media backlashes. Therefore, tarnished reputations reach audiences beyond Twitter, including traditional media and other websites in the converged media space.

Keeping in mind that humorous user-generated parody accounts hijack the emotional appeal of strategic messages, it is necessary to measure the extent to which the emotionally resonant reputation of parodied brands may be jeopardised. An appropriate stakeholder-specific measuring tool is Fombrun and Van Riel’s (2004: 96) Expressiveness Quotient (EQ) which premises that an emotionally appealing and therefore resonant reputation applies integrated communication that aligns brand, strategy, and identity (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:96,86; Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:27). A high EQ score relies on five constructs, namely: (i) visibility, (ii) transparency, (iii) authenticity, (iv) consistency and (v) distinction. With this in mind, this study seeks to identify the most suitable paracrisis response strategies in order to maintain emotionally resonant, and ultimately resilient, reputations when user-generated parody accounts target brands.

1.2. BACKGROUND AND ORIENTATION

In developed countries, and the United States of America in particular, the parodying of brands is already an established trend to the extent that Fournier and Avery (2011:24) and Funnell (2015) typify the current cultural zeitgeist as ‘the age of parody’. Already, in South Africa, the YouTube parody account for SuzelleDIY has become somewhat of a mainstream cultural phenomenon. In general, literature suggests that newfound freedoms to express dissent, coupled with increasing access to the internet in post-Apartheid South Africa are drivers for social media parody as an emerging trend. Moreover, a study about the emotional resonance of humour by Nabi, Moyer-Gusé and Byrne (2007:38,40) concluded that the funnier the audience perceive a joke to be, the more they perceive the source to be liked and credible. Similarly, a study by McGraw, Warren and Kan (2015:1153) found that humorous complaints are far more effective compared to angry complaints when seeking a response on Twitter. Likewise, a study by Wills and Fecteau (2016:33) concluded that social media communities derive pleasure from humour as they not only enjoy laughing at jokes, but also telling jokes, which attract engagements and conversations. At the same time, the social functions of humour on Twitter when using parody hashtags include cohesion building, meaning-making and tension relief, according to a study by Wills and Fecteau (2016:33).
While some believe that being parodied is the highest form of flattery, management may then welcome the fact that parody accounts are drawn to endearing brands with strong, distinct attributes and a unique promise. Yet, in many cases, brand parodies are not perceived as light-hearted, playful spoofs, but rather as malicious. Adding insult to injury, parody as a genre is typically offensive, sarcastic and rude when voicing satiric criticism while the double meaning or irony can be easily misunderstood.

Parody as a form of expressing criticism dates back to Ancient Greek literature; but today, the ease of opening an anonymous social network account implies that any angry critic can create a satirical copycat of the brand’s official social media management account with malicious intent. When gaining traction, an influential user-generated parody account hijacks the brand’s strategic message by making the most of the principles of social media, which is further explained in this study. In fact, content shared by a user-generated parody account that is skilfully written and makes clever use of satire may pose the risk of resonating more with critical social media communities than the brand’s official social media account. Reasons cited are that user-generated parodies are more trustworthy as authentic peers, whereas trust in public relations spokespersons are declining. As such, these parodies are then regarded as more honest and transparent, while social media communities are drawn to their sarcastic humour for comic relief and entertainment value. Therefore, several reputational risks require mitigation, especially when considering that satirised brand identities of the copycat account are easily confused with the brand’s official social media management account. In fact, it is common for highly visible and top-of-mind brands to be targeted by several different parody accounts simultaneously.

For complex social media management teams in the age of parody then, traditional top-down reputation management and crisis communication paradigms are challenged by the disruptive nature of peer-to-peer networks. A more suitable approach then is strategic reputation management (Aula, 2010:46; Aula & Mantere, 2013:340) whereby reputation is the result of collective truths that arise from co-created relationships on converged media channels. As such, strategic reputation management mitigates the reputational risks that arise from the continuous uncertain, profoundly public and dialogic principles of social media that are not within management’s direct control. Likewise, a paracrisis (Coombs, 2014; Coombs & Holladay, 2012) is evident when disgruntled social media users publically accuse the brand of wrongdoing, thereby posing the risk of a full-blown crisis owing to the engaging and viral principles of antagonistic peer-to-peer networks. Correspondingly, when a brand is being parodied, the social media management team is faced with a paracrisis.
Recognising the disruptive nature of social media, social media management teams increase efforts to co-create mutually-beneficial relationships characterised by strong psychological bonds to strengthen feelings of love and affection. Strong attitudinal attachments such as love, emotional bonds and active engagements to establish a sense of community, form the foundation for brand resonance (Keller, 2001:15; 2009:144; 2012:186; 2016:5). Committed relationships characterised by love will outlast adverse circumstances so that relationship transgressions are more likely forgiven (Fournier, 1998:365) and brand advocates may defend brands online when facing criticism (Roberts, 2005:105). As reiterated by Diamond, Sherry, Muñiz, McGrath, Kozinets and Borghini (2009:119) powerful, emotionally resonant brands are produced by “multiple creators authoring multiple representations in multiple venues”. However, when targeted by a humorous parody account, it not clear how social media managers may mitigate and respond to the parodied brand as a paracrisis.

1.3. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The extent to which user-generated parody accounts influence the ability of social media management teams to maintain emotionally resonant brand reputations in terms of the five constructs of Fombrun and Van Riel’s (2004) EQ score is not clear. To reiterate, these measurable constructs are (i) visibility, (ii) transparency, (iii) authenticity, (iv) consistency and (v) distinction. Likewise, literature is limited on appropriate paracrisis response strategies to user-generated parody accounts in terms of Coombs and Holladay’s (2012) four paracrisis response strategies, namely (i) refute, (ii) implicitly admit wrongdoing, (iii) explicitly admit wrongdoing and, (iv) ignore. When integrating Fombrun and Van Riel’s (2004) and Coombs and Holladay’s (2012) theories, it is possible to investigate suitable paracrisis response strategies for social media management teams to maintain emotionally resonant reputations when user-generated parody accounts target brands. The research problem is stated as follows:

To establish how the Expressiveness Quotient (EQ) (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004) as a measure of emotionally resonant reputations can be used by social media management teams to identify appropriate paracrisis response strategies (Coombs; 2014; Coombs & Holladay, 2012) when user-generated parody accounts target brands.

1.4. OUTLINE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This section includes the research objectives and research design.
1.4.1. Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study is to identify the most suitable paracrisis response strategies for social media management teams to maintain emotionally resonant reputations when user-generated parody accounts target brands.

1.4.2. Research questions

Over-arching research question: How can the Expressiveness Quotient (EQ) be integrated into suitable paracrisis response strategies for social media management teams to maintain emotionally resonant reputations when user-generated parody accounts target brands?

Research sub-question 1: How can the emotional resonance of brands that are targeted by user-generated parody accounts as paracrises be quantitatively measured in terms of the constructs of the EQ (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004), and how can the interactions be quantitatively described that specific paracrisis response strategies, as defined by Coombs (2012), exhibit with these measures of emotional resonance?

Research sub-question 2: How can the interactions be described that certain parody account characteristics exhibit with the paracrisis response strategies as defined by Coombs (2012)?

Research sub-question 3: How do social media management teams qualitatively perceive paracrisis response strategies that are intended to maintain emotionally resonant reputations when brands are targeted by user-generated parody accounts?

1.4.3. Research objectives

Over-arching research objective: To establish how the EQ can be used to identity suitable paracrisis response strategies for social media management teams to maintain emotionally resonant reputations when user-generated parody accounts target brands.

Research sub-objective 1: To quantitatively measure, in terms of the constructs of the EQ (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004), the emotional resonance of brands targeted by user-generated parody accounts as paracrises, and to quantitatively describe the interactions that these measures of emotional resonance exhibit with certain parody account characteristics and with specific paracrisis response strategies, as defined by Coombs (2012).
Research sub-objective 2: To quantitatively describe the interactions that certain parody account characteristics exhibit with the paracrisis response strategies as defined by Coombs (2012).

Research sub-objective 3: To qualitatively explore the perceptions of social media management teams regarding paracrisis response strategies that are intended to maintain emotionally resonant reputations when brands are targeted by user-generated parody accounts.

1.5. RESEARCH DESIGN

By applying the core principles of the synergistic approach (Hall & Howard, 2008:249) to mixed methods in a triangulation design the study benefitted from different but complementary data to be collected on the same topic. The reason for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data was to bring together the strengths of both forms of research to validate results. Moreover, additional documented advantages of the synergistic approach are flexibility, reflexivity and pragmatism in selecting the most practical manner in which multiple perspectives can work together to answer the research problem. In so doing, a sample of social media management experts was drawn using purposive sampling and snowball sampling, while the target population for this study was social media management teams. To gather quantitative data, a sample that met the sampling criteria was drawn from social media management experts judging by their relevant content on social networks such as Twitter, YouTube and Facebook as well as their opinion pieces on industry websites dedicated to the topic of this study. To collect qualitative data, an initial purposive sample was drawn from shortlisted nominees for the prestigious 6th Annual Bookmarks Awards as judged by the digital media industry.

Data was collected during a self-administered online survey. The total number of respondents were 188, with 137 completed responses received. In addition, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 19 participants while giving equal weighting to both qualitative and quantitative methods. In terms of data analysis, multiple linear stepwise regression analysis for quantitative data using IBM SPSS (Version 23) predictive analytics software was used. In addition, the SPSS Cross Tabulation function was used to perform Chi-square calculations. Quantitative findings were synergised with Miles and Huberman’s (1994:12) concurrent technique for thematic analysis using Atlas.ti software for qualitative data.
A concurrent process of data collection and data analysis enabled the researcher to confidently establish data saturation after a realised sample of 137 respondents for the online survey (72.87% completion rate and a satisfactory Cronbach alpha value of 0.805 obtained for this study exceeded the 0.70 minimum acceptable value for Cronbach’s alpha coefficient). A pilot study using a purposive sample of 17 respondents who met the sampling criteria was conducted based on the initial questionnaire. Considering that several changes were made to the pilot questionnaire to address the poor completion rate, findings of the pilot study were not included in this study. Both the exploratory and the descriptive objectives of the study were met.

1.6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The entire research process adhered to the requirements of research ethics. Of concern was full disclosure about the purpose of the study and data collection procedures that avoided deception. Furthermore, the ethical clearance and informed consent procedures of the Tshwane University of Technology were followed. At all times, the sample was aware that participation was voluntary and without remuneration. In addition, the anonymity, privacy and confidentiality of the sample was protected. Lastly, best practise procedures were in place to ensure that data was not falsified the theses was submitted to TurnitIn to verify that the dissertation was not plagiarised.

1.7. DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The following delimitations of the study have been identified and acknowledged:

- The rapid changing and unpredictable nature of social media technologies, platforms and user patterns may imply that trends and insights are constantly shifting. Yet, care was taken to incorporate the latest literature at the time of the study. Nevertheless, while platforms and their algorithms may change, the governing principles of social media as outlined in this study seem to remain somewhat stable.

- Post-modernism as a theoretical paradigm is not the overarching approach to this study, although relevant. Where applicable, post-modern approaches and authors have been acknowledged in the study. Instead, integrated communication was selected as a suitable paradigm as a review of literature and the findings of this study suggest that social media management is practised according to a more modernist management approach in South Africa.

- Owing to the rather specialist topic of the study, the researcher acknowledges that a larger sample may have yielded more generalisable results. Considering the specialist topic of
the study and the relatively small population of social media managers in South Africa, it was not possible to draw a representative sample. Yet, care was taken with the purposive sample for the quantitative data by extending the parameters of the sample as much as possible. Therefore, mostly local social media experts, including owners of parody accounts, were included, as they were judged sufficiently knowledgeable about the research problem.

1.8. VALUE AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The proposed study may provide new contributions to the body of knowledge in several ways, considering that traditional reputation management and crisis communication responses are almost absolute when faced with the unique risks of social media management. Moreover, as literature is limited on appropriate paracrisis response strategies to maintain an emotionally resonant reputation when targeted by a user-generated parody account, it is argued that this topic is worthy of investigation. As far as could be established, it appears that the theories of Fombrun and Van Riel (2004) and Coombs and Holladay (2012) have not been integrated into a single study. Therefore, a contribution of the study, both to the body of knowledge and to industry, is a classification of paracrisis response strategies to mitigate the reputational risks of user-generated parody accounts. More specifically, a tangible contribution is a revision of Coombs and Holladay’s (2012:412) paracrisis response strategies as recommended in this study, to maintain emotionally resonant reputations as determined by Fombrun and Van Riel’s (2004:96) EQ when being targeted by user-generated parody accounts.

The revised classification of paracrisis response strategies recommended in this study may provide social media management teams with noteworthy guidelines to establish emotionally resonant and ultimately resilient reputations. The study may be particularly valuable for endearing, prominent and reputable top-of-mind brands, since they are most at risk of being parodied. Considering that social media parody accounts is an emerging trend in South Africa and already an established trend in developed economies, findings recommend specific strategic contingencies to consider for scenario planning and for responsive social media governance frameworks including online reputation management (ORM), policies, integrated risk management and integrated communication, to name but a few. Furthermore, findings may provide valuable insights for emotionally appealing brand story-telling strategies.

1.9. EXPOSITION OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 identifies the research problem and motivates the research questions. It motivates the study by providing a background to the research problem. This chapter provides a context
for the challenges facing social media management teams when having to select appropriate paracrisis response strategies to user-generated parody accounts when maintaining reputations that resonate with critical social media communities. Furthermore, delimitations and the contribution of the study to industry and the body of knowledge are outlined.

Chapter 2 is the first chapter in the literature review. This chapter motivates why integrated communication is a suitable paradigm for complex social media management teams in the converged media space. Furthermore, the chapter argues that reputation is a measurable construct that can be managed in the peer-to-peer, collaborative social media environment over which management has no direct control. In this environment, strategic reputation management takes a collaborative approach to mitigating the risks of social media while being cognisant of the disruptive nature of social media. Finally, Chapter 2 explores the requirements for reputation to resonate with critical social media communities by emphasising the importance of co-creating strong psychologic bonds in mutually beneficial relationships where affection, care and love is reciprocated by brand personalities to attain brand resonance.

Chapter 3 elaborates on the argument presented in Chapter 2, by emphasising how social media management teams optimise the governing principles of social media to co-create reputations that resonate with antagonistic social media communities. An essential element in this process is ORM, which relies on strategic insights gained from metrics and analytics in the converged media space for integrated communication in peer-to-peer, many-to-many social networks founded on the technological principles of Web 2.0. As such, the chapter elaborates on the participation levels of social media users, ranging from passive lurkers to highly active angry critics which is typified by paracrisises such as hating, flaming, ranting and trolling, which intensifies reputational risks. To mitigate these paracrisises and related risks such as user-generated parody accounts, ORM comprises responsive social media governance frameworks. Finally, the chapter concludes that paracrisises response strategies are cognisant of the governing principles of social media which imply that traditional, top-down crisis communication requires re-evaluation in collaborative social networks where reputation is socially constructed and organically co-created.

Chapter 4 is the final chapter in the literature review and elaborates on social media parody accounts an emerging trend in South Africa, most frequently targeting reputable prominent brands. As such, the chapter explores parody as an ironic imitation of a brand’s strategic message to satirise, ridicule or poke fun at a brand for comic effect. The chapter argues that the double meaning of irony and satire can be easily misunderstood, while the rudeness, offensiveness and sarcasm used by copy-cat parody accounts are problematic for brand reputation. Moreover, by making the most of the principles of social media, a parody account
extends its reach, influence and resonance metrics, thereby undermining the emotionally resonant reputation of the brand’s official social media account. The chapter therefore emphasises the paracrisis response strategies of Coombs and Holladay (2012) taking into consideration the constructs of Fombrun and Van Riel’s (2004:96) EQ to protect emotional resonance when brands are targeted by parody accounts.

**Chapter 5** motivates the advantages of the synergistic approach (Hall & Howard, 2008:249) to mixed methods in a triangulation design, while also outlining measures taken to strengthen rigour, trustworthiness, reliability and validity for this study.

**Chapter 6** reports on the data analysed according to the synergistic approach to mixed methods in a triangulation design, discusses the findings and interprets findings against available literature.

**Chapter 7** is the last chapter of the study. General conclusions are drawn based on the findings to shed light on the research problem. In addition, recommendations are made to industry and the body of knowledge, particularly for social media management best practise, education and training and, finally, for future research.

**1.10. SUMMARY**

This chapter introduced the research topic while providing a background to the research problem. After providing a background to the study, a brief overview of the argument was presented as an exposition of the chapters. To answer the research questions and to meet the research objectives, the synergistic approach to mixed methods in a triangulation design were briefly discussed. In closing, the contribution of this study is a revised classification of paracrisis response strategies that may provide parodied brands with noteworthy guidelines to maintain emotionally resonant reputations.

The next chapter, Chapter 2, therefore elaborates on the argument already introduced as the first chapter of the literature review.
CHAPTER 2

STRATEGIC REPUTATION MANAGEMENT AS AN INTEGRATED COMMUNICATION APPROACH TO CO-CREATE EMOTIONALLY RESONANT BRAND REPUTATIONS

2.1. INTRODUCTION

As the first chapter of the literature review, the first aim of this chapter is to (i) critically discuss how traditional brand reputation management approaches that regarded stakeholders as passive recipients of strategic messages are challenged by the disruptive (Quinn-Allan, 2012:47) nature of social media. Therefore, a more appropriate approach is strategic reputation management (Aula & Mantere, 2013:340) whereby brand reputation is the result of collective truths that arise from co-created relationships on converged media channels. Correspondingly, the second aim of this chapter is to (ii) analyse why collaborative many-to-many engagements necessitate integrated communication with its philosophy entrenched in collaboration, openness, shared values, flexibility and accountability (Smith, 2012a:606).

A third aim of the chapter is to (iii) critically discuss how integrated communication consistently aligns emotional associations and sentimental attachments that are prerequisites for brand reputation and brand resonance. More specifically, when telling emotionally appealing stories, consumers may become inspired and captivated by a brand message (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:52). Strong attitudinal attachments such as love, emotional bonds and active engagements to establish a sense of community, form the foundation for brand resonance (Keller, 2001:15; 2009:144; 2012:186; 2016:5). Committed relationships characterised by love will outlast adverse circumstances so that relationship transgressions are more likely forgiven (Fournier, 1998:365) and brand advocates may defend brands online when facing criticism (Roberts, 2005:105). Consequently, expressiveness (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:86,96) is the ability to communicate strong emotional associations and sentimental attachments that are indicative of brand reputations that resonate with stakeholders in complex, antagonistic environments.

The last and fourth aim of the chapter is to (iv) emphasise how the ability to form strong emotional attachments is a deliberately planned for and measurable construct in brand reputation studies regardless of the fact that reputation is socially constructed during processes outside of management’s direct control.
2.2. PEER-TO-PEER COLLABORATION IN SOCIAL COMMUNITIES AND MEDIA CONVERGENCE AS DRIVERS OF INTEGRATED COMMUNICATION

The shift from traditional corporate communication to integrated communication is largely accelerated by the disruptive nature of social media. As a disruptive technology, social media necessitates a change in organisational values, processes and practice (Quinn-Allan, 2012:47). As such, social media disrupt relationships between organisations and their stakeholders by breaking down one-to-many traditional communication lines and replacing them with many-to-many, dialogic and antagonistic communication models (Nitin & Burgess, 2014:293). To elaborate, social networks are decentralised, distributed peer-to-peer technologies which enable users to interact amongst themselves on an equal footing without controlling powers exercised by managers, moderators or editors (Bruns; 2003:3). Similarly, Castells (2007:238) notes how the one-to-many communication of traditional media is replaced with the many-to-many communication of peer-to-peer engagements, using social media in the network society.

Available literature provides several definitions of social media, which are presented chronologically below. In an early definition by Bruns and Bahnisch (2009:5), social media is defined as “websites which build on Web 2.0 technologies to provide space for in-depth social interaction, community formation, and the tackling of collaborative projects”. One year later, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:61) similarly define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content”. Likewise, another year later, Dominick (2011:25) defines social media as “...online communications that use special techniques that involve participation, conversation, sharing, collaboration, and linkage”.

Notably, subsequent definitions of social media introduce the concept of co-creation. As such, Kligienė and Rapečka (2011:34) define social media as open, web-based and user friendly applications that facilitate social networking, the co-creation of content and the sharing of taste and relevance. Likewise, Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011:241) describe social media as mobile and web-based technologies used to create interactive platforms where communities and individuals co-create, modify, discuss and share user-generated content. Considering the abovementioned statements of meaning, social media is defined as follows for the purpose of this study:

Social media is the co-creation of user-generated content in online communities.
It is worth noting that the concept of co-creation within the discipline of brand management is generally concerned with a postmodern view of branding which recognises that management is not able to exert total control, as highlighted by Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel (2006:52). Nonetheless, this study rather recognises co-creation as a concept emanating from contemporary definitions of social media, instead of limiting co-creation to a postmodernist worldview of branding and integrated communication.

Owing to its collaborative and engaging principles, social media is recognised as a market- and environment-based driver of integrated communication, hence traditional, top-down, one-way approaches to corporate communication and reputation management have become largely absolute (Cornelissen, 2011:22-23). Similar arguments are echoed by Angelopulo (2013:42), Grunig (2009:2) and Niemann-Struweg and Grobler (2011:1).

Considering the synergy between public relations and marketing which has historically been contested in territorial turf wars, a chosen definition of corporate communication depends on a researcher’s chosen stream of research, theoretical background, focus, philosophy and analytic form (Illia & Balmer, 2012:416, 418). Correspondingly, corporate communication is defined by Foreman and Argenti (2005:254) as “the unit responsible for organisational communication with key constituencies - in implementing strategy and building a company’s reputation and brand”. Likewise, Van Riel (2003:163,166) describes corporate communication as the coherent orchestration or integration of all communication in order to maintain relationships and a favourable reputation. In other words, corporate communication is a suitable approach for the study of brand reputation in collaborative, peer-to-peer social media communities, which is the focus of this study.

Having established that peer-to-peer collaboration in social media communities are the drivers of integrated communication, definitions of the latter will now be discussed. Not to be confused with integrated marketing communication, integrated communication is broader than integrated marketing communication, which limits integration within the discipline of marketing (Christensen, Firat & Torp, 2008:424). To elaborate, integrated communication ensures consistency across related disciplines, aligns an organisation’s strategic objectives, coordinates multi-functional teams and specialisation areas across the organisational structure to benefit of the organisation’s strategic interests at large (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011; Christensen, Firat & Torp, 2008:424; Dobrescu, 2009:1699; Grunig & Grunig, 1998; Schultz & Kitchen, 2004:353; Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:30, 281, 278). To expand, Angelopulo (2013:40) state that the term ‘communication integration’ is synonymous with integrated communication and defines the latter as “the cross-functional process of
creating and nourishing strategically determined relationships with stakeholders by ensuring that the messages to these groups are as appropriate and beneficial to the business relationship as possible, and engaging in purposeful dialogue with them”. Likewise, a definition by Christensen, Firat and Torp (2008:424) state that integrated communication is “the notion and the practice of aligning symbols, messages, procedures and behaviours in order for an organisation to communicate with clarity, consistency and continuity within and across formal organisational boundaries”. Similarly, integrated communication is defined by Doorley and Garcia (2006:260) as “a dynamic communication practice aimed at advancing not just the marketing plan, but the overall operating or business plan of the firm and in so doing aligning brand with reputation”. As such, the latter definition for integrated communication is suitable for this study, considering that social media management comprises complex multi- and cross-functional teams to manage brand reputation in the converged media space as elaborated on in the subsequent section.

In addition to social media, a concurrent driver of integrated communication is the convergence of media platforms and channels. The convergence of social media with traditional mass media in interactive, horizontal networks of communication implies that public opinion is the collective outcome of peer-to-peer engagements (Castells, 2007:238). Originally posted by Nokia’s strategist Daniel Goodall (2009) on his blog, the brand’s model of digital media planning comprises owned spaces, bought spaces and earned spaces. Subsequently the model is refined by Corcoran (2009) as three types of media, namely earned, owned and paid media that requires consistent and complementary integration in corporate communication strategies (Cuddeford-Jones, 2011:40; Lieb, Owyang, Groopman & Silva, 2012:5; Stephen & Galak, 2012:624; Soat, 2012:6; Stokes, 2011:217). Therefore, three main media types are synthesised, namely:

- **Paid media**: paying for space or exposure, such as display advertising, sponsorships and paid search advertising.

- **Owned media**: management-owned properties, such as corporate websites and a brand’s official social media management accounts.

- **Earned media**: the most credible influencer of reputation over which management has no control. This includes organic word-of-mouth and user-generated content shared on social media channels (Corcoran, 2009, Lieb et al, 2012:5; Soat, 2012:6; Stephen & Galak, 2012:624).

In the increasingly complex converged media space (Castells, 2007:238; Jenkins, 2004, 2006), organisations find it challenging to integrate departments and functions so that a
consistent storyline, look and feel is expressed across earned, owned and paid media in a rapidly evolving spectrum of media, devices and screens, regardless of the medium, channel or device, online or offline (Lieb et al, 2012:5,18; Lieb, Silva & Tran, 2013:4). To attain consistency in the creation and distribution of content across all converged media types, conventional management structures have had to overcome traditional functional silos (Lieb et al, 2012:6,18; Pulizzi, 2012a:121). Typically, the integration of content teams includes functions and tactics such as community management, media buyers, public relations, marketing, email marketing, mobile, finance, advertising, information technology and search engine optimisation, as well as partners such as consultancies, vendors or agencies (Lieb et al, 2012:6,18; Pulizzi, 2012a:121; Reid, 2013:25). Often, the required skills are not necessarily found inside the organisation, hence social media management teams integrate with a network of creative skills such as freelance designers and writers (Lopresti, 2013:10). External vendors may also include advertising agencies, digital agencies, interactive agencies, custom publishers, design agencies, social media and public relations consultancies.

Several terms are used when describing how multidisciplinary and integrated social media management teams function strategically in the converged media space. To illustrate, Breakenridge (2008:13) uses the term PR2.0 while Stokes (2011:21) prefers the term WebPR. Similarly, Kerin, Hartley and Rudelius (2013:502) use the term social media marketing while Keller and Fay (2012:459) use the term social marketing. In addition, Postman (2009:vi,3) favours the term corporate social media to refer to the way in which social media technologies are integrated with business strategies as well as the corporate communications mix. In other words, the term corporate social media is not limited to a specific organisational function or discipline, integrated with the outcomes of business objectives. Correspondingly, social media management is defined by Van Looy (2015:49) as a multidisciplinary approach to create business value by means of a social media strategy. Likewise, social media management is defined by Friedrichsen (2013:42) as the integrated management of internal and external markets to effectively implement a social media strategy that generates business value. To elaborate, Montalvo (2011:91) defines social media management as “the collaborative process of using Web 2.0 platforms and tools to accomplish desired organisational objectives” at a business enterprise level. Similarly, social media management is defined by Bochenek and Bilili (2016:426) as the strategic corporate communication management function which is governed within organisations to enhance the brand. With this in mind, social media management is the most suitable concept for this study which is defined, for the purpose of this study, as the collaborative strategic process of establishing an emotionally resonant brand reputation when engaging with social media communities.
When referring to the individuals responsible for managing a brand’s social media accounts, engaging with social media communities and online reputation management (ORM), the term social media managers are used, as will be explained in more detail in Section 3.6.1, Table 3.8.

2.2.1. Integrated communication challenges for complex social media management teams in the converged media space

A noteworthy concern is consistency between a brand’s social media storytelling and customer service (Doorley & Garcia, 2006:116). Typically, a social service gap between online and offline customer services are experienced as social media management and customer services are two separate business entities, each with its own unique structures, procedures, systems and processes (Cerebra, 2014). The challenge, therefore, is to integrate online and offline customer service processes into a single business with its own set of rules in order to deliver a consistent customer experience. Correspondingly, the integration of social media extends beyond corporate communication to include both high level strategic and operational business functions (Avery, Lariscy & Sweetser, 2010:191; FedEx & Ketchum, 2012; McKinsey Global Institute, 2015; Reid, 2013:25; Li, Solis, Webber & Szymanski, 2013).

The disruptive nature of social media has necessitated business structures and hierarchies to become more flexible, responsive and adaptive to stakeholders’ preferences and needs (FedEx & Ketchum, 2012:9). In fact, for any organisation to succeed, social objectives and the social business strategy need to be integrated with business goals and strategies (Li et al, 2013:5; International Data Corporation, 2010:5). Therefore, every business function is required to become social media literate and experience the value and benefits of social media engagement (Postman, 2009:14). However, a study by Killian and McManus (2015:8) concluded that some organisations remain hesitant to integrate social media technologies into an organisational business model. A few years earlier, a similar study by Altimeter (Li et al, 2013:4) concluded that 52% of social businesses’ top executives were engaged, aligned and informed in their social strategies.

The challenges facing complex social media management teams to ensure consistency in the converged media space highlights the need to overcome traditional turf wars between marketing and other specialist corporate communication functions such as public relations (Lieb et al, 2012:6,18). Correspondingly, media convergence simultaneously requires a convergence between public relations and marketing, which suggest that the two functions may cease to exist as separate entities in the near future (Murtland, 2010:15). Therefore,
social media management necessitates erosion of the boundaries between public relations and marketing, instead of a dominance of the one discipline over the other (Estanyol, 2012:385; Smith, 2012a:602). A longitudinal study over eight years by Moorman (2015:38) concludes that social media remains poorly integrated with organisations’ marketing strategies, as merely 3.8% of respondents reported to have effectively linked social media to marketing strategies in 2011, with 3.9% in 2015. Similarly, a study by Niemann-Struweg and Grobler (2011:10) concluded that South African marketing and communications agencies still lack a comprehensive understanding of integrated communication and predominantly function within an integrated marketing communication orientation. Similarly, a subsequent study by Meintjes, Niemann-Struweg and De Wet (2012:12049) concluded that public relations practitioners have a limited understanding of strategic integrated communication as they largely associate the function with publicity tactics. Moreover, the study found that a general breakdown in communication and teamwork to ensure consistency in corporate communication departments further hampers strategic alignment.

2.2.1.1. The tainted reputation of corporate communication

Corporate communication is often used interchangeably with terms such as strategic communication, communication management and public relations (Elving, 2012:67). It may well be that the somewhat tainted reputation of public relations has encouraged an ongoing debate regarding the scope and preference for somewhat interchangeable definitions of corporate communication, strategic communication, corporate communication, organisational communication and communication management (Grunig, 2008:4; L’Etang, 2014:657; Merkelsen, 2011:134, Steyn & Puth, 2000:3).

Of particular concern is the public relations and marketing industries, as sources of information that may unintentionally contradict corporate communication messages. While corporate communication is regarded as the custodian of reputation management (CIPR:2013; Cornelissen, 2011:5; De Jong, 2011:1; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:xxvii; Foreman & Argenti, 2005:254), professionalism in the public relations industry is continuously challenged by an unflattering reputation (De Bussy & Wolf, 2009:45; Greenberg, Knight & Westersund, 2011:67; L’Etang, 2014; Merkelsen, 2011:132). Equally important are ethical considerations when implementing marketing tactics in order to remain socially responsible when communicating to stakeholders (Goodman, 2006:90; Herder, 2012:42; Katyal, 2010:799; Martin & Smith, 2008:46; Meyer, & Leonard, 2014; Zuo & Veil, 2006:9).
Critics of public relations point out that the profession has a rather dubious reputation for the use of ethically questionable tactics, the use of manipulation and advancing the interests of those in power at the expense of democracy, public discourse and the public interest (Greenberg, Knight & Westersund, 2011:68,76; Simmons & Walsh, 2010:18, Venter, 2010:282). It has to be borne in mind that demonstrating a direct relevance to the public interest is what establishes professionalism in public relations (Kim & Ki, 2014:252; Niemann-Struweg & Meintjes, 2008:255). Considering the tarnished reputation of public relations, it is believed that public relations has to regain its legitimacy (Merkelsen, 2011:125), trust (Davies et al, 2003:33; Venter, 2010:283) and credibility (Bowen, 2009:403; De Bussy & Wolf, 2009:45; Meyer, & Leonard, 2014; Simmons & Walsh, 2010:18). In fact, Simmons and Walsh (2010:18) refer to public relations practised with no regard for ethical and social considerations as “the profession that dare not speak its name”.

Questionable ethical practises are manifested when persuasive communication is used for the benefit of the organisation, regardless of potential harm caused to society (Baker, 1999:71). A related concern is pessimists' image of public relations and advertising as industries that need to be treated with suspicion (Davies et al, 2003:33). A case in point is the derogatory reference to public relations as ‘spin’ and practitioners as ‘spin doctors’. Derived from the idiom to spin a yarn, denoting the telling of a far-fetched story, Lashley (2009:365) articulates that “spin relies on creative presentation of the facts, while political spin uses disinformation, distortion, and deception - lies”. Similarly, Brissenden and Moloney (2005:1005) define spin as modern political public relations “offering to voters, mostly via the media, glimpses of policies and politicians which are favourable to the originating party”. Interestingly, a study among the members of the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA) by Venter (2010:383), concluded that management expectations of public relations to engage in spin doctoring remains a significant contributor to the industry’s dubious reputation. In fact, what the public relations professionals, educators and industry bodies require, is public relations (Bowen, 2009:409).

Spin continues to be practised in the contemporary context of social media management and so does another ethically questionable corporate communication tactic, namely astroturfing. Originating in the days before the internet, astroturfing refers to the practice of disguising an orchestrated campaign as a spontaneous upwelling of public opinion (Astroturfing, 2007:48). Astroturfing is defined as fake grassroots campaigns which are sponsored by marketers for commercial benefit, according to Tilley and Cokley (2008:98). Typically, astroturfing is synonymous with clandestine corporate initiatives to salvage a damaged reputation through the use of stealth or undercover marketing campaigns (Herder, 2012:42). Stealth marketing
is defined by Martin and Smith (2008:45) as surreptitious marketing practices that conceal the sponsors of the marketing message. To this end, stealth marketing relies on deceiving covert practises for effective execution. In essence, the unethical practise of stealth marketing deliberately confuses the boundaries between spontaneous, organic publicity and advertising (Goodman, 2006:90).

Typically, stealth marketing tactics include fake fan blogs (Barwise & Meehan, 2010:84; Burns, 2008; Katyal, 2010:833; Thompson, 2007; Weaver, 2006), paying interns and students to create fake blogs, fake social media accounts and fake comments on social networking sites to neutralise negative sentiment about an organisation (Yin, 2008:9) or to recommend a brand (Biyani, 2009). Related tactics include product placements in blogs without attribution (Goodman, 2006:90) and compensating social media users for product endorsements without disclaimers (Burns, 2008, Davila, 2009:19, Duke, 2009:19). Therefore, stealth marketing tactics “catch people at their most vulnerable” (Kaikati & Kaikati, 2004:6), are intrusive, exploit social relationships for commercial benefit, typically to overcome consumers’ scepticism and circumvention of marketing messages (Martin & Smith, 2008:46).

The adverse strategic consequences of stealth marketing including renewed distrust of business in general and marketing in particular (Martin & Smith, 2008:48). Besides denigration of the brand, stealth marketing causes social harm where seemingly sincere human interactions are fraudulent. Correspondingly, a lack of trust and integrity in marketing culminate in a negative reputation for marketing managers, supported by the detrimental stereotype of marketing as commercial hucksterism (Laczniak & Murphy, 2006:173). To further unpack the concerns of stealth marketing and astroturfing for this study, Section 3.6 will elaborate on the importance of responsive social media governance frameworks to mitigate the reputational risks inherent in social media management.

Several recommendations are considered when addressing the reputational deficit of public relations. Often recommended is global legislation, also enforced in South Africa, to regulate, provide accreditation, enforce professionalisation and regain credibility (Bowen, 2009:403; Meyer & Leonard, 2014:380; Simmons & Walsh, 2010:18; Yang & Taylor, 2013). More specifically, local industry studies concluded that an independent, authoritative body with the necessary disciplinary powers is required to eradicate unethical practices (Meyer & Leonard, 2014:382; Niemann-Struweg & Meintjes, 2008:228; Yang & Taylor, 2013:258). In a global study of professional associations’ ethics codes by Kim and Ki (2014:253) it was found that concerns around standards for acceptable practises of gift-giving, especially to bloggers and journalists, as well as hospitality and fees require attention; however, practises vary globally.
In addition, professionalisation also entails increased requirements for formal tertiary education and ongoing professional training (Meyer & Leonard, 2014; Struweg & Meintjes, 2008:225; Venter, 2010:283). Notably, a study by the Global Alliance (2014:4) concluded that the majority of contemporary senior public relations practitioners do, in fact, hold post-graduate qualifications, as opposed to the 1980s and 1990s when in South Africa only a few practitioners reportedly held formal public relations qualifications.

2.2.2. Integrated communication as the foundation for reputation management when collaborating with critical stakeholders

A lack of integration and coherence among traditional silos discussed earlier, increases the likelihood of fragmented and contradictory messages (Van Riel, 2003:164). Correspondingly, when there are discrepancies and contradictions in strategic messages, critical stakeholders will demand increased transparency and honesty, hence the reputation enhancing value of integrated communication (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011:396, 403).

Before continuing to define reputation, it is necessary to define and elaborate on the exact meaning of stakeholder. Stakeholders are defined by Grunig and Pepper (2008:125) as those publics who either affect the organisations as a result of their decisions or publics who are affected by an organisation’s decisions. Moreover, stakeholders are linked to an organisation as both have an influence on one another and may cause problems for each other. As stakeholders become active and aware of organisations, they are described as publics. In a related definition of stakeholders, Cornelissen (2011:4) define a stakeholder as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objectives”. Similarly, Carroll and Buchholtz, (2015:66) define a stakeholder as “an individual or a group that has one or more of the various kinds of stakes in an organisation”. As such, having a stake implies that the person or group has an interest in a decision because they are affected by that decision.

From the prior discussion, it is clear that stakeholders largely determine reputation. Reputation is a fragile resource that can be damaged easily and cannot be bought (Hall, 1993:617). As billionaire investor Warren Buffett is often quoted as saying: “It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you’ll do things differently” (Shamma, 2012:151; Tuttle, 2010). Similarly, Fombrun and Van Riel (1997:5) and Smith, Smith and Wang (2010:S204) maintain that the real worth of reputation is often only truly realised once it is visibly at risk, most often when faced with considerable damaging publicity.
during a reputational crisis. Damaged corporate reputations threaten organisations’ viability and financial prosperity and, should they survive financially, harm customer and employee loyalty (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004:368). By the same token, brands with strong reputations generate positive word-of-mouth and respect, which in turn, attract customers, the best talent and investors for financial prosperity (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:3). Stated differently, corporate reputation sustains not only shared values, but also mind, heart and market share (Kitchen & Laurence, 2003:103). As an influencer of stakeholder behaviour, a favourable corporate reputation shapes customer loyalty, customer satisfaction, employee retention, shareholder investment (Chun, 2005:91) and is therefore a competitive advantage (Ang & Wight, 2009).

It is evident from the subsequent discussion that definitions of reputation are often ambiguous. The English word, reputation, originates from the Latin reputāre which means to think over (Collins English Dictionary, 2000). Yet, Chun (2005:92), Schwaiger (2004:47) and Fombrun and Van Riel (1997:5) draw attention to the fact that no single definition captures the concept of reputation entirely and that definitions are often ambiguous, conflicting or overlapping. To illustrate, a review of reputation literature in a study by Barnett, Jermier and Lafferty (2006:333) identified 49 different definitions of reputation which contained very little underlying similarity. While considering the purpose of this study, only a few selected definitions of reputation are presented. Fombrun and Van Riel (2004:4) define reputation as “the assessments that multiple stakeholders make about the company’s ability to fulfil their expectations”. Similarly, Argenti and Druckenmiller (2004:369) define reputation as the collective representation of multiple stakeholders’ images of an organisation. However, Chun (2005:95) defines reputation as a value judgement accumulated over a period of time based on an organisation’s qualities and behaviour which are grounded in experience. Stated differently, “reputations are based on how stakeholders evaluate an organisation’s ability to meet their expectations” (Coombs, 2007b:164). Likewise, Ang and Wight (2009:6) define reputation as “a perceptual representation of a company’s past actions and future prospects that describes the firm’s overall appeal to all of its key constituents when compared with other leading rivals”.

When evaluating the aforementioned definitions of reputation, it is evident that they lack the dialogical and collaborative principles of social media. To elaborate on the argument presented, the collaborative and engaging principles of social media imply that stakeholders are no longer passive observers in the marketplace, but are actively engaged in shaping and defining the business landscape (Blackshaw, 2011:108), meaning making (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009:4), and, correspondingly, reputation (Jones, Temperley & Lima, 2009:928). With this in mind, an appropriate definition of reputation for this study is provided by Aula and
Mantere (2013:341) as “a continuously developing set of evaluative narratives, beliefs, and expectations, built and modified in dialogical communication between the target organization and its publics over time”. As such, reputation exists in the process of communication in which sense making emerges from the unfolding interactions between organisations and stakeholders. Correspondingly, Aula and Mantere (2013:340-344) recommend the interpretive approach to reputation management that recognises the vital role of communication in the negotiation of meaning, which is omitted from the reputational capital paradigm (Chun, 2005:93) that measures the financial equation of reputation (Rensburg & De Beer, 2011:157; Van der Waldt, 2009:11).

Commonly used to describe reputation is the concept of an image. Corporate image is defined by Cornelissen (2011:8) as “the immediate set of associations of an individual in response to one or more signals or messages from or about a particular organisation at a single point in time”. Moreover, image or a belief is derived from external stakeholders’ perception of an organisation and does not depend on any real experience of an organisation (Chun, 2005:95). Consequently, image may be quicker to influence or change through tactics such as advertising, whereas reputational adjustment requires continuous internal and external stakeholder interventions.

To reiterate, stakeholders in a networked and interactive marketplace require an organisation to break away from its image as an anonymous, profit-taking and faceless entity to become an entity that nurtures and protects all customer relationships and individual brands in its portfolio through integrated communication (Schultz & Kitchen, 2004:349). As a corporate image is mainly concerned with external stakeholders, management focus their attention on the use of mass media and branding to influence those stakeholders (Caruana, 2008:200). Stated differently, corporate image is a reflection of an organisation’s corporate brand and identity (Argenti & Druckenmillner, 2004:369). Similarly, Gardner and Levy (1955:36) advise that reputable brands persist as a stable image built over time.

In order to clarify the integrated role of branding in establishing reputation, it is necessary to explore several definitions of a brand. A brand is defined as the cognitive and emotional perception that consumers have formed as a result of their experiences with or information received about an organisation or products, according to Ouwersloot and Duncan (2008:8). In a similar definition, Roper and Fill (2012:109) define a brand as “a promise, a summary of the mental associations and emotions that are top of mind when a name is thought of or mentioned”. As such, Arvidsson (2005:244) defines a brand as “a context of consumption” rather than primarily referring to a product. For this reason, the author explains, “cooking with
Jamie Oliver is different from cooking by yourself”. Most significantly, Hatch and Schultz (2009:118) define a brand as the meaning-making by those who use a brand’s symbolism, which implies that brands encompass far more that merely a visual symbol. As the symbolic meaning of brands cannot be controlled, the best management can do is to engage in the process of meaning-making.

In an early study of branding literature by De Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley (1998:426), twelve themes of brand definitions were identified in total to illustrate the different definitions and strategies of brands. These include (i) brand as a legal instrument to designate legal ownership, (ii) brand as a logo to indicate visual identity differentiation, (iii) brand as a company to indicate corporate brands and their reputations, (iv) brand as a shorthand to indicate all the perceptions associated with a brand name, (v) brand as a risk reducer to indicate a consistency, quality and availability promise or contract with consumers that installs confidence, (vi) brand as an identity system to indicate how visual imagery embodies positioning and strategy, (vii) brand as an image in consumers’ minds, (viii) brand as a value system, (ix) brand as a personality, (x) brand as a relationship, (xi) brand as adding value, and, (xii) brand as an evolving entity.

It is still argued that there is no consensus on the ever-evolving definition of brand as it adapts to a changing socio-economic environment (Conejo & Wooliscroft, 2015:287; De Chernatony, 2009:101; Jones & Bonevac, 2013:112). Moreover, as new metaphors emerge to describe brands, such as entropy, orchestration, essence and architecture to name but a few, so too, do the associated meanings and definitions of brand as concluded in a study of branding literature by Stern (2006:222). Similarly, a related study of branding literature by Davies and Chun (2003:57) identified emerging contemporary metaphors such as (i) brand as a warrior or instrument of war, (ii) brand as a family to replace an earlier umbrella brand concept, (iii) brand as a pilot which is inspired by the Virgin phenomenon of charting unfamiliar territories, (iv) brand as an underwriter to reduce risk associated with poor purchasing decisions, (v) brand as a partner to indicate reciprocal relationships, and (vi) brand as a seducer that overcomes consumers’ resistance. In a related study of branding literature, De Chernatony (2009:101) concluded that the initial interpretation a brand was focused on differentiation, but definitions then evolved to emphasise positioning, thereafter, personality, much later, vision, and lately, added value.

Branding is a management process. Branding, according to Kowalczyk and Pawlish (2002:158), describes the efforts to project the distinctiveness of the organisation in such a manner that external audiences perceive the brand to be desirable and attractive. Moreover,
branding is defined by Duncan (2005:71) as “the process of creating a brand image that engages the hearts and minds of customers”. To elaborate, brand image is defined by Keller (1993:3) as “the perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory”. As brand image, being a reflection of brand identity, is established in the consumer's mind, a sound brand image is reinforced by corporate communication to accumulatively establish brand equity (Van Rekom, Jacobs & Verlegh, 2006:182).

A distinction can be made between products or services as brands and organisations as corporate brands (Hatch & Schultz, 2009:118; Keller & Richey, 2006:74). Product brands embody the imagery for a specific brand as viewed by consumers (Keller & Richey, 2006:74). In contrast, corporate brands embody the values, actions and words of employees of an organisation. Corporate branding, as defined by Argenti and Druckenmiller (2004:367), is when an organisation markets the organisation itself as a brand. As such, corporate branding is derived from aligning strategy and communication (Foreman & Argenti, 2005:247). Stated differently, a corporate brand is “who you say you are and who you want to be” (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004:369). However, Hatch and Schultz (2009:118) prefer that the term enterprise branding replaces the term corporate branding, to indicate how branding involves an entire enterprise to deliver on that which stakeholders value.

Individual persons are also viewed as brands. Correspondingly the term 'human brand' is defined by Thomson (2006:104) as “any well-known persona who is the subject of marketing communications efforts”. Individuals such as celebrity athletes, talk show hosts, musicians and movie stars are also viewed as brands that develop and market products such as their own clothing lines, fragrances, household goods, cosmetics and accessories (Kowalczyk & Royne, 2013:213). Celebrities are therefore professionally managed as they demonstrate the same features and associations as traditional brands (Thomson, 2006:105). Celebrity brands include Hollywood movie stars such as Tom Hanks and Meryl Streep (Luo, Chen, Han & Whan Park, 2010:1114) and sports stars (Chadwick & Burton, 2008:307) such as football players David Beckham and Cristiano Ronaldo. Other celebrity brands include singer Jennifer Lopez and businessman, reality television star and U.S. President Donald Trump. Similarly, political parties and sports teams are also considered human brands (Thomson, 2006:105). A related example is South African President, Jacob Zuma, who is regarded as a political brand (Bal, Pitt, Berthon & DesAutels, 2009:230).
2.3. STRATEGIC REPUTATION MANAGEMENT AS AN APPROPRIATE APPROACH WHEN COLLABORATING WITH CRITICAL SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNITIES

The argument already introduced in this study is that the many-to-many, dialogic and rather antagonistic environment of social media disrupt relationships between management and stakeholders (Nitins & Burgess, 2014:293). In these communities, collaboration and engagement occur freely without the controlling powers exercised by management (Bruns, 2003:3). As a result, traditional approaches to reputation management are challenged in collaborative environments where management is asking itself “who is branding whom?” (Jones, Temperley & Lima, 2009:928; 931). To elaborate, conventional approaches to reputation management are challenged in an environment where social media users are active participants in meaning making and no longer passive targets for the traditional broadcasting of corporate communication messages (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009:4; Jones, Temperley & Lima, 2009:928). In the light of the above, consumers engage in the autonomous social construction of brand value (Arvidsson, 2005:242) and, correspondingly, reputation (Jones, Temperley & Lima, 2009:928).

In the past, brand-centric branding from the 1960s to early 1990s focused on aspirational messaging in a media landscape dominated by traditional media in a push economy (Loyal, 2014:3). Since the mid-1990s, accessibility to information has necessitated brands to restructure and re-purpose brand objectives to become more transparent, authentic, collaborative, engaging and co-creating while consistently mirroring the core values of consumers across all channels and touch points. Stated differently, brand building in the digital age has fundamentally adapted to phenomena such as collaboration, transparency, connectivity, immediacy, automation, sociability, responsiveness, interactivity, disintermediation, mobility and customisation (Wiegel, 2014:5). Therefore, the collaborative and engaging principles of social media require top leadership to adapt to the expectations of the connected world whereby every business strategy involves active listening, becoming more engaging and ultimately being more transparent (Feeney, 2011:13).

In a nutshell, social media necessitates a change in the rules of reputation management and branding (Jones, Temperley & Lima, 2009:928). As recommended by Aula and Mantere (2013:343) strategic reputation management is a preferred approach as it entails the co-creation of meaning in a process of dialogue with stakeholders on social networks. As a result of co-creation, both meaning-making and reputation are co-managed between organisations and stakeholders (Jones, Temperley & Lima, 2009:931,935; Veloutsou, 2008:299).
Traditional reputation management is practised by conventional public relations and encapsulates careful planning and a monologue in which practitioners are more in control of the traditional media selected to reach intended audiences (Aula, 2010:48). In contrast, strategic reputation management is cognisant of the convergence of communication technologies and the continuous uncertain, profoundly public and dialogic principles of social media. As a result, strategic reputation management is cognisant of mitigating the risks when collaborating with stakeholders in transparent networks (Aula & Mantere, 2013:340). Consequently, strategic reputation management recognises that reputation risk management is integrated with business risk management strategies (Aula, 2010:44).

To clarify, Aula and Mantere (2008:11) define strategic reputation management as an organisation’s “goal oriented activities by which it strives to achieve a good reputation”. In this manner, organisational strategies need to be both socially responsible while simultaneously attaining a competitive advantage so that managing strong reputations rest on three prerequisites, namely good deeds, good communication and good relations (Aula & Mantere, 2008:11,210). Similarly, a formula for upholding a sound reputation, according to Doorley and Garcia (2006:26), comprise three components, namely performance, plus behaviour, plus communication. Yet, by recognising that interactions are continuous, overlapping and complex, strategic reputation management is cognisant of the fact that reputational challenges or risks may emerge from anywhere in the complex narrative web (Aula, 2010:47). In the complex narrative web of stories, myths, rumours, symbols and images which determine reputation, management accepts the blurred boundaries between stakeholders and media and between privacy and publicity.

To conclude, a disrupted and antagonistic corporate communication environment holds several risks for reputation management, hence the shift from traditional reputation management to strategic reputation management.

2.4. ESTABLISHING EMOTIONALLY APPEALING BRAND REPUTATIONS THAT RESONATE WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Expressiveness, or the ability to communicate brand stories that establish an emotional bond that resonates with stakeholders on a personal level, is largely dependent on brand equity (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:111,133,137). Therefore, brand equity is the result of fostering intangible or immaterial assets such as emotions, experiences and attitudes such as loyalty (Arvidsson, 2005:239). In fact, Hearn (2010:427) argues that emotional associations such as sentimental attachment and share of mind evident in brand equity are, in fact, reputation.
Comparatively, Kitchen and Laurence (2003:116) argue that managing and communicating the corporate brand is synonymous with reputation management. In fact, Corkindale and Belder (2009: 242) and Greyser (2009:590) argue that concepts such as corporate reputation, organisational reputation and brand reputation are synonymous and can be used interchangeably.

Brand reputation is defined by Harris and De Chernatony (2001:445) as “a collective representation of a brand’s past actions and results that describes the brand’s ability to deliver valued outcomes to multiple stakeholders”. Likewise, brand reputation is defined as the aggregate composite of engagements that consumers have with a brand over time (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993:18; 1995:24; Milewicz & Herbig, 1994:41). As such, credibility and consistency to deliver brand promises are prerequisites for a strong brand reputation. Similarly, Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009:315) define brand reputation as “something a company earns over time and refers to how various audiences evaluate the brand”.

When telling emotionally appealing stories, consumers may become inspired and captivated by the brand message (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:52). Strong attitudinal attachments such as love, emotional bonds and active engagements to establish a sense of community, form the foundation for brand resonance (Keller, 2001:15; 2009:144; 2012:186; 2016:5). Stated differently, when communicating emotionally appealing messages, expressive organisations effectively integrate brand, strategy, and identity in reputations that resonate with stakeholders (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:86,96; Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:27). As such, the five measurable constructs of an emotionally resonant reputation comprise: visibility, transparency, authenticity, consistency and distinction. These constructs are defined and discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, Section 4.5.

Emotionally appealing messages are effectively communicated when brand associations resonate with stakeholders. Brand associations are defined as “the strength, favourability, and uniqueness of perceived attributes and benefits for the brand” (Ambler, Bhattacharya, Edell, Keller, Lemon & Mittal, 2002:15). Associations - beliefs or assumptions - are stronger when determined by direct, personal experience while corporate communication and word-of-mouth also assist to establish brand associations (Keller, 1993:10). As such, strong and favourable brand associations may include inferences such as trustworthiness, quality, likeability and expertise which are linked to perceptions of an organisation’s good reputation and credibility (Keller, 1993:10; 2012:186). In turn, expertise, trust and likability are the foundations for credibility, which then solidifies relationships, and ultimately brand resonance (Keller, 2012:186). Strong attitudinal attachments such as love and active engagements to establish
a sense of community, form the foundation for brand resonance (Keller, 2001:15; 2009:144; 2012:186; 2016:5).

Considering that brand associations help to establish reputation (Smith, Smith & Wang, 2010:201), corporate reputation is strengthened when the corporate brand promise is kept (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004:372). Again, Smith, Smith and Wang (2010:201) point out that reputation is an important source of brand associations which affect image. Furthermore, Harris and De Chernatony (2001:445) maintain that brand reputation encompasses congruency between the perceptions of both internal and external stakeholders.

Favourable emotional responses to a brand strengthens brand associations, awareness and, ultimately, brand equity. Using a cognitive psychology perspective to describe the perceived equity or value of a brand (Erdem & Swait, 1998:131), customer-based brand equity is defined by Keller (1993:2; 2009:142) as “the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand”. Elements contributing to the multidimensional concept of brand equity include consumers’ familiarity with a brand, their memorable, strong, positive and unique brand associations, as well as affective responses such as feelings, perceptions, images, as well as cognitive responses (Keller, 1993:2; 2009:140,143). Stated differently, top-of-mind awareness implies brand salience, which is the extent to which consumers recall and recognise a brand, remember a brand, have knowledge about a brand and express opinions about a brand (Aaker, 1996:114; Keller, 2001:8). Strong attitudinal attachments such as love, emotional bonds and active engagements to establish a sense of community, form the foundation for brand resonance (Keller, 2001:15; 2009:144; 2012:186; 2016:5). As such, consumers are familiar with a brand’s visual imagery and symbols (Aaker, 1996:115).

In ambiguous environments, especially, feelings of affection towards a brand requires management’s ability to deliver on the promises made in order to sustain brand equity. Using an information economics perspective that recognises the asymmetrical, imperfect, ambiguous and often inconsistent information sources in the market, the definition of brand equity by Erdem and Swait (1998:131) emphasises the importance of the credibility of a brand’s claims, or confidence in a brand’s claims, which is established during dynamic interactions with consumers. As such, consumer-based brand equity is defined as “the value of a brand signal to consumers (Erdem & Swait, 1998:132). In other words, brand equity is determined by the clarity, consistency, truth and credibility of information received about a brand to signal the value perceived by consumers. As such, a brand signal embodies or symbolises information communicated during an organisation’s past and present marketing
mix strategies. In other words, a brand needs to be “able and willing to deliver what is promised” (Erdem & Swait, 1998:137).

Brand identities, specifically logos and slogans as elements of brand equity, symbolise feelings of affection associated with a brand. Aaker (1991) defines brand equity as “a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, which add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to the firm's customers”. Moreover, brand equity is influenced by brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and proprietary brand assets such as trademarks, channel relationships and patents. As such, brand identities – brand names, logos and symbols – which are distinctive and easy to understand or remember may assist to enhance brand awareness, the linkage of brand associations and, ultimately, brand equity (Keller, 1993:9; 2009:140,143).

Strong attitudinal attachments and active engagements to establish a sense of community, form the foundation for brand resonance (Keller, 2001:15; 2009:144; 2012:186; 2016:5). Correspondingly, investment in logos and slogans enhance brand equity and credibility in order to symbolise a reputation for delivering on promises and claims made (Erdem & Swait, 1998:132). As brand identities encapsulate visual identification elements such as legally protected trademarks, the appropriate use thereof is typically prescribed in a corporate identity manual (Balmer, 2009:10). Therefore, when logos and slogans are compromised in any way, reputation is harmed as a brand fails to deliver on its promises and does not gain returns on brand identity investments (Erdem & Swait, 1998:132).

The protection of brand identities is strictly enforced as these symbolic products are visible expressions of the deeper, underlying identity dynamics which relate to a distinct strategic direction, internal culture, values, philosophy, structure, beliefs, ethos and aims which give a certain sense of individuality (Balmer, Fukukawa, & Gray, 2007:5; Caruana, 2008:199). For internal stakeholders then, trust is enhanced when the values held by employees resonate with the brand values communicated to customers (De Chernatony, 2009:103). For this reason, internal brand building, as defined by Vallaster and Lindgreen (2013:297), is “the alignment of a corporation and employees around a brand”. To elaborate, internal branding is aimed at aligning the external and internal stakeholders’ experience of a brand in order to consistently deliver the brand promise. In other words, corporate communication that is consistent with brand image and brand identity will resonate with customers to establish loyal relationships (Van Rekom, Jacobs & Verlegh, 2006:191). Conversely, inconsistencies may offend or alienate customers.
As argued before, expressive brands establish emotional bonds that connect with stakeholders on a personal level (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:111,133,137). Yet, considering that organisations or brands are inanimate objects, it may be rather difficult for humans to form emotional attachments with these abstract concepts. For this reason, human characteristics are assigned to brands, in the form of a brand personality (Aaker, 1996:112). A brand personality, as an element of brand associations, may be perceived and associated with human traits or emotions such as energy or friendliness and human personality dimensions such as reliability and vitality. Brand personalities are typically defined by asking what a brand would be like, do, wear, live or talk about if it were to come alive as a person (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003:143; Keller & Richey, 2006:74). An example is the Corporate Character Scale of Davies, Chun, Da Silva, and Roper (2004:136) which evaluates brand reputation by measuring the dimensions of a brand personality. By using a projective technique, respondents are requested to describe an organisation as a personality comprising seven dimensions, namely (i) agreeableness, (ii) enterprise, (iii) competence, (iv) chic, (v) ruthlessness, (vi) informality and (vii) machismo.

By humanising and animating brands as brand personalities, as argued in the seminal work by Fournier (1998:344) and reinforced by Fournier and Alvarez (2012:177), consumers relate to enlivened brands as legitimate relationship partners. Therefore, consumer-relationship bonds represent real-life relationship stages such as initiation, maintenance and destruction. Likewise, relationships with enlivened brands satisfy psychosocial identity functions such as social integration, self-worth and image reassurance. To illustrate, a typical consumer-relationship can be described as a ‘committed partnership’ which is characterised by trust and love in a commitment that outlasts adverse circumstances whereby relationship transgressions are more likely forgiven (Fournier, 1998:365).

Emotions such as love and passion are regarded as the foundation for all strong brand relationships (Fournier, 1998:365). Similarly, in the seminal work by Roberts (2005:105), prominent iconic brands are equated to lovemarks, which are “created by emotional connections with consumers in ways that to beyond rational arguments and benefits”. As such, brands embody human characteristics and are built on loyal relationships which are founded on love. Consequently, individuals who own lovemarks express their love for brands by being brand advocates, accelerating word-of-mouth, publishing fan content online and actively engage with or defend brands online. As such, Roberts (2005) defines emotional branding as an affective, relational, story-driven approach to establishing strong and passionate bonds with consumers.
To enhance the emotional appeal of corporate communication messages, emotional branding is a valuable consideration for social media strategists. Emotional branding differs from traditional marketing’s straightforward benefit-driven strategic brand management messaging by rather telling emotionally appealing stories that captivate and inspire consumers (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:52). As such, emotional branding is generally interpreted within a post-modern paradigm. Emotional branding is defined in a study by Rossiter and Bellman (2012:291) “the consumer’s attachment of a strong, specific, usage-relevant emotion - such as Bonding, Companionship, or Love - to the brand”. As such, the study found, that resonance or the feeling that the brand “fits my ‘self-image’”, is a key attachment-like emotion established in emotional branding.

A psychological bond, also described as a strong attitudinal attachment or expressed ‘love’ for a brand as one of their favourite possessions is a characteristic of brand resonance (Keller, 2001:15; 2009:144; 2012:186). The accumulative outcome of the brand equity of strong brands is brand resonance, which is regarded as the most valuable brand-building block to achieve, once all other branding goals have been achieved (Keller, 2001:iv,10; 2009:143). To clarify, strong attitudinal attachments and active engagements to establish a sense of community, form the foundation for brand resonance. Accordingly, Keller (2001:15; 2009:144; 2012:186; 2016:5) defines brand resonance as “an intense, active loyalty relationship”. Correspondingly, brand loyalty or relationship attachments are attained when brand associations resonate with customers (Ambler et al, 2002:16).

Brand resonance is further described by Keller (2001:15; 2009:144) as “the nature of the relationships that customers have with the brand and the extent to which they feel that they are ‘in synch’ with the brand”. To attain brand resonance, consumer experiences need to meet or surpass expectations. Moreover, brand resonance is enhanced by delivering on promises and expectations by strengthening relationships or attachments with stakeholders (Keller, 2009:152). As such, brand resonance implies loyalty expressed by investing resources to actively engage with a brand online and offline, especially through social media, and sharing brand experiences in likeminded communities (Keller, 2001:15,21; 2009:143,149). Strong attitudinal attachments and active engagements to establish a sense of community, form the foundation for brand resonance (Keller, 2001:15; 2009:144; 2012:186; 2016:5). Committed partnerships with brand personalities imply that consumer relationships with brands are co-created (Fournier & Alvarez, 2012:179). Correspondingly, the social construction of brand value occurs when consumers are no longer passive targets of corporate communication messages (Arvidsson, 2005:242). Likewise, Diamond et al (2009:119) maintain that powerful,
emotionally resonant brands are produced by “multiple creators authoring multiple representations in multiple venues”.

2.4.1. An emotionally resonant brand reputation as a measurable construct that can be managed

The ability to form strong emotional attachments is a deliberately planned for and measurable construct in brand reputation studies, as illustrated in this section. Therefore, an emotionally resonant brand reputation is a measurable construct that can be managed regardless of the fact that reputation is socially constructed during processes outside of management’s direct control. As highlighted by Mintzberg (1978:111,948), strategy is essentially a learning process when keeping in mind that accurate prediction is a fallacy in the complex reality of strategy formation. To manage an emotionally resonant brand reputation then, contingency planning, as well as issues and risk management strategies are essential to mitigate the unpredictable and disruptive environment of social media management.

Reputation is a strategic imperative to remain competitive and achieve business goals and therefore needs to be managed despite criticism that reputation is too much of an amorphous concept to be ‘managed’ as such (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004:369). Notably, Aula and Mantere (2008:210; 2013:342) concur that it is difficult to predict the results of reputation management, as reputation is an accumulation of the opinions and experiences of stakeholders rather than the organisation itself. As such, it is misleading to refer to the concept of reputation ‘management’ per se. Reputation management, therefore, is an indirect process involving initiatives to influence meanings and, as a result, influence reputation which exists within processes of communication (Aula & Mantere, 2013:342). Nevertheless, Roper and Fill (2012:55) maintain that a strategy for managing various stakeholder groups is a prerequisite for reputation management. In other words, reputation management is a deliberate process and a mindset embedded within the organisational culture. Therefore, reputation management implies that reputation can be measured, monitored and managed (Doorley & Garcia, 2006:26).

Reputation management is not a haphazard process (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:260). Given the instant information exchange in a turbulent global economy, reputation management is not a reactive measurement when faced with a reputational crisis, but a strategic, proactive and long-term approach to sustain an organisation’s competitive advantage (Shamma, 2012:151,163). A study of Fortune’s Most Admired Companies by Fombrun and Shanley (1990:254) concluded that top ranking organisations’ long-standing reputations may quickly change as a result of short-term actions, whether accidental or intentional. It may therefore be
fair to say that even deliberate and planned reputation management strategies may have unintentional results.

When managing reputation, a reputation management plan or strategy is required to manage reputation assets and risks or liabilities (Doorley & Garcia, 2006:26). Before continuing the discussion on reputation management, it is first necessary to define and unpack risk management and related concepts of strategy.

- **Management** is defined by Capon (2008:175) as a concern for “the achievement of objectives via the efforts of other people in an organisational structure with defined roles, using resources and control systems to achieve the outcomes required for success.” However, Drucker (1998) warns against outdated assumptions that regard management’s function as “running the business” by being mainly internally focused instead of also considering the external environment. Another outdated assumption is that people are managed. Rather, one leads people (Drucker, 1998). Similarly, Miles (2012:8) defines management as “the individuals in organisations who guide and direct the actions of others to accomplish organisational goals”.

- **Strategy** is defined by Aula and Mantere (2008:4) as “matching the competencies of the organisation to its environment”. Mintzberg (1978:111,948) challenges normative techniques of strategic planning which involves systematic analysis, planning and scheduling. Instead, strategy making is a learning process, and accurate prediction is a fallacy considering the complex reality of strategy formation. As such, Mintzberg (1994:108) defines strategies as the result of the messy process of informal learning that may freely appear at any time at any organisation level by those deeply involved with the issues at hand.

- **Issues management** is defined by Pang, Jin and Cameron (2010:44) as the proactive process of creating strategic plans or making behavioural changes in order to address emerging issues. The systematic process involves predicting problems, anticipating threats, minimising surprises, resolving issues, and preventing crises. As such, the proactive phase of issues management involves the development of a crisis plan, should an issue escalate into a crisis. Similarly, issues management is defined by Carroll and Buchholtz (2015:149) as a process involving the identification of issues in the stakeholder environment, prioritising issues, response planning to issues and, lastly, monitoring and evaluating results. Stated differently, issues management “is a clash for legitimacy (and power)” as described by Heath and Palenchar (2009:10). Issues management is the function of the corporate communication strategist as a member of the top management team, whereby strategic issues that have a bearing on organisational goals are prioritised, anticipated and resolved in order to meet stakeholder expectations (Steyn, 2002:59). To
clarify, an issue is defined as “an unsettled matter which is ready for decision” (Chase, 1984:38); or as “situations that present matters of concern to organisations” (Smith, 2009:23). A more suitable definition of an issue is “a gap between what stakeholders expect and what the firm is doing” which then evokes differences of opinion, public debate and controversy which management needs to resolve. (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2015:152).

Related to issues management is scenario planning. Scenarios are defined by Fahey (2003:7) as “descriptive narratives of plausible alternative projections of a specific part of the future”. Accordingly, scenario planning prepares senior managers for anticipated futures during strategy formulation so that possible courses of action can be devised.

- **Risk management** is defined as “the process of identifying, controlling, and minimising the impact of uncertain events in an organisation” according to Smith (2009:23). Risk management then involves the foreseeing and proactive planning for scenarios that may harm reputation in order to either “take, treat, transfer or terminate the risk” (Sapriel, 2003:3). As such, the existence of any threat to an organisation’s reputation, also called a reputation risk, is defined by Aula (2010:43) as “the possibility or danger of losing one’s reputation”. Stated differently, risks are possible threats that may harm an organisation and contingency planning is required to mitigate risks identified (Gregory, 2010:136). As a result, risk communication entails the conveying of threats or dangers to stakeholders with the aim of forestalling damage and to continue communicating to stakeholders when a risk is identified or until a risk escalates into a crisis (Pang, Jin & Cameron, 2010:44). As such, “reputation risk management should begin before, and not after, reputation crises” (Aula, 2010:46,48). In other words, the difference between an issue and a risk is that an issue already exists while a risk is a potential issue that has the likelihood of occurring in the future (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2015:148). Typically, when an issue reaches a critical stage, a crisis state is reached.

- **Crisis communication** is defined by Pang, Jin and Cameron (2010:44) as the implementation of a crisis management plan to meet the needs of stakeholders affected by a crisis. A crisis, as defined by Sapriel (2003:1), is “an event, revelation, allegation or set of circumstances which threatens the integrity, reputation, or survival of an individual or organisation”. Similarly, a definition of a crisis is provided by Coombs (2007a:2) as “the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organisation’s performance and generate negative comments”. Correspondingly, any danger or threat to an organisation related to functions of reputation, risk or issues may trigger a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2012:409).

Ideally, crisis mitigation entails a response to early warning signs and contingency planning which define problem areas where crises could occur (Heath & Palenchar,
2009:285). Once issues are identified, strategic planning involves preventative measures to avoid threats and risks, to manage issues and to mitigate the likelihood of a crisis. As such, a contingency plan is proactive strategic and tactical measures in order to be prepared for the unexpected (Gregory, 2010:135). Strategic level contingency planning address unforeseen scenarios such as reputational threats, while tactical level contingency planning involves the consideration of short term actions to take in case unforeseen incidents occur. Contingency planning for crises is not limited to the corporate communication function, but is also integrated with an organisation’s risk management function (Coombs, 2007a:15) and issues management (Sapriel, 2003:2).

Despite ongoing management efforts to manage reputation, stakeholder perceptions are easily swayed (Smith, Smith & Wang, 2010:201) by a vast array of information sources that organisations have to compete with and have no direct control over (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004:369; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990:234; Grunig & Grunig, 2011:12; Sen, 2010:260). Due to informational asymmetry (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990:234) “the organisation is merely one voice among many reputational narrators”, as articulated by Aula and Mantere (2013:342). As such, Angelopulo (2013:43) points out that organisations may initiate conversations with stakeholders but cannot control these conversations, hence the need for integrated communication, as discussed in Section 2.2.2. The result is that reputation is managed indirectly by influencing the behaviour of management as well as the quality of relationships between organisations and their stakeholders (Grunig & Grunig, 2011:12). As such, a key factor in successful reputation management is sound stakeholder relationships (Aula & Mantere, 2013:342). Reputation is therefore influenced by the types of exchanges with an organisation or the stake that stakeholder groups have in an organisation at a certain point in time (Aula & Mantere, 2013:342; Cornelissen, 2011:8; Puncheva, 2008:276).

Considering how several factors influence the manner in which reputation is established, the ability to manage emotionally resonant brand reputations remains a challenge. Stakeholders may either believe in a positive or a negative image of an organisation depending on the origin and reliability of information received (Nguyen, Leclerc & LeBlanc, 2013:99). Correspondingly, brand associations comprise a complex combination of feelings, ideas and attitudes which may or may not be accurate or relevant to a particular brand (Gardner & Levy, 1955:35). In the absence of their own direct experiences with a brand, stakeholders mainly rely on a variety of information sources, such as word-of-mouth and advertising, to construct an image of a brand (Nguyen, Leclerc & LeBlanc, 2013:99).
The ability to manage emotionally resonant brand reputations is a challenge, considering that a particular reputation held by stakeholders and their perceptions of reality are not always rational or accurate (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:2). Notably, Gardner and Levy (1955:36) raise the concern that consumer beliefs and attitudes, whether accurate or not, are not usually modified rapidly, not easily swayed by communication and not completely malleable. In other words, reputations are sometimes constructed in ways that management is not aware of. For this reason, managers need to be aware of both the intended and unintended emotional impact of brands on consumer communities (Sen, 2010:260). Non-rational decisions tend to be emotional and easily influenced by rumours and the reputations of other information sources such as journalists, well-known analysts, experts, friends, advertisements or other organisations (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:3).

Another factor that challenges the ability to manage an emotionally resonant brand reputation is the fact that no single reputation (Caruana, 2008:201; Smith, 2009:37) exists for a brand. Rather, as each stakeholder group holds a different image of a brand, reputation is inconsistent and varies according to stakeholder group assessments. Stated differently, an organisation may have several different images as customers, employees or investors may have varying viewpoints (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004:369). Likewise, a study by Caruana and Chircop (2000:55) concludes that an organisation does not hold a single reputation, but that different publics view reputation differently as distinct publics consider different attributes of an organisation. Similar conclusions were reached in a study by Shamma and Hassan (2009:334) who maintain that different sources of knowledge for different stakeholder groups drive their different perceptions about corporate reputation. As such, the study found that personal experience is the main driver of customers’ perceptions about reputation, while the mass media is the main driver of the general public's perceptions about reputation. In the same manner, Power, Scheytt, Soin and Sahlin (2009:309) argue that reputation is a communicative construct beyond the direct control of management and is often entrenched in external media-friendly sources such as reputational ranking and rating approaches. These widely-publicised ranking approaches are discussed below.

When comparing prominent surveys of the top ranking reputations, it is evident that the measure of reputation depends on the sample selected. To illustrate, several international and local studies measure the most valuable brands (Brand Finance, 2015) and the most loved brands (Ask Afrika Icon Brands, 2015, 2013/14) and brands with the best online reputation on social media (Africa Brand Index, 2015). In brief, their methodologies are as follows:

- **The Reputation RepTrak Pulse** (Reputation Institute, 2013; 2014a, 2015a) is based on the Reputation Institute’s Reputation Quotient score. The RepTrak Framework forms the
basis for an annual global, multi-stakeholder Reputation RepTrak Pulse survey. At the centre of the model is an emotional connection, or pulse, which comprises four emotional dimensions, namely: esteem, admiration, trust and feeling. In turn, emotional dimensions are related to the perceptions of seven rational dimensions, namely: products/services, innovation, workplace, citizenship, governance, leadership, and performance. The local survey ranks the top corporate reputations based on a random, representative sample of 10 000 respondents from the general public, inclusive of all demographics. The study focused on establishing the reputation, or emotional connection, of companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) and other large firms. The international equivalent (Reputation Institute, 2014b, 2015b) surveys a representative sample of 61,000 interviews in 15 countries.

- The annual **Ask Afrika Icon Brands** (Ask Afrika Icon Brands, 2014, 2015) is said to be an indicator of reputation as it indicates the most loved and favourite brands. The largest of its kind locally, the study surveys 15 000 local consumers in communities bigger than 8 000 residents, which represents over 21 million adult consumers of all demographical profiles.

- The annual **Sunday Times top brands** awards survey a representative sample of 3 433 consumer perceptions from the general population and a further 300 business decision makers in South Africa (Times Media, 2015:4). Questions establish the most favourite brands locally by measuring the brand’s relative advantage as well as presence in the market (Times Media, 2014, 2015).

- The **Brand Finance most valuable brands survey** calculates reputation in terms of the total financial value of respective brands according to a proprietary formula to establish the strength, risk and future potential of a brand relative to its competitors (Brand Finance, 2015).

- **Interbrand** (2014, 2015) calculates the financial value of global brands which is tied to their reputation, according to an extensive list of specified criteria.

- **Africa Brand Index** measures the brands with the best online reputation on social media (Africa Brand Index, 2015); a proprietary algorithm is used across Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram according to a variety of metrics, including sentiment, engagement, reach and growth. Launched in 2015, ORM partners, Ornico and Fuseware, made data publically available of 500 African brands with their official social media profiles which are updated monthly.

To compare the differences between the abovementioned surveys, Table 2.1 and Table 2.2 below summarise the differences between the ten most reputable and most valuable brands in South Africa and globally in 2014 and 2015, as cited in the respective studies.
TABLE 2.1: Differences between the ten most reputable and most valuable brands in 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global RepTrak Pulse survey</th>
<th>South Africa RepTrak Pulse survey</th>
<th>Ask Afrika Icon Brands</th>
<th>Sunday Times top brands survey</th>
<th>Africa Brand Index for social media</th>
<th>Brand Finance survey, South Africa</th>
<th>Interbrand global survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. BMW Group</td>
<td>Woolworths</td>
<td>All Gold</td>
<td>Koo</td>
<td>SuperSport</td>
<td>MTN</td>
<td>Apple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Google</td>
<td>Pick ‘n Pay</td>
<td>Huletts sugar</td>
<td>Coca Cola</td>
<td>Expresso Show</td>
<td>Vodacom</td>
<td>Google</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Daimler</td>
<td>Shoprite</td>
<td>All Gold tomato sauce</td>
<td>KFC</td>
<td>Pick ‘n Pay</td>
<td>Sasol</td>
<td>Coca Cola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Rolex</td>
<td>MTN</td>
<td>Coca Cola</td>
<td>Shoprite</td>
<td>DHL Africa</td>
<td>Standard Bank</td>
<td>Microsoft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Lego</td>
<td>Mister Price</td>
<td>McCain</td>
<td>Clover</td>
<td>Idols SA</td>
<td>FNB</td>
<td>IBM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Disney</td>
<td>FNB</td>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>Lucky Star</td>
<td>Mercedes-Benz SA</td>
<td>Woolworths</td>
<td>Toyota</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Canon</td>
<td>Vodacom</td>
<td>Bostik</td>
<td>Samsung</td>
<td>Vodacom</td>
<td>Nedbank</td>
<td>Samsung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Apple</td>
<td>Spar</td>
<td>Nokia</td>
<td>Tastic</td>
<td>Ford SA</td>
<td>Absa</td>
<td>General Electric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Sony</td>
<td>Standard Bank</td>
<td>KFC</td>
<td>Sunlight dish washing liquid</td>
<td>Woolworths</td>
<td>Investec</td>
<td>McDonalds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Intel</td>
<td>Capitec Bank</td>
<td>Mugg &amp; Bean</td>
<td>Eskort</td>
<td>MTN SA</td>
<td>Mediclinic</td>
<td>Amazon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 2.2: Differences between the ten most reputable and most valuable brands in 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global RepTrak Pulse survey</th>
<th>South Africa RepTrak Pulse survey</th>
<th>Ask Afrika Icon Brands</th>
<th>Sunday Times top brands survey</th>
<th>Africa Brand Index for social media</th>
<th>Brand Finance survey, South Africa</th>
<th>Interbrand global survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Disney and Google</td>
<td>Woolworths</td>
<td>All Gold tomato sauce</td>
<td>Coca Cola</td>
<td>Not available in 2014</td>
<td>MTN</td>
<td>Apple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. BMW and Rolex</td>
<td>Standard Bank</td>
<td>Koo baked beans</td>
<td>Koo</td>
<td>Sasol</td>
<td>Google</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sony</td>
<td>Spar</td>
<td>Huletts sugar</td>
<td>KFC</td>
<td>Vodacom</td>
<td>Coca Cola</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Canon</td>
<td>Pick ‘n Pay</td>
<td>Albany bread</td>
<td>Shoprite</td>
<td>Standard Bank</td>
<td>IBM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Apple</td>
<td>MTN</td>
<td>Coca Cola</td>
<td>Tastic</td>
<td>Absa</td>
<td>Microsoft</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Daimler</td>
<td>Vodacom</td>
<td>Sunlight dish washing liquid</td>
<td>Nokia</td>
<td>Nedbank</td>
<td>General Electric</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Lego</td>
<td>Sasol</td>
<td>Robertson’s spices</td>
<td>Lucky Star</td>
<td>FNB</td>
<td>Samsung</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Microsoft and Samsung</td>
<td>Absa</td>
<td>Nokia</td>
<td>Clover</td>
<td>Mediclinic</td>
<td>Toyota</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Volkswagen and Intel</td>
<td>Shoprite</td>
<td>Tastic</td>
<td>SABC 1</td>
<td>Investec</td>
<td>McDonalds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Adidas</td>
<td>Old Mutual</td>
<td>Black Cat peanut butter</td>
<td>Samsung</td>
<td>Woolworths</td>
<td>Mercedes-Benz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As illustrated in Table 2.1 and Table 2.2 above, it is evident that brand reputation is not fixed and tends to vary somewhat from year to year. Moreover, differences indicate that reputation ranking surveys vary significantly according to the methodology used and the sample surveyed. Interestingly, prominent local brands such as Woolworths, Vodacom and MTN consistently ranked prominently as the most reputable brands and financially most valuable, regardless of the stakeholders consulted and methodology used. These three also enjoy a prominent online reputation on social media. However, none of these feature in the Sunday Times top brands survey or Ask Afrika Icon Brands as the most loved brands. From the comparison above, it is also evident that local brands have a stronger reputation amongst South Africans, compared to global brands. Of these, Coca Cola is the only prominent brand ranked as a financially valuable global brand in the Interbrand survey, the Sunday Times top brands survey or Ask Afrika Icon Brands as the most loved brands two years in a row.

From the comparison above, it is also evident that local brands have a stronger reputation amongst South Africans, compared to global brands. It therefore confirms the claims made in literature that reputation varies according to stakeholder group assessments that all value different attributes of an organisation and that reputation, is inconsistent over time (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004:369; Caruana, 2008:201; Caruana & Chircop, 2000:55; Shamma & Hassan; 2009:334; Smith, 2009:37). To conclude then, owing to the fluctuating survey ranking tendencies of top ranking brand reputations, reputation cannot be haphazardly attended to but needs to be earned and managed continuously as business environments change, according to Fombrun and Van Riel (2004:260). In other words, the ability to form strong emotional attachments is a deliberately planned for and measurable construct in brand reputation studies.

2.5. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the first (i) aim of this chapter was achieved in a critical discussion of how the disruptive (Quinn-Allan, 2012:47) principles of social media necessitates a change in the rules of traditional reputation management and branding (Jones, Temperley & Lima, 2009:928). A more suitable approach then is strategic reputation management (Aula & Mantere, 2013:343) that is cognisant of the principles of social media whereby the co-creation of meaning occurs in a process of dialogue with stakeholders on social networks. During co-creation, both meaning making and reputation are co-managed between brands and stakeholders (Jones, Temperley & Lima, 2009:931,935; Veloutsou, 2008:299). In the process, the second (ii) aim of the chapter was achieved by motivating why collaborative many-to-many engagements are
best suited for integrated communication, considering its philosophy entrenched in collaboration, openness, shared values, flexibility and accountability (Smith, 2012a:606).

The third (iii) aim of the chapter was achieved in a critical discussion of how integrated communication consistently express strong psychological bonds, love and affection which are co-created in mutually beneficial relationships so that resonant reputations are defended by brand advocates when criticized in complex, antagonistic environments. More specifically, emotionally appealing stories strengthen relationships with brand personalities. Consequently, strong attitudinal attachments and active engagements to establish a sense of community form the foundation for brand resonance (Keller, 2001:15; 2009:144; 2012:186; 2016:5) or expressiveness (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:86,96) and are indicative of reputations that resonate emotionally with stakeholders in complex, antagonistic environments.

The last and fourth (iv) aim of the chapter was achieved by emphasising how the ability to form strong emotional attachments is a deliberately planned for and measurable construct in brand reputation studies. Therefore, an emotionally resonant brand reputation is a measurable construct that can be managed, regardless of the fact that reputation is socially constructed during processes outside of management’s direct control. To reiterate, reputation management remains a deliberate and planned process despite criticism that reputation is too much of an amorphous concept to be ‘managed’ as such (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004:369).

Recognising that reputation is socially constructed, the subsequent chapter elaborates on the governing principles of social media to consider when co-creating reputations in antagonistic social media communities. Therefore, Chapter 3 argues that adherence to these principles may help to establish brand reputations that resonate emotionally with social media communities, considering the disruptive nature of social media.
CHAPTER 3

OPTIMISING BRAND REPUTATION TO RESONATE WITH CRITICAL SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNITIES

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The argument already introduced in the previous chapter is that the many-to-many, dialogic and rather antagonistic environment of social media disrupt relationships between management and stakeholders (Nitins & Burgess, 2014:293). In this antagonistic environment, strategic reputation management (Aula, 2010:46; Aula & Mantere, 2013:340) mitigates the risks engendered by reputation that arise from co-created relationships on converged media channels, while integrated communication aligns brand and reputation (Doorley & Garcia, 2006:260). Therefore, the first aim of this chapter is to (i) explore how social media management teams may optimise reputation that resonates with critical social media communities by emphasising the governing principles of social media that are founded on the technological capabilities of Web 2.0. Correspondingly, the second aim (ii) of this chapter is to describe how online reputation management (ORM) essentially gathers strategic insights from metrics and analytics to monitor, manage and measure the resonance of social media management. In addition to resonance, key social media metrics comprise sentiment, visibility, impact, reach and engagement.

A third aim of the chapter is to (iii) elaborate on the participation levels of social media users, ranging from passive lurkers to highly active angry critics which are typified by paracrisis such as hating, flaming, ranting and trolling, which intensify reputational risks. As such, a fourth aim of the chapter is to (iv) define and unpack the various paracrisis response strategies of Coombs and Holladay (2012:412). Finally, as paracrisis response strategies mitigate reputational risks, the fifth (v) aim of the chapter is to critically discuss requirements for a responsive social media governance framework to proactively lower the risks of social media management while safeguarding an emotionally resonant brand reputation.

3.2. ONLINE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT (ORM) ACROSS EARNED, OWNED AND PAID MEDIA

ORM involves a combination of public relations, search engine optimisation and web analytics which allow brands to track online reputation in real time which, in turn, inform their digital and social media strategies (Schiller, 2010:1). To clarify, Goldsborough (2012:16) defines online reputation management as the process of creating a good impression online by tracking online conversations, creating positive content, maintaining honesty and responding to both negative and positive comments. Similarly, online reputation is defined by Jones, Temperley and Lima (2009:934) as “the process of positioning, monitoring, measuring, talking and listening as the
organisation engages in a transparent and ethical dialogue with its various on-line stakeholders”. Correspondingly a digital reputation is defined by Hearn (2010:429) as the measureable value assigned to a social media user’s total social impact which incorporates all their digital activities. Likewise, Stokes (2011:20) defines online reputation management as “the understanding and influencing of the perception of an entity online. This entails ensuring that you know what is being said about you, and that you are leading the conversation”.

In order to gain a strategic advantage from social media metrics, or units of measurement, social media management teams incorporate a variety of suitable social media analytics software services and tools that enable management to listen, track, monitor and analyse social media engagement (Cowlett, 2011:31; Gillette, 2012: 22; Hardey, 2011:13; Jones, Temperley & Lima, 2009:934; Murtland, 2010:15; Postman, 2009:140; Stokes, 2011:20,33). In other words, an appropriate reputation system is selected to measure and analyse return on investment as indicated in key performance indicators or business objectives (Stokes, 2011:33). Stated differently, ORM establishes how earned, owned and paid media resonate with audiences across channels and platforms to ascertain return on investment (Interbrand, 2012:12; Kumar & Singh, 2014: 346; Lieb, Groopman & Etlinger, 2014:10; Stokes, 2011:488). Resonance, as a metric for effective social media management, is the culmination of metrics such as influence, reach and conversations that indicate relevance and reach to establish the extent to which social media users are influenced (Act-On, 2013:1; Solis & Webber, 2012:10) as indicated in Table 3.1 below. To describe the remainder of the metrics, Table 3.1 below incorporates industry-wide standards for social media measurement set by prominent professional associations globally (SMMStandards Conclave, 2013; SMMStandards Coalition, 2013).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Standards for ORM measurement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentions</td>
<td>The organisation, brand, entity or campaign that is being measured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impressions</td>
<td>The gross number of times that content was potentially viewed by all social media users.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>The interaction between social media users. Engagement is the response to content on an owned channel in the form of engaging with a social media user. Engagement counts actions such as shares, votes, likes, comments, retweets, video views and content embeds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentiment</td>
<td>The feelings being conveyed in a particular context which may be favourable or negative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>A judgement or view being expressed which may be favourable or negative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>A level of expressed persuasion in support of or to recommend a policy or cause. Advocacy is therefore a call to action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>The effect of social media management initiatives on the target audience based on strategic objectives. In other words, impact measures return on investment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>The usefulness, importance or worth of social media management based on strategic objectives and return on investment. Value may be expressed in terms of increased customer retention, attracting new customers, comparative cost savings and increase in sales.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Influence
The ability to contribute to change behavior or opinion. This involves the identification and measurement of key influencers which are determined by their personal persuasiveness, audience impact, relevance to a topic, size and centrality to a social network, reach and frequency of communication.

Resonance
The culmination of influence, reach and conversations that indicate relevance and reach (Act-On, 2013:1; Solis & Webber, 2012:10). Resonance measures the rate, duration, and level of interactivity around a topic, content, or conversations. Resonance therefore indicates the extent to which social media users are influenced.

Reach
The total number of unique social media users who had an opportunity to view content.

Conversations
Both online and offline discussions that are relevant to a brand. Conversation counts actions such as comments, tweets, replies, video posts and blog posts.

As illustrated in Table 3.1 above, Social media metrics and standards for ORM measurement comprise the tracking and analysis of several units of measurement as outlined by the SMMStandards Coalition (2013) and the SMMStandards Conclave (2013). Ultimately, resonance is the culmination of relevance and reach (Act-On, 2013:1; Solis & Webber, 2012:10) which is determined by influence, reach and conversations.

ORM enables the identification of consumer trends, insights and market intelligence (MGI, 2012:3,8). To this end, Murtland (2010:15) recommends the use of discovery, text-mining and visualisation technologies to identify significant trends and issues so that brands maintain their competitive advantage. Listening to conversations available in a constant stream of real-time data enables management to maintain flexible strategies as they are able to identify potential risks, track conversations, evaluate and adjust messages (Cowlett, 2011:33). Yet, the speed and immediacy of the social web imply that management have very little time to reflect on or to indulge in strategic planning, that traditionally consumes a considerable amount of time (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007:17; Gaines-Ross, 2010:73; Interbrand, 2012:15; Sederevićute & Valentini, 2011:222; World Wide Worx & Fuseware, 2013:3).

A concern for ORM is the over-reliance of so-called vanity metrics whereby a large number of fans, likes or tweets are the only metrics for effectiveness (Shonfeld, 2011), whereas more meaningful metrics such as impact and value are overlooked (Beshore, 2013; Stokes, 2011:33). When analysed in isolation, vanity metrics exclude key metrics such as engagement, active users, the cost of acquiring new customers and business profits and revenues (Shonfeld, 2011). In other words, vanity metrics neglect to report on the achievement of key performance indicators to more accurately reflect the value created (Beshore, 2013). It is therefore not surprising that McGriff (2012:52) expresses concern over the fact that managers are finding it difficult to leverage social media technology integration. Back in 2013, a local study by World Wide Worx and Fuseware (2013) concluded that most social media
management teams rely on unsophisticated vanity metrics and are still learning how to embrace social media and therefore, to derive business return on investment. Similarly, a study by Lawton Communications Group (2013,ii) concluded that many brands focus on so-called vanity metrics instead of analysing impact and value. Likewise, two years later, a study by Killian and McManus (2015:10) concludes that the strategic integration of social media is still in its infancy, especially considering the plethora of ever-evolving social technologies, issues and platforms. Similarly, a study by Altimeter (Terpening, Li & Akhtar, 2015:6) concluded that 52% of social media management teams indicated that they need to establish metrics to demonstrate the value of social business, despite social media management having reached considerable levels of maturity.

To reiterate, online reputation is indicative of a brand’s search engine ranking, the number of mentions received, as well as the amount of entries in search results (Jones, Temperley & Lima, 2009:931). Therefore, search engine rankings are influenced by search engine optimisation. Search engine optimisation (SEO) is defined by Bothma and Gopaul (2015:98) as activities to achieve a preferred ranking on the organic search engine results page by making it easy for search engine algorithms to locate a brand’s website. Similarly, Fatima, Luca and Wilson (2014:445) define SEO as techniques to get web pages ranked by search engines to increase accurate results when using search engines to locate data from an extensive repository of web pages on the internet. Similarly, within the context of social media management, SEO is defined by the Institute for Public Relations (IPR, 2013:28) as “a method that allows outputs on the social media to be optimized such that they appear frequently when key word searches are conducted”. In other words, web pages are discoverable and easy to index by search engine algorithm software, called spiders or bots (Bothma & Gopaul, 2015:103; Cutts, 2006; Fatima, Luca & Wilson, 2014:445; Hussien, 2014:28). A combination of several factors affect search engine ranking and need to be considered when optimising a web page, including social media accounts, for priority indexing in search engines:

- **Popularity of web pages:** Popular pages draw many visitors by having many external pages citing links to a particular page, which improves search engine ranking (Bothma & Gopaul, 2015:103; Cutts, 2006; Fatima, Luca & Wilson, 2014:445; Hussien, 2014:28). Likewise, social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, have their own algorithms to determine the preference given to popular organic content. On Twitter (2015), popular tweets engaging wide audiences are displayed as so-called “top tweets” in search results. Similarly, the algorithm of Facebook (2015), favours popular organic content as opposed to displaying brand pages’ commercial content in users’ newsfeeds. However, the algorithms of social networks remain contentious as changes to the visibility of organic content is constantly changing and therefore news feed optimisation remains a challenge for social media management teams (Barrett, 2016; Bell, 2016; DeMers, 2016).
• **The relevance of a webpage to a search engine query**: When users type in search phrases, the pages that contain words most relevant to matching search queries will appear first in search results (Bothma & Gopaul, 2015:103; Cutts, 2006; Fatima, Luca & Wilson, 2014:445; Hussien, 2014:28).

• **The authority of a web page**: Older domains are regarded as more trustworthy and therefore more authoritative. Webpages are more search engine friendly and discoverable when they are cited by inbound links or external pages that are popular and authoritative (Bothma & Gopaul, 2015:103; Cutts, 2006; Fatima, Luca & Wilson, 2014:445; Hussien, 2014:28).

As mentioned before, listening hold advantages for ORM, as Stokes (2011:414) states that loyalty is enhanced, which in turn facilitates the creation of social media brand ambassadors. On the contrary, when turning a deaf ear, brands may soon experience social media users' vocal resentment. Therefore, social media management teams that excel in ORM, publish superior content, achieve business return on investment for money spent on social media management, actively engage with stakeholders and achieve brand leadership (Jones, Temperley & Lima, 2009:929).

### 3.3. WEB 2.0 AS THE TECHNOLOGICAL PLATFORM FOR INTERACTIVE, PEER-TO-PEER, MANY-TO-MANY ENGAGEMENTS IN SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNITIES

Web 2.0 is described by Murugesan (2007:34) as both a technology paradigm and a usage paradigm that includes business strategies, technologies and social trends. More specifically, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:61) regard Web 2.0 as the platform for the evolution of social media. As such, in the seminal text by O’Reilly (2007:17) Web 2.0 is defined as follows:

> “Web 2.0 is the network as platform, spanning all connected devices; Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an ‘architecture of participation’, and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences.”

Synonymous terms used to describe Web 2.0 are the participative web, the people-centric web, the read/write web and the wisdom web (Murugesan, 2007:34; Raffl, 2008:86) as well as the social web (Evans, 2010:4). A brief introduction of the Web 2.0 principles and features relevant for this study are provided below:

• **Collaboration and content curation**: Web 2.0 is the aggregated organic output of the collective activity of all web users (O’Reilly, 2007:22,24) who continuously create and publish content in a collaborative, participatory manner (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:61).
Through filtering existing content by linking to content, adding comments, providing additional context and resources, or by aggregating content, it is also known as content curation (P2P Foundation, 2012:92; Wilkins, 2013:22). Content curation is defined by Evans (2010:17) as “the act of sorting and filtering, rating, reviewing, commenting on, tagging or otherwise describing content”. Simply stated, content curation is the process of highlighting content that a social community values (Evans, 2010:175).

- **Tagging, social indexing and folksonomies** (O'Reilly, 2007:23): As opposed to using taxonomies, folksonomies comprise keywords created by users to tag content, users collaboratively categorise content. The statistical analysis of folksonomies is presented in tag clouds which visually distinguish popularity levels of tags (Murugesan, 2007:34; Rollett, Lux, Strohmaier & Dosinger, 2007:90). As folksonomies do not comprise the controlled vocabularies of taxonomies, tags and keywords respond quickly to illustrate changing trends and popular topics being discussed as users categorise content (Murugesan, 2007:37). As such, folksonomies are synonymous with social indexing (Postman, 2009:173). When many internet users comment about a subject, tag a topic or aggregate information about a subject, it becomes a trending topic which is updated in real time (Huang, Thornton & Ethimiadis, 2010:1; Kwak, Lee, Park & Moon, 2010:1; Zubiaga, Spina, Fresno & Martínez, 2011:2461).

- **Trust in non-commercial, transparent peer-to-peer production** (O'Reilly, 2007:25,30): Content is freely created by peers in a collaborative and transparent process which is more trustworthy compared to content produced in a commercial, closed and controlled environment. As more devices are connected, they not only consume data but also report data. Therefore, easy-to-use, low barriers of entry allow any user to voice their opinions and share content as a citizen journalist, broadcaster, critic, reviewer, publisher or public performer (George & Scerri, 2007:3; Gibbon & Hawkes, 2008:3; Stokes, 2011:334). Regardless of a user’s expertise, anyone is welcome to make a useful contribution with the result that contributors enjoy a shared ownership of the products generated (Bruns & Bahnisch, 2009:5).

- **Organic virality** (O'Reilly, 2007:25): Users recommend content to one another organically as opposed to relying on paid advertising to generate awareness and the adoption of ideas. Therefore, the term viral is used to denote how content spreads quickly and organically from one internet user to another by means of sharing with their connections or friends (O'Reilly, 2007:25; Postman, 2009:181), which is equated to word-of-mouth (Barwise & Meehan, 2010:84; Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009:7; Roberts, 2009:9; Ross, 2012:25) or word-of-mouse (Kaikati & Kaikati, 2004:9). Another definition by viral content marketing experts, Buzzfeed (2015) states that “posts go viral when they get
traffic from elsewhere on the web - being shared, searched for, and linked to from the internet at large”.

- **Remixability and hackability** (O’Reilly, 2007:32): Web 2.0 facilitates creative reuse and modifications due to flexible web design when integrating data from different sources (Murugesan, 2007:35). A remix is defined as “a work created from one or more pre-existing works such as music, photos, videos or computer games” (Merges, 2007:1259). In the process, pre-existing works are adapted, distributed, traded and commented on.


It is necessary to distinguish between two related concepts, namely social networking and social media. As explained by Kligienė and Rapečka (2011:34), social media facilitate social networking. Stokes (2011:354) defines social networking as the reliance on software to create and sustain communities of people who share in one another’s interests and activities. Likewise, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:63) define social networking sites as “applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending emails and instant messages between each other”. Similarly, social networking sites are defined as “Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system”, according to Boyd and Ellison (2007:211).

A social network is synonymous with a social graph, which is defined by Evans (2010:288) as the people who are members of a particular network, or graph, which indicates how these members are connected to one another, typically in a pattern or map of relationships depicted in a graphic. In other words, social networking describes how members are bound together on a particular network. On the other hand, social media refers to user-generated content being published, often in a social network. Stated differently, a social graph depicts how individuals in virtual communities are linked to one another on social networks when content is discussed, shared and relationships are formed (Stoica, Pitic & Cristescu, 2015:368).

### 3.3.1. The extent of the social media management landscape

Around 40%, just over three billion, of the world’s population had internet access (Internet Live Stats, 2015a) in 2015. At the time, the South African population count was 53 139 528, which implied that almost half (46.88%) of South Africa’s population had internet access. Compared to the rest of the world, South Africa was ranked the 24th largest user-base which represented
a mere 0.85% of internet users globally. In contrast to developed countries, where internet penetration has stabilised for almost entire populations, in South Africa, internet access was still catching up (Internet Live Stats, 2015a). Locally, there were 24 909 854 internet users with an increase of 24% in access between 2014 and 2015 (Internet Live Stats, 2015a). Increased internet access, especially in urban areas, is largely accelerated by the roll-out of the national broadband policy called South Africa Connect, published in 2013 (Macharia, 2014; Perry, 2015; South African Government, 2013). Yet, owing to the fast changing nature of social media platforms, technologies, applications and connectivity rates, user data and trends fluctuate continuously (Accenture, 2012; Alexa, 2013; Blue Magnet Digital Solutions, 2013; Duggan & Brenner, 2012; Fuseware, 2010:19; Hattingh, Russo, Sun-Basorun & Van Wamelen, 2012; Interbrand, 2012; Lawton Communications Group, 2013; Nielsen, 2011, 2012b; Portland Communications, 2012; Technorati Media, 2013; TNS, 2012; World Wide Worx & Fuseware, 2013).

For the purpose of this study, it suffices to say that by 2015, 65% of adults in the USA were using social networking sites, which is almost a tenfold increase over the ten years, according to a study by the Pew Research Centre (Perrin, 2015). Of these, the five most popular sites are Facebook (71%), LinkedIn (28%), Pinterest (28%), Instagram (26%) and Twitter (23%). After China, the USA is ranked the second largest in terms of internet access where 279 834 232 people, 86.75% of the population, has internet access (Internet Live Stats, 2015a). According to a local study by World Wide Worx and Fuseware (2015), the most popular social networking sites in South Africa at the time of this study were Facebook (13-million users), of which 77% accessed Facebook on mobile devices. Second most popular was YouTube (7,2-million users), followed by Twitter (6,6-million users), MXit (4,9-million users), LinkedIn (3,8-million users), Instagram (2,68-million users) and Pinterest (840 000 users). Moreover, 95% of South Africa's biggest brands used Twitter while 92% used Facebook.

The business return on investment in social media management continues to be somewhat difficult to measure. In 2012, the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI, 2012, ii) found that 70% of brands used social technologies and 90% of the brands that used social technologies reported that the use thereof produced some business benefits. A mere three years later, a follow-up global study concluded that social technologies and social media management was maturing and that adoption has plateaued (MGI, 2015). As such, social media has become prominently integrated into public relations (57%), customer-relationship-management (53%), marketing activities (53%) and developing customer insights/competitive intelligence (50%). Likewise, a study by Altimeter (Terpening, Li & Akhtar, 2015:9,12) concluded that social media management has reached maturity and has become prominently integrated in corporate
communication and customer service. As such, cross-functional integration on social media strategies involves the five most ranked disciplines, namely marketing (69%), public relations (59%), digital (56%), advertising (56%) and customer support (27%). A subsequent global study by Moorman (2015:36) concludes that the allocation for social media spend in marketing budgets has significantly increased, as 9.9% was spent on social media management in 2015 while and expenditure of 22.4% was anticipated for the next five years.

Similarly, a global study by the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI, 2015) found that 71% of corporate communication teams expect budgets allocated to social media to increase in the next three years, compared to 58% the year before. Back in 2013, a study found that most organisations were still learning how to embrace social media, as only 19% indicated that they derived business value from social media management (World Wide Worx and Fuseware, 2013).

One year later, a study by the Global Alliance (2014:4) concluded that the biggest challenge for integrated communication in South Africa was to rethink its business models in order to derive strategic value and return on investment for digital expenditure. Similarly, one year later, in a global study by the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI, 2015), most executives reported very limited return on investment for social media management as they found it difficult to measure the potential value and impact of social media technologies on business. Correspondingly, only 32% of businesses had quantitative social metrics in place to assess the impact of social media management. Likewise, a study by Altimeter (Terpening, Li & Akhtar, 2015:4) concluded that despite the maturity of social media management, fully integrated and cohesive strategies are still lacking, as the breaking down of functional silos remain a challenge in complex teams facing rapidly evolving and multi-faceted social media platforms.

Integrated strategies that require the breaking down of functional silos is evident in content marketing. Content marketing is defined by the Content Marketing Institute (2013) as “a marketing technique of creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience – with the objective of driving profitable customer action”. Similarly, Solomon (2013:8) defines content marketing as “the process of creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire and engage a target audience”. Correspondingly, a study by Altimeter (Terpening, Li & Akhtar, 2015:4) found that 38% of social media management teams increase budgets allocated to social media advertising. Of these, 20% of advertising budgets were allocated to social media advertising in 2015 compared to 13% in 2014. Locally, 51% of brands indicated that they are
increasing their social media budgets and that content marketing has become a significant focus area in South Africa (World Wide Worx & Fuseware, 2015).

A global study by IPG Media Lab and Google (2015:4) found that 44% of professionals expected to increase their content marketing budgets to produce branded content. Only two years earlier, 20.5% of professionals already expected to increase their budgets to between $2 000 and $4 999 – around R20 000 to R49 000 – per month on content marketing, according to a study by Copy Press (2013:4). Locally, a study by World Wide Worx and Fuseware (2015) concluded that 73% of brands will increase their budgets on content marketing, followed by 60% of brands that will spend more money on multimedia content.

It is evident that content marketing relies on a complex set of resources to create and supply the need for valuable branded content. According to a study by the Custom Content Council (2012:7), 56% of companies outsourced a portion of at least one type of branded content creation in 2012. In South Africa, a study by World Wide Worx and Fuseware (2013:2), established that 16% of organisations outsource social media management to agencies. A subsequent study by Moorman (2015:41) concludes that organisations are increasingly outsourcing social media activities to agencies, increasing from 17.4% in 2014 to 18.8% in 2015. Similarly, a study by Killian and McManus (2015:10) concluded that brand management is typically equally divided between digital agencies that provide specialised social media services, and traditional advertising agencies. The result of a dual-agency approach is a lack of cross-agency integration and consistency, which then necessitates management to maintain strong relationships and cross-agency collaboration.

A study by the Global Alliance (2014:42) concluded that South African agencies and clients are experiencing a loss of trust as a consequence of agencies playing a diminishing role as mere executers of client strategies, agencies’ lack of accountability, skills shortages to keep abreast of new social media technologies, poor quality service and delivering measurable return on investment. As a result, the study suggests, agencies may need to adapt their organisational structures and enhance strategic partnerships with clients to be mutually accountable for brands in order to strategically manage earned media and owned media.

### 3.3.2. User-generated content participation levels and the prevalence of lurkers and critics

As discussed in the previous section, branded content is paid media. In contrast, user-generated content is typically organically created earned media. Before explaining the extent of user-generated content participation, several definitions are explored. User-generated content is defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
(OECD:2007:4) as content which is created outside of professional practices and routines, publicly available on the internet and requires a certain amount of creative effort. Similarly, Trosow, Burkell, Dyer-Witheford, McKenzie, McNally, Whippey and Wong (2010:10) define user-generated content as “content that is voluntarily developed by an individual or a consortium and distributed through an online platform”. In yet another definition, Gervais (2010:465) articulates that user-generated content is “content that is created using tools specific to the online environment and/or disseminated using such tools”. Typically, user-generated content includes original or remixed music, videos, photos, text and content created in virtual communities (OECD, 2007:15,16).

It is worth noting that there are several motivations for the creation and aggregation of content by ordinary web users considering that the Web 2.0 environment is inherently social, as opposed to a commercially driven environment. Typically, Bruns and Bahnisch (2009:5) identify egocentric needs, community needs, personal satisfaction and social rewards as motivators for social media engagement. Other motivators are pleasure and intellectual stimulation that are derived from sharing knowledge and opinions (MGI, 2012:13). Expecting to receive no remuneration for contributions, motivators for user-generated content include the achievement of prestige or fame, connecting with peers, and self-expression (OECD, 2007:4).

A significant outcome of collaborative publishing platforms such as wikis is that contributors trust the environment and work together towards the collective goal of the common good rather than remuneration as principal concern (Bowman & Willis, 2003:19, 44). In fact, the P2P Foundation (2012:21) maintains that the social impact of collaboration whereby users have become ‘produsers’ of something which their peers find valuable, is a stronger driver of participation than monetary accumulation. Similarly, Gibbon and Hawkes (2008:3) identify sharing as the underlying need of users to feel acknowledged by others for what they can contribute towards common goals while being members of a collective.

Having discussed the importance of non-commercial motivators of earned media, the extent of web users’ activity levels in social communities will now be discussed. As such, metrics such as influence, engagement, conversations and reach indicate the resonance for ORM as already explained in Table 3.1. Forrester Research ranks a Social Technographics score (Bernoff, 2010:3; Li, 2007:5) that categorises and segments the use of online behaviour of consumers into a ladder with seven levels of participation or metrics, of which the seventh and final level indicates the most sophisticated level of involvement, as summarised in Table 3.2 below.
TABLE 3.2: User-generated content activity levels in 2010 as adapted from Bernoff (2010:3) and Li (2007:5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Profile</th>
<th>% of users</th>
<th>Description of activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most influential</td>
<td>Creators</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>Publish user-generated content such as blogs, web pages, music, articles or videos at least once per month.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conversationalists</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>Post tweets on Twitter and other status updates on social networking sites at least once per week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critics</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>Offer their expertise by posting reviews and ratings about products or services on sites like Amazon, commenting on blogs, participating in online forums or contributing to a wiki.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collectors</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Organise, aggregate and share information by using social bookmarking sites, RSS feeds, tagging web content or voting for content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least influential</td>
<td>Joiners</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>Visit social networking sites and maintain profiles on social networking sites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spectators</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>The audiences who read blogs, online forum discussions, customer reviews and tweets, watch videos and listen to podcasts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inactives</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>Internet users who neither create nor read user-generated content nor social networking sites.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As illustrated in Table 3.2 above, a proportionately small fraction of user-generated content is created by highly active social media users who have the most influence. Similar findings were reported in a related study of a typology of social networking users in Norway by Brandtzaeg and Heim (2011:41), as indicated in Table 3.3 below.

TABLE 3.3: User-generated content activity levels in 2011 as adapted from Brandtzaeg and Heim (2011:41)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Profile</th>
<th>% of users</th>
<th>Description of activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most influential</td>
<td>Actives</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>The most frequent and active users who are actively engaged all social network functions to engage, socialise, upload content and debate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Debaters</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>Actively engage, upload content, mainly to discuss and debate topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Socialisers</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Mainly engage in small talk with family and friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lurkers</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>Do not contribute or interact, but passively consume information, mostly just to pass the time and find personally relevant information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least influential</td>
<td>Sporadics</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>The least frequent and occasional use of social networks, mainly to see if they have been contacted by someone.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar to the abovementioned levels of user-generated content engagement levels illustrated in Table 3.3, Forrester Research’s Social Technographics score (Elliott & Strohmenger, 2014) was updated to reflect the maturity of social media management. A typology of social networking users’ participation levels in 2014 is illustrated in Table 3.4 below.
TABLE 3.4: Typology of social networking users’ sentiment and engagement levels in 2014 adapted from Elliott and Strohmenger (2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Profile</th>
<th>% of users</th>
<th>Description of sentiment and engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most sceptical</td>
<td>Social Stars</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>Relatively receptive to corporate communication messages and aspire to own top brands. Demand brand engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Savvies</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Social technologies are part of everyday life. Expect brand engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Snackers</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>Infrequently seek brand engagement which they appreciate. Relatively low brand consciousness and somewhat passive attitudes towards brands on social media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Skippers</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>Spurn brand engagement, disdain for brands and sceptical about corporate communication messages. Passive social media users who prefer traditional media channels and interpersonal engagement in real-life environments such as retail stores.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is evident that Table 3.4 confirms the findings of preceding studies illustrating user-generated content activity levels. Notably, the vast majority of users are rather inactive as lurkers or spectators of user-generated content and the brand’s official social media content. Similarly, a significant percentage of social media users are critical towards social media management.

The participation inequality of the internet highlights the fact that the vast majority of users - 90% - are ‘lurkers’ who passively read or observe online content without contributing. Only 9% of online users are occasional ‘contributors’ to some degree and a mere 1% of online users are ‘superusers’ who produce most of the user-generated content online. This phenomenon whereby 90% of online user-generated posts are generated by 1% of users, is called the 90-9-1 principle or the 1% rule of participation, according to a study by Nielsen (Nielsen, 1997; 2009) and is subsequently verified in related studies by Carron-Arthur, Cunningham and Griffiths (2014), and Van Mierlo (2014) amongst others. To illustrate, nearly 320 million monthly active users on Twitter are active, whereas a further 500 million are passive Twitter users (Trefis, 2015a; 2015b).

Considering the ability of highly engaged social media users to influence public opinion, and consequently reputation, Sedereviciute and Valentini (2011:232) propose a holistic stakeholder mapping model, based on the power and influence associated with social media users. Power and influence are determined by the number of social media users’ connections which, in turn, determine their visibility in a network. From the least to the most influential stakeholders, these comprise:

- **Unconcerned lurkers**: non-stakeholders who have no connections in a network and express no interest in a brand.
- **Concerned lurkers**: create content about a brand, but they are not very powerful as they do not have a central position in the network.
• **Unconcerned influencers:** dormant stakeholders who are powerful, given the high number of connections in a network; however, they do not express an interest in the brand.

• **Concerned influencers:** the most powerful stakeholders, as they are highly visible in a network, display many connections and share content which targets the brand.

Given the plethora of content published on social networks, it is increasingly difficult for social media management teams to publish content that is valuable, relevant, consistent and resonate with communities (Lieb, Silva & Tran, 2013:3; Mildenhall, 2011; Pulizzi, 2012a:116; 2012b:20). Likewise, Keller and Fay (2012:459) highlight the need to publish brand-related content that encourage word of mouth sharing in order to extend the reach of messages and generate implicit consumer endorsement to enhance credibility and impact. Correspondingly, competition between brands to supply memorable and noticeable content is increasing (Hipwell & Reeves, 2013:66), hence the emphasis on content marketing.

The value of effective content has become equal to the value of the products and services that brands provide (Lawton Communications Group, 2013,ii). In order to attract and retain customers, content marketing implies that brands have, in fact, come to resemble the qualities of media companies where the marketing departments have become publishing entities that compete with traditional media for audience attention, concludes Pulizzi (2012a:116, 119; 2012b:21). As a result, brands cultivate passionate content subscribers as opposed to fleeting vanity metrics such as likes, followers and fans on social media platforms.

As audiences have become desensitised to the noise created by social media, it is becoming increasingly difficult for social media management teams to create branded content that resonates with communities, is emotionally appealing and, ultimately, engaging as confirmed by recent studies (Havas Media & Crowd Emotion, 2015; Track Maven, 2015:3). To illustrate, it is found that branded content engagement decreased by 60% between 2013 and 2014 compared to an increase of 78% in branded content in that period (Track Maven, 2015:3). Less than 20% of sponsored brand content, which all contained visual imagery, is ignored on social media (Havas Media & Crowd Emotion; 2015). As such, the study found that branded content that tend to evoke the most emotional responses, contain linkbait about stories that are regarded as cute, offensive, shocking and amusing.

Linkbait is defined by Cutts (2006) as “something interesting enough to catch people’s attention”, typically by content that is creative, eye-catching, entertaining, controversial and/or generate high levels of discussion. Linkbait, synonymously used with clickbait, is a term originally used by SEO specialists to describe the advantages of compelling content that encourage incoming links to boost search engine rankings (Clark, 2006; Cutts, 2006). Linkbait is also effectively used by many websites, including traditional media websites of newspapers such as the Washington Post, and in to increase viral social sharing and internet traffic to its
website (Ingram, 2015; Konnikova, 2014). Websites such as Buzzfeed and Upworthy, are regarded as prime examples of the effective use of sensational linkbait headings in their viral content marketing strategies, although they are also criticized for the excessive use thereof (Konnikova, 2014; Smith, 2014; Thompson, 2013). Describing the requirements for viral content that are emotionally appealing and search engine optimised, Buzzfeed (2015) outlines the following: (i) intriguing, comprehensible and engaging headlines, (ii) relevant content that is topical and current in pop culture, (iii) humorous and unique angles on culturally relevant topics, (iv) provocative thumbnail images, (v) descriptive, yet succinct introductions to support headlines and links, (vi) content presented in the form of lists of facts, (vii) social bookmarking, (viii) frequent posts on social networks, (iv) tagging content, and, (ix) quizzes.

As indicated earlier, the prevalence of lurkers and critics creates an antagonistic environment towards social media management. Therefore, it is argued that content marketing overcomes scepticism by means of telling emotionally resonant stories. Content marketing differs from advertising, which typically interrupts the viewer experience (Hipwell & Reeves, 2013:63). More effectively, content marketing creates emotionally resonating messages, hence the emphasis on brand storytelling (Handley, 2013:67; Solomon, 2013:8). As explained by Keller and Fay, (2012:463): “Stories are how emotions are best conveyed; people like to share stories”. In another comparison between advertising and brand storytelling on social media platforms offered by Hipwell and Reeves (2013:68), emotive storytelling involves a narrative structure of connected sequences of events which is too complex to fit into the space or time limits of traditional broadcast or print advertising. Content marketing is synonymous with brand storytelling, custom media, branded content, custom publishing and brand journalism that does not rely on third-party credibility of journalists to produce engaging content (Pulizzi, 2012b:20).

Synonymous with content marketing and brand storytelling is content PR (Meranus & Serouya, 2013; Skerik, 2013:8). Content PR integrates public relations’ objectives to influence opinion, enhance visibility and measure results with content marketing objectives (Skerik, 2013:8). As stated by Dennison and Borgstede (2012:5), public relations practitioners are already experienced brand storytellers and may employ content PR to complement traditional public relations tactics. Increasingly, content marketing teams employ journalists who have traditional media experience and storytelling backgrounds as content marketing directors, managing editors and in-house journalists or brand journalists in order to execute the content marketing strategies (Handley, 2013:66; Lopresti, 2013:10; Pulizzi, 2012b:20). At the same time, other titles are emerging in the content team, such as the Chief Storyteller or Chief Content Officer, who is a senior executive responsible for managing the content strategy (Pulizzi, 2012a:121; 2012b:21; Reid, 2013:25). Consequently, the influence of journalism in
branded content is evident in the use of terms such as editorial strategy and editorial calendar, as discussed in Section 3.6.

3.4. OPTIMISING THE PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO CO-CREATE BRAND REPUTATIONS THAT RESONATE WITH COMMUNITIES

Social media management engagements that are embedded in the governing principles of social media tend to resonate with communities (Fournier & Avery, 2011:32). Strategies that optimise the principles of social media enhance resonance, which in turn, increases engagement, reach, influence and sentiment (Stokes, 2011:488). When adapting to the conversational environment of Web 2.0, Barwise and Meehan (2010:84) note that the social media management strategists and teams need to acquire the necessary expertise to feel naturally “at home with the culture and rules of each social network” in order to be accepted by the community. These rules are not written down but conversations are typically semi-structured and collaboratively moderated by social community members themselves.

Available literature is abundant with descriptions of the governing principles of social media which serve to explain the typical norms and practises of social media communities. To illustrate, Doorley and Garcia (2006:116) identify five broad characteristics of social media, namely authenticity, transparency, decentralisation of authority, speed and collaboration. Similarly, Postman (2009:8) identifies six attributes of social media, namely authenticity, transparency, immediacy, participation, connectedness and accountability. Likewise, Gibbon and Hawkes (2008) identify five key attributes of social media, namely content, sharing, conversation, openness and interaction. Moreover, Ang (2011:34) proposes that social media relationship management relies on a 4Cs model, namely connectivity, conversations, content creation and collaboration. Additionally, Kietzmann et al (2011:243) proposes a framework of seven functional building blocks of social media usage, namely identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, groups and reputation. Notably, most of the principles underscore the collaborative nature of reputation as a social construct in peer-to-peer networks, as introduced in Chapter One. Based on the most pertinent principles of social media identified above, six governing principles are subsequently discussed.

3.4.1. Interactivity, engagement and conversations

The first principles of social media are interactivity, engagement and conversations. Considering that audiences are no longer passive consumers of media content, there is no longer a barrier between ‘us’ as the organisation and ‘them’, referring to the consumers (Gibbon & Hawkes, 2008:2). The shift in power from the organisation to the consumers, who are no longer passive observers in the marketplace, imply that they are actively shaping and
defining the business landscape by creating and sharing personal stories, emotions and opinions about organisations, services, products and brands (Blackshaw, 2011:108).

Empowered and active audiences choose which content to consume, the relationships they want to engage in and the information they want to access (Gibbon & Hawkes, 2008:2; Landsbergen, 2010:244). Empowered consumers want to exercise control over the flow of media in their lives and be allowed to talk back to mass media content (Jenkins, 2004:37). Correspondingly, the power of social media lies in its two-way, interactive qualities, according to Landsbergen (2010:244), which is more empowering to users compared to traditional media’s one-way, broadcasting communication model. In particular, the intermediation of the traditional mass media has become almost redundant, as stakeholders and organisations are able to talk directly to each other (Estanyol, 2012:834; P2P Foundation, 2012:21; Solomon, 2013:8). Correspondingly, disintermediation is defined by Kerin, Hartley and Rudelius (2013:389) as bypassing intermediaries to buy or sell products directly. Similarly, O’Shaughnessy and Stadler (2012:123) define disintermediation as the process “to bypass intermediaries, such as publishers and distributors, in order to transmit media directly from the creator to the consumer via self-publishing tools and techniques”. In the process, audiences are drawn away from traditional media to a user-centric model of consumption (Daugherty, Eastin & Bright, 2008:21). Consequently, social media content is driven by a pull economy where demand is the main driver of economic development which has replaced the supply-driven push economy of traditional media (P2P Foundation, 2012:21).

The downside of the pull economy is information overload, which Benkler (2006:12) calls the Babel objection, a phenomenon where anyone can speak, but as a result, nobody is really heard. Likewise, a study by Chandler Chicco Companies (Alexander & Atkins, 2015:7) found that only a third of social media users exposed to brand criticism actually notice and digest the information. However, as they then share the criticism with their friends, it is difficult to truly ascertain the true impact of online content. Whereas traditional media exposes audiences to opposing points of view and give audiences a broader perspective of the world, Laidlaw (2012:37) argues that online sources of information enhance the fragmentation of discourse and community. Instead of encouraging public debate, online audiences tend to gravitate towards blogs, forums and websites where like-minded people congregate, in order to reinforce their worldviews. As Benkler (2006:128) concurs, internet users tend to overcome information overload by restricting their access to information sources based on what others recommend, such as trending topics and Google search engine suggestions based on frequently visited websites.
The complex, participatory characteristic of the digital communication landscape provides networked users with increased opportunities to engage in public speech, to access information and to undertake collective action (Feeney, 2011:14). Accordingly, Alqudsi-ghabra (2012:147) observes how digital technologies inform, educate, empower and mobilise masses of people. For example, during Hurricane Sandy in the USA in 2012 (Dewey, 2012), social media was the main channel for real-time reporting, keeping informed and rallying recovery operations. Similarly, social media collaboration was fundamental in raising money during the Haiti earthquake in 2010 (Pepitone, 2010). Stated differently, user-generated content signifies a democratic model of production and distribution whereby power is shared between producers and consumers of content, according to Trosow et al (2010:8). Likewise, Landsbergen (2010:246) maintains that social media is a catalyst for social and digital inclusion, and thereby political inclusion. Moreover, Druick (2009:306) observes that audiences are increasingly disappointed with the inability of traditional media to facilitate public debate and serve the public interest (Tryon, 2008:210; Tufekci, 2013:849). Hence, renewed hope is placed in the internet, and social media in particular, as a medium for reinvigorating public debate where anyone, even those whose opinions which had previously been silenced, can engage in conversations with one another and as well as with those in authority (Benkler, 2006:12; Chen, 2013:43; Kietzmann et al, 2011:244; Laidlaw, 2012:40; Levine, Locke, Searls, & Weinberger, 1999).

As social media technologies facilitate democratic approaches to public relations addressing matters of public interest, Quinn-Allan (2012:47) highlights the fact that a change in industry values are necessitated, which reinforces the rejection of asymmetry as the preferred position in relationship-building. For this reason, the interactive characteristic of social media challenges conventional reputation management, as highlighted by Aula (2010:45), considering that stakeholders are active participants in the social construction of reputation. Correspondingly, the social media management team is advised to surrender outdated practises whereby control over public opinion and debate is sought (Bruns, 2003:3; Cowlett, 2011:33; Daugherty, Eastin & Bright, 2008:21; Jenkins, 2004:37; Murugesan, 2007:37; Pavitt, 2012:24; Quinn-Allan, 2012:47; Stokes, 2011:361; Terblanche, 2011:166). In other words, public relations practitioners cannot merely dump messages in an asymmetrical manner on social media communities, as is commonly practised when relying on traditional media channels (Grunig, 2009:1).

Literature suggests that storytelling in social media communities, both by users and by social media management teams (Stokes, 2011:28), is a manifestation of the internet's envisaged dialogical potential (Postman, 2009:5), as outlined in the Cluetrain Manifesto. As such, the Cluetrain Manifesto (Levine et al, 1999) states, as the first of 95 theses, that 'markets are
conversations' which refer to direct, two-way conversations between organisations and stakeholders on the internet, that were not possible when traditional mass media was the dominant channel for businesses to reach their markets.

For social media management teams then, a key aspect of engagement is dialogue, whereby two-way conversations are maintained directly with stakeholders in order to nurture relationships (Murtland, 2010:15; Ryan & Leong, 2007:4). Similarly, interactions with brands define relationships with stakeholders to establish trust and mutual benefit or value (Lieb et al, 2012:11). Correspondingly, listening is a key aspect of engagement, Rowles (2011:3) and Killian and McManus (2015:10) highlight, as humans have an innate need to feel that what they say is important and that others are truly listening and interested in what they say.

3.4.2. Connectivity and collaboration

The second principles of social media engagement are connectivity and collaboration. Connectivity relates to the value of communication networks, which is illustrated by Metcalfe’s Law (Jones, Temperley, & Lima, 2009:928; Tongia & Wilson, 2010:5). As such, Metcalfe’s Law states that the value of a network increases non-linearly as more people join a network (Tongia & Wilson, 2010:5). Stated differently, the value of a telecommunication network is proportional to the square of the number of connected users of the system (n2) (P2P Foundation, 2012:23). Consequently, Metcalfe’s Law illustrates the network effect evident in Web 2.0 applications, whereby the value of a service to a user increases as more people join a network (Hendler & Golbeck, 2008:1). When connectivity increases and the network grows, more people link to one another’s content and the value of the social network rapidly increases for its members (Hendler & Golbeck, 2008:1; Rollett et al, 2007:98).

Also called the wisdom of crowds by Surowiecki (2004:11), the underlying principle is that aggregated content as a result of the network effect is more valuable to users, especially in bringing about change and solving problems, compared to the voice a single individual. A case in point is the protests that erupted in the Arab world in 2011, called the Arab Spring (Alqudsighabra, 2012:147; MGI, 2012:12). Around four years later, South Africa’s equivalent of the Arab Spring was said to be the #FeesMustFall university protests for free education (Letsoalo, 2015; Naidoo, 2015), which are linked to the anti-racism #RhodesMustFall and #RhodesMustFallOxford (Espinoza, 2016; RMFO, 2016) global student protests emerging in 2015. Similarly, the global #BlackLivesMatter movement protested against racism and discrimination (Black Lives Matter, 2016) and is shortlisted as Time Magazine’s 2015 Person of the Year (Altman, 2015). Likewise, #ZumaMustFall protests against government corruption.

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1 Metcalfe’s Law was formulated by electrical engineer and co-inventor of the Ethernet, Bob Metcalfe in the 1980s (Hendler & Golbeck, 2008:1; Jones, Temperley, & Lima, 2009:928)
were largely organised through collaborative social media engagements (Koyana, 2016; Laing, 2015; Shamase, 2015).

As the network effect illustrates the collaborative principle of social media, the latter describes how a specific online destination provides the means to multiple users of contributing cooperatively add value and working together to complete a singular or several projects (Ang, 2011:35). When collaborating, connected users produce, share, consume and respond to content and, in addition, create value when coming together as communities who share a common purpose (P2P Foundation, 2012:23) and values (Bruns & Bahnisch, 2009:27). Correspondingly, the value of social networks is the credibility of and trust placed in connected peers. Rather than an appointed editor being responsible for correcting facts, the collaborative environment of trusted, peer-to-peer networks result in self-correcting processes, similar to academic peer reviews, where users correct one another when inaccuracies arise (Bowman & Willis, 2003:25). Likewise, Aula (2010:46) proposes that social media culminate in presenting a collective truth about an organisation, which is a significant challenge for conventional strategic reputation management. As such, social media users’ subjective truths accumulate to form a collective truth or reputation. However, should undesirable viewpoints remain unanswered or unchecked, the situation becomes difficult to correct.

Instead of relying on corporate communication messages, consumers prefer to consult their network peers and experts who have actually experienced products and services for advice on what to purchase and how much to pay for it (Murtland, 2010:15). Likewise, customers rely less on social media management for customer support as they collaborate and assist one another (Stokes, 2011:374). As explained by Heinonen (2011:360), network peers’ opinions are more reliable and honest, as they do not benefit from recommending a product or service. Some of these trusted peers are considered influencers.

Influence, as an ORM metric, has already been discussed in Section 3.2. According to the Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA, 2013:6), influence is defined as “the ability to cause or contribute to a change in opinion or behaviour”. In the same manner, influential are defined by Watts and Dodds (2007:441) as a small number of individuals who play a significant role in the formation of public opinion as they have influence over a considerable number of their peers. Likewise, an influencer is defined by Solis and Webber (2012:8) as “someone of notable status and focus within a community who possesses the ability to cause effect or change behaviour among those to whom they’re connected”.

Typically, influencers may be bloggers, news commentators, analysts, celebrities (Lieb et al, 2012:12), brand advocates, employees, family members, public relations professionals or business partners (WOMMA, 2013:21). Yet, Edelman (2008) points out that their status as
influencers in social networks are not necessarily determined by professional or academic credentials, but rather by their desire to share knowledge and personal experiences as well as passion for a particular topic. A global study by Initiative (2012:7) concludes that 72% of social influencers read both printed and digital newspapers and magazines at least once a day, while 79% of social influencers use social media more than once a day. Notably, the study finds that 99% of social influencers report that their friends ask their opinion before making an important purchase. As a result of their authority and considerable loyal following by social network users, social influencers’ ability to influence others comprises their strong union with like-minded individuals with whom they maintain meaningful interactions to gain social capital (Solis & Webber, 2012:8). For communication managers, social influencers pose a significant challenge as they contribute to the fragmentation of available media, with the result that corporate communication messages can no longer be assumed to reach the targeted audiences (Murtland, 2010:15).

Recognising the importance of including influencers in stakeholder maps and stakeholder relationship strategies, several authors interchangeably use terms such as influencer outreach (Lawton Communications Group, 2013:42; Ross, 2012:26), influencer relations (Lieb et al, 2012:9; Arthur W. Page Society, 2007:22), influencer engagement (Edelman, 2008) and influencer marketing (Roberts, 2009:3; 2010:16) by the social media management team. Influencer marketing is defined by the Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA, 2013:7) as “the act of a marketer or communicator engaging with key influencers to act upon influencees in pursuit of a business objective”. As such, influencer marketing involves identifying and ranking influencers, communicating marketing messages to influencers, relying on influencers to disseminate marketing messages and persuading influencers to become advocates for the brand (Act-On, 2013:1). Consumers bypass traditional corporate communication channels by rather consulting their social network peers and other influencers who actually use the products and services (Murtland, 2010:15).

According to a study by Technorati Media (2013:11,31), 65% of brands participate in influencer marketing, while 70% of influencers receive less than 10 requests in a week from brands who would like to collaborate with them. The primary reasons cited for collaborating with a brand is affinity to the brand (68%) and the opportunity for the influencer to gain access to a brand’s audience on social media platforms (61%). In contrast to the aforementioned findings of Technorati Media (2013:11,31), a study of 130 social strategists by Lieb, Silva and Tran (2013:3) concludes that merely 27% of responders indicate that their top external social media strategy involves an influencer relations programme. It therefore seems that influencer marketing is practised with various degrees of success.
Although powerful influencers are characterised by a large, engaged following on social networks, they typically only account for a fifth of the online population and are therefore disproportionately responsible for four-fifths of online impressions (Lieb et al., 2012:12). As such, this relatively small number of social media users’ opinions draw considerate attention on the social web. Already, the 1% rule of participation was discussed in Section 3.3.2.

Influencer relations strategies target a selected few to amplify word of mouth messages instead of engaging with the masses (Roberts, 2009:9). When influencers perform the role of brand advocates, their opinions are more authentic and trusted by their network peers, compared to messages originating from marketers (Act-On, 2013:1; Initiative, 2012:7, Lieb et al., 2012:12; Roberts, 2010:17; Technorati Media, 2013:4). In so doing, a brand borrows the social capital from the influencer to appear desirable and approachable to their followers (Solis & Webber, 2012:8).

In an ideal scenario, an influencer not only amplifies the brand message (Lieb et al., 2012:12), but also has the potential to instigate the viral distribution of content, depending on the influencer’s reputation, extent of social network connections, what they say about a brand and the content being shared (Solis & Webber, 2012:5). The organic, word-of-mouth viral sharing of content is enhanced by the fact that the opinions of peers are more trusted and credible than mass marketing efforts (Keller & Fay, 2012:459; P2P Foundation, 2012:21; Roy, 2015).

Influencers are typically active on a variety of social media platforms where they are capable of changing the opinion of sizable audiences. Influencer marketing studies (RhythmOne, 2015:11; Roy, 2015; Technorati Media, 2013:19; Tomoson, 2015) conclude that the most effective influencer platforms for earned media are blogs, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. With regard to influencer marketing tactics for earned media, the following are recommended:

- Identifying and establishing relationships with influencers that are relevant to a social media management strategy (Initiative, 2012:7; Lewis PR, 2015:9; RhythmOne, 2015:8; Roberts, 2010:16; Roy, 2015; Solis & Webber, 2012:6).
- Announcing new products or services first and/or exclusively to influencers. This includes product launches (Act-On, 2013:3; Roy, 2015).
- Collaborating with influencers to create content and promote content in order to improve social amplification and search engine optimisation (RhythmOne, 2015:11; Roy, 2015).
- Pre-testing brand campaign messages with influencers (Initiative, 2012:7).
- Providing influencers with freebies (Act-On, 2013:3) and products to give away (RhythmOne, 2015:4).
- Pitching interview opportunities (Act-On, 2013:3).
- The curation of influencer content, making reference to influencers as respected voices in their respective fields and quoting their opinions in brand content (Act-On, 2013:3).
- An industry survey found that only 14% of social media management strategies involve collaborating with influencers to manage crises (Roy, 2015).

Metrics such as reach and influence are benchmarks for popular social media accounts to monetise followers and generate income for an account holder. For a YouTube (2014d) channel, monetisation occurs when the account holder receives payment for advertisements placed on the channel. Alternatively, a YouTube channel may be converted to a paid channel by charging annual subscription fees or receiving an income from paid product placements. On Twitter, for example, influential and popular reality television celebrity, the 18-year old Kendall Jenner, who has millions of Twitter followers, charges $1,000 per tweet for a brand mention (Ornos, 2014).

Influencer marketing studies (Roy, 2015; Technorati Media, 2013:26) conclude that influencers monetise their content by means of the following:
- Earning revenue from producing brand-sponsored content and brand sponsored posts (RhythmOne, 2015:6).
- Being paid to facilitate contests or giveaways; earning revenue from banner advertising.
- Earning revenue from affiliate programmes.
- Producing brand-sponsored product reviews and by posting brand content.

In essence, as pointed out by Wilkins (2013:26), influencer marketing is a social media management strategy which co-creates content to generate earned media.

### 3.4.3. Transparency

The third characteristic of social media engagement is transparency which is synonymous with the characteristic of openness. As such, openness refers to the availability of information to everybody instead of only a privileged class of individuals or selected few such as marketers, product experts or management (Evans, 2010:5). As a result, openness is related to transparency. Accordingly, the open and public nature of social media creates a transparent environment for interactions between organisations and stakeholders (Doorley & Garcia, 2006:116; Evans, 2010:5).

The social media principle of transparency places increased pressure on brands to maintain equitable relationships with their supply chain, customers and employees as those that fail to do so, are easily exposed and scrutinised (Lawton Communications Group, 2013:9). In the process, unfiltered and unprompted information about markets and products are exposed, according to the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI, 2012:8). As such, digitally connected
stakeholders demand to hear everything about brands, the good, the bad and the ugly (Cowlett, 2011:33; Hanna, 2009:26; Stokes, 2011:361). No longer are interactions only visible to departments directly involved with customer service and stakeholder relations, but now everybody has access to interactions that include customer enquiries, product or service discussions, customer dissatisfaction and crises (Doorley & Garcia, 2006:116).

As illustrated in the quote by Pavitt (2012:24), “Organisations can no longer hide behind closed doors, just telling their stakeholders what they think they need to know”. To elaborate, Feeney (2011:13) observes that corporate messages are only one half of the story whereas the other half of the story is being told by information revealed on the social web. As explained by Pavitt (2012:24), the power of corporate communication to control which messages are released to the public has shifted to ordinary citizens who openly discuss brands on the social web. For this reason, press releases are not exclusively available to a select group of journalists, but are now shared and discussed by everyone in social communities (Stokes, 2011:33). Likewise, corporate communicators cannot merely issue media releases that contain promises that contradict the organisations’ actual behaviour, and expect no consequences (Hanna, 2009:26). Critical stakeholders scrutinise statements and are quick to point out contradictions on social networks. All these factors are congruent with the findings of a study among public relations practitioners by Wright and Hinson (2008:11) which concludes that 76% of practitioners agreed that the need for organisational transparency significantly changed the way that organisations communicate with stakeholders when using social media.

Stakeholders’ increased demand for transparency is attributed to the decline of trust in business as corporate scandals are uncovered (Doorley & Garcia, 2006:117; Postman, 2009:9). To illustrate, Edelman’s (2013:12) Trust Barometer indicated that the two major reasons for a global decline in business trust are, firstly, corruption and fraud (27%) and secondly, dubious incentives driving business decisions (23%). Similarly, the two major reasons for a global decline in government trust are, firstly, corruption and fraud (33%) and secondly, poor performance or incompetence (31%).

Whereas trust in both traditional media (Bowman & Willis, 2003:44; Gibbon & Hawkes, 2008:2) and corporate communication are waning, more trust is placed in content shared by social media peers (Act-On, 2013:1; Initiative, 2012:7, Lieb et al, 2012:12; Murtland, 2010:15; Roberts, 2010:17; Technorati Media, 2013:4). A global study by Nielsen (2015:3) concluded that 83% of respondents trusted recommendations from people they know, 66% trusted consumer opinions posted online and, likewise, 66% trusted editorial content from journalists (Nielsen, 2015:3). In total, 70% trusted branded websites and 61% trusted brand sponsorships. These findings are congruent with Edelman’s annual Trust Barometer.
(Edelman, 2013:27; 2016:21). With regard to the most trusted media channels (Edelman, 2016:21), these are ranked as search engines (71%), television (69%) and social media (67%). Comparatively, trust in owned and paid channels is lower compared to earned media. With regard to the least trusted sources of information in Edelman’s (2013:27) Trust Barometer, these are CEO’s (43%), Boards of Directors (44%) (Edelman, 2016:21), as well as government officials or regulators (35%).

Interestingly, in Africa specifically, trust in paid media channels is the second highest, following Latin America (Nielsen, 2015:15). In contrast, European respondents were found to be the most sceptical about advertising. The six most trusted channels in Africa are recommendations from people known to an individual (85%), branded websites (76%), editorial content from journalists (71%), consumer opinions posted online (71%), advertisements on television (70%) and branded sponsorships (73%).

Transparency is a prerequisite for authenticity (Hanna, 2009:26) and the result is that authentic brands are more successful because they are trusted (Faust & Householder, 2009:46; Murtland, 2010:15) as being truthful and open with social communities (Barwise & Meehan, 2010:84; Lawton Communications Group, 2013:9). Owing to the widespread use of social media to openly share internal strategies, policies, processes and challenges, the term radical transparency (Anderson, 2006, Ayling, 2012:505; Thompson, 2007) is preferred. As consumers increasingly trust the word-of-mouth from their social media peers, management has opted for radical transparency to move away from the secrecy of top-down and tightly controlled corporate communication (Anderson, 2006).

Radical transparency is defined by Hart and Sharma (2004:7) as the systematic integration of stakeholders on the fringe, and even non-human stakeholders, to manage disruptive change in competitive business models. Sources indicate that radical transparency was first phrased by Thompson (2007) to describe how organisations should rather be honest and transparent about business challenges and invite stakeholders to partner in solving problems rather than applying spin doctoring to cover up imperfections which, in anyway, would be discovered and shared online. However, Roberts (2012:130) remains sceptical about the actual social change that is brought about as a result of radical transparency, as is evident in whistle-blower website WikiLeaks. Instead, WikiLeaks merely creates an illusion of the breakdown of old-style, pre-digital age secrecy as sanctions against WikiLeaks and the treatment of whistle-blowers are tightened by the US government.

Radical transparency denotes a breakdown in privacy and experiences shared in the open, which is exacerbated by the endless streams of minute-to-minute, around-the-clock, real-time
updates from always-on devices (JWT, 2012:6) also known as a digital footprint (Ayling, 2012:505). An internet user’s data trail, known as a digital footprint or digital reputation (Botsman, 2012; Hearn, 2010:429), comprises all the online posts connected to user’s name online (Madden, Fox, Smith, & Vitak, 2007). Sources of a digital footprint include content posted on social networks, internet profiles created either by an internet user or by an employer and association sites, message board posts, blogs and chats. Stated differently, a digital footprint or digital tattoo (Colfer, 2011) is all the information found about a person when using a search engine such as Google to extract information from different sources (Naish, 2012:6). As a result, the private information of business leaders, public figures and key decision makers on social network profiles need to be professionally managed in order for leaders to retain their credibility, authenticity (Ayling, 2012:505) and reputation (Kane, 2012:7).

Owing to the discoverability of a digital footprint, Terblanche (2011:156) elaborates how damaging user-generated content has an extended life on the social web as users continuously criticize, share, discuss, co-create and modify content which implies that a tarnished reputation may exist infinitively. Consequently, the European Court of Justice (European Commission, 2014) ruled that search engine Google is obliged to remove European complainants’ historical content that is “inadequate, irrelevant or no longer relevant”, known as the right to be forgotten (Manjoo, 2015; Williams, 2015), in order to repair stigmatised digital reputations.

3.4.4. Authenticity

The fourth principle of social media is authenticity. Authenticity is the need for realness and naturalness as opposed to being artificial (Ryan & Leong, 2007:13). Stated differently, authenticity is achieved by social media engagements that are spontaneous, unfiltered (Postman, 2009:8), personal and intimate (Bowman & Willis, 2003:44). As explained by Hanna (2009:26), people want to sense that they are communicating with other humans online. Authenticity is particularly relevant on social networks where people project certain personas and interact with one another as avatars (Cowlett, 2011:32). Instead of interacting with organisations on an impersonal and ‘faceless’ website, social media provides the opportunity for brands to be perceived as a human person who has a reputation, a name and the ability to make a commitment (Landsbergen, 2010:244). For this reason, social media management needs to demonstrate an authentic human tone and voice (Doorley & Garcia, 2006:116; Gibbon & Hawkes, 2008:3; Ryan & Leong, 2007:2,15), be personal and identical to real life, face-to-face conversations (Hanna, 2009:26). Moreover, social media management that is trusted as credible sources need to display an open and honest conversational tone (Murtland,
To reinforce a sense of authenticity then, all employees need to disclose their affiliation when engaging with stakeholders on social networks.

Social media communities have a low tolerance for social media management posts that contain aggressive threats, public relations spin, corporate jargon and legalese (Doorley & Garcia, 2006:116). The reason for this is that user-generated content is viewed as more authentic or ‘closer to home’ compared to advertising and other traditional media content (Lee, 2008:1522). It needs to be borne in mind that social media are not driven by commercial motivations, but the need for organisations that provide something real that users can connect to (Faust & Householder, 2009:46). Often, social media management undermines an authentic brand image by posting too many promotional messages which focus on discounts and vouchers instead of approaching social media as an opportunity to create value for the customer and enhance the brand experience (Interbrand, 2012:5).

Indeed, social media management requires messages that do not resemble the corporate mouthpiece (Gibbon & Hawkes, 2008:3). In so doing, messages are not spoken at people, but spoken to people on the social web, which is one of the most significant shifts from traditional media. While it is easy to brand messages to tell the market what it wants to hear, it may not be successful in the social media environment where users respond positively to messages that are authentic (Faust & Householder, 2009:46). Essentially, stakeholders no longer accept outdated hierarchical cultures and management approaches but demand proof of authenticity instead of organisations acting as ‘the voice of authority’ (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007:27). Often, the result is a conflict between authenticity as a core value of social media and the hidden agendas of marketing messages which are aimed at driving sales (Postman, 2009:9).

A challenge for social media management is the fact that social media users prefer to share interesting content with friends and are not interested in sharing a brand’s advertising messages (Faust & Householder, 2009:46). Consumers in the digital, post-modern age expect brands to be perceived as invented by ordinary people in the street who do not have an instrumental economic agenda (Holt, 2002:83,84), or businesses that are only concerned about profits (Hanna, 2009:26). As a result, modern branding is viewed as inauthentic as brands are invented by specialists and are entrenched in commercial intent (Holt, 2002:83,84). Consumers are overwhelmed by contrived experiences and an abundance of commercial messages that vie for attention; social media users have become more discriminating, preferring brands that they sense to be more genuine and authentic than their competitors (Faust & Householder, 2009:46). Consequently, Holt (2002:85) recommends that effective branding camouflage its aggressive commercial intentions on the social web.
3.4.5. Speed, immediacy and virality

The fifth principle of social media is speed, which is related to the principles of immediacy and virality. Already, virality has already been defined in Section 3.3.

When content spreads quickly online it goes viral and when viral content is adapted and remixed several times, it is known as a meme (Da Silva & Garcia, 2012:94; Wolford, 2011). Tonkin (2008:65,66) defines a meme as a phenomenon comprising popular ideas, words, phrases, jokes, images or videos that are widely distributed amongst online community members. Likewise, Postman (2009:175) defines a meme as “a piece of multimedia content, a phrase or even a form of behaviour that spreads virally through the internet”. Similarly, Leskovec, Backstrom and Kleinberg (2009:497) describe memes as short phrases that “act as signatures of topics and events” that diffuse over the internet involving both social media and traditional media.

The quick and viral distribution of memes is intensified by slacktivism, a neologism that combines the words activism and slacker (Thompson, 2012). In fact, the word slacktivism was on Oxford Dictionaries’ (2014) shortlist for the word of the year in 2014, defined by the dictionary publishers as “actions performed via the Internet in support of a political or social cause but regarded as requiring little time or involvement, e.g. signing an online petition or joining a campaign group on a social media website”. Correspondingly, viral memes such as #IceBucketChallenge, #NoMakeUpSelfie and #BringBackOurGirls implied the mainstream adoption of the word slacktivism.

Whereas activism supports a cause, a slacker avoids responsibility or real effort (Goldsborough, 2011:13). Slacktivism is a rather belittling term (Christensen, 2011) associated with the use of social media to symbolically demonstrate an individual’s support of a social or political cause without physically becoming involved in traditional forms of activism such as attending protests, lobbying, or other forms of internet activism such as hacking – or hacktivism – which requires effort (Christensen, 2011; Penney, 2015:55; Thompson, 2012). Typically, symbolic support for a cause involves signing or liking internet petitions, joining social media communities such as Facebook groups, posting status updates and tweets, re-sharing content such as copying and pasting audio-visuals to raise awareness of an issue, changing profile pictures to demonstrate support for an issue, forwarding emails to others in protest against a brand as a feel-good measure without sacrificing resources to get involved or achieving much practical effect (Christensen, 2011; Gladwell, 2010; Goldsborough, 2011:13; Humphrey, 2013; Penney, 2015:55; Thompson, 2012).
Slacktivism is easy and provides a self-satisfying alternative to traditional, real-life forms of activism (Penney, 2015:55). As such, slacktivism may be a substitute for activism and is also referred to as clicktivism to illustrate how an individual takes little effort and merely clicks a computer mouse to feel good about demonstrating affinity with a cause, taking a stand and creating the feeling that an individual has done their bit (Christensen, 2011; Goldsborough, 2011:13; Humphrey, 2013). Nevertheless, Christensen (2011) maintains that slacktivism is not replacing real-life activism, but rather reinforces off-line activism. Moreover, slacktivism may succeed in increasing awareness of issues and may therefore help to mobilise engagement by individuals and decision-makers. Consequently, it is argued that slacktivists may cause considerable damage to reputation, especially when the message is initiated by organised activist groups who rely on social media to attract attention (Veil, Reno, Freihaut & Oldham, 2015:104). Examples include the #FeesMustFall, #BlackLivesMatter, #RhodesMustFall and #ZumaMustFall hashtags discussed in the previous section.

The virality of content demonstrates the fast speed of social networks. Correspondingly, real-time data available from Internet Live Stats (2015b) counted 7 103 Tweets sent per second, 52 745 Google searches per second and 116 391 YouTube videos viewed per second. As a result of the immediacy of social networks, Postman (2009:10) points out that communication has become more current and relevant. Moreover, Interbrand (2012:5) observes that digital media transformed the concept of time to be experienced as non-linear while simultaneously creating consumers’ expectations of time. As a result, management is expected to respond quickly, appropriately and timely to consumers’ lives and needs.

Corporate communication is faced with the challenge of responding quicker to broker tensions between the real-time content requirements of the Web 2.0 environment on the one hand, while, on the other hand, long-term strategic planning cycles are often only scheduled every quarter or annually (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007:17). Similarly, Gaines-Ross (2010:72) highlights that fact that the immediacy of social media grants business leaders no advance notice or time to reflect. Correspondingly, Bowman and Willis (2003:44) stress the importance of a quick response when interacting with social media users as it creates trust and the perception of reliability. Compared to the instant and rapid spreading of harmful information on social networks (Quinn-Allan, 2012:46), many organisations remain too sluggish and consensus driven to effectively respond in time (Gaines-Ross, 2010:73).

As a result of the speed at which damaging information spreads virally through social networks, Interbrand (2012:15) suggests that the demands on and nature of leadership are changing. For this reason, Gillette (2012:21) advises that CEOs carefully analyse the social and political backgrounds of corporate boardrooms, retail experiences and supply chains to not only identify issues that may potentially trigger a social media backlash but also devise
strategies to diffuse potential reputational repercussions. Especially important is the rapid escalation of unresolved customer complaints which may trigger social media backlash (Killian & McManus, 2015:9). When customer complaints are left unanswered, customers feel ignored and it therefore reflects poorly on the brand (Killian & McManus, 2015:10). A related study confirmed that 52% of Twitter users expect responses from social media management accounts within an hour (Lithium, 2013). Moreover, 60% of Twitter users will take unpleasant actions, such as publically shaming brands, when their complaints are not adequately resolved. A South African study by World Wide Worx and Fuseware (2013:3) determined that the average response time of brands is 271 minutes – just over 4.5 hours – for customer complaints raised on Twitter. Correspondingly, Interbrand (2012:15) observes how the controlling culture of supply-driven management finds it difficult to acquire the necessary focus, clarity and speed to respond to the rapidly-changing demand-driven pull-economy of the digital world. Nevertheless, a study by Killian and McManus (2015:8) concluded that although consumers vent personal frustrations on social media, it also provides valuable ORM insights that may determine whether strategic change is required.

3.4.6. Co-creation

The sixth and last principle of social media is co-creation. The interactive (MGI, 2012:10) principle of social media transforms users into active co-creators of brands instead of merely being passive consumers of brands (Christodoulides, Jevons & Bonhomme, 2012:57). Again, Deighton and Kornfeld (2009:4,8) point out that audiences of communication campaigns co-produce meaning as they interactively engage in communities so that meaning making is created by the consumer. In this manner, the basis of brand value is the meaning-making activities of consumers (Arvidsson, 2005:237).

Notably, when stakeholders interact with one another on their own terms, meaning is co-created outside corporate boundaries (Ind, Iglesias & Schultz, 2013:9). When meaning-making shifts from marketer to consumer, the interactive consumer transforms corporate media usage from traditional broadcasting marketing to what Deighton and Kornfeld (2009:4) describe as participatory, interactive marketing. Similarly, Jones, Temperley and Lima (2009:931) use the term ‘social casting’ to describe how organisations replace traditional corporate broadcasting of messages in an environment where social media users are active participants in meaning making. As such, co-creation recognises that consumers are no longer regarded as malleable passive audiences over which the brand exerts power and control (Roper & Fill, 2012:128). Consequently, a challenge for brand management, according to Arvidsson (2005:244), is to make consumers’ use of the brand coherent with the forms of life that the brand embodies, rather than imposing a certain message, meaning or manner of
relating to a brand. In a co-creative context, brand management is a process whereby the brand is likely to evolve in a particular direction.

Within a branding context, several definitions of co-creation are provided. Bertilsson and Cassinger (2011:412) define co-creation as “the process where exchange value is co-created between firm and consumers” by “setting up brands as platforms that enable consumers to do things”. In another definition by Ind, Iglesias and Schultz (2013:7) co-creation is not simply a place for consumers to interact but “an active, creative and social process based on collaboration between organisations and participants that generates benefits for all and creates value for stakeholders”. Similarly, Zwick, Bonsu and Darmody (2008:184) define co-creation as organisational strategies that give stakeholders the freedom and encouragement to produce knowledge through social relations in a creative common. Stated differently, brand co-creation recognises the value of relationships and interactive dialogue shared in brand communities (Hatch & Schultz, 2010:592).

Recognising that neither the consumers nor managers have complete control over brand meanings, Roper and Fill (2012:128) acknowledge that the co-creation of brands is an emerging paradigm of practise and research to bridge the gap between managerial intent and market response. Again, co-creation as recognised as a new branding paradigm (Hatch & Schultz, 2010:592) or marketing worldview that was first introduced by Vargo and Lusch (2004) as an alternative to the dominant economics logic which emphasises the tangible value of exchange such as manufactured output. Instead, co-creation recognises that intangible resources such as relationships, knowledge and specialised skills service provision result in the co-creation of value.

Whereas wealth is obtained from surplus of tangible resources and goods through the owning, producing and controlling of operand resources in the traditional goods-centred dominant logic, co-creation regards the obtaining of wealth as the continuous application and exchange of specialised knowledge and skills (Vargo & Lusch, 2004:7, 11). Moreover, Zwick, Bonsu and Darmody (2008:184) describe co-creation as the “provision of ambiances that set consumers free to produce and share technical, social and cultural knowledge” through relationships between producers and consumers that are mutually beneficial. In fact, relationships are regarded as more important than the monetary transaction itself. Most importantly, relationship building is not limited to marketing, but all employees are co-creators of value and services (Vargo & Lusch, 2004:14). In fact, Merz, He and Vargo (2009) argue that post-2005, all stakeholders help to co-create brand value, which is determined by their collectively perceived value of a brand as they interact in network relationships with brands.
Co-creation is also synonymous with the term ‘prosumers’ to describe the blurring lines between consumers and producers (Humphreys & Grayson, 2008). As productive agents in the process of brand value creation (Bertilsson & Cassinger, 2011:412), the boundary between the roles of consumers and producers cease to exist, to the extent that the consumer is a co-producer and not an operand resource or ‘target’ (Vargo & Lusch, 2004:11).

Essentially, active consumers who are producing content on the social web are also equated to citizen journalists or so-called ‘consumanagers’ (Jones, Temperley, & Lima, 2009: 935). During the co-creation of brands, consumers and brands collaborate, learn from one another, while brand remain adaptive to customers' dynamic needs (Vargo & Lusch, 2004:6). The result is that outsiders begin to see themselves as insiders (Ind, Iglesias & Schultz, 2013:5). As consumers are made somewhat responsible for shaping the brand, greater brand authenticity is achieved as consumers feel a sense of ownership over that which they have produced (Bertilsson & Cassinger, 2011:415).

As consumanagers influence not only reputation but also future business strategies, they assume the role of co-managers. Consequently, Veloutsou (2008:299) suggests that the co-creation of reputation occurs in digital communities. Similarly, Jones, Temperley and Lima (2009:931,935) maintain that reputation is co-created and co-managed between organisations and stakeholders as reputation is not exclusively the domain of the management team.

Notably, Medeiros and Needham (2008:4) highlight the resistance by large corporations to embrace co-creation as they are frightened of losing control to empowered consumers. In particular, empowered consumers may “run riot” with a brand and tarnish its reputation.

Another concern is the question around intellectual property rights for ideas suggested by empowered consumers which may result in expensive and drawn out litigation processes. Therefore, reputation as a fragile resource can be easily enhanced or damaged by social media (Jones, Temperley & Lima, 2009:931). Similarly, a study by the Global Alliance (2014:42) concluded that co-creation and communication convergence provide new challenges for traditional public relations and reputation management in South Africa which used to rely extensively on paid media. Although earned media is the most trusted, it is also the most difficult to achieve while simultaneously being the most valued for enhancing reputation.
3.5. THE SHIFT FROM TRADITIONAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION TO MITIGATING THE REPUTATIONAL RISKS OF A PARACRISIS

A reputation crisis, as the concept implies, inflicts damage to reputation and includes corporate communication messages that offend stakeholders or is the result of irresponsible management behaviour (Coombs; 2014:3). Therefore, a reputation crisis is different from an operational crisis, as the latter typically involves industrial accidents, product recalls or any other natural disaster that disrupts business operations. A typical reputation crisis is a social media crisis which is defined as a situation that emerges on social media or is amplified on social networks (Coombs; 2014:7).

Prior to the disruption of social media, the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) of Coombs (2007a,b,c) was largely based on response strategies dominated by the one-way monologues of traditional media. Correspondingly, the situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) is a widely recognised approach to traditional crisis communication management and prominently addresses operational crises. As such, the SCCT organises crisis response strategies according to management intent (Coombs, 2007b:139; Coombs & Holladay, 2002:166). To elaborate, the SCCT is defined as “understanding when to use a particular strategy for a specific crisis situation” (Coombs, 2007b:138). As such, SCCT identifies four typical crisis response strategy clusters when management needs to repair reputational damage in a predominantly one-way communication environment, as illustrated in Table 3.5 below.

**TABLE 3.5: Traditional Situational Crisis Communication Theory response strategies. Adapted from Coombs (2007a:140; 2007b:170) and Coombs and Holladay (2002:171).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis response strategy cluster</th>
<th>Management intent</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Denial</strong>&lt;br&gt;Defensive and diminishing strategies.&lt;br&gt;Aims to disconnect any relationship between the crisis and the organisation.</td>
<td>Attack the accuser</td>
<td>Confronting stakeholders who claim that a crisis exists. Threatening to use force, such as litigation, against stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deny</td>
<td>Responding that a crisis does not exist. Explaining why a crisis does not exist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scapegoat</td>
<td>Blaming external forces to be responsible for the crisis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diminishment</strong>&lt;br&gt;Strategy to prioritise organisational interests. Aims to reduce responsibility for the crisis.</td>
<td>Excuse</td>
<td>Minimising the organisation’s responsibility in causing the crisis. Declaring that the causes of the crisis are out of the organisation’s control. Stating that the organisation did not intend to cause any harm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>Minimising the perceived harm associated with the crisis. Declaring that those affected by the crisis deserved what they received. Stating that minimal harm was caused.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rebuilding</strong>&lt;br&gt;Accommodative strategy. Aims to improve reputation. Acknowledging, taking responsibility and/or</td>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>Providing gifts or money to those affected by the crisis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apology</td>
<td>Declaring that the organisation takes full responsibility for the crisis. Asking for forgiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corrective action</td>
<td>Repairing the damage caused by the crisis and/or trying to prevent a repeat of the crisis.</td>
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As is evident in Table 3.5 above, the SCCT aims to match a crisis response strategy with the issue responsible for the crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2002:171). This implies that crises triggered by factors within management’s control require more accommodating responses, such as rebuilding to mitigate a damaged reputation. Correspondingly, management needs to prepare crisis management plans for each relevant cluster.

Interestingly, contingencies will determine the best strategy to follow considering that rebuild strategies may not necessarily hold more reputational benefit compared to the diminish strategy (Coombs, 2007c:170). Considering that overly accommodative strategies are often expensive to implement and may sometimes worsen a situation, managers may rather opt for the “next best” crisis response strategy. It should also be noted that in most cases, the first three clusters in Table 3.5 above are regarded as primary crisis response strategies compared to the last cluster which is regarded as supplemental crisis response strategies (Coombs, 2007c:172).

Owing to the disruptive nature of social media, traditional crisis communication responses are problematic. Subsequent to the publication of the SCCT, Coombs (Coombs, 2014; Coombs & Holladay, 2012:408,410) argues that pre-Web 2.0 crisis communication theory is almost obsolete as it does not fully accommodate disruptive social media principles such as virality, engagement, collaboration and transparency discussed in the previous section. Additional social media risks associated with managing reputation crises include public petitioning against organisations to demand change, social media crises that crossover to traditional media reports, and public scrutiny of official responses.

To elaborate, a study by Chandler Chicco Companies (Alexander & Atkins, 2015:8) identified how a typical conversation by a disgruntled social media user surfaces gently, gathers intensity and escalates quickly as soon as slacktivists, sympathisers and traditional media join the conversation. Once escalated into a crisis, the ensuing social media backlash can last a few hours, or may continue for several days or even weeks as conversations peaks and troughs.

In a related study, Ott and Theunissen (2015) applied Coombs’ SCCT (2007b) and pointed out several shortcomings of conventional crisis communication response strategies when
faced with the interactive, dialogical and uncontrollable principles of social media. Findings recommend that traditional crisis communication tactics and strategies require re-evaluation, as social media management response strategies tend to escalate an existing crisis or, worse even, trigger a viral social media backlash as discussed before.

The constant engagement and criticism of corporate communication responses on social networks may further damage reputation (Coombs, 2014; Coombs & Holladay, 2012:408,410). As a result, brands that do not meet stakeholder expectations of responsible or ethical behaviour face a reputational threat or paracrisis whereby the risks inherent in social media need to be managed.

Considering that a social media crisis poses risks that organisations need to manage in public view, a more suitable term to use is a paracrisis (Coombs; 2014; Coombs & Holladay, 2012:409). A paracrisis is warning sign, a trigger for a crisis, a crisis threat or a situation that could easily escalate into a full blown crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2012:409). Rather, a paracrisis is a form of risk management, since social media make it easy for criticism to quickly escalate into a fully developed reputation crisis (Coombs; 2014:12). Coombs and Holladay (2012:408) define a paracrisis as a reputational risk and early warning sign that may easily escalate into a full-blown crisis considering the virality of social media and the constant scrutiny of official brand responses.

Notably, a paracrisis resembles a crisis and requires a strategic response, however, a paracrisis does not justify “convening the crisis team and operating in a crisis mode” (Coombs & Holladay, 2012:408). As such, a user-generated brand parody is regarded as a paracrisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2012:412) especially when it is created by a disgruntled stakeholder which then creates a challenge type crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2002:170).

A summary of the four paracrisis response strategies, namely (i) refute, (ii) implicitly admit wrongdoing, (iii) explicitly admit wrongdoing and (iv) ignore, are outlined in Table 3.6 below:
As evident in Table 3.6 above, paracrisis response strategies recognise the governing principles of social media already discussed in Section 3.4. Typically, paracrisis are triggered by complaints about customer service, angry customers venting their frustrations in a malicious manner, and other critics challenging the organisation by making accusations of irresponsible corporate behaviour (Coombs, 2014:8). To elaborate, the subsequent section unpacks the unique risks of angry critics and viral social media backlashes typically encountered during a paracrisis.

### TABLE 3.6: Paracrisis response strategies as adapted from Coombs and Holladay (2012:412)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paracrisis response strategy</th>
<th>Desired outcome</th>
<th>Measurement of success</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Refute</strong></td>
<td>Most social media users support the brand’s position that no change is required. Most social media users agree that changes in practises would harm the organisation and its stakeholders.</td>
<td>Increased support for the brand indicates success. Increased support for the petition of the challenging stakeholders indicates failure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict with disgruntled social media stakeholders who make challenging claims of irresponsible or unethical behaviour. The challenge increases as management fights back. In the process, management base their defence on the core values shared with important stakeholders. When defending the brand’s practises, it is believed that many social media users who notice the conflict will defend the brand.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Implicitly admit wrongdoing</strong></td>
<td>The reputational threat disappears. As a result, critical social media stakeholders now support the changing organisation. The message emphasises that the rationale for change is to repair flaws. The organisation is perceived as learning and improving.</td>
<td>Disgruntled social media stakeholders accept the changed behaviour and cease to petition or challenge the brand. The expectation gap is addressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrongdoing is not directly expressed. Incorporating stakeholder demands when changing behaviour.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explicitly admit wrongdoing</strong></td>
<td>The paracrisis ceases to exist due to a lack of attention.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admission of wrongdoing or repentance as the foundation for change to repair violated expectations.</td>
<td>Success is indicated when social media users cease to discuss the paracrisis. Failure is indicated when the paracrisis persists and gains attention as more social media users engage with the issue.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Management explicitly or implicitly recognises organisational practises as problematic, and reforms. Practises are changed to reflect the demands of challenging social media stakeholders. When changing behaviour, stakeholder demands are incorporated.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ignore</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management refuses to acknowledge the challenge and ignores the paracrisis. Management believes that the criticism is not worth their attention and does not publically respond to the paracrisis or rumours. Instead, messages may be aimed at bolstering reputation such as reiterating positive social responsibility contributions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
3.5.1. The risks of encountering a paracrisis: Angry critics and viral social media backlashes

The ability to tag content accelerates the sharing, aggregation and discoverability of content on social networks (Doorley & Garcia, 2006:117; O'Reilly, 2007:22,24; Surowiecki, 2004:11; Zubiaga et al, 2011:2461). Correspondingly, the network effect and virality of social networks imply that damaging publicity about brands spreads quickly through social networks to instantly reach millions of people around the globe (Barwise & Meehan, 2010:82; Gillette, 2012:21; Kucinich, 2011). Whilst it has been a long known fact that negative publicity in traditional media casts a dark shadow on reputations (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:1), digital media has transformed disgruntled employees, dissatisfied customers or anyone with an axe to grind into so-called new-media snipers who increasingly cause harm to reputation (Gaines-Ross, 2010:73). Therefore, management is forced to rethink their communication strategies considering the speed at which reputationally damaging information flows through social networks (Pavitt, 2012:24). To confirm, an annual global study by Aon Risk Solutions (Aon, 2015:3) concluded that damage to brand and reputation is the main risk of concern owing to the principles of social media whereby reputational crises and management responses are instantly and incessantly scrutinised.

Social media antagonists’ attacks are not always truthful but rather irrational and highly emotional (Gaines-Ross, 2010:72). The somewhat problematic principle of participatory networks is the widespread posting of antagonistic rants conflated with related forms of inappropriate forms of hostile online phenomena such as flaming, trolling and hating (Lange, 2007:3, 2014:53; McCosker, 2014:201). Concerns are raised whether these forms of provocation do, in fact, stimulate public debate or rather impair productive criticism as comments are often cruel and harmful. Notably, McCosker (2014:215) warns against normalising and accepting vilification and bigotry as related forms of acting out on social networks.

To begin with, a rant is defined by Vrooman (2002:54) as hyperbolic performances, as angry monologues of insult to critique the absurdities of society. Rants may degenerate into undesirable bickering and flame wars aimed at the verbal destruction of opponents. In a strategy to win the verbal war, silence opponents and demonstrate others’ stupidity, rants and flame wars may also contain parody and satire. Stated differently, flames are excessive expressions of emotion, anger, swearing and personal insults to kill the opponent (Vrooman, 2002:59). As such, flame wars are also perceived as games that provide a form of entertainment (Vrooman, 2002:61).
Flaming is defined by Hmielowski, Hutchens and Cicchirillo (2014:1198) as “sending aggressive or hostile online messages via email, instant message, chat groups, or social networking websites”. Stated differently, flaming is “an uninhibited reaction to receiving a real or perceived aggressive comment”. Similarly, flaming is defined by Vrooman (2002:53) as a verbal war of performance in online communities with the sole purpose to winning a verbal war of insults in order to gain social prestige and status.

Related to flaming is the internet phenomenon of trolling. A troll is defined by Cramer (2013:6) as “an individual who uses anonymity to stir up drama, often within a comment thread on a blog or news website”. A similar definition by Taylor, Wells, Howell and Raphael (2012:25) states that “a ‘troll’ is internet slang for those who provoke other users and disrupt discussion; posting off-topic or making inflammatory statements”. Stated differently, “to troll is to have negative intents, to wish harm or at least discomfort upon one’s audience” as defined by Bergstrom (2011). Typically, trolls provoke bickering among fellow social media community members by inciting hatred, racism and bigotry (Cramer, 2013:6). As such, the high prevalence of trolling has become a concern for reputation management as trolling erodes trust, integrity and goodwill in communities, as concluded in a study by Taylor et al (2012:25). In fact, Pitts and Aylott (2012:252) are of the opinion that trolling may be a significant reason why organisations are hesitant to fully adopt social media management.

Hating and related antagonistic behaviour such as trolling and flaming are said to be encouraged by the fact that online personas are anonymous and not face-to-face (Lange, 2007:1; Vrooman, 2002:60). According to a study by Lange (2007:3), hating is defined as non-constructive criticism that discourages the free expression of opinions. A hater therefore is defined (Lange, 2007:6) as “someone who posts a negative comment that doesn't offer any [criticism] or any helpful information”. A related study by TNS (2013) seems to concur that a large fraction of complaints on social networks are not motivated to provide constructive criticism. Notably, 23% of complaints on social networks are posted purely out of vengeance while a further 30% of complaints are posted to vent negative feelings. In contrast, 48% of complaints are posted to seek help with customer problems. Likewise, a related study (Pew Research Centre, 2014) found that 40% of internet users have personally experienced some form of online harassment while a further 70% observed others being harassed. As such, harassment includes being called offensive names (26%), being purposefully embarrassed (22%), being physically threatened and/or stalked (8%), being harassed for a sustained period (7%) and experiencing sexual harassment (6%).

Commenting on how the internet has made critics of everyone, The Guardian newspaper refers to “an age of rage” (Adams, 2011:24). In fact, as moderation systems are ineffective against the flood of flaming, hating and trolling, websites’ comments sections have become
“cesspools of racism, sexism, misogyny and all forms of bigotry” (Moosa, 2014). Instead of being spaces of free speech and constructive debate, comments on websites and social media have become flooded with poison and vitriol (Davis, 2015; Moosa, 2014). As a result, both prominent international as well as local websites such as 24.com (2015) ceased the ability to leave comments on their articles. On Twitter, particularly, the smallest mishap, remotely uncomfortable sentiment or slightly ambiguous statement may easily offend a single overly sensitive critic, start false rumours and trigger a witch hunt by social media mobs and viral social media backlashes (Sevasti Fairweather, 2015; Whitlock, 2015). A case in point is a witch-hunt for the perpetrators of the Boston Bombings when several people were killed and injured during a marathon in 2013 (Adams, 2013). Social media was not only the primary channel for live, first-hand eye-witness accounts of events, but also resulted in mob speculations and the false identification of the supposed suspects.

It is widely believed that the malicious public shaming, trolling, flaming, ranting and hating easily escalate into social media crises and silence the honest and free expression of opinions, thereby diminishing the value of Twitter (Adams, 2011; 2013; Leopold, 2015; Morrison, 2015; Ronson, 2015; Van der Merwe, 2015; Whitlock, 2015). Swift acting Twitter lynch mobs tend to spin out of control so that the intensity of public shaming and reputational harm is disproportionate to the initial tweet in question (Ferreira, 2015; Milnes, 2015; Whitlock, 2015). Owing to its public nature and the power of the hashtag to amplify conversations, Twitter is notorious for hating, trolling and flaming. Consequently, Whitlock (2015) remarks: “If it’s trending on Twitter, it’s more than likely bullshit”.

When Twitter and Facebook users disagree with the majority’s opinions on these social networks, they tend to remain silent out of fear of being ostracised or ridiculed, as concluded in a related study by the Pew Research Centre Internet Project (Hampton, Rainie, Lu, Dwyer, Shin & Purcell, 2014). Therefore, social media’s potential for making public debate more inclusive is questioned. Rather, the findings suggest, individuals self-censor their opinions to confirm with their social network connections. To illustrate, the study found that 86% of social media users will voice their opinions in real-life, interpersonal settings, whereas only 42% have the courage to share their opinions on social networks.

On the positive side, the plurality of perspectives on social media enhances public debate that provides a more accurate and complete understanding of reality (Arnaboldi & Coget, 2016:3). On the negative side, however, the mob mentality of social media eases the spreading of false rumours and causes considerable reputational harm to brands and individuals. Yet, owing to social networks’ ability to self-regulate, public lynching tends to come to an end when voices
of reason emerge. Nevertheless, the limits of free speech remain problematic, as concluded in a global study by British research and educational charity, Demos (Bartlett, Reffin, Rumball & Williamson, 2014:6). The study of racism on Twitter found 10 000 tweets containing racial slurs per day on Twitter which accounts for nearly one in every 15,000 tweets to contain a derogatory, pejorative or highly offensive content about race and ethnicity. Similarly, another study by London-based football equality and inclusion charity, Kick It Out (2015), concluded that Twitter is the preferred platform for all forms of hating, abuse and discrimination. The study analysed discriminatory online content directed at Premier League clubs, their fans and players in a single football season, between August 2014 and March 2015, as illustrated in Table 3.7 below.

TABLE 3.7: The extent of hating, discrimination and abuse on Twitter and other online sources as adapted from Kick It Out (2015).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of discriminatory messages</th>
<th>Frequencies of abuse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online platform</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter:</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook:</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forums:</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blogs:</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume of instances of direct abuse</td>
<td>from August 2014 - March 2015 per month per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>134 000.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 000.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>551</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categories of discrimination</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race:</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual orientation:</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability:</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antisemitism:</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamophobia:</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age:</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Reassignment:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume of abusive comments directed at Premier League teams</td>
<td>95 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chelsea:</td>
<td>20 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liverpool:</td>
<td>19 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arsenal:</td>
<td>12 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester United:</td>
<td>11 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester City:</td>
<td>11 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume of abusive comments directed at Premier League players</td>
<td>39 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mario Balotelli:</td>
<td>8 000 of which 52% racist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danny Welbeck:</td>
<td>1.7 000 of which 50% racist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Sturridge:</td>
<td>1.6 000 of which 60% sexual orientation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is evident that the results of the study by Kick It Out (2015) presented in Table 3.7 above confirm the findings of the study regarding the prevalence of racism by Bartlett et al (2014:6) mentioned before. Correspondingly, racism, misogyny, sexism, and bigotry are rather prevalent on Twitter. Notably, these findings remain a concern for social media management, considering the high risk reputation damaging content on Twitter.
Meanwhile, in South Africa, a spate of racist comments on Twitter and Facebook, with ensuing angry Twitter backlashes (Chigumadzi, 2016), resulted in new legislation being considered to “criminalize any act that perpetuates racism or glorifies apartheid” (Mothapo, 2016), similar to German laws related to Holocaust denial (Laing, 2016). The public scrutiny of racism on Twitter is related to the phenomena of Black Twitter and so-called ‘woke Twitter’ in South Africa and the USA to describe how black Twitter communities are awake and alert to bring racism to public attention and accountability, typically by enhancing visibility through Twitter’s trending topic algorithm (Brock, 2012:529; Chigumadzi, 2016; Latief & Henney, 2016; Manjoo, 2010; Whitlock, 2015).

The rapid and viral distribution of information on social media, not only influences the opinion of groups, but more specifically, has the potential to influence an organisation’s activities and behaviour (Sedereviciute & Valentini, 2011:222). For this reason, brands find it challenging to effectively respond to user-generated content. Complicating matters further is the virality of social media crises, which implies that the reputational damage may be rather disproportionate to the initial issue (Pitts & Aylott, 2012:253). Correspondingly, the most significant challenge for traditional strategic reputation management is the lack of corporate control over social media conversations, as pointed out by Aula (2010:44). Recognising the high prevalence of anger, flaming, trolling and hating, television show *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* features a highly popular segment called *Mean Tweets*, where prominent individuals read actual abusive tweets sent to them in person (Alter, 2015; Somanader, 2015). In the process, those targeted have the opportunity to demonstrate their sense of humour when responding to angry tweets live in studio and on camera. Notably, in 2015, President Obama’s humorous *Mean Tweets* responses were the tenth most trending video on YouTube (2015). Correspondingly, the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI, 2012:12) observes that some brands continue their attempts to censor critical opinions on the social web while others engage in conversations with their critics. As articulated by Stokes (2011:365), efforts to control conversations usually result a social media backlash. A case in point is an internet phenomenon known as the Streisand effect.

To clarify, Louw (2013:6) defines the Streisand effect as a “phenomenon where an attempt to hide or remove information from public view has the unintended consequence of only publicising the information more widely”. The term was invented by *Techdirt* blog editor, Mike Masnick, in 2005 (Cacciottolo, 2012; Jansen & Martin, 2015:656; Masnick, 2005; 2013; 2015, Parkinson, 2014) to describe how popular singer and actress Barbara Streisand unsuccessfully attempted legal action in 2003 against a photographer for the violation of her privacy. As part of an online aerial photographic project to document environmental erosion of
the Californian coastline, the photographer unwittingly included a photo of Streisand's house. Following the media and public attention gained from the lawsuit attempting to remove the photograph from the internet, the Streisand effect came into motion when the photograph of Streisand’s house was downloaded nearly half a million times, posted on several websites and file-sharing networks, spoofed by parody content and shared virally across the internet. As an unintended consequence, the previously unfamiliar website of the photographer was visited thousands of times and the previously unknown photo of Streisand's house became public knowledge.

Following this well-documented unintended wider publication of attempted repression by brands seen as aggressively curbing freedom of speech, including satire, several subsequent incidents have been studied under the Streisand effect (Cacciottolo, 2012; Jansen & Martin, 2015:656; Louw, 2013:8,24; Masnick, 2015; Parkinson, 2014; Zamani, Kasimati & Giaglis, 2012:442). Typically, the Streisand effect is illustrated in defamation lawsuits in an attempt to protect brands’ reputations from undesirable content instead of doing nothing about it and thereby possibly going unnoticed by most people (Jansen & Martin, 2015:656; Marton, Wilk & Rogal, 2010:62).

The Streisand effect generally denotes the consequences of heavy-handed, knee-jerk responses by public relations professionals to hide potentially embarrassing information on social media (Louw, 2013:614). Moreover, the Streisand effect is synonymous with public relations crises which occur as a collaborative groundswell effect or an echo effect arises on social media networks in retaliation to attempts at suppressing information, according to a study by Zamani, Kasimati and Giaglis (2012:442,445). In South Africa, the Streisand effect was noticed during the ANC's reaction to the satiric Spear painting of President Jacob Zuma and South African Brewery's litigation against satiric T-Shirt manufacturers, Laugh It Off Promotions (Louw, 2013:7,24). As such, the phenomenon illustrates how management attempts to suppress information paradoxically causes the opposite of the desired result when that which is repressed is further propagated and only causes more damage to the brand which attempted to salvage a harmed reputation through lawsuits (Zamani, Kasimati & Giaglis, 2012:442,445) or cease-and-desist letters against satiric content (Louw, 2013:9).

A study of the South African electorate’s dissemination of political cartoons about President Jacob Zuma on the social web by Terblanche (2011:166) concluded that co-created and modified content have an even greater impact in its later appearance compared to the initial content published on the web, thereby confirming the reputational risks of the Streisand effect.
3.5.2. Reputational halos as reservoirs of goodwill during a paracrisis

The phenomenon of the halo effect is termed in the seminal text by psychologist Thorndike (1920:25) and describes a construct error or tendency among assessors to rather appraise individuals on overall impressions instead of evaluating each personality trait separately. Assessors’ judgements are therefore clouded by general feelings towards a person. To illustrate, a study of *Fortune’s Most Admired Companies* by Brown and Perry (1994:1349, 1358) concludes that both a reputational halo and a financial performance halo effect distort the perceptual judgements of respondents in reputational ranking surveys to the extent that they give distorted ratings to individual attributes such as products, jobs and people. A similar study by Fryxell and Wang (1994:12) also concluded that *Fortune’s* evaluators do not adequately discriminate between non-financial and financial aspects of brand reputation, which may be attributed to impression bias or a halo effect. Moreover, Scholz (2012:43) expresses the concern over the ‘faulty logic’ of the halo effect whereby stakeholders perceive all aspects of an organisation’s performance as being outstanding even if, in fact, they do not know much about these high ranking organisations. Stated differently by Puncheva (2008:276), reputation is the performance of an organisation in one specific area which overrides detailed information on other areas of business activities.

Branding seems to play a significant role in establishing reputational halos. Typically, a reputational halo effect is present when favourable reputational associations are attributed to a particular brand which is then also carried over to its brand extensions (Caruana & Chircop, 2000:48,54; Herbig & Milewicz, 1993:22; Roper & Fill, 2012:17).

Reputational halos have the potential to establish resilient reputations during crises. Reputational halos are evident in organisations that maintain solid reputations which function as reservoirs of goodwill especially when organisations are facing crises (Jones, Jones & Little, 2000; Shamma, 2012:151). For this reason, Scholz (2012:43) maintains that a strong reputation is not only a profitable investment but also assists brands in regaining their reputations after a crisis. These organisations benefit from stakeholders who already feel positive towards a brand before the crisis occurs and as a result of a reputational halo, stakeholders are willing to listen in times of crises.

A study of *Fortune’s Most Admired Companies* by Jones, Jones and Little (2000) concluded that the stock prices of organisations with solid reputations dropped significantly less than those with poorer reputations during the 1989 stock market crash. As a reservoir of good will, reputation may therefore serve as a buffer against economic loss (Jones, Jones & Little, 2000) or reputational damage (Coombs, 2007c:165) in times of crises. To elaborate, organisations
with favourable pre-crisis reputations are likely to recover their reputations post-crisis more quickly and stronger than organisations that have negative or neutral pre-crisis reputations (Coombs, 2007c:165). To illustrate, Argenti and Druckenmiller (2004:372) maintain that effective reputation management whereby brands deliver on their promises is the reason why Johnson & Johnson ranked amongst the strongest Reputation Quotient scores in 2001, 20 years after the Tylenol cyanide contamination crisis. Competent handling of crises therefore may moderate negative reputational consequences and illustrate reputational resilience instead (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990:255). In fact, Caruana and Chircop (2000:48,54) suggest that the halo is, in fact, an organisation’s reputation, while Fombrun and Van Riel (2004:2) maintain that reputational halos are equated to reputational capital.

The halo effect is synonymous with so-called sticky reputations (Roper & Fill, 2012:84) which imply that once an organisation appears on a reputation ranking list, it tends to remain there. Although some of the ranking approaches discussed in the previous chapter indicate that the top rankings may sometimes fluctuate, a sticky reputation (Schultz, Mouritsen & Gabrielsen, 2001:25) and an equally sticky brand (Ang & Wight, 2009) may remain resilient regardless of respondents and statistical measures changing over time. As such, reputation is durable, as a selected number of organisations tend to remain at the top of the ranks over time. A contributing factor to a sticky reputation is the visibility and size of the top ranking organisations which make it easier for respondents to intuitively give a higher rating to these organisations (Schultz, Mouritsen & Gabrielsen, 2001:25).

The halo effect is particularly evident when organisations perform well financially although non-economic factors, which may be difficult to pinpoint, also contribute to reputation (Kowalczyk & Pawlish, 2002:172). It may therefore be assumed that there seem to be several factors originating from the macro-environment, as well as undefined uncertainties which impact on reputation. For this reason, Fombrun and Shanley (1990:255) recommend that extensive research is required which focuses on a specific audience to distinguish central and peripheral influences on organisations’ reputations over and above ranking surveys such as Fortune’s Most Admired Companies.

A study of Fortune’s Most Admired Companies by Fombrun and Shanley (1990:252) concluded that stakeholders construct reputations from a large mix of signals that are not limited to historical financial performance and return on investment, but also include non-economic cues such as media exposure, social responsibility and institutional ownership. Therefore, sticky reputations require a substantial continuous commitment and investment in reputation building activities instead of merely a reactive strategy (Ang & Wight, 2009). To demonstrate, a study by Caruana and Chircop (2000:55) concluded that a reputational halo
may outlast the actual reality and in order to maintain credibility, organisations need to defend their reputational halos by ensuring that there is congruity between the information cues emanating from the organisation and stakeholders' perceptions of reality.

3.6. RESPONSIVE SOCIAL MEDIA GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORKS TO MITIGATE THE REPUTATIONAL RISKS INHERENT IN SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT

As argued in this chapter, ORM optimises the governing principles of social media to co-create reputations that resonate with communities (Fournier & Avery, 2011:32). As such, the governing principles of social media illustrate the need to mitigate the risks inherent in social media management. Notably, the characteristics of social media imply that “risks can grow exponentially and cause damage which is disproportionate to the initial issue”, as articulated by Pitts and Aylott (2012:253).

Although risk and reputation management already receives prominent attention by boards of directors when addressing corporate governance, the risks of social media management is easily overlooked (Kumar & Singh, 2014: 348). As such, governance mitigates the risks that manifest when social media engagements do not resonate with communities. To confirm, a global study by McKinsey Global Institute (2015) concluded that the integration of social media with risk management and/or reputation risk management is limited to only 12% of executives surveyed globally. As such, the integration with reputation risk management is the second least concern when compared to the integration of social media with other business functions and strategic concerns. In fact, it is believed that any reputational damage, whether originating from social media or not, is a concern for a brand’s social media governance function, considering the principles of social media (Zerfass, Fink & Linke, 2011:6) in a converged media environment.

Social media governance is defined by Zerfass, Fink and Linke (2011:3) as “the formal or informal frameworks which regulate the actions of the members of an organisation within the social web”. Interestingly, in the context of peer-to-peer social network, Wikipedia (Leskovec, Huttenlocher & Kleinberg, 2010:98), social media governance is defined as the deliberation and decision-making of a core group as well as the enforcement of those decisions. In that sense, adherence to social media governance is a key aspect in the safeguarding of brands against reputational damage (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012:302; Pitts & Aylott, 2012:253; Thomson & White, 2013:184; Whalen & Krishna, 2013a:16). Stated differently, reputational damage is caused when the risks addressed in social media governance frameworks are crystallising (Pitts & Aylott, 2012:253).
Management is already familiar with the concept of corporate governance as outlined in the Third King Report on Corporate Governance for South Africa (IOD, 2009; IODSA, 2012). Therein, corporate governance is described as an organisation’s “practical expression of ethical standards” (IOD, 2009:16) that is based on the ethical values of responsibility, accountability, fairness and transparency. To achieve these standards, the King III report recommends processes and principles of good governance to meet all stakeholder expectations such as reputation management, effective communication, risk management, internal audits, stakeholder relations, sustainability, laws, codes, rules, standards, performance objectives, the remuneration of top management and leadership expectations. Governance, as explained by Zerfass, Fink and Linke (2011:302) is a socially sensitive and necessary approach to corporate communication management in order to meet requirements and reputation management standards. Likewise, corporate governance is defined by Carroll and Buchholtz (2015:98) as “the method by which a firm is being governed, directed, administrated, or controlled and to the goals for which it is being governed”. In essence, corporate governance is concerned with all internal and external stakeholders’ rights, roles and accountabilities. However, a study by Meintjes and Grobler (2014) raised the concern that although public relations professionals may understand the importance of corporate governance issues, their knowledge thereof is rather limited.

The rapid explosion of social media technologies caught many organisations ill-prepared as existing corporate governance processes had not considered the potentially damaging repercussions of social media on overall reputation, customer confidence levels, stock prices and market share (Ernst & Young, 2012:14). As such, social media governance as a dedicated business function seems to have only recently emerged as a key issue in reputation management (Johnston, 2014; KMPG, 2011; Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012:295; Zerfass, Fink & Linke, 2011). In this emerging field, it appears as if social media management is still learning to adopt best practice in social media governance.

Considering the principles of social media, Aula (2010:43) emphasises the need for strategic reputation management whereby reputation risk management strategies are integrated with business risk management strategies to mitigate both the internal and external reputation risks of social media engagement. Audit committees and board committees responsible for risk management and compliance are advised to ensure that the responsibility for managing robust social media governance frameworks is ideally lead by corporate communication functions and further supported by management functions across the organisation (Pitts & Aylott, 2012; Whalen & Krishna, 2013a:16; Whalen & Krishna, 2013b:68). As social media impacts differently on the various organisational functions, social media governance requires a holistic, cross-divisional, interdisciplinary and co-ordinated approach to ensure consistency when
protecting the brand (Ernst & Young, 2012:8). The decentralised nature of social media requires a sound social media governance framework and processes which ensure that all functions involved in social media management are involved in the development, implementation and management thereof (Macnamara & Sakinofsky, 2012:11; Postman, 2009:15).

Owing to the loss of control when co-creating brands in social networks, Hatch and Schultz (2010:595) argue that governance is no longer the sole responsibility of the traditional board, but has shifted to the dynamic outcome of stakeholder co-creations where reputation-building is shared in networks. As a result, the governance of organisations and the governance of brands are not limited to the individuals appointed to oversee governance, but have also become concerns for all stakeholders participating in co-creation, especially considering the principle of transparency (Hatch & Schultz, 2010:603). It stands to reason then that Ernst & Young (2012:8) recommends that an effective social media governance strategy should be transparent to all stakeholders and should provide valuable reputational insights which empower both the employees and the customers to help lower risks and strengthen the brand.

As Diermeier (2011:182) points out, reputational risks most often occur as a direct consequence of organisational actions rather than originating from an external event or misfortune. As such, management needs to anticipate the consequences or reputational impact of strategic decisions before such decisions are made. Stated differently, Aula (2010:46) explains that reputation risk management of social media management needs to commence before, and not after, reputation crises.

### 3.6.1. Requirements for a responsive social media governance framework for strategic reputation management

Having motivated the need for a social media governance framework, the following section identifies and describes the elements of a responsive social media governance framework for the social media management team to consider for effective strategic reputation management. Notably, the management of social media risks is rather complex in the digital age, hence governing bodies continuously require information about the shifting risk landscape and emerging threats in order to maintain pro-active, robust, flexible and responsive frameworks (Pitts & Aylott, 2012:260). Moreover, ORM is a key aspect of social media governance frameworks to lower risk and protect a brand (Ernst & Young, 2012:9). Specifically compiled by the researcher for the purpose of this study, a responsive social media governance framework comprises the following concerns:
i. **Clearly defined social media management team structures and governance standards:** The foundation of social media governance and risk management is an appropriately structured integrated social media management team with resources allocated to social media crisis response planning (Hootsuite & Nexgate, 2013:2; Owyang, 2012; Owyang, Jones, Tran & Nguyen, 2011:9). To illustrate, Table 3.8 below summarises the titles, roles, requirements and social media governance risks associated with typical integrated social media management team structures (Hootsuite & Nexgate, 2013:3; Owyang, 2012; Owyang et al, 2011:14; Pitts & Aylott, 2012).

**TABLE 3.8: Titles, roles, requirements and social media governance risks associated with complex integrated social media management team structures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Associated titles</th>
<th>Role level</th>
<th>Social media management requirements</th>
<th>Social media governance and risk concerns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Head of corporate communication | Strategic | Executive oversight and leadership. Accountable to the executive team and/or board of directors for the effectiveness of social media strategies, return on investment and reputation. | • Reputation management  
• Brand and image protection  
• Marketing regulatory compliance |
| Social strategist | Strategic | Strategic vision, leadership and accountability for return on investment across organisational functions. | • Resistance from internal culture  
• Shortage of resources  
• Ever-changing technological environment  
• Measuring return on investment  
• Reputation management |
| Social analyst | Strategic | Monitoring, analytics, measurement and reporting across organisational functions. | • Reputation management  
• Ability to identify and analyse the impact of social media on organisational strategies |
| Chief technology officer, information technology, web developer | Strategic to tactical | Assist the social media team with the integration of social technologies into the organisation's existing information technology systems. Overseeing privacy, data security and channel breaches. | • Data integration as a strategic asset  
• Ever-changing technological environment  
• Disparate social technologies  
• Data security and privacy  
• Hacking  
• Network protection |
| Digital strategist | Strategic to tactical | Assist the social media team with the integration of social technologies in the converged media landscape, including TV, online, all digital channels and the real world. | • Ever-changing technological environment  
• Responding to negative content  
• Rapid response teams  
• Reputation management |
<p>| Agency partners | Strategic to tactical | Outsourced third party expertise, including digital agencies and social media agencies. Specialised service providers for content | • Integration of functions and services |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Focus Area</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Legal and audit: chief legal officer, compliance manager, audit manager | Strategic to operational | Oversight of social media policies and governance, auditing of brand accounts, standardisation of the brand and brand compliance across social networks, brand and/or reputation management and protection, managing and responding brand hijacking within a regulatory and legal compliance framework. | • Reputation management  
• Intentional and unintentional brand hijacking  
• Internal and external brand compliance  
• Partner and affiliate use  
• Social media management |
| Content strategist                         | Strategic | Content marketing. Integrating content strategies across organisational functions, markets and partners. Integrating corporate content, advertising and social media content. | • Reputation management  
• Ability to identify and analyse the impact of social media on organisational strategies |
| Social media manager                      | Managerial | Managing the day-to-day execution of several concurrent social media projects. Content and channel planning, creation and approval. Crisis identification and response. Monitoring and analytics. Channel and application security. | • Reputation management  
• Social media expertise  
• Project management expertise  
• Managing resources and expectations  
• Fake and copycat accounts  
• Channel and account proliferation  
• Staff policies and training |
| Community manager                         | Managerial and operational | Day-to-day interaction with social media users or customers as a liaison between the brand and the community. Community management and monitoring. Management of policies. Being perceived as a trusted member of social communities. | • Reputation management  
• Inappropriate community use  
• Poor community management  
• Social media spam  
• Customer issue escalation and intensification  
• Customer data management  
• Customer interactions |

### ii. Social media management strategy:

In order to achieve consistency in messages communicated, an integrated communication strategy is required (Soat, 2012:6) while ensuring that the social media strategy and tactics are integrated with the overall business goals and business strategy (Doorley & Garcia, 2006:115; Murtland, 2010:15; Postman, 2009:14) as well as the communication strategy (Killian & McManus, 2015:9). In turn, strategic considerations and behaviour need to remain consistent with an organisation's purpose, mission and core values (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007:16). The importance of a social media strategy is highlighted in a study by Interbrand (2013:1), which concludes that two-thirds of the organisations surveyed expressed concern about the fragmented way in which decisions were made regarding their digital strategies. As such, Stokes (2011:217) highlights the importance of a social media strategy to ensure consistency.
across channels to reach out to variety of stakeholders across several dynamic platforms. At the same time a social media strategy, synonymous with a social network strategy, evaluates of the most suitable social media networks for engagement with stakeholders (Postman, 2009:15).

**iii. Content strategy:** To define, guide and plan the creation and publishing of content that meets business needs while also setting benchmarks for metrics (Reid, 2013:22,24). A content strategy comprises the framework, content-related objectives, governance and processes that need to be followed when strategically integrating paid, owned and earned media content (Lieb et al, 2012:6).

**iv. Social media playbook or editorial strategy:** A social media playbook is synonymous with an editorial strategy (Barwise & Meehan, 2010:83). A social media playbook is described as guidelines in social media management best practise, workflow and ORM, while also addressing contingency planning for risks (Campie, 2015; Salesforce Marketing Cloud, 2013). As such, the roles, responsibilities and expectations of the social media management team are clearly outlined. Likewise, an editorial strategy outlines the strategic messages that will be communicated by all functions involved in social media management (Postman, 2009:15). More specifically, the tone of social media management content needs to be consistent with the brand voice in order for stakeholders to establish trust and a relationship with a brand (Stokes, 2011:132, 186). An appropriate tone of voice is a brand’s distinct way of speaking consistently across all channels and platforms in a manner that resonates with communities (Interbrand, 2012:12). As such, the tone and brand voice is coherent with the brand’s personality traits, hence the social media team needs access to a clear description of the brand essence (Killian & McManus, 2015:10). The editorial strategy is synonymous with editorial positioning which guides the editorial agenda, namely the choice of content, identity and tone of voice (Hipwell & Reeves, 2013:66). As interactions need to be true to the brand promise and brand values, the organisational culture is reflected in the way that every employee communicates and shares information on social media (Hanna, 2009:26). When organisations consistently deliver on their brand promises, social media amplify their reputations (Barwise & Meehan, 2010:80). The result is a consistent brand experience across communication channels (Stokes, 2011:217).

**v. Content calendar:** To integrate planned content and messages across social media management functions (Killian & McManus, 2015:9; Stokes, 2011:217). A conversation calendar is synonymous with the term content calendar (Killian & McManus, 2015:9;
Wilkins, 2013:14) or editorial calendar (Solomon, 2013:9) which is needed to execute the social media strategy and content strategy. Typically, an editorial calendar or editorial plan comprise the topics and themes that will be covered on a weekly or monthly basis (Postman, 2009:172).

vi. Escalation protocol: Standards and procedures on how to respond to ORM metrics, especially mentions and sentiment (Stokes, 2011:217). Also addressed in a social media playbook (Campie, 2015; Salesforce Marketing Cloud, 2013), an escalation protocol includes aspects such as timelines for responses, especially when dealing with complaints, the tone of messages, procedures for quick access to senior management when facing an imminent reputational threat, cross-agency collaboration and standard messages when responding to both positive and negative content (Killian & McManus, 2015:9; Stokes, 2011:217). Considering the virality of customer complaints, well-developed escalation protocols serve as a pro-active mitigation plan to quickly resolve customer issues before they turn into crises (Killian & McManus, 2015:9).

vii. Social media guidelines and policies: Social media guidelines are supported by policies to describe how all employees need to be responsible users of social media, both privately and professionally (Pitts & Aylott, 2012:256; Zerfass, Fink & Linke, 2011:9). Such policies and guidelines need to be consistent with organisational policies (Postman, 2009:15) and may also be addressed in a social media playbook (Campie, 2015; Salesforce Marketing Cloud, 2013). Applicable to all employees, such policies should regulate their digital footprints, especially pertaining to comments on organisational matters, adherence to brand identities standards and workplace conduct (Whalen & Krishna, 2013a:16). More specifically, social media policies often require private lives to be presented in a professional manner, seeing that online conduct influences an employer’s reputation (Landsbergen, 2010:248). While these policies may raise privacy concerns, they nevertheless illustrate the blurring of public and private lives as a result of social media. Again, Brandtzæg, Lüders and Skjetne (2010:1007) highlight the privacy dilemma of social networks. On the one hand, the complete protection of privacy will compromise content sharing and sociability. On the other hand, social networks need to promote content sharing and sociability while simultaneously ensuring privacy.

viii. Social media council: A cross-functional team responsible for continuously reviewing, auditing and making recommendations and enforcing policies for social media strategies (Postman, 2009:16). Customer service and human resources need to be added to the functions already illustrated in Table 3.8 (Hootsuite & Nexgate, 2013:5).
ix. **Social media skills and training:** Integrated social media management teams require professional skills and talent to meet the requirements of content marketing in the converged media environment (Global Alliance, 2014:4; Lieb, Silva & Tran, 2013:4). Likewise, Feeney (2011:13) recommends that social media teams gain the necessary social intelligence to grasp the principles of social media. With regard to community managers, it is believed that these individuals are often the most under-appreciated individuals, considering their frequent engagement with angry customers, even after hours, which imply that they are often personally affected (Owyang, 2012). Both the social media management team and all employees require practical training in the social media strategy, philosophy and social media etiquette as well as skills to use social media management platforms and technologies professionally (Postman, 2009:15; Zerfass, Fink & Linke, 2011:6). By training stakeholders across and even outside the organisation, customer groups, product as well as sales functions are able to recognise stories and write in the brand voice (Lieb, Silva & Tran, 2013:8).

x. **Awareness campaigns:** To ensure consistency and help to strengthen the brand, social media governance awareness programmes target all stakeholders (Ernst & Young, 2012:9).

xi. **Social asset audits:** Monitor and assess the individuals allowed to access the brand’s social media management accounts and ensure the safekeeping of passwords to protect online assets (Thomson & White, 2013:185). A social media analysis assesses the value and relevance of external stakeholders on social media management such as influencers, business partners and competitors (Postman, 2009:15). Moreover, the value and relevance of social media management strategies and technologies are evaluated.

xii. **Community guidelines:** Guidelines are necessary to set an appropriate tone for community conversations (Greengard, 2014:4; Stokes, 2011:217) that may also be addressed in a social media playbook (Campie, 2015; Salesforce Marketing Cloud, 2013). This includes monitoring undesirable behaviour and using software to filter, block, ban or remove malicious comments or community members (Cramer, 2013:6; Stokes, 2011:217; Taylor et al, 2012:25). As such, it is necessary to have the necessary moderation systems in place to safeguard reputation from social spam, malicious comments and trolls (Cramer, 2013:6; Greengard, 2014:4; Pitts & Aylott, 2012:256). It is advised that community guidelines distinguish between comments originating from trolls and social spammers as opposed to comments from dissatisfied customers, as the latter requires
issues to be appropriately addressed (Johnson, 2009:24). In the case of trolls and spammers, generally, these do not warrant replies from the social media management team and should be ignored (Greengard, 2014:4; Johnson, 2009:24). Responding to trolls, who usually comment anonymously by using fraudulent identities to provoke reaction, as already discussed in Section 3.5.1, merely serves to validate trolling which further encourages their hostility (Bergstrom, 2011; Cramer, 2013:6).

xiii. Social media cyber-squatting. Cyber-squatting is defined as “the unauthorized use of a trademarked name or phrase in a Web domain pointing to a Web site that isn't owned by the trademark holder” (Hesseldahl, 2007). Cyber-squatters register a website domain name in the name of an existing organisation or person, often with the intent of selling the domain name back to the rightful owner at an inflated price (Auty, 2004:214-219). As a form of trademark abuse, a common goal of cyber-squatters is to lure unsuspecting supporters of a popular brand to their unaffiliated websites where interesting content is posted for financial gain (Hesseldahl, 2007). In other instances, the domain name of a cyber squatter is linked to an empty web page containing criticism or parody websites poking fun at the targeted brand (Auty, 2004:214-219).

Related to the cyber-squatting of web pages whereby two separate entities claim the same domain name (Chavan & Ahire, 2015:3393), is the practise of social media cyber-squatting (Mitchell, 2009:23), also known as username-jacking (Malachowski, 2010:227), typically by parody accounts. Frequently targeting prominent brands, user-name jacking is defined as the practise whereby “an imposter has stolen or squatted on a celebrity's or brand's social networking site username” (Malachowski, 2010:223). The cyber-squatting of social media accounts has become a growing business which necessitates social media management teams to defensively register brand names and trademarks, as well as variations thereof, on social networks (Mitchell, 2009:23).

Possible variations of account names are limited on social networks with the result that official brand names may already be taken when a social media management team joins a social network (KMPG, 2011:2). Therefore, all possible social media account names need to be registered as early as possible as a safeguard against social media cyber-squatters and fake spam accounts using the official brand name. Moreover, the proactive registration of all possible brand-related account names on social networks may also offer some form of protection against parody accounts (Miltenberg, 2013). A related practise of cyber-squatting is typo-squatting, which is defined as the “intentional registration of misspellings of popular website addresses” (Moore & Edelman, 2010:175) to attract website traffic of unsuspecting users for financial gain. Also known as URL hijacking, typo-
squatters is may also create fake websites with the intention to spread malicious software such as viruses, and for phishing attacks (Siciliano, 2013).

xiv. **Brand hijacking or brand jacking:** Brand jacking is when an individual assumes a brand’s official identity and engages with social media users under false pretences, as defined by Williams (2015). Prominent and popular brands are particularly vulnerable to brand jacking (Hesseldahl, 2007). Related practises of brand jacking include cybersquatting and phishing (Hesseldahl, 2007; Williams, 2015). Consequently, the reputation-damaging goals of brand jacking are varied, including parody accounts to prank or to troll a brand for fun or to criticize brands (Williams, 2015). Correspondingly, Milne (2013:210) and Ramsey (2010) recognise the somewhat complex and wide-ranging intentions of user-generated parody accounts as a form of brand jacking that requires risk mitigation to safeguard reputation.

xv. **Protection against viruses, malware and social spam** (Zerfass, Fink & Linke, 2011:6). Spam encountered on social media is commonly referred to as social spam. Spam is defined by Twitter (2014b) as “unsolicited, repeated actions that negatively impact other users. This includes many forms of automated account interactions and behaviours as well as attempts to mislead or deceive users”. Whereas email spam occurs on a one-to-one basis and are more effectively limited by corporate spam blockers, social spam is publically visible and quickly spreads through social networks where it exploits the fact that user-generated content and virtual friends are easily trusted (Kharif, 2012:38; Nextgate, 2013:6; Zi, Widjaja, Haining, Feng, Samarati & Jianying, 2012:457). Social spam is mostly disguised as linkbait mimicking authentic user-generated content or interesting content from official social media management accounts. Often, spam may be so deeply embedded within the comments section of a page that social media management teams may not easily identify the spam comments (Nextgate, 2013:12). Spam comments are more prevalent on popular brand pages that attract many followers in order for spammers extend their reach.

The malicious aims of social spam are phishing and malware that are uploaded onto a user’s computer (Hesseldahl, 2007; Martinez-Romo & Araujo, 2013:2992). Malware is malicious software that is accessed on websites and installed on users’ computers where it may take various forms such as phishing viruses, worms and Trojan horses (Abu-Nimeh, Chen & Alzubi, 2011:25). Correspondingly, malware makes it easy for botnets to further spread spam through computer networks. Botnets, short for robot networks, or ‘zombie armies’ spread spam and viruses from a large number of computers already
infected by malware known as bots (F-Secure, 2014; PCMag, 2014). Lists of compromised computers are sold in a thriving trade to spammers and hackers.

Phishing is the practice of soliciting personal identification details from a victim, such as passwords and banking details in order to commit fraud (Nextgate, 2013:11). As such, protection against viruses, malware, spam and fraudulent or a hijacked corporate presence, is a key concern for social media governance (Zerfass, Fink & Linke, 2011:6). Several types of social spam are used to lure unsuspecting social media users and threaten the reputation of social media management, including:

- **Link spam:** Once a user clicks on a link, it drives traffic to a spammer's website where the spammer gets paid every time a user clicks on any of the many advertisements visible on the spammer's website (Kharif, 2012:38; Nextgate, 2013:6). Also known as spamdexing, or link farms, the search engine rankings of a spammer's website are manipulated and increase as more users click on link spam (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:13; Nextgate, 2013:6). Some forms of link spam distribute quickly when it automatically distributes links to all the contacts in a social media user's account, thereby appearing as if it originates from a friend or follower (Nextgate, 2013:8).
- **Like-jacking:** Associated with click-jacking, like-jacking occurs when unsuspecting users click on link spam on Facebook; the spam requests the user to 'like' or 'share' the content or give permission to an app to gain access to a user's account (Kharif, 2012:38) Typically appearing on Facebook, content in a user's news feed appears to have been 'liked' by friends. However, these 'likes' are generated by link spam (Nextgate, 2013:15).
- **Social bots:** Robots – bots for short – are computer scripts used by programmers to automatically generate content and even reply to social media users’ content, thereby appearing to be real humans (Cresci, Di Pietro, Petrocchi, Spognardi & Tesconi, 2015: 56; Guo & Chen, 2014:372; Nextgate, 2013:17). Their replies then contain spam. These bots can also follow social media accounts and send friend requests. In addition, bots often automatically copy original content to draw traffic to their fake accounts (Guo & Chen, 2014:375).
- **Fake social media accounts, cloned content and hoaxes:** The internet is rife with social bots, fake content, imposters, linkbait and scams such as fake websites and fake social media accounts, often intended to support spam and fraud like phishing, identity theft or trade in pirated products and counterfeit goods (Baker, 2015:127; Elgin, Riley, Kocieniewski & Brustein, 2015:64; Kharif, 2012:37; Lavergne, Urvoy & Yvon, 2011:26; Malamed, 2011:44; Mitchell, 2009:23). Fake content, often displayed as linkbait and containing Photoshopped images, easily escalate into viral rumours.
and are synonymous with internet hoaxes (Dewey, 2014; Thomas, 2014b). Correspondingly, it makes it difficult to believe everything encountered on the internet. Websites dedicated to expose hoaxes, such as Hoax-slayer (2015), identify hundreds of hoaxes such as fake warnings about social media networks deleting user accounts or stealing users’ content, appliances causing cancer, fake scientific discoveries of unusual or deadly new species of animals or insects, food brands contaminated by harmful ingredients, freak weather conditions and brand logos containing hidden satanic messages. An example close to home is the death hoax of former president Nelson Mandela in 2011 (Thomas, 2014b).

Fake websites contain automatically generated text which is artificially created by software programmes to mimic natural texts, functioning as search engine optimised spam sites (Baker, 2015:128; Lavergne, Urvoy & Yvon, 2011:26). Often, fake or cloned content is completely plagiarised. These fake or dummy accounts resemble social media accounts of real people and post high volumes of repetitive spam content such as status updates, tweets and photos (Baker, 2015:128; Nextgate, 2013:17).

Fake social media accounts may be created by automated software (bots), sometimes remaining inactive, or otherwise being managed by low-paid humans from developing countries (Friedman, 2014:22; Ohikuare, 2013:88; Simonite, 2015:67). The humans behind fake accounts are paid for every social media interaction, such as likes, clicks, following accounts, mentions, tagging and retweets (Baker, 2015:128; Ohikuare, 2013:88). These fake accounts may either have malicious intentions, such as the spreading of spam and malware, but most often, fake accounts are created to inflate the followers of social media accounts so that they appear to be influential, trustworthy and popular (Baker, 2015:128; Cresci et al, 2015:56; Friedman, 2014:22; Ohikuare, 2013:88; Simonite, 2015:67). As a result, fake followers are more common among celebrity accounts, popular brands and politicians. In other words, the creation of fake accounts, that then act as fake followers, is motivated by social media management’s quest for vanity metrics. Fake accounts may also serve to skew sentiment metrics for social media management, especially around political conversations (Baker, 2015:127; Cresci et al, 2015:56; Simonite, 2015:67). For example, it was discovered that 41% of US Presidential candidate Hillary Clinton’s 4.45 million followers, were fake accounts (Majaski, 2015).
Fake social media accounts influence algorithms and are search engine optimised. Fake accounts are easily visible in the high traffic attracted to trending topics by using trending keywords and hashtags in large numbers of unrelated spam content (Baker, 2015:127; Guo & Chen, 2014:372; Simonite, 2015:67; Zi et al, 2012:457). Interjecting hashtagged conversations with rather off-topic posts to change the direction thereof, is known as hashtag-hijacking (Alexander & Atkins, 2015:6; Fathi, 2009:13; Zi et al, 2012:457). Hundreds of thousands of fake accounts can be bought easily on the internet (Baker, 2015:128; Ohikuare, 2013:88; Simonite, 2015:67). Typically, fake accounts compile fake profiles by cloning real humans’ user-generated content copied from the internet, and display provocative profile photos that entice users to click on them (Nextgate, 2013:16; Simonite, 2015:67). Therefore, fake social media accounts exploit the human need to have many followers. It is said that one in 20 active Twitter accounts are fake, while as many as one in 100 active Facebook accounts are fake (Simonite, 2015:67). To illustrate, it was discovered that more than half of the 7.98 million Twitter followers of reality television celebrity from Keeping Up With The Kardashians, Kendall Jenner, were fake or inactive at one stage (Ornos, 2014). Already a few years ago, Facebook tightened measures to close down fake accounts after Facebook revealed that 83.9 million (8.7%) of their 955 million monthly active users were fake accounts (Kelly, 2012; United States Securities and Exchange Commission, 2012). Similarly, a study by Nextgate (2013:4) concluded that a 355% increase of social spam was detected in the first half of 2013, with Facebook and YouTube favoured the most. A few years later, Statistic Brain (2016) reported that Facebook had 1 721 000 000 monthly active users in total of which 81 000 000 were fake Facebook profiles.

Although social networks have measures in place to report, detect and remove social spam, it remains a challenge to keep up with the extent to which new spam accounts are created (Kharif, 2012:38; Martinez-Romo & Araujo, 2013:2993; Nextgate, 2013:8; YouTube, 2014e). Social network owners repeatedly remove fake accounts, however these simply re-appear again (Baker, 2015:128; Friedman, 2014:22; Majaski, 2015). Several websites and apps are available to identify fake accounts and assist in the removal thereof.

- **Linkbait.** Already, Section 3.3.2 introduced the use of Linkbait as a strategy in content marketing, However, linkbait is also used by spammers as so-called linkspam by featuring sensational headlines to trick users into expecting compelling, valuable content (Kharif, 2012:38; Konnikova, 2014). In this context, Facebook (El-Arini & Tang, 2014) defines clickbait as posts displaying a teaser headline that coaxes users to click on a link in order to view the remainder of the content.
Correspondingly, Facebook implemented community guidelines and measures to avoid linkbait as a means to artificially prioritise misleading popular content into users’ news feeds.

- **Fake user-generated parody accounts:** Considering the profitable potential to monetise followers of influential parody accounts, fake user-generated parody accounts can be bought on the internet (Horne, 2015). Created by spambots, fake user-generated parody accounts circumvent distrust in advertising and make use of link-bait and cloned content to deceive followers (Davis, 2015; Horne, 2015).

Social spam is a concern for strategic reputation management, as it breaks down the trust of the social media community as unsuspecting members are tricked by malicious content that appears to be originating from human friends and real-life brands (Nextgate, 2013:6; Zi et al, 2012:456). Moreover, social media management return on investment is in jeopardy when unsuspecting users access spam content instead of the brand's official social media content (Nextgate, 2013:6). As such, social spam skews the ORM success metrics of social media management when reporting on trending topics, for example, as many conversations, are in fact, merely social spam (Guo & Chen, 2014:372). Another threat to strategic brand reputation management is the fact that social spam diverts website traffic away from the corporate webpage (Mitchell, 2009:23), thereby hijacking a corporate communication message. In addition, website search engine rankings of spammers improve to the determent of corporate websites, as users click on spam (Nextgate, 2013:6).

**xvi. Cybercrime, hacktivism and social media hijacking:** The surge in cybercrime from malicious hackers pose a risk to organisations’ data security (Chavan & Ahire, 2015; Ernst & Young, 2013:2; Hootsuite & Nexgate, 2013:3). Data breaches pose a risk to the securing of customer, operational and financial data, reputation, and intellectual property (Ernst & Young, 2013:2). The official social media management accounts of prominent brands with millions of followers are especially vulnerable to hackers. For example, both the Facebook pages of Cricket South Africa and the rock music band Linkin Park were defaced with pornographic linkbait, trolling and spam which has the potential to quickly infect a vast number of social media users’ computers, should they click on the links (Amir, 2014; Kahn, 2015; Prabhu, 2015). At the time of the hacks, Cricket South Africa had over three million followers while Linkin Park had over 60 million followers on their official Facebook pages (Amir, 2014; Kahn, 2015). In a similar manner, the official Twitter handle of Minister of Sport and Recreation, Fikile Mbalula (Herman, 2016), was hacked as well as the Facebook pages for Crayola (Keating, 2015) and Delta Airlines (Zhang, 2015). Although verified Facebook pages are generally secure, a possible vulnerability may be
a community manager as page administrator, whose computer was previously compromised by spam, linkbait or phishing attempts (Kahn, 2015). To confirm, an annual global study by Aon Risk Solutions (Aon, 2015:9) concluded that the ninth most concerning reputational risk is a combination of computer crime, hacking, viruses and/or malicious code.

Cyber-attacks typically involve the compromising of official social media management accounts by hackers or hacktivists to post unauthorised content. More specifically, hacktivists break into digital assets in order to gain attention and promote their political goals (Ernst & Young, 2013:2; Hootsuite & Nexgate, 2013:6; Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010:241). Hacktivists are defined by Chavan and Ahire (2015:3392) as hackers with a political agenda. Likewise, hacktivism is defined by Ziegler (2002:14) as a practice of resistance whereby hackers make use of technology for activism, mostly with a political agenda. Similarly, Jordan and Taylor (2004:1) define hacktivism as “the emergence of popular political action, of the self-activity of groups of people, in cyberspace. It is a combination of grassroots political protest with computer hacking”.

Hacktivism is equated to virtual sit-ins, a form of online activism and protest, where targeted web pages are defaced, protest messages are posted, viruses are planted or website servers are overloaded with requests, eventually causing servers to crash (Ziegler, 2002:14). Often, when defacing websites, hacktivists post satirical comments and parody content (Jordan & Taylor, 2004:85). A well-documented incident is hacktivist group Anonymous’ breaking into Burger King’s Twitter account and changing the handle to reflect McDonald’s corporate identity (Goldman, 2013). At the same time, the defaced Burger King account was used to post parody content incriminating McDonald’s, presumably motivated by the horsemeat scandal which exposed fast food laced with meat from horses and other undisclosed animal sources (Musil, 2013a). Often, the political motivation for hacktivism is the exposing of corporate and government secrets (Jordan & Taylor, 2004:164). Likewise, controversial conservative Afrikaans artist, Steve Hofmeyr’s Wikipedia page was hacked in 2012 to mock the singer’s several children out of wedlock and in protest against his planned song that contained hate speech in reaction to Julius Malema’s song “Shoot the Boer”, that also contained hate speech (Seifart, 2012).

A related practice by activists is social media hijacking, whereby hacktivists take ownership of a social media account to post content to further their cause (Veil et al, 2015:104). Alternatively, social media hijacking occurs when organised online activists flood a brand’s official social media account page with comments (Veil et al, 2015:104) and parody content (Coombs & Holladay, 2012:412) where the public outrage is visible to
everyone. Owing to the anonymity of the internet, activists easily create fake profiles to hijack the message of the brand’s official social media page. As such, a study on social media hijacking and slacktivism by Veil et al (2015:107) concluded that these forms of online activism, when gaining sufficient traction across converged media channels, collectively harm reputation and, ultimately, instigate strategic change.

Considering the elements of a social media governance framework, it seems to remain a challenge for both ORM and strategic reputation management. As reiterated by Zerfass, Fink and Linke (2011:7), many organisations lack the necessary skills, structures and strategies required for long-term social media business impact. As confirmed by a study among corporate communication practitioners of organisations’ social media governance practises by Macnamara & Zerfass (2012:297) it was concluded that 14% of European practitioners measure social media KPIs, 23% of European practitioners reported to have broad social media strategies/policies in place, 27% of European practitioners reported that organisations train their staff in social media, 29% of European practitioners monitored social media, while 31% of European practitioners made use of specific social media guidelines. As such, the study recommended that organisations require strong management and governance frameworks for social media use. Similarly, a study by Interbrand (2013:1) concludes that only 44% of respondents from digitally active organisations have a social media policy. Similarly, a study by Larcker, Larcker and Tayan (2012:10) concludes that 75% of organisations do not have formal social media policies or guidelines for board members. Likewise, a few years later, an annual global study by Aon Risk Solutions (Aon, 2015:3) concluded that social media is only the 46th most concerning risk for management.

Interestingly, Pitts and Aylott, (2012:253) are of the opinion that social media principles, such as virality that is indicative of the loss of control in decentralised networks often result in reputational damage, having already been widely shared long before corporate governance systems are able to detect, respond to and mitigate the risks. It stands to reason then that good social media governance is particularly concerned with when and how management chooses to respond to the reputational risks of social media engagement (Whalen & Krishna, 2013b:68). It is therefore fair to say that brands’ integrated social media management teams’ responses to social media parody accounts is a fundamental concern for social media governance.

In summary then, in an online environment saturated with fake content, hoaxes and spam, it becomes increasingly easy to confuse the latter with authentic user-generated parody accounts created by real humans without fraudulent intentions. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the difference between fake content that copies brand identities and user-
generated parody accounts that also copy brand identities. Therefore, fake content and user-generated parody accounts may look similar, but have different intentions. To elaborate, the subsequent chapter clarifies the intentions of user-generated parody accounts.

3.7. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the first aim (i) of this chapter was achieved by exploring how social media management teams may optimise reputation that resonates with critical social media communities by emphasising the governing principles of social media that are founded on the technological capabilities of Web 2.0. Likewise, the second aim (ii) of this chapter was achieved by describing how ORM essentially gathers strategic insights from metrics and analytics to monitor, manage and measure the resonance of social media management. As such, online reputation metrics such as resonance, sentiment, visibility, impact, reach and engagement require continuous monitoring and analysis to mitigate a complex set of risks which may jeopardise the extent to which reputation resonates with critical stakeholders.

A third aim of the chapter (iii) was achieved by elaborating on the participation levels of social media users, ranging from passive lurkers to highly active angry critics which is typified by paracrises such as hating, flaming, ranting and trolling which intensifies reputational risks. Therefore, the ability to maintain a coherent corporate story that is emotionally appealing, otherwise known as an expressive quotient (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:133,137) is disrupted by a complex mix of paracrises such as fake content, social spam, hoaxes and angry social media communities who accuse management of wrongdoing. A particularly disruptive platform is Twitter, a volatile social network for paracrises characterised by hating, flaming and trolling where social media management engagements are continuously scrutinised, criticized and attacked.

The fourth aim of the chapter (iv) was achieved by defining and unpacking the various paracrisis response strategies of Coombs and Holladay (2012:412). Finally, as paracrisis response strategies mitigate reputational risks, the fifth (v) aim of the chapter was achieved in a critical discussion of the requirements for a responsive social media governance framework to proactively lower the risks of social media management while safeguarding an emotionally resonant reputation.

As elaborated in the subsequent chapter, Twitter is also the antagonistic environment where user-generated parody accounts as paracrises occur the most frequently. All things considered, responsive social media governance frameworks may mitigate these risks while also remaining cognisant of the governing principles of social media to co-create reputations that resonate with critical social media communities.
CHAPTER 4
PARACRISIS RESPONSE STRATEGIES TO MAINTAIN EMOTIONALLY RESONANT REPUTATIONS WHEN USER-GENERATED PARODY ACCOUNTS TARGET BRANDS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Given the popularity of satire on social media, it is believed that the current cultural zeitgeist is best typified as the age of parody (Fournier & Avery, 2011:24; Funnell, 2015), characterised by the increasing appreciation of social media parodies which is problematic for strategic reputation management. Owing to the democratisation of consumer voices on the social web, management is facing an unpalatable reality, namely that “if possible a brand message will be caricatured”, as articulated by Berthon and Pitt (2012:97). Particularly concerning is the fact that parody transform audiences’ perceptions to such an extent that they never view the object of parody in the same manner again (Burgess, 2011:130).

With the above in mind, the first aim of this chapter is to (i) explore how social media parody as an emerging trend in South Africa hijacks strategic messages. The chapter argues that the double meaning of irony and satire can be easily misunderstood, while the rudeness, offensiveness and sarcasm used by copy-cat parody accounts complicate the ability to maintain an emotionally resonant brand reputation. The secondary aim (ii) of this chapter is to analyse the reasons why brands are likely to be targeted by parody accounts and to establish when brands are at risk of being parodied.

The third aim of the chapter is to (iii) provide a critical discussion of the possible paracrisis response strategies to a user-generated parody account. Lastly, the fourth aim of the chapter is to (iv) motivate why Fombrun and Van Riel’s (2004:94) Expressiveness Quotient (EQ) provides valid constructs to measure and identify the most suitable paracrisis response strategies (Coombs; 2014; Coombs & Holladay, 2012) for social media management teams to maintain emotionally resonant reputations when user-generated parody accounts target brands.

4.2. THE IMITATING VOICE AND DOUBLE MEANINGS OF PARODY TO CONVEY CRITICISM

This section explores the imitating voice and double meanings of parody as a form of criticism. More concerning is the fact that audiences often don’t realise they are encountering a parody as the subtlety of irony is easily confused with the original message that it imitates.
An abundance of definitions of parody, which seems to have not changed significantly over the course of time, is provided in modern literature. A chronological account of definitions is provided below before arriving at a suitable definition for the purpose of this study. Dentith (2002:9) defines parody as “any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemic allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice”. Likewise, Visser (2005:322) defines parody as “a literary or artistic work that imitates the characteristic style of an author or a work for comic effect or ridicule”. Colebrook (2005:181) elaborates by defining parody as a certain voice or style used for the purpose of exposing the peculiarities and blindness of the text being parodied. In the same manner, Sclafani (2009:615) defines a parodic performance as “a speech genre which dialectically builds on, while simultaneously subverting, prior texts and prior meanings associated with language use”. Similarly, Blake (2011:283) defines parody as a mocking imitation of text or any form of artistic expression such as stories, music or images. Similarly, Burgess (2011:122) defines parody as the use of double meanings to provide humorous commentary on familiar narratives with the purpose of confounding them through laughable and implausible conclusions. In the same way, Skågeby (2013:65) defines parody as “an imitation of the style of a particular writer, artist or genre with deliberate exaggeration for comic effect”.

Having evaluated an ample number of definitions of parody, it seems that the most common concerns are the use of parody to imitate an original text while using humour to criticize serious issues. Consequently, for the purpose of this study, parody is defined as the ironic imitation of a brand’s strategic message to satirise, ridicule or poke fun at a brand for comic effect.

Parody is an ancient genre that attacks prominent official messages. The word parody, as a specific genre of literature, was used for the first time in the fourth century BC by Greek philosopher Aristotle in his work entitled Poetics (Dentith, 2002:6,10; Jean, 2011:19). At the time, the word parodia referred to a narrative poem that was characterised by the use of satire or a mock-heroic subject (Dentith, 2002:10). The Greek word parodia means ‘counter-song’ (Hutcheon, 2000:32). As such, a mock-heroic poem is intended for comic effect while imitating the epic poems about legendary ancient Greek heroes, for instance, the Iliad and the Odyssey, written by Homer. To clarify the definition of mockery, Roehm and Roehm (2014:19) note that “mockery is a form of disparaging humour, which elicits amusement through mimicry with denigration or belittlement”.

Since Antiquity, diverse forms of satire (Crittenden, Hopkins & Simmons, 2011:174) irony (Bal et al, 2009:231) and parody, also known as genres or cultural practices, have been produced
For example, during medieval times, *parodia sacra*, or a parody of sacred texts, emerged. During modern times, parodic novels similar to that of author Miguel de Cervantes’ 1605 work, *Don Quixote*, was published. As a classical parody, *Don Quixote* mocked chivalric romances (Dentith, 2002:37; Hutcheon, 2000:26). Interestingly, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, parody was no longer limited to literature, as other media such as music, caricatures and paintings also expressed parody (Jean, 2011:19).

Parody is expressed in a range of parodic forms or media which vary significantly between historical periods and between cultures (Dentith, 2002:19,21). In contemporary culture, parody serves many purposes and varies according to the specific genre in which parody is expressed (Dentith, 2002:162). Moreover, Skågeby (2013:66) notes that the standard conventions of a genre continuously develop or merge over time as new technology evolves and markets transform. Consequently, the interpretations, meaning and definitions of parody have changed throughout history (Hutcheon, 2000:32). Regardless of the ancient history of parody, Mikkonen and Bajde (2013:331) maintain that parody is a core expressive form of contemporary consumer culture.

Although there are many genres or forms in which parody may be expressed, new technologies such as social media make it possible for parody to reach contemporary audiences in the form of social media parody accounts. Being familiar representations of contemporary consumer culture, brands are frequently targeted in the form of social media parodies, as elaborated in Section 4.3.3. To illustrate, Table 4.1 below outlines the different forms of parody in contemporary popular culture while also highlighting their varying intentions, as specifically compiled by the researcher for the purpose of this study.

**TABLE 4.1: Classification of contemporary popular culture parody genres and their intentions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contemporary parodic cultural form</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political cartoons</strong></td>
<td>● Zapiro’s lady justice rape cartoon</td>
<td>Political satire (Bal <em>et al.</em>, 2009:230; Robins, 2014:93) and caricature (Jean, 2011:19).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stand-up comedy</strong></td>
<td>● Stand-up comedy</td>
<td>Political satire, humour and irony (Hariman, 2008:248; Robins, 2014:93)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Satiric magazines and comic books | • Mad magazine  
• AdBusters  
• Bittercomix  
| Satiric T-shirts | • T-shirts created by high school learners parodying brands and ANC leaders (Floris, Ncobo & Maqhina, 2013).  
| Satiric artworks | • Brett Murray’s painting of President Jacob Zuma, *The Spear*.  
• Artworks by Any Warhol and Pawel Kuczynski | Political satire and parody (Olivier, 2012; Randeree, 2012; Van der Walt & Shay, 2013:3). |
| Animated sitcoms | • *Die Antwoord*  
| Rap and hip-hop music | • *Die Antwoord*  
• In Johannesburg, depicting trade in blood diamonds (Smith, 2012b). | Socio-political satire, protest (Evans, 2015: 692; Gilmore, 2012:84) and activism in Africa (Chiripasi, 2013; McConnell, 2012; Root, 2013; Smith, 2012b). |
| Parody advertisements | • Nando’s advertisements  
• Cell C advertisements mocking Vodacom  
• Mercedes-Benz advertisements parodying BMW | Satire and mocking competitor brands (Nicolson, 2012a; Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam & Hove, 2011:6). |
| Fake online newspapers/ spoof websites/ news parody websites | • *The Onion*  
• ZA News Network  
• whitehouse.gov1.info  
| Anti-brand websites | • starbucked.com  
• walmartsucks.org  
• fuckyoueltkom.co.za | Consumer activism and brand parodies (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006:479; 2010: 325). |
| Social media parody accounts | • YouTube parody advertisements of the official MacBook Air advert and Nestlé’s Kit Kat chocolate bar.  
• YouTube parody account SuzelleDIY (Du Plessis, 2015; Blaine, 2015; Moodie, 2015).  
• Twitter user-generated parody accounts @BPGlobalPR and @QuantasPR | Brand parodies (Berthon & Pitt, 2012:88; Wilson, 2013), advertising parodies (Berthon & Pitt, 2012:88; Da Silva & Garcia, 2012:94; Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam & Hove, 2011:5), news satire (Quart, 2009:12), political satire (Lim & Golan, 2011:711), fan fiction parodies (Jenkins, 2006:16; Montano, 2013:692; Tumblr, 2014) and brand hijacking (Milne, 2013:208). |
It is evident from Table 4.1 above that social media parody accounts are merely one of several forms in which brands are parodied. Moreover, when analysing Table 4.1 above, the wide-ranging and somewhat ambiguous intentions of parody is evident, as intentions typically varies from harsh satiric criticism to light-hearted frivolousness. Correspondingly, the intentions of parody may be playful imitation, while in other instances, the purpose may be harsh satire (Ross, 1998:49). In a similar explanation, Dentith (2002:19,27) suggests that the function of parody is twofold. On the one hand, parody is a subversive genre that attacks and criticizes the official word, undermines the seriousness of those who hold authority and mocks the pretensions of authoritative discourse. On the other hand, parody playfully attacks, mocks or ridicules a wide range of phenomena such as social innovation, anything that threatens the status quo, or whatever is new or unusual. In this way, parody may even be inconsequential, irreverent and silly (Dentith, 2002:37). Again, Hutcheon (2000:32) maintains that irony evident in parodies may be destructive, playful, belittling or even express constructive criticism.

In conclusion then, the somewhat ambiguous intentions of parody may be problematic for ORM metrics and analytics, which then further complicates the selection of appropriate paracrisis response strategies to maintain an emotionally resonant brand reputation. To further explore the double meanings and rather complex intentions of parody, the subsequent section explains how irony and satire are related forms of humour that pose reputational risks.

4.2.1. Irony and satire as related forms of humour to voice criticism through parody

As already stated, the purpose of parody is often to satirise, ridicule or poke fun at its target. In order to understand the meaning of humour, Da Silva and Garcia (2012:92) define humour as playing with meanings while challenging audiences’ beliefs about that which is being taken for granted. A close relationship exists between parody and irony as related expressions of humour. As such, irony is highlighted in the definition of parody by Hutcheon (2000:xii), who states that parody is “a form of repetition with ironic critical distance, making difference rather than similarity”. With regard to irony, Ross (1998:50) defines irony is “an expression of meaning, often humorous or sarcastic, by the use of language of a different or opposite tendency”. However, Colebrook (2005:3) maintains that a single definition of irony is problematic, considering that definitions of irony vary according to its historical, cultural and contextual uses and the interpretations thereof.

Having defined irony, it is evident that this form of humorous criticism is rather complex. When used in fiction, irony typically involves a character who is ignorant about facts that are apparent to everybody else, including other characters and the reader (Blake, 2011:260). Equally
important is the problem of irony, namely the notion that irony is elitist and that only those audiences who are privy to the context of the ironic statement will understand what is being said (Colebrook, 2005:19). Stated differently, irony is to say one thing, but to mean something else. The fact that irony is elitist is further explained by Reyes, Rosso and Veale (2013:241), who describe irony as a sophisticated mode of communication that is ambiguous and subtle.

A related form of humour that often features in parody is satire. As such, critical satire is highlighted in the definition of parody by Malone (2012:297) as “a work created to mock, comment on, or make fun of an original work, its subject, author, style, or some other target, by means of imitation”. Satire, as is the case with parody, originated in ancient Greek culture where satire was used to mock the shortcomings of human nature (Matsa, 2010:7). In modern-day culture satire is used more broadly in parody, comedy or humour to describe or ridicule events that audiences find funny. In a related definition, satire is defined by Visser (2005:322) as an attack on wickedness or folly by using derisive wit. Similarly, Colebrook (2005:183) defines satire as a “form of an attack by way of ridicule, irony or parody”. Likewise, Berthon and Pitt (2012:90) and Bal et al (2009:231) define satire as expressing sarcasm, irony and ridicule to lampoon someone or something.

A main function of satire is to express criticism for comic effect. More specifically, the social function of satire is to shatter deception and illusion (Da Silva & Garcia, 2012:92). For this reason, satire is seen as an attack on an individual or a social institution (Matsa, 2010:9). By the same token, Gring-Pemble and Watson (2003:136) maintain that satire primarily provides social criticism and deflate egos while comic effect is a secondary function. A case in point is the mission statement of the controversial French satirical newspaper, Charlie Hebdo (2016) - the word Hebdo translates into the English word weekly - which reads as follows:

“Charlie fights... Religions which inspire swarms of fools, Rednecks who can't see further than the tip of their nose, the dotcom billionaires googlelising the world, bankers who gamble away our money, manufacturers who would make us live with a gas mask, footballers with more ego than talent, hunters who shoot us while mushroom picking and dictators who force us to agree with Bernard-Henri Levy.”

Essentially, satire is characterised by exaggeration and irony, although audiences may easily miss the target of satire when satire is taken seriously (Blake, 2011:284). In essence, then, Reyes, Rosso and Veale (2013:260) describe parody, irony and satire as overlapping figurative phenomena which differ mostly to the various degrees that meanings are obvious and a particular tone is being used. In addition to irony and satire as overlapping forms of criticism for comic effect, additional related forms are pastiche, spoof, travesty, burlesque and carnivalesque. A brief explanation of each will now be provided.
Spoof: According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2013) spoof is to “imitate (something) while exaggerating its characteristic features for comic effect”. An alternative definition of spoof, according to the same dictionary, is to “hoax or trick (someone)”. The word was first used by English comedian Arthur Roberts, circa 1852, in a card game involving a bluff which Roberts then called a spoof (Cresswell, 2009a). Subsequently, a spoof may also indicate a swindle, a hoax or a parody.

Pastiche: O’Shaughnessy and Stadler (2012:453) define pastiche as “an imitation of a style or various styles that is often affectionate and humorous about its sources.” Instead, Colebrook (2005:181) premises that pastiche is strictly postmodern and defines pastiche as “a collection, series or juxtaposition of style and voices with no sense of an underlying normality from which they depart”. When used in a postmodern paradigm, O’Shaughnessy and Stadler (2012:453) agree that pastiche delights in imitation considering that postmodernism questions the making of meanings and the process of signification. Generally, pastiche denotes a playful imitation of another text (Dentith, 2002:11). Pastiche is therefore similar to parody as both borrow from other texts (Hutcheon, 2000:38). However, pastiche is different from parody in that pastiche does not maintain a critical distance from the original text, which is a key function of parody (Dentith, 2002:155). In this manner, pastiche is monotextual as it highlights similarity rather than difference as in the case of parody which is intertextual (Hutcheon, 2000:33).

Travesty: Baldick (2008b) defines travesty as “a mockingly undignified or trivialising treatment of a dignified subject, usually as a kind of parody”. Travesty was first used in French as travesti which translates as being disguised or dressed to appear ridiculous (Cresswell, 2009b). Later on, the word travesty became the source for transvestite. In modern times, travesty is associated with absurd or false absurd representations.

Burlesque: Baldick (2008a) defines burlesque as an expression of parody that ridicules a serious topic by treating it with a lack of dignity or by expressing a trivial topic with elevated seriousness. Burlesque describes a tradition of parodic theatre which originated in the late seventeenth century (Dentith, 2002:123). Nowadays, burlesque theatre is presented in the form of disreputable comic entertainment featuring a striptease or other titillating dances (Baldick, 2008a).

Carnivalesque: During carnivals, participants wear masks and costumes to parody everyday life (McLean & Wallace, 2013:1522). Originally, the transgressions of norms expressed during a carnival, as a parody of the existing social order, was permitted because authorities strictly limited the carnival to be held over a few days during the year (Ross, 1998:49). As such, parody may contain carnivalesque allusions when a single language of authority is questioned (Dentith, 2002:23). When parody elicits discourse into
a carnivalesque spectatorship, it functions to expose the true nature of the people behind
the masks and the backstage realities of public performances (Hariman, 2008:255; 256).

As the preceding section illustrated, parody is expressed in several overlapping forms of
criticism for comic effect. To conclude, the preceding section illustrates how corporate
communication, as the official word, is vulnerable to being parodied. Moreover, it is evident
that tainted brand reputations are particularly at risk of being parodied since satire typically
unmaskoods shortcomings and shatters deception for comic effect. However, the somewhat
complex and ambiguous conventions of parody imply that audiences do not find the humour
funny and easily overlook the fact that they are encountering a brand parody that is intended
to be a satiric copycat of the official brand. Therefore, the subsequent section elaborates on
the conventions of parody that require an appreciation of this genre in order for audiences to
recognise that fact that they are, in fact, encountering a parody that sarcastically alludes to
the original text being imitated.

4.2.2. Familiarity with the conventions of parody is required to appreciate its humour

Owing to the fact that parody is a complex form of expressing criticism that often integrates
several related forms of humour as previously discussed, it is understandable that audiences
often overlook the allusions to the original text being imitated. Stated differently, being familiar
with the codes and conventions that characterise parody as a genre (O’Shaughnessy &
Stadler, 2012:231), audiences may appreciate its humour and recognise the fact that the
imitation being encountered is a spoof aimed at mocking the original.

When referring to a wide range of cultural practices, or parodic cultural forms, what is
essentially being described is a genre (Dentith, 2002:19). A genre or textual type is defined by
O’Shaughnessy and Stadler (2012:231) as a distinct collection of texts that typically share
conventional characteristics such as visual style, narrative structure and content. Likewise,
Skågeby (2013:65) defines a genre as a familiar form of expression that relies on somewhat
stable patterns so that a common frame of reference is established. Once an audience is then
familiar with parody as a genre, the intended meaning of parody emerges through a somewhat
complex process called intertextuality.

Essentially, Gray (2005:223) proposes that the semantic and syntactical rules of a genre teach
audiences what to expect from a medium’s rhetoric, messages and styles in order to determine
how meaning should be interpreted. When watching a political advertisement, as a genre, for
example, audiences generally expect the messages to contain political rhetoric (Tryon,
Once familiar with the genre, audiences are then able to interpret parody through a process called intertextuality (Gray, 2005:223). As such, O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2012:145) define intertextuality as “the process of knowingly borrowing and referring to other texts, or interpreting one text in the light of other related texts”. Stated differently, Ross (1998:111) defines intertextuality as “the way in which one text echoes or refers to another text”. Similarly, Dentith (2002:5) defines intertextuality as the interrelatedness of texts as utterances allude to preceding texts and repudiate succeeding texts. To clarify, allusion is defined by Blake (2011:265) as “an incidental or passing reference which may include references to events, customs, history, places, figures from myth or literature”. In addition, intertextual allusions may also include clichés, slang, jargon and other catch phrases used in everyday speech (Dentith, 2002:5). To illustrate, Blake (2011:287) explains how comedians use allusions to mock the jargon of sports commentators or the pompous style of politicians.

It is necessary to critically explore the reasons why parody, as a complex genre, is easily open to misinterpretation. As McKain (2005:417) argues, parody may only succeed when the audience is familiar with the parodied text and when they believe that the text is worth parodying. Indeed, Hutcheon (2000:33) maintains that parody is a sophisticated genre which places demands on both the encoders and decoders of meaning to understand the context of parodic intertextuality and allusions. As such, audiences firstly need to recognise the fact that text is being parodied, and secondly, audiences are required to comprehend the significance of parody’s ironic distance and intended allusions in order to grasp both the primary and the implied meanings thereof. To elaborate, irony occurs when a speaker or writer encodes a hidden meaning behind the words being used which requires an audience to understand the context of the ironic statement if they want to grasp what it really means (Colebrook, 2005:16,4). For the reader then, the enjoyment of the irony used in parody is a result of intertextual bouncing between texts, rather than merely the humour itself being used (Hutcheon, 2000:32).

The humour used in parody may not be interpreted as being funny by all audiences as intertextuality requires audiences to understand the context of the existing text being parodied (Ross, 1998:37, 47). Only when audiences accept the irony and satire encoded in a joke, will they find both the premise and the punch line funny (Neacsu, 2011:278). In other words, there is no certainty that an audience will receive humour in the way that the writer intended (Ross, 1998:50). However, Opdycke (2013:63) disagrees and explains that ironists do not proclaim that their own perspectives are necessarily correct and they do not presume that one particular viewpoint is entirely true or false. To clarify, Blake (2011:284) explains how some audiences may overlook the intertextual allusive dimensions of satire and parody and therefore take them.
at face value, as in the case of Lewis Carol’s popular 1865 novel, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland. Many of the original poems parodied in the book were known to audiences at the time; however, contemporary audiences still find them entertaining while overlooking the fact that Carol mocks serious poems.

To reiterate, when taken at face value, the allusions of parody is easily overlooked (Blake, 2011:284). As confirmed in a related study of parodied fairy tales by Gring-Pemble and Watson (2003:151), readers largely overlook pertinent issues such as abortion and affirmative action addressed in the stories owing to the integration of related forms of humour such as burlesque and satire. In a like manner, Gilmore (2012:82) is concerned that the carnivalesque and satirical parody used in protest graffiti as expressions of socio-political critique may be misconstrued. Due to the murals’ artful design and humour, this form of protest is ideologically palatable so that audiences perceive graffiti to advance the very power structures that they are attempting to undermine. Younger audiences, especially, misunderstand the underlying socio-political context of protest graffiti by merely associating with graffiti as ‘a cool way to be different’ (Gilmore, 2012:81).

The preceding discussion and examples underline the view of Skågeby (2013:65), who observes that parody relies on intertextuality or references to other texts and genres. In this manner, textual meaning depends on intertextuality which is co-dependent on other texts. When satirising a highly charged social issue, such as political correctness, audiences on both sides of a controversy may find it amusing and even laugh at the satire; however, both sides’ original viewpoints may remain intact (Gring-Pemble & Watson, 2003:139). Consequently, a satirist’s indented meaning may be lost. Again, Skågeby (2013:66) draws attention to the fact that parody is at the mercy of the audience who may disregard the message or fail to understand satire and its intended meaning. A case in point is the extensive public debate which surrounded the controversial satirical painting by artist Brett Murray, metaphorically titled The Spear (Olivier, 2012), which depicts South African President Jacob Zuma with his genitals exposed.

Not only was The Spear painting vandalised where it was displayed in the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg in 2012, but many angry protestors also interpreted the painting as racist, vulgar and disrespectful (De Wet, 2012; Polgreen, 2012). In addition, the South African government also unsuccessfully attempted to obtain a court interdict to ban the image from being published on the internet and to prohibit the painting from being displayed in the art gallery (De Wet, 2012; Randeree, 2012). As displayed in Figure 4.1 below, The Spear parodies a well-known pose of the former Russian revolutionary leader, Vladimir Lenin, as it
was originally depicted on a Soviet-era communist propaganda poster (Olivier, 2012; Van der Walt & Shay, 2013:1; Van Graan, 2012). Another intertextual allusion in The Spear painting is the 1837 Hans Christian Andersen story, The Emperor’s New Clothes (Van Graan, 2012). In addition, The Spear parodies the name of the ruling party’s former military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe – The Spear of the Nation (Olivier, 2012). Other allusions in the painting include President Zuma's acquittal in a 2006 rape charge involving an HIV positive woman and his polygamist marriage to four wives (Polgreen, 2012). As such, The Spear is a parody of masculine, patriarchal authority (Olivier, 2012) as illustrated in Figure 4.1 below.

As illustrated in Figure 4.1 above, The Spear painting is an example of a satiric parody which, on the one hand, satirises Zuma, while, on the other hand, parodies the poster of Lenin (Van der Walt & Shay, 2013:3). Yet, as Dentith (2002:28) points out, no single political or social meaning can be assigned to a parody. Indeed, parody demands a sophisticated audience that is able to decode multiple texts considering parody’s double-voiced discourse (Druick, 2009:301). For this reason, audiences need to comprehend the context and background text in order to appreciate and evaluate the new creation of the parody (Hutcheon, 2000:31).

To conclude, the preceding section underlines how the ability to maintain an emotionally resonant reputation is socially constructed during processes outside of management’s direct control. As the double meanings of parody and implied humour of satire is at the mercy of the audience’s interpretation, those unfamiliar with the conventions of parody easily take it at face value. Adding to that, as The Spear illustrated, audiences may not be familiar with the intertextual allusion of parody. The result is a full-blown reputational crisis, confusion, violence and heated public debates. In other words, parody has the ability to discredit brand messages, especially when targeting prominent and powerful brands.
4.2.2.1. Offensive satire as a convention of parody to gain attention, stimulate debate and discredit reputations

Parody is a catalyst for conversations often characterised by inappropriateness, noise and laughter (Dentith, 2002:189). As illustrated in Figure 4.1 in the previous section, The Spear was regarded as rather inappropriate and offensive. Not only was The Spear vandalised where it was displayed in the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg in 2012, but many angry protestors also interpreted the painting as racist, vulgar and disrespectful (De Wet, 2012; Polgreen, 2012). Such objections to vulgarity is nothing new. The 1973 film, The Rocky Horror Show, was deemed unacceptable philosophical material in South Africa during apartheid and was banned for offending the sexual mores of the Afrikaner’s dominant ideology (Tomaselli, 1980:8). The film is a parody of the Hollywood genre of the horror film while theatrical burlesque is expressed in the film’s playfulness, musical jokes and use of puns (Dentith, 2002:153).

Inasmuch as satiric parody ridicules its target, it also delivers critical social commentary (Sadleir & De Beer, 2014) through the use of humour (Mikkonen & Bajde, 2013:313). For this reason, parody plays an essential role in a multiplicity of discourses and the expression of public opinion and debate in a democracy (Hariman, 2008:260; Sadleir & De Beer, 2014). To illustrate, Matsa’s (2010:91) study of television satire programmes found that 92% of the respondents engage in discussions with others about topics mentioned on television satire shows. The aforementioned finding is congruent with the views of Hariman (2008:248, 253) that parodic genres are indispensable for a sustainable, engaged and democratic public culture. Likewise, Druick (2009:295, 306) argues that televisual parodic satire mobilises public dialogue around contradictions and social conflicts as parody ridicules official discourse which is seemingly irrational. By the same token Gray (2005:235) describes how audiences enjoy the sharing and discussion of their favourite comedic moments from the animated television parody, The Simpsons, in their respective networks of discussions and interpretive communities. As such, The Simpsons is regarded as a parody of racial and sexual stereotyping as well as the American Dream.

The vulgarity expressed in parody continues to evoke heated debates around democracy and freedom of speech. An ongoing global debate questions the right to freedom of speech and the extent to which it safeguards the right to offend, following attacks on French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo (Charlie Hebdo, 2016; Flood, 2016; Noorlander, 2015; Singapore, 2015; Slayton & Thawar, 2015; Tonneau, 2015). In 2015, 12 people were killed during an editorial meeting in the newspaper’s office in Paris by offended Islamic terrorists, including the
editor-in-chief, cartoonists and other staff. *Carlie Hebdo* has a history of publishing crude, distasteful, irreverent, religious and culturally offensive cartoons. Their editorial offices were also bombed in 2011 after which the editor-in-chief lived under police protection. In 2007 French courts ruled that *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons, including a cartoon of Prophet Mohammed, did not incite hate speech against Muslims (Charlie Hebdo, 2016; Noorlander, 2015).

Parody’s strategic use of offensive satire to provoke conversations and discredit reputations is emphasised by the violent reactions against parodists and the limits of free speech. A case in point is the so-called “first puppet in history to win a court case” (Naik, 2014). A magistrate court dismissed hate speech claims made by conservative South African entertainer Steve Hofmeyr against a ventriloquist’s puppet named Chester Missing who made satirical comments about Hofmeyr’s racist tweets (Kwanele, 2014; Lindeque, 2014; Sosibo, 2014). The magistrate ruled that Hofmeyr exposed himself to criticism, satire and ridicule whereafter the case was applauded for upholding freedom of speech in post-Apartheid South Africa (Mitchley & Sapa, 2014). Following the ruling, the puppet was punched outside the court by a Hofmeyr sympathiser. Although Hofmeyr deleted the racist tweet, it was nevertheless copied and circulated virally on social media (Sithole & Zwane, 2014).

Often, the parody advertisements of fast food brand Nando’s are criticized by offended stakeholders. Soon after the overthrow of the Libyan government and death of their leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, a Nando’s television commercial satirised Zimbabwe’s President Robert Mugabe as the ‘Last Dictator Standing’ (BBC, 2011). After receiving threats against Nando’s employees and customers and from Mugabe supporters, Nando’s withdrew the advertisement from traditional broadcasting channels. In another instance in June 2012, Nando’s anti-xenophobia parody commercial was banned by the SABC, e.tv, MultiChoice’s DStv channels and M-Net for being offensive and trivialising a sensitive issue (Ferreira, 2012).

Parody’s strategic use of offensive satire to provoke conversations, gain attention and discredit reputations is evident in caricature. Using exaggeration when expressing criticism, parody achieves ludicrous outcomes (Dentith, 2002:32). Considering that caricature relies on visual exaggeration, political cartoons tend to be highly emotive (Bal *et al.,* 2009:231). Early forms of political satire include political cartoons of the eighteenth century that ridicule British colonisation (Bal *et al.,* 2009:230). As such, Berthon and Pitt (2012:92) define caricature as “the exaggeration of difference in an object of empathy so as to reveal a gap between image and reality”. Likewise, satirical political cartoons as forms of caricature are defined by Bal, Pitt, Berthon and DesAutels (2009:231) as “a picture or description ludicrously exaggerating peculiarities or defects in persons or things”.

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A widely cited example of offensive caricature is the satirical *Rape of Justice* cartoon featuring President Zuma, published in the *Sunday Times* in 2008 (Zapiro, 2011). Commonly referred to as ‘the lady justice rape cartoon’, the author is cartoonist Jonathan Shapiro using the pen-name, Zapiro. The cartoon in question is presented in Figure 4.2 below.

![Figure 4.2: The lady justice rape cartoon featuring President Jacob Zuma and key figures the ruling party’s alliance with the SACP and COSATU (Zapiro, 2011)](image)

The cartoon in Figure 4.2 above alludes to Zuma’s acquittal in a 2006 rape charge involving an HIV positive woman, and former ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema’s statement that he would kill for Zuma if the latter was prosecuted for fraud and corruption charges (Underhill, Pillay & SAPA, 2012; Zapiro, 2011). The offensive cartoon evoked public protests, extensive public debate and severe criticism, especially from members of the ruling party’s alliance partners whose leaders are depicted in the cartoon. Four years after its publication, Zuma withdrew a court case against the *Sunday Times* and Zapiro in which he claimed damages to his reputation and injury to his dignity (Underhill, Pillay & SAPA, 2012).

As explained by Bal *et al* (2009:230), political cartoons such as Zapiro’s lady justice rape cartoon highlight and attack political brands and the political image of their target. As such, political cartoons employ humour as a means of public opposition by exaggerating and exploiting a leader’s most obvious or grotesque physical or ideological features (Bal *et al*, 2009:231; Berthon & Pitt, 2012:92). Moreover, Matsa (2010:97) claims that satire keeps citizens alert and interested in politics in instances when traditional methods, such as party membership and voting, have largely failed to engage them. However, Gring-Pemble and Watson (2003:144) reiterate that audiences ascribe different meanings to satire. Correspondingly, caricature may accentuate social rifts which may become stumbling blocks in community building. Nevertheless, Hariman (2008:248) observes that public culture and democracy do not exclusively depend on “the right forms of serious public discourse” such as television news programmes, documentaries, letters to the editor and editorials. Equally
important are other forms of public opinion expressed in parodic genres such as comic strips, animated sitcoms, stand-up comedy, bumper stickers and drag shows.

Regardless of its strategy to offend, audiences nevertheless appreciate parody as a source of information. Correspondingly, Matsa’s (2010:89) study of television satire programmes finds that 70% of the respondents watch satiric television news programmes in order to be updated and informed. Likewise, Brewer and Marquardt’s (2007:249,265) study of the mock news series, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* concluded that audiences find this form of infotainment to be a valuable source of knowledge about international events and politics. In contrast, Rill and Cardiel’s (2013:1739) study of political parody videos on YouTube during the 2008 U.S. presidential election concluded that audiences did not consider their level of confidence in political knowledge to have increased.

To conclude, the rather inappropriate, vulgar and offensive conventions of parody is problematic since emotionally resonant brand reputations are easily discredited. Should the intertextual allusions of parody be overlooked and the exaggerated vulgarity taken at face value, the reputational risk is that offensive brand associations are established in the minds of the consumers. In this manner, parody mobilises public opinion, which is essential in a democracy. In other words, it is not clear if management should fight back and defend brand reputation or simply ignore a parody. Again, a careful analysis of the intentions of the parody is required in order for brands to respond in a manner that will protect their emotional resonance since audiences enjoy and seek out humorous content.

### 4.2.2.2. Humorous entertainment as a convention of parody to subvert apathy to criticism

The power of parody lies in its use of humour to mask criticism of hegemonic narratives as a joke (Kumar, 2015:243). Likewise, Hariman (2008:262) notes that audiences enjoy laughing at others being exposed in the media and laugh out of relief when realising that events in the media are merely mediated and therefore not real. Moreover, a study by Woodside (2001:58) confirms that the humour used in spoof advertisements help them to ‘stand out’ and be noticed in a cluttered media environment where audiences experience an information overload. Likewise, the emotionally resonant humour of Twitter parody accounts gain attention in cluttered newsfeeds (Knoblauch, 2014).

The use of humour in parody is the primary motivation for audiences to seek out parody as opposed to other overt forms of didactic messages (Gray, 2005:234). As confirmed by
Neacsu’s (2011:89) study of the popular satiric television comedy programme, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* – later known as *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* – parody does not impose its intended message on the audience, so that the audience hardly feels as if parody is attempting to teach them a lesson of some sort. For this reason, the study found that a vast majority of respondents, 97% of the sample, was motivated to watch parody for its entertainment value and to have fun. On the contrary, some authors are of the opinion that parody does, in fact, teach audiences a lesson. A study by Tryon (2008:210,213) concludes that the purpose of parody videos is pedagogical so that audiences are made aware of political issues and policies. Likewise, Gray (2005:236) highlights the conversational value of parody, which ensures that audiences are continuously reminded about the parodic lessons being taught.

The triviality and frivolousness characterising parody is a deliberate strategy to express criticism and resistance (Mikkonen & Bajde, 2013:315). Comparatively, comic parody typically challenges those in authority, deconstructs orthodox seriousness and offers comic relief (Haomin & Xin, 2010:16) or tension relief (Wills & Fecteau, 2016:33). In this manner, parody not only entertains audiences but also enables communicators to subvert ideas that may be otherwise resistant to authoritative and formal expressions of critique. As a matter of fact, Jiramonai (2012:37) notes that although humorous parodies may sometimes seem to be merely comical, entertaining or senseless, they are, in fact, addressing serious issues through the process of critical intertextuality. Critical intertextuality occurs when parody reveals the concealed ideologies of a particular text (Gray, 2005:227). In order to explain the concept of critical intertextuality further, Hutcheon (2000:31,32) suggests that the use of irony emphasises and dramatises the critical distance between the background text being parodied and the new incorporating work. In this manner, parody is a contrast or opposition between texts which results in parody being “a repetition with a difference”. For this reason, Jiramonai (2012:37) is of the opinion that the critical intertextuality of parody is subversive as it opposes authority, the elite and formal institutions. In fact, Quart (2009:12) regards news parody as a means to retaliate against the doublespeak of political public relations. For similar reasons, advertising parodies criticize advertising as a practice of social control and deception, or mocks consumers who fetishise their favourite brands (Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam & Hove, 2011:4,6).

When watching news parody, audiences are challenged to actively distinguish fact from fiction when being presented with competing versions of a story (Jenkins, 2006:227). Therefore, audiences are challenged to evaluate the ambiguity of competing perspectives in parody, as concluded in a study of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* by Opdycke (2013:63). By relying
on irony as a strategy to present the news, audiences are encouraged to question their pre-existing beliefs while being given the power to decide for themselves which side of a perspective they agree with. Likewise, a study of satiric fake news series, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* by Brewer and Marquardt (2007:249, 265) suggests this entertaining form of soft news is far from absurd; rather it encourages audiences to think critically and cynically about politics and the way that politicians carefully manage their image in the media. To elaborate, a study of political parody videos on YouTube by Tryon (2008:210,213) suggests that skilfully created parody does, in fact, have the potential to foster audience’s critical thinking skills to subvert official campaign messages. Similarly, in a study of online parody videos Jiramonai (2012:108) concludes that parody has subversive potential as it interferes with the speakers of original texts so that the latter cease to have control over the communication effect on the audience.

Parody seems to play a significant role in stimulating public discourse and criticizing political ideologies among citizens facing media censorship and free speech restrictions in the Middle East (Reuters, 2013) and China (Shi, 2008) in particular (Funnell, 2015). In China, public deliberation is carefully monitored by the state with harsh punishment for digressers (Jiang, 2010:28). For this reason, parody, humour and sarcasm have become an essential means of retaining a delicate balance between self-censorship and self-expression for civic-minded Chinese when criticizing government on the internet. In a related study by Cheong and Gong (2010:471, 481) political user-generated parody videos effectively challenged and subverted the Chinese government’s discourse. In the end, corruption and power abuses were exposed, which then pressurised the regime to be more accountable. In Saudi Arabia, a viral YouTube parody video drew attention to the plight of female drivers as a result of the government’s ban on female drivers (Agence France-Presse, 2013; Fisher, 2013). In Singapore, user-generated parodies and satiric memes were used to criticize an autocratically implemented Mass Rapid Transport project, as explored in a study by Chen (2013:43,55, 64). The study concluded that parody provided a means of empowerment for a traditionally docile and consenting citizenry by mocking the lack of media freedom and government’s intolerance of any form of dissent and free speech. As a result, Singapore’s reputation for efficiency was harmed and citizens’ demand for accountability spurred the resignation of the rail project’s CEO.

As such, literature is somewhat divided on the persuasive ability of parody to influence perceptions. Although the preceding views argued in favour of the ability of parody to challenge pre-existing beliefs, attitudes and behaviour, findings of several studies are inconclusive (LaMarre, Landreville & Beam, 2009; Matsa, 2010; McKain, 2005; Neacsu, 2011; Reilly, 2011; Rill and Cardiel, 2013; Sabri & Michel, 2014:243; Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel,
2006; Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam & Hove, 2011:14). A possible explanation for the lack of persuasive ability of parody is offered by Tryon (2008:210,213), in a study which concludes that the semiotic and intertextual complexity of parody videos is the reason why parody does not change opinions.

Nevertheless, it is believed that humorous parody is an effective strategy for advertisers to generate positive attitudes towards a brand and to enhance brand recognition and recall (Fournier & Avery, 2011:24; Jean, 2011:19). When used by advertisers, parody disparages competitor brands’ product claims, cultural meanings, creativity and branding techniques (Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam & Hove, 2011:6). Well-documented controversies include Vodacom’s complaint lodged with the Advertising Standards Authority against rival Cell C’s advertisements which parodied the rebranding of Vodacom from blue to red in 2011 (Nicolson, 2012a; Sitole, 2011). To satirise Vodacom’s complaint against Cell C’s parody advertisements, Nando’s responded with a parody advertisement that mocked both the rebranding of Vodacom and Cell C’s advertising campaigns (Daniel, 2010; Vermeulen, 2010). In return, Cell C responded to Nando’s with a parody advertisement as well as an approving response from Cell C’s (2010) CEO Lars P. Reichelt stating: “Nando’s campaign gave us a real chuckle, we love the ads and it’s great to know that our initial campaign is inspiring creativity in other companies.”

Fast food brand, Nando’s (2013), has an established reputation for its use of controversial advertising parodies and has received several awards for their distinctive use of satire in advertising. In fact, as soon as current events occur, people soon expect Nando’s to respond in the form of an advertising parody which is then quickly shared virally on social networks (Britten, 2013). To illustrate, Nando’s parodied a Santam advertisement, to which Santam responded quickly by making a parody advertisement (Fisher, 2012; Granger, 2013; Nicolson, 2012a; Thomas, 2012). In a related instance, Old Spice responded by creating their own parody advertisement to satirise Nando’s spoof of Old Spice’s well-known ‘I’m on a horse’ advisement (Channel24, 2013; Granger, 2013). A study of the humorous brand narratives in advertisements of Santam and Nando’s parodying one another’s campaigns across the converged media space by Irwin (2015:506, 515), concluded that these parodies enhanced consumer engagement, reach, top-of-mind awareness and memorability on social media. As a result, Santam, a rather serious brand personality, benefited from humorous brand associations. Similarly, humorous banter between BMW and Mercedes Benz’ parody advertisements in the 1990s gained prominence and recall (Nicolson, 2012a).
When prominent brands engage in humorous banter, they are appreciated for demonstrating authentic personalities which enhance top-of-mind (Fisher, 2012; Nicolson, 2012a), entertainment, and goodwill for both parties (Thomas, 2012). Social media, in particular, make it possible to reply to both competitors and social media users’ criticism with advertising parodies in real time. At the same time, parody circumvents comparative advertising, which is not legal in South Africa (Daniel, 2010; Nicolson, 2012a; Thomas, 2012). Instead of typically running scared of parodies, management is encouraged to invite social media communities to parody advertisements and intentionally design campaigns that provide fodder for user-generated parodies (Fournier & Avery, 2011:24). So doing, brands may gain resonance from the engaging, collaborative and viral principles of social media.

4.2.3. The emotional resonance of the humour in parody

As can be seen from the ancient history of parody and the wide appeal of this genre of humour as already illustrated in Table 4.1, parody remains popular with audiences. As such, McGraw, Warren and Kan (2015:1154) define humour as “a psychological response characterised by the positive emotion of amusement, the appraisal that something is funny, and the tendency to laugh”. Correspondingly, humour is an emotional reaction experienced by the audience that perceive a message to be funny.

The reason for the popularity of parody seems to be its potential to induce positive emotions associated with humour such as laughter and amusement, according to a study by D’errico and Poggi (2016:12). As such, the study found that emotions associated with parody intended for harmless fun include pleasure, fun, joy and enthusiasm. Often then, these positive emotions are then also associated with the source of the parody. Similarly, a study by Botha (2014:372) of humour and political satire used in Nando’s advertisements concluded that the higher the creativity and intensity of the positive emotions felt in political satire, the greater the likelihood of content being virally shared. As such, when satire makes fun of issues that hit closer to home, the emotional intensity felt by audiences tend to increase. Similarly, a study by Boukes, Boomgaard, Moorman and De Vreese (2015:739) concluded that when audiences hold views congruent with the satire, positive thoughts are elicited towards the target of the parody so that audiences suspend their criticism and agree with the satire.

Often, the intention of humour is perceived to be for entertainment and not for information purposes, and therefore the message is easily dismissed as “just a joke” that should not be taken seriously, according to a study by Nabi, Moyer-Gusé and Byrne (2007:38,40). Yet, the funnier the audience perceive a joke to be, the more they perceive the source to be liked and
credible. As such, the study found, humour is functional for diffusing negative emotions such as anger. Similarly, a study by McGraw, Warren and Kan (2015:1153) found that humorous complaints are far more effective compared to angry complaints when seeking a response on Twitter. Humorous complaints evoke positive emotions such as sympathy from peers and as comic relief, help the complainant cope with a stressful situation. Although humorous complaints may not be taken as seriously as non-humorous complaints, humour breaks through the clutter on social media by gaining traction and visibility so that unresponsive brands may be motivated to admit wrongdoing and address the problem.

Parody resonates with audiences owing to the positive emotions, comic relief and pleasure associated with this expression of humour. According to a study by Wills and Fecteau (2016:33), social media communities derive pleasure from humour as they not only enjoy laughing at jokes, but also telling jokes, which attract engagements and conversations. At the same time, the social functions of humour on Twitter when using parody hashtags include cohesion building, meaning-making and tension relief, according to a study by Wills and Fecteau (2016:33).

A study by Nabi, Moyer-Gusé and Byrne (2007:38, 40) confirms that humour attracts attention, encourages audiences to pay closer attention to a message and, therefore, enhance the likelihood of remembering a message. A study of the humorous bantering between Santam and Nando's parodying one another's advertising campaigns by Irwin (2015:506, 515) concluded that parody advertisements are more likely to be shared virally in brand communities owing to the entertainment value of the content, further receiving communal approval when followers and friends enjoy the content, thereby confirming a social networker's sense of humour. The viral sharing of humorous bantering between brands therefore demonstrates how social media communities share content that resonates both psychologically and emotionally.

To conclude then, the extensive resources invested in maintaining an emotionally resonant brand reputation may be easily eroded by skilfully created user-generated parody accounts that are perceived to elicit positive emotions such as laughter, amusement, pleasure, fun and joy. Not only do humour and satire provide welcome comic relief, but also elicit positive thoughts so that audiences tend to let down their guard and agree with the criticism expressed in parody. The more audiences care about the issue raised in the parody, the higher the emotional intensity felt. In fact, the social capital of the humour in user-generated parody not only transfers to the parodist but also to the followers of the parody account who engage with and share the laughter. In the process, the parodist and those engaging with a funny parodied
brand are all then perceived to be more likeable and credible, therefore gaining communal approval for the joy and entertainment derived from sharing a sense of humour. In fact, the positive emotions experienced when laughing together not only strengthens engagement and visibility in a cluttered environment, but also builds cohesion in a social graph. Correspondingly, brands are faced with a paracrises when being parodied, which implies that emotionally resonant brand reputations are challenged by the intense emotional appeal of humorous parody, especially when raising criticism about issues that social media communities care about.

To further explore the popularity of parody, the subsequent section unpacks social media parody accounts as an emerging trend in the age of parody.

4.3. SOCIAL MEDIA PARODY ACCOUNTS AS AN EMERGING TREND IN THE AGE OF PARODY

Literature suggests that the phenomenon of parody accounts created on social networks is regarded as an established trend in developed countries. It appears that social media parodies have emerged as trend in South Africa around 2014. Some of the driving forces for this trend are explored below:

- The parodying of brands has become such a popular pastime for social media community members who seek entertainment and use satire that Fournier and Avery (2011:24) and Funnell (2015) typify the current cultural zeitgeist as ‘the age of parody’.
- Successful humorous brands such as the Comedy Network and Comedy Central, coupled with the viral sharing of parody websites (Funnell, 2015) and memes contributed to user-generated parody being recognised as a trend by Trend Hunter (2015). Correspondingly, user-generated parodies are pressurising brands to stay truthful.
- The creation of parody accounts is regarded as a noteworthy subculture and micro trend that brand managers need to pay attention to, according to Kung (2015). As such, the popularity and virality of user-generated parodies that mock brands, often draw attention to serious issues and therefore have a significant cultural impact.
- Parody is a newly emerging discourse of cultural and social critique on the Indian web (Kumar, 2015:232).
- The demand for candidness is a trend in Africa that is brought about by disillusioned and angry stakeholders who are increasingly seeking transformation, accountability, authenticity, honesty and transparency from poorly governed and underperforming organisations, especially governments (Trendwatching, 2015). Access to digital technologies and information has contributed towards the trend in the demand for greater
candidness and also extended the reach of activism, typically escalating into viral hashtags. Examples include pressure on the Nigerian government to find the school girls kidnapped by terrorists in 2014, using the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls. In another instance, the parody hashtag meme #MugabeFalls was created to mock Robert Mugabe, the chair of the African Union and 90-year-old Zimbabwean president since 1987, when he fell from a flight of stairs in 2015. As such, user-generated parody is instrumental for digitally empowered Africans, and South Africans specifically, to satirise social inequalities and racism.

- In post-Apartheid South Africa, access to digital technologies has brought about a proliferation of parodic cultural forms such as political satire, irony and joking (Robins, 2014:93). Therefore, parody is a central feature of democratic public culture and media-based political mobilisation.

- In South Africa, the popular YouTube parody account SuzelleDIY (2015) continues to attract thousands of subscribers and millions of views since its creation in 2014. SuzelleDIY parodies the distinct accent that Afrikaans people have when speaking English, while also making fun of the fact that self-help videos are popular on YouTube (Blaine, 2015; Du Plessis, 2015; Moodie, 2015; Pitamber, 2015; Roets, 2015; Sleet, 2015). In addition, the humorous and entertaining persona, Suzelle (SuzelleDIY, 2015), also satirises broader controversies in South Africa such as Eskom’s load shedding and Tim Noakes’ controversial Banting diet. Owing to the success of her snackable, viral videos, SuzelleDIY has become somewhat of a cultural phenomenon by inspiring the use of the word “braai pie”, brought about lucrative brand sponsorships, radio and television advertisements featuring the Suzelle character, magazine covers, a cookbook and possibly a movie (Blaine, 2015; Du Plessis, 2015; Moodie, 2015; Pitamber, 2015; Roets, 2015; Sleet, 2015). Moreover, SuzelleDIY has also inspired a few YouTube parodies. As a testimony to the parody’s impact on defining contemporary youth culture, SuzelleDIY was voted first in Superbalist’s (2015) 100 most influential South Africans. In addition, SuzelleDIY was voted the best YouTube channel in the Channel24 (2014) Awards. Thereafter, television channel Comedy Central broadcast episodes from the parody account (SuzelleDIY, 2016).

- Parody accounts are described as a growing trend in South Africa by Legg (2014), as controversial politicians are increasingly being targeted by parody accounts, often by four or more parody accounts for the same individual.

Although several other examples may be cited here, the remainder of this section will devote more space to social media parody accounts as an emerging trend in South Africa and the reasons for the popularity of this social media phenomenon, especially on Twitter. As such, it
is evident that user-generated parody accounts pose a reputational risk to emotionally resonant reputations, as brand messages are easily hijacked by angry critics in the form of copy-cat parodies.

4.3.1. The ease with which angry critics can create parody accounts to mimic brand identities

Owing to the ease of use and convenience of Web 2.0 technologies, user-generated parodies can be created by any critic to spoof a brand and, with the click of a mouse, instantly share the content with a vast global audience (Bal et al., 2009:236; Berthon & Pitt, 2012:88; Crittenden, Hopkins & Simmons, 2011:174, Petty, 2012:765; Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam & Hove, 2011:3). Correspondingly, online parodies have become a popular pastime to voice opinions or vent frustrations in a creative manner (Earle, 2002:2). In the process, parody is no longer restricted to a few elite, professional producers (Lim & Golan, 2011:711; Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam & Hove, 2011:3). Before Web 2.0, the mass production of satire was mainly reserved for professional satirists who mostly relied on traditional media channels (Crittenden, Hopkins & Simmons, 2011:174).

Nowadays, parodists comprise a wide range of social media users such as amateur and professional satirists, consumers, employees, individual bloggers and activist collectives such as anti-brand communities (Berthon & Pitt, 2012:89; Crittenden, Hopkins & Simmons, 2011:179; Crompton, 2011:32; Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006:479, 2010:325; Petty, 2012:760; Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:50). When brands are targeted in a parody, it is also known as brand parodies, spoof marketing, parody advertising or brand spoofs (Earle, 2002:1).

Typically, online parodies are created by using a variety of digital multi-media formats such as audio-video files, digital images and animations which often include reproductions of existing advertising campaigns and spoofs of corporate logos (Earle, 2002:1). For instance, parody videos shared by amateurs on YouTube, remix images from popular culture such as stand-up comedy with images taken from political advertisements (Tryon, 2008:209).

When a social network user creates an account for the sole purpose of created parody content, such an account is generally referred to as a social media parody account (Szany, 2013), a parody account (Hill, 2014; Milne, 2013:207; Twitter, 2013b) or a user-generated parody (Vanden Bergh, Lee, M., Quilliam, & Hove, 2011). In the case of YouTube, a parody account is more accurately called a YouTube (2014) parody channel. As such, Sadleir and De Beer
define social media parody accounts as “accounts set up in the name of public (and sometimes private) figures providing updates in an often tongue-in-cheek, satirical humorous manner”.

No specific definition of a user-generated parody account seems to exist in available literature. However, as already discussed in Section 3.3.2, user-generated content is defined (OECD:2007:4) as content which is created outside of professional practices and routines, publicly available on the internet and requires a certain amount of creative effort. In addition, parody is already defined for the purpose of this study in Section 4.2 as the ironic imitation of a brand’s strategic message to satirise, ridicule or poke fun at a brand for comic effect. With this in mind, for the purpose of this study, user-generated parody accounts are defined as social media accounts created by non-professional satirists as ironic imitations of the official account’s brand identities to satirise, ridicule or poke fun at a brand for comic effect. Therefore, user-generated parody is different from content that is created by professional parodists such as professional stand-up comedians.

A review of literature suggests that the most popular social networks for user-generated parody accounts are Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. As already discussed in Section 3.3.1, the popularity of social networks is rather fickle. Continuously-evolving platforms, user-patterns and social technologies tend to regularly replace older ones, which implies that parody accounts are similarly context dependent. At the time of the study, however, user-generated parody accounts were most prevalent on Twitter and YouTube, as explained in the subsequent sections.

Considering that parody accounts closely mimic the brand identities being satirised, it is necessary to distinguish user-generated parody from content with harmful fraudulent intentions. Of particular concern is the prevalence of fake accounts, cloned content, hoaxes, linkbait, cyber-squatting and fake parody accounts to disguise social spam, as already discussed in Section 3.6.1. Correspondingly, the average social network user requires a fair level of digital literacy to distinguish between fake content, social spam, user-generated parody and the brand’s official social media content.

Recognising the confusion that exists between the brand’s official social media accounts and other content on social networks, measures are in place to verify official accounts in an attempt to protect brand identities. The terms and conditions for the use of Facebook (2014b), Twitter (2013a) and YouTube (2014a; 2014b) explicitly allow the brand’s official social media accounts to be verified as being authentic by allocating blue verification badges to official accounts. To
illustrate, Figure 4.3 below is a screen shot of the authenticated official social media Twitter account for President Zuma, displaying the verification badge in the form of a ‘√’ sign.

![Figure 4.3: The official, verified Twitter account for President Zuma (SAPresident, 2013)](image1)

Whereas the verification badge is displayed on the brand’s official social media account in Figure 4.3 above, it is absent from the user-generated parody accounts below. To illustrate, Figure 4.4 below contains screen shots of the avatars and biographies of four parody accounts for President Zuma.

![Figure 4.4: Twitter user-generated parody accounts for President Zuma (Jacobzuma, 2012; Plaid_Zuma, 2013; Realjacobzuma, 2011; Jacobzuma1, 2013)](image2)

As can be seen from Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4 above, one has to look closely to distinguish a user-generated parody account from the brand’s verified official social media account. In addition to the blue verification badge for official accounts, another way to identify a user-generated parody account is the irony and satire expressed in the account handles and biographies. However, blue verification badges cannot always be trusted, as social media
users reportedly use photo editing software such as Photoshop to create fake verification symbols in their avatars (Van den Hurk, 2015).

Several other factors mislead unsuspecting social network users to confuse the official social media account with parody that satirises brand identities. Damaging parody typically mimics the brand personality (Jones, 2012; Mann, 2012) which confuses consumers who associate social media content with trust and transparency (MarkMonitor, 2012:2). When mimicking the brand voice in order to confuse consumers online, angry critics create copycat (Malone, 2012) or doppelgänger brands, defined by Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel (2006:50) as parodies of brands, advertisements or logos with opposing meanings. When user-generated parody accounts assume the voice of the parodied brand, they falsely represent public relations messages so that parody is misinterpreted and accounts are associated with the parodied brands during a crisis, according to a study by Wan, Koh, Ong and Pang (2015:383). Likewise, spoof or lookalike websites mimic corporate sites to deliberately confuse consumers about management’s true position on controversial issues (Alsop, 2004:169; Auty, 2004:214). As a result, confusion is aggravated during a crisis when stakeholders seek information to cope and are exposed to inaccurate messages from user-generated parody accounts (Wan, Koh, Ong & Pang, 2015:383). Consequently, parody accounts accentuate a stressful situation. In fact, when journalists from News24 quoted politician Julius Malema’s tweet as comment on a story, they mistakenly quoted Malema’s parody account (Thomas, 2016). Similarly, a paracrisis created a considerable reputational risk for U.S. President Donald Trump’s son when his son’s parody account was quoted by a journalist (Notopoulos, 2016; Reuters, 2016).

To illustrate how parody mimics the brand personality and can therefore be confused with the official social media account, is Woolworths and its related parody accounts as a case in point. A user-generated Woolworths parody account, @Woolworse_SA (2012), was created to satirise accusations that Woolworths’ soft drinks infringed on the intellectual property rights of a small manufacturer called Frankie’s (Boshomane, 2011; Nicolson, 2012b). Although the parody account is inactive, Twitter users still engage with the @Woolworse_SA account, confusing it with both the official account and a very active @Woolworst_SA user-generated parody account. A noteworthy strategy of the parody account, @Woolworst_SA (2016), is the trolling of Woolworths customers who are confused when the parody account responds in a sarcastic and rude manner to their complaints lodged at the official account (Conradie, 2015; Louw, 2015). Correspondingly, unsuspecting customers feel offended and shocked when they confuse the parody account’s sarcastic and rude replies to their complaints as originating from the brand’s official social media account during a paracrisis (Conradie, 2015; Louw, 2015; Ott & Theunissen, 2015:100; Wan, Koh, Ong & Pang, 2015:383). Interestingly, offensive,
distasteful or vulgar content indicates the drastic measures that online parodists take to draw attention to their message (Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam & Hove, 2011:14). See Figure 4.5 below for the parody accounts that mimic Woolworths brand identities:

FIGURE 4.5: Woolworths user-generated parody accounts @Woolworse_SA (2012) and @Woolworst_SA (2016) satirising brand identities

As illustrated in Figure 4.5 above, user-generated parody accounts satirise and imitate brand identities such as the logo, slogan, brand personality and brand voice of Woolworths.

As already mentioned in the case of @Woolworse_SA (2012), a user-generated parody account often becomes active as soon as a brand crisis or controversy erupts and is therefore a reflection of a particular zeitgeist (Erickson, 2012). As highlighted by Malone (2012:297), a noteworthy feature of a parody is its ability to openly explore controversial topics. Correspondingly, in South Africa the eight most controversial user-generated parody accounts on Twitter (Thelwell, 2014) at the time of the study is said to be the following:

- @CyrilRamaphosa: a parody account for Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa who did not have any official social media accounts at the time.
- @NotHlaudi: a parody account for SABC’s acting chief operations officer Hlaudi Motsoeneng, who reportedly lied about his qualifications and accepted gifts, such as a wife, a calf and a cow from traditional Venda community chiefs.
- @Coachdivvy: a popular parody account with 38 600 followers for former Springbok rugby team coach Peter de Villiers, who continues to give advice on current matches.
- @Julias_Malema: a popular parody account with 18 500 followers. It is one of several parody accounts for the leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters and former President of the African National Congress Youth League, Julius Malema.
- @PresidentRSA and @PresidentZA: two of several parody accounts for South African President, Jacob Zuma.
- @notHelenZille: a parody account for former Democratic Alliance leader, Helen Zille, who also happens to be one of the first local politicians to effectively use a Twitter account.
• @BarryRouxLaw: a parody account for Oscar Pistorius’s lawyer Barry Roux.
• @MemorialSigner: a parody account for the fake sign language interpreter at former President Nelson Mandela’s funeral.

One year later, City Press (2015) commended South Africa’s five best Twitter parody accounts as follow:
• @daviddvanrooyen: a parody account for the brief appointment of David Des van Rooyen as Minister of Finance, accompanied by a sharp decline in the value of the Rand.
• @The-SA-Rand: a parody account satirising the above-mentioned incident.
• @SAFuckingNews: a news parody account.
• @ANN7Reporter: a news parody that initially satirised the news channel’s technical problems and inexperienced journalists in 2013. It has since also become known for trolling.
• @NkandlaHome: a parody account for the controversial expensive homestead of President Jacob Zuma.

As can be seen from the most controversial and popular user-generated parody accounts listed above, the reputation of top-of-mind human brands owned by politicians are the most vulnerable to being satirised and ridiculed by angry critics. While Twitter is the most prevalent social network for user-generated parody accounts targeting brands, YouTube and Facebook are less preferred. Starting with Facebook as the least likely choice for user-generated parody accounts, the subsequent section unpacks the reasons why angry critics prefer Twitter compared to Facebook and YouTube.

4.3.1.1. Facebook as the least likely choice for user-generated parody accounts

A brief introduction of Facebook is firstly provided in order to become familiar with Facebook terminology and to explain how Facebook accounts function. Thereafter, this section provides an explanation why the most popular social network, both locally and in the USA, is the less likely choice for parody accounts to target brands, compared to other platforms.

By providing limited personal demographical information and an email address, anybody can easily create an account at no cost on Facebook (2014a). Once a user has opened an account, various options are available to interact with other users, such as posting and sharing multimedia content in status updates which are visible in friends’ newsfeeds. In addition, users can follow other users without being virtual friends and join groups with likeminded individuals around shared interests. For social media management purposes, brands create Facebook
pages. If a user is interested in receiving status updates from a page, a page is ‘liked’ or followed. In addition, advertisements may also be placed on Facebook.

Facebook was founded by Mark Zuckerberg in February 2004 while he was still a student at Harvard University (Charnigo & Barnett-Ellis, 2013:23). Ironically, one of the few parody Facebook accounts is one named Not Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook, 2013c). The prevalence of Facebook parody accounts has received little attention in literature to date.

Facebook’s (2013a) user policies and attempts to eradicate fake accounts do not encourage parody accounts. As such, Facebook’s terms and conditions do not make specific mention of parody accounts, but do state that any account resembling that of a brand should clearly indicate that it is not the official brand account (Facebook, 2013a, 2013b).

One of the few examples of a user-generated Facebook parody account cited in literature is a parody Jetstar Australia Facebook account. The parody account left rude and sarcastic responses to customer questions on Jetstar Australia’s official social media Facebook page, presumably to highlight the airline’s slow responses to customer enquiries (Driver, 2012; Singer, 2012; Starke, 2012; Thorne, 2012). In fact, several customers commented on how the parody responses were quicker, more effective and funnier than the brand’s official Facebook page interactions with customers.

4.3.1.2. YouTube as a more likely choice for user-generated video parody accounts

This section firstly provides a brief introduction of YouTube in order to explain how YouTube channels function. Thereafter, the discussion explains why YouTube a more likely platform for user-generated parody accounts targeting brands, especially music video parody.

The video sharing social network YouTube was founded in 2005 by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim (Fitzpatrick, 2010). All that is needed to create a YouTube account, known as a YouTube channel, is an email address, whereas a user with an existing Google Account gets instant access to a YouTube account (2014c). Once a user has created a YouTube channel, videos may be uploaded and shared with others. In addition, social interaction options are also available, such as subscribing to other users’ channels, befriending other users, choosing favourite videos, commenting on videos or responding to other channels by posting response videos (Susarla, Oh & Tan, 2012:23; YouTube, 2014c). In addition, YouTube also offers advertising opportunities.

YouTube’s (2014) user policy embraces user-generated parody and prescribes that parody videos should not be deceptive in any manner by clearly indicating that the content is a spoof.
Correspondingly, both advertising parodies and music video parodies are popular on YouTube. To illustrate, a study by Erickson, Kretschmer and Mendis (2013:3) established that an average of 24 user-generated video parodies was available for each original music video. In a related study of user-generated parody music videos on YouTube, Erickson, Kretschmer and Mendis (2013:3,12) conclude that skilled parodists attract large followings. Although created by a professional Canadian comedian, the fourth most trending video on YouTube for 2013 (Google, 2013) was a music video parody of pop star Miley Cyrus’s music video, Wrecking Ball on Stephen Kardynal’s (2013) channel where it attracted 97 735 918 views at one stage. Likewise, skilfully created user-generated advertising parodies quickly draw millions of viewers worldwide, as confirmed in a study by Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam and Hove (2011:4,6).

4.3.1.3. Twitter as the most prevalent platform for user-generated parody accounts

This section firstly provides a brief introduction of Twitter in order to explain Twitter terminology and how Twitter accounts function. The discussion highlights how Twitter user-generated parody accounts rapidly respond to controversial events and are favoured by influential users who prefer to stay abreast of breaking news. As such, user-generated parody created by angry critics is a significant brand reputational risk on Twitter.

Twitter founder and first CEO, Jack Dorsey, posted his first tweet on 21 March 2006 (Luckerson, 2013). The microblogging site is co-founded by Evan Williams, Noah Glass and Biz Stone. The creation of an account on Twitter (2014a) follows the same procedures as other social networks by simply providing limited personal demographical information and an email address. Notably, Twitter has a unique vocabulary which needs to be understood when using this social network (Kwak et al, 2010: 591; Luckerson, 2013; Twitter, 2014a). A Twitter account is typically recognised by a profile name or a handle which is indicated by an '@' sign preceding the username (Twitter, 2013c). Once an account is created, users opt to follow other users in order for tweets to be received in a news stream called a timeline. Short messages posted on Twitter are generally limited to 140-charcters which are called tweets. A tweet may be accompanied by multi-media content. The re-sharing of other users’ tweets are called retweets. Posting tweets are sometimes accompanied by hashtagged keywords, indicated with a '#' sign preceding a word or phrase. By tagging content in this manner, users can search and access all the tweets posted about a particular hashtagged word (Guo & Chen, 2014:375).

Hashtags are the one of the most effective amplification and organising tools of the internet, ranging from the organisation of mass protests to criticizing brand failures (Gillin & Gianforte,
When many users hashtag a specific phrase or word it may appear as a trending topic, which indicates its popularity on Twitter. The popularity of hashtagged phrases on Twitter resulted in the use thereof also being noticed on other social networks such as Facebook, Google Plus, Pinterest, Tumblr and Instagram (Hiscott, 2013).

Said to be unique to the legacy (Knoblauch, 2014) and founding culture of Twitter that encourages free expression (Chu, 2016), the social network is a favourite for parody accounts for several reasons. Notably, Twitter’s (2013b) terms and conditions explicitly guide the creation of parody accounts in its parody policy. These conditions stipulate that, firstly, the parody account image or avatar should not be the actual brand logo or trademark. Secondly, the parody account name should be different from the brand name. Lastly, the account biography should clearly state that it is a parody and not the official account.

Parodists favour the use of a moniker in their Twitter handles, which gives a sense of anonymity and protection from personal abuse (Cutler, 2015). Owing to its simplicity, speed and immediacy of its algorithm, Twitter is favoured by both ordinary users and journalists as a valuable platform for accessing and sharing breaking news as it unfolds (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:15;18; Milnes, 2015; Whitlock, 2015). Moreover, as tweets are public, as opposed to Facebook status updates only being visible to friends, Twitter is the preferred platform where user-generated parody accounts, brand hijackers, social media influencers, opinion leaders and other critics can amplify their messages. In addition, the use of hashtags results in Twitter being the platform where criticism erupts into viral social media crises the quickest, compared to other social networks. Already, the previous chapter provided an overview of the propensity for hating, flaming and trolling on Twitter.

Although Twitter’s user base is much smaller, compared to Facebook, its users are more influential, visible and vocal, which explains why social media crises and controversies most often erupt on Twitter (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:18). Although not attracting a diverse audience, the profile of Twitter users typically includes journalists, corporate communications, marketers, social media enthusiasts and technology professionals, which implies that Twitter’s influence is disproportionate to its size. To illustrate, a study by Pew Research Centre (Duggan, 2014) concluded that only 23% of all internet users in the USA use Twitter. Of these, most live in urban areas and at least have a college qualification. Likewise, in South Africa, Twitter was the third most popular social network in 2014; however, it remains the most engaged social network (World Wide Worx & Fuseware, 2015). User-generated engagement levels and social influence have already been discussed in the previous chapter.
Twitter is reportedly the preferred social media platform for parody accounts, as it attracts educated users who are interested in real-time breaking news and thereby enjoy satire that comments on topical events as they unfold (Jones, 2012). As Twitter is the preferred network for gaining the attention of opinion leaders, a study by Roy (2015) established that Twitter is used to engage with social influencers by 68% of communication professionals. Likewise, a study by Cision UK and Canterbury Christ Church University (2015:4) concluded that Twitter is the chosen social network for public relations professionals, used by 89% for both personal and professional reasons. Correspondingly, a Twitter parody account has an increased likelihood of attracting the attention of influencers.

Whereas parody videos are more time-consuming to create and edit before being posted on YouTube, text-only tweets can be posted instantly (Cutler, 2015). For this reason, a significant feature of Twitter parody accounts is that they become active as soon as a brand controversy erupts, most notably when a brand is facing a crisis (Erickson, 2012; Fournier & Avery, 2011:27; Malone, 2012:297; Miine, 2013:206; Nitins & Burgess, 2014:297; Van den Hurk, 2015; Wilson, 2011:8; Wan, Koh, Ong & Pang, 2015:381). Notably, Twitter parody accounts may remain active long after a crisis has subsided (Amanda B., 2012).

Another reason why parody is commonplace on Twitter is the unique anti-establishment ideology and culture of the social network that resists overly commercial messages (Nitins & Burgess, 2014:295). As confirmed in a study by Track Maven (2015:6), 73% of tweets receive 10 or fewer interactions with branded content, which is the lowest engagement rate compared to other social networks. Owing to its anti-establishment ideology and culture, Twitter users typically find pleasure in discovering ‘gotcha’ moments whereby PR gaffes and mistakes are quickly pointed out and scrutinised (Nitins & Burgess, 2014:295).

By closely monitoring the brand’s social media management campaigns, posts and responses to crises, social media managers’ social media blunders on Twitter are prone to being parodied, according to a study by Wan, Koh, Ong and Pang (2015:383). Therefore, user-generated parody accounts cause reputational harm to brands experiencing a crisis by hijacking the official social media accounts’ strategic messaging when their satirical comments appear almost immediately on evolving issues and slip-ups. A case in point is the @BPGlobalPR (2010) satirical user-generated parody account which criticized the lack of honest and transparent corporate communication during BP’s environmental disaster in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 (Gaines-Ross, 2010:72; Malachowski, 2010:228; Malone, 2012:309). Moreover, the @BPGlobalPR (2010) parody account tweeted fake spin (Wilson, 2011:8) and
attracted twelve times more followers than BP’s official social media account (Fournier & Avery, 2011:27).

Considering that a user-generated parody account typically tweets more frequently and therefore gains more followers than the official account during a crisis, it succeeds in overpowering and disrupting relationships with followers of the official social media account (Wan, Koh, Ong & Pang, 2015:383). The result is that parody accounts discredit corporate communication and enjoy stronger relationships with their followers, compared to the official account during a crisis.

For various reasons already mentioned, public relations is often parodied, with the initials ‘PR’ typically included a satiric Twitter handle (Coffee, 2015; Ragan Communications, 2012). To illustrate, Figure 4.6 below contains screen shots of tweets from popular Twitter user-generated parody accounts that all feature the initials PR in their handles:

As illustrated in Figure 4.6 above, user-generated parody accounts often satirise public relations. Correspondingly, the extensive use of the initials ‘PR’ in parody accounts may be indicative of the tainted professional image of the custodians of reputation management, as already highlighted in Section 2.2.1.1.

In conclusion then, when angry critics easily create user-generated parody accounts to mimic brand identities, social media management teams are faced with a paracrisis. Twitter parody accounts are the most damaging to brand reputation since it is known to be a community that is highly engaged, influential and outspoken. Moreover, the virality of Twitter, combined with its predisposition for hating, flaming, ranting and trolling, implies that a parody account as a paracrisis may easily escalate into a full-blown crisis. Owing to the highly engaged nature of Twitter, the brand’s official responses are constantly scrutinised, which further emphasises
the importance of selecting an appropriate response that will maintain an emotionally resonant brand reputation.

4.3.2. User-generated parody’s ability to hijack strategic messages when co-creating brand reputations that resonate with communities

As a parodied brand image is established over time, emotionally resonant branding strategies and brand stories are undermined by the opposing meanings emanating from the copycat brand (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:50). Therefore, humorous user-generated parody should not be dismissed as light-hearted joking, considering the serious consequences of its critical, disparaging and ridiculing conventions which influence consumer attitudes while also subverting a brand image and reputation (Earle, 2002:2,12; Jean, 2011:23; Kumar, 2015:232; Vanden Bergh, Lee, M., Quilliam, & Hove, 2011: 106). In fact, most advertising parodies on YouTube are specifically aimed at mocking a brand’s reputation and strategic message (Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam & Hove, 2011:4,6). Especially damaging is parody that attacks a brand’s values and core positioning (Fournier & Avery, 2011:26).

When the humour expressed in parody resonates with audiences, parody accounts gain traction and influence for several reasons. Skilfully created, compelling and popular user-generated parody accounts are said to enjoy “a near-cult following” (Cutler, 2015; Manning; 2013). Often, skilfully created user-generated parody accounts receive considerable publicity and are recommended in lists of the best parody accounts that users should follow (City Press, 2015; Hernandez, 2011; Hill, 2013; Jones, 2012; Kantrowitz, 2012; Mann, 2012; Manning, 2013; Thelwell, 2014; Valinsky, 2012). Typically, these top-ranked parody accounts are praised for their use of political satire and criticism (Kantrowitz, 2012; Manning, 2013), humour (Cashmore, 2009) and influence (Mann, 2012; Valinsky, 2012). Moreover, the virality of social media is demonstrated when followers repeatedly share parody that they regard as truthful and funny (Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam & Hove, 2011:15). The result is that viral parodies reach the news agenda of mainstream media (Hill, 2012b; Kantrowitz, 2012; Malone, 2012; Starke, 2012) to gain new audiences, even those beyond the social web (Kumar, 2015:233), including policy-makers in the converged media space. In so doing, anti-brand narrations are not limited to a counter cultural niche, but permeate mainstream perceptions of a brand (McGriff, 2012:53). As confirmed in a study of user-generated parody videos on YouTube by Skågeby (2013:74), the issues criticized in parody enter mainstream conversational networks and are absorbed in public discourse.
A tactic often used by a user-generated parody account is hashtag-hijacking that further helps its content to gain traction and spread virally. Hashtag-hijacking further compromises a brand's official social media accounts' strategic messaging, as concluded in a related study by Wan, Koh, Ong and Pang (2015:383). The repercussions of hashtag-hijacking have already been discussed in Section 3.6.1 of the preceding chapter.

Online parodies take advantage of the fact that humour attracts attention, according to a study of parody videos by Jiramonai (2012:112). Correspondingly, a study by the Pew Research Centre (Smith & Duggan, 2012:2) established that 37% of voters watched parody or humour online videos during the US Presidential election in 2012. Likewise, a related study of live-tweeting practices on Twitter during the 2012 U.S. presidential elections by Parguel, Lunardo and Chebat (2012:2) concluded that 31% of the top quartile of the most retweeted accounts was mainly used for the purpose of expressing parody, comedy, humour and sarcasm. The study found that humour is an important currency for Twitter users as a means to attract the attention of followers and thereby enhance their number of followers.

In another study of user-generated advertising parodies on YouTube, Sabri and Michel (2014:243) conclude that the most reputation-damaging parodies are those that are perceived to be highly credible and humorous. Such parodies also attract the most attention, visibility and influence as they get passed along more frequently. In the process, the repetitive sharing of parody by many users through online word of mouth or e-WOM (Armelini, & Villanueva, 2011:33), by using hashtags (Kumar, 2015:240), typically escalate into memes (Kumar, 2015:233; Tufekci, 2013:849), viral parody (Earle 2002:2; Kumar, 2015:233; Singer, 2012; Sithole & Zwane, 2014; Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam & Hove, 2011:15) and trending topics (Poston, 2012:9). Notably, satiric user-generated parodies and internet memes are regarded as the equivalent of political cartoons, as pointed out in a study of YouTube parodies by Chen (2013:43,55, 64).

To reiterate, popular memes circulated on social networks often ignite national conversations (Tufekci, 2013:849) as parody accounts typically gain credibility when receiving publicity in traditional media (Singer, 2012; Wan, Koh, Ong & Pang, 2015:384). A much publicised case of a viral parody meme is #hasjustinelandedyet. The parody meme was ignited when senior public relations executive, Justine Sacco, posted an offensive tweet about the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa before boarding a flight from London to Cape Town for a local vacation in December 2013 (Beschizza, 2013; Taylor, 2013). The harmful tweet can be seen in Figure 4.7 below:
The example illustrated in Figure 4.7 above, confirms that Twitter, especially, is the platform where PR gaffes are scrutinised (Nitins & Burgess, 2014:295) and that an emotionally resonant brand reputation is the most vulnerable to the viral backlashes of angry Twitter mobs who publically name and shame offenders (Ferreira, 2015; Milnes, 2015; Whitlock, 2015). To illustrate, examples of the viral parody meme #hasjustinelandedyet as a backlash to the initial tweet illustrated in Figure 4.7 above can be seen in Figure 4.8 below:

In addition to the text illustrated in Figure 4.8 above, images were also used in the viral parody meme #hasjustinelandedyet as illustrated in Figure 4.9 below:

Soon after Sacco had departed from London, #hasjustinelandedyet emerged as a trending topic on Twitter and two influential parody accounts @LOLJustineSacco and @jsaccoPR were created. When her 12-hour flight arrived at Cape Town International Airport, Sacco first deleted her tweet, later also her Twitter account and then apologised for her tweet (Beschizza,
2013; Taylor, 2013). Thereafter she was suspended as communications director of the internet organisation InterActive Corp in New York (Stelter, 2013).

The negative controversy created by damaging parody certainly jeopardises reputation (Earle 2002:2,12). Online reputation is especially vulnerable considering that popular parody accounts often appear close to the brand’s owned pages in search engine results, thereby enhancing the visibility of parody accounts (Malachowski, 2010:226). Of equal concern to management is the fact that large budgets are dedicated to strategic communication initiatives to protect brand reputation only to find corporate messages being hijacked by social media users on tiny budgets (Avery, Lariscy & Sweetser, 2010:189; Driver, 2012; Neff, 2009; Nitins & Burgess, 2014:293; Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam, & Hove, 2011:104; Veil et al, 2015:104).

By exploiting the governing principles of social media and the propensity for slacktivism, almost any lone parodist or other advocate for a cause has the power to potentially hijack a brand, especially if the gripe strikes a chord that resonates broadly, according to a study by Chandler Chicco Companies (Alexander & Atkins, 2015:7). Similarly, a study of online parodies of Starbucks by Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel (2006:53, 59) concludes that the parodied brand image undermines Starbucks’s emotional branding message of authentic and sincere relationships with consumers. As such, the parodied Starbucks image that tends to resonate with consumers is that of a profit-driven, commercial business which relies on marketing to dupe its customers. When user-generated parodies remix cultural content, messages are re-interpreted and re-evaluated in counter-cultural interpretive communities, according to a study by Skågeby (2013:74). Correspondingly, Dentith (2002:36) articulates that “parody has the paradoxical effect of preserving the very text that it seeks to destroy”. Stated differently, parody creates a new form out of the old without effectively destroying the old (Hutcheon, 2000:35). As such, user-generated parodies are indicative of management’s loss of control in the contemporary social media environment (Jeppesen & Pettersson, 2010:81; Nitins & Burgess, 2014:295).

It is not surprising then that amateurs who create parodies that subvert a brand’s image and cause reputational harm, are scorned as internet vigilantes (Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam & Hove, 2011:4). Similarly, Muñiz, and Schau (2007:35) prefer the term vigilante marketing, which is defined as unpaid advertising and marketing tactics in user-generated content by loyal brand community members on behalf of the brand. Since the mainstream availability of social media technologies, satire has become a genre for the masses and has transformed social media satirists into influencers. As such, Crittenden, Hopkins and Simmons (2011:177)
identify four types of political satirists as opinion leaders who compete for influence, as summarised in Table 4.2 below.

**TABLE 4.2: Types of satirists and their tactics to gain influence as adapted from Crittenden, Hopkins and Simmons (2011:177-178)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent of reputational risk</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Type of opinion leader</th>
<th>Tactics to gain influence</th>
<th>Primary channels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most influential</td>
<td>Professional satirist</td>
<td>Traditionalist</td>
<td>Influences public opinion by relying on the underlying satiric message.</td>
<td>Traditional media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creator</td>
<td>Creator</td>
<td>Relying on both the underlying satiric message and the effective use of social media to influence opinion.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least influential</td>
<td>Amateur satirist</td>
<td>Rookie or newbie</td>
<td>Influences public opinion by using humour as entertainment, having not yet the required rhetorical skills to encode an underlying satiric message.</td>
<td>Social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technologist</td>
<td>Technologist</td>
<td>Influences public opinion by relying on digital skills to create humorous entertainment in animated graphics and videos. Rhetorical abilities to encode an underlying satiric message are lacking.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As illustrated in Table 4.2 above, professional satirists are adept at rhetoric, but still need to learn how to effectively use social media should they wish to establish themselves as social influencers (Crittenden, Hopkins & Simmons, 2011:179). On the contrary, much of the user-generated satire available, seem to focus on humorous entertainment that seems to be a minor concern for ORM. However, user-generated content that contains skilfully created satiric parody poses a significant risk to online reputation, since these satirists are the most influential critics.

For influential parodists, social networks provide opportunities for financial gain. As discussed earlier, the YouTube parody account Suzelle DIY is a case in point. Considering the large following of parody music videos, a small but growing market exists for skilled parodists whose large audiences have the potential to be monetised, according to a study by Kretschmer and Mendis (2013:3,12). Monetisation opportunities include advertising revenue on YouTube, digital download sales, self-promotion and merchandise. As such, the study found that advertising revenue of 8 299 parodies viewed on YouTube in 2011 totalled £2 million – around R34 000 000. Interestingly, in some cases, a user-generated brand parody may receive far more views on YouTube than a brand’s original sponsored advertisements (Fournier & Avery, 2011:26). Likewise, receiving millions of views on YouTube, income from popular user-generated parody music videos reportedly exceed that of the official music videos, according to a report by the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI, 2014:20). Accordingly, YouTube and the music industry have opted to allow for the licensing of user-
generated content which triggers payments to intellectual property rights owners, instead of removing mash-ups for infringements. Due to the monetisation of popular user-generated parody music videos, these are encouraged as profitable sources of revenue (Smith, 2014).

A similar trend is noticed on Twitter. Once user-generated parody accounts reach millions of views on Twitter, parodists typically monetise their accounts by getting paid by advertisers seeking influence to mention their brands (Alfonso, 2012). In the process, influential parodists are also employed by brands to create content, including sponsored posts, and at the same time drive traffic to a brand’s website (Cutler, 2015). In some cases, influential parody accounts are taken over by brands and sold at a profitable amount. In other cases, influential parody accounts make profits from creating and selling merchandise such as T-shirts and mugs. To maximise their reach, parody accounts collaborate and retweet one another’s content to escalate into trending topics and memes, which then also increases return on investment for their sponsored tweets (Broderick, 2014). When reaching millions of followers in this manner, influential parody accounts then increase their advertising rates and make it possible to run profitable businesses from their accounts. However, when influential user-generated parody accounts start posting paid brand mentions they are criticized for a lack of authenticity and deceiving audiences with profitable hidden agendas (Golby, 2015). Nevertheless, vanity metrics serve as a benchmark for many social media accounts to monetise followers.

4.3.3. Highly resonant reputations of prominent brands as frequent targets of parody

There are several reasons why brands become the target of parody. As already mentioned, one such explanation is the proliferation of user-generated content which makes strategic messages rather vulnerable as the fodder for brand burlesque (Berthon & Pitt, 2012:97). Another explanation offered is that brands are rich in culture and therefore provide the ideal content for parody (Fournier & Avery, 2011:24). That is to say, brands are ingrained in society’s cultural consciousness, which make them fall prey to parody for two reasons, argues Katyal (2010:797). Firstly, a brand represents a convergence between corporate and personal identity which is open to reinterpretation and questioning. Secondly, a brand’s economic and political powers are vulnerable to contestation, hence a brand may function as an organising principle for political action, as can be seen when anti-brand activists expand a brand into public discourse. Another reason for parodying brands is the fact that organisations are perceived as disembodied entities and therefore easily fall victim to viral angry attacks and social media crises, especially on Twitter (Ott & Theunissen, 2015:100). Prominent brands,
especially, are more likely to be parodied, such as Absolut vodka, regarded as one of the most parodied brands on the internet (Earle, 2002:11).

Available literature provides several explanations why prominent and reputable brands are favoured as targets for parody. The larger the customer base, the higher the risk of encountering customer complaints and criticism (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19-25). Reputable brands are more likely to be the target of parodies on anti-brand websites, according to a study by Krishnamurthy and Kucuk (2009:1123), because strong brands have far more disadvantages in comparison to the small number of shortcomings of weaker brands. Typical vulnerabilities being satirised include excessive profits, anti-competitive practices, harmful products, unfair labour practises and the unfair treatment of animals in product testing.

Nevertheless, Herder (2012:45) maintains that brands that proactively manage their reputations and those that have longstanding reputations as good corporate citizens, are less likely to be the target of anti-corporate campaigns. Notwithstanding, McDonalds’ exemplary CSR strategy seems to provide no safeguard against anti-corporate activism that is often aimed at its poor labour relations (Herder, 2012:46). By the same token, Klein (2000:22,342,356) is of the opinion that the incessant parodying of brands such as Nike, Calvin Klein, McDonald’s and Starbucks is indicative of a decline in trust in global corporations. In addition, Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel (2006:63) argue that brands that lack iconic status correspondingly also lack visibility and hence go unnoticed by anti-corporate activists.

In the contemporary age of parody (Fournier & Avery, 2011:24; Funnell, 2015), the prevalence of user-generated parody extends beyond harsh satiric criticism to also celebrate the iconic status of successful brands. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, not all parodies harshly criticize their targets, but are rather playful (Hutcheon, 2000:32; Ross, 1998:49), inconsequential, irreverent and silly (Dentith, 2002:37). Notably, often brand parodies are created for harmless fun (Williams & Jupp, 2012) and for entertainment purposes (MarkMonitor, 2012:2).

Several parodies, in fact, are specifically created to pay homage to favourite and much loved brands (Berthon & Pitt, 2012:88). As explained by Ross (1998:49), distinctly successful texts often inspire parodies, which then suggest that parodies are celebrations of the text being targeted. Comparatively, Sutherland (2004) argues that the brands most talked about become embedded in popular culture, hence being parodied is indicative of a brands’ popularity. Indeed, brands that have achieved iconic status are more visible and therefore most often parodied, observe Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel (2006:63). Likewise, Fournier and Avery
premise that brand parodies are indicative of effective culturally resonant and memorable advertising campaigns.

As already argued, when communicating emotionally appealing messages, expressive brands gain from reputations that resonate with stakeholders (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:86,96; Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:27). More specifically, dimensions of expressive brands include high visibility and the distinctiveness of a unique promise (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:111,133). To confirm that highly resonant reputations are conducive to parody, a study of YouTube parody advertisements of Starbucks by Berthon and Pitt (2012:91,94,96) concluded that brands at risk of being parodied are those that audiences have empathy for. When audiences can relate emotionally to a brand, they will also more likely relate to the context of satire and caricature. In addition, the study concluded, brands with strong distinct attributes that differentiate themselves either ideologically or physically, are more likely to be parodied. For example, the controversial user-generated Twitter parody account for English cricketer Kevin Pietersen, called KP Genius, was created by a fan (Hoult, 2012; The Telegraph, 2012).

To illustrate, a study by the Canadian Media Production Association (CMPA, 2013:19) concludes that an indication that the visibility of corporate digital content has reached a tipping point is when content becomes the fodder for parody. Notably, Mikkonen and Bajde (2013:331) assert that parody has become such a mainstream form of cultural expression that parodies are being appreciated and welcomed by the brands being targeted. Consequently, the authors argue, parody has largely lost its scornful and resistant edge. Further, Earle (2002:2) asserts that when parodies are created to place a brand in a positive light they serve to enhance the authenticity of the brand.

Parody as a celebration of consumers' favourite brands occurs in online-specific phenomena such as fan fiction. Lawrence and Schraefel (2006:1) define fan fiction as “(amateur) fiction written about characters or set in a world that has been previously created by someone else”. Likewise, Black (2009:398) defines fan fiction as “a unique form of writing in which fans base their stories on the characters and plotlines of existing media and popular culture”. When creating parodies of popular culture genres, fans remix and share a variety of creative user-generated content such as fan videos, role-playing games, digital artworks and fan films (Curwood, Magnifico & Lammers, 2013:680; Jenkins, 2006:4).

Fan fiction is published almost exclusively on the internet where several websites such as FanFiction (2013) and FictionAlley (2013) are dedicated to fan communities (Montano, 2013:692). Likewise, fan fiction is also shared on blogs while fans of a particular brand may also create a so-called fan account on a social network (Crompton, 2011:29; Petty, 2012:763;
Twitter, 2013b). As such, Twitter’s (2013b) user policy clearly allows for fan accounts although there is no such equivalent in Facebook’s (2013a) policies. A distinctive feature of fan fiction, also known as fanfic (Warner, 2012), is the author’s exploration of alternative storylines (Black, 2009:398) for popular culture genres or brand stories. Global brands and popular culture genres remain the preferred targets for fan fiction such as Author J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter fantasy novel and film series (Montano, 2013:692), the Twilight fantasy film series (Tumblr, 2014; Warner, 2012) and The Star Wars space opera film series (Jenkins, 2006:4,25). When strong admirers of a brand are bound together by a structured set of social relationships in a playful, post-modern digital landscape, these relationships typify brand communities (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001). Typically, user-generated advertisements are created in brand communities and provide valuable strategic insights that may be leveraged to create content that resonates with brand admirers (Muñiz & Schau, 2007:47). As such, Stokburger-Sauer (2010:346) defines brand communities as “groups of users and admirers of a brand who engage jointly in group actions to accomplish collective goals and/or to express mutual sentiments and commitments”.

4.3.4. Unresolved issues and broken promises as catalysts for user-generated parody accounts as paracrises

As already noted in the previous chapter, a user-generated brand parody is regarded as a paracrisis (Coombs, 2014; Coombs & Holladay, 2012:412). As such, failure to address and respond to reputation-threatening smouldering issues and built-up anger over a period of time are catalysts for Twitter user-generated parody accounts as a reputational crisis, according to a study by Wan, Koh, Ong and Pang (2015:383). As a result, parody accounts fill the communication void left by the brand. Moreover, continuous criticism from parody accounts maintain top-of-mind awareness of tarnished reputations, constantly refresh social media users’ memories about a brand’s unresolved issues and past wrongdoing. Therefore, the pre-existing negative associations of a brand prior to the crisis are reinforced. To illustrate, a study of tweets surrounding cyclist Lance Armstrong’s doping scandal by Highfield (2015:2726) concluded that humorous tweets had a longer lifespan on Twitter, compared to breaking news. As humorous tweets were retweeted and discussed, their lifespan, traction and visibility were further extended when being shared by social media influencers. In fact, the study found that the majority of humorous tweets originated from parody accounts, which illustrate the influential role of parody accounts in sustaining a reputational crisis. As such, whereas tweets around news declined rapidly, well-written punch-lines were shared and discussed for several days or months after the initial news cycle.
When angry stakeholders accuse a brand of irresponsible behaviour on social media, such a threat is defined as a paracrises (Coombs, 2014:8; Coombs & Holladay, 2012:408). Similarly, a study of paracrises by Wan, Koh, Ong and Pang (2015:383) concluded that user-generated parody accounts emerge as manifestations of public ridicule when irresponsible behaviour is the cause of the crisis. Aggravating the reputational harm during crisis is when parody accounts mimic the harmful mannerisms, behaviour and characteristics of a brand.

Brands are at risk of being parodied when there is a perceived dissonance between corporate communication rhetoric and actual actions, between image and reality, as found in a study of YouTube parody advertisements of Starbucks by Berthon and Pitt (2012:91, 94, 96). Often, satirists magnify the manifest or known disparity between reality and image. Alternatively, satirists may draw attention to a latent or overlooked gap. Another technique is when satirists manufacture a plausible gap by suggesting an alternative reality that differs from the audience’s assumptions about reality.

For this reason, advertising, as a genre of popular culture, is especially vulnerable to parody (Herder, 2012:38; Klein, 2000:282, 286; Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam & Hove, 2011:15,104). One explanation offered, is the persuasive techniques used in advertising to increase sales by means of a singular dominant message and one-sided claims (Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam & Hove, 2011:15,104). Moreover, consumers are familiar with clichéd advertising techniques such as testimonials, product demonstrations and spokespeople, which are easily imitated to express humorous criticism. In some cases, entire anti-brand campaigns are organised around satiric parodies of familiar corporate advertising themes (Herder, 2012:38). Likewise, Klein (2000:282,286) maintains that advertising parodies exploit tactics usually reserved for corporate communication to subvert a brand’s intended strategic message. Essentially, parodied phrases of corporate advertising themes highlight contradictions in corporate practices (Herder, 2012:38).

As already argued in the previous chapter, Section 3.4, social media management teams optimise the principles of social media to co-create brand reputations that resonate with communities. Some user-generated parodies seem to emerge when these principles are violated in some way. To elaborate, social networks were originally created for people to share in conversations in collective networks and not for marketers to sell their branded products and services (Fournier & Avery, 2011:2-4). When disregarding the principles of social media, social media management teams are not prepared for the repercussions of the dialogic culture of social networks when attempting to transfer traditional top-down, one-to-many advertising and public relations models with little or no adoption (Nitins & Burgess, 2014:294). The so-
called unwelcome or ‘uninvited brand’ continues to produce intrusive stylised content that does not resonate with the governing principles of the Web 2.0 environment (Fournier & Avery, 2011:2-4). Similarly, Holt (2002) maintains that inauthentic brands with overly commercial intent and orchestrated messages by management do not resonate with sceptic consumers. Consequently, consumers retaliate by hijacking brand messages and turn brand stories into parody. Instead of brands targeting consumers, consumers are targeting brands and playing with brands to entertain themselves.

To mitigate the reputational risks of unresolved issues, broken promises and intrusive, top-down social media management, responsible social media governance frameworks are required to mitigate the risks of many-to-many social media engagements.

4.3.5. Responsible social media governance frameworks for online reputation management (ORM)

As already explained in Section 3.6, ORM and contingency planning are key requirements for responsive social media governance frameworks to mitigate the reputational risks inherent in social media management. In other words, risk mitigation in the form of a social media governance framework is the proactive first line of defence to protect reputation from parody accounts.

When a user-generated parody account hijacks strategic messages, it may escalate into a social media crisis necessitating crisis communication contingency planning (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19-25). Ideally a variety of ORM systems monitor analytics such as sentiment, reach and mentions of a user-generated parody account (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19-25; Sabri & Michel, 2014:243; Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam & Hove, 2011:5). Real-time tracking of parody mentions (Petty, 2012:759), especially trending topics (Poston, 2012:9), is crucial. Considering the complexity of paracrises and the many risks inherent in social media, a vast volume of metrics needs to first be analysed, before deciding on the most effective response strategy (Coombs, 2014:9). Correspondingly, management is advised to first listen and analyse metrics instead of haphazardly jumping into conversations and respond in haste to defend a brand during a social media crisis triggered by a parody account (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19-25).

By analysing metrics and developing contingency plans the reputational risks of user-generated parodies may be mitigated in the following ways:
• **Analyse mentions at an early stage:** Locate early warning signs (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:61) or indications of trends to analyse the reasons for criticism (EURIB, 2009:1).

• **Analyse engagement:** Establish the extent of reputational risk posed by parodies that are shared by a large number of social media users, as recommended in a study by Sabri and Michel (2014:243).

• **Analyse sentiment:** Establish what social media users like or dislike about the parodied brand (Sabri & Michel, 2014:243) and the extent to which they agree with the parody (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:61). The frequency and intensity of anti-brand sentiments need to be analysed in order to establish when a brand story is beginning to arouse parodies (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:61). In addition, qualitative interviews may help to establish why social media users identify with parodies.

• **Analyse the influence of the parody account:** An analysis of the parodied brand image describes the adversarial symbolic brand meanings being created and identifies which aspects of brand stories are being subverted (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:61). In addition, analyse audiences who ended their relationships with the brand as a result of agreeing with the critical message of the parody. This data may also be gathered from qualitative interviews and customer relationship management systems.

4.3.5.1. **ORM metrics and analytics to establish the intent of a parody account**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, not all parodies harshly criticize their targets, but some are also rather playful (Hutcheon, 2000:32; Ross, 1998:49), inconsequential, irreverent and silly (Dentith, 2002:37). For this reason, ORM systems and the analysis of metrics are key requirements in establishing if a user-generated parody is either harmless or malicious, according to a study by Chandler Chicco Companies (Alexander & Atkins, 2015:2). In so doing, it is possible to differentiate an isolated complaint from legitimate grievances, constructive criticism or parodies that may escalate into a viral social media crisis.

When analysing the intent of the parody, it becomes clear that some spoofs are not aimed at embarrassing the organisation, and may be harmlessly poking fun at corporate communication messages (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19-25). Other parodies, however, are not complimentary, push their own agenda and may be rather vicious. Examples include brand parodies that express prejudice and bigotry. Also cause for concern are parodies using offensive, explicit and sensational content while hijacking brand identity elements such as logos and advertising jingles. Nevertheless, a careful analysis is required considering that there is a fine line between a harmless and a malicious parody. As such, qualitative data
analysis is recommended to establish the motivations for the criticism expressed in brand parodies (EURIB, 2009:1) in order to mitigate reputational risks.

When distinguishing between parody accounts with malicious intent as opposed to harmless spoofs, corporate communication teams may be empowered to mitigate risks, neutralise criticism and shorten the life expectancy of a brand attack (Alexander & Atkins, 2015:2). Similarly, Earle (2002:10) is of the opinion that by analysing the reason for user-generated parodies, management can address the gaps between brand image and actual brand perception. To confirm, Berthon and Pitt’s (2012:96) study of user-generated parody advertisements of Starbucks on YouTube concluded that response strategies need to consider how to address the gap between stakeholders’ perception of the brand’s image and their perceptions of reality as highlighted in the parody. Notably, should management not understand the intent of the parody, the brand’s reaction may complicate rather than ameliorate reputational damage (Berthon & Pitt, 2012:96).

In another attempt to differentiate between parodies with malicious intent as opposed to harmless spoofs, a study by Earle (2002:4) identifies three typical intentions of parody as illustrated in Table 4.3 below:

**TABLE 4.3: Classification of parody intentions as adapted from by Earle (2002:4)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent of reputational risk</th>
<th>Target of parody</th>
<th>Intention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brand specific parody</td>
<td>The most prevalent and potentially harmful. Expresses consumer opinions against a brand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Industry specific parody</td>
<td>Prominent brands are regarded as symbols of the industries that they represent. Brands in the ill-reputed tobacco, alcohol and beauty industries are often criticized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most harmful</td>
<td>Pop art parody</td>
<td>A brand is simply used as a context to poke fun at popular events or individuals. These parodies are rather harmless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least harmful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 4.3 above, the intentions of parody, and therefore the extent of reputational risk, vary between harsh satiric criticism to light-hearted frivolousness. Consequently, these findings confirm the overview of reputational risk of parody already identified in Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 at the start of the chapter. Moreover, Table 4.3 confirms that prominent brands are at a high risk of being parodied, as already argued in Section 4.3.3, particularly those criticized for broken promises and irresponsible behaviour, as already discussed in Section 4.3.4.
In a similar manner, a study of user-generated music parody videos on YouTube by Erickson, Kretschmer and Mendis (2013:9) established the various intentions of the genre. A valuable classification of the different intentions of parodies and the frequency of their occurrence are illustrated in Table 4.4 below.

**TABLE 4.4: Classification of user-generated parody intentions and their frequencies as adapted from Erickson, Kretschmer and Mendis (2013:9)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent of reputational risk</th>
<th>Type of parody</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Intentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most harmful</td>
<td>Target parodies</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>Criticizing a brand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weapon parodies</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>Criticizing socio-political topics related to race, religion and gender. Other issues criticized include the intellectual paucity of the mass media, the banking crisis and the commercialisation of the internet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least harmful</td>
<td>Self-parody</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>Parodists introspectively criticizing themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amateur performances</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>Seemingly containing no criticism or malicious intentions. Humorous videos depicting karaoke performances, remixes, mashups, choreography and machinima or computer graphics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is evident from both Table 4.4 and in Table 4.3 above that the intentions of user-generated parody vary between harsh satiric criticism to light-hearted frivolousness. As such, Table 4.4 illustrates that parodies criticizing a brand are the most frequently encountered and are likewise the most detrimental to reputation. Interestingly, these findings confirm the analysis of Crittenden, Hopkins and Simmons (2011:177) already illustrated earlier in Table 4.2, Section 4.3.2, namely that amateur satirists tend to be the least influential and equally less harmful to reputation when their humorous intentions are not criticizing brands directly or when they lack the necessary satirical skills to criticize a brand.

To conclude, this section explored how social media parody accounts are an emerging trend in the age of parody as South Africans are increasingly enjoying satire that mocks familiar brands. As such, social media management teams for prominent brands, and politicians in particular, are mostly at risk of encountering user-generated parody accounts as paracrises on Twitter. At the same time, simmering anger and broken promises are indicative of brand reputations that no longer resonate with critical social media communities, hence parody accounts are created to vent frustrations and amplify anger by making the most of the virality of Twitter. In the process, any amateur satirist may achieve significant influence and reach if the sentiment of a parody account resonates with a large audience. For this reason, responsive social media governance frameworks are required as the proactive first line of
defence to mitigate risks and protect brand reputation from parody accounts created by angry social media users.

In some cases, parody accounts are also created to express affection for prominent brands and social media management teams welcome such parodies as testimony to emotionally resonant brand reputations. Either way, the unique governing principles of social media illustrate how brand resonance is the outcome of highly engaged communities that co-create and socially construct reputation.

Given the reputational risks of social media then, social media management teams are advised to comprehend how the many-to-many, dialogical and unpredictable nature of social media differs from traditional top-down crisis communication response strategies. Social media managers who embrace the principles of social media stand a better chance to select paracrisis response strategies that could maintain emotionally resonant reputations.

4.4. PARACRISIS RESPONSE STRATEGIES FOR PARODIED BRANDS TO MAINTAIN EMOTIONALLY RESONANT REPUTATIONS

The insensitive and irresponsible misuse of social media management in desperate attempts to be relevant and attention-worthy on social networks easily escalate into social media crises (Coombs, 2014:7), more accurately termed a paracrisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2012:412). Considering the unique nature of a paracrisis and user-generated parody in particular, typical paracrisis response strategies have already been summarised in Section 3.5 in the preceding chapter. If response strategies to parody accounts selectively incorporate some traditional crisis communication management principles (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19-25) while simultaneously embracing the principles of social media, messages are more likely to resonate with social media users during a crisis (Veil, Buehner & Palenchar, 2011:115). It is hoped that a suitable response strategy to address legitimate criticism from user-generated parodies and related brand hijackers may then mitigate a tarnished reputation (Alexander & Atkins, 2015:7).

A review of literature highlights several considerations for paracrisis response strategies that parodied brands may consider in order to maintain emotionally resonant reputations. Considerations for social media managers to mitigate the risks inherent in paracrises are explored in the subsequent sections.

To elaborate on the social media management response strategies to a user-generated parody account as a paracrisis, the subsequent sections make specific reference to the
options outlined by Coombs and Holladay (2012:412). These have already been introduced in Table 3.6 the preceding chapter, Section 3.5. To reiterate, the four paracrisis response strategies comprise (i) refute, (ii) implicitly admit wrongdoing, (iii) explicitly admit wrongdoing and (iv) ignore.

4.4.1. Refute: Management responds by fighting back at copycat brand parodies

When refuting parody accounts, paracrisis response strategies typically include threats to close down Twitter (Bremmen, 2010; Mallinson, 2010), legal action (Crompton, 2011:32; Malachowski, 2010:224), complaints lodged with social media platforms to remove parody accounts (Christensen, 2012; Malone, 2012:309; McConnachie, 2011; The Presidency, 2011) and aggressive responses such as lashing out at parodists (Bremmen, 2010; Howden, 2010, Mallinson, 2010; Sapa, 2013) and 'urgent' press releases to dissociate from parody accounts (Legg, 2014).

Parody accounts closely mimic the brand identities of official social media accounts, and therefore may be easily mistaken for the legitimate account (Van den Hurk, 2015). Brand identities such as logos, mascots and slogans are highly valued reputational assets which are tightly controlled in corporate identity style manuals and policies (Patel, 2011:6). More specifically, brands are protective over the usernames of official social media accounts, also called 2vanity URL’s, which are indicative of the reputational capital of social media which need to be managed in the same way as corporate websites (Malachowski, 2010:225) and other owned media.

When brand identities are satirised by copycat brand parodies, management may resort to legal action to fight back (Earle, 2002:16). In an attempt to challenge and prohibit the creation of parody, management typically cites infringement of legislation such as intellectual property laws and trademark laws (Deacon & Govender, 2007:18; Ginsburg, 2005:573, Petty, 2009:64; Pistorius, 2004:727; Van der Walt & Shay, 2013:12). Broadly speaking, these laws prohibit the unauthorised duplication or confusingly similar use of distinguishable brand identities such as logos, signs, jingles and slogans. It is argued that the violation of trademarks, or brand identities, confuse consumers to no longer associate a certain mark with a particular brand or business (Deacon & Govender, 2007:18, 22). Such confusion may ultimately tarnish brand

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2 A Uniform resource locator (URL) is the unique internet address of a page. For social media accounts, a vanity URL includes the name of the brand in the URL (Malachowski, 2010:225) such as https://twitter.com/McDonalds_SA or https://www.facebook.com/Absa.Bank. As such, a vanity URL matches the account username and makes it easy for an internet user to discover a brand’s official social media account (Musil, 2013b).
reputation, diminish the value of a brand’s legacy and result in business revenue loss. In other words, it must be proven that social media users actually believe that the parody account is that of the real brand (Malachowski, 2010:224).

When managers are of the opinion that a copycat parody account is an infringement of intellectual property laws and trademark laws, there are several legal considerations. In particular, the purpose of trademark laws is to protect the distinctive character or reputation of a well-known trademark (Pistorius, 2004:727,737). The purpose of copyright legislation is to prohibit the creation of new works that will not economically benefit the original author (Van der Walt & Shay, 2013:12). As such, copyright laws give exclusive rights to an author to duplicate the work ‘in any manner or form’ (Pistorius, 2004:727,737).

Global agreements are aimed at consolidating legal protection for brand reputations. Internationally, trade mark laws adhere to the principles contained in the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), the European Directive on Trade Marks and the Uruguay Round of the negotiations on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which are also recognised in South African law (Deacon & Govender, 2007:20; Kelbrick, 2007:87). Yet, Crompton (2011:32) cautions that legal defence varies considerably around the world and litigation may therefore be challenging to pursue. Internationally, the only countries that explicitly exempt parody from copyright laws are Canada, the Netherlands, France and Australia (Erickson, Kretschmer & Mendis, 2013:3,12).

Locally, Van der Walt and Shay (2013:12) recommend that South African copyright law exempts parody to protect freedom of expression and creativity, considering the exponential growth in user-generated parody as a creative and valuable free expression of opinions and criticism. However, in South African courts, parody as a defence against copyright infringement has not been adequately addressed (Pistorius, 2004:738) although parody and satire are recognised as protected forms of speech in the local democracy (Sadleir & De Beer, 2014). Generally, courts seem to rule in favour of brands claiming damages for trade mark infringements and disregard the defence of humorous parody as freedom of expression (Ginsburg, 2005:574).

Court cases where the creators of parody were sued for trade mark and copyright infringements, demonstrated that there is a fine balance between permissible trademark infringements and freedom of expression (Deacon & Govender, 2007:43, Kelbrick, 2007:88; Pistorius, 2004:740). To illustrate, parody expressed on anti-brand websites such as telkomsucks.co.za and on satiric T-shirts, such as those that targeted SA Breweries’ Carling
Black Label, contain both social comments as well as the use of a brand’s trade mark. In a widely reported, expensive and drawn out litigation process, SA Breweries resorted to trade mark law to gain protection against the abuse of its trade mark and the tarnishing of the brand’s reputation (Accone, 2005:19). In the process, SA Breweries – now SAB Miller – gained a reputation as a big corporation that uses its extensive resources against a small company in order to silence a voice of dissent in a David and Goliath-type battle (Accone, 2005:19; Merten, 2004). Eventually, in 2005, the Constitutional Court found that T-shirt creators Laugh It Off Promotions did not infringe on the brand’s trade mark as it was a parody and their right to freedom of expression should be acknowledged (Ginsburg, 2005:573, Visser, 2005:322).

In a related local incident, telecommunications brand Telkom, threatened parody websites Hellkom and Telkomsucks with a R5 million law suit for infringement of trademark rights and encouraging hate speech in 2004. Telkom was widely criticized for acting like a bully and censoring free speech (Cinman, 2008:42; Vecchiatto, 2004). Eventually, Telkom abandoned its law suit against Hellkom (Finance24, 2005).

Although legislation seems to offer ample protection for organisations that suffer financial losses and reputational damages, the fact that parody may be produced by anyone around the globe, causes litigation to be especially problematic in the digital age. To begin with, it may be difficult to locate the creators of parody accounts as they often use masked IP addresses and fake email addresses when registering a social media account (Malachowski, 2010:224). Another challenge in the digital age is the ease and speed of opening a multitude of email and social network accounts which cannot be easily controlled. To illustrate, several Twitter parody accounts mocking the teething problems of Africa News Network7 (ANN7) emerged in 2013 (Davis, 2013; Van Schie, 2013). In addition, several YouTube videos about ANN7’s embarrassing moments were shared on YouTube. However, the YouTube videos were taken down and replaced with a notice citing copyright infringements as an explanation. Simultaneously, a popular Twitter parody account, @ANN7news (2013) was removed from Twitter. Despite these acts of so-called “management censorship” (Davis, 2013), a few other parody accounts, such as @ANN7newss (2013), spelt slightly differently, soon emerged. It goes without saying that the disappearance of the @ANN7news (2013) parody account has become the fodder for parody in the account biographies of @ANN7newss (2013) and @ann7reporter (2014). Likewise, when UK cricketer Kevin Pietersen criticized a parody account mocking his skills, the publicity merely attracted more attention and followers for the parody account (The Telegraph, 2012). To conclude, the above knee-jerk responses and the ensuing backlash by parody accounts illustrates the Streisand effect, already discussed in Section 3.5.1.
A related incident was when the ANC Youth League threatened to shut down the entire Twitter (Boshomane, 2015; Mallinson, 2010) in reaction to 12 Twitter parody accounts for former leader Julius Malema. A parody account that was started in 2009 and had over 500 000 followers, was subsequently reclaimed by Malema in 2012 (Legg, 2014) and used as his official account (Boshomane, 2015). It is believed that the large number of parody accounts for Malema is encouraged by his abrasive manner and controversial exuberant lifestyle (Howden, 2010). At one time, the most popular Twitter parody account @Julius_S_Malema had 15 000 followers (Bremmen, 2010). Shortly after the Youth League’s threat to close down Twitter, the initial 12 Twitter parody accounts for Malema increased to 22 parody accounts and the incident escalated to such an extent that the parody meme #JujuFriday became a global trending topic on Twitter (Bremmen, 2010; Pillay, 2010). In addition, the Youth League’s threat to close down Twitter was reciprocated with a Twitter parody account @Floyd_Shivambu, named after the former party spokesperson (Howden, 2010). To conclude, the backlash of parody accounts and parody meme #JujuFriday serve to illustrate the Streisand effect.

To reiterate, the Streisand effect is evident in overly-aggressive intellectual property rights enforcement by prominent brands against satirists, which usually result in public sentiment being in favour of the satirist (Louw, 2013:8,28). Typically, public opinion sympathises with the satirist as an unfortunate victim of corporate bullying and arrogance in an attempt to muzzle free speech. Similarly, a study by Berthon and Pitt (2012:96) confirmed that legal action against user-generated parody advertisements that satirise both the brand and its consumers may create the perception that the brand is acting like a bully. Rather, management is advised to recognise that consumers are laughing at themselves, and laugh with them. Therefore, a legal, threatening and strong defensive response may easily translate into a viral social media backlash (Veil, Petrun & Roberts, 2012:319) as irate users perceive their intimate relationship with brands on social media being betrayed by a strong corporate response (Crompton, 2011:29). In retaliation, a social media outcry rapidly spreads virally online as comments and links to corporate content are being curated.

As already mentioned in Section 3.5.1., the Streisand effect denotes a social media backlash in reaction against attempts to hide or remove information from public view (Louw, 2013:6). Correspondingly, social media crises gain unprecedented attention. Likewise, when social media management teams respond by deleting embarrassing social media management content or negative customer comments an existing crisis may escalate, as concluded in a study by Ott and Theunissen (2015:100). When social media communities discover that a brand’s official social media account deletes incriminating content from their digital footprint
during a crisis, the result is a social media backlash. Similarly, when hiding negative customer comments, a brand is accused of censorship and hypocrisy. Notably, Mortimer (2008:15) believes that the average consumer hardly notices brand parodies as these brand attacks occur on a few selected channels.

The blocking and deleting of offensive and abusive comments carry a risk, even if community guidelines are in place to mitigate hating, flaming and trolling (Ott & Theunissen, 2015). Therefore, deleting, hiding or blocking critics may ignite anger and break down trust as it is perceived that management has something to hide. As a result, management denies itself the opportunity to discover the motivations behind the attacks and thereby gain valuable insights to learn from mistakes. In any case, the discoverability of a brand’s digital footprint implies that copies of parodied content stay on the internet infinitely (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19). One such example concerns Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga, who does not have a Twitter account. Although the parody @AngieMotshekga (2013) had 4 024 followers at one stage, the parody continued to tweet spoof posts despite a government statement that criticized the account was misleading and disrespectful (Sapa, 2013).

For the reasons already discussed, Petty (2009:64) recommends that managers realise that they cannot exercise complete control over the use of their brand names and therefore should rather avoid legal action as a knee-jerk reaction to anyone who dares to make fun of a brand. Likewise, several authors advise against litigation as the most effective response strategy to parody accounts (Crompton, 2011:32; Malachowski, 2010:224; Petty, 2009:64; Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:50). Apart from being costly, litigation often leads to negative public opinion (Petty, 2009:64). Often, court cases, judgements and appeals may risk unwarranted media exposure to parodists and other relevant brand critics (Mortimer, 2008:15). Therefore, litigation is only advised for parody that is truly harmful to the brand, rather than simply poking fun at a brand (Petty, 2009:65; 2012:767).

An alternative response to legal action, especially when responding to a malicious parody account (Wan, Koh, Ong & Pang, 2015:384), is to appeal to a social network like Twitter to close down a parody account (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19). In most instances, defamation is prohibited by the terms and conditions of social networks and if requested, defamatory statements may be removed by the website owners (Petty, 2012:766). In the case of brand trademarks that have been used without permission and with the clear intent to confuse or deceive social network users, requests may be submitted to reclaim these accounts or to request that they are removed from Twitter (Malachowski, 2010:230; Patel, 2011:6). However, not all these requests are necessarily granted by Twitter since parody is protected by Twitter’s
user policies (Christensen, 2012; Malone, 2012:309; Nitins & Burgess, 2014:295). Moreover, it may take a considerable amount of time before an answer is received (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19).

When brand identities are hijacked, especially by parody accounts with malicious intentions, suing for defamation may also be considered. To elaborate, a claim of defamation – the publication of false information that harms the reputation of an individual – generally offers legal protection against reputational harm caused by brand parody (Petty, 2012:758). Therefore, when a malicious parody account causes considerable reputational harm, a defensive response may warrant a confrontational tone (Wan, Koh, Ong & Pang, 2015:384). In such cases, a disclaimer may be posted on the brand’s official social media account to dissociate the official account from the parody account. Another option is to contact the parodist directly by issuing cease-and-desist letters, which are formal requests to a party to refrain from conduct or action that is damaging to a defamed person’s reputation (Marton, Wilk & Rogal, 2010:62). Cease-and-desist letters by corporate lawyers often contain evidence to refute the false information that is damaging a defamed party’s reputation. Notably, when being targeted by a malicious parody account, it may be that litigation is the only option to secure its removal (Malachowski, 2010:230).

4.4.2. Explicitly admit wrongdoing: Responses to embrace parody, co-create content and collaborate with critics

As anyone can create a social media account, managers have no immediate control over the content, the message or the extent of user-generated parody accounts (Armelini & Villanueva, 2011:33; Malachowski, 2010:226; Patel, 2011:6). Therefore, Berthon and Pitt (2012:95) recommend that brand managers accept user-generated parodies as a logical consequence of media democratisation. By embracing the popularity of user-generated parodies in the playful age of parody, Fournier and Avery (2011:25) recommend that response strategies that mitigate the risks of social media management are embedded in the collaborative, participatory principles of social media.

An example of a brand that embraced the misinterpretation of their communication campaigns in YouTube brand parodies is Dove (Jeppesen & Pettersson, 2010:85). Dove accepted that parody is one way in which resonant brand stories are co-created. As a result, consumers defended the brand when critics posted negative comments. Similarly, popular culture artist Lady Gaga, shared a parody fan music video of her song Bad Romance on Twitter (Edgar, 2013:9). Likewise, local parodist Suzelle DIY shares popular parodies of her character with
her followers (SAPeople, 2015). These examples illustrate how creative, non-confrontational spoofs may help to enhance brand reputation (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19-25). To illustrate, when user-generated parody videos of Cadbury’s Gorilla advertisement became a cult hit, the official corporate communication response complemented the parodies, as spokesperson Tony Billsbrough is quoted in the *Birmingham Mail* (2012) as saying:

“We’ve seen them and we feel that imitation is the most sincere form of flattery. There are some which range from the sublime to the ridiculous, but there are some which look quite professional. It’s fine by us and we will let it ride so long as it doesn’t get out of hand.”

Popular and skilfully created parodies not only attract a large following for the parodist, but also simultaneously draw attention to the brand, thereby increasing awareness of corporate communication messages (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19-25). Considering the popularity and viral tendencies of skilfully created parodies, Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam and Hove (2011:15) advise advertisers to encourage the creation of user-generated parodies which allows the original advertisement’s imagery, themes or catchphrases to reach a larger audience than initially intended. As Fournier and Avery (2011:25) articulate: “Smart marketers recognise the power of parody memes in advertising, and many design campaigns that aim to crack this code” in the age of parody. In this manner, consumers are enticed to work on behalf of the brand which enhances strategic messages that resonate with communities.

A brand personality that demonstrates a sense of humour and are therefore not “too stuck up” for consumers is more likely to enhance brand equity and elicit brand loyalty (Petty, 2009:65). Essentially, management is advised to rather tolerate parodies, take the mocking in their stride and demonstrate that they have a sense of humour (Petty, 2009:64; Veil, Petrun & Roberts, 2012:319). Conversely, should management act in a manner that expresses no sense of humour, criticism may quickly gain momentum and intensity online (Crompton, 2011:32; Poston, 2012:9). Correspondingly, an appropriate response strategy may be the use of humorous parody in corporate communication content to engage user-generated parody accounts (Mortimer, 2008:15). Stated differently, in the playful age of parody the path of least resistance denotes giving in to social media pressure and relinquishing control of a brand to the consumer by means of listening and collaboration (Fournier & Avery, 2011:25).

When a response strategy engages critics, they will more likely accept an official response if they feel that they are treated fairly and with respect (Mortimer, 2008:15). As such, an appropriate corporate response to parody is one that is open and tactful, while striving towards maintaining a long-term relationship with stakeholders (Crompton, 2011:29). Correspondingly, a study on social media hijacking and slacktivism by Veil *et al* (2015:107) recommends that
the social media management team physically meets with disgruntled stakeholders in order to build personal relationships and listen to their grievances. As a result, social media hijackers, such as parodists, often cease their activities when their legitimate concerns are perceived to have been heard.

Similarly, a study by Ott and Theunissen (2015:100) recommends collaborating with critics and taking corrective action. Although resource intensive, such a response strategy seems to dissipate a crisis owing to increased transparency and openness. Corrective action then encompasses a change in corporate behaviour by collaborating with critics to improve shortcomings. Moreover, parodied brands may use the opportunity to be more transparent about business processes (Mortimer, 2008:15). In the process, criticism diminishes when openly admitting to making mistakes.

When apologising, it is recommended to quickly post a statement on the brand’s official social media accounts (Ott & Theunissen, 2015). Social communities appreciate official apologies and the transparent acknowledgement of a crisis situation, as is the case when applying traditional crisis communication tactics. However, public responses by the social media management team should rather be limited only to directly affected customers and followed up privately via email and call centres. As a result, public attacks subside and reputational damage may be minimised as concern for each individual is demonstrated. In other words, angry critics who are not directly affected by the crises are ignored (Ott & Theunissen, 2015). Instead, only initiate conversations on social networks with those directly affected by the crisis and offer to assist them. This may help to contain the crisis and is a more productive use of resources.

Upholding the authenticity principle of social media may mitigate the risks inherent in social media management during a paracrisis. Often escalating a crisis are social media managers who merely copy and paste sections of official corporate communication statements in their replies to each individual critic (Ott & Theunissen, 2015). Traditional, top-down communication is perceived as ‘talking down’, which then further enrages social media communities and risks a social media backlash. Correspondingly, traditional crisis communication tactics, such as using top management or the CEO as the spokesperson, is rather redundant during a social media crisis. Likewise, inauthentic responses, such as using paid media to apologise, is then further satirised by user-generated parody accounts, as confirmed in a study of paracrises by Wan, Koh, Ong and Pang (2015:383).
To reiterate, authentic responses are most likely to reduce angry attacks (Ott & Theunissen, 2015). It is observed that when social media managers disclose their real names, criticism tends to subside, as a brand’s official social media accounts are then associated with a human face. Furthermore, social media managers’ tone of engagement remains less formal and more personal compared to traditional corporate communication messages. In doing so, cultural resonance is attained by fitting in seamlessly with social media principles (Fournier & Avery, 2011:5; 25). Instead of being an intrusive, unwelcome brand, management embraces the nuanced principles and governing mechanisms of social media by listening to conversations and ceding control.

Instead of hasty litigation as a means to prohibit brand parodies (Petty, 2009:64), management is advised to rather appreciate the strategically valuable cultural insights that brand parodies provide (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:50). All things considered, parodies that express valid criticism may provide valuable strategic marketing insights needed to address internally when adjusting strategies to resolve product or service flaws and customer dissatisfaction (Earle, 2002:12). As such, a study of online parodies by Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel (2006:59) concurs that managers need to analyse consumers’ broader socio-economic and cultural context as catalysts for the creation of parodies and use these insights to align marketing strategies. Having learnt from valid shortcomings, insights may be applied to match expectations and then change attitudes towards the parodied brand. As such, parodies may point out necessary policy changes to discard poor business practises and therefore offer opportunities for organisations to change behaviour and become more socially responsible. Should a reform of business practises take place, it is advised that corrective measures are widely communicated on corporate communication channels (Ott & Theunissen, 2015:100).

Once an analysis of the parodied brand is completed, a new emotional-branding story is developed and tested (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:61), based on the results of market intelligence gathered, according to the European Institute for Brand Management (EURIB, 2009:1). In this manner, the proactive adjustment of a strategy and the testing of new emotionally appealing brand stories through qualitative methods occur before existing brand stories become stale and lose their appeal (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:61). Proactive adjustments may diffuse a crisis triggered by parody accounts before they gain reach and influence (EURIB, 2009:1; Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:61).

In the age of parody (Fournier & Avery, 2011:24; Funnell, 2015) where control over brands is at the mercy of stakeholders outside the organisation, Fournier and Avery (2011:30)
recommend that management remains strategically flexible. The pro-active pre-planning of strategies based on carefully collected marketing intelligence is replaced by serendipity, coincidence, the discovery of social media management strategies, the acknowledgement of uncertainty and reactivity.

4.4.3. Implicitly admit wrongdoing: Indirectly responding to angry critics

Instead of directly responding to a parody account, another option is to address issues and measures taken to resolve valid criticism expressed in a parody account in a general manner by issuing a position statement on social media accounts and websites (Earle, 2002:16; Ott & Theunissen, 2015). In the process, criticism is indirectly countered by reinforcing positive measures to address the issue (Ott & Theunissen, 2015).

4.4.4. Ignore: Face the risk that an official response may escalate into viral social media backlash

Owing to the critical, conversational and viral nature of social media, official responses need to be carefully considered so that they don’t further inflame a social media crisis triggered by a user-generated parody (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19). For this reason, an established social media management presence enables the team to familiarise themselves with the unique and highly critical culture of Twitter (Ott & Theunissen, 2015:100). Considering the high prevalence of Twitter parody accounts, understanding Twitter’s user culture will allow a more calculated response during a social media crisis.

The outright avoidance of critics is not a recommended response strategy considering that “the more you ignore them, the louder they get”, according to Veil et al (2015:107). When initially ignoring angry critics, they merely retaliate by building up an extensive army to attack the brand. In the same manner, avoiding social media as a means to circumvent critics altogether is not a recommended management response (Crompton, 2011:31). When so doing, managers merely allow someone else to take over and host the debate. When ignoring parody accounts altogether (Earle, 2002:16), an information vacuum exists that denies brands the opportunity to assert their voices, as concluded in a study of paracrises by Wan, Koh, Ong and Pang (2015:384).

An equally important consideration is social media communities’ expectations for an official response (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012). When a brand’s official social media accounts already have a good online reputation for engagement and typically respond to customer complaints
within minutes, the social media community may have high expectations of a timely official response during a social media crisis. When then withholding a response to a parody account, social media users may be disappointed and criticize the absence of a response.

There may be times when refusal to respond to a user-generated parody is a suitable strategy. It is advised that brands with poor reputations before a crisis situation should rather limit engagement during a crisis, according to a study by Ott and Theunissen (2015). When there is a history of irresponsible behaviour, official responses encounter a higher degree of anger, emotional involvement and pleasure derived from the brand’s misfortune during a social media crisis. Another scenario whereby ignoring a parody account may be preferable is when the consumers of a brand, and not the brand itself, is satirised according to a study by Berthon and Pitt (2012:96). Instead, it may be best to rather just monitor and analyse the situation to gain from consumer insights.

Deliberate decisions to withhold official responses may be rather beneficial in some cases (Ott & Theunissen, 2015:100). Instead of issuing inauthentic, traditional corporate statements, it is advised that management relinquishes some measure of control over social media crises by rather giving loyal fans and supporters the opportunity to defend the brand. Correspondingly, the social media management team may garner the support of social media influencers during a social media crisis (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19-25). When enlisting the favour of influencers, the latter may be willing to defend a brand and change sentiment.

As already argued in the previous chapter, traditional crisis communication response principles are almost redundant, considering the principles and risks inherent in social media. Typically, traditional crisis communication principles prescribe a persistent, accurate and clear communication by publishing frequent official statements to correct facts during a crisis (Ott & Theunissen, 2015:100). Notably, such strategies are ineffective, considering the principles of social media, as official statements merely become fodder for escalating criticism. Angry social media communities do not want to hear what corporate communication has to say, so official statements quickly get buried under a flood of negative comments. Worsening the crisis is the fact that high engagement content attracts algorithms which then prioritise crises in news feeds and expedite viral attacks. Therefore, when official engagement with critics subsides, so too criticism, mentions and visibility about the crisis decrease. Likewise, when not directly replying to every individual’s complaint during a social media crisis, angry comments are ignored and criticism is more likely to be contained to some degree (Ott & Theunissen, 2015). In this sense, traditional crisis communication responses such as attacking the accuser, denial
and justification are used. However, activists and other critics may nevertheless continue their campaigning.

As parodies by so-called brand terrorists are becoming a worrisome trend, Mortimer (2008:15) recommends ignoring brand parodies as a way to “take the high ground”, as defensive responses may create the impression that management is “forcing people to like your brand”. Essentially, corporate communication needs to “learn when to speak and when to just listen” by analysing the nuances and unique culture of social media conversations while also understanding the tendency for provocative and funny parodies to spread exponentially, according to a study by Veil, Petrun and Roberts (2012:319). Stated differently, when venting is aimed at ridiculing a brand during a paracrisis, the most suitable corporate communication response may be to “have a sense of humour and a thick skin” while allowing angry comments to persist without any management interference (Coombs, 2014:8).

Management has no control over the intensity, sentiment and extent to which official responses to parody will be judged and discussed on social networks. As such, management needs to ascertain the risk and potential damage to reputation should they decide to respond, and the potential effect of a response on long-term goals (Veil, Petrun & Roberts, 2012:319). Considering the propensity for defensive responses to escalate into a viral social media backlash, it may very well be that it is not worth responding to user-generated parody. When considering these factors, an official response to a user-generated parody may be more damaging than publically ignoring the criticism.

In conclusion, the four paracrisis response strategies proposed by Coombs and Holladay (2012:412) illustrate how the many-to-many, peer-to-peer principles of social media disrupt traditional crisis communication dominated by the one-way monologues of traditional media. Since a paracrisis edges on a full-blown crisis, paracrisis response strategies are a form of risk management, considering that social media make it easy for criticism to quickly escalate into a fully developed reputation crisis (Coombs; 2014:12). For this reason, social media management teams need to consider all contingencies, especially how to mitigate the risks evident in the governing principles of social media. As such, the selection of an appropriate paracrisis response strategy may be described as a balancing act between knowing when to speak and when to listen to ORM analytics, when to have a thick skin and when to display a sense of humour, when to ignore and when to refute. While explicitly admit wrongdoing may seem as the most appropriate paracrisis response to address broken promises, corporate social media teams also need to consider the ambiguous meanings and multiple intentions of parody before investing resources in changing behaviour. All things considered, literature is
scares on paracrisis response strategies to maintain emotionally resonant brand reputations, hence the need for this study. In particular, very little literature seems to support implicitly admit wrongdoing as a paracrisis response strategy when targeted by a user-generated parody account.

### 4.5. MEASURING THE REPUTATION OF PARODIED BRANDS TO SELECT A PARACRISIS RESPONSE STRATEGY THAT RESONATES WITH CRITICAL SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNITIES

It is evident that the extent to which a paracrisis taints reputation requires measurement, interpretation and recommendations for strategic reputation management. An appropriate stakeholder-specific measuring tool is Fombrun and Van Riel's (2004) EQ score, which premises that an emotionally appealing and therefore resonant reputation applies integrated communication that aligns brand, strategy, and identity (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:96,86; Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:27). A high EQ relies on five constructs, namely: (i) visibility, (ii) transparency, (iii) authenticity, (iv) consistency and (v) distinction. Considering that user-generated parody accounts hijack the emotional appeal of strategic messages, the extent of reputational damage needs to be measured in order to establish suitable paracrisis response strategies to maintain emotionally appealing brand reputations that resonate with critical social media communities. As such, the constructs of emotionally appealing messages that resonate with stakeholders are illustrated in Figure 4.10 of the EQ (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:97) below.

![Figure 4.10: Constructs of the EQ as a measure of emotionally resonant brand reputations adapted from Fombrun and Van Riel (2004:96)](image-url)
To elaborate on the five core constructs and their operational definitions illustrated in Figure 4.10 above, the subsequent discussion will further explain the EQ as a measure of emotionally resonant brand reputations as set out below:

i. **Visibility**: Information is widely available and reduces the need for stakeholders to search for information (Fombrun & Van Riel: 2004:111). Visibility is equated with familiarity which is a result of publicity such as news coverage, regular advertising and, therefore, top-of-mind awareness. A primary driver is the brand equity of strong, prominent brands such as Microsoft, Disney and McDonalds. An association also exists between brands that receive negative publicity which result in reduced interest from investors and may ultimately contribute to a downward spiral in shares and reputation. Good corporate citizens behave ethically by upholding the best interests of consumers by being socially, environmentally and economically responsible in a visible manner. Crises are often the reason why brands become visible for their wrongdoing.

ii. **Distinctiveness**: A brand that stands out from rivals reduces the efforts that stakeholders need to go through to understand the purpose of the brand. Distinctiveness entails establishing and managing reputations around a unique promise that coherently resonates with all stakeholders and tells them a story (Fombrun & Van Riel: 2004:133,137). More importantly, emotionally resonating promises encourage emotional bonds that connect with stakeholders on a personal level.

iii. **Consistency**: Distinctive and emotionally appealing messages are consistently communicated across all communication channels to all stakeholder groups. Furthermore, consistency between actions and messaging result in shared values among external and internal stakeholders (Fombrun & Van Riel: 2004:218). Consistency is achieved through dialogue with stakeholders, a shared identity, integrated communication and coherent service standards. Ultimately, messages are consistent with the corporate story.

iv. **Transparency**: Providing information that is timely, relevant, comparable and reliable. Corporate communication statements and actions are credible (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:188). The degree of disclosure is profoundly influenced by the intensity of powerful, sceptical stakeholders that criticize a lack of transparency. Often, organisations do not voluntarily divulge information unless pressurised to do so by external drivers such as social, political, legal and market forces.

v. **Authenticity**: An authentic organisation is more trustworthy and likeable as it expresses the “voice of the gut” which attracts loyalty. Moreover, authenticity requires honesty in all stakeholder interactions in order for a brand to be regarded as reliable, genuine, real and accurate (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:163,165). Authenticity narrows the gap between “claims and deeds, between who you are, what you say, and what you do”. If
there is a lack of authenticity, critical stakeholders quickly voice discrediting opinions to others which may reduce support for the brand. Moreover, authenticity is strengthened when messages evoke emotional appeal so that feelings of respect, liking and trust are resonating with stakeholders. As such, organisations need to demonstrate accountability for mishaps. As authenticity originates internally, discovery of identity is a bottom-up process initiated by top management involving all employees in a dialogue to agree on the organisation’s core purpose and values.

In summary, the greater a brand’s expressiveness, the more likely a brand will be emotionally appealing and therefore resonate with stakeholders (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:96,86). Correspondingly, stakeholders will identify with the brand and be more willing to engage in supportive behaviours. The result is that customers and employees will act as ambassadors for the brand.

4.5.1. Motivation for the use of the EQ score as valid constructs for this study

The argument already introduced in the previous chapter is that the many-to-many, dialogic and rather antagonistic environment of social media disrupt relationships between management and stakeholders (Nitins & Burgess, 2014:293). In this antagonistic environment, strategic reputation management mitigates the risks inherent in social media management (Aula & Mantere, 2013:340) that are amplified during a paracrisis (Coombs; 2014; Coombs & Holladay, 2012). Therefore, an interpretive approach acknowledges that management has very little direct control over perceptions being tainted as reputation emerges during engagement with active social media communities (Aula & Mantere, 2013:340-344).

A paracrisis inflicts damage to reputation (Coombs; 2014:3) and the intense relationship attachments needed to sustain brands that resonate with social media communities (Ambler et al, 2002:16; Keller, 2001:15,21; 2009:143,149). Strong attitudinal attachments and active engagements to establish a sense of community form the foundation for brand resonance (Keller, 2001:15; 2009:144; 2012:186; 2016:5). Emotional associations and sentimental attachments are prerequisites for brand equity, which is equated to reputation (Hearn, 2010:427). More specifically, when telling emotionally appealing stories, consumers may become inspired and captivated by the brand message (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:52). Emotions such as love, in particular, is the foundation for brand resonance (Keller, 2001:15; 2009:144; 2012:186). Love is also the characteristic of committed relationships that will outlast adverse circumstances (Fournier, 1998:365) so that brand advocates will defend brands online when facing criticism (Roberts, 2005:105). The ability to form a resonating
psychological bond (Keller, 2001:15; 2009:144; 2012:186) and project feelings such as passion, love, commitment and trust, are facilitated through brand personalities that humanise and animate brands so that mutually beneficial relationships are co-created (Fournier, 1998:344; Fournier & Alvarez, 2012:177). In the process, consumers are actively engaged in the social construction of brand value (Arvidsson, 2005:242) as powerful, emotionally resonant brands are the result of “multiple creators authoring multiple representations in multiple venues” (Diamond et al, 2009:119).

It is safe to deduce that strong emotional associations and sentimental attachments are attained when brand reputations resonate with actively engaged communities. Already, resonance is a key metric used in ORM to establish social influence through relevance and reach (Solis & Webber, 2012:10). As stated by Alsop (2004:25), measuring reputation is the first step in managing reputation, as one cannot manage what one cannot measure.

Owing to the importance of strong emotional connections when measuring reputation, the following studies typically use affection and emotional appeal as a construct when measuring reputation:

- **The Ask Afrika Icon Brands** (2015, 2013/14) ranks the most loved brands, as already discussed in Section 2.4.1.
- **The Reputation RepTrak Pulse** (Reputation Institute, 2013; 2014a, 2015a), as already discussed in Section 2.4.1. At the centre of the model is an emotional connection, or pulse.
- **Africa Brand Index** (2015) includes sentiment as a metric in their online reputation measurement, as already discussed in Section 2.4.1.
- **The Pyramid-based pillars for corporate reputation management** of Shamma and Hassan (2009:335) and Shamma (2012:164) includes emotional appeal as one of six constructs for measuring reputation. The primary pillars are the grounding blocks needed to be considered first, namely (i) workplace environment, and (ii) products and services. The secondary pillars comprise (i) financial performance, (ii) vision and leadership, (iii) emotional appeal, and finally (iv) social and environmental responsibility at the highest level of reputation.
- **The Harris-Fombrun Reputation Quotient score**: The Reputation Quotient score (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:51; Harris Interactive, 2013:6), also known as the Harris-Fombrun Reputation Quotient (Roper and Fill, 2012:90), applies emotional appeal as one of six constructs for reputation (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:53). The six dimensions are as follows: (i) financial performance, (ii) emotional appeal, (iii) social responsibility, (iv) products and services, (v) vision and leadership, and (vi) workplace environment.
While the abovementioned studies use emotional appeal and affection as a construct when measuring reputation, a noteworthy contribution of this study is the fact that there is a scarcity of studies in literature that applied either Coombs (2014) or Coombs and Holladay’s (2012:412) paracrisis theory or Fombrun and Van Riel’s (2004:53) EQ. For example, Apéria, Brønn and Schultz (2004:229) concluded that transparency was the most important construct of the EQ during a crisis. However, Martin and Hetrick (2006:74) criticize the EQ score for omitting to clearly explain the relationship between reputation and branding, by arguing that the two are often used synonymously. Nevertheless, a positive relationship between corporate branding and reputation is found in a study by Kowalczyk and Pawlish (2002:172), who applied Fombrun and Van Riel’s (2004:53) Reputation Quotient measurement to six prominent Silicon Valley brands. With regard to paracrisis, a study of user-generated parody accounts by Wan, Koh, Ong and Pang (2015:383) conducted a content analysis of tweets to establish the motivators for parody accounts and how they compromise strategic messages. Based thereon, the study of Wan, Koh, Ong and Pang (2015:383) recommended three typical response strategies, as already indicated in this chapter. Consequently, this study seeks to address a clearly identified gap in literature by integrating both the EQ of Fombrun and Van Riel (2004) and the paracrisis response strategies recommended by Coombs and Holladay (2012) in a single study while further analysing both quantitative and qualitative data in order to suggest suitable paracrisis response strategies to maintain emotionally appealing brand reputations that resonate with critical social media communities. As such, the next chapter will elaborate on the methodology chosen for this study.

4.6. CONCLUSION

The first aim of this chapter (i) was achieved by exploring how social media parody is an emerging trend in South Africa since around 2014 and how parody can hijack strategic messages. The chapter argued that the double meaning of irony and satire can be easily misunderstood, while the rudeness, offensiveness and sarcasm used by copy-cat parody accounts complicate strategic reputation management. Moreover, it was highlighted how brand identities are satirised and how parody accounts are easily confused with the brand’s official social media account. The second aim (ii) of this chapter was achieved by analysing the reasons why brands are likely to be targeted by parody accounts and to establish when brands are at risk of being parodied. It was established that prominent, reputable brands are mostly at risk, especially when they are accused of wrongdoing.

The third aim of the chapter (iii) was achieved by providing a critical discussion of the possible paracrisis response strategies to a user-generated parody account. It was emphasised that official responses need to seamlessly fit into the governing principles of social media, or else
paracrises may escalate into a full crisis in the form of viral social media backlashes. Lastly, the fourth aim of the chapter (iv) was achieved by motivating why the EQ score (Fombrun & Van Riel (2004:94) provides suitable constructs to measure and identify the most suitable paracrisis response strategies (Coombs; 2014; Coombs & Holladay, 2012) for social media management teams to maintain emotionally resonant reputations when user-generated parody accounts target brands. The chapter reiterated that that several prominent studies typically use affection and emotional appeal as a construct when measuring reputation.

Based on the assumptions presented, it is concluded that when reputation resonates with stakeholders in highly engaged and critical social media communities, reputation may be more resilient when faced with a paracrisis, hence the need for this study. To reiterate, brands that attain emotionally appealing corporate communication messages, equally have reputations that resonate with stakeholders (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:154). As such, integrated communication is required to ensure consistency between reputation and brand equity (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:27). Moreover, the EQ score values the establishment of strong relationships or emotional bonds with stakeholders through dialogue, so that they act as brand ambassadors. Likewise, as said before, passionate and committed relationships will most probably outlast adverse circumstances (Fournier, 1998:365) so that brand advocates will defend brands online when facing criticism (Roberts, 2005:105). As such, reputational resilience is demonstrated when corporate communication is able to moderate the damaging consequences of a reputational crises (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990:255). When mitigating the risks inherent in social media management, it is hoped that appropriate response strategies to a paracrisis may co-create reputations that resonate with critical social media communities in the age of parody.

The following chapter, Chapter 5, provides a detailed discussion and motivation for a synergistic approach (Hall & Howard, 2008:249) to mixed methods in a triangulation design to benefit from different but complementary data to be collected on the same topic. As such, quality data can be gathered and rigorously analysed to shed light on the research problem.
CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the various methods used to collect and analyse data in order to derive at findings that would answer the research problem. More specifically, the research problem deals with integrating the five constructs of Fombrun and Van Riel’s (2004) Expressiveness Quotient (EQ) with Coombs and Holladay’s (2012) four paracrisis response strategies. By integrating these theories, social media management teams may maintain emotionally resonant band reputations when responding to user-generated parody accounts as paracrises.

In order to answer the research questions, the chapter explains and justifies the advantages of a synergistic approach (Hall & Howard, 2008:249) to mixed methods in a triangulation design. The target population for this study was social media management teams, while a sample of social media management experts was drawn using purposive sampling and snowball sampling. While giving equal weighting to both qualitative and quantitative methods, data was collected during a self-administered online survey and semi-structured in-depth interviews. In terms of data analysis, multiple linear stepwise regression analysis for quantitative data, using IBM SPSS predictive analytics software, were synergised with Miles and Huberman’s (1994:12) concurrent technique for thematic analysis, using Atlas.ti software for qualitative data. Finally, the discussion explains how rigour was utilised while triangulation enhanced validity and correspondingly strengthened credibility and confirmability. Reliability was strengthened through a pilot study, while dependability and reflexivity were enhanced through reflexive memoing. A concurrent process of data collection and data analysis enabled the researcher to confidently establish data saturation after a realised sample of 137 respondents for the online survey (72.87% completion rate and a satisfactory Cronbach alpha of 0.805) and 19 participants in the interviews. Adherence to research ethics for this study is explained throughout.

The reason for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data was to bring together the strengths of both forms of research to validate results. By upholding the core principles of the synergistic approach to mixed methods in a triangulation design, the study benefitted from different but complementary data to be collected on the same topic.
Parody as a form of expressing criticism dates back to Ancient Greek literature, but today, disgruntled stakeholders can easily create user-generated parody accounts to satirise brands on social media where they gain influence and escalate into viral crises. In fact, given the popularity of user-generated parody, the current environment is referred to as the age of parody (Fournier & Avery, 2011:24). In South Africa, social media parody is regarded as an emerging trend where some have already reached iconic mainstream cultural status. For social media management teams, strategic reputation management is problematic in the age of parody, considering the unique principles and risks inherent in social media. More specifically, social media disrupt (Quinn-Allan, 2012:47) relationships between organisations and their stakeholders by breaking down one-to-many traditional communication lines and replacing them with many-to-many (Castells, 2007:238), dialogic and antagonistic communication models (Nitins & Burgess, 2014:293). Correspondingly, traditional one-to-many reputation management and crisis communication theories that regarded stakeholders as passive receivers of corporate communication messages are almost obsolete. Considering that reputation emerges through collaborative engagements, more appropriate paradigms are required. Therefore, strategic reputation management mitigates the collaborative risks inherent in social media management (Aula & Mantere, 2013:340) that are amplified during a paracrisis (Coombs; 2014; Coombs & Holladay, 2012) that brands need to manage in public view when responding to disgruntled stakeholders such as parodists. As such, Coombs and Holladay, (2012) identified four typical paracrisis response strategies, namely, (i) refute, (ii) implicitly admit wrongdoing, (iii) explicitly admit wrongdoing and (iv) ignore.

The potential to taint reputation when angry stakeholders create parody accounts using mockery, ridicule and offensive satire to gain attention and discredit a strategic message is several-fold. Typically, parody accounts imitate the brand identity and mimic the brand personality, thereby tricking unsuspecting social media communities to confuse the humorous copycat with the official brand account. Moreover, the irony used in satire is often subtle and open to misinterpretation, so that social media users easily misinterpret the parody for the brand’s official content that the parody account imitates and hijacks. At the same time, user-generated parody accounts exploit the many-to-many, viral principles of social media to create authentic messages that resonate with large audiences who appreciate humour as entertainment and comic relief.

The extent to which user-generated parody accounts taint emotionally resonant reputations in terms of the five constructs of Fombrun and Van Riel’s (2004) EQ is not clear. To reiterate, these measurable constructs are: (i) visibility, (ii) transparency, (iii) authenticity, (iv)
consistency and (v) distinction. Likewise, literature is scarce on appropriate paracrisis response strategies to user-generated parody accounts in terms of Coombs and Holladay’s (2012) four constructs, namely (i) refute, (ii) implicitly admit wrongdoing, (iii) explicitly admit wrongdoing and, (iv) ignore. When integrating Fombrun and Van Riel’s (2004) and Coombs and Holladay’s (2012) theories, it is possible to investigate how the EQ can be integrated into suitable paracrisis response strategies for social media management teams to maintain emotionally resonant reputations when user-generated parody accounts target brands. The research problem is stated as follows:

To establish how the Expressiveness Quotient (EQ) (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004) as a measure of emotionally resonant reputations can be used by social media management teams to identify appropriate paracrisis response strategies (Coombs; 2014; Coombs & Holladay, 2012) when user-generated parody accounts target brands.

5.3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Several objectives and research questions were established to explore the research problem as outlined below.

5.3.1. Research questions

Over-arching research question: How can the EQ be integrated into suitable paracrisis response strategies for social media management teams to maintain emotionally resonant reputations when user-generated parody accounts target brands?

Research sub-question 1: How can the emotional resonance of brands that are targeted by user-generated parody accounts as paracises be quantitatively measured in terms of the constructs of the EQ (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004), and how can the interactions be quantitatively described that specific paracrisis response strategies, as defined by Coombs (2012), exhibit with these measures of emotional resonance?

Research sub-question 2: How can the interactions be described that certain parody account characteristics exhibit with the paracrisis response strategies as defined by Coombs (2012)?

Research sub-question 3: How do social media management teams qualitatively perceive paracrisis response strategies that are intended to maintain emotionally resonant reputations when brands are targeted by user-generated parody accounts?
5.3.2. Research objectives

**Over-arching research objective:** To establish how the EQ can be used to identify suitable paracrisis response strategies for social media management teams to maintain emotionally resonant reputations when user-generated parody accounts target brands.

**Research sub-objective 1:** To quantitatively measure, in terms of the constructs of the EQ (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004), the emotional resonance of brands targeted by user-generated parody accounts as paracrisis, and to quantitatively describe the interactions that these measures of emotional resonance exhibit with certain parody account characteristics and with specific paracrisis response strategies, as defined by Coombs (2012).

**Research sub-objective 2:** To quantitatively describe the interactions that certain parody account characteristics exhibit with the paracrisis response strategies as defined by Coombs (2012).

**Research sub-objective 3:** To qualitatively explore the perceptions of social media management teams regarding paracrisis response strategies that are intended to maintain emotionally resonant reputations when brands are targeted by user-generated parody accounts.

5.4. POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

As far as can be established, it seems as if the theories of Fombrun and Van Riel (2004) and Coombs and Holladay (2012) have not been integrated into a single study. Therefore, a contribution of the study, both to the body of knowledge and to industry, is a revision of Coombs and Holladay’s (2012:412) paracrisis response strategies in order to recommend how social media management teams may maintain emotionally resonant reputations as determined by Fombrun and Van Riel’s (2004:96) EQ when brands are targeted by user-generated parody accounts.

A tangible contribution is the revised classification of the four paracrisis response strategies initially suggested by Coombs and Holladay (2012). As such, the paracrisis response strategies recommended in this study may provide social media management teams with noteworthy guidelines to optimise emotional resonance, while also proactively mitigating the risks of malicious brand parodies and ultimately establishing resilient reputations. The study may be particularly valuable for endearing, top-of-mind and reputable brands, since they are
most at risk of being parodied. Considering that social media parody accounts are an emerging trend in South Africa and already an established trend in developed economies, findings recommend specific strategic contingencies to consider for scenario planning and for responsive social media governance frameworks including ORM, policies, integrated risk management and integrated communication, to name but a few.

Interestingly, the last question in the questionnaire requested respondents to leave their email addresses, should they be interested in receiving a copy of the completed report. In total, 85 respondents – ten (58.82%) respondents from the pilot study and an additional 75 (39.89%) respondents in the final survey requested a copy of this study. This favourable response is indicative of the interest in the results and therefore underlines the potential contribution of this study.

5.5. RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is defined by 6 and Bellamy (2012:308) as “the specification of the way in which data will be created, collected, constructed, analysed and interpreted to enable the researcher to draw warranted descriptive, explanatory or interpretive inference”. In the same manner Vogt, Gardner and Haefele (2012:340) define a research design as the overall research project plan that outlines sampling choices, data collection methods, strategies for analysing and interpreting data, and ensuring research ethics.

In order to elaborate on a suitable research design to answer the research problem of this study, the subsequent sections provide an extensive discussion of, as well as a motivation for the methods chosen.

5.6. RESEARCHER’S WORLDVIEW

Methodology, or “how do we know the world or gain knowledge of it?” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:12) is interrelated with the philosophies of ontology and epistemology as they shape how a researcher sees the world and acts in it. Ontology is defined by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2010:4) as “beliefs about the nature of reality”. Stated differently, ontology asks: “What is the nature of reality, and by extension, truth?” (Mertens, 2008:74). Moreover, a researcher’s ontological position defines what kind of being the human being is (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:12). As such, ontology is closely related to epistemology. Epistemology, the science of knowing (Babbie, 2008:6), is concerned with the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:12; Mertens, 2008:74). Moreover, as a sub-discipline of philosophy, epistemology asks whether truth may be established either by
making inferences or by observations (6 and Bellamy, 2012:61). In other words, epistemology is a researcher’s justification of how knowledge is discovered (Plowright, 2011:177). In fact, Vogt, Gardner and Haeffele (2012:vii) regard methodology as a form of applied epistemology.

The various philosophies, ontologies and methodologies are all contained in respective paradigms (Gaver, 2012:941). A theoretical paradigm in social science is defined by Babbie (2008:34) as “a model or framework for observation and understanding, which shapes both what we see and how we understand it”. Described here are the differences between quantitative and qualitative paradigms, respectively derived from positivist and interpretive social science approaches (Neuman, 2003:70).

Irrespective of the different paradigm positions, Neuman (2003:92) believes that every approach to social science aims to be “creative systematically gathered, empirically based theoretical knowledge through public processes that are self-reflective and open ended”. Nevertheless, Glaser and Strauss (1967:15) alert to the “clash between advocates of quantitative and qualitative data”, also known as the so-called paradigm wars of the 1980s (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:1; Morgan, 2008:31) where superiority of one paradigm over another was argued by purists (Johnson & Christensen, 2014:31). In fact, the incompatibility thesis presumes that quantitative and qualitative methods are mutually exclusive (Johnson & Christensen, 2014:31).

Critics maintain that paradigms are too different, independent and incompatible to be mixed (Creswell, 2010:54). Typically, criticism of qualitative research often emanates from researchers who operate from a positivist quantitative paradigm (Goulding, 2002:18). Some of these criticisms include the view that findings are subjective, value laden and intuitive, because data is filtered through the eyes of the data collector. On the contrary, mixed methods reject the incompatibility or epistemological superiority of either quantitative or qualitative paradigms or methods (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2011:286). However, mixed methods reject the rigid categories of information represented by paradigms or worldviews (Creswell, 2010:54). As such, mixed methods assume that there are “multiple legitimate approaches to social inquiry and that any given approach to social inquiry is inevitably partial”, articulates Greene (2008:20). To elaborate, mixed methods are characterised by paradigm pluralism which entails the reliance on a variety of paradigms or philosophical orientations (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2011:287).

In order to briefly point out the most predominant schools of thought, Table 5. below compares the different paradigm positions as adapted and summarised from Guba (1981), Hesse-Biber

**TABLE 5.1: Comparing quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods paradigm positions as interpreted from literature**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodological issue</th>
<th>Quantitative paradigm</th>
<th>Qualitative paradigm</th>
<th>Mixed methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aim of inquiry</strong></td>
<td>To explain, predict and control.</td>
<td>To empathetically understand, interpret and critique.</td>
<td>Multiple objectives to understand or explain multiple perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nature of knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Testing a hypothesis.</td>
<td>Meaning is discovered. Hypotheses or grounded theory is generated.</td>
<td>Exploratory and confirmatory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nature of reality</strong></td>
<td>Objective. Researcher remains distanced from data in controlled conditions.</td>
<td>Multiple and subjective realities as experienced by participants in their natural settings. Researcher is reflective, flexible and immersed in data that unfolds in multiple realities.</td>
<td>Pluralistic by integrating objective, subjective and inter-subjective realities. Multiple contexts and factors are studied as they operate together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nature of data</strong></td>
<td>Variables: numbers and precise measurements.</td>
<td>Words, categories and images from transcripts, observations and other documents.</td>
<td>Mixture of multiple types of data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Criteria for trustworthiness or rigour</strong></td>
<td>Internal validity</td>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>Multiple approach and pragmatism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External validity/ generalisability</td>
<td>Transferability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Dependability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Objectivity</td>
<td>Confirmability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nature of theory</strong></td>
<td>Causal and deductive.</td>
<td>Causal or non-causal and mostly inductive.</td>
<td>Deductive and/or inductive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge accumulation</strong></td>
<td>Systematically creating measures, generalisations and cause-effect linkages.</td>
<td>Ad-hoc creation of measures which are contextual and embedded in communities of practice.</td>
<td>Pragmatic justification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research procedures</strong></td>
<td>Replication is assumed by using standard procedures. Context free.</td>
<td>Replication is not usually achievable as procedures are particular and context bound.</td>
<td>Theory and practice are connected in dynamic, complex and multiple perspectives for a comprehensive understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sampling</strong></td>
<td>Probability sampling</td>
<td>Non-probability sampling</td>
<td>Pragmatic justification.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data collection methods</strong></td>
<td>Surveys and experiments.</td>
<td>Case studies, interviews, open-ended questions in questionnaires, participant observation, field notes and qualitative content analysis.</td>
<td>Multiple data collection methods, both quantitative and qualitative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data analysis</strong></td>
<td>Charts, tables and statistics. Generalisations and discussions explain how numbers relate to hypotheses and variables.</td>
<td>Thick descriptions supported by themes and patterns. Data is organised to provide a coherent narrative that answers a research question.</td>
<td>Analysis of quantitative and qualitative done in combination or separately.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
By integrating a variety of paradigms, the advantage of using mixed methods is that a study is able to simultaneously address a diversity of questions ranging from explanatory to exploratory research questions, which may not be the case when a study is limited to a single paradigm (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011:287). Moreover, the synthesis of paradigms in mixed methods benefits the researcher by resulting in better understanding of the complex nature of social phenomena which is gained from divergent views in conclusions obtained from complex data sources and analyses (Greene, 2008:20; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011:287). Another advantageous result of synthesising paradigms and methods is that an extensive range of methodological options are available to the researcher, which results in innovative designs (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011:288).

Considering the advantages of mixed methods, this approach is deemed suitable for this study. As a synthesis of paradigms guided by pragmatic justifications for methodological choices, mixed methods benefit from both the reliability and validity of a quantitative paradigm while concurrently taking advantage of the equally rigorous methods to establish trustworthiness in a qualitative paradigm.

Owing to the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation, mixed methods are the most suitable to explore and describe the research problem from multiple perspectives using several data collection methods and data analyses processes in order to synthesise findings.

5.7. RESEARCH METHOD

Several definitions of mixed methods are discussed in literature. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2011:286) define mixed methods research as a form of methodological eclecticism whereby the researcher, as a connoisseur of methods, selects and synergistically integrates the most appropriate technique from a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods. Similarly, Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007:129) define mixed methods research as an intellectual and practical synthesis based on qualitative and quantitative research; it is the third methodological or research paradigm (along with qualitative and quantitative research). Likewise, Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann and Hanson (2008:165) define mixed methods as a single study involving both the collection and analysis of quantitative and/or qualitative data that are prioritised either sequentially or concurrently in order to integrate data at one or several stages of the research design.

The term mixed methods research is often synonymously used with terms such as mixed methodology, integrated research, multi-method research, mixed research and mixed methods (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011:285). Moreover, mixed method designs are also known
as simultaneous, concurrent and triangulation designs (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010:11). Stated differently, mixed methods blend, integrate, link and connect quantitative and qualitative approaches (Creswell, 2010:51,59). As such, mixed methods are viewed as a contemporary, postmodern approach to research (Creswell, 2010:53) which formally emerged as a distinct methodological field in 2003 (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010:2).

Mixed methods extend beyond a mere combination of quantitative and qualitative methods as two independent data collection methods (Creswell, 2010:51) in order to compensate for the respective weaknesses of these two approaches (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011:286). Rather, mixed methods rely on methodological eclecticism, which involves the selection of the most appropriate qualitative and quantitative methods to answer the research question by synergistically integrating these methods in order to more rigorously investigate a phenomenon (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011:286,287). Regardless of the method driving a study, each method needs to meet the criteria for rigour and be conducted as if the method stands alone (Morse, 2008:154). In other words, the researcher adheres to the assumptions and rules inherent in each method (Morse, 2008:154).

Instead of a particular paradigm dictating a particular method to be used, mixed methods rely on research questions to guide the methods chosen and may be selected based on what works, which is otherwise known as pragmatism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:2; Greene, 2008:13; Plano Clark & Badiee, 2010:279,285). Pragmatism is defined by Johnson and Christensen (2014:32) as a “philosophical position that what works is what is important or ‘valid’”. Also known as progressivism, Deweyan pragmatism favours a particular method when it is likely to encourage growth and usable knowledge (Vogt, Gardner & Haefele, 2012:ix). At the same time, pragmatism dictates that a particular method is disregarded when growth and usable knowledge are restricted. Either way, pragmatism requires debate, judgement and reflection when choosing appropriate methods. Also called ‘dialectical pragmatism’ by Johnson and Christensen (2014:32), the term dialectical emphasises the “dynamic back-and-forth listening to multiple perspectives”. Again, Creswell (2011:276) maintains that pragmatism highlights the key role of research questions, the understanding of real life phenomena and practical consequences (Creswell, 2011:276).

With regard to the study in question, mixed methods were a suitable approach, since data collection and analysis methods were selected, based on pragmatic abilities to elicit answers to the research questions from multiple perspectives instead of either a quantitative or a qualitative paradigm dictating a particular method. At the same time, mixed methods allowed the researcher to uphold criteria for rigour in both quantitative and qualitative methods while
benefitting from the synergetic integration of methodological choices. Pragmatic justifications will be discussed at each subsequent methodological choice in the research design.

5.7.1. A synergistic approach to mixed methods in a triangulation design

Method triangulation is defined by Hair et al. (2016:311) as using different data collection methods and comparing the findings, typically involving both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Similarly, methodological triangulation is defined by Morse (2008:152) as “the use of at least two methods, usually qualitative and quantitative, to address the same research problem”. Stated differently, mixed methods benefit from the convergence of results from different sources, otherwise known as triangulation (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011:287).

When multiple methods or perspectives are used to study the same dimension of a research problem, triangulation achieves a holistic, contextual, more complete and holistic portrayal of the unit(s) under study, which a singular method may overlook (Jick, 2008:108).

When collecting and analysing data, mixed methods designs may give equal value and representation to qualitative and quantitative methods (Creswell, 2010:59). With regard to data collection in mixed methods, there is no fixed sequence that researchers should follow (Creswell, 2010:52, 56; Creswell et al., 2008:171). Therefore, mixed methods designs may involve concurrent, sequential or other multi-phase data collection (Creswell, 2010:52, 56).

Instead of a phased and linear approach to mixed methods, Hall and Howard (2008:250) recommend a flexible synergistic approach whereby the core principles of mixed methods, rather than the artificial preferential weighting of a particular paradigm or phase, guide the methodology. As such, the synergistic approach to mixed methods is defined as a “set of core principles within a conceptual framework that brings the principles of typological and systemic perspectives together” (Hall & Howard, 2008:249).

To illustrate, Figure 5.1 below presents the core principles of the synergistic approach to mixed methods in a triangulation design used in this study.
FIGURE 5.1: The core principles of the synergistic approach in a triangulation design used for this study as adapted from Hall and Howard (2008:250).

Illustrated in Figure 5.1 above, are the core principles of the synergistic approach (Hall & Howard, 2008:249) suitable for a triangulation design applied in this study, entails the following:

- **Synergy:** The combined effect of two or more options is greater than the sum of the individual effects of quantitative or qualitative alone. In other words, no particular approach is superior or more effective than the other. Therefore, qualitative and quantitative approaches work together from multiple perspectives to answer the research problem. At the same time, paradigm-specific analysis and interpretations from the same study are not absolute. Multiple perspectives imply that a synergistic approach does not expect results to support, confirm or cancel out one another, as no single truth is sought.

- **Position of equal value:** The synergistic approach favours a triangulation design wherein both quantitative or qualitative approaches, theories and methodologies are given equal status or equal weight.

- **Ideology of difference:** Instead of emphasising the similarities between methods, the design favours methods that inherently contribute multiple points of view on the research problem. In the process, paradigmatic differences are acknowledged and protected in order to ensure cross-paradigm communication.

- **Relationship between the researcher(s) and the study design:** The synergistic approach is suitable for a single researcher and does not depend on a multidisciplinary team of researchers. Reflexivity and a sense of balance between the objectivity of quantitative and subjectivity of qualitative approaches are maintained towards the design.
For the purpose of this study, the core principles of the synergistic approach to mixed methods in a triangulation design were applied for several reasons. By giving equal weight to both qualitative and quantitative methods, data in this study were able to confirm one another. More importantly, data collected around the five constructs of Fombrun and Van Riel’s (2004) EQ and Coombs and Holladay’s (2012) four paracrisis response strategies could be synergised from multiple perspectives by a single researcher to answer the research questions. True to the principles of mixed methods, this process enabled the researcher to apply the “dynamic back-and-forth listening to multiple perspectives” (Johnson & Christensen, 2014:32). Moreover, qualitative and quantitative data analysis were synthesised during interpretation. In this manner, quantitative data for this study was able to rigorously expand on, triangulate and verify qualitative findings. As such, triangulation enhanced the validity, credibility and confirmability of the study, as discussed in Section 5.11.

5.8. POPULATION AND SAMPLE

A population, otherwise known as the target population, is defined by Vogt, Gardner and Haefele (2012:346) as “the group the researcher wants to describe or make generalizations about”. Stated differently, the population is the group of people about whom a study draws conclusions (Babbie, 2008:121; Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:185). As such, a population is synonymous with the term universe and comprises the total of knowledgeable individuals that share some homogenous characteristics or elements (Hair, Samouel, Page, Celsi & Money, 2016:172).

With regard to this study, the population was social media management teams which comprise the multi-functional individuals responsible for community management and ORM, as explained in Chapter 3, Section 3.6.1, Table 3.8.

5.8.1. Sampling design and criteria

A sample is defined by Wimmer and Dominick (2006:88) and Hair et al (2016:171) as a smaller, representative subset of a population. A sample, therefore, contains characteristics similar to the traits of the overall population (Boyle & Schmierbach:2015:177). Moreover, Bauer and Aarts (2000:30) maintain that sampling is “a rationale for studying only parts of a population without losing information”. Sampling not only determines the sampling frame (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:178) or boundaries set around the choice of people to interview, but also concerns decisions around social processes, events and settings suitable to answer the research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994:30).
For the quantitative methods of the study, the sample was social media experts. Sampling criteria included awareness of both social media management and user-generated parody accounts. In the questionnaire, as provided in Appendix A, Question 2 served as a qualifying question to establish the level of social media expertise required from the sample, while Question 1 served to compile the demographical profile of the sample.

For the online questionnaire, the total number of respondents were 188, with 137 completed responses received implying a satisfactory completion rate of 72.87%. Demographically, 188 completed responses were received in total of which 163 (86.70%) were located in South Africa. Another 25 (13.29%) of the respondents were located elsewhere. A more detailed breakdown of the respondents’ demographical profile is provided in Figure 5.2 below.

![Demographical profile of respondents](image)

**FIGURE 5.2: Demographical profile of respondents in the realised sample**

With regard to Figure 5.2 above, it is evident that the vast majority of respondents were from South Africa and mostly from Gauteng and the Western Cape provinces. Consequently, the realised sample of the quantitative methods is somewhat homogenous compared to that of the qualitative methods. Yet, the realised sample was inclusive of multiple contexts from locations outside South Africa, while still meeting the sampling criteria.

In terms of establishing the social media management expertise levels of respondents, 185 completed responses were received. In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to describe their professional use of social media. Overall, 181 (97.83%) respondents use social media for professional reasons while only 4 (2.16%) use social media mostly for fun and/or other. A more detailed breakdown of the respondents’ social media management expertise is provided in Figure 5.3 below.
FIGURE 5.3: Social media management expertise levels of respondents to meet the sampling criteria

With regard to Figure 5.3 above, it was established that the vast majority of the realised sample meet the sampling criteria. As most of the respondents were well-versed in social media, it may be deduced that they were knowledgeable about user-generated parody accounts.

For the qualitative methods of the study, the sample was social media management experts from South Africa.

To ensure that a sample is valid, Wimmer and Dominick (2006:91) recommend that elements or subjects are eliminated from a study when they fail to meet specific criteria. As a sampling strategy, criterion sampling not only ensures that all cases meet specified criteria, but also enhances quality assurance (Miles & Huberman, 1994:28).

For the purpose of the study, the sampling criteria for the qualitative methods comprised social media management experts from South Africa who had a working knowledge of user-generated parody accounts and ORM. All of the 19 participants met the purposive sampling criteria. To illustrate, Table 5.2 below provides a demographical profile of the purposive sample.

<p>| TABLE 5.2: Demographical profile of participants to meet the sampling criteria |
|-------------------------------|-----------|----------|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Highest qualification</th>
<th>Industry experience</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Type of organisation</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>6 – 10 years</td>
<td>Managing director</td>
<td>Integrated communications agency</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>6 – 10 years</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Online communications agency</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>11 – 15 years</td>
<td>Head of Social Media</td>
<td>Digital marketing agency</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>26 – 30 years</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Integrated marketing communications agency</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>1 – 5 years</td>
<td>Technical Director</td>
<td>Digital agency</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Honours degree</td>
<td>1 – 5 years</td>
<td>Social media manager</td>
<td>Digital agency</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>16 – 20 years</td>
<td>Digital community’s content manager</td>
<td>Corporate organisation</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Post graduate diploma</td>
<td>1 – 5 years</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Digital communications agency</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Honours degree</td>
<td>11 – 15 years</td>
<td>Managing director</td>
<td>Brand communications and connectivity agency</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>11 – 15 years</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Social media and digital agency</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P11</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>6 – 10 years</td>
<td>Managing director</td>
<td>Marketing communications and social media agency</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>6 – 10 years</td>
<td>Social media manager</td>
<td>Corporate organisation</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P13</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Honours degree</td>
<td>6 – 10 years</td>
<td>Head of digital</td>
<td>Integrated agency</td>
<td>Cape Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P14</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>6 – 10 years</td>
<td>Account director</td>
<td>Reputation management consultancy</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P15</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>1 – 5 years</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Social media agency</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P16</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>1 – 5 years</td>
<td>Social media officer</td>
<td>Corporate organisation</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P17</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Matric</td>
<td>11 – 15 years</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Integrated communications agency</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P18</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>6 – 10 years</td>
<td>Managing director</td>
<td>Digital agency</td>
<td>Cape Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P19</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>16 – 20 years</td>
<td>Digital creative director</td>
<td>Integrated communication agency</td>
<td>South African expat working elsewhere in Africa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As illustrated in Table 5.2 above, every participant's demographical profile meets the sampling criteria. By using a short questionnaire as provided in Appendix A, each participant’s demographical background and social media management expertise relevant to the sampling criteria were established before each interview commenced. In addition, each participant's position and type of organisation were obtained from their corporate websites, social media profiles and interpersonal correspondence.

The answering of standard short and direct biographical questions is standard practise during in-depth interviews (Miller & Crabtree, 2004:191). For this reason, the researcher read out the
short questionnaire to participants at the start of each interview. To elaborate, Figure 5.4 below illustrates participants’ social media management and reputation management expertise to meet the sampling criteria.

As illustrated in Figure 5.4 above, all 19 participants met the sampling criteria. In addition, it has to be mentioned that two of the participants were experienced parodists since they have created parody accounts in the past.

5.8.2. Sampling strategy

Sampling strategies in mixed methods may incorporate any of the various traditional probability sampling techniques used in quantitative designs and non-probability sampling techniques associated with qualitative studies (Teddlie & Yu, 2008:201).

Probability sampling comprises a representative sample taken from a population which enables a study to generalise findings from a sample to a wider population (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:179; Plowright, 2011:38). Probability sampling is mainly used in quantitative studies and is drawn in a random manner so that a sufficiently large sample accurately and objectively represents the entire population (Hair et al, 2016:171; Teddlie & Yu, 2008:200).

A non-probability sampling strategy relies subjectively on the researcher’s expert judgement and personal experience to deliberately and conveniently select cases of individuals who possess the necessary knowledge to answer the research question (Hair et al, 2016:183; Plowright, 2011:38; Teddlie & Yu, 2008:200). Such a sample does not allow the study to
generalise findings from the sample to the wider population, as cases do not represent groups outside the study (Plowright, 2011:38,42; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006:89). Rather, findings from a relatively small sample or number of cases “embedded in a single social setting” (Miles & Huberman, 1994:27) typically develop, discover and describe theory (Hair et al, 2016:171). Advantages of non-probability sampling include cost-effectiveness and a fairly consistent relationship between variables so that moderating variables are largely absent which, in turn, enhances internal validity (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:194).

With this in mind, this study applied a non-probability sampling strategy, considering the preferential weighting to qualitative methods and the fact that cases needed to be limited to the narrow sampling criteria. Furthermore, non-probability sampling enabled the researcher to make sampling decisions both before and during data collection to select the most trustworthy, and therefore, transferable, sample. Essentially the researcher deliberately selected social media management experts. Such experts, it was assumed, would either have had first-hand experience of most probably had noticed brands being satirised by user-generated parody accounts.

A type of non-probability sampling is purposive sampling, also known as judgement sampling (Hair et al, 2016:184) or deliberate sampling (Boyle & Schmierbach:2015:178), in which the researcher selects units to be observed on “the basis of the researcher’s judgement about which ones will be the most useful or representative” (Babbie, 2008:204). Stated differently, purposive or judgement sampling occurs when the researcher decides on the appropriate units to include in a sample (Neuendorf, 2002:88) that would yield the most relevant and plentiful data (Yin, 2010:88). Purposive sampling decisions may be made before commencing the study, while the study is in progress, or both (Teddlie & Yu, 2008:207).

The advantage of progressive sampling is that it provides more depth to constructs and their relationships (Miles & Huberman, 1994:27). Purposive sampling is suitable for qualitative methods where participants need to have experienced the phenomena being studied (Morse, 2008:155). To elaborate, it is required that participants possess the necessary experience, knowledge or beliefs relevant to the research questions and research topic (Vogt, Gardner & Haeffele, 2012:148). With regard to sample size, a small sample may provide valid results when the research problem indicates that variables may be strongly related or highly correlated (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:182). In addition, the advantage of purposive sampling is the ability to attain variation in a sample by soliciting individuals from diverse locations and expertise, thereby strengthening the transferability of findings (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:196).
Another type of non-probability sampling is snowball sampling, also known as referral (Hair et al., 2016:184), network (Hair et al., 2016:184), reputational (Neuman, 2003:214) or chain sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994:28). As such, snowball sampling relies on asking participants to refer additional cases or names of participants who may be suitable to participate in a study (Neuman, 2003:214; Yin, 2010:89) and thereby provide information-rich cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994:28).

With this in mind, the sampling strategy for the descriptive quantitative methods of this study is first discussed. As data needed to be gathered from a sample of social media experts that had significant knowledge about user-generated parody accounts to answer the research questions, mixed methods provided the researcher with the pragmatic justification to apply purposive and snowball sampling in order to ensure that sampling criteria were met. A purposive sample was drawn from the following:

- Digital agencies recognised and recommended by respected social media publication, Memeburn (Thomas, 2014a). In addition, resources such as relevant websites featuring news by industry thought leaders and top agencies featured in the South Africa PR country landscape 2014 report (Global Alliance, 2014:52,55).
- Members belonging to various groups dedicated to social media management discussions on Facebook, LinkedIn and Google Plus.
- Parodists who manage user-generated parody accounts on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter.
- Social media influencers, bloggers and opinion leaders who were experts in social media, social media management, user-generated parody, ORM and social media crises. Opinion leaders were located using the search engines of Google, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google Plus and YouTube. This was a particularly effective strategy since social media experts generally also use social media.
- Once a purposive sample was drawn, snowball sampling was further applied by asking respondents to refer additional names that met the sampling criteria. In this manner, an influential South African blogger with an equally large Twitter following referred additional respondents by encouraging Twitter users to participate in the study.

By not limiting the sample to South African social media experts and by including user-generated parody account owners, a wider variety of social media experts, both locally and
internationally, could be included in the sample. Moreover, this pragmatic decision was necessary, as user-generated parody is a more established trend in developed countries. In this manner, the flexibility of the synergistic approach to mixed methods in a triangulation design was applied. Ultimately, the diversity of the sample strengthened the confirmability and transferability of the data.

For pragmatic reasons and to accommodate the flexibility of the synergistic approach to mixed methods in a triangulation design, the purposive and snowball sampling strategy used to collect descriptive data was repeated for the explorative qualitative methods. Firstly, a purposive sampling strategy was applied by consulting the shortlisted nominees for the 6th Annual Bookmarks Awards in the various social media categories for 2013. The prestigious Bookmarks Awards rewards excellence for integrated communication in the South African digital media industry while being judged by both local and international judges (BizCommunity.com:2013; Bookmarks:2013). As such, Bookmarks nominees were regarded as experts in social media management and this purposive sampling decision was made before the study commenced. However, as not all the nominees were available to set aside time for interviews, a secondary purposive sampling decision was made while the study was in progress. In this manner, a sample was further drawn by searching for suitable profiles on the professional social network LinkedIn. Lastly, a snowball sampling decision was made while the study was in progress. As such, participants in the qualitative sample were asked to recommend acquaintances who would meet the sampling criteria and would therefore be suitable to participate in the study. In essence, the sampling strategy for this study was guided by pragmatism. Moreover, as variables in the research problem are strongly related, a small sample was suitable.

The sample size for the qualitative methods was 19 participants while the realised sample size for the quantitative methods was 189 respondents.

Cross-sectional studies, according Babbie (2008:111) investigate a phenomenon or a sample at a specific point in time and often involve exploratory and descriptive studies. Stated differently, cross-sectional surveys describe a population at a given time and the sample is only contacted once (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:245). In terms of this study, the sample was only contacted once between 2014 and 2015, which implies that this research project a cross-sectional study.

5.9. DATA GATHERING

This section describes the data gathering methods used by applying the core principles of the synergistic approach for a triangulation design.
5.9.1. Self-administered online survey

A survey is defined by Crano, Lac and Brewer (2015: 256,369) as the process of polling a group of respondents to establish their opinions, beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviour. A self-administered questionnaire comprises a rigorously developed rating scale whereby a single item measures each construct (Crano, Lac, & Brewer, 2015:369). The advantage of a self-administered online survey, whereby a hyperlink to the questionnaire is posted on a website or included in an email, is convenience and resource-effectiveness in reaching a large number of respondents in a short period of time (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016:147; Du Plooy-Cilliers & Cronje, 2014:150). However, a low response rate is a common disadvantage whereby external validity of the design is compromised (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016:147). Another concern is the drop-out rate of respondents who do not complete all the questions (Crano, Lac, & Brewer, 2015:371). Typically, statistical tests remove such respondents from the analysis. To encourage the completion of all items, options such as ‘don’t know’ or neutral response options are included (Crano, Lac, & Brewer, 2015:371; Fowler, 2009:95).

As a rapport cannot be established in self-administered questionnaires, a brief introduction, clear instructions (Du Plooy-Cilliers & Cronje, 2014:152) and ordering of questions to start with the least threatening items are advised (Crano, Lac, & Brewer, 2015:371; Fowler, 2009:120). To minimise participant fatigue, questionnaires need to be reasonably short while minimising complicated questions, leading questions, eliminating double-barrelled that ask several questions at once (Crano, Lac, & Brewer, 2015:370; Du Plooy-Cilliers & Cronje, 2014:152; Fowler, 2009:94,122).

A Likert scale is one of the most commonly used formats in survey questionnaires (Babbie, 2008:188, Crano, Lac, & Brewer, 2015:377; Vogt, Gardner & Haefele, 2012:26). A Likert scale questionnaire relies on standardised response categories, typically in 20 statements, to measure the relative intensity of the various items (Babbie, 2008:189) regarding the underlying construct and the degree of agreement (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016:233; Vogt, Gardner & Haefele, 2012:26). These response categories usually comprise scores from one to five which enables the researchers to calculate the average index score of respondents who agree with each of the statements (Babbie, 2008:189; Crano, Lac, & Brewer, 2015:377; Du Plooy-Cilliers & Cronje, 2014:159). Therefore, rating scales provide multiple items to measure opinions, help to define a concept and to triangulate on (Crano, Lac, & Brewer, 2015:372).

Several advantages of Likert’s method of summated ratings are noteworthy. These include the ordinality and unambiguousness of response categories (Babbie, 2008:188), resource effectiveness, anonymity (Du Plooy-Cilliers & Cronje, 2014:160) and high reliability (Crano,
Lac, & Brewer, 2015:377) when collecting ordinal or interval data (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016: 233; Fowler, 2009:101). Likewise, when combining responses over many items in a Likert scale, measurement error or item-specific irrelevancies are minimised, which then promotes internally reliable measures of constructs (Crano, Lac, & Brewer, 2015:377).

A variation of a rating scale are questions which typically asks respondents if they agree or disagree with a statement, with binary options such as ‘yes’ or ‘no’ (Crano, Lac, & Brewer, 2015:375). Although closed ended questions provide limited predetermined options which enhance reliability of ordinal data (Fowler, 2009:101), open ended questions are also beneficial as they do not constrain answers, thereby strengthening the fidelity of nominal data (Crano, Lac, & Brewer, 2015:370). However, open ended answers require a coding scheme to analyse data.

With regard to software programmes to collect data for online surveys, Survey Monkey is a reliable, affordable, easy-to-use and convenient application for a wide range of academic studies (Anderson, Croxon, & McGarry, 2015; Bisera, 2015; Donovan, 2009; Fiore, Vrontis, Silvestri & Contò, 2016; Survey Monkey, 2016). As such, hyperlinks to an online questionnaire can be made available in emails or posted elsewhere on the internet (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016:147). Moreover, software applications feature automated data entry into spreadsheets which are accessible for statistical manipulation by a team of researchers. Another advantage is the ability of data to be downloaded for statistical analysis in the software program IBM SPSS (2016).

With regard to this study, a self-administered online survey was selected owing to its ability to reach a large, purposive sample that met the sampling criteria in a convenient manner over a short period of time. Respondents could anonymously enter their answers in a reasonably short questionnaire at a time convenient for them. Following a brief introduction with clear instructions, the questionnaire started with easy questions and progressed to more difficult questions. To lessen the drop-out-rate, a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions were asked, including Likert scale questions and ‘yes’, ‘no’, ‘not sure’ options. As Likert scales are the most commonly used instruments, the format of these questions may already have been familiar to respondents. As such, Likert scale questions were chosen considering its high internal reliability and the unambiguousness of response categories, ranging from one to five. Open-ended questions strengthened the fidelity of nominal data and the answers were analysed using the same thematic analysis coding scheme as the qualitative methods. An example of the final questionnaire can be seen in Appendix H.
To reach the purposive sample, a link to the survey was posted on social networks, more specifically, in groups dedicated to discussing social media management. An example of the hyperlink to the Survey Monkey questionnaire posted on a social network can be seen in Appendix I. To increase the completion rate, the contact details of the purposive sample were collected via the internet where after personalised emails were sent to respondents motivating the value of their contribution to the study. Included in the email was a hyperlink to the questionnaire hosted on Survey Monkey. An example of the personalised email can be seen in Appendix J. This strategy was effective, as several respondents offered to share the survey with industry colleagues, thereby enabling snowball sampling.

Given the ability of Survey Monkey to provide automated data entry into spreadsheets, data could be downloaded and analysed in IBM SPSS. Moreover, Survey Monkey provides a smartphone application which facilitates the real-time tracking of responses which allowed the researcher to continually evaluate sampling and data collecting decisions. The total number of respondents were 188, with 137 completed responses received, implying a satisfactory completion rate of 72.87%.

5.9.2. Semi-structured in-depth interviews

Exploratory research objectives are usually pursued by collecting data from a small number of in-depth interviews with highly knowledgeable participants comprising open-ended questions (Babbie, 2008:98; Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:285; Kvale, 2007:44; Vogt, Gardner & Haeffe, 2012:144,147). Compared to highly structured survey interviews that strictly follow a series of predetermined questions, in-depth interviews are less structured conversations where both the participant and the researcher are involved in the co-production of knowledge in an exchange of ideas and meanings (Gaskell, 2000:45; Wengraf, 2001:4), also called collaborative storytelling by Miller and Crabtree (2004:199). Therefore, semi-structured in-depth interviews follow predetermined questions, but allows for most of the questions to evolve in response to participants’ answers in order gain a deep understanding (Wengraf, 2001:3,5). Conversational interviewing is flexible as it allows the researcher to frequently probe the participant for clarification of answers in order to improve accuracy of understanding (Babbie, 2007:306; Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014:188; Wengraf, 2001:161; Yin, 2010:136).

Setting the scene: According to Miller and Crabtree (2004:194), preparation for in-depth interviews start with a process called setting the scene, during which pre-interview contact is established, between a day and a week beforehand. During this time the interviewer contacts the potential participant in order to introduce the researcher, explain the purpose of the interview, indicate the anticipated length of the interview, explain the recording method used,
motivate the selection of the participant for the interview, obtain informed consent and assure anonymity. As such, participants need to be willing to be interviewed in the context and location chosen (Vogt, Gardner & Haeffele, 2012:149). As for a suitable location for the interview, an everyday location where minimal disruptions may occur is best (Miller & Crabtree, 2004:194). Considering that the social setting may influence participants’ answers, a factor such as the presence of other people may sometimes inhibit open and honest answers when a sensitive topic is being discussed (Neuman, 2003:298).

**Skype interviews**: Another option suitable for qualitative interviews in a context and location suitable for participants is Skype. Many people are familiar with the use of a Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) application such as Skype, which is available for free and is widely used for phone and video calls, instant messaging or virtual meetings (Moylan, Derr & Lindhorst, 2013:41). As such, Skype is recognised as a qualitative data collection method to reach participants who may otherwise be geographically inaccessible to the researcher (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013:603; Hanna, 2012:240; Moylan, Derr & Lindhorst, 2013:41). In addition, digital recorders can be used to record Skype interviews (Moylan, Derr & Lindhorst, 2013:41). A study by Bertrand and Bourdeau (2010:4,8) concluded that the use of Skype for virtual video interviews is a scientifically valid and reliable method of data collection that can be used with other methods such as face-to-face interviews. Similarly, Deakin and Wakefield (2013:604) and Hanna (2012:241) note that qualitative researchers increasingly rely on Skype interviews as an alternative to face-to-face interviews as this form of real-time, audio-visual communication over the internet is accessible, inexpensive and easy-to-use. In fact, a study by Deakin and Wakefield (2013:610) found that there is no significant difference in the quality of conversations and the rapport built between the interviewer and the participant when using Skype compared to face-to-face interviews, considering that email correspondence usually precedes a Skype interview to establish a relationship between the two parties. Another advantage of Skype interviews is that both the researcher and the participant feel comfortable in a neutral, yet personal location where neither is imposing on the other’s personal space (Hanna, 2012:241).

**Interview guide**: Before the interview, the interviewer prepares a list of open-ended questions, called an interview protocol (Vogt, Gardner & Haefele, 2012:40; Yin, 2010:102), topic guide (Gaskell, 2000:40), interview guide (Charmaz, 2004:503; Kvale, 2007:34; Miller & Crabtree, 2004:191) or interview schedule (Du Plooy, 2002:144; Neuman, 2003:267,279). Before drawing up the interview schedule, it is advised that literature is critically reviewed in order to decide on the conceptual areas to investigate and on which to base initial questions for interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 2008:38; Gaskell, 2000:40; Miller & Crabtree, 2004:189). In
this manner, the researcher operationalises and conceptualises variables, as questions are based on the research question while considering the sample of participants selected (Neuman, 2003:267). Interview schedules ensure that participants are asked identical questions (Du Plooy, 2002:144). However, Babbie (2007:306) and Yin (2010:102) maintain that qualitative interviews do not strictly follow a set of pre-determined questions asked in a certain manner and in a specific order. Rather, a general plan of enquiry is needed, which includes a set of topics that will be discussed in depth.

Typically, a topic guide is no longer than a page and is written in everyday language and terms that the participants would understand (Gaskell, 2000:40). In this manner, the interview guide typically comprises one to six open-ended grand tour questions which may be supported by follow-up questions or probes (Miller & Crabtree, 2004:191; Yin, 2010:137). As such, these grand tour questions are based on the categories identified during the critical review of literature (Miller & Crabtree, 2004:191). Advantages of open-ended questions are that participants provide detailed and rich answers that reveal their thoughts to the degree that unanticipated findings may be discovered (Neuman, 2003:278). As such, qualitative interviews provide in-depth understanding and a thick description of a social setting (Gaskell, 2000:39). Stated differently, “rich data reveals thoughts, feelings, and actions as well as context and structure” from the participant’s point of view, as described by Charmaz (2004:502).

**Introducing the topic at the start of the interview**: The interviewer first explains and introduces him or herself and briefly explains the topic of the interview (Gaskell, 2000:51; Neuman, 2003:278). In terms of the order of questions, it is advisable to start the interview with broad, open-ended questions, especially when the interviewer is not certain what to expect from the interview (Vogt, Gardner & Haeffele, 2012:40). Moreover, easy questions at the start of the interview help the participant to feel comfortable and confident about answering the remainder of the questions (Neuman, 2003:282).

**Flexibility during the interview**: The interviewer needs to stay flexible by adding additional questions for subsequent interviews or revising existing questions based on feedback obtained during the initial interviews (Charmaz, 2004:503; Vogt, Gardner & Haeffele, 2012:40). At the same time, the interviewer needs to remain flexible by allowing the interview conversation to lead to areas not considered prior to the interview but which may be potentially relevant to the study (Goulding, 2002:59; Yin, 2010:135), or topics that the respondents define as being important (Charmaz, 2004:502). In this manner, the interviewer recognises unanticipated issues or topics arising by modifying the topic guide for subsequent interviews (Gaskell, 2000:40). At the same time, researchers need to respect the amount of time that participants are willing to spend in an interview while guarding that interviews do not stray off
the topic (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014:190; Vogt, Gardner & Haeffele, 2012:149). When the participant strays off the topic, the interviewer gently brings the participant back to the topic of enquiry (Babbie, 2007:306). To elaborate, the length of each interview is determined by the research objectives, although it is found that one-hour to one and a half hours is generally sufficient (Gaskell, 2000:51; Vogt, Gardner & Haeffele, 2012:149).

**Establishing rapport:** While the interview is in progress, the interviewer needs to establish a rapport with the participant by establishing a relationship of trust and confidence while allowing the participant to be at ease to speak his or her mind (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:286; Gaskell, 2000:45; Wengraf, 2001:155; Yin, 2010:138). The interviewer’s appropriate non-verbal communication cues as well as verbal or non-verbal reinforcements all help to enhance rapport. Moreover, as the interview is approached as a conversation, the researcher focuses on listening while allowing the participant to dominate the conversation (Babbie, 2007:306; Yin, 2010:136). As so eloquently stated by Miller and Crabtree (2004:196), “the interview is a dance of intimacy and distancing”. To elaborate, trust and rapport (Neuman, 2003:391) are established between the participants and the researcher through a process of mutual discovery and sharing of experiences.

Gaining trust needs to be established early on and is particularly important when research is of a personal or sensitive nature or if participants may fear that information divulged may be used against them (Goulding, 2002:60). Moreover, rapport may be hampered if the researcher is over-familiar with the participant or takes an obvious academic position resulting in the participant being hesitant to openly share information. Therefore, careful consideration is needed when deciding how the researcher presents him or herself to the participant and how much information is revealed about the nature of the research. At the same time, rapport should not be hampered when recording the interview and therefore the interviewer needs to be open and relaxed about using a recorder, which allows the interviewer to focus on the content of the conversation (Gaskell, 2000:51).

Another manner in which rapport is enhanced is by asking short biographical questions (Miller & Crabtree, 2004:192) before commencing with the questions from the interview schedule, which helps to create a climate of trust and self-disclosure. Data collected during the biographical questions for this study have already been reported in Section 5.8.1. Moreover, these short questions not only enhanced rapport, trust and self-disclosure, but were also valuable in providing context data for analysis.
**Closure:** As the interview draws to a close, it is advised to start toning down the emotional level of the conversation and when concluded, the researcher is advised to linger for five to 15 minutes after the recorder is switched off (Miller & Crabtree, 2004:199). This post-interview phase is characterised by small talk to maintain good relations and thanking the participants for their time and effort.

**Data saturation:** With regard to the number of interviews required, it is usually not possible to decide in advance; however, numbers commonly range between 20 to 40 interviews per study (Vogt, Gardner & Haeffele, 2012:149) or between 15 and 25 interviews for a single researcher (Gaskell, 2000:43). In general, data collection is a compromise between fewer interviews that are held in depth or larger numbers of interviews that achieve a breadth of data (Vogt, Gardner & Haeffele, 2012:149). Researchers need to use their judgement and end the interviewing process when data saturation (Morse, 2008:154) or recurring patterns (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:294) have been achieved. Otherwise known as the point of diminishing returns, data saturation is recognised when no new information emerges during interviews (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016:321; Vogt, Gardner & Haeffele, 2012:149).

**Transcriptions:** Completed interviews are transcribed by listening to recorded interviews and writing down conversations verbatim without paraphrasing, correcting slang, incomplete sentences, incoherencies, grammar, overlaps and repetitions so as to avoid distorting answers (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:326; Hair et al, 2016:297; Kvale, 2007:95,97; Myers, 2000:194). When the researcher does not personally transcribe interviews, transcribers have to be trained to adhere to best practise (Kvale, 2007:95; Myers, 2000:194). In addition, all transcribers are advised to include attribution in the transcripts so that it is clear who said what, during an interview. Transcribing interviews is a time-consuming process, considering that it may take four to six hours to transcribe every one hour of a recorded interview, (Kvale, 2007:95; Miller & Crabtree, 2004:200; Myers, 2000:194). Yet, when using transcriptions for analysis, it needs to be borne in mind that transcriptions are “impoverished decontextualized” versions of conversations (Kvale, 2007:93), frozen interpretive constructs and never fully capture the reality of the original conversation (Miller & Crabtree, 2004:200).

**Simultaneous data collection, coding and analysis:** Data collection may be phased by conducting a first set of interviews followed by an analysis thereof, before continuing with a second set of interviews (Gaskell, 2000:43). Yet, a concurrent process of data collection and data analysis is characteristic of the flexibility of qualitative research (Gibbs, 2007:3). In fact, by simultaneously being involved in data collection and analysis, the researcher is able to collect more data around emerging themes and questions instead of collecting large volumes of unfocused, general data (Charmaz, 2004:500) while remaining close to the data (Charmaz,
This simultaneous process of data collection and analysis of codes also more accurately establishes the point when data saturation is achieved.

Saturation is achieved when the researcher notices similar instances repetitively occurring in the data and that no additional data are being found to further bring new insights to a category, as advised in the seminal text by Glaser and Strauss (1967:61,71). In fact, Flick (2002:64) prefers that sampling decisions are made gradually during the process of data collection and interpretation. In this manner, the representativeness of a sample is ensured when individuals, cases or groups are selected according to their expected level of new insights for the developing theory while considering the material already used. In this manner, one class of events may be adequately compared to another class of events observed (Miles & Huberman, 1994:27) and findings are strengthened (Goulding, 2002:67). Similarly, Glaser and Holton (2004) recommend that a researcher simultaneously collects, codes and analyses data so that emerging gaps in theory are identified and informed decisions can be made as to what data to collect next and where to find such data, also known as theoretical sampling. In so doing, theory-driven sampling facilitates the development of theory as it emerges in order to investigate constructs which is commonly practised in qualitative grounded theory (Glaser & Holton;2004, Miles & Huberman, 1994:27,29).

Notably, Miles and Huberman (1994:65) insist on the early and continuing coding of data for two reasons. Firstly, the quality and robustness of data are enhanced when the researcher does not become tired and overwhelmed by large volumes of data being analysed all at once, leading to sloppiness, resentfulness and partialness. Lastly, ongoing coding may uncover potential sources of bias while allowing the researcher to review his or her perspective, which may result in necessary adjustments to questions that will be used in subsequent interviews. In other words, data collection and data analysis are an iterative, flexible and simultaneous process (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:313; Goulding, 2002:68; Hair et al, 2016:302).

With regard to this study, open-ended questions for the interview guide were drawn up after consulting literature in order to clarify the conceptual areas relevant to the research questions. As such, questions for the interview guide were drawn up around the concepts of the Expressiveness Quotient (EQ) score’s (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:97) five core dimensions, namely: visibility, transparency, authenticity, consistency and distinction. The literature reviewed extensively explored, defined and conceptualised these variables as they related to brand reputation and user-generated parody accounts.
For this study the decision to conduct a concurrent process of data collection and data analysis held several advantages, while adhering to the characteristic of flexibility in qualitative research. By analysing data early, the researcher prevented the collection of large volumes of general and unfocused data. Moreover, by concurrently collecting and analysing data, the researcher was not overwhelmed by having to analyse a total of 19 transcripts all at once. As recommended in literature, another advantage of concurrent data collection and analysis is to confidently establish when data saturation around emerging themes, concepts and categories has been reached. This process not only allowed the researcher to critically analyse and review the quality of data collected, but also provided insights for the adjustment of the interview schedule. Furthermore, simultaneous data collection and analysis enabled the researcher to make better informed sampling decisions and to deliberately seek participants that meet the sampling criteria and were able to bring new insights as the study progressed, as discussed in Section 5.8. To illustrate, two participants were not only social media experts and social media management consultants, but had also created noteworthy user-generated parody accounts in the past. Subsequently the researcher was confident that data saturation had occurred after 19 interviews, which is also well within the typical number of interviews recommended in literature for a single researcher to complete.

A significant advantage of concurrent data collection and data analysis, especially given the rather unexplored research problem, was the ability to continuously adjust the interview guide as themes emerged that the researcher had not considered prior to the interviews. For this study then, the interview guide was revised twice, as explained below:

a) An initial interview guide was drawn up, as illustrated in Appendix B.

b) After completing and transcribing two interviews, questions were slightly re-worded so that questions were more clearly formulated. The second, revised interview guide is attached as Appendix C.

c) After completing and analysing the data of nearly six interviews, it emerged that parody accounts have different intentions. It also emerged that different paracrisis response strategies were used to maintain an emotionally resonant brand reputation when brands are parodied. Correspondingly, the following follow-up questions were added to the interview guide:

- Do parody accounts warrant a strategy committed to responding to parody or does it form part of something else, like SOPs or protocols?
- How do you think it would be possible to classify and name the different types of parodies that one may encounter in the social space?
The third, revised interview guide can be seen in Appendix D.

With regard to the phrasing of questions, the interview guide contained social media and brand reputation jargon, but considering that the purposive sample consisted of social media experts with experience in reputation management, the participants were familiar with the terminology. However, the tone of the questions was more conversational, while avoiding academic language. Although literature recommends a maximum of six grand tour questions, it was exceeded in this study where the interview guide contained nine grand tour questions. This was necessary to accommodate five questions related to the five core dimensions of the EQ score, while also providing additional questions which allowed for in-depth exploration of the research problem considering that user-generated parody accounts were a fairly new area of research in South Africa at the time. In addition, the interview guide contained three follow-up questions. As mentioned before, the interview guide remained flexible and follow-up questions were revised during the interview process as unexpected and relevant considerations were highlighted by participants.

Preparations for the semi-structured in-depth interviews commenced by setting the scene, which usually started a week before the actual interviews. Participants who met the sampling criteria were contacted via email, as illustrated in Appendix E. During pre-interview contact the researcher briefly introduced herself, explained the topic of the study, the expected duration of the interview, the use of a digital recorder and the suitability of the participant as an expert on social media who has encountered parody accounts. In order to elaborate on the purpose, expectations and ethical requirements of the interviews such as informed consent, every email was accompanied by the official TUT document named Information leaflet and informed consent, as illustrated in Appendix F.

In most instances, face-to-face interviews occurred in the participants’ work environments which were regarded as convenient and familiar surroundings where participants would feel at ease. In many instances, interviews took place in quiet boardrooms or offices, without any disruptions. In a few instances, interviews occurred in quiet corners of office common rooms, typical features of open plan offices, as the only available space for interviews. Although co-workers occasionally walked past while the interview was in progress, this did not affect the quality of the interviews as the participants seemed to feel comfortable in their familiar surroundings. In one instance a participant in a senior position called in a co-worker to add value to the answers after the interview had commenced as the co-worker had direct, tactical experience in responding to social media parody accounts. As qualitative interviewing requires flexibility, the researcher then ensured that both participants had an equal opportunity to answer every question. This small-group setting for the interview was effective considering
the conversational nature of the interview, while it was evident that the two participants enjoyed an open, friendly and trusting work relationship. Moreover, as the topic of the interviews was not particularly sensitive, evoking emotionally vulnerable situations or risking highly confidential information being shared, public spaces did not seem to impact on the rapport established between the researcher and the participants.

In a few instances, participants preferred to meet at a coffee shop of their choice. Care was taken to select a quiet corner in a coffee shop to allow for clear and audible digital voice recordings of interviews. These somewhat buzzing environments did not seem to hamper the quality of the interviews or rapport established as the participants were mature, professional individuals and the researcher assumed that they felt more comfortable in neutral environments that did not encroach on their personal space.

In addition to face-to-face interviews, four Skype interviews were conducted and recorded with a digital voice recorder. Three of these Skype interviews allowed the researcher to access participants in locations such as Cape Town and elsewhere in Africa, which would otherwise have been inaccessible to the researcher who was based in Johannesburg. The fourth Skype interview was conducted with a participant in Johannesburg which allowed the participant to set aside time in a busy schedule for an interview after hours. Considering that all four of these participants were social media experts who were familiar with digital technologies, the quality and rapport created during Skype interviews were experienced in the same manner as real-life, face-to-face interviews. Also, before the interviews commenced, it was evident that these three participants had already been using their Skype accounts and were therefore familiar and comfortable with the medium. Similarly, the researcher was an experienced Skype user. In two of these interviews, the video function was switched off as it took up too much bandwidth and distorted the sound quality of the interviews, which is a common obstacle encountered when using Skype.

In general, rapport established during both face-to-face and Skype interviews were further enhanced as a result of pre-interview contact and by commencing the interview with a short demographical questionnaire read out by the researcher, which took around five minutes to complete. The demographical questionnaire is also discussed in more detail in Section 5.8.1 and is attached as Appendix A.

During the interviews, and as evident in the interview guide, the first question was broad and easy to answer in order to allow the participant to feel at ease and confident. Although the researcher used the same interview schedule for every interview, the researcher often paraphrased answers to acknowledge understanding and probed participants to elaborate on
and to clarify answers while remaining mindful not to stray too far off topic. The interviewer approached the interviews as conversations, which allowed for rich answers to emerge, rather than prescriptive question-and-answer sessions. Furthermore, the interviewer respected the time that each participant was able to set aside for the interviews. With regard to the duration of the interviews, these typically ranged from 40 minutes to 75 minutes, which seemed to be largely determined by the extent of experience that participants had with parody accounts.

After the interviews were completed, the digital recorder was switched off and time was set aside for some small talk and to thank the participants. In addition, a follow-up email was sent to every participant to thank them for their time and to assure them that they will receive transcripts of the interviews for checking along, with a commitment to send them a final copy of the research report once it is published. Each participant also received a copy of the interview transcript to ensure accuracy, rigour and trustworthiness. To respect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants, a brief extract from a transcript can be seen in Appendix G.

Of the 19 interviews conducted, the researcher transcribed 13 interviews while the remaining six interviews were transcribed by a final year Bachelor’s degree student majoring in English who was also familiar with user-generated parody accounts. The student was thoroughly briefed on the topic of the interviews and trained to write down conversations verbatim without correcting grammar, slang, repetitions or incoherencies. As transcriptions were completed, the researcher ensured quality and reliability of the data by listening to the recording of each interview while checking and editing each transcription for accuracy and completeness. This process enabled the researcher to continuously remain close to the data. In addition, all transcriptions contained attributions so that it was clear who said what during interviews.

5.10. DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis in mixed methods is challenging, as a single researcher is required to be adept at both qualitative and quantitative methods (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2010:398). Data collection and analysis are reported separately, while the integration of information occurs in the discussion and conclusion sections of the study (Creswell et al, 2008:172). As such, findings are coherently integrated (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2010:398) according to the core principles of the synergistic approach to a triangulation design (Hall & Howard, 2008:249).

Research objectives that are descriptive are usually achieved in qualitative studies (Babbie, 2008:99) by obtaining thick descriptions and lengthy quotations obtained from interviews (Vogt, Gardner & Haeffele, 2012:144). Descriptive statistics are used to analyse quantitative
data which enables the researcher to enhance understanding by organising and summarising data (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2010:399).

5.10.1. Quantitative statistical analyses performed

Figure 5.5 below graphically illustrates the interactions between variables that were investigated statistically in this study. One way in which such a set of interactions could have been investigated was by means of a statistical procedure called structural equation modelling. However, all the requirements needed for conducting structural equation modelling could not be satisfied (e.g. the number of respondents was too small). It was therefore decided to conduct statistical procedures called multiple linear stepwise regression analyses (e.g. in those cases where the dependent variable was measured on an interval level) and conduct Chi square tests of independence in those cases where the variables were measured on a nominal/categorical level.

Predictor variables: Target audience of parody account Intention of parody account


[Regression analyses = (a), (b), (c) and (d); Chi square analyses = (e)]

FIGURE 5.5: Regression analyses and Chi square analyses performed

Multiple regression is a family of techniques (Pallant, 2007:140), also called multivariate analysis (Oliveira, 2013:185), a widely-used, advanced statistical method to establish the relevant factors that predict an outcome, thereby enabling the researcher to understand the linear causal relationships between variables (Lynch, 2013:143). More specifically, the value or relationship between one continuous dependent variable (Pallant, 2007:140), also called the response or target variable, and the role of multiple predicting or independent variables (Chatterjee & Simonoff, 2013:3). Stated differently, the role played by a set of explanatory variables (x) on the variable of primary interest (y) can be calculated (Fahrmeir, Kneib, Lang, & Marx, 2013:21) to predict a dependent variable (Pallant, 2007:95). In the multiple regression method, two or more independent variables are statistically analysed (Kahane, 2008:59) to
establish statistical significance (Cramer & Howitt, 2004:106). An advantage of multiple regression is the ability to statistically control threats to causality while extending the simple regression model to include additional independent variables (Lynch, 2013:151). Estimates of the simultaneous relationships between multiple variables (Oliveira, 2013:185) are calculated, using statistical software packages (Lynch, 2013:154) such as SPSS (Kahane, 2008:62; Pallant, 2007).

Stepwise multiple regression involves the incremental inclusion of variables to establish which predictor variables play a statistically significant role in the value of a dependent variable, based on the logic of stepwise algorithms (Oliveira, 2013:193; Wand, 2003:1082). Variables are selected and eliminated until none are left that meet the criteria for removal (Vogt, 2005:312). Notably, stepwise regression is a preferable method when a large number of predictor variables are evident (Oliveira, 2013:193) and there is little subject knowledge or theory to guide the selection of variables (Wand, 2003:1082).

For the purpose of this study, a number of multiple linear stepwise regression analyses were considered suitable for analysing the interaction between certain predictor variables and each of five measures of Emotional Resonance (see Figure 5.5). Each regression analysis was conducted to investigate the role that a number of predictor variables can have in determining the value of one dependent variable. In each stepwise regression analysis, a number of calculations were performed sequentially. Firstly, the contribution of only one predictor variable was calculated, then the other variables were added one at a time. Thereafter, recalculations were performed. After each calculation the predictor variable that had the weakest correlation with the dependant variable was removed. The process was repeated until it could be determined what largest combination of predictor variables played a statistically significant role in the value of a dependent variable. In this way a final statistically significant regression model was obtained, which could be expressed as a regression equation.

To further explore the relationship between categorical variables (two at a time), a number of Chi-square tests were conducted by using SPSS (Pallant, 2007:288) to establish the probability that the two variables of interest were independent of each other (Lynch, 2013:110). A requirement for conducting a Chi-square test, is that the “minimum expected cell frequency” (Pallant, 2007: 291) should be five or greater in at least 80% of the cells in the two-way frequency table being analysed, while the significance level of $p < 0.05$ would indicate a statistically significant proportional difference between two categorical variables. For this study, data was analysed using SPSS’s Cross Tabulation function.
5.10.2. Thematic analysis

A thematic analysis of interview transcripts involves the allocation of themes which are based on the research question and the theoretical framework of the study (Bergman, 2010:391). In the process, thematic analysis comprises the identification and comparison of ‘typical’ cases that display certain thematic characteristics (Altheide, 1996:43) in order to identify, analyse and report patterns or themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006:6; Gibbs, 2007:4; Hair et al, 2016:302). As such, thematic analysis is a categorising strategy (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014:26).

The identification of themes may either involve top-down or bottom up coding (Bergman, 2010:391). Top-down coding is when the researcher imposes a coding scheme on the text while bottom-up coding is when themes emerge inductively. As such, themes, categories and concepts emerge inductively from the data as the researcher discovers threads and ways of relating themes and categories (Hair et al, 2016:297; Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014:26; Richards, 2009:74). In this manner themes and categories do not fit some pre-existing coding frame (Braun & Clarke, 2006:12) and is synonymous with open coding, which Corbin and Strauss (2008:195) define as the assigning of themes or categories that represent qualifying blocks of data in terms of their dimensions and properties. To elaborate, open coding occurs concurrently with data collection and initially comprises an extensive list of very broad and unrelated or ‘open’ codes that are revised as the data analysis process continues and patterns start to emerge and meaning is discovered (Glaser & Holton, 2004; Goulding, 2002:77). Likewise, Flick (2002:150) describes open coding as the initial stage where “text is read reflectively to identify relevant categories”.

A coding strategy is defined by Goulding (2002:74) as “the process of braking down interviews, observations and other forms of appropriate data into distinct units of meaning which are labelled to generate concepts”. Coding involves the process of assigning labels to parts of documents, called units of analyses (Miles & Huberman, 1994:63,65), which enables the researcher to bring together or aggregate data about a topic for interrogation and interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006:15; Hair et al, 2016:297; Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014:24,26; Richards, 2009:95). As such, a code, also called a category label, is defined by Miles and Huberman (1994:56) as “tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study”. In the process, a code then represents a theme that is related to the research question while representing a patterned meaning in the data set (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:317; Braun & Clarke, 2006:10). This is achieved by organising codes into a system of categories, which in turn, enables the researcher to cluster those segments that relate to a certain contextual construct, theme, or research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006:19; Miles & Huberman, 1994:57; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2013:109). In other words,
the relations between themes, subthemes and combinations of themes are assessed and indicated, as well as their relevance to the research problem (Bergman, 2010:392; Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:318; Braun & Clarke, 2006:20; Hair et al, 2016:302). In this manner, codes follow a structural and conceptual order or structure which illustrates how they relate to one another coherently (Miles & Huberman, 1994:62). Moreover, the quantification of themes or a frequency count of themes is illustrative of the characteristics of the material selected for the sample (Bergman, 2010:391).

Some authors insist that themes are mutually exclusive and therefore can only be categorised into one particular code at a time (Du Plooy, 2002:193; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006:159). However, in exploratory studies, it is argued, multiple coding may be assigned to a single unit of analysis (Gibbs, 2007:4; Miles & Huberman, 1994:56,64). Alternatively, a single code may also be assigned to a particular sentence, chunks of text comprising a couple of sentences or even paragraphs (Miles & Huberman, 1994:56,64; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2013:109). In terms of ensuring that every unit of analysis is coded, themes need to be exhaustive (Du Plooy, 2002:193; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006:159). Moreover, the assigning of new codes ceases when saturation is achieved (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:318). Notably, the naming of codes need to be precise and relate closely to the concept that it describes (Miles & Huberman, 1994:64). Correspondingly, substantive similarity-based categories each describe participants' beliefs and concepts (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014:25).

Researchers are advised to benefit from the many advantages of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) programmes such as Atlas.ti to enhance the quality, depth and sophistication of analysis (Bazeley, 2010:436; Bergman, 2010:386; Friese, 2012:1; Kvale, 2007:99; Miles & Huberman, 1994:44; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2013:108; Yin, 2010:180). As such, it needs to be noted that software cannot think in the way that a human does and therefore cannot perform the actual analysis, but supports the researcher in the process (Friese, 2012:1; Hair et al, 2016: 308; Yin, 2010:180). Documented advantages of Atlas.ti include the following:

- Effectively managing large volumes of data (Friese, 2012:1; Miles & Huberman, 1994:66).
- Easily allocates, revises and modifies code names and coded chunks of data (Bazeley, 2010:435; Friese, 2012:1; Miles & Huberman, 1994:63,65).
- Convenient search functions when searching for specific words (Friese, 2012:1).
- Eases the process of assigning more than one code to a chunk of text (Miles & Huberman, 1994:65).
- Integrates data and raw material in one coherent system (Friese, 2012:1).
• Enhances the validity of results, particularly during the conceptual stage of analysis (Friese, 2012:1).
• Enhances rigour and reliability especially as consistency in coding is easily applied (Bazeley, 2010:461).
• Able to trace the steps that were followed during the analysis, which results in transparency (Bazeley, 2010:461; Friese, 2012:1).
• The ability to quantify data (Friese, 2012:1) thereby converting qualitative coding to variable data (Bazeley, 2010:435).
• The ability to compile and edit memos, comments and code definitions (Friese, 2012:234).
• Generates visual graphic displays that illustrate patterns in the data, such as relationships between codes and the hierarchies of categories (Bazeley, 2010:435; Friese, 2012:210, 213; Miles & Huberman, 1994:63).
• The availability of extensive easy-to-understand audio-visual support material online to troubleshoot, demonstrate and guide researchers (Atlas.ti:2015).

Not only the transcripts, but also the actual recordings and memos are repeatedly revised so that the researcher becomes familiar with and immersed in the data (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:324; Braun & Clarke, 2006:16; Kvale, 2007:93; Hair et al, 2016:298; Yin, 2010:183). Therefore, the codes assigned to text are revised several times while moving backward and forward between the data set as data collection and analyses are in progress, which may result in the renaming of codes, the emerging of new codes, the decay of existing codes or the breaking down codes into sub-codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006:20; Miles & Huberman, 1994:61). When elaborating on the systematic, cyclical, iterative and interactive model of data analysis (Hair et al, 2016:302), Miles and Huberman (1994:12) propose a concurrent process involving data reduction, data display and conclusion-drawing or verification in an interactive model of thematic data analysis, as illustrated in Figure 5.6 below:
As illustrated in Figure 5.6, thematic analysis of collected data is a rigorous and flexible process that involves the following components:

**Data reduction**: A transforming process involving analytic choices to organise data, such as focusing, simplifying, abstracting and selecting data (Miles & Huberman, 1994:12). Activities include coding, clustering codes, memo writing, writing summaries, noticing patterns and teasing out themes. Data reduction commences before data collection and continues after the fieldwork had been completed, to end only when the final report is completed. In the process, data may be converted to primitive quantities, such as high or moderately occurring cases, as long as the context of the data remains intact.

**Data display**: The organising and compressed assembly of data to enable conclusions to be drawn (Miles & Huberman, 1994:12). Valid qualitative analysis simplifies bulk data or extended text from transcripts by displaying information in a compact and accessible form through charts, graphs, matrices and/or networks. Data display involves data reduction that enables the researcher to see what is happening, which guides the drawing of conclusions. By including verbatim quotations from interviews, a reflexive report clearly demonstrates how evidence is grounded in the data collected and interpreted (Gibbs, 2007:97). Moreover, quotations bring the reader closer to the data and illustrate how the ideas or theories discussed are expressed by participants.

**Conclusion-drawing and verification**: Conclusion-drawing involves the noting of patterns, explanations, causal flows, regularities, causal flows and propositions which may be vague at the start of the data collection but data once collection is over, final conclusions become clearer through inductive reasoning (Miles & Huberman, 1994:12). As such, conclusions are verified by re-checking field notes, remaining grounded in the theory, reaching intersubjective consensus through review amongst colleagues or by replicating findings in another data set. The confirmability or validity of meanings emerging from the data is being tested for their plausibility. The continuous drawing and verifying of conclusions serve to cross-check possible alternative explanations or conclusions by collecting data from multiple sources and approaches in order to arrive at the most credible conclusion justified by the data (Hair *et al*, 2016: 308). Notably, in mixed methods, the merging or blending of data does not occur in the analysis thereof, but when fitting “results from each study into a cohesive and coherent outcome or theory, or confirming or revising existing theory” (Morse, 2008:154).

With regard to this study, the interactive model of Miles and Huberman's (1994:12) thematic analysis was applied. This iterative process ensured flexibility and enhanced rigour. Bottom-up or open coding allowed for themes to emerge inductively instead of imposing Fombrun and
Van Riel's (2004:97) EQ score dimensions, namely (i) visibility, (ii) transparency, (iii) authenticity, (iv) consistency and (v) distinction that formed the conceptual basis for the interview guide. Considering the exploratory nature of the study, open coding entailed assigning labels closely, and sometimes even verbatim, as described by the participants in order to uphold the trustworthiness of data analysis.

The researcher remained close to the data during a flexible and iterative process by repetitively listening to recordings, comparing them with transcriptions to confirm contextual meanings and inferences. Simultaneously, code names were continuously revised, memos were modified and summaries were adjusted to tease out themes. By coherently grouping similar themes according to their respective categories, the relationships between variables and concepts could be demonstrated. To illustrate the revision of codes and the quantification thereof, Appendix K illustrates both the initial codes and the modified codes generated by Atlas.ti.

All the data were coded. Codes were assigned to parts of data that coherently indicated a particular meaning. In some instances, a code was assigned to a sentence while in other instances a code was assigned to a paragraph. Given the exploratory nature of the study, in a few cases, two codes were assigned to the same chunk of text. All the while, analysis and data reduction were grounded in the theoretical framework and the research objectives of the study as patterns emerged. In fact, as unexpected themes emerged during data reduction, literature review and memos, the interview guide was expanded and repeatedly revised, owing to the exploratory nature of the research problem where relevant literature is scarce. In addition, the simultaneous data collection and analysis methods stretched over a three-year period, which challenged the analysis of themes as social media is a rapidly-evolving phenomenon, especially in South Africa where internet access was increasing significantly over the period under review.

The many documented advantages of Atlas.ti enabled the cyclical data analysis to effectively manage and quantify the large volume of data produced by the 19 transcriptions. In addition, the researcher attended two training sessions on the use of Atlas.ti presented by qualitative research subject matter experts at the University of Johannesburg.

Data was displayed using tables and figures. The richness of data was supported by verbatim quotes, as indicated in the findings.
5.11. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Reliability is defined by Boyle and Schmierbach (2015:123) as the consistency of a measurement. Similarly, Babbie (2008:157) defines reliability as the repetitive application of a particular technique to the same object providing the same results every time (Babbie, 2008:157).

Not to be confused with reliability, validity is defined by Babbie (2008:160) as a measure that “accurately reflects the concept that it is intended to measure”. Likewise, validity is defined by Boyle and Schmierbach (2015:128) as “an accurate reflection of the true value of the underlying concept with minimal systematic error”.

Broadly speaking, reliability and validity outline the criteria for quality research (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011:108) or benchmarks for rigour (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011:120; Morrow, 2005:250) which are equated to the parallel constructs of trustworthiness in the qualitative paradigm (Hair et al, 2016:308; Morrow, 2005:250; Shenton, 2004), namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba, 1981:80). The trustworthiness of qualitative research, compared to quantitative research, involves replacing quantitative reliability with dependability, internal validity with credibility, external validity with transferability, and objectivity with conformability (Goulding, 2002:43). Stated differently, in qualitative studies, valid findings are sufficiently authentic whereby such findings are trustworthy, isomorphic to some reality and related to the way in which others construct their social worlds (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011:120).

5.11.1. Reliability and dependability

Pilot study: Pilot studies enhance both reliability (Neuman, 2003:181) and validity (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:137). Typically, a pilot study, or pre-testing, comprises the collecting and analysis of data drawn from a small sample drawn from the population in order to establish which changes need to be made to the data collection method (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:136,239; Fowler, 2009:122), and to eliminate unanticipated problems with the data collection instrument (Du Plooy-Cilliers & Cronje, 2014:15). During a pilot study, the completion of the self-administered survey may be accompanied by directly observing respondents while they are interacting with the online questionnaire and asking them to evaluate their experience in person (Fowler, 2009:124). This is followed by a debriefing session about the procedures and instruments to discuss any problems encountered with the survey.
Data of the pilot study may be included in the analysis if participants in the pilot were drawn from the same sample as the rest of the study (Plowright, 2011:88). The value of a pilot study lies in verifying that questions are clearly formulated and if the way in which questions are asked effectively answer the research questions (Plowright, 2011:88). In other words, construct validity is tested (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:137). Therefore, reliability is enhanced by asking participants or respondents only relevant questions that they most likely know the answers to and avoiding complicated and ambiguous questions (Babbie, 2008:158).

With regard to this study, a pilot study using a purposive sample of respondents who met the sampling criteria was conducted, based on the initial questionnaire is attached as Appendix L. The pilot study was completed using Survey Monkey by making the link available to participants on social networks and via email. In addition, the researcher personally accompanied a few participants while they completed the questionnaire to establish if questions were clear, navigation of Survey Monkey was easy, the layout was user-friendly and to ascertain if the length of the questionnaire was fair. By direct observation and in-person discussions, many of the navigational issues and question ambiguity were resolved. A debriefing session was also held with supervisors.

In total, 17 responses were collected of which only nine questionnaires were completed, which implied a completion rate of only 52.94% during the pilot study. Ambiguous questions were rephrased and complicated questions were simplified, mainly, by replacing many of the Likert scale questions with simpler ‘yes’, ‘no’, ‘not sure’ options. Considering that several changes were made to the questionnaire to address the poor completion rate, findings of the pilot study were not included in this study. In addition, respondents who completed the pilot were not contacted again and they did not complete the final revised questionnaire. Following changes made to the questionnaire, the completion rate of the revised and final questionnaire was a satisfactory 72.87%. The total number of respondents were 188, with 137 completed responses received.

**Dependability and reflexivity:** The qualitative equivalent of reliability is dependability, as the latter is characterised by reflexivity. Reflexivity or self-examination (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016:321) is defined by Boyle and Schmierbach (2015:286) as the process in which the qualitative researcher considers how personal context, background, personal preferences and biases may influence the data gathering, data analysis and conclusions drawn. Therefore, dependability is evident when measures are taken to ensure the stability of data (Guba, 1981:86). To achieve dependability, multiple and overlapping complementary methods may be selected:
• **Collaborative peer engagement**: Reflexivity, as an aspect of both confirmability and credibility, is particularly characterised by collaborative peer debriefings and learning from peer scrutiny during which assumptions are challenged and methodologies discussed with faculty colleagues, supervisors, feedback at conference presentations and other scholarly peers (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016:321; Guba, 1981:87; Hair *et al*, 2016:311; Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004:67).

• **Memoing in a research journal**: Memoing in a research journal is indicative of reflexivity (Kvale, 2007:43) and strengthens the confirmability of a study (Guba, 1981:87). As already mentioned in the previous section, memoing is a distinct feature of data reduction (Miles & Huberman, 1994:12). Memos written in a reflective diary or logbook record insights, experiences, thoughts, ideas, hunches, influences and inspirations that occur throughout the research journey (Gibbs, 2007:26). Providing a bank of ideas which are frequently revisited, memos map out the emerging theory as they help to identify concepts and their properties and re-orientate the researcher at a later stage (Goulding, 2002:65;75). Therefore, memoing is an extensive, continuous and systematic process (Glaser & Holton, 2004) involving memos or notes that the researcher writes to him or herself, and/or other members in the research team, throughout the research process (Gibbs, 2007:30).

• **Code memos**: Commencing immediately after data collection and during open coding, memos are written to describe the situation and to document the researcher's impressions and analyse data (Goulding, 2002:75). As such, memoing involves the writing of initial preliminary conclusions during the data collection and data analysis phases which are continuously revised as the study progresses (Hair *et al*, 2016:308). As such, memo writing also assists in suggesting ongoing sampling decisions. During data analysis and coding, memos are the “analytic thoughts about the codes and provide clarification and direction during coding” (Gibbs, 2007:31). By also including code definitions, memos also provide the means to theorise and comment during the development of analytic ideas related to codes and the analytic framework. Notably, definitional drift occurs while building up a coding system and when analysing a large dataset (Gibbs, 2007:98). Text coded later during the research process may be coded differently from text coded at the beginning. Constant checking and comparisons minimise inconsistencies and enhance reliability. Furthermore, the writing of code memos which are constantly revised for consistency, also enhances reliability. Stated differently, reliable coding, when measuring qualitative data, implies that coding is consistently used and achieves the same result each time on the same set of data (6 & Bellamy, 2012:21).

• **Audit trail**: Documenting a detailed chronological audit trail of the research process detailing influences on data collection and analysis, emerging categories and themes,
analytic memos and memoing in a research journal (Guba, 1981:86; Kvale, 2007:43; Morrow, 2005:252). In addition to dependability, confirmability is promoted through triangulation and accountability through an audit trail comprising a clear description and critical motivation for methodological choices (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016:321; Morrow, 2005:252; Shenton, 2004:72). Confirmability is defined by Morrow (2005:252) as “the acknowledgment that research is never objective”. As such, confirmability is enhanced when strategies clearly indicate that findings do not depend on a researcher’s personal predispositions or investigator bias, but emerge from data (Shenton, 2004:72) as the integrity of findings lies in the data (Morrow, 2005:252).

- **Dependability audit**: a dependability audit relies on competent peer researchers and colleagues to examine and comment on the audit trail to ensure that accepted practise was followed (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016:321; Guba, 1981:86; Morrow, 2005:252). Therefore, dependability aims for the possibility of subsequent enquiries to repeat a study by documenting extensive detail about the research design and its implementation (Morrow, 2005:252; Shenton, 2004:71).

With regard to this study, dependability was confidently achieved through a continuous reflexive process. A clear and transparent audit trail described in this document confirms that findings did not depend on the researcher’s bias. Likewise, study leaders were able to conduct a dependability audit having had continuous access to the data collection and data analysis methods which they evaluated, discussed and revised to ensure best practise in the audit trail. In addition, any personal bias was removed through extensive collaborative peer engagement with several scholarly peers at the University of Johannesburg where the researcher is employed, as well as through collaboration with the supervisors of this study. In addition, preliminary findings of this study were presented and scrutinised at a paper presented at the Global Business and Technology Association (GBATA) 17th Annual International Conference in Lisbon, Portugal in July, 2015. See Appendix M for the GBATA conference programme.

Memoing was extensively applied throughout the study to prevent definitional drift. Commencing during data collection, memoing assisted in ongoing sampling decisions while also providing the basis for adjustments to the interview guide, theoretical concepts, codes and categories. Memos were written in different mediums. Memos specifically related to codes and their definitions were captured in Atlas.ti, as can be seen in Appendix N. In other instances, reflexive memos about data collection and data analysis methods were shared with the two supervisors of this study via email. In addition, reflexive memos detailing sampling decisions, the researcher’s impressions, preliminary conclusions, insights, hunches and the development of theoretical concepts pertaining to the research problem were extensively
documented in a reflective diary. To respect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants, a brief extract from the reflective diary is available in Appendix O.

5.11.2. Internal validity and credibility

Within a quantitative paradigm, internal validity is defined as the extent to which a study’s results can be correctly attributed to the treatment or independent variable (Vogt, Gardner & Haefele, 2012:53). Likewise, Crano, Lac, and Brewer (2015:45) define internal validity as the extent to which causality may be established in the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable. Similarly, Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:128) define internal validity as the extent to which “reported patterns and relationships are, in fact, found within the population being studied”. Moreover, internal validity is achieved when systematic bias or errors arising from the research design are eliminated (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016:236; Neuman, 2003:187). Internal validity is attained when the research conditions are controlled to the extent that incorrect but plausible explanations for results are ruled out (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006:27). Notably, internal validity does not secure external validity; however, a study needs to contain internal validity before external validity may be addressed (Vogt, Gardner & Haefele, 2012:53).

Concerning internal validity, several concerns are worth noting. Instrument validity indicates a valid relationship between a concept and its measurement (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016:237). In addition, semantic validity is strengthened when codes relate to the words used in the unit of analysis (Bauer, 2000:144). Likewise, face validity is established when a measure or item unambiguously fits the conceptual definition (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:132) or construct (Crano, Lac, & Brewer, 2015:87). Stated differently, codes and categories are clearly defined and the analysis thereof is adequate so that the instrument measures what it purports to measure (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006:271). Therefore, face validity is dependent on construct validity as the latter establishes if a measured variable is distinct from and logically related to other variables (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:128). More specifically, construct validity is evident when the theoretical rationale and concepts are related to the test instrument and distinct variables (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016:239). Construct validity is evaluated during a pilot study (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:137)

Cronbach alpha is a measure of the internal consistency of the scores on a measuring instrument, in other words on a number of scales, and is a function of the average intercorrelation between the items’ scores (Crano, Lac, & Brewer, 2015:69; DePoy & Gitlin, 2016:236). A high degree of interrelatedness among items indicates strong relations between
the total scores from two halves of the scale which implies that items focus on the same underlying attitude. Typically, an adequate Cronbach alpha coefficient (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994:212) is a minimum value of 0.75 (Crano, Lac, & Brewer, 2015:69) or 0.80 (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016:236). Notably, Tavakol and Dennick (2011:54) are satisfied with an alpha of 0.70. Correspondingly, a validity coefficient measures an estimation of measurement error (Cronbach, 1951:297). To illustrate, Table 5.3 below indicates the case processing summary for Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the five scales in Question 8 of the self-administered questionnaire, as this was the only Likert scale question asked.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cases</th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>134</th>
<th>71.3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excluded*</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a: Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

In addition to the case processing summary provided above, Table 5.4 below indicates the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the five scales in Question 8 of the questionnaire, which measured the five constructs of the EQ.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.805</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As is evident from Table 5.4 above, the Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.805 obtained for this study exceeds the 0.70 minimum acceptable value for Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Within a qualitative paradigm, credibility is defined by Shenton (2004:64) as findings that are congruent with reality. Similarly, Morrow (2005:252) defines credibility as internal consistency. Credibility is attained by informed consent, voluntary participation, establishing rapport with participants, iterative questioning or probing, thick descriptions, examining previous studies and emphasising the independent status of the researcher (Shenton, 2004:63). Methods to ensure credibility include the following:

- **Prolonged engagement**: Confidence in credibility is attained by prolonged engagement (Hair et al, 2016: 311), memoing in personal research journals, peer debriefing, the collection of referential adequacy materials such as audio recordings, member checks and triangulation (Guba, 1981:84; Morrow, 2005:252). Moreover, credibility and trustworthiness are established when research procedures are rigorous and methodical.
while being transparently described in order to allow for the scrutiny of all data (Yin, 2010:19).

- **Member checks:** Also known as participant checks (Morrow, 2005:252), the accuracy of data typically involves requesting participants to verify that transcripts are accurate to raise confidence about credibility, called member checks (Shenton, 2004:68; Shopes, 2011:454). Therefore, member checking removes investigator bias (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016:321) The aim of member checking is to validate the findings by ensuring credibility and consistency of the analysis (Goulding, 2002:89). Member checking may also include external reviewers such as academics to comment and evaluate the researcher’s interpretation (Goulding, 2002:90). Similarly, check-coding enhances reliability by allowing a secondary analyst or colleagues to review operational definitions and the coding scheme to be applied consistently over time (Miles & Huberman, 1994:64).

- **Triangulation:** Triangulation extends the confirmability of a study Guba (1981:84). As such, triangulation indicates multiple data collection methods, including the examination of documents mentioned by participants, and drawing a sample from a wide range of diverse participants in order to validate viewpoints against one another while collecting rich data describing participants’ experiences and contexts (Morrow, 2005:252; Shenton, 2004:66).

With regard to internal validity of the quantitative methods of the study, an acceptable value for Cronbach’s alpha of 0.805 implies that reported relationships were valid for the population being studied with minimal systematic error. This implies that the face validity of items was coherent with their conceptual definitions. In addition, construct validity was evaluated and strengthened following a pilot study, as already explained in Section 5.11.1.

When assessing how confidence in credibility was attained for the qualitative methods of the study, these included member checks whereby participants verified the accuracy of transcripts. As such, only one participant made a minor correction in the interview transcript. In addition, member checking also involved check-coding to enhance reliability, whereby operational definitions and the coding scheme were reviewed by two qualified peers as well as the two study leaders.

The confirmability of qualitative methods was strengthened through triangulation with quantitative data whereby rich data from a wide range of diverse participants were validated. In addition, documents and theories mentioned by participants during interviews and mentioned in the open-ended questions of the questionnaire were reviewed, cited in the literature review and reported in the findings.
Lastly, the synergistic approach to a triangulation design enhanced the validity of findings by allowing qualitative and quantitative approaches to work together from multiple perspectives to answer the research problem, as prescribed by Hall and Howard (2008:249). Moreover, methodological triangulation achieved a convergence of findings and biases were counteracted in two ways. Firstly, the five core dimensions of Fombrun and Van Riel’s (2004) EQ score formed the basis for the constructs. Constructs were measured in the questionnaire for the self-administered online survey and worded similarly to the interview guide used to collect data during the semi-structured in-depth interviews. Secondly, a significant portion of the key themes that emerged during the qualitative data analysis were verified in the data collected by the questionnaire. Notably, data collected from the open ended questions in the questionnaire were analysed using the same coding scheme as for the qualitative data which not only confirmed data saturation but also confirmed the validity of the rich data analysed.

5.11.3. External validity and transferability

External validity, or generalisability, is defined by Boyle and Schmierbach (2015:128) as the extent to which “reported results for a given sample might reasonably be expected to occur within a larger population”. Similarly, Crano, Lac and Brewer (2015:45) define external validity as the generalisability or extent to which findings can be applied to different contexts, groups or settings, and different ways in which conceptual variables may be operationalised.

As mixed methods converge results from different sources (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2011:287) triangulation strengthens the validity of findings (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016:320). By relying on complementary methods, mixed methods offset and counteract biases, which further enhance the validity of findings (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 2008:123; Jick, 2008:109).

Typically, exploratory studies are not generalisable beyond the sample (Pascoe, 2014:145). Within a qualitative paradigm, transferability is defined by Morrow (2005:252) as “the extent to which the reader is able to generalise the findings of a study to her or his own context”. As a result, transferability recognises that phenomena are context-bound as statements are interpretive or descriptive of a particular context (Guba, 1981:86). Therefore, conclusions and findings are not applicable to other populations, settings and situations (Morrow, 2005:252; Shenton, 2004:69). As such, purposive sampling processes are governed by emerging insights and rather maximises the range and depth of data collected within a clearly defined context (Guba, 1981:86). Correspondingly, the development of thick descriptions enables the
interpretation of one context to be reasonably transferable and compared to other similar contexts, depending on the degree of fittingness between contexts (Guba, 1981:86; Morrow, 2005:252). In other words, transferability is possible when the researcher provides extensive detail about the context of the methodology processes, particularly data collection and sampling criteria, so that the reader of a research report may judge if contextual findings are similar to other settings known to the reader (Morrow, 2005:252; Shenton, 2004:70).

For the purpose of this study, external validity is largely limited to the context of social media management teams, given the exploratory nature of the study. Likewise, the transferability of findings and interpretations for social media management teams is achieved with confidence as a detailed audit trail is provided in the report. Correspondingly, readers of this document can judge the degree of fittingness between the purposive sample and the population.

5.12. ETHICS

Ethical issues bear upon the entire research process and are of particular concern in the planning and data collection stages (Gibbs, 2007:7), especially pertaining to the expectation of honesty (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:82). The following concerns regarding research ethics need to be addressed:

- **Full disclosure to minimise deception:** Formal, direct contact with participants involves obtaining the necessary permission from the participants to be interviewed and recorded, which includes some explanation of the purpose of the study and the identity of the researcher to avoid deception (Babbie, 2007:67,296,312; Fowler, 2009:164; Louw, 2014:264,268). Stated differently, full disclosure is needed about the data collection procedures, topic of the study, expected length thereof and expectations (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016:27). Notably, a balance needs to be maintained between deceiving participants by telling them about certain aspects of the study's purpose and divulging the complete purpose of the study, which may affect participants' behaviour or eliminate their participation (Babbie, 2007:305). When establishing this balance, decisions will be influenced by the nature of the topic.

- **Informed consent without coercion to participate voluntarily:** Fully informed consent requires that participants and respondents are completely aware of what is expected of them during the study, including any potential risks, potential benefits and how data they provided will be used after the completion of the study (Babbie, 2007:64; Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:83; Gibbs, 2007:8). Informed consent includes voluntary participation, without coercion, often by signing a statement or consent form (Babbie, 2007:62;64; Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:83; DePoy & Gitlin, 2016:27; Louw, 2014:264). Moreover, informed consent includes the option to withdraw from the research at any time (Boyle &
Schmierbach, 2015:81; Depoy & Gitlin, 2016:29; Gibbs, 2007:8). Furthermore, the researcher respects the fact that participants’ regular activities are disrupted during the research process (Babbie, 2007:62).

- **Anonymity and respect for privacy:** Anonymity and privacy are maintained by ensuring that no unauthorised people have access to unanonymised data (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:81; Fowler, 2009:166; Gibbs, 2007:102). Therefore, original recordings of interviews (Miller & Crabtree, 2004:200) and completed survey instruments (Fowler, 2009:166) are stored safely. As qualitative data are very personal, care needs to be taken not to reveal the identities or invade the privacy of the participants (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:86; Gibbs, 2007:8,101). Therefore, the anonymity of participants needs to be protected when reporting on data, by sufficiently obscuring their identities or that of the settings and organisations they are associated with when providing direct quotations. Moreover, anonymity implies that respondents’ contact details will not be exploited for marketing purposes (Louw, 2014:267). With regard to quantitative data, measures need to be in place to protect the identity and privacy of respondents while access to data is restricted to those involved in the data analysis (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:86).

- **Confidentiality:** Involves not publically releasing a participant’s demographical details or responses in such a way that the responses reveal the participant’s identity (Babbie, 2007:65; Depoy & Gitlin, 2016:27; Fowler, 2009:164; Louw, 2014:267). Confidentiality is further maintained by removing demographical information from questionnaires and transcripts once a study is completed and it is no longer necessary to access personal information, for example, in order to contact participants to verify transcripts.

- **Ensuring that data is not falsified:** With regard to the researcher, ethical conduct ensures that results are not distorted, personal biases are removed, minimising harm and ensuring that data is not falsified (Louw, 2014:269). In addition, transcriptions need to remain faithful to the original interview and thereby preserve the fragmental, ungrammatical, hesitant and colloquial way in which participants naturally express themselves (Gibbs, 2007:102). Lastly, plagiarism needs to be prevented and intuitinally monitored (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2015:82).

With regard to this study, full disclosure was provided in an information leaflet and consent form in Appendix F regarding the purpose of the study, the requirements for participation and details of the researcher. As can be seen from Appendix F, the ethical clearance and informed consent procedures of the Tshwane University of Technology were followed, as the necessary documents were submitted. Participants signed the consent form. Similarly, when posting a hyperlink to the survey and when sending an email to respondents, full disclosure was provided without declaring an overly detailed explanation of the study so as to prevent biased
answers. Nobody was coerced to participate in the study and no rewards were offered as participation was voluntary and without remuneration. Anonymity and respect for privacy was upheld by removing any details from the report that might compromise confidentiality. Likewise, in the survey, respondents remained anonymous and their Internet Protocol addresses were not collected in the questionnaire. Only the researcher, supervisors and data analysts had access to the data collected via the questionnaire. Moreover, when asking respondents to leave their email addresses should they want a copy of the report, instructions clearly stated that their details would not be exploited, shared with anyone or used for unsolicited emails or spam. All transcripts, recordings and data collected in the survey are securely stored in the cloud and password protected.

The researcher ensured that personal biases were removed, particularly through reflexivity and collaborative peer reviews of data collection and analysis transparently evaluated with study leaders as well as several methodological scholars in the field. Data were not falsified in any manner, transcriptions were recorded verbatim and returned to participants for approval and the reliable software application TurnitIn was used to verify that the report was not plagiarised.

5.13. CONCLUSION

This chapter motivated for the synergistic approach to a triangulation design as the most appropriate research method to draw trustworthy and valid findings against the exploratory and descriptive research objectives. At the same time, steps to strengthen rigour and adhere to research ethics were outlined. In the next chapter, findings will be reported, based on the data collected and analysed.
6.1. INTRODUCTION

As explained in the previous chapter, this study tried, in line with the study’s over-arching research objective, to establish how the EQ of Fombrun and Van Riel (2004:96) could be used to identify suitable paracrisis response strategies for social media management teams to maintain emotionally resonant reputations when user-generated parody accounts target brands. To achieve this, the five constructs of Fombrun and Van Riel’s (2004:96) Expressiveness Quotient (EQ) were each regarded as a measure of an emotionally resonant reputation.

The findings in this chapter are structured as they pertain to the study's three research sub-objectives. The research sub-objectives for the study were as follows:

- **Research sub-objective 1**: To quantitatively measure, in terms of the constructs of the EQ (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004), the emotional resonance of brands targeted by user-generated parody accounts as paracrices, and to quantitatively describe the interactions that these measures of emotional resonance exhibit with certain parody account characteristics and with specific paracrisis response strategies, as defined by Coombs (2012).

- **Research sub-objective 2**: To quantitatively describe the interactions that certain parody account characteristics exhibit with the paracrisis response strategies, as defined by Coombs (2012).

- **Research sub-objective 3**: To qualitatively explore the perceptions of social media management teams regarding paracrisis response strategies that are intended to maintain emotionally resonant reputations when brands are targeted by user-generated parody accounts.

Section 6.2 of this chapter contains findings and discussions that address research sub-objective 1. These findings are based on quantitative data collected during the study’s online survey. The findings and discussions in Section 6.3 address research sub-objective 2 and are also based on quantitative data collected during the study’s online survey. Finally, the findings and discussions in Section 6.4 of this chapter address research sub-objective 3, and are based on qualitative data collected during study’s semi-structured in-depth interviews.
The reason for collecting and presenting both quantitative and qualitative data is to bring together the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative types of research. By upholding the core principles of the synergistic approach (Hall & Howard, 2008:249) to mixed methods in a triangulation design, the study benefitted from different but complementary data to be collected on the same topic.

6.2. FINDINGS (QUANTITATIVE) ADDRESSING RESEARCH SUB-OBJECTIVE 1

In order to present and discuss the findings pertaining to research sub-objective 1, this section has been divided into a number sub-sections: Firstly, findings on the emotional resonance (EQ scores) of parodied brands are presented in Section 6.2.1, while Section 6.2.2 contains an interpretation and discussion of the EQ scores. This is followed by sections that present and discuss the results of a number of regression analyses. Each regression analysis is investigated statistically, in line with research sub-objective 1, the interactions between a number of independent/predictor variables (namely certain parody account characteristics and specific paracrisis response strategies) and a dependent variable (an emotional resonance/ EQ construct score) are reported.

In Figure 6.1 below these interactions pertaining to research sub-objective 1, are presented graphically by the arrows marked (a), (b), (c) and (d), while interaction (e) has to do with the interaction mentioned in research sub-objective 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor variables:</th>
<th>Dependent variables:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of brand being parodied</td>
<td>Emotional Resonance:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target audience of parody account</td>
<td>(Scores on each of five EQ constructs:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention of parody account</td>
<td>i. Brand Consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paracrisis response strategies</td>
<td>ii. Brand Transparency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e)</td>
<td>iii. Brand Authenticity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d)</td>
<td>iv. Brand Visibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a)</td>
<td>v. Brand Distinctiveness)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Sub-objective 1: Interactions (a), (b), (c) and (d) investigated with regression analyses.
* Sub-objective 2: Interaction (e) investigated with Chi-square tests.

FIGURE 6.1: Interactions* investigated statistically in research sub-objectives 1 and 2

The subsequent section focuses on the findings pertaining to the constructs of emotional resonance.
6.2.1. Emotional resonance (EQ scores) of parodied brands

Findings presented in this section pertain to the first part of research sub-objective 1, namely: “To quantitatively measure, in terms of the constructs of the EQ (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004), the emotional resonance of brands targeted by user-generated parody accounts as paracrises ……”.

The five dependent variables of emotionally resonant reputations as measured by the dimensions of the EQ score (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004), namely (i) visibility, (ii) distinctiveness, (iii) consistency, (iv) transparency and (v) authenticity. Table 6.1 below reports on the results of the mean EQ scores (EQ dimension scores and EQ total score) for a parodied brand.

**TABLE 6.1: Mean EQ scores (EQ dimension scores and EQ total score) for a parodied brand**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EQ dimensions</th>
<th>Mean EQ scores</th>
<th>Standard error</th>
<th>95% Confidence interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lower limit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>0.101</td>
<td>3.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniqueness</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>0.109</td>
<td>2.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>0.104</td>
<td>2.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>0.093</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>0.094</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All (EQ_total score)</td>
<td>15.32</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>14.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.1 above contains the mean EQ scores for each of the five EQ dimensions, as well as the mean EQ total score (which for each respondent was the sum of the EQ dimension scores). In addition, for each mean EQ score the standard error is given, which was used to calculate 95% confidence interval, which is an indication of variation one could statistically expect in the value of that score with less than a 5% chance of error.

For example, Table 6.1 above shows that the mean EQ total score for the parodied account was 15.32. However, the 95% confidence interval for that score shows that a statistically more accurate description of the mean EQ total score is that one could expect (with at least 95% confidence) the true mean score to be anything from 14.57 (the lower limit of the confidence interval) to 16.07 (the upper limit of the confidence interval).

With regard to the mean EQ dimension scores in the table it is clear that the Visibility dimension has the highest EQ score, namely 3.75, and a 95% confidence interval ranging from 3.55 to 3.95. As this confidence interval does not overlap with the confidence interval of
the four other EQ dimension scores, it can be concluded that the mean Visibility EQ score differs statistically from all four other EQ dimension scores (significant on the 5% level). In other words, when an account is parodied it can be expected that the greatest contribution of that parody to the EQ total score will be found in the Visibility dimension. As the confidence intervals of the remaining four dimensions of the EQ scores all overlap with each other, it can be concluded that these four mean dimensions of the EQ scores do not differ significantly from each other, and that they therefore contribute equally to the EQ total score.

6.2.2. Interpretation and discussion of the EQ scores of parodied brands

As will be seen in the subsequent sections that report on the qualitative findings of this study, the above-mentioned quantitative finding indicates that the Visibility dimension has the highest EQ score for parodied brands. As such, a high Visibility dimension confirms the interpretation and supporting literature with regard to certain qualitative themes, namely ‘contingency planning for parody accounts’, that will be discussed in Section 6.4.1.3 and ‘prominent brands attract parodies’, that will be discussed in Section 6.4.2.9.

The implication of this finding is that highly visible and loved brands, especially top-of-mind human brands with emotionally resonant reputations, are the most at risk of being targeted by user-generated parody accounts. These include prominent public figures and brands known for their humorous campaigns. The brand resonance of iconic lovemarks (Roberts, 2005:105) is in jeopardy when targeted by malicious parody accounts that criticize the high expectations and disappointment about broken promises, which is far more common for big service brands. Big brands have more opportunities for failure, given their vast number of customers and greater number of weaknesses compared to smaller, less visible brands. Even should a parody account target a weaker and lesser-known brand, social media communities would probably not really have an opinion about an insignificant brand, care enough to follow the parody account or even take it seriously, since weaker brands also lack both economic and political power. Therefore, viral paracrises for prominent corporate brands and product brands are more likely to experience a more intense and extended lifecycle compared to human brands. For these brands, it is therefore essential to ensure emotionally resonant brand personalities.

By virtue of the fact that a highly visible and prominent brand holds a position of power, embodies brand personalities and speaks the official word, a brand represents that which a parody typically ridicules. Parody and satire, as related genres of humour, would almost not exist without a subject that has an ego to deflate and a dignity to offend. In general, parodies
of prominent brands indicate the extent to which communities recognise, remember and have adequate knowledge about a brand to express an opinion. Prominent corporate brands and product brands with distinct and emotionally resonant reputations, particularly those with memorable advertising campaigns or those accused of wrongdoing, are often the targets of parody accounts. This is because communities are more likely to enjoy the humour, express their opinions, relate to and care about the satirised brand that they are already familiar with.

Having invested both money and strong psychological bonds with much loved brands, it stands to reason that anger is more malicious when directed at corporate brands and product brands as they are regarded as inanimate objects, abstract concepts and disembodied entities incapable of reciprocating feelings. Human brand personalities, it seems, are easily forgiven as it is human to make mistakes. The same cannot be said for inanimate objects such as corporate brands and product brands, especially on Twitter, being most often at the receiving end of malicious parody accounts and related paracrises.

It is fair to say then that the unpredictable, organic nature of social media is a high risk environment which is challenging for scenario planning. Owing to the high levels of related paracrises such as hating, flaming, ranting, complaints and viral social media backlashes, parody accounts are usually treated as another form of criticism and not singled out for scenario planning. Yet, highly visible brands are at a higher risk of being parodied and therefore require more detailed risk profiling and crisis communication planning, considering that a parody account is a paracrisis that may easily escalate into a full-blown crisis if not mitigated appropriately. Instead of attempting to control and abiding to predetermined plans, strategic reputation management values brand reputation that is co-created and essentially socially constructed. Nevertheless, risks need to be identified in responsive social media governance frameworks. These include escalation protocols, safeguarding against social media cyber-squatting and the verification of the brand’s official social media accounts to decrease the vulnerabilities of being targeted by a parody account.

Typically, a parody account gains visibility and credibility when receiving publicity in traditional media in the converged media space. However, scenario planning for parody accounts remain problematic as scenarios are highly organic and management has no control over the effectiveness of their responses or mitigation measures because of the transparent, highly critical and publicly visible scrutiny of a paracrisis.
In closing, since Visibility has the highest EQ score, findings of this study differs from Apéria, Brønn and Schultz (2004:229) who concluded that Transparency was the most significant construct of the EQ during a crisis.

6.2.3. The relationship between the Type of Brand being parodied and emotional resonance

Findings reported in this section pertain to the statistical stepwise regression analyses that were conducted to quantitatively describe the interactions that are mentioned (see italics) in research sub-objective 1: “... to quantitatively describe the interactions that these measures of emotional resonance exhibit with certain parody account characteristics and with specific paracrisis response strategies, as defined by Coombs (2012)’’.

More specifically, the five stepwise regression analyses that are reported on in this section investigated the relationship between a number of variables representing specific “types of brands being parodied” (as indicated by respondents when referring to a particular “recent user-generated parody account that appeared on social network”) and emotional resonance (as represented by the five EQ (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004) construct scores, namely (i) visibility, (ii) distinctiveness, (iii) consistency, (iv) transparency and (v) authenticity.

Each of the above-mentioned five EQ construct scores served as the dependent variable in a regression analysis. The independent/predictor variables were measures of whether or not the Type of Brand being parodied was one of the following: a celebrity, a politician, government, a business or organisation, a prominent person in society, a brand, a television show, a movie, irresponsible behaviour, and a controversial topic in the news. In all of the stepwise regression analyses performed during this study, the following criteria were used to enter or remove predictor variables from the regression model being investigated: Probability-of-F-to-enter <= .050; Probability-of-F-to-remove >= .100.

Table 6.2 below presents the results of the five stepwise regression analyses that were conducted to determine which types of parodied brands (Q3) best predict each of the five constructs of emotional resonance of the parodied brand. The table shows that with regard to two dependent variables, namely Brand Visibility and Brand Authenticity, no statistically significant best model could be found.

With regard to the dependent variable called Brand Distinctiveness, Table 6.2 below shows that a best model was found that contained one predictor variable, namely Celebrity. For that
best model the F value was 3.956 and p< .05, which means that an F-test was performed that showed that the model was statistically significant on the 5% level of significance. The negative β value (β = -.168) found for the predictor variable Celebrity indicates that when the parodied brand was a celebrity, this was negatively associated with Brand Distinctiveness. In other words, when a celebrity’s account is parodied, this is associated with a drop in the perceived distinctiveness of that celebrity’s account.

**TABLE 6.2: Types of brands that significantly predict the emotional resonance of the parodied brand**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable (Emotional resonance construct)</th>
<th>Type of data</th>
<th>Findings of linear stepwise regression analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand Distinctiveness</td>
<td>Independent variables (in best model): Celebrity</td>
<td>$R^2 = .028; F = 3.956; p = &lt; .05$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beta (β) values $β = .168$</td>
<td>Brand Distinctiveness = 2.849 - 0.168 (Celebrity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Best Model:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Consistency</td>
<td>Independent variables (in best model): Politician</td>
<td>$R^2 = .034; F = 4.723; p &lt; .05$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beta (β) values $β = -.183$</td>
<td>Brand Consistency = 3.049 - 0.183 (Politician)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Best Model:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Transparency</td>
<td>Independent variables (in best model): Celebrity</td>
<td>$R^2 = .041; F = 1.644; p &lt; .05$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beta (β) values $β = .202$</td>
<td>Brand Transparency = 2.690 + 0.202 (Celebrity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Best Model:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Visibility</td>
<td>(No statistically significant best model found)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Authenticity</td>
<td>(No statistically significant best model found)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the case of the dependent variable Brand Distinctiveness in Table 6.2 above, the best model found also contained one predictor variable, namely Celebrity, while that best model was also statistically significant on the 5% level of significance ($F = 3.956; p = < .05$). The positive β value ($β = .168$) found for the predictor variable Celebrity indicates that if the parodied brand was a celebrity, this was positively associated with Brand Distinctiveness. This indicates that when a celebrity is parodied, this is associated with an increase in the perceived distinctiveness of a celebrity's brand reputation.

With regard to the dependent variable Brand Consistency, the best model found also contained one predictor variable, namely Politician, while that best model was also statistically significant on the 5% level of significance ($F=4.723$; and $p< .05$). The negative β value ($β = -.183$) found for the predictor variable Politician indicates that if the parodied brand was a
politician, this was negatively associated with Brand Distinctiveness. This means that when a politician’s account is parodied, this is associated with a drop in the perceived consistency of a politician brand reputation.

In relation to Brand Transparency, a statistically significant best model (F = 1.644; p < .05) was found that contained one predictor variable, namely Celebrity. The positive β value (β = .202) found for the predictor variable Celebrity indicates that if the parodied brand was a celebrity, this was positively associated with Brand Transparency. This indicates that when a celebrity is parodied, this is associated with an increase in the perceived transparency of a celebrity brand reputation.

6.2.4. Discussion of the relationship between the of Type of Brand being parodied and emotional resonance

The regression analyses investigating the relationship between the Type of Brand being parodied and emotional resonance yielded three main findings, which are discussed below:

a) **Celebrity positively predicts Distinctiveness**: Parody accounts make fun of the unique promise of endearing celebrity brand personalities. As these parodies are mostly created for light-hearted, playful entertainment, celebrity parody accounts amplify the emotional resonance of a distinct brand personality.

b) **Celebrity positively predicts Transparency**: Social media communities form strong psychological bonds and emotionally resonate with parodied celebrity brand personalities that are tangible and constantly conduct their affairs openly in the public eye. Therefore, parodied celebrity human brands seem to be easily forgiven during paracrises, as it is human to make mistakes. As such, parody accounts for celebrities amplify the credibility and timeliness of transparent brand personalities.

c) ** Politician negatively predicts Consistency**: Findings suggest that politicians with tarnished reputations are the result of disparity between actions and promises made. Correspondingly, parody accounts for politicians are usually more malicious as they most likely satirise wrongdoing. Therefore, politician parody accounts deflate egos and suggest a breakdown in shared values and trust. In such cases, parody accounts express anger and satirise that fact that false promises do not resonate emotionally with critical social media communities.

The abovementioned findings confirm the interpretation and supporting literature that will be presented later on in this chapter. As such, these findings confirm the qualitative theme, ‘prominent brands attract parodies’, that will be discussed in Section 6.4.2.9. To reiterate,
human brands are mostly targeted by parody accounts since social media communities find it easier to enjoy the humour of parody accounts targeting well-known human personalities that can reciprocate feelings, are cared about and that communities can relate to, as opposed to inanimate corporate brands and product brands. Conversely, findings suggest, inanimate brands may resonate emotionally with social media communities if their brand personalities are distinct, transparent and consistent.

6.2.5. The relationship between the Intended Audience of the parody account and emotional resonance

The results based on the Intended Audience of the parody account (as derived from the responses to survey question Q4) on the perceptions of the brand, which comprise constructs of an emotionally resonant reputation, namely, visibility, distinctiveness, consistency, transparency and authenticity respectively, were not significant. The Intended Audience of the parody account consisted of journalists, social media users in general, social media influencers, managers of the brand that was parodied, followers of the official social media account, public relations and marketing teams, trolls, activists, the official social media account and Other. Since there was no significant contribution from these audiences, it is assumed that the Intended Audience of the parody account does not have an effect of the perceptions of a parodied brand.

6.2.6. Discussion of the relationship between the Intended Audience of the parody account and emotional resonance

Findings confirm the argument and supporting literature discussed in several qualitative themes, namely that social media disrupts one-to-many traditional communication models by replacing these with antagonistic many-to-many models (Castells, 2007:238, 2008; Nitins & Burgess, 2014:293). A more suitable approach therefore is strategic reputation management (Aula, 2010:46; Aula & Mantere, 2013:340) whereby reputation is the result of collective truths that arise from co-created relationships on converged media channels. As such, strategic reputation management mitigates the reputational risks that arise from the continuous uncertain, profoundly public and dialogic principles of social media that are not within management’s direct control. Likewise, a paracrisis (Coombs, 2014; Coombs & Holladay, 2012) is the result of disgruntled social media users’ publically visible accusations of wrongdoing on social media that poses the risk of a full-blown crisis owing to the engaging and viral principles of antagonistic peer-to-peer networks.

To conclude then, in the many-to-many, peer-to-peer converged media space, a clearly defined target audience for a parody account cannot be established and is uncertain.
Therefore, just about anybody or everybody may be exposed to the ironic imitations of the official account’s brand identities to satirise, ridicule or poke fun at for comic effect. Correspondingly, strategic reputation management and integrated communication are essential to mitigate the reputational risks of paracrises across owned, paid and earned media in the converged media space.

6.2.7. Relationship between the intention of the parody account and emotional resonance

The Parody Intent (as derived from the responses to survey question Q5), consisting of, to provide harmless fun, to express love for a brand, to maliciously damage a brand on purpose, to share interesting and compelling content by using satire in an intelligent manner, to voice people’s unhappiness with a situation, to demand change in behaviour, to draw as much attention as possible, to attract followers, to publish spam, to harm the brand and its stakeholders, to hijack the brand’s strategic message, to expose wrongdoing, to infringe on intellectual property laws, and not sure of the intention of the parody account. These intentions were considered in the prediction of the perceptions of the brand which comprise constructs of an emotionally resonant reputation, namely, visibility, distinctiveness, consistency, transparency and authenticity respectively.

The significant independent variable predicting the specific prediction of the brand perceptions, visibility, distinctiveness and authenticity as reported in Table 6.3 below, show the results.

### TABLE 6.3: Intention of the parody account that significantly predicts the emotional resonance of the parodied brand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable (Emotional resonance construct)</th>
<th>Type of data</th>
<th>Findings of linear stepwise regression analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Visibility</strong></td>
<td>Independent variables (in best model):</td>
<td>Malicious Intent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta (β) values</td>
<td>β = -.236</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Model:</td>
<td>Brand Visibility = 3.861 - 0.236 (Malicious Intent)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>$R^2 = .056; F = 8.113; p &lt; .05$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Distinctiveness</strong></td>
<td>Independent variables (in best model):</td>
<td>Intent of Harmless Fun   Intent to Expose Wrongdoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta (β) values</td>
<td>β = .265</td>
<td>β = -.264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Model:</td>
<td>Brand Distinctiveness = 2.735 + 0.265 (Intent of Harmless Fun) - 0.264 (Intent to Expose Wrongdoing)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>$R^2 = .015; F = 12.045; p &lt; .05$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Authenticity</strong></td>
<td>Independent variables</td>
<td>Intent to Expose Wrongdoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the case of the dependent variable Brand Visibility, in Table 6.3 above, the best model found also contained one predictor variable, namely Malicious Intent, while that best model was also statistically significant on the 5% level of significance (F = 8.113; p < .05). The negative β value (β = -0.236) found for the predictor variable Malicious Intent indicated that if the intention of the parody was malicious, this was negatively associated with Brand Visibility. This indicates that when a parody has a malicious intent, this is associated with a decrease in the perceived visibility of brand reputation.

With regard to the dependent variable Brand Distinctiveness, the best model found also contained two predictor variables, namely Intent of Harmless Fun and Intent to Expose Wrongdoing, while that best model was also statistically significant on the 5% level of significance (F = 12.045; p < .05). The positive β value (β = 0.265) found for the predictor variable Intent of Harmless Fun indicates that if the parody was intended for harmless fun, this was positively associated with Brand Distinctiveness. This means that when a parody is intended for harmless fun, this is associated with an increase in the perceived distinctiveness of brand reputation. In addition, the negative β value (β = -0.264) found for the predictor variable Intent to Expose Wrongdoing indicates that if the parody was intended to expose wrongdoing, this was negatively associated with Brand Distinctiveness. This means that when a parody is intended to expose wrongdoing, this is associated with a drop in the perceived distinctiveness of brand reputation.

In relation to Brand Authenticity, a statistically significant best model (F = 3.941; p < .05) was found that contained one predictor variable, namely Intent to Expose Wrongdoing. The negative β value (β = -0.169) found for the predictor variable Brand Authenticity indicates that if the parody was intended to expose wrongdoing, this was negatively associated with Brand Authenticity. This indicates that when a parody is intended to expose wrongdoing, this is associated with a decrease in the perceived authenticity of brand reputation.
6.2.8. Discussion of the relationship between the intention of the parody account and emotional resonance

The regression analyses investigating the relationship between the intention of the parody account and emotional resonance yielded four main findings, which are discussed below:

a) Malicious Intent negatively predicts Brand Visibility: Parody typically uses inappropriateness, offense and sarcasm to draw attention to its criticism, thereby creating inappropriate brand associations when parody accounts are confused with official accounts. In addition, the subtlety and ambiguousness of irony in satirised brand identities are often misunderstood and overlooked so that unsuspecting social media communities further confuse the copycat parody account with the official account. Another concern is when fake parody accounts that post malicious spam about highly visible brands are confused with official accounts and user-generated parody accounts. Making the most of the principles of social media and algorithms to reach vast audiences, influential parody accounts escalate into memes and trending topics, using sensational linkbait and hashtag hijacking to compromise the brand’s official social media conversations. Being opportunistic, parody accounts increase activity during breaking news on Twitter and comment on viral trending topics to make their humour immediately relevant, visible and reach many followers. During a paracrisis, a parody account’s constant criticism refreshes social media users’ memories about past crises to re-ignite anger.

Findings therefore suggest that tarnished reputations may then be infinitively visible, intermittently modified and co-created as a brand’s digital footprint. Ultimately, the humorous satirised brand promise may become more top-of-mind and memorable for its ironic meaning and may resonate more with critical stakeholders compared to the official brand being targeted. Highly visible brands are most likely targeted by parody accounts, since most social media users will then be familiar enough with the brand being ridiculed to find the spoof funny.

The abovementioned quantitative findings verify the interpretation and supporting literature of some of the qualitative findings that will be discussed later in this chapter. As such, these findings verify the qualitative themes, ‘parody accounts hijack strategic messages’ as will be discussed in Section 6.4.2.2, as well as ‘controversy triggers parody accounts’, to be discussed in Section 6.4.2.18.

b) Intent of Harmless Fun positively predicts Distinctiveness: When recognising that parody is the highest form of flattery, management welcomes the fact that parody accounts
are drawn to brands with strong, distinct attributes and a unique promise. Therefore, a well-written and clever parody account may be appreciated as testimony to brand resonance and brand equity. A skilfully created parody account, especially for playful brand personalities, indicates that a brand is loved, relevant, discussed, engaged and in synch with social media communities. It also implies that even haters care enough to mock a brand.

The abovementioned quantitative findings verify the interpretation and supporting literature that will be discussed in the qualitative theme, ‘recognise parody that compliments reputation’, in Section 6.4.2.16.

c) Intent to Expose Wrongdoing predicted a decrease in Distinctiveness: Any disgruntled stakeholder with long-standing gripes about poor customer service, broken promises, and corporate wrongdoing are more likely to harness the power of social media by means of a user-generated parody account as a means to be heard. Smouldering issues criticized in a parody account satirise the gap between actual experiences and distinct promises made. Wrongdoing, built up anger and false promises are discovered, shared and publically scrutinised by parody accounts and their networks of trusted peers. The stronger the break of the unique promise, the harsher the criticism voiced by a parody account. Instead of first resolving business failures internally, management may rather rely on corporate communication to create the desired image. As a result, public relations have become a rather stigmatised profession. Correspondingly, attempts to hide wrongdoing criticized by parody accounts will tarnish emotionally resonant reputations as critical social media communities no longer believe the distinct promise.

The abovementioned quantitative findings verify the interpretation and supporting literature that will be discussed in qualitative theme, ‘parody exposes unresolved business issues and broken promises’, in Section 6.4.2.8. In addition, quantitative findings also confirm the qualitative theme, ‘disgruntled stakeholders create parodies’, as will be highlighted in Section 6.4.2.14 in this chapter.

d) Intent to Expose Wrongdoing predicted a decrease in Authenticity: Social media communities’ high regard for authenticity seems to be symptomatic of the declining trust in corporate communication, with more trust being placed in user-generated parody accounts as authentic peers and search engines in a radical transparent peer-to-peer environment. Being cognisant of parody accounts that are calling brands out by ridiculing inauthentic corporate jargon and exposing misleading brand promises, management is pressurised to be honest, transparent and accountable in peer-to-peer networks.
Therefore, satirised brand promises may resonate well with critical social media communities’ emotions when they believe that the parody account is more authentic compared to the official brand.

The abovementioned quantitative findings verify the interpretation and supporting literature that will be discussed in the qualitative theme, ‘parody exposes unresolved business issues and broken promises’, in Section 6.4.2.8 of this chapter.

6.2.9. Relationship between paracrisis response strategies and emotional resonance

Official responses comprise the constructs of the four paracrisis response strategies of Coombs and Holladay (2012), namely, Refute, Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing, Explicitly admit wrongdoing, and Ignore (Q6). These independent variables were analysed to determine whether they have an effect on the prediction of the perceptions of the brand which comprise constructs of an emotionally resonant reputation, namely, visibility, distinctiveness, consistency, transparency and authenticity. As per previous analysis, using stepwise regression, variables that did not make a significant contribution to the perceptions of the brand, were removed. Dependent variables reported on the prediction of the perceptions of the parodied brand, which comprise constructs of an emotionally resonant reputation, namely consistency, transparency and authenticity, as illustrated in Table 6.4 below.

**TABLE 6.4: Relationship between paracrisis response strategies and the emotional resonance of the parodied brand**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable (Emotional resonance construct)</th>
<th>Type of data</th>
<th>Findings of linear stepwise regression analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Consistency</strong></td>
<td>Independent variables (in best model):</td>
<td>Ignore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beta (β) values</td>
<td>$\beta = -0.185$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Best Model:</td>
<td>Brand Consistency $= 3.175 - 0.185$ (Ignore)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>$R^2 = 0.034; F = 4.201; p &lt; 0.05$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Transparency</strong></td>
<td>Independent variables (in best model):</td>
<td>Explicitly admit wrongdoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beta (β) values</td>
<td>$\beta = 0.245$ \ $\beta = -0.224$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Best Model:</td>
<td>Brand Transparency $= 2.958 + 0.245 \ 0.224$ (Ignore)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>$R^2 = 0.125; F = 8.224; p &lt; 0.05$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Authenticity</strong></td>
<td>Independent variables (in best model):</td>
<td>Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beta (β) values</td>
<td>$\beta = 0.214$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Best Model:</td>
<td>Brand Authenticity $= 2.8 - 0.214$ (Explicitly admit wrongdoing)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As regards the dependent variable Brand Consistency in Table 6.4 above, the best model found also contained one predictor variable, namely Ignore, while that best model was also statistically significant on the 5% level of significance (F = 4.201; p = < .05). The negative β value (β = -.185) determined for the predictor variable Brand Consistency indicates that if the paracrisis response strategy was to Ignore the parody, this was negatively associated with Brand Consistency. This indicates that when Ignore is chosen as a paracrisis response strategy, this is associated with a decrease in the perceived consistency of brand reputation.

With regard to the dependent variable Brand Transparency, the best model found also contained two predictor variables, namely Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing and Ignore, while that best model was also statistically significant on the 5% level of significance (F = 8.224; p < .05). The positive β value (β = .245) found for the predictor variable Explicitly admit wrongdoing, indicates that if the paracrisis response strategy was to Explicitly admit wrongdoing, this was positively associated with Brand Transparency. This means that when Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing is chosen as a paracrisis response, this is associated with an increase in the perceived transparency of brand reputation. In addition, the negative β value (β = -.224) determined for the predictor variable Ignore, indicates that if the paracrisis response strategy was to ignore the parody account, this was negatively associated with Brand Transparency. This means that when ignore is chosen as a paracrisis response, this is associated with a drop in the perceived transparency of brand reputation.

In relation to Brand Authenticity, a statistically significant best model (F= 5.639; p < .05) was found that contained one predictor variable, namely Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing. The positive β value (β = .214) determined for the predictor variable Brand Authenticity indicates that if the paracrisis response strategy was to Explicitly admit wrongdoing, this was positively associated with Brand Authenticity. This indicates that when Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing is chosen as a paracrisis response, this is associated with an increase in the perceived authenticity of brand reputation.
6.2.10. Discussion of the relationship between paracrisis response strategies and emotional resonance

The regression analyses investigating the relationship between the paracrisis response strategies chosen and emotional resonance yielded four main findings, which are discussed below:

a) **Ignore negatively predicts consistency:** Refusing to respond to valid criticism raised by a parody account is indicative of a breakdown in trust and shared values, especially considering the dialogical principles of social media. Yet, management is advised not to hastily rush responses, but to first listen, learn and watch by analysing ORM metrics to determine the right time to respond, considering that responding to a parody account is a calculated risk in peer-to-peer social media communities. When valid criticism is raised, findings imply that withholding a response accentuates a disparity between the corporate story and actions. Top-down paracrisis responses exercise some form of control using traditional channels, however, the governing principles of self-correcting collaborative, peer-to-peer networks imply that responses containing excuses, obfuscation, spin doctoring, deflecting from the situation and shifting blame are constantly challenged. Correspondingly, inconsistency does not resonate with critical social media communities as it raises suspicion that management is not able to deliver on broken promises, does not care enough to take the time to respond to criticism, repair relationship failures or take measures to change behaviour.

b) **Ignore negatively predicts transparency:** The collaborative principles of social media establish mutually beneficial relationships with expectations for an honest and authentic official response to avoid suspicion that management has something to hide. Resistance to transparency and upfront honesty when valid criticism is raised by a parody account, may be perceived as management’s reluctance to expose their own weaknesses, or placing economic interests above open engagements. When being perceived as hiding behind closed doors, a social media backlash may escalate a paracrisis into a full-blown crisis. Therefore, the transparent principle of social media places more pressure on official responses to be honest, transparent and forthcoming with information. As a result, management could be pressurised to release information that they did not really want the public to know. Correspondingly, findings suggest that non-transparency and a refusal to address the criticism raised by a parody account deter from the ability to form strong psychological bonds and reciprocate affection, hence injuring brand resonance.

c) **Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing positively predicts transparency:** Findings suggest that the radical transparency arising from the discoverability of digital footprints in socially connected graphs requires voluntary openness and honesty to co-create mutually
beneficial relationships that may solidify emotional bonds. Conversely, self-correcting collaborative, peer-to-peer networks openly scrutinise official responses and if they appear to be hiding information or making empty promises, such attempts get caught out and are openly shared by angry critics. Although the constant scrutiny of paracrisis responses may seem overwhelming, the vast majority of social network users are passive lurkers and spectators. Known as the 1% rule, this phenomenon may skew metrics, whereby reach and sentiment is not necessarily representative of an entire population. However, it also implies that a silent majority are quietly forming their own opinions, hence the importance to explicitly admit wrongdoing; not only for the benefit of critics, but also for the benefit of the vast majority of lurkers who are more likely to resonate with a brand that is open, engaging and transparent.

d) Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing positively predicts authenticity: An honest apology to valid criticism raised by a parody account enhances trust, respect and accountability, when accompanied by actual and visible changes in behaviour. Considering the hostile environment of social media, especially Twitter, initial apologies are best kept brief but also assertive, as volatile communities tend to take advantage of community managers if they seem to be cowering. As the smallest mishap easily erupts into hating, flaming, ranting and trolling, community managers tend to apologise, even if the brand was not really wrong, in order to diffuse anger, gain positive sentiment and to mitigate a viral backlash. For the same reasons, apologies are restricted to a once-off statement to mitigate the risk of anger gaining the traction of social network algorithms. Later on, when the paracrisis has subsided, campaigns may be considered to expand on management challenges experienced, and awareness campaigns to reinforce the verified status of the official account. Therefore, findings imply that authenticity in paracrisis responses that Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing demonstrate care and respect that resonate with critical social media communities.

The abovementioned quantitative findings confirm the interpretation and supporting literature that will be discussed in qualitative theme, ‘honest and authentic responses are scrutinised in many-to-many dialogues’, to be discussed in Section 6.4.3.1., and the theme ‘responding to parody accounts is a calculated risk’, to be discussed in Section 6.4.3.6. of this chapter.

In conclusion, findings suggest that the remaining paracrisis response strategies, namely Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing, and Refute, do not significantly predict emotional resonance.
6.3. INTERACTIONS THAT PARACRISIS RESPONSE STRATEGIES EXHIBIT WITH CERTAIN PARODY ACCOUNT CHARACTERISTICS

The findings reported on in this section pertain to research sub-objective 2: To quantitatively describe the interactions that certain parody account characteristics exhibit with the paracrisis response strategies, as defined by Coombs (2012). In this instance, characteristics include considerations such as the Intention of the parody account, the Intended Audience of the parody account and the Type of Brand parodied, when selecting an appropriate paracrisis response strategy.

This section provides descriptive statistics on the cross tabulation results. Using the SPSS Cross Tabulation function, each of the variables representing the Type of Brand parodied (as derived from the responses to survey question Q3), the Intended Audience (as derived from question Q4) and the Parody Intent (as derived from question Q5) were combined in separate tables with the variable representing the responses of the brand’s official social media account to the paracrisis (as derived from the responses to survey question Q6). For each of these tables the SPSS function also performed a Chi-square calculation to investigate whether or not the two variables in the table were statistically independent of each other (if not, this indicated the existence of an association between the two variables). The results of the cross tabulation analyses are presented in the respective tables in the remainder of this section.

According to Pallant (2007:291), a requirement for conducting a chi-square test on a two-way table of frequencies is that the “expected cell frequency” that is calculated for each cell of the table should be five or greater in at least 80% of the cells (and never smaller than 1), while if the probability is \( p < 0.05 \), this would indicate that there is a statistically significant association (on the 5% level) between the two categorical variables. Another way of describing a statistically significant association between two categorical variables is stating that a significant proportional difference was found between the two variables (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2007). In some cases, (namely when both variables involved in a statistically significant association were dichotomous, in other words, had only two categories), a phi-correlation coefficient was calculated to serve as an indication of the strength of that association.

6.3.1. Association between Ignore and the Type of Brand parodied

This section reports on the possible association between the categorical variable Type of Brand (as derived from the responses to survey question Q3), and the dichotomous variable
Ignore, which indicates whether or not the paracrisis response strategy of the brand’s official social media account was to Ignore the parody account.

As illustrated in Table 6.5 below, the variable Type of Brand contained the following categories (each indicating a possible type of account that was parodied): Celebrity, Politician, Government, Business or organisation, Prominent person in society, Brand, Controversial topic in the news, and Other. Interestingly, the following additional categories were offered in question Q3 but were not selected: Television show, Movie, Irresponsible behaviour. (Regarding the Other category, the following ten verbatim responses were collected from the open-ended question: “Religion, Another non-famous Twitter user, A dietician in the Noakes trial, Customer, A publicly known executive of a large company, Upper middle class white people (Woolworst), Sportsman, News reporter, A landmark, All thee above! Theirs no single parody account that only parodies a specific topic”).

### TABLE 6.5: Cross-tabulation of Ignore as a paracrisis response with Type of Brand parodied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Brand parodied</th>
<th>Ignore</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A brand</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A business or organisation</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A celebrity</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A politician</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A prominent person in society</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A controversial topic in the news</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>83</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson $\chi^2 = 6.542 \ (8); \ p = .587$

8 cells (44.4%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .48.

It is evident from Table 6.5 above that as the probability ($p$) of the Chi-square calculated was larger than 0.05, there was not a statistically significant association between Type of Brand parodied and Ignore as paracrisis response strategy. It could however be concluded, from an inspection of the frequencies in the table, that just over half of the types of brands parodied (namely 83 out of 158, which equals 52.53%) mentioned Ignore as a paracrisis response strategy. Also, the types of brands indicated as being ignored the most were: Brand, Business or organisation, and Celebrity.

### 6.3.2. Association between Refute and the Type of Brand parodied

Table 6.6 below reports on the findings dealing with a possible association between the variable Refute (which indicates whether or not the parodied brand’s official response to the
paracrisis was to Refute the claims made by the parody account), and the variable Type of Brand.

**TABLE 6.6: Cross-tabulation of Refute as a paracrisis response with Type of Brand parodied**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Brand parodied</th>
<th>Refute</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A brand</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A business or organisation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A celebrity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A politician</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A prominent person in society</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A controversial topic in the news</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
<td><strong>118</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson $\chi^2 = 4.090$ ($p = 0.849$)

8 cells (44.4%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .16.

Table 6.6 above shows that there was no statistically significant association between the Type of Brand parodied and Refute as a paracrisis response strategy (because the probability ($p$) was larger than 0.05). It was, however, clear from an inspection of the frequencies in the table, that only a small percentage of the parodied brands mentioned (namely 22 out of 140, which equals 15.71%) selected Refute as a paracrisis response strategy. Also, the types of parodied brands that mostly Refute the claims made by the parody account were Brand, Business or organisation, and Celebrity.

**6.3.3. Association between Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing and the Type of Brand parodied**

Table 6.7 below reports on the findings dealing with a possible association between the variable Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing (which indicates whether or not the parodied brand’s official response to the paracrisis was to Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing), and the variable Type of Brand.

**TABLE 6.7: Cross-tabulation of Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing as a paracrisis response with Type of Brand parodied**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Brand parodied</th>
<th>Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A brand</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A business or organisation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A celebrity</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A politician</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A prominent person in society</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6.7 above indicates that there was no statistically significant association between Type of Brand parodied and the Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing response (because the probability \( p \) was larger than 0.05). It was, however, clear from an inspection of the frequencies in the table, that only a small percentage of the parodied brands mentioned (namely 9 out of 138, which equals 6.52%) selected Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing as a paracrisis response strategy. Also, the types of parodied brands that mostly selected Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing as a paracrisis response strategy were Brand, Business or organisation, and Celebrity.

6.3.4. Association between Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing and the Type of Brand parodied

Table 6.8 below reports on the findings dealing with a possible association between the variable Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing (which indicates whether or not the parodied brand’s official response to the paracrisis was to Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing), and the variable Type of Brand.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Brand parodied</th>
<th>Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A brand</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A business or organisation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A celebrity</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A politician</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A prominent person in society</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A controversial topic in the news</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson \( \chi^2 = 6.583 \) (8); \( p = .582 \)
10 cells (55.6%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .06.

Table 6.8 above illustrates that there was no statistically significant association between Type of Brand parodied and the Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing response (because the probability \( p \) was larger than 0.05). It was, however, clear from an inspection of the frequencies in the table, that only a small percentage of the parodied brands mentioned (namely 9 out of 141, which equals 6.38%) selected Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing as a paracrisis response strategy. Also,
the types of parodied brands that mostly selected Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing as a paracrisis response strategy were Celebrity, Business or organisation, and Brand.

6.3.5. Conclusion about the association between the Type of Brand parodied and paracrisis response strategies

A possible explanation for the lack of a significant association between the Type of Brand parodied and the paracrisis responses is the fact that in social media communities, different types of brands represent themselves and engage with audiences as brand personalities (Aaker, 1996:112; Keller & Richey, 2006:74). Therefore, distinctions between certain types of brands, namely human brands (Thomson, 2006:104), corporate brands (Foreman & Argenti, 2005:247) and product brands (Keller & Richey, 2006:74) are not always clear.

6.3.6. Association between Ignore and the Intended Audience of the parody account

This section reports on the possible association between the categorical variable Intended Audience of the parody account (as derived from the responses to survey question Q4), and the dichotomous variable Ignore, which indicates whether or not Ignore was the parodied brand’s official social media response to the paracrisis.

As can be seen in Table 6.9 below, the variable Intended Audience of the parody account contained the following categories (each indicating a possible audience that was targeted): journalists, social media users in general, social media influencers, managers of the brand that was parodied, followers of the official social media account, public relations and marketing teams, trolls, activists, the official social media account and Other. (Regarding the Other category, verbatim data collected from the open-ended question included the following six responses: “Satirical comment, ICT and Security people, White privilege, Cyber security professionals, Fans of UFC, Young adults; age 18-34”).

Interestingly, in terms of the Intended Audience of the parody account, the following two categories were not selected in the closed-ended questions: Journalists, and, Public relations and marketing teams.

Table 6.9 below reports on the findings dealing with a possible association between the variable Ignore (which indicates whether or not the parodied brand’s official response to the paracrisis was to Ignore the parody account), and the variable Intended Audience of the parody account.
TABLE 6.9: Cross-tabulation of Ignore as a paracrisis response with the Intended Audience of the parody account

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended Audience of the parody account</th>
<th>Ignore</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media users in general</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Followers of the official social media</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activists</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The official social media account</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trolls</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media influencers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The managers of the brand that was parodied</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>83</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson $\chi^2 = 5.483 \,(7); \, p = .601$

12 cells (75.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .48.

Table 6.9 above illustrates that there was no statistically significant association between the Intended Audience of the parody account and Ignore as a paracrisis response strategy (because the probability ($p$) was larger than 0.05). It was, however, clear from an inspection of the frequencies in the table, that just over half of the Intended Audience of the parody account mentioned (namely 83 out of 159, which equals 52.20%) selected Ignore as a paracrisis response strategy. Also, the Intended Audiences of the parody account that were mostly Ignored, were Social media users in general, Followers of the official social media account, and Activists.

6.3.7 Association between Refute and the Intended Audience of the parody account

Table 6.10 below reports on the findings dealing with a possible association between the variable Refute (which indicates whether or not the parodied brand’s official response to the paracrisis was to Refute the claims made by the parody account), and the variable Intended Audience of the parody account.

TABLE 6.10: Cross-tabulation of Refute as a paracrisis response with Intended Audience of the parody account

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended Audience of the parody account</th>
<th>Refute</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media users in general</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Followers of the official social media</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activists</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The official social media account</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trolls</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media influencers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The managers of the brand that was parodied</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson $\chi^2 = 5.705 \,(7); \, p = .575$

11 cells (68.8%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .16.
Table 6.10 above shows that there was no statistically significant association between the Intended Audience of the parody account and Refute as a paracrisis response strategy (because the probability \(p\) was larger than 0.05). It was, however, clear from an inspection of the frequencies in the table, that only a small percentage of the Intended Audiences mentioned (namely 22 out of 141, which equals 15.60%) selected Refute as a paracrisis response strategy. Also, Refute was mostly selected for Intended Audiences, namely Social media users in general, Followers of the official social media account, and Activists.

### 6.3.8. Association between Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing and the Intended Audience of the parody account

Table 6.11 below reports on the findings dealing with a possible association between the variable Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing (which indicates whether or not the parodied brand’s official response to the paracrisis was to Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing), and the variable Intended Audience of the parody account.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended Audience of the parody account</th>
<th>Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media users in general</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Followers of the official social media account</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activists</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The official social media account</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trolls</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media influencers</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The managers of the brand that was parodied</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson \(\chi^2 = 9.244 \)\(^{(7)}; p = .236\)
11 cells (68.8%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .06.

Table 6.11 above indicates that that there was no statistically significant association between the Intended Audience of the parody account and Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing as a paracrisis response strategy (because the probability \(p\) was larger than 0.05). It was, however, clear from an inspection of the frequencies in the table, that only a small percentage of the Intended Audiences mentioned (namely 9 out of 139, which equals 3.77%) selected Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing as a paracrisis response strategy. Also, Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing was mostly selected for Intended Audiences, namely Social media users in general, Followers of the official social media account, and Activists.
6.3.9. Association between Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing and the Intended Audience of the parody account

Table 6.12 below reports on the findings dealing with a possible association between the variable Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing (which indicates whether or not the parodied brand’s official response to the paracrisis was to Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing), and the variable Intended Audience of the parody account.

**TABLE 6.12: Cross-tabulation of Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing as a paracrisis response with the Intended Audience of the parody account**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended Audience of the parody account</th>
<th>Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media users in general</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Followers of the official social media account</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activists</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The official social media account</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trolls</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media influencers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The managers of the brand that was parodied</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson $\chi^2 = 1.893 \ (g; \ p = .966)$

11 cells (68.8%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .06.

Table 6.12 indicates that there was not a statistically significant association between the Intended Audience of the parody account and Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing as a paracrisis response strategy (because the probability ($p$) was larger than 0.05). It was, however, clear from an inspection of the frequencies in the table, that only a small percentage of the Intended Audiences mentioned (namely 9 out of 142, which equals 6.34%) selected Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing as a paracrisis response strategy. Also, Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing was mostly selected for Intended Audiences, namely Social media users in general, Followers of the official social media account, and Activists.

6.3.10. Conclusion about the relationship between the Intended Audience of the parody account and paracrisis response strategies

A possible explanation for the lack of a significant association between the Intended Audience of the parody account and paracrisis response strategies confirm the findings of the regression analysis already reported in Section 6.2.6. As already concluded, a parody account does not target a clearly defined target audience, considering the many-to-many, peer-to-peer converged media space that is typically unpredictable and uncertain.
6.3.11. Association between Ignore and the various Intentions of the parody account

This section reports on the possible association between the categorical variable Intention of the parody account (as derived from the responses to survey question Q5), and the dichotomous variable Ignore, which indicates whether or not Ignore was the parodied brand’s official paracrisis response strategy.

As evident in Table 6.13 below, the variable Intention of the parody account contained the following categories (each indicating a possible intentions of the parody account): Harmless fun, Express love for a brand, Maliciously damage a brand on purpose, Clever use of satire, Voice people’s unhappiness, Demand change in behaviour, Attract attention, Attract followers, Publish spam, Harm the brand and its stakeholders, Infringe on intellectual property laws, Hijack the brand’s strategic message, Expose wrongdoing, and, Not sure. Interestingly, the following options were also included in the closed-ended questions, but were not selected: Publish spam, and Infringe on intellectual property laws. As these options were not selected, it may be assumed that the sample of social media experts understood the satiric intentions of parody accounts.

Table 6.13 below reports on the findings dealing with a possible association between the variable Ignore (which indicates whether or not the parodied brand’s official response to the paracrisis was to Ignore the parody account), and the variable Intention of the parody account.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intention of the parody account</th>
<th>Ignore</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmless fun</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson $\chi^2 = .114$ (1); $p = .736$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 31.55.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express love for a brand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson $\chi^2 = .678$ (1); $p = .410$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 cells (50.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.30.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maliciously damage a brand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson $\chi^2 = .000$ (1); $p = 1.0$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.13.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clever use of satire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson $\chi^2 = .470$ (1); $p = .493$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice people’s unhappiness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson $\chi^2 = 1.191$ (1); $p = .275$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 18.64.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demand change in behaviour</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson $\chi^2 = .000$ (1); $p = 1.10$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 12.43.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attract attention</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson $\chi^2 = .130$ (1); $p = .719$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 22.47.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attract followers</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson $\chi^2 = .465$ (1); $p = .495$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 17.69.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hijack the brand’s strategic message</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson $\chi^2 = .203$ (1); $p = .653$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 9.56.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expose wrongdoing</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson $\chi^2 = .065$ (1); $p = .799$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 16.84.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Harm the brand and its stakeholders</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson $\chi^2 = .552$ (1); $p = .458$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.74.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson $\chi^2 = .000$ (1); $p = 1.00$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 cells (50.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.87.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.13 above shows that for all 12 variables representing the Intention of the parody account, there was no statistically significant association between the Intention of the parody account and Ignore as a paracrisis response strategy (because in all of the cases the probability ($p$) was larger than 0.05). An inspection of the frequencies in the table reveals the following with regard to each of the Intention variables:

**Harmless fun:** Just over half of the respondents (namely 47 out of 93, which equals 50.54%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended for Harmless fun, it had been Ignored.

**Express love for a brand:** A small percentage of respondents (namely 3 out of 9, which equals 33.33%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Expresses love for a brand, it had been Ignored.
Maliciously damage a brand: Just over half of the respondents (namely 9 out of 17, which equals 52.94%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Maliciously damage a brand, it had been Ignored.

Clever use of satire: Nearly half of the respondents (namely 18 out of 39, which equals 46.15%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Cleverly use satire, it had been Ignored.

Voice people’s unhappiness: Most of the respondents (namely 26 out of 43, which equals 60.47%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Voice people’s unhappiness, it had been Ignored.

Demand change in behaviour: Just over half of the respondents (namely 14 out of 26, which equals 53.85%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Demand a change in behaviour, it had been Ignored.

Attract attention: Nearly half of the respondents (namely 23 out of 47, which equals 48.94%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Attract attention, it had been Ignored.

Attract followers: Nearly half of the respondents (namely 17 out of 37, which equals 45.95%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Attract followers, it had been Ignored.

Hijack the brand’s strategic message: Nearly half of the respondents (namely 9 out of 20, which equals 45%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Hijack the brand’s strategic message, it had been Ignored.

Expose wrongdoing: Nearly half of the respondents (namely 17 out of 35, which equals 48.57%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Expose wrongdoing, it had been Ignored.

Harm the brand and its stakeholders: Most of the respondents (namely 8 out of 12, which equals 66.67%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Harm the brand and its stakeholders, it had been Ignored.

Not sure: Half of the respondents (namely 3 out of 6, which equals 50%) indicated that if they were Not sure of the intention of the parody account, it had been Ignored.

6.3.12. Association between Refute and the Intention of the parody account

Table 6.14 below reports on the findings dealing with a possible association between the variable Refute (which indicates whether or not the parodied brand’s official response to the paracrisis was to Refute the claims made by the parody account), and the variable Intention of the parody account.
TABLE 6.14: Cross-tabulation of Refute as a paracrisis response with Intention of the parody account

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intention of the parody account</th>
<th>Refute</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmless fun*</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Pearson $\chi^2 = 5.817 \ (1); \ p = .016$
0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 9.36.

**Express love for a brand**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson $\chi^2 = .000 \ (1); \ p = 1.00$
1 cell (25.0%) has an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.40.

**Maliciously damage a brand**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson $\chi^2 = .762 \ (1); \ p = .383$
1 cell (25.0%) has an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.34.

**Clever use of satire**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson $\chi^2 = 2.316 \ (1); \ p = .128$
0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.30.

**Voice people's unhappiness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson $\chi^2 = .000 \ (1); \ p = 1.00$
0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.09.

**Demand change in behaviour**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson $\chi^2 = .024 \ (1); \ p = .877$
1 cell (25.0%) has an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.75.

**Attract attention**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson $\chi^2 = 1.523 \ (1); \ p = .217$
0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.02.

**Attract followers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson $\chi^2 = .000 \ (1); \ p = 1.00$
0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 31.55.

**Hijack the brand's strategic message**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson $\chi^2 = .991 \ (1); \ p = .320$
0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 31.55.

**Expose wrongdoing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson $\chi^2 = .029 \ (1); \ p = .866$
0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 31.55.

**Harm the brand and its stakeholders**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson $\chi^2 = .272 \ (1); \ p = .603$
Table 6.14 above shows that except for Harmless fun, the remainder of the 12 variables representing the Intention of the parody account, indicates no statistically significant association between the Intention of the parody account and Refute as a paracrisis response strategy (because in 11 of the 12 of the cases the probability ($p$) was larger than 0.05). An inspection of the frequencies in the table reveals the following with regard to each of the Intention variables:

*Harmless fun*: A small percentage (namely 7 out of 81, which equals 8.64%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended for Harmless fun, it had been Refuted. The significant $\chi^2$ indicates that a significant association exists between the variable indicating that the parody is intended for Harmless fun and the Refute response variable. This association can be interpreted as meaning that the more a parody account is perceived as being intended for harmless fun, the less it is refuted.

**Express love for a brand**: A small percentage of respondents (namely 1 out of 9, which equals 11.11%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Expresses love for a brand, it had been Refuted.

**Maliciously damage a brand**: A small percentage of respondents (namely 4 out of 15, which equals 26.67%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Maliciously damage a brand, it had been Refuted.

**Clever use of satire**: A small percentage of respondents (namely 2 out of 34, which equals 5.88%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Cleverly use satire, it had been Refuted.

**Voice people’s unhappiness**: A small percentage of respondents (namely 6 out of 39, which equals 15.38%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Voice people’s unhappiness, it had been Refuted.

**Demand change in behaviour**: A small percentage of respondents (namely 3 out of 25, which equals 12.00%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Demand a change in behaviour, it had been Refuted.

**Attract attention**: Most of the respondents (namely 35 out of 45, which equals 77.78%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Attract attention, it had been Refuted.
Attract followers: A small percentage of respondents (namely 5 out of 34, which equals 14.71%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Attract followers, it had been Refuted.

Hijack the brand’s strategic message: A very small percentage of respondents (namely 1 out of 19, which equals 5.26%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Hijack the brand’s strategic message, it had been Refuted.

Expose wrongdoing: A small percentage of respondents (namely 4 out of 32, which equals 12.50%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Expose wrongdoing, it had been Refuted.

Harm the brand and its stakeholders: A small percentage of respondents (namely 3 out of 12, which equals 25%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Harm the brand and its stakeholders, it had been Refuted.

Not sure: A small percentage of respondents (namely 2 out of 6, which equals 33.33%) indicated that if they were Not sure of the intention of the parody account, it had been Refuted.

6.3.12.1. Conclusion about the significant association between Refute and a parody account intended for Harmless fun

In conclusion then, there is a significant difference between the extent to which the participants agreed on whether a parody account is intended for Harmless Fun and correspondingly should select a paracrisis response to Refute the parody account. The more a parody account is perceived as being harmless fun, the less it is refuted.

To conclude, light-hearted, playful spoofs intended for harmless fun may be perceived as the highest form of flattery, as a well-written and clever parody account without malicious intent may be appreciated as testimony to brand resonance. Cleverly-written humour expressed in user-generated parody accounts of skilled amateur satirists resonate emotionally with social media communities so that funny satirists become notable social influencers for several reasons. Using a moniker, a parody account creates a distinct personality with an authentic voice. Resonating most with communities is parody that touches a nerve or a human truth that exposes contradictions that the brand may know about but is not be able to say. Seeking good humour that distils issues and provides comic relief, especially during stressful situations, communities follow and share funny parody accounts for fun or to be entertained. Humour is a popular on Twitter and is frequently shared as a means to increase users’ reach and influence. Yet, Twitter is also notorious for its propensity for flaming, ranting, hating and trolling, of which the latter is largely ignored by official social media accounts. To gain the necessary attention then, skilfully created parody accounts that have gained considerable influence and deliver constructive criticism stand a better chance of meeting their goals.
Parody’s sophisticated style of seemingly frivolous humour, ludicrous exaggeration and subtle irony is not overtly didactic and imposing, hence its effectiveness to break down stakeholders’ resistance to criticism. In other words, having become rather immune to the endless stream of angry complaints and crazy customer rants on social media, management may be more receptive to criticism voiced by a skilfully created parody account.

In some cases, the humour, authenticity and credibility of a parodied brand personality may resonate stronger with communities compared to that of the official account. Therefore, empathy is a common denominator of love, for both parody account personalities and brand personalities, results in the co-creation of intense relationship attachments. When communities have humorous associations with emotionally appealing stories, they are motivated become engaged, loyal and inspired. Correspondingly, humour is an essential requirement for brand resonance.

With regard to a parody account intended for harmless fun, findings of the cross tabulation confirm the supporting literature and qualitative data that will be reported on later in this chapter regarding the theme, ‘establish the intent of a parody interpreted’ in Section 6.4.2.5, the theme, ‘recognise parody that compliments reputation’ in Section 6.4.2.16, the theme ‘guard against indiscriminately shutting down parody accounts’ in Section 6.4.3.4., and the theme, ‘clever parody is the voice of the people’, to be discussed in Section 6.4.2.4.

To conclude, given the ambiguous meaning, dynamic and overlapping intentions of parody, qualitative assessments would require humans, and not only ORM software systems, to interpret the context, sentiment, hidden meanings and subtlety of irony in order to establish if a parody is indeed intented for harmless fun before deciding on an appropriate response strategy. It may very well be that upon closer examination it may emerge that light-hearted, playful entertainment is purposely used to draw attention to valid and serious criticism or express love for a brand or, of more concern, rather malicious. Correspondingly, management needs to carefully establish if the reputational benefits of fighting back against a parody account will, indeed, outweigh the risks of escalating a paracrisis, given that a parodied brand is already injured. An aggressive, knee-jerk defence may portray the brand as an arrogant bully.

In addition, quantitative findings verify the following sub-themes of the qualitative theme, ‘guard against indiscriminately shutting down parody accounts’, as will be discussed in Section 6.4.3.4, namely (i) ‘litigation is costly, complicated and drawn out when refuting criticism’, (ii) ‘parody accounts are created anonymously and account holders are difficult to track down when refuting criticism’, (iii) ‘the Streisand effect illustrates that the internet does not like to be
told what to do when refuting criticism', (iv) 'refute, but when management is seen as a bully, sentiment sides with the parodist as the underdog', and, (v) 'as fair comment, parody accounts should not be closed down'.

6.3.13. Association between Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing and the Intention of the parody account

Table 6.15 below reports on the findings dealing with a possible association between the variable Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing (which indicates whether or not the parodied brand’s official response to the paracrisis was to Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing), and the variable Intention of the parody account.

TABLE 6.15: Cross-tabulation of Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing with Intention of the parody account

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intention of the parody account</th>
<th>Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmless fun</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson $\chi^2 = 1.487 \ (1); p = .223$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 cell (25.0%) has an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.76.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express love for a brand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson $\chi^2 = .000 \ (1); p = 1.00$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 cell (25.0%) has an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .58.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maliciously damage a brand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson $\chi^2 = .274 \ (1); p = .601$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 cell (25.0%) has an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .97.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clever use of satire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson $\chi^2 = .316 \ (1); p = .574$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 cell (25.0%) has an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.20.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice people’s unhappiness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson $\chi^2 = .007 \ (1); p = .935$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 cell (25.0%) has an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.40.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand change in behaviour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson $\chi^2 = .626 \ (1); p = .429$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 cell (25.0%) has an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.62.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attract attention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson $\chi^2 = .067 \ (1); p = .796$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 cell (25.0%) has an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.85.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6.15 above indicates that for all 12 variables representing the Intention of the parody account, there was no statistically significant association between the Intention of the parody account and Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing as a paracrisis response strategy (because in all of the cases the probability ($p$) was larger than 0.05). An inspection of the frequencies in the table reveals the following with regard to each of the Intention variables:

**Harmless fun**: A very small percentage of respondents (namely 3 out of 81, which equals 3.70%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended for Harmless fun, the official response was to Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing.

**Express love for a brand**: A small percentage of respondents (namely 1 out of 9, which equals 11.11%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Expresses love for a brand, the official response was to Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing.

**Maliciously damage a brand**: None of the respondents (namely 0 out of 15) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Maliciously damage a brand, the official response was to Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing.

**Clever use of satire**: A very small percentage of respondents (namely 1 out of 34, which equals 2.94%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Cleverly use satire, the official response was to Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing.
Voice people’s unhappiness: A very small percentage of respondents (namely 3 out of 37, which equals 8.11%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Voice people’s unhappiness, the official response was to Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing.

Demand change in behaviour: A small percentage of respondents (namely 3 out of 25, which equals 12.00%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Demand a change in behaviour, the official response was to Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing.

Attract attention: A very small percentage of respondents (namely 3 out of 44, which equals 4.55%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Attract attention, the official response was to Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing.

Attract followers: A very small percentage of respondents (namely 1 out of 33, which equals 3.03%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Attract followers, the official response was to Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing.

Hijack the brand’s strategic message: A small percentage of respondents (namely 3 out of 19, which equals 15.79%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Hijack the brand’s strategic message, the official response was to Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing.

Expose wrongdoing: A small percentage of respondents (namely 3 out of 31, which equals 9.68%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Expose wrongdoing, the official response was to Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing.

Harm the brand and its stakeholders: None of the respondents (namely 0 out of 12) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Harm the brand and its stakeholders, the official response was to Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing.

Not sure: None of the respondents (namely 0 out of 6) indicated that if they were Not sure of the intention of the parody account, the official response was to Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing.

6.3.14. Association between Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing and the Intention of the parody account

Table 6.16 below reports on the findings dealing with a possible association between the variable Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing (which indicates whether or not the parodied brand’s official response to the paracrisis was to Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing), and the variable Intention of the parody account.
### TABLE 6.16: Cross-tabulation of Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing as a paracrisis response with Intention of the parody account

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intention of the parody account</th>
<th>Explicitly admit wrongdoing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmless fun*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Pearson $\chi^2 = 3.537 \ (1); p = .060$

1 cell (25.0%) has an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.80.

|                                 |     |     |
| Express love for a brand        |     |     |
| No                              | 8   | 125 | 133  |
| Yes                             | 1   | 8   | 9    |

Pearson $\chi^2 = .000 \ (1); p = 1.00$

1 cell (25.0%) has an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .57

|                                 |     |     |
| Maliciously damage a brand      |     |     |
| No                              | 9   | 118 | 127  |
| Yes                             | 0   | 15  | 15   |

Pearson $\chi^2 = .255 \ (1); p = .614$

1 cell (25.0%) has an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .95

|                                 |     |     |
| Clever use of satire            |     |     |
| No                              | 9   | 99  | 108  |
| Yes                             | 0   | 34  | 34   |

Pearson $\chi^2 = 1.784 \ (1); p = .182$

1 cell (25.0%) has an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.15

|                                 |     |     |
| Voice people’s unhappiness      |     |     |
| No                              | 5   | 99  | 104  |
| Yes                             | 4   | 34  | 38   |

Pearson $\chi^2 = .721 \ (1); p = .396$

1 cell (25.0%) has an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.41

|                                 |     |     |
| Demand change in behaviour      |     |     |
| No                              | 8   | 109 | 117  |
| Yes                             | 1   | 24  | 25   |

Pearson $\chi^2 = .006 \ (1); p = .939$

1 cell (25.0%) has an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.58.

|                                 |     |     |
| Attract attention               |     |     |
| No                              | 5   | 92  | 97   |
| Yes                             | 4   | 41  | 45   |

Pearson $\chi^2 = .230 \ (1); p = .632$

1 cell (25.0%) has an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.85.

|                                 |     |     |
| Attract followers               |     |     |
| No                              | 7   | 101 | 108  |
| Yes                             | 2   | 32  | 34   |

Pearson $\chi^2 = .000 \ (1); p = 1.00$

1 cell (25.0%) has an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.15.

|                                 |     |     |
| Hijack the brand’s strategic message |     |     |
| No                              | 7   | 116 | 123  |
| Yes                             | 2   | 17  | 19   |

Pearson $\chi^2 = .090 \ (1); p = .765$

1 cell (25.0%) has an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.20.

|                                 |     |     |
| Expose wrongdoing               |     |     |
| No                              | 6   | 103 | 109  |
| Yes                             | 3   | 29  | 32   |

Pearson $\chi^2 = .142 \ (1); p = .707$

1 cell (25.0%) has an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.04.

|                                 |     |     |
| Harm the brand and its stakeholders |     |     |
| No                               | 9   | 121 | 130  |
| Yes                              | 0   | 12  | 12   |

1 cell (25.0%) has an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.5.
Table 6.16 above shows that except for Harmless fun, the remainder of the 12 variables representing the Intention of the parody account, there was no statistically significant association between the Intention of the parody account and Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing as a paracrisis response strategy (because in 11 of the 12 of the cases the probability \( p \) was larger than 0.05). An inspection of the frequencies in the table reveals the following with regard to each of the Intention variables:

**Harmless fun**: A very small percentage (namely 2 out of 82, which equals 2.44%) indicated that if the parody account was Intended for Harmless fun, the official response had been to Explicitly admit wrongdoing. The significant \( \chi^2 \) indicates that a significant association exists between the variable indicating that the parody is intended for Harmless fun and the Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing response variable. This association can be interpreted as meaning that the more a parody account is perceived as being intended for harmless fun, the less suitable is Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing as a paracrisis response strategy.

**Express love for a brand**: A very small percentage of respondents (namely 1 out of 9, which equals 11.11%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Expresses love for a brand, the official response was to Explicitly admit wrongdoing.

**Maliciously damage a brand**: None of the respondents (namely 0 out of 15) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Maliciously damage a brand, the official response was to Explicitly admit wrongdoing.

**Clever use of satire**: None of respondents (namely 0 out of 34) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Cleverly use satire, the official response was to Explicitly admit wrongdoing.

**Voice people’s unhappiness**: A small percentage of respondents (namely 4 out of 38, which equals 10.53%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Voice people’s unhappiness, the official response was to Explicitly admit wrongdoing.

**Demand change in behaviour**: A very small percentage of respondents (namely 1 out of 25, which equals 4.00%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Demand a change in behaviour, the official response was to Explicitly admit wrongdoing.

**Attract attention**: A small percentage of respondents (namely 4 out of 45, which equals 8.89%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Attract attention, the official response was to Explicitly admit wrongdoing.
**Attract followers:** A small percentage of respondents (namely 2 out of 34, which equals 5.88%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Attract followers, the official response was to Explicitly admit wrongdoing.

**Hijack the brand’s strategic message:** A small percentage of respondents (namely 2 out of 19, which equals 10.53%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Hijack the brand’s strategic message, the official response was to Explicitly admit wrongdoing.

**Expose wrongdoing:** A small percentage of respondents (namely 3 out of 32, which equals 9.38%) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Expose wrongdoing, the official response was to Explicitly admit wrongdoing.

**Harm the brand and its stakeholders:** None of the respondents (namely 0 out of 12) indicated that if the parody account had been Intended to Harm the brand and its stakeholders, the official response was to Explicitly admit wrongdoing.

**Not sure:** None of the respondents (namely 0 out of 6) indicated that if they were Not sure of the intention of the parody account, the official response was to Explicitly admit wrongdoing.

**6.3.14.1. Conclusion about the significant association between Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing and a parody account intended for Harmless fun**

There is a significant difference in the extent to which the participants agreed on whether a parody account is intended for Harmless Fun. Findings indicate that Explicitly Admit Wrongdoing is not an appropriate paracrisis response strategy for light-hearted, playful spoofs inteneded for harmless fun.

To conclude, findings of the cross tabulation analysis confirm the supporting literature and qualitative data that will be discussed later in this chapter as interpreted in the theme, ‘establish the intent of a parody’ in Section 6.4.2.5, the theme, ‘recognise parody that compliments reputation’ in Section 6.4.2.16 and the theme, ‘clever parody is the voice of the people’ in Section 6.4.2.4. Similar findings were interpreted in the conclusions for the cross-tabulation, already discussed in Section 6.3.12.1 above.

As already established, light-hearted, playful spoofs intended for harmless fun should not be refuted, as the cross tabulation findings of Section 6.3.12 above indicated. As this section indicates, Explicitly admitting wrongdoing is also not a suitable paracrisis response for parody accounts intended for harmless fun. Interestingly, none of the other paracrisis response strategies, namely, Ignore and Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing were significant for parody accounts intended for harmless fun.
Correspondingly, findings extend on the conclusions reported for the cross-tabulation in Section 6.3.12.1 above and additionally suggest the confirmation of the literature and findings of the qualitative theme that will be discussed later in this chapter, namely ‘respond by co-creating content’ concluded in Section 6.4.3.8. More specifically, the following sub-themes seem to be relevant, namely (i) ‘humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter by taking it on the chin and playing along’, (ii) ‘humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter by reciprocating with love and humour’, and, (iii) ‘humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter by using parody to respond to parodies’.

Once again, findings confirm the recommendation made in this study, namely that Coombs and Holladay’s (2012:412) existing classification is updated with a new paracrisis response strategy, to be named, ‘humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter’. Although Coombs (2014:8) admits that the most suitable response to a paracrisis that ridicules a brand is a sense of humour, such a response is overlooked in to Coombs and Holladay’s (2012:412) classification of paracrisis responses.

To elaborate on the additional paracrisis response strategy recommended by this study, when a brand is targeted by a light-hearted, playful spoof intended for harmless fun, a suitable paracrisis response would be humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter with the parody account. Such a response strategy is entertaining while co-creating and co-managing sentiment, reach, authenticity, visibility, relevance and influence that is mutually beneficial. When relinquishing some measure of control by playing along, brand resonance is amplified as bantering demonstrates a mature brand personality that can take it on the chin and has a sense of humour. Moreover, playful spoofs often express love for a prominent brand and therefore, humorous bantering reciprocates affection and care as investments in reputational halos so that loyal brand advocates, including parodists, may defend a brand when experiencing a full-blown crisis. Correspondingly, when meaning-making is co-created outside corporate boundaries, reputational resilience is more likely. Owing to the resonance of humour in storytelling, social media management teams may also consider branded content or organic satiric parody in their paracrisis responses.

6.4. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Findings for this section pertain to research sub-objective 3: To qualitatively explore the perceptions of social media management teams regarding paracrisis response strategies that are intended to maintain emotionally resonant reputations when brands are targeted by user-generated parody accounts.
By grouping together related themes, three overarching categories emerged from the data, namely, (i) maintain a responsive social media governance framework, (ii) determine how parody accounts express reputational concerns, and (iii) responses to co-manage reputation. In total, 22 themes emerged from the data, which equalled 1 780 cases. In addition, minimal quantitative data are also included to verify qualitative themes where applicable.

6.4.1. Category and supporting themes: Maintain a responsive social media governance framework

Maintain a responsive social media governance framework is the first of three qualitative categories. This category emerged from a cluster of seven relevant themes. Social media governance comprises socially sensitive formal or informal frameworks to safeguard ethical, legal and reputation management standards (Zerfass, Fink & Linke, 2011:3,302) to guide responses to reputational issues arising from social media management (Whalen & Krishna, 2013b:68). Clearly, reputational damage results when social media governance frameworks do not proactively identify and adequately address issues that may pose a threat to stakeholder perceptions (Pitts & Aylott, 2012:253) in order to lower risk and protect a brand from potentially harmful practises (Ernst & Young, 2012:9).

Overall, the validity of this category was confirmed in quantitative data (Q9): Have social media governance processes in place. Of the 138 respondents, the vast majority of 124 (89.86%) said Yes, only 2 (1.45%) said No, while 9 (6.52%) were Not sure.

In summary, the category, maintain a responsive social media governance framework, describes the pro-active measures that need to be in place to pro-actively mitigate the risks surrounding the occurrence of and responses to user-generated parody accounts. Themes pertaining to the category, maintain a responsive social media governance framework, are further defined and analysed in Table 6.17 below as they pertain to the findings. To reiterate, 22 themes emerged from the data which equalled 1 780 cases in total.

**TABLE 6.17: Themes, definitions and frequencies for the category: Maintain a responsive social media governance framework**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category: Maintain a responsive social media governance framework</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Frequency of cases</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monitor and analyse conversations</td>
<td>A requirement of good social media governance, ORM systems continuously track conversations to analyse the reputational risk of a parody account in time. Suitable metrics provide real-time strategic insights that require strategic integration in the converged media space to maintain strategic flexibility. A lack of integrated ORM may trigger parody accounts.</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>5.22%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingency planning for parody accounts</td>
<td>The extent to which social media governance frameworks contain contingency planning to mitigate the risks associated with parody accounts. The ability to maintain emotionally resonant brand reputations involves tactical and strategic contingency planning. Highly vulnerable brands rely on pronounced contingency strategies.</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>3.60%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional social media management skills</td>
<td>Suitable appointments and the professionalism of social media managers who are skilled in social media technologies are overseen by social media governance frameworks. When the strategic value of social media management is appreciated, social media managers uphold a resonant reputation by being accountable, accurate, consistent, and culturally sensitive as the voice of a brand personality.</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>3.43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated social teams</td>
<td>Social media governance frameworks aim to protect consistency between messages and actual stakeholder experiences. Therefore, vertical and horizontal strategic integration is necessary between internal social media management team functions, business operations and outsourced agencies. Disjuncture leaves brands vulnerable to parody accounts that harm reputation.</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3.15%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolve complaints, rants and trolls</td>
<td>Social media governance frameworks mitigate paracrises by resolving valid complaints. Likewise, hating, flaming, ranting and trolling require community guidelines. Should valid complaints be ignored, they may trigger parody accounts and related paracrises.</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.02%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic content strategies in place</td>
<td>A pro-active, strategic approach to content, safeguarded by social media governance, is the primary mitigation against the risk of encountering parody accounts and related paracrises. Authentic content strategies seek to engage, rather than haphazardly imposing one-way corporate communication tactics that aim to control social media conversations.</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.91%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies, guidelines and formal agreements</td>
<td>Responsive social media governance frameworks mitigate the risks of parody accounts and related paracrises. Concerns include data security, while also ensuring access to passwords for social media managers. Social media playbooks contain corporate and brand identity guidelines to uphold intellectual property applications. Moreover, social media playbooks set standards for best practise in social media management. Contracts and service level agreements between outsourced partnerships further mitigate the workflow and accountability risks facing integrated social media management teams.</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1.57%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>372</td>
<td>20.90%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The discussion that follows further elaborates on the findings reported in Table 6.17 above. Themes are interpreted following a thematic analysis of seven related themes, clustered around the category, maintain a responsive social media governance framework. Structured
in a descending order of frequencies, the subsequent section will discuss and interpret the findings of the themes.

### 6.4.1.1. Interpretation and discussion the theme: Monitor and analyse conversations

The theme, monitor and analyse conversations, was one of seven themes related to the category, maintain a responsive social media governance framework. In total, monitor and analyse conversations, was expressed the most frequently in this category, namely in 93 cases (5.22%).

**ORM detect early warning triggers of parody accounts:** The constantly updated and therefore short news cycle of social media increases the likelihood that a parody account could go unnoticed and cause reputational damage. Therefore, most of the participants agreed that they have ORM systems in place in order to continuously monitor conversations and identify a parody account as soon as it appears in order to respond appropriately. Participant 11 observed:

> “You know, it all starts with monitoring your environment... when these parody accounts pop up, and when you’ve basically targeted keywords, hashtags, whatever it is on your ORM triggers, they know about it straight away and then that company can react.”

Findings pertaining to this section of the study concur with available literature. Continuous monitoring enables the quick identification of parodies to formulate timely responses (EURIB, 2009:1; Petty, 2012:759; Poston, 2012:9; Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam & Hove, 2011:5). Early warning signs establish when a brand story is beginning to trigger parodies (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:61). Conversely, ineffective social media governance processes that neglect standards and processes for effective ORM, may cause reputational injuries if threats go unnoticed (Ernst & Young, 2012:14), especially considering the fast speed at which information is shared on social networks (Pitts & Aylott, 2012:253).

**The value of social media metrics to analyse the extent of the potential reputational risk of a parody account:** Nearly all participants agreed that a careful analysis of ORM metrics establishes the extent of the potential reputational threat of a parody account. Moreover, metrics enable a case-by-case analysis of the underlying issues and recurring themes raised by the parody account and its supporting community. Metrics are then interpreted, as the potential reputational risk of each parody is different and therefore requires a different response. A few participants explained the value of metrics such as mentions, sentiment, advocacy, impressions, reach, engagement, conversations, influence and resonance are continuously monitored and analysed to ascertain the level of reputational risk of a parody account. Participant Three articulated:
“Is it generating a big level of discussion? Are people saying what does BP have to say about this? If that is happening a lot... If a journalist retweets it and asks for a comment, then yes you do have to [respond]. And you see immediately a lot of people are talking about it. You need to be concerned.”

These findings are verified in quantitative data (Q9): Continuously analyse social media conversations. Of the 138 respondents, the vast majority of 131 (94.93%) said Yes, only 3 (2.17%) said No, while 2 (1.45%) were Not sure.

Findings pertaining to this section of the study are in congruence with available literature. User-generated parody is a risk which needs to be assessed and managed (Macnamara & Sakinofsky, 2012:8). Therefore, continuous monitoring, analytics, measurement and reporting are key requirements of social governance frameworks to mitigate reputation risk (Hootsuite & Nexgate, 2013:3; Owyang, 2012; Owyang et al, 2011:14). In so doing, social media management teams gain valuable insights (Ernst & Young, 2012:9,15) in order to implement the most effective ORM strategies (Jones, Temperley & Lima, 2009:929). When analysing metrics such as resonance (Solis & Webber, 2012:10), mentions, influence, sentiment, influence (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:61) and engagement (Sabri & Michel, 2014:243) the frequency, intensity and extent of reputational risk of a parody is established.

A lack of integrated ORM in the converged media space as a trigger of parody accounts: A significant number of participants criticized ORM systems for not being fully functional. Management reports are often not forthcoming owing to the lack of value placed on metrics and analytics, as intelligence gathered from metrics and analytics lacked strategic integration with traditional media campaign evaluation. Of concern is the assumption that traditional media measurements of reputation such as “beautiful” advertising, “nice pictures, and the cute headlines” exclude the two-way conversational principles of social media. In the process, traditional media campaigns are sometimes imposed on social media management without considering the unique principles of social media. Consequently, a campaign that may have been regarded as effective in traditional media when assuming “well, we are a cool brand - they’ll love us”, is then met with criticism by parody accounts when imposed on social networks. Participant 14 noted:

“Brands now are learning that slowly because they have been bitten because of social parody accounts...just because you have a high reputation or brand affinity in the traditional space, does not mean automatically in the social space that you’ll have that...”

A few participants recommended that reports to management need to integrate all types of owned, paid and earned media to overcome the disjuncture between channels, as “there is no longer the separation between traditional and social”.
Findings pertaining to this section of the study confirm available literature. The converged media space (Castells, 2007; Jenkins, 2004, 2006) requires consistent and synthesised reputation management and governance strategies across paid, owned and earned media channels (Corcoran, 2009, Lieb et al, 2012:5; Soat, 2012:6; Stephen & Galak, 2012:624). Accordingly, an integrated communication paradigm (Schultz & Kitchen, 2004:353) is called for to overcome traditional silos for fully integrated and cohesive strategies, as confirmed in a study by Altimeter (Terpening, Li & Akhtar, 2015:4). Therefore, integrated and sophisticated ORM systems are necessary (Armelini, & Villanueva, 2011:33; Duty, 2011). However, several studies confirm that the strategic integration of social media is still in its infancy (Killian & McManus, 2015:10; World Wide Worx & Fuseware, 2013) as metrics such as impact and value for return on investment in social media management spent is not evident (Lawton Communications Group, 2013,ii). As social media disrupts one-to-many traditional communication models, these are replaced by antagonistic many-to-many models (Nitins & Burgess, 2014:293). Therefore, the governing principles of social media need to be understood or else brands are criticized for being intrusive and unwelcome (Fournier & Avery, 2011:25).

**The strategic value of insights gained from parody accounts:** Many participants maintained that value is a key metric to reflect on the reputational impact of parody accounts which provide insights regarding the effectiveness of not only social media management, but all owned, earned and paid media. As such, “you can learn an enormous amount from parody accounts in terms of how your brand is perceived”, which is valuable for continuously-evolving, flexible strategies. Of significant strategic value is “if people are engaging more with our parody account than with us... let's see what the parody account is getting right.”

Upon probing to establish how prominently parody accounts feature as a dedicated section in management reports, a small number of participants argued that they “didn't form part of our reporting because in the general volume analysis and sentiment analysis it is just like a drop of water in the ocean”. However, considering their frequent occurrence overseas, one participant recommended that the insights gained from parody accounts are included in trend reports for strategic decision-making.

Findings pertaining to this section of the study confirm available literature. The occurrence of social media parodies is an emerging trend in South Africa (Superbalist, 2015; Trendwatching, 2015) and already an established trend in developed countries (Kung, 2015; Trend Hunter, 2015), hence the current cultural zeitgeist is best described as the age of parody (Fournier & Avery, 2011:24; Funnell, 2015). Parodies provide valuable strategic insights to address gaps between image and reality (Berthon & Pitt, 2012:96; Earle, 2002:12). Of specific value of
integrated ORM (Armelini, & Villanueva, 2011:33; Duty, 2011), is the strategic insights gained from trends and issues (MGI, 2012:3,8; Murtland, 2010:15), especially from metrics such as resonance (Act-On, 2013:1; Solis & Webber, 2012:10). Insights then determine the re-evaluation and alignment of strategies (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:59) as confirmed in a study by Killian and McManus (2015:8). Accordingly, strategic flexibility is synonymous with integrated communication (Schultz & Kitchen, 2004:353-364).

6.4.1.2. Conclusion of the interpretation of the theme: Monitor and analyse conversations

In conclusion, findings suggest that sophisticated and integrated ORM standards need to be outlined in social media government frameworks to mitigate the reputational risk of user-generated parody accounts. A concern is that some managers still do not see the strategic value, and therefore the return on investment in social media management expenditure. Such environments rely on unsophisticated metrics and analytics, largely operate in silos, lack integrated ORM and consequently impose one-way, traditional media paradigms on social media. As such, a brand that resonates when using traditional media channels, does not necessarily also enjoy the same affinity or reputation in social media communities. When making this assumption, such unwelcome brands are therefore ill-prepared for the risks inherent in social media, especially criticism by social media communities whose dialogic principles are easily disregarded. Typically, such intrusiveness cultivates anger that may fuel parody accounts. On the contrary, when sophisticated and integrated ORM triggers are functional, management gain valuable insights in the converged media space.

When metrics such as mentions are constantly monitored, early warning signs are detected as soon as a parody appears in the constantly refreshing and short social media news cycle. Moreover, metrics such as sentiment, advocacy, impressions, reach, engagement, conversations and influence are analysed to ascertain the level of reputational risk of a parody account. Only then can a suitable response strategy be devised, as the reputational risk of every parody account is different. Notwithstanding the response strategy chosen, parody accounts provide valuable management insights as regards perceived gaps between the brand promise and consumers’ perceptions. Of specific value is resonance as an ORM metric for analysing a parody account. This may help to establish why the copycat has higher resonance because it is more engaging and influential compared to the brand’s official social media account. Therefore, insights are valuable for learning, adjusting and staying strategically flexible in the converged media space. In conclusion, as social media parody is an emerging trend in South Africa, management reports may increasingly benefit from insights gained from parody accounts.
6.4.1.3. Interpretation and discussion of the theme: Contingency planning for parody accounts

The theme, contingency planning for parody accounts, was one of seven themes related to the category, maintain a responsive social media governance framework. In total, contingency planning for parody accounts, was expressed the second most frequently in this category, namely in 64 cases (3.60%).

Scenario planning for anger, hating, complaints and social media backlashes: For many participants, worst-case scenario planning for parody accounts is no different from mitigating related risks where severe criticism may be encountered. Participant 12 explained:

“And a lot of the times brands come in with a very naïve view that customers will treat them how they treat their friends on social media. You know, they think: ‘Ah, it is just such a bright, sunny world of social, like fun’. And then they get in there and they’re not prepared for the backlash, for the angry customers, for the parody accounts. They don’t realise the risk and the nasty side of social, especially for brands.”

Crisis communication contingency planning: In the converged media space “when there is a problem or a crisis in social media, journalists are actually monitoring there and it forms the stories in the traditional space”. Most participants were of the opinion that the organic, conversational and unpredictable nature of social media may unexpectedly escalate both the satiric comments of the parody account, as well as the official responses into a crisis. As Participant 17 explained:

“A parody account is not…it will become a crisis if you handle it badly, but you can’t use that same crisis management tool. It’s not yet a crisis; if you handle it correctly it won’t become one.”

Similarly, Participant One explained the importance of pro-active risk mitigation, although a parody account is not at the level of a legitimate crisis:

“It is important that a process is put into place before they encounter a parody account. We have a process here. We know exactly how to deal with them. We communicate that with our clients when we take on the business. Effectively, it is crisis comms for online but not quite at the level of a legitimate crisis. Knowing what to do or how to react in the event of a parody account.”

This sentiment is verified in quantitative data (Q9): Have contingency plans in place that address a possible future scenario where a parody account may have to be dealt with. Of the 138 respondents, the vast majority of 128 (92.75%) said Yes, only 6 (4.35%) said No, while 1 (0.72%) was Not sure.
Response policies and strategies: Due to the transparent principle of social media where “the internet will find you and they'll find a way to expose what you’re telling not to be true”, a “firm response policy” needs to be in place as part of contingency planning.

High risk environments necessitate contingency plans for parody scenarios: Brands that are more vulnerable, are those that have a history of being targeted by parodies, prominent brands, playful or humorous communication campaigns, brands that frequently experience social media backlashes and service orientated brands. Prominent public figures, especially politicians, require risk-profiling and need to accept that being parodied is “a non-negotiable – it’s going to happen and they need to be prepared for it”. Typically, tactical contingency planning would include proactive messaging and the adequate availability of searchable information online to dispel rumours and clarify facts. The higher the risk of anger, hating, complaints and social media backlashes, such as the announcement of price increases, the more pronounced the contingency planning for a parody account scenario. Upon probing, most participants stated that parody scenarios are not singled out in their protocols, strategies, policies or service level agreements with partners. Participant Two explained:

“Social is too malleable for you to have every possible scenario. Parody accounts is such a small possibility that something could occur. We would be more worried about hate generated towards the brand, or, you know, defamation about the brand. Parody accounts would fit only within the third or fourth level of things to worry about.”

Protecting brand identities from social media cyber-squatting by parody accounts in contingency plans: The proactive opening of dormant social media accounts in order to reserve accounts and handles for official use is recommended. To do this, social media accounts are registered by using all the possible ways that a brand name could be spelt, especially ironic versions of brand names or phrases typically used by parody accounts. Participant 11 elaborated:

“Claim those handles, basically, put them to bed. Don’t let people pick them up. Let them rather have to build on something that is not directly associated with your name. Break that association.”

In addition, a brand’s social media account needs to be verified with a social network as being the official account.

Findings pertaining to this section of the study substantiate available literature. Visibility is a key requirement for resonant reputations (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:188). Yet, visible, prominent, emotionally appealing (Berthon & Pitt, 2012:91,94,96) brands, especially prominent public figures (Thelwell, 2014) and politicians (Bal et al, 2009:231), are highest at the risk of being parodied (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:63). At risk too, are humorous
campaigns (Nicolson, 2012a; Sitole, 2011) and brands frequently criticized in social media backlashes (Thelwell, 2014). Also at risk of being parodied are service oriented brands with frequent customer complaints (Killian & McManus, 2015:9), considering the larger the customer base, the higher the risk of encountering customer complaints and criticism (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19-25).

A user-generated parody is regarded a paracrisis which resembles a full-blown crisis, considering how social media’s unpredictably and public scrutiny of official responses (Aon, 2015:3) may escalate a paracrisis, especially if responding inappropriately (Coombs & Holladay, 2012:408,410). Aggravating the reputational risk of social media management, are frequent viral social media backlashes (Sevasti Fairweather, 2015; Whitlock, 2015), which then gain credibility when receiving publicity in traditional media, as confirmed in a study by Wan, Koh, Ong and Pang (2015:384). As confirmed by related studies, the high prevalence of hating (Lange, 2007:3, 2014:53; McCosker, 2014:201), ranting (Vrooman, 2002:54) and complaints (TNS, 2013) easily escalate into a reputational crisis.

The mitigation of risks is the dynamic outcome of all stakeholder conversations so that social media governance and reputation are co-created in transparent networks (Ernst & Young, 2012:8; Hatch & Schultz, 2010:603). As such, social media governance frameworks include escalation protocols (Killian & McManus, 2015:9; Stokes, 2011:217) and mitigation against brand hijacking (Hesseldahl, 2007; Milne, 2013:210; Miltenberg, 2013; Ramsey, 2010; Williams, 2015; Zerfass, Fink & Linke, 2011:6) including social media cyber-squatting (KMPG, 2011:2; Mitchell, 2009:23), also known as username-jacking (Malachowski, 2010:227), and the verification of official accounts (Facebook, 2014b; Twitter,2013a; YouTube, 2014a; 2014b).

Although scenario planning prepares for anticipated futures (Fahey, 2003:7), the participatory and unpredictable principles of social media necessitate strategic reputation management, instead of traditional top-down reputation management (Aula, 2010:46). Response policies stipulated in responsive social media governance frameworks (Pitts & Aylott, 2012:260) and strategies therefore need to emphasise honesty, owing to the transparency principle of social media, otherwise the risk of being parodied is increased (Gaines-Ross, 2010:72; Malachowski, 2010:228; Malone, 2012:309). As a result, user-generated parodies are indicative of the inability to control the risks inherent in social media management (Jeppesen & Pettersson, 2010:81; Nitins & Burgess, 2014:295).
6.4.1.4. Conclusion of the interpretation of the theme: Contingency planning for parody accounts

In conclusion, findings indicate that the unpredictable, organic nature of social media is a high risk environment which is challenging for scenario planning. Owing to the high levels of related paracrisises such as hating, flaming, ranting, complaints and viral social media backlashes, parody accounts are usually treated as another form of criticism and not singled out for scenario planning. Yet, some brands are at a higher risk of being parodied and therefore require more detailed risk profiling. Notably, highly visible brands with emotionally appealing reputations are the most at risk and so too are prominent, service oriented brands that encounter frequent customer complaints from their large customer base, especially when announcing price increases. Similarly, prominent public figures, brands that have a history of being criticized by parody accounts, those often encountering social media backlashes and humorous campaigns, are mostly at risk.

Findings indicate that crisis communication planning principles are suitable for contingency planning, considering that a parody account is a paracrisis that may easily escalate into a full-blown crisis if not mitigated appropriately. Typically, a parody account gains credibility when receiving publicity in traditional media in the converged media space. However, scenario planning for parody accounts remain problematic, as scenarios are highly organic and management has no control over the effectiveness of their responses or mitigation measures owing to the transparent, highly critical and public scrutiny of a paracrisis. Therefore, strategic reputation management is a suitable paradigm which recognises the reputational risks inherent in social media. Instead of attempting to control and abiding to predetermined plans, strategic reputation management values brand reputation that is co-created and essentially socially constructed in order to maintain emotionally resonant brand reputations. Nevertheless, risks need to be identified in responsive social media governance frameworks. These include escalation protocols, safeguarding against social media cyber-squatting and the verification of the brand’s official social media accounts to decrease the vulnerabilities of being targeted by a parody account.

6.4.1.5. Interpretation and discussion of the theme: Professional social media management skills

The theme, professional social media management skills, was one of seven themes related to the category, maintain a responsive social media governance framework. In total, professional social media management skills, was expressed the third most frequently in this category, namely in 61 cases (3.43%).
Most participants agreed that the appointment of skilled social media managers “to eliminate risk is obviously in the people who are obviously going to be handling it”. Based on participants’ statements, Table 6.18 below summarises professional social media management practises and reputation management concerns.

**TABLE 6.18: Summary of participants’ recommendations for investing in professional social media management practises and reputation management concerns**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional social media management practises</th>
<th>Reputation management concerns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate skills sets</td>
<td>● Public relations practitioners appointed as social media managers often lack the necessary education, training and skills, which results in inappropriate social media management. Consequently, reputation is harmed when parody accounts and related social media backlashes criticize community managers’ indiscretions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Prioritise the strategic value of social media and community management | ● A disregard for the strategic value of social media, results in the inappropriate appointment of unsupervised interns, personal assistants or anyone else that is willing or frequently uses social media.  
● “It’s people that say: ‘We need to be in social, why? Because our competitors are there. Okay. Hey, you’re the PA, you’ve got some time. Go.’ Or even the intern. Or: ‘You’re the whatever, but don’t you have a blog? Okay, can’t you do social for us?’: ‘Ja, sure’” (Participant Nine).  
● Community managers are often undervalued as junior operational level executers of higher level strategies. Consequently, community managers are poorly remunerated, especially considering the key customer-facing role they play in managing reputation on a day-to-day basis. |
| Prioritise social media governance | ● “The reputation and governance around the people that are responsible for speaking to your community and your customers... It gets neglected more often than it gets attention” (Participant Nine).  
● Adhering to response protocols and social media management guidelines. |
| Discretion and socio-cultural sensitivity | ● Be sensitive towards others before posting content. Demonstrate empathy and diplomacy as “your response to a parody account could become a bigger talking point than the parody account itself”. |
| An appropriate tone of voice | ● Understanding how the brand personality supports the brand purpose and values, so as not to engage in an offensive or inappropriate tone.  
● “The people who are on your social media accounts, must know your brand inside and out. Must know what your brand stands for, must know what your brand would and would not say, how they speak, what they would and wouldn’t respond to” (Participant 12). |
| Anticipating the organic, peer-to-peer participatory principles of social media | ● Management practises that acknowledge the risks inherent in social media which “is exciting, it’s organic, it’s dangerous, you can’t control it.”  
● Social media backlashes arise against deleting embarrassing posts and then being defensive when communities confront the community manager with screen grabs of deleted content.  
● Public relations’ preference for one-way, top-down press releases needs to be adapted to the participatory nature of social media because “PR agencies don’t understand that”. |
| Maintaining a responsible personal online reputation or digital footprint | ● Since the community manager’s image is intricately identified with the official accounts being managed, these individuals need to ensure that their personal conduct on social media remains professional and in support of the brand values. |
The findings in Table 6.18 above were validated in quantitative data (Q9): Professional social media management skills. Of the 138 respondents, the vast majority of 128 (92.75%) said Yes, a mere 3 (2.17%) said No, while 6 (4.35%) were Not sure.

Findings pertaining to this section of the study are in congruence with available literature. While corporate communication is regarded as the custodians of reputation management (CIPR:2013; Cornelissen, 2011:5; De Jong, 2011:1; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:xxvii, Foreman & Argenti, 2005:254), professionalism in the public relations industry is continuously challenged by an unflattering reputation (De Bussy & Wolf, 2009:45; Greenberg, Knight & Westersund, 2011:67; L’Etang, 2014; Merkelsen, 2011:132). Therefore, specialised community management education, training and skills are required both globally (Lieb, Silva & Tran, 2013:4) and in South Africa (Global Alliance, 2014:4,42). A related concern of reputation management recommended by related studies locally, is the need to prioritise the strategic value of community management (Global Alliance, 2014:42; World Wide Worx & Fuseware, 2013:2). These concerns seem to be attributed to the under-appreciation of community management (Owyang, 2012).

Correspondingly, intrusive brands are prone to being parodied if community managers do not adhere to the governing principles of social media (Fournier & Avery, 2011) and maintain a professional digital footprint (Ayling, 2012:505; Kane, 2012:7). As such, emotionally resonant reputations require consistency between values and messages (Fombrun & Van Riel: 2004:218). For this reason, a social media playbook outlines an appropriate tone and brand voice is coherent with the brand’s personality (Hipwell & Reeves, 2013:66; Killian & McManus, 2015:10) and brand values (Hanna, 2009:26). Of specific concern is social media backlashes against the deletion of embarrassing social media management content, as illustrated in the Streisand effect (Cacciottolo, 2012; Jansen & Martin, 2015:656; Louw, 2013:8,24; Masnick, 2015; Parkinson, 2014; Zamani, Kasimati & Giaglis, 2012:442). Accordingly, social media management indiscretions and public relations’ failure to acknowledge the reputational repercussions of social media’s organic, peer-to-peer participatory nature, are targeted by parody accounts and related social media backlashes (Beschizza, 2013; Nitins & Burgess, 2014:294; Stelter, 2013; Taylor, 2013).

Community managers’ blunders on Twitter are prone to being parodied, as confirmed in a study by Wan, Koh, Ong and Pang (2015:383). More specifically, on Twitter, PR gaffes are frequently pointed out and scrutinised (Nitins & Burgess, 2014:295). Likewise, the unfortunate reputation of the public relations profession is satirised by using the initials ‘PR’ in parody
accounts’ Twitter handles (BPGlobalPR, 2010; CatsarsePR, 2013; Coffee, 2015; Ragan Communications, 2012; ShellGlobalPR, 2013; BPGlobalPR, 2010).


6.4.1.6. Conclusion of the interpretation of the theme: Professional social media management skills

In conclusion, findings propose that parody accounts are more likely to target brands that underappreciate the strategic value of social media management and community management, which is largely a public relations function. Correspondingly, reputational risks include the appointment of inadequately skilled community managers such as interns and personal assistants, exacerbated by the regrettable reputation of the public relations profession. Community management blunders and failure to recognise the reputational repercussions of social media’s organic, peer-to-peer, participatory principles, may then be targeted by parody accounts and related social media backlashes. Of particular concern is the deletion of embarrassing content that escalates into a paracrisis, as evident in the Streisand effect. To illustrate, the frequent use of the initials ‘PR’ in parody account handles satirise public relations blunders, especially on Twitter. As a result, reputation may lose its emotional resonance if there is disparity between brand values and brand personality. Moreover, brands that diminish the strategic value of social media management and disregard the governing principles of social media, are so-called ‘uninvited brands’ that are targeted in the age of parody (Fournier & Avery, 2011).

The multitude of social media management risks require robust social media governance frameworks to establish best practise standards and processes to continuously sensitise and
train complex social media management teams to integrate social media management strategies, community management philosophy, brand voice, brand personality, responsible messaging, crisis communication planning, social media etiquette, professionalism, professional digital footprints, ever-evolving technologies, networks and platforms in the converged media space.

6.4.1.7. Interpretation and discussion of the theme: Integrated social teams

The theme, integrated social teams, was one of seven themes related to the category, maintain a responsive social media governance framework. In total, integrated social teams was expressed the fourth most frequently in this category, namely in 56 cases (3.15%).

Inconsistent messaging owing to the complex, fragmented structures of social media management teams: Many participants shared the frustrations experienced when working in complex integrated social media management teams which involve an extensive hierarchy of functions and divergent areas of expertise. Participants mentioned that teams typically comprise community managers, public relations, brand managers, social media managers, advertising, research, media buying, customer care, call centres, legal counsel, content strategists, graphic designers, outsourced skills, cross-agency collaboration and partnerships, specialist service providers and trans-national teams for global brands. Participant 16 explained:

“Teams of 55 people, brand managers, social media managers, social media co-ordinators, junior co-ordinator, you know. It goes through seven people before that tweet is posted. Mistakes happen, things go wrong and in that environment things can go wrong. Or things can be misinterpreted... for every 25 tweets on this brand one thing could go wrong.”

Especially for the larger teams of prominent brands, consistency is not only challenged by accuracy, but also by continuity as “the guys creating the content are not the same guys who are managing the responses”, often because “strategic thinkers move on to the next project”. In the process, insights gathered during the research and strategic planning phases may easily become disconnected from tactical executions. Similarly, access to key decision-makers and the signed-off approval of content may sometimes be cumbersome. Considering that “there’s so many people, there’s so many different channels, there’s so many different platforms”, a significant challenge is accountability, consistent messaging and responses to parody accounts, as Participant One articulated:

“Say, like five people running one handle, they’ll all deal with different kinds of complaints. If there is no consistency between the five in the situation of a parody account... One has responded and will no longer respond. The other responds every time and the other just ignores. Then, what do you do?”
This sentiment is validated in quantitative data (Q9): Work together as integrated social media management teams, comprising different disciplines and management functions. Of the 138 respondents, the vast majority of 122 (88.41%) said Yes, while only 5 (3.62%) said No and 9 (6.52%) were Not sure.

Parody accounts accentuate disjuncture between social media management messaging and actual delivery: Several participants expressed the disappointment experienced when a highly efficient social media management team, backed by adequate escalation policies, are left in the lurch by inadequate operational capacity and sluggish business processes to resolve complaints. Complaints are sometimes left unattended when passed on to call centres “where it frizzles out like any other complaint”, especially where the larger teams of prominent brands are concerned. Participant 13 elaborates:

“We have an agency of crack experts that can respond in seconds and have fantastic escalation policies but in reality they’re a large fast food chain. And can they fix the problem within 12 minutes when it’s got a number of franchises around the country? The answer is no. So, there has to be consistency in both messaging and delivery.”

Weighing up the reputational advantages and disadvantages of outsourced agencies as opposed to in-house expertise: Participants were divided on their preferences for outsourcing social media management skills to agencies. One fraction of participants argued in favour of in-house social media management teams. Shortcomings of agencies, such as a detachment from day-to-day operations, leadership, culture and decision-making as they unfold, were cited as reasons for preferring in-house social media management teams. When outsourcing social media expertise, brands “put themselves at risk for this kind of attack, because agencies are working on so many brands at any given time”. As a result, the social media management priorities of an agency’s client may be neglected, owing to divided loyalties. With all these factors in mind, agencies are said to be never fully integrated into corporate communication teams and strategies. On the contrary, a distinct benefit of in-house teams is their innate comprehension of the brand personality and authenticity.

Nevertheless, another fraction of participants argued in favour of outsourcing a selection of social media management functions to complement in-house teams or, alternatively, the entire management thereof to agencies specialising in social media marketing and ORM. Considering the unique demands on reputation management when encountering parody accounts, it is advised that the distinctive expertise and insights of agencies is consulted. Those in favour of agencies argued that their objectivity enables rational decision-making.

Findings pertaining to this section of the study support available literature. Reputation that resonates with critical stakeholders require consistent corporate stories and authenticity to
narrow the gap between claims and deeds (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:163,165). However, consistency is vulnerable in the converged media space, where the creation and distribution of content occur in complex horizontal and vertical networks of functional silos, relying on a vast array of specialised disciplines and skills (Doorley & Garcia, 2006:116; Lieb et al, 2012:5,18; Lopresti, 2013:10; Pulizzi, 2012a:121; Reid, 2013:25). Increasingly, brands are outsourcing content marketing services to a vast array of partners with specialist digital skills to keep up with the supply of valuable content (Moorman, 2015:41).

A breakdown in teamwork may hamper consistency and integrated communication, as confirmed in a study by Meintjes, Niemann-Struweg and De Wet (2012:12049). Likewise, a few studies confirmed that fully integrated and cohesive strategies are often lacking, owing to fragmentation in complex teams facing rapidly evolving, multi-faceted social media platforms (Terpening, Li & Akhtar, 2015:4), cross-agency collaboration (Killian & McManus, 2015:10) and therefore diminishing trust and accountability (Global Alliance, 2014:42). A noteworthy concern is consistency between social media management storytelling and customer service (Doorley & Garcia, 2006:116), which necessitates integration between online and offline customer service structures, procedures, systems and processes (Cerebra, 2014). Correspondingly, the disruptive nature of social media has necessitated business structures and hierarchies to become more flexible, responsive and adaptive to stakeholders’ preferences and needs (FedEx & Ketchum, 2012:9). Owing to the immediacy of social media, customers expect quick answers to their complaints (Interbrand, 2012:5), however, many organisations remain somewhat sluggish and too consensus driven to effectively respond (Gaines-Ross, 2010:73; Quinn-Allan, 2012:46) to the rapidly-changing demand-driven pull-economy of the digital world (Interbrand, 2012:15). Therefore, the rapid escalation of unresolved customer complaints which may trigger social media backlash (Killian & McManus, 2015:9).

As a final prerequisite to mitigate the disjuncture in a complex network of social media teams in the converged media space, findings of this study confirm the need for social media governance measures to enhance consistent messaging such as integrated social media strategies, content strategies, editorial strategies, policies, escalation protocols, a social media council, training and awareness programmes, social asset audits and cross functional implementation (Hootsuite & Nexgate, 2013:3; Owyang, 2012; Owyang et al, 2011:14). In the process, social media governance requires a holistic, cross-divisional, interdisciplinary and co-ordinated approach to ensure consistency when protecting a brand (Ernst & Young, 2012:8). In so doing, social media governance guides a coherent brand voice in order for stakeholders to establish a trusting relationship with a brand that consistently delivers on its promises (Hipwell & Reeves, 2013:66; Stokes, 2011:132, 186), thereby protecting reputation.
(Barwise & Meehan, 2010:80; Ernst & Young, 2012:9) from risks such as parody accounts which typically arise when disparity between reality and image prevails (Berthon & Pitt, 2012:91-94).

6.4.1.8. Conclusion of the interpretation of the theme: Integrated social teams

In conclusion, findings suggest that the constant need of valuable content for ever-evolving platforms in the pull economy requires highly complex and cumbersome content marketing teams in the converged media space. Increasingly, specialised digital skills are outsourced, which further increases fragmentation, enhances the likelihood for mistakes and lowers accountability. For prominent, big brands in particular, the risks associated with complex social media management teams and customer complaints are amplified. Owing to the speed of social media, disgruntled customers expect rapid answers, yet sluggish decision-making processes, complex operational systems and multifaceted customer service functions remain a challenge in the pull economy. What is needed, then, are more flexible, responsive and adaptive processes for truly integrated teams to overcome silos and ultimately gain consistency between promises and delivery. In fact, consistency and authenticity are important prerequisites for reputation to resonate with critical stakeholders. Should these be at risk, unresolved customer complaints may trigger viral paracrises, especially parody accounts, which arise when disparity between reality and image prevails.

To mitigate the risks associated with complex social media management teams, particularly for big, prominent brands, social media governance frameworks guide prerequisites for an authentic brand personality that consistently delivers on its promises. A key social media governance concern is a careful analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of outsourced agencies as opposed to in-house expertise, as both imply distinct challenges for integrated corporate communication.

6.4.1.9. Interpretation and discussion of the theme: Resolve complaints, rants and trolls

The theme, resolve complaints, rants and trolls, was one of seven themes related to the category maintain a responsive social media governance framework. In total, resolve complaints, rants and trolls, was expressed the fifth most frequently in this category, namely in 36 cases (2.02%).

House rules to mitigate flaming, hating, ranting and trolling on social networks: Most participants recommended that social media management teams need to be prepared to the
excessive volume of “brand attacks” for the sake of seeking attention online, especially on Twitter. This typically include “hate tweets”, off-topic remarks, venting frustrations, conversations inciting racism, “rants”, people “bashing your brand”, people “talking nonsense”, offensive and rude comments. As such, “people like to flame” because “they can say things they’d never say to someone’s face”. Participant Three argued:

“The majority of people online are aggressive. The majority of people in an actual physical environment tend to be quite passive when they confront the real person.”

Participant Eight emphasised the importance of community guidelines:

“We post things that are called house rules on accounts. They’re like, it’s basically like terms and conditions of accounts. And we basically post it, like: no abusive behaviour, you can’t insult people, you can’t have any racism. It’s in our guidelines. You can then dismiss people on those guidelines. And say: “You’re being abusive. Delete”.

Ignore flaming, hating, ranting and trolling, but resolve valid complaints: Many participants recommended the blocking of abusive content and ignoring trolls. Participant Ten observed:

“I might have been learning how to make a website because I’m bored and I go and find something to say and I want to troll the hell out of it. I might be right, actually and I’m having a good time with it, you know.”

Most participants agreed that complaints containing “a valid point and a valid query” are their main priority, considering that a disgruntled stakeholder may proceed to create a parody account in an attempt to make their grievances heard. Participant Three elaborated:

“People are quick to go and rant and a brand will try to help them, but they’ll just rant and rant, like: “I don’t care what you are doing to try to help me; I am just going to carry on ranting”.

Participant 12 argued:

“And generally, our stance is not to engage with trolls. …if they are a customer and they have a valid point and a valid query or they really need help, or whatever the case or they have a valid question or whatever, absolutely, we’ll help them… But if they’re just like talking nonsense or being nasty, or, you know, then generally we don’t.”

These findings were verified in quantitative data (Q9): Effectively resolve complaints received on social networks. Of the 138 respondents, the vast majority of 129 (93.48%) said Yes, only 1 (0.72%) said No, while 5 (3.62%) were Not sure.

Findings pertaining to this section of the study support available literature. Encouraged by the fact that online personas are anonymous and not face-to-face (Lange, 2007:1; Vrooman, 2002:60), several studies confirm that trolling, flaming, hating and ranting are highly prevalent on social networks (Pew Research Centre, 2014; TNS, 2013), especially Twitter (Bartlett, Reffin, Rumball & Williamson, 2014; Kick It Out, 2015). In the age of rage, almost everyone is a critic online (Adams, 2011:24). Instead of engaging in constructive debate, angry
monologues of insult, called rants, and the expression thereof in flame wars, are games performed to provide entertainment to gain social prestige and status (Vrooman, 2002:61), similar to trolls' bickering, stirring up drama and off-topic comments inciting hatred, racism, sexism, misogyny and bigotry (Cramer, 2013:6; Moosa, 2014; Raphael, 2012:25). Locally, social media backlashes against racist posts on social media have ruined the reputation of several individuals and their employers, to further mobilise public anger about ongoing discrimination in post-Apartheid South Africa (Chigumadzi, 2016; Latief & Henney, 2016; Mothapo, 2016). Moreover, flaming and trolling make use of parody (Vrooman, 2002:54) as well as parody accounts to gain attention and troll customer complaints (Conradie, 2015; Louw, 2015; Ott & Theunissen, 2015:100; Starke, 2012; Thorne, 2012), as confirmed in related studies.

Trolling, flaming, ranting and hating easily escalate into social media crises and silence the honest and free expression of opinions, thereby deteriorating the value of social media engagement (Adams, 2011; 2013; Leopold, 2015; Morrison, 2015; Ronson, 2015; Van der Merwe, 2015; Whitlock, 2015). Moreover, paracrises are triggered by complaints about poor customer service, angry customers venting their frustrations in a malicious manner, and disgruntled stakeholders challenging the organisation by making accusations of irresponsible corporate behaviour (Coombs, 2014:8). Owing to the fact that organisations are perceived as disembodied entities, they are easily fall victim to viral angry attacks (Ott & Theunissen, 2015:100).

A sound social media governance framework mitigates reputation risks (Macnamara & Sakinofsky, 2012:11). To this end, escalation protocols (Killian & McManus, 2015:9; Stokes, 2011:217) outline processes to effectively resolve valid complaints to mitigate reputation crises (Armelini, & Villanueva, 2011:33; Cinman, 2008:42; Fournier & Avery, 2011:21; Stokes, 2011:420), often in the form of parodies (Earle, 2002:2; Dell Hell, 2008; Dell Hell Revisited, 2007; Jarvis, 2005a, 2005b; Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam & Hove, 2011:4). To safeguard reputations from malicious behaviour such as trolling, social media governance clarifies and outlines proactive measures like moderation systems (Greengard, 2014:4; Cramer, 2013:6) and community guidelines supported by software to filter, block, ban or remove offensive comments, trolls or community members (Cramer, 2013:6; Johnson, 2009:24; Stokes, 2011:217; Taylor et al, 2012:25). Trolls, in particular, are best ignored. However, even when community guidelines prescribe the blocking, deleting or hiding of inappropriate comments, it may still ignite anger and break down trust, as it is perceived that management has something to hide (Ott & Theunissen, 2015:100). In fact, moderation systems in general seem to find it difficult to effectively mitigate and keep up with the high prevalence of trolling and related
provocatively malicious practises, while still accommodating free speech (Davis, 2015; Moosa, 2014; 24.com, 2015; Whitlock, 2015). As such, these harmful practises erode trust, integrity and goodwill in communities, as concluded in a related study (Taylor et al, 2012:25). As such, trust is a key requirement for authenticity, for reputation to resonate with stakeholders (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:163,165).

6.4.1.10. Conclusion of the interpretation of the theme: Resolve complaints, rants and trolls

The goodwill, trust and free expression of opinions in social communities are significantly at risk as the result of widespread hating, flaming, ranting and trolling, often used to vent anger and frustration as somewhat anonymous online personas. These malicious expressions of anger may be expressed in parody to win flame wars, garner social prestige and to troll customer complaints. Instead of engaging in constructive debate and valid customer concerns, such bickering and off-topic discussions incite hatred, racism, sexism, misogyny and bigotry. When succeeding to attract the attention they provoke, reputational insults may easily escalate into viral paracrises, especially on Twitter, and even more so against racist social media comments in post-Apartheid South Africa. Therefore, the trust required for authentic brand reputations that resonate with stakeholders are at risk.

Although wisdom is dictated in the saying: “Don’t feed the trolls”, moderation systems to block, ban and delete this and related forms of anger is problematic, especially on Twitter. Aiming to protect the brand and its community of stakeholders from harm, moderation systems often fall short of achieving the delicate balancing act between free speech and the control of reputational insults. Too much control, and a backlash of angry community members denounce community guidelines as censorship attempts to hide wrongdoing. No mitigation measures whatsoever, and the brand and its community’s trust and integrity are in doubt. Correspondingly, much forethought and circumspection are required when compiling social media governance frameworks to proactively mitigate the risks of hating, flaming, ranting, trolling and associated anger expressed in parody accounts, especially in post-Apartheid South Africa. As organisations are regarded as disembodied entities, they are particularly at risk of falling victim to paracrises, where almost everyone is an angry critic online. For this reason, hating, flaming, ranting and trolling as paracrises are mostly ignored, while valid customer complaints need to be resolved in time.
6.4.1.11. Interpretation and discussion of the theme: Authentic content strategies in place

The theme, authentic content strategies in place, was one of seven themes related to the category, maintain a responsive social media governance framework. In total, authentic content strategies in place, was expressed the sixth most frequently in this category, namely in 34 cases (1.91%).

Unwelcome one-way broadcasting that seeks to control rather than engage: Most participants cautioned against the inauthentic content plans comprising a continuous stream of overt top-down, traditional one-way marketing and public relations practises that “try and control your messages”. Too often, social media users are flooded with “hundreds of promotions and competitions” while disregarding the fact that “brands shouldn’t be advertising or marketing, they should be communicating” on social networks. Participant 13 explained:

“Too often you’ve got traditional marketers bringing in a social or a digital element at the eleventh hour and say: look, this is what my message is going say on television so let’s put it on social… But if it is another medium where they think they can simply push a broadcast message about CSI, then I’d ask them to rethink that strategy very quickly or pursue the wrath of the social trolls who will no doubt begin parodying those accounts.”

Haphazard social media tactics instead of strategic foresight and planning: Many participants highlighted a lack of strategic planning as the primary risk that may bring about parody accounts that hijack strategic messages. Should a parody account then occur, “you should be able to stand up and go: ‘Guys, surely you know us better”’. Participant 13 explained:

“Because if you go in there without a plan and without objectives, then very quickly the likes of a social media account will pick a hole in the messaging that you haven’t thought about and your campaign will end up in a very different direction…”

Conversely, proactive ORM comprises relevant and authentic content strategies that outline strategic objectives, strategic messages and engagement strategies to mitigate the risk of parody accounts and related reputational crises. Participant 12 explained:

“If you have good reputation and you have a good relationship with your customers and you genuinely do listen and engage with them, then you probably have less of the negative parodies. You might have have a few parodies that are coming in like just have a fun and a little bit playful or whatever.”

Similarly, Participant 11 observed:

“A lot of the times there is no strategy, it just says: ‘Look, these are the platforms we need to be on. Make it happen. Buy us some fans, buy us some followers. We’re launching into it.’ So, sadly I don’t think there is enough foresight and planning around the social media activities.”
The same sentiment is verified in quantitative data (Q9): Have social media strategies in place. Of the 138 respondents, the vast majority of 135 (97.83%) said Yes, none said No, while 1 (0.72%) was Not sure.

Findings pertaining to this section of the study are in congruence with available literature. Reputational halos (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993:22) or sticky reputations (Roper & Fill, 2012:84), are reservoirs of goodwill in times of crises (Jones, Jones & Little, 2000; Shamma, 2012:151) which imply that stakeholders are more willing to listen to corporate communication messages when crises occur (Scholz, 2012:43). However, sticky reputations are the cumulative result of substantial proactive and continuous investment in reputation management strategies (Ang & Wight, 2009), especially visibility (Schultz, Mouritsen & Gabrielsen, 2001:25) and credibility (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993:22) which are prerequisites for reputation to resonate with critical stakeholders (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:111).

Findings therefore support a related study by Caruana and Chircop (2000:55) concluding that reputational halos need to be defended by ensuring consistency between corporate communication messages and stakeholder experiences. In the unpredictable converged media space, however, the defence of reputational halos is best suited for a strategic reputation management paradigm. As such, strategic reputation management (Aula, 2010:44,48) emphasises integrated reputation risk management that recognises that traditional, top-down corporate communication is replaced by uncertain, many-to-many (Castells, 2007) dialogues in the converged media space that management cannot control. A primary mitigation of the reputational risks intrinsic to the uncertain Web 2.0 environment requires social media governance frameworks that institute an integrated, pro-active, strategic approach to social media management (Doorley & Garcia, 2006:115; Hootsuite & Nexgate, 2013:3; KMPG, 2011:2; Lieb et al, 2012:6; Murtland, 2010:15; Postman, 2009:14; Soat, 2012:6).

Notably, the absence of strategic reputation management whereby social media management attempts to overtly push, control and broadcast, are vulnerable to the risk of becoming an uninvited brand. Consequently, uninvited brand tactics (Fournier & Avery, 2011) such as top-down advertising, marketing, public relations, excessive competitions, promotions, and the purchasing of vanity metrics (Beshore, 2013; Nextgate, 2013:16; Shonfeld, 2011) become the targets for parodies that hijack the strategic messages of inauthentic brands (Avery, Larischy & Sweetser, 2010: 189; Driver, 2012; Neff, 2009; Nitins & Burgess, 2014:293; Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quillian, & Hove, 2011:104; Veil et al, 2015:104). As such, authenticity is a prerequisite for reputation to resonate with critical stakeholders (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:163,165).
6.4.1.12. Conclusion of the interpretation of the theme: Authentic content strategies in place

In conclusion, findings indicate that social media management teams seeking visibility and influence may haphazardly impose traditional one-way corporate communication practises while disregarding the uncertain, many-to-many dialogues in the converged media space that management cannot control. The purchasing of vanity metrics, excessive competitions and promotional content ignore the dialogic principles of social media. Consequently, intrusive brands are likely to be targeted by parody accounts. Conversely, substantial proactive and continuous investment in ORM strategies, safeguarded by responsive social media governance frameworks, are the primary mitigation measures against the risk of encountering parody accounts and related paracrises. In fact, social media management teams that embrace the organic and dialogic assumptions of the strategic reputation management approach most likely maintain emotionally resonant brand reputations and therefore resilient reputations. Having already earned the goodwill of their communities, reputational halos may retain the credibility and authenticity of social media management messages during paracrisis. Moreover, should parodies occur, they are more likely to be harmless. As such, it is safe to say that the pro-active investment in establishing sticky reputations are less at risk of being targeted by highly malicious parody accounts that completely hijack corporate communication messages. As such, reputational halos, as reservoirs of goodwill during paracrises, are more evident when reputations resonate on an emotional level with social media communities.

6.4.1.13. Interpretation and discussion of the theme: Policies, guidelines and formal agreements

The theme, policies, guidelines and formal agreements, was one of seven themes related to the category, maintain a responsive social media governance framework. In total, policies, guidelines and formal agreements, was expressed the seventh and least most frequently in this category, namely in 28 cases (1.57%).

As mentioned by participants, the guidelines, policies and processes contained in social governance frameworks to mitigate the risks of parody accounts and related paracrises are outlined in Table 6.19 below.

TABLE 6.19: Summary of participants’ recommendations for policies, guidelines and formal agreements as responsive social media governance concerns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social media governance concerns</th>
<th>Policies, guidelines and formal agreements</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hacking websites to commit fraud and identity theft</td>
<td>● Safeguarding access to data in the event that “someone is trying to maliciously get data out of our websites or data, like people’s registrations”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Safeguarding social media accounts from malicious hackers and hacktivists | • Ensuring that passwords for official social media accounts are secure.  
• “McDonalds got hacked technically. And they went and they changed all the Burger King things to KFC, or Burger King to McDonalds or whatever it was, and now suddenly, what?” (Participant Nine). |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to passwords for official social media accounts</td>
<td>• Ensuring that the social media management team have continuous access to the passwords for official social media accounts. Passwords need to be transferred after community managers have resigned.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Corporate and brand identity guidelines and manuals | • Guidelines and processes to consistently apply the brand identities such as the distinct voice, the correct brand logo’s, colours and slogans.  
• Intellectual property protection to mitigate defamation, logo and copyright infringements.  
• “You need to have some sort of brand guidelines, a brand CI, you need all your employees who work on… actually all your employees, but specifically those who work on the touch points with customers to know exactly who your brand is, what your brand stands for, what your brand sounds like, what your brand looks like, what your brand would and wouldn’t say, what your brand would and wouldn’t get involved in. All those sorts of things, so that the voice is consistent” (Participant 12). |
| Contracts stipulating financial liabilities | • Contracts to exempt liability for reputational damage or financial losses during data breaches or crises for outsourced partnerships. |
| Service level agreements with outsourced service providers | • Addressing liabilities for accountability, roles and responsibilities in the social media management team and outsourced partnerships. These include liabilities for posting inappropriate content, adhering to acceptable response times, systems and processes for content development and approval. |
| Social media playbooks | • A social media playbook which outlines best practise processes, responsibilities, contingency planning, social media etiquette, accountabilities, editorial strategies, social media strategies, escalation protocols, social media guidelines and policies.  
• “I work very closely with companies to do their governance, their policies. What is your code of conduct? Because can you fire that person? Have they signed a policy to say that’s dismissible?” (Participant Nine).  
• “You need to eliminate the risk that is around your no-go areas, what you can and cannot say.” (Participant 11). |

The findings in Table 6.19 above were validated in quantitative data (Q9): Have social media policies and/or guidelines in place. Of the 138 respondents, the vast majority of 131 (94.93%) said Yes, only 1 (0.72%) said No, while 4 (2.90%) were Not sure.

Findings pertaining to this section of the study reflect available literature. Social media governance frameworks mitigate the reputation risks associated with parody accounts and related reputation vulnerabilities. With regard to data security (Pitts & Aylott, 2012:252), social media governance integrates the expertise of information technology experts (Hootsuite & Nexgate, 2013:3) to mitigate cyber-crime (Chavan & Ahire, 2015; Ernst & Young, 2013:2) such as the malicious hacking of websites to commit fraud, and identity theft or phishing (Hesseldahl, 2007; Martinez-Romo & Araujo, 2013:2992; Nextgate, 2013:11; Williams, 2015; Zerfass, Fink & Linke, 2011:6). Similarly, social media governance mitigates hacktivist attacks (Chavan & Ahire, 2015:3392; Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010:241; Ziegler, 2002:14), with emphasis on those aimed to deface the brand’s official social media accounts with parody content (Jordan & Taylor, 2004:85), also known as social media hijacking (Coombs &

Social media playbooks (Barwise & Meehan, 2010:83; Campie, 2015; Salesforce Marketing Cloud, 2013) or editorial strategies (Hipwell & Reeves, 2013:66; Postman, 2009:15; Stokes, 2011:132,186) outline roles, responsibilities, expectations, best practise, workflow, brand personality and ORM standards while also addressing contingency planning for vulnerabilities. Furthermore, social media playbooks and content strategies outline benchmarks for measuring success (Campie, 2015; Reid, 2013:22,24), including escalation protocols to establish acceptable workflow standards and response times (Killian & McManus, 2015:9; Stokes, 2011:217). Moreover, social media playbooks contain social media guidelines and policies (Campie, 2015; KMPG, 2011:6; Salesforce Marketing Cloud, 2013; Zerfass, Fink & Linke, 2011:9) which mitigate risks of intellectual property infringements (Ernst & Young, 2013:2; Pitts & Aylott, 2012:252). As such, trademarks are protected by visual identification elements in brand identities (Erdem & Swait, 1998:132) or corporate identity style manuals (Balmer, 2009:10; Balmer, Fukukawa, & Gray, 2007:5; Caruana, 2008:199; Patel, 2011:6; Whalen & Krishna, 2013a:16). Consequently, social media risk management integrates several functions in addition to corporate communication, such as information technology, audit, legal, compliance, agency partners, outsourced expertise, service providers, customer service and human resources (Hootsuite & Nexgate, 2013:5; Owyang, 2012; Owyang et al, 2011:14; Pitts & Aylott, 2012) to ensure consistency when protecting the reputation of a brand (Ernst & Young, 2012:8).

6.4.1.14. Conclusion of the interpretation and discussion of the theme: Policies, guidelines and formal agreements

Considering the extensive roles and multi-disciplinary functions involved in complex, integrated social media management teams, social media risk management requires extensive social media governance frameworks to manage reputation. To ensure teams function optimally, service level agreements and contracts need to be in place with outsourced partners. In addition, a social media playbook is essential to outline best practise and, more specifically, scenario planning and the required processes for responding to parody accounts and related paracrises. Considering that parodies may also be created by hacktivists, it is essential that social media playbooks outline procedures and processes to safeguard systems against data breaches. Another key consideration for a social media playbook is the guidelines
and procedures that address intellectual property protection as parody accounts typically copy brand identity elements. As malicious parody accounts may contain defamatory content, playbooks also need to outline contingencies to address these if necessary. Parody accounts typically satirise social media management blunders, hence playbooks focus on professionalism and related best practises. Also important is a section devoted to complaints procedures and escalation policies since parody accounts may be created by angry customers who have been let down by customer care.

6.4.2. Category and supporting themes: Determine how parody accounts express reputational concerns

Determine how parody accounts express reputational concerns, is the second of three qualitative categories. This category emerged from a cluster of nine relevant themes. As an evaluative narrative, the intentions behind the mockery expressed in parody are diverse, including harsh satire (Ross, 1998:49), attacking and criticizing the official word (Dentith, 2002:19,27), subverting ideas that may otherwise be resistant to critique (Mikkonen & Bajde, 2013:315), voicing public opinion (Hariman, 2008:248), providing comic relief (Haomin & Xin, 2010:16; Wills & Fecteau, 2016:33), paying homage to favourite brands (Berthon & Pitt, 2012:88) and celebrating the iconic status of the most talked about, visible brands (Sutherland, 2004; Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:63). Correspondingly, social media management teams need to understand the various intentions of parody accounts, how they hijack strategic messages and the issues they criticize before devising the appropriate response strategies during a paracrisis. Themes pertaining to the category, determine how parody accounts express reputational concerns, are further defined and analysed in Table 6.20 below, as they pertain to the findings. To reiterate, 22 themes emerged from the data which equalled 1 780 cases in total.

**TABLE 6.20: Themes, definitions and frequencies for the category: Determine how parody accounts express reputational concerns**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Frequency of cases</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parody accounts hijack strategic</td>
<td>The prevalence of hoaxes and fake content on the internet creates an ambiguous environment conducive to parody accounts that are ironic copycats of brand identities, often mistaken for authentic official accounts. In addition, parody accounts benefit from the principles of social media to hijack strategic messages that cannot be controlled.</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>12.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>messages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clever parody is the voice of the</td>
<td>Skilfully written parody accounts rely on satire and irony to express a human truth that resonates with communities. Many social media followers are attracted to the comic</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>8.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>people</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
relief and honesty of the authentic personalities of parody accounts that express a shared sentiment. The anonymity of parody accounts allows for the fearless expression of criticism.

| Establish the intent of a parody | A careful case-by-case analysis of parody accounts’ intentions is required considering that there is a fine line between malicious parodies and light-hearted, playful spoofs. | 98 | 5.51% |
| Parody exposes unresolved business issues and broken promises | Poor management decisions result in broken promises that linger without resolve to the point that parody accounts emerge as the accumulative result of tainted reputations, as a result of broken promises. Owing to transparency of digital footprints, management is held accountable for false promises. | 96 | 5.39% |
| Prominent brands attract parodies | Top-of-mind human brands are more likely to be targeted by parody accounts, compared to corporate brands and product brands. Parody accounts of prominent human brands are encountered more often and typically provide more light-hearted, playful spoofs compared to the rather malicious criticism of parodies targeting corporate brands and product brands. | 84 | 4.72% |
| Parody as a noteworthy trend | Social media parody is an emerging trend locally, for which management needs to prepare. | 69 | 3.88% |
| Disgruntled stakeholders create parodies | Parody accounts are created by frustrated stakeholders who have had long-standing gripes and complaints about failed promises, wrongdoing or bad experiences that were left unresolved. | 55 | 3.09% |
| Recognise parody that compliments reputation | Management may benefit from embracing skilfully created parody accounts as the highest form of flattery that express love, care and brand resonance. | 52 | 2.92% |
| Controversy triggers parody accounts | The opportunistic nature of parody accounts ensures their relevancy by providing satiric comments on trending topics and reputational crises on Twitter. | 48 | 2.70% |

Total 871 48.93%

The discussion that follows further elaborates on the findings reported in Table 6.20 above. Themes are interpreted following a thematic analysis of nine related themes, clustered around the category, determine how parody accounts express reputational concerns. Structured in a descending order of frequencies, the subsequent section will discuss and interpret the findings of the themes.

6.4.2.1. Interpretation and discussion of the theme: Parody accounts hijack strategic messages

The theme, parody accounts hijack strategic messages, was one of nine themes related to the category, determine how parody accounts express reputational concerns. In total, parody
accounts hijack strategic messages, was expressed the most frequently in this category, namely in 220 cases (12.36%). Compared to the frequency of all the themes in the three categories, in total, this theme occurred the most often.

Most participants agreed that parody accounts intentionally cause reputational harm, although they could also be “damaging the brand by accident”. Likewise, Participant Four noticed:

“They may not be created to either or, to bring down the brand but to ride on the brand, but to hijack and to copy the brand.”

The copying, counteracting, undermining, circumventing or hijacking of strategic messages occurs “because customers know their power now”. However, “it’s not just on social – the day you get on digital, you’re handing that marketing message to other people and they take control of it”. As Participant 12 commented:

“Some people call it the social revolution. Some people call it Marketing 3.0. Some people call it the big disruption.”

In the process, strategic messages are mocked, contradicted and discredited by parody accounts to derail communication campaigns and tactics which hijack “positive publicity” and the brand promise. Participant 18 elaborated:

“It is the same as any other brand terrorist, if you want to call him that, who just won't shut up. The difference is that they've only got one thing to talk about and that one thing is you.”

Notably, parody accounts make the most of the principles of social media to hijack strategic messages, as follows:

The prevalence of fake content on the internet creates an environment conducive to parody accounts: Nearly all the participants pointed out how much of the content on the internet comprise rumours, inaccuracies, speculation, Photoshopped images, fake accounts, fake followers, fraudulent activities, linkbait, hoaxes and spam. The proliferation of fake content exploits internet users who are “too lazy” to verify the authenticity of information, which in turn, encourages more fake content to be produced. Participant 17 explained:

“The public are so gullible. You must remember, this is a public that thinks if they click on an email they’ll grow two inches of extra penis.”

Essentially, when failing to check the authenticity of content, parody accounts communicate reputation-damaging information that is easily mistaken for that of the brand’s official social media account.

Parody accounts fool social media users by copying the brand personality and visual identities: Given the fact that a parody account’s biography explicitly states that it is a parody and blue verification badges are displayed on the brand’s official social media accounts, the
differences between the two may be rather obvious. Parody accounts’ exaggerated humour, in particular, gives away its nature, because “no consumer in their right mind genuinely thinks that the BBC would be running around making comments about, whatever it is that the @BBCspof account does.” However, in reality, unsuspecting social media users, including journalists, are often fooled by parody accounts. Many participants pointed out that parody accounts deliberately choose account names that closely mimic the brand’s official social media account names. In addition, the copying of visual brand identity elements such as logos, slogans, as well as the mimicking of the brand voice, are typically the reasons why parody accounts are confused with official accounts. Participant 16 observed:

“Sometimes I even get confused because it gets sort of retweeted into your timeline and then you kind of have to take a second look because you are not sure if that was actually really tweeted from Sky or not.”

Considering the constant sharing of content in fast-changing newsfeeds, especially on Twitter, it is even more likely that a parody account could be mistaken for an authentic account. Therefore, a parody account that looks and sounds identical to an official account may harm reputation when the strategic message is being contradicted. Participant Two articulated:

“Parody accounts can have problems and ramifications on the brand because if you are following an account and you think that it is legitimate then it could be saying things that are counterintuitive to what the brand stands for. And that is when your brand damage starts to occur.”

Parody accounts use account names that are ironic versions of the brand name and promise: The name or handle chosen for a parody account is preferably a memorable, ironic play on words that satirise the brand name and slogan. The brand promise is contradicted and hijacked when “you are going to say your thing is ‘so good’ and there’s this parody account that’s actually ‘so bad’” As Participant 16 explained:

“The authenticity that they’ve worked so hard and spent millions and millions and millions of Rands on marketing campaigns and redesigning their stores and really sourcing the products - getting those refrigerated trucks that cost millions of Rands. And then all it takes is for one parody account to just come in and say, and make a joke about their slogan and then it’s done, and their whole slogan is ruined for the rest of your life.”

Unwary social media users mistakenly ask parody accounts to resolve customer complaints: Confusing the parody account with the official account, social media users mistakenly address their complaints to a parody account, and sometimes even to a dormant parody account. Correspondingly, customers get angry when the official account does not respond to their complaints.
Parody accounts outperform the pace at which official accounts create content: Parody accounts are able to post content at a continuously faster rate compared to the brand’s official social media account, thereby ensuring that the mockery is “constantly pushed in your face”.

Parody accounts jolt the memories of old crises when new scandals gain attention: The immediacy of social networks implies that paracrisis are short lived. However, parody accounts divert attention from new scandals, by re-igniting anger over past crises. Participant 16 explained:

“People on Twitter, they’ll get angry for a couple of days and then they’ll get over it because then there’ll be a new scandal to fuel, fired up about. But then this parody account is just continually feeding me information... Because it’s constantly putting negativity in the consumer’s mind.”

Parody accounts share sensational linkbait and offensive content to extend their reach: By making exaggerated and provocative claims, often supported by shocking visuals “that's putting you off completely” and putting a “stream of thought into people's minds that wouldn't actually be there”, parody accounts are likely to reach vast audiences and gain attention. Participant Eight articulated:

“If the consumer is unaware that it is a fake account and the account is posting offensive messages or something like that it could have a negativity. There was a Jacob Zuma account, a bogus one that was posting sensationalist messaging. People could then interpret that as the words of the President. I think that could circumvent the messaging of the brand.”

Incorrect and sensational claims harm both the trustworthiness and credibility of a brand. To elaborate, Participant Three explained:

“There have literally been people who have complained to a company saying: ‘You are shocking and disgusting. And I can’t believe that you said this online’. And the company said: ‘Well, it was not us, it was a parody account.’”

Moreover, brand identity elements feature prominently in graphically explicit parody content “so that association is so strong that that's such a negative perception for the brand”. Having said that, inaccuracies may have financial ramifications on sponsorship agreements and cause a breakdown of profitable strategic partnerships.

Effective parody accounts attract search algorithms by exploiting the viral nature of trending topics, hashtags and memes: Influential parody accounts not only have a large follower base, but also extend their reach, advocacy, influence and engagement when their content attracts attention, comments by influencers, increased levels of conversations and re-shares. The use of tags and hashtags further increase reach, influence and engagement. This “ripple effect” or going viral then accumulates into memes and trending topics. In the process,
the damage to reputation escalates as the disgruntled parodist knows that “if I can just get this cause to trend for one day, I’m really going to do damage to this brand and they’re going to have to wake up and take notice.” Participant 16 elaborated:

“In the social media space, things blow out of proportion extremely quickly. You know, it just takes one or two tweets for something to literally just be taken up by the wrong person and then it becomes a social media disaster for a brand.”

Active and engaging parody accounts attract trusted algorithms, so “when you search the brand’s name, the account comes up below the brand so it’s quite negative”. Likewise, the absence of a social media management presence is substituted by a parody account because “if you go and search David Beckham there are thousands of followers of accounts because people assume that he would be on [Twitter]”.

**Parody accounts interject conversations with hashtag hijacking:** A common tactic used by parodists is hashtag hijacking, which a few participants cited as a form of consumer activism to derail communication campaigns and advertising campaigns, in particular. Hashtags chosen for communication campaigns are carefully researched and regarded as extensions of a brand, especially since their use is promoted both in traditional and digital media. Participant 14 explains:

“It was amazing to see people all of a sudden create that hashtag and jack the conversation... And then they created a parody account to go: ‘No, you can’t… just say okay we are going to have a 15-minute conversation and when it goes wrong, shut it down and then hope you will go away’. No, they created the parody account to go: ‘No, we are still going to rap you over the knuckles about this. We are not going anywhere. We exist’.

**Parody accounts harness the trust and credibility inherent in user-generated content and social media influencers:** Social media users are more prone to trust and therefore inclined to believe parody accounts that are created by their peers and social media influencers, compared to the strategic messages from the brand’ official social media accounts.

**Influential parody accounts may monetise their reach:** A large follower base, as a metric for reach and influence is a contentious issue for ORM, since “brands spend millions and millions of Rands trying to get followers every year, I mean, like huge money trying to get – like that’s our KPI’s as well”. Being rather protective of their followers, parody accounts are criticized for “stealing our followers”. Followers of influential parody accounts may be exploited for their commercial value when realising “to get like a hundred thousand subscribers you can earn a salary through YouTube just by posting videos”. Spoofs of popular brands and topical
issues are typically exploited to attract many followers and consequently “convert that account into something else when I need those followers”. Participant Five raised his concerns:

“There’s a money incentive on Facebook and on Twitter as well. Because if you get an account up to X amount of users, you can sell that account to someone. So, if you’ve got ten thousand users even, people will pay good money for those subscribers... If you could do that by using a parody instead of trying to use some other thing, they don’t care. They’re just there to get users and make a buck at the end of the day.”

Yet, influence may be a deceiving metric for authenticity when a social media user assumes that “if they’ve got 400 million likes then you know it must be the real account - 400 million people can’t be wrong”. However, using vanity metrics to establish authenticity, reach and influence may be misleading, considering that ”some people buy followers”. As a result, social media users are likely to be fooled by fake content and parody accounts with covertly profitable intentions.

Findings reported in this section of the study corroborate with available literature. Parody accounts are a form of brand hijacking (Fournier & Avery, 2011:2; Milne, 2013:210; Ramsey, 2010; Williams, 2015), sometimes unintentionally damaging reputation (Hoult, 2012; Tapley, 2014). Metrics for reach and influence are contentious issues for ORM as measures for return on investment, hence brands are rather protective of their followers (SMMStandards Coalition, 2013; SMMStandards Conclave, 2013; World Wide Worx and Fuseware, 2013). For the same reason, brands are tempted to falsely inflate their metrics by buying fake followers (Baker, 2015:127; Cresci, Di Pietro, Petrocchi, Spognardi & Tesconi, 2015:56; Majaski, 2015; Simonite, 2015:67).

Driven by profitable outcomes, a proliferation of fake content on the internet has created an ambiguous environment where it is becoming increasingly difficult to identify authenticity (Cresci et al, 2015:56; Ornos, 2014). Rather concerning are brand spoofs that exploit their large follower base, typically by changing its strategy when starting to post promoted content to monetise followers and sell the products of their sponsors (Alfonso, 2012; Broderick, 2014; Golby, 2015). Likewise, influential parody accounts may be sold for considerable profits to brands seeking influence (Cutler, 2015). A related practise is the buying of fake user-generated parody accounts created by spambots (Davis, 2015; Horne, 2015). In an ambiguous social media environment which is rife with imposters, both parody accounts and fake user-generated parody accounts, are easily mistaken for the brand's official social media accounts (Davis, 2015; Horne, 2015). Deceptive brand hijacking practises, such as fake accounts, hoaxes and related scams, are mostly created by spam bots, often presented as provocative linkbait, to exploit human weaknesses and be fooled by fake identities (Baker, 2015:127; Dewey, 2014; Elgin, Riley, Kocieniewski & Brustein, 2015:64; Friedman, 2014:22;
Notably, at its core, parody is an imitation (Blake, 2011:283; Dentith, 2002:9; Malone, 2012:297; Skågeby, 2013:65; Visser, 2005:322) or spoof (Cresswell, 2009a) of original work (Malone, 2012:297) or prior texts (Sclafani, 2009:615). Moreover, parody is particularly effective when imitating popular texts that are well-known (Burgess, 2011:122), as the intended intertextual meaning thereof is then easier to understand (Gray, 2005:223; O’Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2012:145). In other words, audiences will more likely understand the subtleness of irony and find a parody funny if they are already familiar with the topic being ridiculed (Blake, 2011:287; Colebrook, 2005:19; Reyes, Rosso & Veale, 2013:241; Ross, 1998:37,47). However, parody is a demanding genre which requires audiences to firstly recognise the fact that text is being parodied and, secondly, grasp the ambiguous, subtle and implied meanings of irony (Hutcheon, 2000:33; Reyes, Rosso & Veale, 2013:241) that reverses indented meaning (Colebrook, 2005:19). Considering that parody and satire is easily taken at face value (Blake, 2011:284), audiences are required to actively distinguish fact from fiction (Jenkins (2006:227). Even more confusing is the fact that parody is in essence a spoof or hoax (Cresswell, 2009a).

mobilises public opinion (Dentith, 2002:189; Druick, 2009:295, 306; Gray, 2005:235). Another related study confirms that user-generated parodies make use of offensive, distasteful or vulgar content as a drastic measure to draw attention to their plight (Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam & Hove, 2011:14). Especially damaging to reputation is parody that attacks a brand’s values and core positioning (Fournier & Avery, 2011:26) and mimics the brand personality (Jones, 2012; Mann, 2012).

To extend their reach, advocacy, influence and engagement, parody accounts take advantage of social media characterised by trust (Heinonen, 2011:360; MarkMonitor, 2012:2; Murtland, 2010:15) in a peer-to-peer (Bowman & Willis, 2003:25; Bruns, 2003:3), many-to-many (Castells, 2007, 2008) organic environment where reputation cannot be controlled by management (Jeppesen & Pettersson, 2010:81; Nitins & Burgess, 2014:295). More specifically, parody accounts are advantaged by using linkbait (Buzzfeed, 2015; Clark, 2006; Cutts, 2006; Smith, 2014; Thompson, 2013), hashtags (Kumar, 2015:240) and continuously supplying content (Interbrand, 2012:5; Monsen, 2013). As a result, parody accounts’ criticism continuously refreshes social media users’ memories about a brand’s unresolved issues, crises and past wrongdoing (Wan, Koh, Ong & Pang, 2015:383).

Similarly, parody accounts reap benefits when going viral (Buzzfeed, 2015; Earle 2002:2; Kumar, 2015:233; O’Reilly, 2007:25; Singer, 2012; Solis & Webber, 2012:5), escalating into trending topics (Benkler, 2006:128; Huang, Thornton & Efthimiadis, 2010:1; Kwak et al, 2010:1; Zubiaga et al, 2011:2461) and viral memes (Beschizza, 2013; Da Silva & Garcia, 2012:94). When also practising hashtag hijacking (Fathi, 2009:13; Knoblauch, 2014; Wan, Koh, Ong & Pang, 2015:383; Zi et al, 2012:457) search algorithms are attracted (Benkler, 2006:128; Bothma & Gopaul, 2015:103; Fatima, Luca & Wilson, 2014:445; Hussien, 2014:28; Malachowski, 2010:226). In fact, search algorithms are the most trusted compared to other channels in the converged media space (Edelman, 2016:21). In the end, the digital footprint (Ayling, 2012:505; Botsman, 2012; Hearn, 2010:429; Madden et al, 2007) or extended life of online content (Manjoo, 2015; Williams, 2015) implies that tarnished reputations are constantly shared, discussed, co-created and modified to exist infinitively (Terblanche, 2011:166). Moreover, parody reaches the news agenda of traditional media (Hill, 2012a, 2012b; Kantrowitz, 2012; Malone, 2012:297; Starke, 2012) to reach new audiences, even those beyond the social web (Kumar, 2015:233). In the process, mainstream perceptions of a brand are permeated (McGriff, 2012:53).

Findings of this section confirm a study of parody accounts by Wan, Koh, Ong and Pang (2015:383), which concluded that parody accounts take advantage of social media principles to confuse, compromise and disrupt the brand’s social media messaging and relationships
with stakeholders. Consequently, parody has the potential to transform audiences’ perceptions to such an extent that they never view the target of parody in the same manner again (Burgess, 2011:130) since “parody has the paradoxical effect of preserving the very text that it seeks to destroy” (Dentith, 2002:36).

6.4.2.2. Conclusion of the interpretation of the theme: Parody accounts hijack strategic messages

The theme, parody accounts hijack strategic messages, occurred the most often, compared to the total of all themes identified in this study. This implies that the most pressing concern for emotionally resonant brand reputations is the ability of parody accounts to hijack strategic messages. In conclusion, to appreciate the humour and ridicule of parody, social media users need to be familiar with the topic being mocked. Therefore, familiar brands provide an effective target for parody. As such, parody is in essence a spoof or a hoax that uses the subtlety and ambiguousness of irony to reverse intended meanings. In like manner, parody is a demanding genre that requires the ability to firstly identify the fact that something is being parodied. Not realising that parody typically uses inappropriateness, offense and sarcasm to draw attention to its criticism, unsuspecting social media users are offended by what they believe to be the official account’s rude tone of voice. Considering that distasteful and vulgar content is a deliberate strategy used to draw attention to a parody account’s claims, parody may be quite harmful to the trustworthiness and credibility of a brand should it be confused with the official social media account. In the process, offensive and rude brand associations are formed.

Given that reach and influence are prized metrics for return on investment, influential parody accounts that hijack brand followers are diminishing the value of a brand’s online reputation. As such, influential parody accounts with many followers are often assumed to be official accounts. More concerning is influential parody accounts that exploit their large following when covertly changing strategies to suddenly post promoted content or selling their accounts to the highest bidder. Adding to the ambiguousness of parody, is the equally perplexing online environment riddled with fake content, devious imposters and hoaxes that exploit human weaknesses. Therefore, the difference between fake content and hoaxes used by spammers as opposed to user-generated parody accounts is rather confusing in rapidly changing newsfeeds. In the end, it becomes increasingly difficult to identify messages that are authentic and of value.

Complicating matters is the very nature of parody that imitates that which is being mocked, so that a parody accounts looks and sounds almost identical to the brand’s official social media account. Therefore, social media users inadvertently engage with parody accounts to resolve
their complaints. Sometimes the reputational harm is an unintentional outcome of a parody account, especially given the tendency for viral paracrises on Twitter to blow out of proportion.

Although parody is an ancient phenomenon, the expression thereof today makes the most of social media principles and algorithms to reach vast audiences, which imply that parody has the potential to permeate mainstream perceptions of a brand in the converged media space. This is achieved through viral social sharing encouraged by a constant supply of spoof content to stay ahead of continuously-updating newsfeeds that are favoured by trusted, peer-to-peer networks. Further extending their reach, advocacy, influence and engagement, parody accounts escalate into memes and trending topics spurred on by the use of sensational linkbait and the hashtag hijacking of the brand’s official social media conversations. In the meantime, a parody account’s constant criticism outlasts the fickle nature of trending topics, thereby refreshing social media users’ memories about past crises to re-ignite anger over past shortcomings. Correspondingly, popular brand spoofs are favoured by algorithms and search engines, the most trusted channels in the converged media space, where tarnished reputations may exist infintively and are intermittently modified and co-created as a brand’s digital footprint.

Particularly of concern is the substantial financial investments made to protect reputation, a brand’s core positioning, brand values, brand personality and highly valued intellectual properties, only to find that a brand terrorist on a small budget is able to hijack a strategic message. In essence, brand equity is equally hijacked as highly prized logos and slogans are satirised so that the humorous satirised brand promise may become memorable for its ironic meaning. In an organic social media environment where management is unable to control strategic messages, reputation is even more vulnerable to brand hijacking. Consequently, effective parodies have the potential to modify perceptions, even of those not using social media, to such a degree that a spoofed brand is never viewed the same again and the disrupting parodied brand is immortalised.

6.4.2.3. Interpretation and discussion of the theme: Clever parody is the voice of the people

The theme, clever parody is the voice of the people, was one of nine themes related to the category, determine how parody accounts express reputational concerns. In total, clever parody is the voice of the people, was expressed the second most frequently in this category, namely in 149 cases (8.37%).

Clever parody is more effective than the usual flood of flaming, ranting, hating and trolling: Many participants agreed that skilfully created parodies are well-written and well
thought-through, “but without great content, you’re kind of stuck”. Therefore, “the little person” stands a better chance to bring about a favourable response when using humorous parody in a clever manner instead of being dismissed as just another “crazy” consumer. Participant Three added:

“It does lead companies to act in some way, those parody accounts, if they get a lot of followers and if they are intelligent, if they are constructive. Not just a #IhateTelkom, #YouGuysAllSuck...#Brandfail.”

**Social communities enjoy being entertained by clever comedy:** Most participants agreed that a parody account’s good use of humour is an effective strategy to make content appreciated, noticeable and “if it’s funny enough, it will stay with people forever”. As noted by several participants, parody accounts that effectively use humour comprise the following:

- **Good jokes are retold:** “I think that’s where the power is, a joke can be retold by anyone and said again and again” (Participant 17).
- **Good humour distils issues:** “One of the essences of good comedy, if it is parody comedy, is that it’s very clear. It distils the issues very clearly” (Participant Four).
- **Wit:** “They really have to be clever, they have to be witty in order to work” (Participant Seven).
- **Sarcasm and irony:** “Parody account is based a lot on sarcasm - sarcastic comments about the company or ironic comments about the company. And I think that's where the power is. Parody accounts have a personality, jokes don’t. Maybe that's the difference” (Participant 17).
- **Relevance:** “And I think Zuma is funny for us because it is so relevant whereas there is no reason for the internationals to really give a shit what Zuma is going to say about 2014” (Participant Two).
- **A chance to laugh at others’ mistakes:** “Ja, [I follow a parody account] for fun. And actually engage with it and laugh. Laugh at Coca Cola’s mistakes. Laugh at Nando’s mistakes. Laughing at the fact that their adverts were pulled from TV. Laughing with somebody who believes it was racist, you know, and even though you don’t believe it wasn’t racist and wished the TV ad would stay on, you know.” (Participant 10).
- **Adding fun to one’s timeline:** “That sort of thing adds a little bit of fun to your timeline. So, I am a big fan of parody accounts” (Participant Two).
- **People love to be entertained:** “Some of them are really entertaining and people loved to be entertained. If possible, I think that they should be allowed to stay, because everything is very serious. It is nice to have that there” (Participant Seven).
- **Comic relief in stressful situations:** “But if we can start laughing at each other it can lift an entire nation... In South Africa, when we were really going through deep, dark days, the Mail and Guardian had some wonderful parody headlines, you know, in the newspaper. I just used to sit there and just laugh and people, even in stressful situations, maybe just need to laugh” (Participant 19).

**Authentic personalities that many followers can relate to:** An account is effective when followers “can identify with the personality of the parody” as it represents authentic human characteristics with a distinct voice. Participant Two explained:
“Parody accounts done well are really good because there is some clever writing about it and they are creating a character in a 140 characters that you want to follow.”

**Compared to the brand’s official social media account, parody accounts may more emotionally resonant and attract more followers:** Several participants said that a parody account by “some guy who wakes up in the morning in his pyjamas, sits in front of his computer and he’s got more followers... because he is more real” compared to the brand’s official social media account. An effective parody account resonates with audiences because “it has to touch a nerve” and “there is a fibre of truth, there is something you can connect with”. Participant Nine observed:

“So, when you touch a human truth, whether it’s positive, negative and neutral. You kind of go: ‘Shit, that’s so me’... The reason parody is a threat is because it touches a human truth.”

Moreover, when a parody account is more transparent, engaging and interesting, it may ultimately become more credible and influential than the brand’s official social media account. Participant Three articulated:

“The reason people will follow them sometimes more than the actual brand account is because they are going to be little more honest and they are going to be a little bit more reverent about your brand. They can actually say things that you may not actually say about your brand even though it might be things that the brand thinks.”

**When parody accounts resonate with popular sentiment, followers can effortlessly express their affinity:** As “a representation of the broader unhappiness” a parody account is “holding up that mirror to these organisations and showing them in a different light”. An effective parody account “has to represent the views of many people” because “you only have power if enough other people believe in what you are doing”. In this manner, people “follow them because they believe in the anti-sentiment of that brand or, they love the sentiment of that brand”. In order to gain traction, social media easily facilitate engagement, likes, social sharing and followers “where before, maybe, you would have had the physical protestor in front of the building or letter to the editor”. Participant 14 observed:

“It also allows other people the power to retweet and go ‘totally agree’ without seeming bias because it’s just a retweet or a favourite... You are just sharing with the sentiment and that is what people want to do. I don't want to have the big political discussion. I want to express my feelings, that is all. I do not want to have a two-hour debate about whatever, but I’m dealing with this. This person’s book aligns with what I’m feeling.”

**The moniker of a mask encourages fearless criticism:** “The same way people used to write books under a false name”, a parody account “gives you a sort of mask because what you see is, if I’m unhappy with a celebrity or a brand they can ignore me or their supporters or influencers can come back and attack me”. In African countries where socio-political
conditions may suppress criticism, there are “parody accounts that pop up because people use that moniker to air their frustrations because they feel that they can't personally”.

Findings pertaining to this section of the study reflect available literature. Skilfully created, compelling and popular user-generated parody accounts are said to enjoy a committed following and are appreciated for their use of satirical criticism (Cutler, 2015; Kantrowitz, 2012; Manning; 2013), humour, influence (Valinsky, 2012) and sarcasm, as confirmed in a related study (Parguel, Lunardo and Chebat, 2012). Audiences value parody with a distinct voice (Colebrook, 2005:181), comedy that is fun and entertaining (Bal et al, 2009:231; Hutcheon, 2000:32; Jiramonai, 2012:37; Mikkonen & Bajde, 2013:315; Neacsu, 2011:89; Skågeby, 2013:65). By challenging orthodox seriousness, parody also offers comic relief (Haomin & Xin, 2010:16). When audiences can relate to the topic of the joke, they laugh at the satire and irony of the joke (Neacsu, 2011:278) while also enjoying the allusions to relevant issues and topics being mocked (Blake, 2011:287; Dentith, 2002:5). Several studies confirm that social media users seek out parody and are more likely to share humorous Tweets as a means to gain attention and influence (Jiramonai, 2012:112; Parguel, Lunardo & Chebat, 2012:2; Smith & Duggan, 2012:2). The virality of social media is demonstrated when followers repeatedly share parody that they regard as truthful and funny (Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam & Hove, 2011:15).

The most successful parodies that attract the most attention, visibility and influence are those that are highly credible and humorous (Sabri & Michel, 2014:243), mimic the brand personality (Jones, 2012; Mann, 2012), especially much loved brands that audiences have empathy for as they can relate emotionally to those brands (Berthon & Pitt, 2012:88). The greater a brand’s expressiveness, the more likely a brand will be emotionally appealing and therefore resonate with stakeholders (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:96,86). However, a paracrisis inflicts damage to reputation (Coombs; 2014:3). Intense relationship attachments are needed to sustain brands that resonate with social media communities (Ambler et al, 2002:16; Keller, 2001:15,21; 2009:143,149). Strong attitudinal attachments and active engagements to establish a sense of community, form the foundation for brand resonance (Keller, 2001:15; 2009:144; 2012:186; 2016:5).

Emotional associations and sentimental attachments are prerequisites for brand equity, which is equated to reputation (Hearn, 2010:427). More specifically, when telling emotionally appealing stories, consumers may become inspired and captivated by the brand message (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:52). Emotions such as love, in particular, are the foundation for brand resonance (Keller, 2001:15; 2009:144; 2012:186) and are expressed in brand personalities so that relationships with consumers are co-created (Fournier, 1998:344;

By exploiting the governing principles of social media and the propensity for slacktivism, almost any lone parodist or other advocate of a cause has the power to potentially hijack a brand, especially if the gripe strikes a chord that resonates broadly, as confirmed in a study by Chandler Chicco Companies (Alexander & Atkins, 2015:7). Often, consumers relate more to the parodied brand image that undermines a brand’s emotional branding message by exposing negative sentiment, as confirmed in a study Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel (2006:53, 59). Moreover, parodists are often outsiders motivated to ridicule the beneficiaries of the status quo (Burgess, 2011:122).

Owing to Web 2.0’s democratisation of content production and distribution (Benkler, 2006:12; Berthon & Pitt, 2012:97; Kietzmann et al, 2011:244; O’Reilly, 2007:36; Levine et al, 1999), satire has become a genre for the masses and has transformed skilled amateur parodists into social influencers (Crittenden, Hopkins & Simmons, 2011:174). The same can be said about a proliferation of user-generated parody in the democratic, post-Apartheid South Africa (Robins, 2014:93; Van der Walt & Shay, 2013:12). Therefore, feel-good slacktivism is effortless affinity for a cause and does not require real-life responsibility, effort and commitment to bring about change (Christensen, 2011; Goldsborough, 2011:13; Penney, 2015:55; Thompson, 2012). Nevertheless, parody tricks its audiences by purposively using frivolous humour while delivering serious criticism that may be otherwise resistant to authoritative and formal expressions of critique (Jiram onai, 2012:37; Mikkonen & Bajde, 2013:315). On Twitter, especially, complaints and criticism in the form of ranting, flaming, hating and trolling are rather commonplace (Cramer, 2013:6; Lange, 2007:3, 2014:53; Leopold, 2015; McCosker, 2014:201; Sevasti Fairweather, 2015; Vrooman, 2002:61; Whitlock, 2015).

The laughter and inappropriateness of parody mobilise public dialogue and opinion (Dentith, 2002:189; Druick, 2009:295, 306; Gray, 2005:235) and audiences prefer parody as opposed to overtly didactic messages, considering that parody does not impose its message (Gray, 2005:234; Neacsu, 2011:89). Of value is the fact that a parodist hides anonymously behind the mask of a moniker to freely express criticism without the fear of personal attacks (Cutler, 2015; Dentith, 2002:23; McLean & Wallace, 2013:1522; Ross, 1998:49), especially in socio-political environments intolerant of other forms of dissent (Chen, 2013; Cheong & Gong, 2010; Fisher, 2013; Jiang, 2010:28). As such, a mask enables a parody to expose the true identities and backstage realities of an organisation’s public image (Hariman, 2008:255;256).
6.4.2.4. **Conclusion of the interpretation of the theme: Clever parody is the voice of the people**

Cleverly-written humour expressed in user-generated parody accounts of skilled amateur satirists resonate emotionally with social media communities so that funny satirists become notable social influencers for several reasons. Using a moniker, a parody account creates a distinct personality with an authentic voice. Resonating most with communities is parody that touches a nerve or a human truth that exposes contradictions that the brand may know about but is not be able to say. By giving satirical, sarcastic and ironic comments on familiar brands, social media users are able to relate to the allusions of parodied brands and find them funny. Seeking good humour that distils issues and comic relief, especially during stressful situations, communities follow and share funny parody accounts for fun or to be entertained. Humour is a popular on Twitter where users like to laugh at brands’ mistakes and frequently share these as a means to increase their reach and influence. Yet, Twitter is also notorious for its propensity for flaming, ranting, hating and trolling, of which the latter is largely ignored by official social media accounts. To gain the necessary attention then, skilfully created parody accounts that have gained considerable influence and deliver constructive criticism stand a better chance of meeting their goals.

In some cases, the humour, authenticity and credibility of a parodied brand personality may resonate stronger with communities compared to that of the official account. Therefore, a common denominator of love, for both parody personalities and brand personalities, is empathy, so that intense relationship attachments are co-created. When communities have humorous associations with emotionally appealing stories, they are motivated to become engaged, loyal and inspired. Correspondingly, humour is an essential requirement for brand resonance.

As mentioned before, humour provides valuable comic relief during stressful situations which are problematic during a paracrisis. For slacktivists who don’t want to spend too much time and effort to demonstrate their affinity with the sentiment expressed by the parody account, social media offers quick and convenient shares, likes, tweets and retweets. Consequently, reputation is co-created. In fact, it may be safe to say that an influential parody account, that holds up a mirror to express a particular sentiment, is a reflection of brand reputation, brand resonance and brand equity.

Owing to the democratic principles of social media, any amateur in pyjamas, or otherwise marginalised outsider, has the ability to mobilise public opinion. By taking advantage of the anonymity of a moniker, the mask used by a parody account fearlessly expresses criticism and expose wrongdoing, especially in environments where socio-political conditions may
suppress other forms of dissent. Parody's sophisticated style of seemingly frivolous humour, ludicrous exaggeration and subtle irony is not overtly didactic and imposing, hence its effectiveness to break down stakeholders' resistance to criticism. Considering the proliferation of user-generated content in the democratic post-Apartheid South Africa and its historic intolerance of dissent, humorous parody is increasingly becoming an emerging trend to fearlessly ridicule wrongdoing, as more serious expressions of criticism may be rather resistant to negative public sentiment. In other words, having become rather immune to the endless stream of angry complaints and crazy customer rants on social media, management may be more receptive to criticism voiced by a skilfully created parody account.

6.4.2.5. Interpretation and discussion of the theme: Establish the intent of a parody

The theme, establish the intent of a parody, was one of nine themes related to the category, determine how parody accounts express reputational concerns. In total, establish the intent of a parody, was expressed the third most frequently in this category, namely in 98 cases (5.51%).

Most participants agreed that the motivations and aims of parody accounts vary considerably and therefore it “comes back to identifying, is this harmful or not?”. Before responding to a parody account, therefore, the intent of a parody account needs to be established on a “case-by-case basis” because “we need to be clever what we pick and choose, in whether we get involved in and when we don’t”.

Upon probing, some participants stressed that a classification of parody accounts’ intentions is “quite a complicated thing”, because “it’s something that’s almost like oversimplifying, or overcomplicating – either one you want to see it”. As such, parody accounts have “different types of objectives of what they are trying to achieve”. In fact, there is “quite a fine line” between mocking a brand and being a malicious troll. In other words, it “is all about sentiment: it can be very positive, it can be very negative”. Complicating the decoding of meaning and intentions of a parody account is the fact that each individual has their own context-specific and subjective interpretation of meaning. Nevertheless, many participants suggest that parody is a reputational judgement of some sort, because “positive or negative it’s telling you something about your reputation” and “even if it is negative, it means that they are trying to have a conversation with you and that is all you need to take from the parody”. Participant 18 elaborated:

“It could be in love, it could be in whatever. But, if it’s in anger, the account, it’s going to almost completely disrupt in every corner.”

When summarising data, a possible classification of parody accounts’ complex intentions,
outcomes and similarities to fake accounts is provided in Table 6.21 below.

**TABLE 6.21: Statements from participants classifying parody accounts’ possible complex intentions, outcomes and similarities to fake accounts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parody accounts with malicious intentions</th>
<th>Intentions of light-hearted, playful spoofs</th>
<th>Intentions of fake accounts mistaken for parody accounts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Maliciously damaging the brand on purpose”, repetitively “bashing”, or harming the brand and its stakeholders on purpose.</td>
<td>Created “just to have fun and be a little bit playful”.</td>
<td>Cloning the content of the official account.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranting, flaming, hating and trolling.</td>
<td>Constructive criticism and fair comment.</td>
<td>Social media cyber-squatting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuse and bullying.</td>
<td>Amusement and entertainment.</td>
<td>Spam, especially to spread malware.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hate, vindictiveness, viciousness and aggression.</td>
<td>Mocking and making fun of well-known people, brands or issues without any underlying sinister intentions.</td>
<td>Fake accounts created to commit fraud, e.g. solicit personal information for phishing and identity theft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflammatory statements indicating sexism, racism and bigotry.</td>
<td>Sharing a passion, admiration and love for brands: prominent people, movies or television shows. Likewise, hobbies and animals.</td>
<td>Fake accounts created to monetise fake likes and fake followers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defamation.</td>
<td>Fan fiction to express love for a brand.</td>
<td>Fake user-generated parody accounts created by spam bots.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Commonly shared intentions**

- Sharing satire, sarcasm, irony and humour.
- Exposing wrongdoing.
- Social commentary and stimulating public debate.
- Providing feedback and seeking engagement about strategic messages.
- Expressing disgruntlement, anger and frustration.
- Advocating for change and accountability.

**Commonly shared outcomes**

- Gaining reach and influence by attracting many followers.
  - Hijacking and disrupting the strategic message.
  - Humour and entertainment.
- Disproving the brand promise, values and principles.
- Copying the official account’s intellectual properties.
  - Mimicking the brand voice.
  - Monetising followers.
- Viral social sharing of provocative and funny linkbait or hoaxes.

Notably, Table 6.21 above illustrates that light-hearted, playful spoofs and malicious parody accounts may have overlapping intentions. Likewise, user-generated parodies may be mistaken for fake accounts since they may achieve similar outcomes. In fact, a significant number of participants managing the official social media accounts for prominent, influential brands recalled how their intellectual properties and content were “copied and pasted” by “copycat” or fake accounts with ambiguous fraudulent intentions.

Findings pertaining to this section of the study concur with available literature. Already, Section 6.4.2.2 has concluded that the ambiguous interpretation of satire and subtle irony used in parody is problematic for emotionally resonant brand reputations. Likewise, it has already
been established that parody is a form of resistance that purposively employs triviality and frivolousness (Mikkonen & Bajde, 2013:315). To avoid repetition, it suffices to say here that not all parodies express serious criticism, as some are merely playful (Hutcheon, 2000:32; Ross, 1998:49), inconsequential, irreverent and silly (Dentith, 2002:37). Other parodies may be created purely for entertainment purposes (MarkMonitor, 2012:2) or to pay homage to favourite and much loved brands (Berthon & Pitt, 2012:88) or popular texts (Ross, 1998:49). A careful analysis is needed, considering the fine line between non-confrontational parody accounts that poke harmless fun at brands and malicious parody accounts that push their own agendas while being vicious, offensive, sensational and in bad taste (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19). Notably, user-generated parodies have complex and wide-ranging intentions (Milne, 2013:210; Ramsey, 2010). To this end, findings of this study build on the three categories of online parody, namely: brand specific, industry specific and pop art parody, as concluded in a related study (Earle, 2002:4).

Continuous ORM identifies (Petty, 2012:759) and analyses the symbolic meanings of the parodied brand image and subverted brand stories (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:61). Likewise, related studies confirm the necessity for using ORM systems to establish the intent of a parody account (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19; Sabri & Michel, 2014:243; Wan, Koh, Ong & Pang, 2015:384). Should management miscomprehend the intention of a parody account, their reaction may complicate rather than ameliorate the situation (Berthon & Pitt, 2012:96).

The many-to-many, dialogic and rather antagonistic environment of social media disrupts relationships between management and stakeholders (Nitins & Burgess, 2014:293). Given the ambiguous social media environment that is rife with malicious imposters and fake content, social media users inadvertently assume these are authentic user-generated parody accounts, as already established in Section 3.6.1. As confirmed by literature, anyone can be fooled by the human-like disguise of fake accounts, social spammers and related fraudsters that seek out prominent and influential brands whose large follower base they exploit (Baker, 2015:128; Cresci et al., 2015:56; Friedman, 2014:22; Nextgate, 2013:12; Ohikuare, 2013:88; Simonite, 2015:67).

Fake content circumvents distrust in advertising (Davis, 2015; Horne, 2015). Meanwhile, stakeholders’ trust in real-life brands are eroded and return on investment is jeopardised when fake content skews metrics (Guo & Chen, 2014:372; Nextgate, 2013:6; Zi et al., 2012:456), diverts website traffic (Mitchell, 2009:23) and contaminates search engine rankings (Nextgate, 2013:6). Correspondingly, strategic reputation management requires an analysis of and planning for a complex narrative web of stories, myths, rumours, symbols and images which may emerge from anywhere (Aula, 2010:47). Stated differently, an abundance of information
sources (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990:234) facilitate irrational decisions based on emotions and fuelled by rumours (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:3). The result is that corporate communication is somewhat overpowered by a plethora of reputational narrators (Aula & Mantere, 2013:342). As such, stakeholders may either believe in a positive or a negative image of a brand, depending on the origin and reliability of a source (Nguyen, Leclerc & LeBlanc, 2013:99; Shamma & Hassan, 2009:334). Therefore, reputation comprises a complex combination of irrational feelings, ideas and attitudes which may not be accurate or relevant to a particular brand (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004; Gardner & Levy, 1955:35).

6.4.2.6. Conclusion of the interpretation of the theme: Establish the intent of a parody

In conclusion, the exact intention of a parody account is not that obvious and clear. On one end of the continuum, a parody account may have malicious intent to damage a brand on purpose, while on the opposite end of the continuum the intent may simply be inconsequential entertainment. At the same time, the intentions of these two extremes overlap somewhat. Both a malicious parody, as well as light-hearted, playful spoofs may simultaneously raise sarcastic criticism motivated by anger, and purposively offend. Moreover, the hidden meaning of irony is open-ended, and so too, does each individual have their own context-specific and subjective interpretation of meaning.

Complicating matters even further, is the tendency of parody accounts to intermittently change their intentions. More troubling is the fact that fake accounts favours much loved, popular brands and achieve the same outcomes as authentic user-generated brand spoofs, such as attracting many followers to their humorous content, only, with fraudulent intentions. In the process, fake accounts tarnish online reputation as they erode trust in corporate communication, skew metrics, divert website traffic and contaminate search engine rankings.

Equally daunting is the fact that management may misinterpret the intentions of a parody account and unknowingly prepare a response strategy that could taint reputation. It is safe to say, then, that management is advised to remain sceptic and not over-reliant on software systems to analyse quantitative metrics, since they may be skewed. In addition, qualitative assessments of each parody are required on a case-by-case basis while making sure they are not, in fact, encountering a fake parody account. Given the ambiguous nature of parody, qualitative assessments would require humans, and not only ORM software systems, to interpret the context, sentiment, hidden meanings and subtlety of irony in order to establish if a parody is indeed malicious before deciding on an appropriate response strategy. It may very well be that the parody's intention is not malicious, but upon closer examination it may emerge that light-hearted, playful entertainment is purposely used to draw attention to valid and
serious criticism, or to express love for a brand. Alternatively, a parody account could merely be regarded as feedback and an attempt to engage in a conversation with the social media management team about strategic messages that are not clear.

Accumulatively, the complex and overlapping intentions of parody accounts, coupled with their close similarity to fake accounts, result in a noisy network of rumours, myths, symbols and stories, likely to result in a rather irrational and misguided brand reputation. Therefore, corporate communication is somewhat overpowered by a plethora of disruptive reputational narrators, and the ability to create a distinct, authentic and credible brand personality that resonates with critical social media communities is a challenge for strategic reputation management during a paracrisis.

6.4.2.7. Interpretation and discussion of the theme: Parody exposes unresolved business issues and broken promises

The theme, parody exposes unresolved business issues and broken promises, was one of nine themes related to the category, determine how parody accounts express reputational concerns. In total, parody exposes unresolved business issues and broken promises, was expressed the fourth most frequently in this category, namely in 96 cases (5.39%).

Smart social media users expose cover-ups of wrongdoing in the transparent age of Google and WikiLeaks. Having access to search engines and websites such as WikiLeaks, “smart” social media users question facts, discuss issues on social networks, search the internet for information and publically share cover-ups of wrongdoing. Most participants agreed that reputational concerns such as poor customer service, underperforming products, a lack of transparency and wrongdoing, are criticized by parody accounts created by “smart” social media users in interactive, digitally connected networks. Ultimately, “it forces them to be transparent because whether you want it or not, we live in a digital age now, nothing is hidden.”

Parody accounts amplify the inconsistency between promises made and consumers’ actual experiences: Participant 18 explained:

“*In almost all cases, the market only responds to a broken promise. There’s almost nothing that they respond to beyond that. And the stronger the break of the promise, the stronger the response.*”

Parody accounts criticize inauthentic corporate communication: Several participants were of the opinion that parody accounts are created in reaction to spin doctoring and inconsistent corporate communication messages in the converged media space. Often, parody accounts are created “because they don’t believe the marketing communication that
you’re bringing forward is true” and are therefore questioning authenticity and credibility. Participant Nine articulated:

“I think smart customers are calling brands out. You’re not bigger, better, faster. You’re not simpler, easier, best. How do you know this is new and improved? So, people are getting real with brands.”

A few participants raised their concerns about management’s tendency to rely on corporate communication teams to compensate for business failures and poor strategic decision-making, instead of resolving these concerns internally first. Similarly, Participant 14 observed:

“Don't just go, spin doctor it and go: ‘Well, we have lost 10 000 jobs but we see this as a positive thing’. Do you think I’m stupid? Your top CEO’s still got a bonus but you are laying off people who are my friends, who are in my community. I am going to open a parody account and show you how stupid you are being.”

Parody accounts seek accountability for poor strategic management decisions: Most participants agreed that parody accounts express failure to meet expectations, especially those functioning in ill-reputed industries such as politics, the beauty, energy and oil industries.

Parody accounts are desperate attempts to bring a resolve to issues that don’t go away: Participant 18 explained:

“Take Telkom SA, there’s a very strong case to build a parody account there because the issue isn’t going away, they are not resolving it. It's a big issue, it’s facing lots of people. So, the issue itself, it’s almost like this system has festered to the point that that issue now needs to be taken on by the public.”

Findings pertaining to this section of the study are in accord with available literature. A brand is a promise (De Chernatony & Dall’Olmo Riley, 1998:426; Roper & Fill, 2012:109) which results in brand equity (Erdem & Swait, 1998:132) when communication is clear, consistent, truthful and credible to deliver on promises made. Emotionally resonating distinct promises encourage emotional bonds with stakeholders on a personal level (Fombrun & Van Riel: 2004:133,137).

Therefore, reputation is strengthened when the brand promise is kept (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004:372), which explains why brand equity is synonymous with corporate reputation (Caruana & Chircop, 2000:43). As confirmed by related studies, user-generated parodies satirise the gap between reality and image (Berthon & Pitt, 2012:91-94), or the gap between the brand promise and the actual brand experience (Earle, 2002:12).

For reputation to resonate with stakeholders, honesty is a prerequisite for authenticity in order to narrow the gap between “claims and deeds, between who you are, what you say, and what you do” (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:163,165). In the digital age, stakeholders highly value authenticity (Postman, 2009:9; Ryan & Leong, 2007:2,15). Social network users are
particularly critical of any hidden, commercial agendas in marketing messages (Postman, 2009:9) and therefore demand proof of authenticity (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007:27) as the legitimacy of institutionalised power is challenged in peer-to-peer networks (Bruns, 2003:3; Castells, 2007). Correspondingly, related studies confirm that trust in organisational spokespersons is declining while trust in social network peers and search engines is increasing (Edelman, 2013:27; 2016:21; Nielsen, 2012a; 2015:15). Likewise, the incessant parodying of brands is indicative of the decline in trust in global corporations (Klein, 2000:22,342,356). In view of the above, social media communities have a low tolerance for public relations spin and corporate jargon (Doorley & Garcia, 2006:116).

Transparency is another prerequisite for authenticity (Hanna, 2009:26) with the result that authentic brands are more successful because they are trusted (Faust & Householder, 2009:46; Murtland, 2010:15) as being truthful and open with social communities (Barwise & Meehan, 2010:84; Lawton Communications Group, 2013:9). The more organisations withhold information, the more intense the pressure to be transparent and to be accountable (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:188). Given the radical transparency of information in the digital age, spin doctoring to cover up imperfections will be discovered and shared online (Thompson, 2007) to encourage accountability (Ayling, 2012:505). Therefore, the transparency principle of social media is a significant challenge to strategic reputation management which prioritises socially responsible and ethical practises. In the context of “social media, an organisation cannot just look good; it has to be good” (Aula, 2010:46). To do this, management needs to instil authenticity from within the organisation around corporate values (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004:369; Balmer, Fukukawa, & Gray, 2007:5; Cornelissen, 2011:8; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:163,165) rather than pressurising public relations to spin the truth, as confirmed in a related study (Venter, 2010:383). Unfortunately, the use of spin doctoring has stigmatised public relations as “the profession that dare not speak its name” (Simmons & Walsh, 2010:18).

As a result, stakeholders may turn to parody to voice their criticism of unethical practises (Fournier & Avery, 2011:27), to expose corporate wrongdoing (Earle, 2002:12) and demand accountability, as confirmed in related studies (Chen, 2013; Cheong & Gong, 2010). Particularly popular are parodies of brands operating in tainted industries (Coombs & Holladay, 2012:412; Earle, 2002:4; Musil, 2013a), and built-up anger (Wan, Koh, Ong & Pang, 2015:383). Prerequisites for reputations that resonate emotionally with stakeholders are brand equity through integrated communication of a consistent brand and strategy to garner respect, trust and liking (Fombrun & Van Riel: 2004:111; Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:27) in the converged media space (Cuddeford-Jones, 2011:40; Lieb et al, 2012:5; Stephen & Galak, 2012:624; Soat, 2012:6).
6.4.2.8. Conclusion of the interpretation of the theme: Parody exposes unresolved business issues and broken promises

To conclude, social media communities’ high regard for authenticity seems to be symptomatic of the declining trust in corporate communication spokespersons. At the same time, access to trusted search engines create a radical transparent peer-to-peer environment. Wrongdoing, unethical practises, built up anger and false promises are discovered, shared and publically scrutinised by parody accounts and their networks of trusted peers. The stronger the break of the distinct promise, the harsher the criticism voiced by a parody account. Likewise, the more an organisation withholds information and becomes untrustworthy, the stronger the pressure from parody accounts and likeminded critics to be honest and transparent. Similarly, brands functioning in tainted industries are more likely targeted by paracrises created by parody accounts.

Honesty and transparency are prerequisites for authentic and distinct reputations that resonate on an emotional level. These are, in the first instance, driven by management and embedded in organisational values. Thereafter, authenticity will externally manifest in a distinct brand promise which is synonymous with the brand equity of reputations that encourage emotional bonds that resonate with critical social media communities. That is to say, when parody accounts satirise the gap between actual experiences and distinct promises made, it is tempting for management to rather rely on corporate communication to create the desired image, than to first resolve business failures internally. As a result, public relations have become a rather stigmatised profession, of which the derogatory term ‘spin doctor’ is a case in point. The challenge then for strategic reputation management is to be good, which will then enable a brand to look good.

Being cognisant of parody accounts that are “calling brands out” by ridiculing inauthentic corporate jargon and misleading brand promises, management is pressurised to be honest, transparent and accountable. Correspondingly, an emotionally resonant reputation that achieves brand equity requires integrated communication to garner respect, trust and liking in the converged media space.

6.4.2.9. Interpretation and discussion of the theme: Prominent brands attract parodies

The theme, prominent brands attract parodies, was one of nine themes related to the category, determine how parody accounts express reputational concerns. In total, prominent brands attract parodies, was expressed the fifth most frequently in this category, namely in 84 cases (4.72%).
To summarise participants' responses, Table 6.22 below outlines examples of prominent corporate brands and product brands as well as the reasons why they may be targeted by user-generated parodies.

**TABLE 6.22: Prominent corporate brands and product brands and the reasons why they are likely to be targeted by user-generated parodies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corporate brands and product brands</th>
<th>Reasons for being parodied</th>
<th>Examples of prominent brands likely to be targeted by user-generated parody accounts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South African parastatals</td>
<td>Reputation for poor service.</td>
<td>● SANRAL, Eskom, Metro Police and Telkom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Brands experiencing crises         | Brands experiencing crises, high volumes of complaints, product or service failures. | ● During the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010 in the Gulf of Mexico.  
● When paralympian Oscar Pistorius who was sentenced to prison for murdering his girlfriend in 2013, several parodies of his lawyer, Barrie Roux, as well as the door used as courtroom evidence during the murder trial.  
● When news channel, ANN7 experienced technical glitches and mistakes by poorly trained presenters during its first broadcasts in 2013.  
● When Woolworths was charged and found guilty by the Advertising Standards Authority for imitating cold drinks produced by the Frankie's Olde Soft Drink Company in 2012.  
● Parody account for FIFA during the controversies surrounding the 2010 FIFA World Cup. |
| Prominent and much loved brands    | Often regarded as having a reputation for quality or achieving good profits. | ● Woolworths, Vodacom, Standard Bank, SASOL, Multichoice/DSTV, KFC and Nando’s. |
| Prominent advertising campaigns of popular brands | Advertising campaigns that are top-of-mind. | ● Parodies of Dove advertisements, FNB advertisements and Nando’s advertisements. |

With reference to Table 6.22 above, prominent corporate brands and product brands are frequently targeted by parody accounts, especially when a reputational crisis is the result of wrongdoing. To illustrate why prominent human brands are targeted by user-generated parodies and to give relevant examples, Table 6.23 below summarises participants’ opinions.

**TABLE 6.23: Prominent human brands and the reasons why they are likely to be targeted by user-generated parodies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human brands</th>
<th>Reasons for being parodied</th>
<th>Examples of prominent brands likely targeted by user-generated parody accounts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Politicians who are often in the news | Prominent politicians. Politicians who are regarded as controversial, outspoken and opinionated are particularly vulnerable. | ● Julius Malema, leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters and former President of the African National Congress Youth League (Boshomane, 2015).  
● Helen Zille, former Democratic Alliance leader.  
● Fikile Mbalula, Minister of Sport and Recreation.  
● Tony Ehrenreich, regional secretary of the Western Cape region of Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).  
● Barack Obama, President of the United States. |
| Much loved celebrities and prominent personalities | | Much loved fictional characters | | Much loved prominent CEOs |
|---|---|---|---|
| Celebrities who are regarded as global icons or prominent South African personalities. Well-known, high-profile and popular personalities in popular entertainment industries such as television, radio, film, music, and sport. | | Well-known and popular fictional characters in the entertainment industry. | | CEOs who are in the “limelight” or who have a reputation for their innovative and effective leadership qualities. |

As illustrated in Table 6.23 above and confirmed by respondents, iconic and much-loved human brands are parodied more often compared to product brands and corporate brands. Except for some controversial politicians, generally there are “personal parody accounts which are usually not as intense” and malicious, compared to those of corporate brands and product brands. Participant 16 explained:

“If it was BP, people go on an absolute rampage about it because it’s a brand because, because it’s a brand. If it was Gareth Cliff eats grapes imported from Israel, and that story broke, then you will have them angry at Gareth Cliff but they’ll get over it. People get more angry at a brand. I don’t know if it’s because people pay brands, so they expect more from them. Because we are paying you.”

It is reasoned that a human brand is tangible and clearly embodies a relatable personality. For this reason, celebrity parody accounts have a greater reach, influence and lifespan compared to product brands and corporate brands. Participant Ten argued:

“When you’re attacking Will Smith’s son or you’re attacking Oscar Pistorius, you’ve see him standing in court. You see him as a human being, you know what it looks like. You don’t see Coke’s CEO as a Coke can or part of a Coke can. You don’t even know who he is. You never see his face.”

Concerning politicians, some participants argue that politicians are favourites for parody accounts, given their poor reputation in general. With regard to global celebrities, they are targeted more often because “we just don’t have the global icons that people actually give a
shit about”. Similarly, a parody account for breakfast cereal or soap, for example, is highly unlikely, considering that social media users don’t “care enough” about them.

Brand personalities that are loved, cared about and top-of-mind, are mostly parodied:

Several participants agreed that any brand represents human characteristics expressed in a brand personality to evoke human emotions. Participant 18 observed:

“I’d say, I must be careful of saying this on record, but there is fundamentally no difference between a relationship, between a brand, a brand, and a brand's human and humanness. All relationships, it’s all promises... There is fundamentally no difference there. It’s just… particularly in the social media space where everybody is a brand, in whatever way you look at it.”

Parody accounts are created because people “love a brand”. To elaborate, Participant Four explained:

“If you go and look for Kevin Lane Keller, he is a writer on brands and he’s got a consumer based brand equity pyramid. It is a very good model of how brands work. At the very top of that, at the pinnacle of that is brand resonance. And then Saatchi and Saatchi put another one on top of that called a lovemark.”

“Big brands” that are well-known, top-of-mind, have many followers on social media, have high levels of media exposure in general, relevant for a particular market, significant and cared for by many people. As one participant observed:

“So, there’s no question that obviously the more publicity you’re getting, the more chance of being parodied. I mean, why would I have a parody account for Kodak Express Linksfield? No one's going to follow it, no one's going to find it amusing.”

Findings pertaining to this section of the study correlate with existing literature. As confirmed by a related study, prominent and highly distinct brands are most likely to be targeted by user-generated parodies, because audiences are then more likely to relate to the satirised brand, both cognitively and emotionally (Berthon & Pitt, 2012:91). With regard to prominent human brands, these are more popular, controversial and entertaining on Twitter (Thelwell, 2014). Regardless of the type of brand, it is argued that the most visible, top-of-mind brands equally have positive brand equity which culminates in a high EQ Score or reputation that is emotionally resonant (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004). This implies that a brand is expressed as a personality with human characteristics (Aaker, 1996:112; Fournier, 1998:344; Keller & Richey, 2006:74) so that consumers can express their strong psychological bond or love for a brand and therefore co-create relationships. It stands to reason then, that much loved brands are said to be iconic brands or lovemarks (Roberts, 2005:105) that are able to attain brand resonance (Keller, 2001:15; 2009:144; 2012:186). Strong attitudinal attachments and active engagements to establish a sense of community, form the foundation for brand resonance (Keller, 2001:15; 2009:144; 2012:186; 2016:5). Moreover, top-of-mind awareness implies the
extent to which consumers recall and recognise a brand, remember a brand, have knowledge about a brand and express opinions about a brand (Aaker, 1996:114; Keller, 2001:8). At the same time, parody and satire most often deflate egos (Gring-Pemble & Watson, 2003:136) of institutionally powerful (Matsa, 2010:9), prominent individuals (Mikkonen & Bajde, 2013:312) or ridicule any other dignified subject (Balick, 2008b; Cresswell, 2009b) and the official word (Dentith, 2002).

Highly visible and much loved brands are associated with extensive promises, high expectations, as well as considerable economic and political power, which are frequently leveraged by parodies (Earle, 2002:11; Hesseldahl, 2007; Katyal, 2010:797; Klein, 2000; Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009:1123). Another reason for frequently parodying prominent brands (Earle, 2002:11) is the fact that organisations are perceived as disembodied entities, and therefore easily fall victim to viral, angry attacks and social media crises, especially on Twitter (Ott & Theunissen, 2015:100). Moreover, big brands with many customers encounter more complaints and criticism (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19-25) as parodies often criticize corporate wrongdoing (Erickson, Kretschmer & Mendis, 2013:9). Also, strong brands have far more disadvantages in comparison to the small number of shortcomings of weaker brands, as confirmed in a study by Krishnamurthy and Kucuk (2009:1123). Iconic brands (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:63) most talked about become embedded in popular culture, hence being parodied is indicative of a brands' popularity (Sutherland, 2004). Likewise, parodies of familiar corporate advertising themes are appreciated (Herder, 2012:38) Similarly, brands lacking iconic status and visibility tend to be ignored by activists (Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:63).

### 6.4.2.10. Conclusion of the interpretation of the theme: Prominent brands attract parodies

In conclusion, it appears that top-of-mind human brands are the most often targeted by user-generated parody accounts. This may suggest that social media communities find it easier to relate to, emotionally resonate with and care about real life, tangible and authentic personalities, as opposed to inanimate corporate brands and product brands. Correspondingly, parody accounts of human brands are more popular, since they likely provide light-hearted, playful entertainment, compared to the rather serious criticism of parodies targeting corporate brands and product brands. Consequently, parody accounts of corporate brands and product brands are typically more damaging to reputation, compared to those targeting human brands.

By virtue of the fact that a prominent brand holds a position of power, embodies brand personalities and speaks the official word, a brand represents that which a parody typically ridicules. Parody and satire, as related genres of humour, would almost not exist without a
subject that has an ego to deflate and a dignity to offend. In general, parodies of prominent brands indicate the extent to which communities recognise, remember and have adequate knowledge about a brand to express an opinion. With regard to prominent corporate brands and product brands, parody accounts are more likely to target those with distinct and emotionally resonant reputations, particularly those with memorable advertising campaigns or those accused of wrongdoing. This is because communities are then more likely to enjoy the humour, express their opinions, relate to and care about the satirised brand that they are already familiar with. Having invested both money and strong psychological bonds with much loved brands, it stands to reason then why anger is more malicious when directed at corporate brands and product brands, as they are regarded as inanimate objects, abstract concepts and disembodied entities incapable of reciprocating feelings. Human personalities, it seems, are easily forgiven, as it is human to make mistakes. The same cannot be said for inanimate objects such as corporate brands and product brands, especially on Twitter.

The brand resonance of iconic lovemarks is jeopardised by malicious parody accounts that criticize high expectations and disappointment about broken promises, which is far more common for big service brands. Big brands have more opportunities for failure given their vast number of customers and greater number of weaknesses compared to smaller, less visible brands. Even should a parody account target a weaker and lesser-known brand, social media communities would probably not really have an opinion about an insignificant brand, care enough to follow the parody account or even take it seriously, since weaker brands also lack both economic and political power. Therefore, viral paracrases for prominent corporate brands and product brands are more likely to experience a more intense and extended lifecycle compared to human brands. For these brands, it is therefore essential to ensure emotionally resonant brand personalities. To conclude, findings in this section confirm that prominent brands attract parodies, as indicated in the ten most reputable and most valuable brands in 2014 and 2015, illustrated in Chapter 2, Section 2.4.1, Table 2.1 and Table 2.2.

6.4.2.11. Interpretation and discussion of the theme: Parody as a noteworthy trend

The theme, parody as a noteworthy trend, was one of nine themes related to the category, determine how parody accounts express reputational concerns. In total, parody as a noteworthy trend, was expressed the sixth most frequently in this category, namely in 69 cases (3.88%).

A clever and skilfully created parody account has the potential to become a mainstream cultural phenomenon: A cleverly written and influential user-generated parody may inspire a book, television series or feature film. Participant Two explained:
“There are implications for parody accounts to actually become mainstream memes that become part of society. And I think parody accounts done right are some of the best accounts online.”

Social media parody is a trend in developed economies, mostly targeting prominent American brands: “America’s total market size in social media it is massive compared to what we’ll ever reach”. As such, social media parody is somewhat of an established trend in the USA and UK.

The creation and appreciation of parody accounts is a niche trend locally, owing to expensive internet access: Expensive internet access accounts for limited online audiences and creative digital skills to publish compelling satirical parody. Participant Ten observed:

“So, it’s quite interesting that you guys are doing research on this because it seems like a very niche thing.”

Parody accounts are not a fad, and warrant scientific enquiry and trend reports to management: When probed whether this study is warranted, considering that parody accounts are more prevalent in the developed world, most participants agreed that the phenomenon is not “a fad” and that South Africa usually follows USA trends. Therefore, “don’t just assume that because there hasn’t been a big parody or a big social thing yet, it’s not coming”, which then would require contingency planning and analysis. As such, insights around parody accounts need to be included in trend reports. Participant 14 argued:

“You need to start monitoring. You have to break it down for relevance to your brand, your client’s brand, and go: ‘Okay, so the fact that we are seeing this trend of parody in the UK where I picked it up several times. It seems to be very big there as well as in the US.’”

Findings pertaining to this section of the study corroborate available literature. Findings suggest that user-generated parody varies between being recognised as a subculture or micro trend (Kung, 2015) or regarded as an established trend with significant cultural impact (Trend Hunter, 2015), to the extent that Fournier and Avery (2011:24) and Funnell (2015) typify the current cultural zeitgeist as the age of parody. Findings suggest that it is safe to assume that parody accounts appear to be a noteworthy, emerging trend in South Africa. The popularity of parody is brought about by the proliferation of satire in the democratic, post-Apartheid South Africa, as well as the increasing access to social media technologies (Robins, 2014:93). Already, the parody account SuzelleDIY (2016) has become a mainstream cultural phenomenon (Blaine, 2015; Du Plessis, 2015; Moodie, 2015; Pitamber, 2015; Roets, 2015; Sleet, 2015; Superbalist, 2015). In Africa and South Africa, specifically, user-generated parodies play a vital role in the trend towards candidness (Trendwatching, 2015), as angry and disillusioned stakeholders increasingly demand transparency, transformation and accountability from institutional governance. Therefore, ORM systems
need to track early warning signs of user-generated parodies and constantly monitor, analyse and prepare contingency plans to manage reputation (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:61).

6.4.2.12. Conclusion of the interpretation of the theme: Parody as a noteworthy trend

To conclude, findings suggest that cleverly-written and humorous social media parody is a noteworthy emerging trend in South Africa which has already become a mainstream cultural phenomenon in the case of the multi-award winning SuzelleDIY who has published a book, whose YouTube videos are broadcast on television and whose character appears in several television advertisements. As internet access and digital skills are increasing locally, it is fair to say that South Africa is slowly but surely also embracing the cultural zeitgeist of the age of parody in the converged media space. A contributing factor is the proliferation of satire in the democratic, post-Apartheid South Africa.

Although SuzelleDIY is a light-hearted playful spoof, the potential for more malicious brand parodies to become a mainstream cultural phenomenon cannot be dismissed. Already, user-generated parody accounts play a key role when expressing criticism in the trend towards candidness. Angry and disillusioned stakeholders increasingly demand transparency, transformation and accountability from poorly governed and underperforming institutions in South Africa and the rest of the continent. Therefore, management insights in trend reports are valuable for contingency planning to mitigate the risks of social media parody accounts, especially for prominent local brands to maintain reputations that resonate with critical stakeholders.

6.4.2.13. Interpretation and discussion of the theme: Disgruntled stakeholders create parodies

The theme, disgruntled stakeholders create parodies, was one of nine themes related to the category, determine how parody accounts express reputational concerns. In total, disgruntled stakeholders create parodies, was expressed the third least frequently in this category, namely in 55 cases (3.09%).

Most of the participants agreed that parody accounts are created by frustrated stakeholders, including disgruntled customers, employees, activists, angry social media users or competitors. Parodists typically have had long-standing gripes and complaints about an organisation, because “you must be really angry with the brand for you to have created this account”. When complaints have not been resolved in any other way, a parody account is created to draw more attention to poor customer experiences or wrongdoing in general. As Participant 14 observed:
“If you are not listening to me on your Twitter handle, I’ll create one and show you what you are missing... It is almost like screaming the hashtag brandfail.”

In fact, two participants, who are also social media management experts, explained how their own long-standing frustrations with broken promises and poor customer service motivated them to create parody accounts as a means to harness the power of social media to highlight their plight.

Findings pertaining to this section of the study confirm available literature. User-generated parodies are created by any disgruntled stakeholder (Berthon & Pitt, 2012:89; Crittenden, Hopkins & Simmons, 2011:179; Crompton, 2011:32; Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006:479, 2010:325; Petty, 2012:760, Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006:50). In this manner, user-generated parodies that express anger, dissatisfaction and criticize wrongdoing are definitive of a reputational threat or paracrisis (Coombs, 2014:8; Coombs & Holladay, 2012:408). Similarly, findings confirm the conclusions of related studies that the perceived gap between image and reality (Berthon & Pitt, 2012) irresponsible behaviour and built-up anger over a period of time are catalysts for parody accounts (Wan, Koh, Ong & Pang, 2015:383).

6.4.2.14. Conclusion of the interpretation of the theme: Disgruntled stakeholders create parodies

To conclude, any disgruntled stakeholder with long-standing gripes about poor customer service, broken promises, and corporate wrongdoing are more likely to harness the power of social media by means of a user-generated parody account as a way to be heard. Built-up anger and smouldering issues criticized in a parody account satirise the perceived gap between image and reality, which is definitive of a paracrisis that may tarnish an emotionally resonant reputation.

6.4.2.15. Interpretation and discussion of the theme: Recognise parody that compliments reputation

The theme, recognise parody that compliments reputation, was one of nine themes related to the category, determine how parody accounts express reputational concerns. In total, recognise parody that compliments reputation, was expressed the second least frequently in this category, namely in 52 cases (2.92%).

Clever parody accounts raise top-of-mind awareness: A significant number of participants agreed that a cleverly written, funny and entertaining parody account attracts attention, visibility, conversations, viral word-of-mouth sharing, “free advertising” and “free fans” for a brand. When audiences “heard of brand X through that cheesy, that cocky account”, a parody
account may reach audiences that may not otherwise have been aware of a brand, because “they’ll check out the original brand to compare and then go: ‘Oh, that’s actually quite cool!’”.

**A parody account compliments a distinct emotionally resonant reputation:** Many participants agreed, that regardless of the criticism expressed, a parody account is indicative of popularity, prominence, and relevance, because “people have noticed you enough to dedicate time to impersonating you”. Participant Nine noted:

“The parody could actually mean that you have a very good reputation. Even negative parody – because why do people skinner about you? Because you’re so damn good.”

Likewise, participant Eight articulated:

“Well, if you’re big enough to have someone have a parody of you it’s actually kind of testimony to your success... Like they say, you know you’re doing well if you have haters... People will look up to you or they will dislike you because of the fact that you are big and you’re popular.”

**As the highest form of flattery, parody accounts are indicative of care, love and affinity for distinct brands:** A parody account is created “because he loves the brand so much, plus he wants to sort of ride on its coat tails... so why punish that guy?” Likewise, Participant 14 elaborated:

“It still means that people care. The moment no one is mocking you is the moment you are not relevant.”

Similarly, Participant Two observed:

“Parody is the highest form of flattery. So, sometimes it does have a beneficial angle and I think it all depends on the seriousness of the brand.”

Findings pertaining to this section of the study corroborate available literature. Expressive reputations that resonate emotionally include high visibility and the distinctiveness of a unique promise (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:111,133). Likewise, distinctly successful texts inspire parodies (Ross, 1998:49) to pay homage to favourite brands (Berthon & Pitt, 2012:88). The expression of love for a brand manifests when stakeholders publish fan content online, accelerate word-of-mouth, actively engage with brands online (Roberts, 2005:105). Considering that brand equity is demonstrated by sentimental attachment, emotional associations and share of mind, these intangibles are, in fact, reputation (Hearn, 2010:427). Brands most talked about become embedded in popular culture, hence being parodied is indicative of a brands’ popularity (Sutherland, 2004). Therefore, brand parodies are indicative of salient corporate communication that has achieved cultural resonance (Fournier & Avery, 2011), and relationships based on love and passion for brand personalities (Fournier, 1998:344; Fournier & Alvarez, 2012:177). Notably, a study by Berthon and Pitt (2012)
confirmed that brands with strong distinct attributes that differentiate themselves either ideologically or physically, are more likely parodied.

Brand resonance reflects the brand equity of strong brands that engage in close social media relationships with consumers who love and feel ‘in synch’ with a brand (Keller, 2001; 2009). Strong attitudinal attachments and active engagements to establish a sense of community, form the foundation for brand resonance (Keller, 2001:15; 2009:144; 2012:186; 2016:5). In the process, brands are actively co-created by consumers and management (Christodoulides, Jevons & Bonhomme, 2012:57; Fournier & Alvarez, 2012:179; Ind, Iglesias & Schultz, 2013:9). A related study confirms that being parodied is a measure of effective online visibility (CMPA, 2013:19). Therefore, top-of-mind awareness implies the extent to which consumers recall and recognise a brand, remember a brand, have knowledge about a brand and express opinions about a brand (Aaker, 1996:114; Keller, 2001:8). As a result, many managers appreciate and welcome brand parodies (Mikkonen & Bajde, 2013:331), especially those that place a brand in a positive light, as they enhance authenticity. Notably, the co-creation of brands imply that reputation is equally co-created in mutually beneficial collaborations (Arvidsson, 2005:244; Hatch & Schultz, 2010:592; Ind, Iglesias & Schultz, 2013; Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

6.4.2.16. Conclusion of the interpretation of the theme: Recognise parody that compliments reputation

When recognising that parody is the highest form of flattery, management welcomes the fact that parody accounts are drawn to brands with strong, distinct attributes and a unique promise. Therefore, a well-written and clever parody account may be appreciated as testimony to brand resonance and brand equity. A skilfully created parody account, especially for playful brand personalities, indicates that a brand is loved, relevant, discussed, engaged and in synch with social media communities. It also implies that even haters care enough to mock a brand. When gaining viral traction on social networks, a complimentary parody account may further raise top-of-mind awareness by exposing previously unfamiliar audiences to a brand. In the mutually beneficial process, authenticity is enhanced as both management and parody accounts actively collaborate to co-create reputation. Given the above, clever parody accounts may extend relationships and create previously neglected emotionally resonant brand associations such as humour, fun and playfulness.

6.4.2.17. Interpretation and discussion of the theme: Controversy triggers parody accounts

The theme, controversy triggers parody accounts, was one of nine themes related to the category, determine how parody accounts express reputational concerns. In total, controversy
triggers parody accounts, was expressed the least frequently in this category, namely in 48 cases (2.70%).

Most participants agreed that the types of controversies that mostly trigger parody accounts, especially on Twitter, are crises associated with some form of wrongdoing. These crises are regarded as controversial when they typically attain prominent publicity in traditional media and high levels of discussion on social media. Other types of controversies that are likely to be targeted by parody accounts on Twitter include any current, newsworthy event and/or trending topics. By so doing, parody accounts remain relevant and “opportunistic, because that joke the next day is not that funny”. Such parody accounts deliver satiric social commentary and stimulate debate “during high media impact” to enhance visibility and attract more followers. Some of these become dormant after a crisis has receded, only to be succeeded by a new wave of parody accounts when another crisis occurs.

Findings pertaining to this section of the study confirm available literature. Twitter parody accounts become active as soon as controversy erupts, most notably during a crisis (Erickson, 2012; Fournier & Avery, 2011:27; Malone, 2012:297; Milne, 2013:206; Nitins & Burgess, 2014:297; Van den Hurk, 2015; Wilson, 2011:8; Wan, Koh, Ong & Pang, 2015:381). Wrongdoing is scrutinised during a para crises (Coombs, 2014) to enlist public petitioning against brands (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). Parody accounts extend their reach and influence when collaborating with trending topics on Twitter (Broderick, 2014). Hashtags used in trending topics are the most effective amplification and organising tools to criticize brand failures (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:15). Twitter, especially, attract educated users and social media influencers interested in real-time breaking news (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:15; Milnes, 2015; Whitlock, 2015) and satire about topical events as they unfold (Jones, 2012).

6.4.2.18. Conclusion of the interpretation of the theme: Controversy triggers parody accounts

As a preferred network for real-time breaking news where social influencers stay updated, Twitter is the chosen platform for parody accounts that satirise controversies and wrongdoing. Being opportunistic, parody accounts leverage breaking news and viral trending topics to make their humour immediately relevant and visible, reaching many followers. Therefore, decision-makers and journalists are most likely reached on Twitter so that a parody account stands a better chance of reaching its goals during a paracrisis. Given how quick and easy it is to create a Twitter account, a new controversy may trigger a fresh set of parody accounts to satirise events unfolding, only replacing dormant ones that have lost their relevance. Therefore, the visibility of emotionally resonant brand reputations is mostly at stake during a paracrisis.
6.4.3. Category and supporting themes: Responses to co-manage reputation

Responses to co-manage reputation, is the third and last category. This category emerged from a cluster of six relevant themes. Owing to the participatory nature of the social web, brands and reputation are actively co-created by consumers and management in mutually beneficial collaborations (Arvidsson, 2005:244; Christodoulides, Jevons & Bonhomme, 2012:57; Fournier & Alvarez, 2012:179; Hatch & Schultz, 2010:592; Ind, Iglesias & Schultz, 2013:9; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). With this in mind, the category, responses to co-manage reputation, refers to the response strategies of social media management teams to co-create and co-manage and emotionally resonant brand reputation when encountering parody accounts in critical, many-to-many social media communities. Themes pertaining to the category, responses to co-manage reputation, are further defined and analysed in Table 6.24 below, as they pertain to the findings. To reiterate, 22 themes emerged from the data which equalled 1 780 cases in total.

**TABLE 6.24: Themes, definitions and frequencies for the category: Responses to co-manage reputation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme: Responses to co-manage reputation</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Frequency of cases</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honest and authentic responses are scrutinised in many-to-many dialogues</td>
<td>In the digital age where information is discoverable, official responses need to be forthcoming, honest, transparent and authentic, which is a challenge for management. The many-to-many, conversational nature of social media implies that official responses are constantly scrutinised and being held accountable. When parody accounts criticize wrongdoing, official responses need to honestly apologise for wrongdoing, ideally accompanied by actual changes in behaviour. Conversely, defensive responses, concealing information, and spin doctoring result in social media backlashes which harm reputation.</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>8.09 %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guard against indiscriminately shutting down parody accounts</td>
<td>Although malicious intentions may justify the shutting down of parody accounts, defensive responses, especially by prominent brands, mostly draw more attention to and sympathy for the parody account. Regardless of the intention of the parody account or the methods used to get the account removed, a social media backlash easily escalates into a crisis as it is impossible to control the viral sharing and digital footprint of content, once removed from the internet.</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>6.24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to parody accounts is a calculated risk</td>
<td>Owing to the unpredictable and uncontrollable nature of social media, coupled with its propensity for hating, flaming, ranting and trolling, a timely response to parody accounts is regarded as a calculated risk which requires a careful consideration of all contingencies before taking action. Although aspects such as the intention of the parody account are first considered when</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>4.94%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
devising an appropriate response, even benevolently honest responses may face unintentional negative consequences. Consequently, many managers fear social media and opt to dismiss and ignore parody accounts altogether.

Respond by co-creating content
Instead of being defensive, rather embrace parody accounts by means of co-creating content and humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter with parody accounts. Both the brand’s official social media accounts and parody accounts enhance their emotionally resonant reputations during entertaining humorous dialogues involving their respective networks of influencers, which enhance visibility, reach and authenticity.

Value the insights gained from parody accounts as instigators for strategic change
Parody accounts and their ability to make the most of the principles of social media provide valuable insights to direct decision-making when management is responsive, and listens to issues being raised.

Tactical responses are aligned with higher-level strategic business objectives
Tactical responses to parody accounts need to be integrated with higher-level strategic business objectives, which, in turn, are reinforced by strategic communication objectives, social media strategies, brand values, brand promise, brand personality and, ultimately, the appropriate tone of voice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respond by co-creating content</td>
<td>4.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value the insights gained from parody accounts as instigators for strategic change</td>
<td>3.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactical responses are aligned with higher-level strategic business objectives</td>
<td>3.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30.17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The discussion that follows further elaborates on the findings reported in Table 6.24 above. Themes are interpreted following a thematic analysis of ten related themes, clustered around the category, responses to co-manage reputation. Structured in a descending order of frequencies, the subsequent section will discuss and interpret the findings of the themes.

6.4.3.1. Interpretation and discussion of the theme: Honest and authentic responses are scrutinised in many-to-many dialogues

The theme, honest and authentic responses are scrutinised in many-to-many dialogues, was one of six themes related to the category, responses to co-manage reputation. In total, honest and authentic responses are scrutinised in many-to-many dialogues, was expressed the most frequently in this category, namely in 144 cases (8.09%).

Explicitly admit wrongdoing, as official responses are openly scrutinised in many-to-many converged media networks: Official responses are not a one-way process, but a continuous engagement “because everybody can see exactly the processes that you are going through in dealing with this”. When deciding to issue official responses, these cannot be isolated to press releases for traditional media, only because “if you say something on radio
and you say something different on TV and online, and then we talk to each other, we will
know. This is the many-to-many concept”. Participant 12 reiterated:

“It used to be very easy for businesses, you know, the backlash would be a few
hundred letters in the post and that’s it. And it dies down and you carry on with business
as usual.”

Several participants advised against ignoring parody accounts, which creates a perception of
an unwillingness to engage, and non-transparency. Silence may further fuel criticism and
suspicion that management tries to “hide behind our walls”. During a crisis there will be an
expectation of an honest and authentic official response.

Explicitly admit wrongdoing, as a silent majority is quietly scrutinising responses:
Although only a small fraction of social media users are actively engaged online, the silent,
but largest majority forms opinions and may sympathise with the official response. Participant
One elaborated:

“What is quite important to know is that if it is a parody account we will respond
necessarily for the benefit of the parodist, so to speak, but for the benefit of his
followers. So, the follower will see that we are a proactive brand and that we are
responding and that we have given a decent answer.”

Explicitly admit wrongdoing, as those who try to hide information get caught out by
socially connected graphs: The interconnected and dialogical nature of social media
requires honest, authentic, forthcoming and open responses to valid criticism by parody
accounts. Most participants warned against any attempts to spin doctor or “massage the truth”
in official responses. Participant Three observed:

“You can frame it in a nice way. Even then, as soon as you try to pretty it up, people
are going to attack you for that.”

Any information is discoverable, either through search engines, whistle-blower websites like
WikiLeaks or published by hackers, because “if somebody wants to find out something they
will”. Therefore, “you cannot get away with leaving out as much out like you used to”. Transperency “forces you to then release information that you might not have really wanted
or the public shouldn’t actually know”. Participant 13 observed:

“I think from a transparency and consistency point of view, social is probably one of
the biggest areas in which you can get caught out. And to try and control your
messages in this kind of enormous world of socially connected graphs and people who
have access to things like Google in seconds. You’ve got to be that much surer of the
message and you need to be that much for honest because it will come back and bite
you.”

Explicitly admit wrongdoing, and reform by taking measures to change behaviour:
Apologies without any real change in business behaviour are “very difficult for brands that
have fundamental issues with their products or their services”. When valid criticism by a
parody account demonstrates a commitment to finding solutions, critics feel respected and see that management cares enough to respond and to “fix the problem”. Participant Three elaborated:

“You have to be apologetic with no caveats, so it’s got to be: ‘We are incredibly sorry. We are taking measures’. What measures are you taking? Very much traditional PR thinking.”

Explicitly admit wrongdoing, and give a once-off, firm apology to diffuse anger: Community managers are cautioned against the “risk of being too apologetic on social” because “customers will take advantage of you if they see you are cowering”. Emphasising the prevalence of hating, flaming, ranting and trolling, Participant 16 said:

“Any opportunity for people to hate on brands on social media - they’ll take it, and the smallest little thing from a brand trying to be perceived as a bully - gets taken it the wrong way and it blows up in your face kind of a thing.”

In an antagonistic social media environment, apologies function to diffuse anger. Participant 12 elaborated:

“And I think sometimes you do have to admit that you were wrong, even if you weren’t really wrong. Just by virtue of you being involved, before you can start saying: ‘But actually, we’re less wrong than they are.’… then you’re more of the hero.”

In order avoid being bullied in antagonistic social communities, “you need to sort of stand your ground and be firm while also admitting that you were wrong”, while “later down the line, an opportunity to explain the whole story” is provided. Participant 12 articulated:

“And the main thing when dealing with a crisis, actually, is to first say: ‘Look, we acknowledge. We were wrong’. Then say what you’re going to do about it before you can start talking about, or trying to deflect from the situation, or giving an excuse of what actually happened.”

Considering the propensity for anger to pick up traction on social media, Participant One explained:

“We will say to them that we will give them a response approved by the client. Whatever that might be. Thereafter we are satisfied that we have given them a response that the client had agreed to. Thereafter, we don’t respond to them further. There will be some sort of feedback, we will say that we feel that we have adequately responded to your complaint. That’s the end.”

This sentiment is verified in quantitative data (Q7): Publicly acknowledge the parody account by responding once and not again thereafter. Of the 150 participants, 64 (42.67%) said Yes, 57 (38.00%) said No, while 16 (10.67%) were Not sure.

Explicitly admit wrongdoing, by issuing a statement to reinforce the authenticity of the official account: Participants were somewhat divided over the effectiveness of a public versus a private response strategy. A public response could entail tweets or media releases
to point out a parody account, or awareness campaigns to reinforce the verified status of the official account. Alternatively, the parodist could be tweeted publically with a request to engage with the social media management team.

**Implicitly Admit Wrongdoing by ignoring publically, but admit wrongdoing by engaging the parodist privately:** Nearly half of the participants preferred that the parodist is approached offline to resolve the underlying issues being criticized. On the one hand, some believed that offline engagement with a parodist is “the worst thing that you can do - you have got to be as transparent as possible”. Yet, quantitative data recommended a public engagement (Q7): Do not respond publicly, but rather contact the owner of the parody account offline. Of the 150 respondents the majority of 79 (52.67%) said No, 31 (20.67%) said Yes, while 24 (16.00%) were Not sure. On the other hand, some participants recommended offline interactions such as phone calls, emails, direct messages or personally meeting with the parodist to “go behind the scenes, keep your dirty linen private”. As such, Participant 18 explained:

“As long as the fire is burning, stay away, you know. Don’t engage in public with it. So if the situation is going on, you need to at least engage the person offline. Or, engage them privately so that you’ve got an opportunity to find out where their heads are at. Because some of them are doing it because they want to be trolls. Some are doing it because they genuinely want to get feedback, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. I wouldn’t recommend ever engaging until one knows the state of the person that owns the account. Thereafter, it depends on the brand.”

**Refute when management is not willing to expose weaknesses and protect economic interests:** Most participants agreed that a suitable response to valid criticism by a parody account is honesty and authenticity, which is closely related to transparency. For Participant 18, honesty is the degree to which “the brand is willing to expose their own weaknesses” in the way that any ordinary person would do. As such, a few participants agreed that it takes courage for management to be honest and forthcoming with information. As Participant 19 argued:

“So, if a brand can be transparent, and upfront, everybody benefits. But, they don’t, I’m sorry to say they don’t... It’s usually because of shareholders. And basically, they’re looking at their shares and they don’t give a shit about brand, you know, reputation. They are just saying: ‘Get rid of this problem, get rid of these silly little people.’”

**Refuting criticism by threatening a parodist could escalate into social media backlash:** Several participants warned against aggressive or threatening responses via private messages. Most often, such private communication will also be made public on social networks to strengthen the parodist’s view that the organisation is guilty of the issues being raised, or trying to hide something. Similarly, issuing defensive threats against parodists in
public, giving excuses, shifting blame, or defending an organisation’s wrongdoing as catalysts for social media crises. A defensive response “creates a perception of that you’re hiding or you are not being forthcoming”.

Findings pertaining to this section of the study agree with and elaborate on Coombs and Holladay’s (2012:412) paracrisis response strategies. To elaborate, Table 6.25 below summarises participants’ descriptions and confirmation from literature to illustrate honest and authentic paracrisis response strategies in many-to-many networks.

**TABLE 6.25: Honest and authentic paracrisis response strategies in many-to-many networks supported by literature**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paracrisis response strategy</th>
<th>Participants’ descriptions</th>
<th>Confirmation from literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Refute criticism             | • Management is not willing to expose weaknesses, but protect economic interests  
• Threatening a parodist could escalate into social media backlash | • The networked marketplace is critical of anonymous, profit-taking and faceless entities, which necessitates integrated communication to nurture customer relationships and brands (Schultz & Kitchen, 2004:349). When management fights back, conflict with angry social media users escalates (Coombs & Holladay, 2012:412).  
• Heavy-handed responses to silence criticism may escalate into a viral social media backlash, known as the Streisand effect (Louw, 2013:614; Žamani, Kasimati & Giaglis, 2012:442). |
| Implicitly admit wrongdoing and reform | • Ignore publically but engage the parodist privately | • A related study recommends a personal meeting to listen to grievances and build a relationship with a parodist (Veil et al, 2015:107).  
• Instead of directly responding to a parody account, address issues and measures taken to resolve valid criticism in a general manner in a position statement (Earle, 2002:16; Ott & Theunissen, 2015). |
| Explicitly admit wrongdoing and reform | • Official responses are openly scrutinised in many-to-many converged media networks  
• A silent majority is quietly scrutinising responses  
• Those who try to hide information get caught out by socially connected graphs  
• Take measures to change behaviour  
• Give a once-off, firm apology to diffuse anger  
• During a paracrisis, risks are publically managed while official responses are constantly criticized (Coombs, 2014; Coombs & Holladay, 2012) in the uncontrollable converged media space, necessitating strategic reputation management (Aula & Manterse, 2008:210).  
• Twitter users have high expectations of a timely official response (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19). Criticism tends to dissipate when critics feel that they are treated fairly and with respect (Mortimer, 2008:15) and official statements (Wan, Koh, Ong & Pang, 2015:384) reinforce positive measures to address the issue (Ott & Theunissen, 2015). Authenticity requires messages to correlate with management actions (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:163).  
• Respond to parodies by being open and tactful while striving to maintain long-term relationship (Crompton,
Social communities have a low tolerance for inauthentic corporate jargon and public relations spin (Doorley & Garcia, 2006:116). Radical transparency, as evident in WikiLeaks, disrupts top-down spin doctoring (Thompson, 2007) owing to a discoverable digital footprint (JWT, 2012:6; Madden et al., 2007). When hiding damaging information, hacktivists may publish the information in protest (Chavan & Ahire, 2015:339; Jordan & Taylor, 2004:164; Musil, 2013a; Ziegler, 2002:14).

- A small number of opinions draw disproportionate attention, as the large majority of social media users are lurkers or spectators (Bernoff, 2010:3; Brandtzaeg & Heim, 2011:41; Li, 2007:5; Lieb et al., 2012:12) who passively observe content, also called the 1% rule for participation (Carron-Arthur, Cunningham & Griffiths, 2014; Nielsen, 1997; 2009; Van Mierlo, 2014).

6.4.3.2. Conclusion of the interpretation of the theme: honest and authentic responses are evaluated in many-to-many dialogues

Conclusions are drawn to confirm and elaborate on Coombs and Holladay’s (2012:412) paracrisis response strategies as follows:

Refuting criticism by threatening a parodist could escalate into social media backlash:
Owing to the Streisand effect, defensive threats – even those made in private – tend to escalate into a viral social media backlash from angry critics in many-to-many social graphs when management fights back.

Refute when management is not willing to expose weaknesses, but protect economic interests: Resistance to transparency and upfront honesty when valid criticism is raised, seem to be management’s reluctance to expose their own weaknesses. Should management be seen as placing economic interests above honest engagements, a social media backlash could break down trusting relationships and criticize the brand as an inauthentic faceless entity.

Ignore publically, but admit wrongdoing by engaging the parodist privately: Most participants preferred a public response with a parody account to resolve criticism and maintain transparency. Yet, some participants believed that private off-line engagements could be an alternative. Considering the propensity for flaming and trolling on social media, interpersonal engagements may be more effective to establish and resolve legitimate concerns. Instead of directly responding to a parody account, wrongdoing is admitted as issues raised by the parody account are addressed in general.

Explicitly admit wrongdoing, and reform by taking measures to change behaviour:
When a parody account raises valid criticism, an apology will not be regarded as authentic unless it is also accompanied by actual and tangible changes in behaviour. Conversely,
brands that have fundamental issues with their products or their services may not be able to truly reform.

**Explicitly admit wrongdoing, as official responses are openly scrutinised in many-to-many converged media networks:** Whereas top-down responses exercise some form of control using traditional channels, self-correcting collaborative, peer-to-peer networks imply that responses containing excuses, obfuscation, spin doctoring, deflecting from the situation and shifting blame are constantly scrutinised and challenged. Considering the principles of social media where the risks of a paracrisis are amplified in public, the most suitable paradigms entail strategic reputation management and integrated communication. This sentiment is verified in quantitative data (Q7): The two-way conversational nature of social media places more pressure on official responses to be honest. Of the 150 respondents, 94 (62.67%) said Yes, 27 (18.00%) said No and 13 (8.67%) were Not sure.

**Explicitly admit wrongdoing, as those who try to hide information get caught out by socially connected graphs:** The radical transparency arising from the discoverability of digital footprints, whistle-blower websites such as WikiLeaks, and hacktivism, emphasise the importance of openness and honesty. As a result, management could be pressurised to release information that they did not really want the public to know.

**Explicitly admit wrongdoing by issuing a statement to reinforce the authenticity of the official account:** In the converged media space, statements require consistency as press releases and social media posts are scrutinised. In other words, emotionally resonant brands and relationships are co-created in social graphs. In fact, mutually beneficial relationships create expectations for an honest and authentic official response to avoid suspicion that management has something to hide.

**Explicitly admit wrongdoing and give a once-off, firm apology to diffuse anger:** Considering the hostile environment of social media, especially Twitter, initial apologies are best kept brief but also assertive, as volatile communities tend to take advantage of community managers if they seem to be cowering. As the smallest mishap easily erupts into hating, flaming, ranting and trolling, community managers tend to apologise, even if the brand was not really wrong, to diffuse anger, gain positive sentiment and to mitigate a viral backlash. For the same reasons, apologies are restricted to a once-off statement to mitigate the propensity for anger to gain traction on social media. Later on, when the paracrisis has subsided, campaigns may be considered to expand on management challenges experienced and awareness campaigns to reinforce the verified status of the official account.
Explicitly admit wrongdoing, as a silent majority is quietly scrutinising responses: Although the constant scrutiny of paracrisis responses may seem overwhelming, the truth is that the vast majority of social network users are passive lurkers and spectators. Known as the 1% rule, this phenomenon may skew metrics, whereby reach and sentiment is not necessarily representative of an entire population. However, it also implies that a silent majority are quietly forming their own opinions, hence the importance to explicitly admit wrongdoing.

6.4.3.3. Interpretation and discussion of the theme: Guard against indiscriminately shutting down parody accounts

The theme, guard against indiscriminately shutting down parody accounts, was one of six themes related to the category, responses to co-manage reputation. In total, guard against indiscriminately shutting down parody accounts, was expressed the second most frequently in this category, namely in 111 cases (6.24%).

Refute by taking legal action against fraudulent social spammers, malicious or offensive parody accounts: Most participants cautioned the social media management team against official responses to parody accounts that may be perceived as being unnecessarily aggressive, strong-armed and heavy-handed. Only when a parody account is exceptionally damaging to reputation, or in highly regulated industries, could the closing down of accounts and legal action be considered. Nevertheless, aggressive, “knee-jerk” responses typically damage reputation and cause a “PR nightmare” as a brand may be perceived as being “big and arrogant”. Most participants argued that brands do not want to be associated with offensive parodies, especially as parody accounts are often confused with the brand’s official social media account. Participant One observed:

“I think Twitter, or platforms rather, should allow humorous accounts provided they are not racially [offensive], slanderous, sexist, anti-religious, etcetera, etcetera, or hate speech.”

Other malicious intentions include personal attacks, abuse, rude comments, trolling, bullying, defamation, copyright infringements, false rumours, disclosure of sensitive or confidential information. Yet, upon probing, one participant said: “I actually don’t think anything is too sensitive to parody, I honestly don’t... you should make people aware it’s a parody”. Interestingly, a few participants observed that compared to South Africa, America is far more litigious when responding to parody regarded as defamation and intellectual property infringement. Yet, it may be necessary to consider litigation or cease-and-desist letters, although these options are mostly reserved for extremely malicious accounts and are more likely to be pursued by prominent international brands. Another reason to consider closing
down parody accounts that are “stealing our followers” is the fact that metrics, such as follower counts, are used to measure return on investment for key performance indicators.

If requests to close down fake accounts with fraudulent intentions are not successful, legal action may be necessary to stop the harmful practises of social spam, cloned accounts, fraud and domain squatting. Often, fake accounts are confused with the brand’s official social media accounts.

**Litigation is a costly, complicated and drawn out process when refuting criticism:** Even if legal action may be warranted, participants warned that intellectual property infringement and defamation cases are rather resource-intensive and negative attract publicity. Moreover, legislation and internet protocols vary globally. Participant Three observed:

“For defamation to be proven, it has to be proven that what the account is saying is untrue which is why very few people actually bother trying to sue. Defamation is a very, very difficult thing to sue for.”

**Refute by politely asking the parodist to voluntarily close down the account:** Such requests may be done via private electronic communication or interpersonal communication, although they are not always successful.

**Parody accounts are created anonymously and account holders are difficult to track down, when refuting criticism:** Social media accounts and email accounts may be created anonymously and with false personal information.

**Refute by requesting a social network to close down a parody account:** Many participants mentioned that an alternative to legal action against malicious parody accounts is to request the social network to close down the parody account. Facebook is reportedly rather responsive to requests to close down parody accounts. However, Twitter’s user policy accommodates parody accounts and therefore requests to remove them, are often not granted.

**The Streisand effect illustrates that “the internet does not like to be told what to do”, when refuting criticism:** Regardless of the method chosen in an attempt to “just delete them, or ban them”, most participants mentioned that it remains problematic, due to the uncontrollable nature of social media. The closing down of parody accounts and related attempts to control or conceal information create the impression that the brand is attempting to hide something, “because often there is a lot of truth in the parody”. Therefore, aggressive threats often imply more publicity for the parodist, who will “become a very well-known blog as soon as you sue me, so please go for it”. Owing to a discoverable digital footprint, “people are still sharing it and even if you delete the Twitter account it will be online, it will be a poster”.
In addition, it is likely that new parody accounts may be created to satirise management as a villain. This sentiment is verified in the quantitative data (Q7): Request the closing down of the parody account. Of the 150 respondents, 105 (70.00%) said No, 24 (16.00%) said Yes and (4.00%) were not sure. Pertaining to Other, one participant commented: “I do not think brands should try have parody accounts shut down unless it infringes on IP. Community manager needs to learn about the Streisand effect before attempting to shut down parody accounts”.

Similarly, deleting unwanted criticism or embarrassing community management posts could spark a social media backlash, as screenshots of the deleted content is then widely shared, discussed and parodied. As such, Participant 13 observed:

“Barbara Streisand was suing newspapers because people were taking helicopter shots of her house. Because suddenly it was a big deal and it was a court case. The internet was suddenly awash with thousands of pictures of Barbara Streisand’s house, because the internet does not like to be told what to do.”

Refute, but when management is seen as a bully, sentiment sides with the parodist as the underdog: Overzealous legal action by prominent brands often escalates into a “David and Goliath” situation. Whereas the brand is perceived as the “bully” that is “not going to improve your reputation by going and attacking Joe Bloggs”, the parodist receives support and sympathetic attention as a victim or “underdog”. Participant Two elaborated:

“So, if a brand acts out and becomes the villain within a situation, their followers and their customers can quickly turn on them and people that are prospective clients – they could turn around and say: ‘You know what, this bank is a douche and I am not actually going to do business with them’.”

As fair comment, parody accounts should not be closed down: The right to free speech, criticism and fair comment is protected by South Africa’s constitution. Participant Three articulated:

“I think the big thing for me is a parody account is actually great. It can be fun and it can be good for transparency. It can be good for public debate and fair comment. Just remember, you are still accountable... Parody and satire done in an amusing and intelligent way – it counts as fair comment, you see.”

Findings pertaining to this section of the study all agree with and elaborate on Coombs and Holladay’s (2012:412) paracrisis response strategy, namely, refute. When management fights back, it is believed that many social media users who notice the conflict will side with the brand. To elaborate, Table 6.26 below summarises refuting criticism as a paracrisis response strategy that guards against indiscriminately shutting down parody accounts as supported by literature.
TABLE 6.26: Refuting criticism as a paracrisis response strategy that guards against indiscriminately shutting down parody accounts as supported by literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ descriptions to refute criticism as a paracrisis response strategy</th>
<th>Confirmation from literature</th>
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<tr>
<td>Legal action against fraudulent imposters, malicious or offensive parody accounts</td>
<td>Management is advised not to hastily shut down parody accounts, but to first establish whether the intent of the parody account is malicious and offensive, as opposed to being non-confrontational, playful spoofs (Gillin &amp; Gianforte, 2012:19) as confirmed in a related study (Wan, Koh, Ong &amp; Pang, 2015:384). In other words, the benefits of a chosen response strategy need to outweigh the potential reputational risks, seeing that an inappropriate response may further cause injury to a reputation already compromised by a parody during a paracrisis (Berthon &amp; Pitt, 2012:96; Coombs, 2014:9; Coombs &amp; Holladay, 2012; Sabri &amp; Michel, 2014:243; Wan, Koh, Ong &amp; Pang, 2015:384). Notably, distasteful and vulgar content is unique to parody as a genre (Dentith, 2002:189; Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam &amp; Hove, 2011), yet satire is open to many different interpretations (Gring-Pemble &amp; Watson, 2003:144). Metrics for reach and influence are a contentious issue for ORM as measures for return on investment, hence brands are rather protective of their followers (SMMStandards Coalition, 2013; SMMStandards Conclave, 2013; World Wide Worx and Fuseware, 2013). The proliferation of fake content on the internet has created an ambiguous environment where it is becoming increasingly difficult to identify authenticity (Cresci et al, 2015:56; Ornos, 2014). Of concern is the copying of brand identities (Erden &amp; Swait, 1998:132), fake user-generated parody accounts that are easily mistaken for the brand’s official social media accounts (Davis, 2015; Horne, 2015), social media cyber-squatting of prominent brands (Chavan &amp; Ahire, 2015:3393; Mitchell, 2009:23), phishing (Hesseldahl, 2007; Williams, 2015) and social spam (Kharif, 2012:38; Martinez-Romo &amp; Araujo, 2013:2992). As such, the authenticity and visibility of emotionally resonant brand reputations are compromised (Fombrun &amp; Van Riel, 2004:163,165) while being actively co-created (Arvidsson, 2005:244; Fournier &amp; Alvarez, 2012:179; Hatch &amp; Schultz, 2010:592; Ind, Iglesias &amp; Schultz, 2013:9; Vargo &amp; Lusch, 2004).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Litigation is costly, complicated and drawn out</td>
<td>Legal defence varies considerably around the world (Crompton, 2011:32), is expensive, complicated, drawn out and may lead to negative public opinion (Accone, 2005; Ginsburg, 2005; Petty, 2009:64; Visser, 2005). To protect reputation, defences include infringement of intellectual property laws and defamation (Deacon &amp; Govender, 2007:18; Malachowski, 2010:224; Petty, 2009:64; Petty, 2012:766; Van der Walt &amp; Shay, 2013:12). Cease-and-desist letters are commonly issued against brand parodies (Marton, Wilk &amp; Rogal, 2010:62).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politely ask the parodist to voluntarily close down the account</td>
<td>Engage with critics and demonstrate respect as they may be more willing to accept a response by a brand (Mortimer, 2008:15).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parody accounts are created anonymously and account holders are difficult to track down</td>
<td>Owing to the anonymity of the internet, it may be difficult to locate the true authors of parody accounts who use fake profiles and user-names, masked IP addresses and fake email addresses when registering a social media account (Malachowski, 2010:224; Veil et al, 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request a social network to</td>
<td>Management can request social networks to close down the account (Wan, Koh, Ong &amp; Pang, 2015:384). Yet, social networks are slow to respond and do not</td>
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always grant requests to reclaim or remove parody accounts that are said to intentionally confuse social media users (Christensen, 2012; Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19; Malone, 2012:309; Nitins & Burgess, 2014). Twitter’s user policies make provision for parody accounts (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19; Twitter, 2013b).

The Streisand effect illustrates that “the internet does not like to be told what to do” The Streisand effect illustrates how management attempts to silence satire and criticism escalates into a viral social media backlash, whereas embarrassing content would otherwise have gone unnoticed (Jansen & Martin, 2015:656; Marton, Wilk & Rogal, 2010:82). In retaliation, prohibited content is deliberately shared (Masnick, 2005; Louw, 2013; Zamani, Kasimati & Giaglis, 2012). Aggressive threats and litigation typically escalate into a viral social media backlash, thereby attracting unprecedented publicity to a parody account (Hoult, 2012; Mortimer, 2008:15; The Telegraph, 2012). This is confirmed in a related study (Veil, Petrun & Roberts, 2012: 319). Despite court cases and other attempts to remove parody and brand spoofs, parodied content remains infinitely discoverable on the internet (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19). As soon as one parody account is closed down, many more are created in its place in retaliation and to satirise management censorship (Bremmen, 2010; Davis, 2013; Pillay, 2010). “Parody has the paradoxical effect of preserving the very text that it seeks to destroy” (Dentith, 2002:36). Stated differently, parody creates a new form out of the old without effectively destroying the old (Hutcheon, 2000:35).

When management is seen as a bully, sentiment sides with the parodist as the underdog Satire is meant to be humorous and to take it seriously is missing the point of parody (Blake, 2011:284). When a big corporation is seen to use extensive resources against a small company to silence criticism, a David and Goliath type battle ensues (Accone, 2005:19; Merten, 2004) and create the perception of the brand being a bully (Berthon & Pitt, 2012:96).

As fair comment, parody accounts should not be closed down Parody is a catalyst for conversations often characterised by inappropriateness, noise and laughter (Dentith, 2002:189) which is essential in the expression of public opinion and debate in a democracy (Hariman, 2008:260). An ongoing global debate questions the right to freedom of speech and the extent to which it safeguards the right to offend (Charlie Hebdo, 2016; Flood, 2016; Noorlander, 2015; Singapore, 2015; Slayton & Thawar, 2015; Tonneau, 2015). There is a fine balance between permissible trade mark infringements and freedom of expression (Deacon & Govender, 2007:43, Kelbrick, 2007:88; Pistorius, 2004:740).

6.4.3.4. Conclusion of the interpretation of the theme: Guard against indiscriminately shutting down parody accounts

Refute by taking legal action against fraudulent imposters, malicious or offensive parody accounts: Owing to the reputational value of brand associations and brand identities, it is understandable that brands do not want to be associated with vulgar copycats that troll, offend and hate, or other imposters with malicious intentions such as phishing, domain squatting or related social spam bots. In fact, many social media community members have been fooled, offended or tricked by copycat accounts, especially given the ambiguous environment of cloned accounts of prominent brands. Therefore, litigation or cease-and-desist letters may be considered as a last resort to protect authenticity and disassociate from malicious accounts. Especially of concern are user-generated parody accounts that promote hate speech, sexism, racism and other defamatory content. Yet, satire and irony are open to many different interpretations and, further complicating sense-making is that parody, as a genre, typically uses offense and sarcasm about sensitive topics to gain attention to its
message. Therefore, maintaining reputations that resonate with critical social communities is a challenge, as reputation is co-created in an ambiguous environment.

Considering the highly ambiguous assessment of malice in parody, management needs to carefully establish if the reputational benefits of fighting back against a parody account will, indeed, outweigh the risks of escalating a paracrisis, given that a parodied brand is already injured. An aggressive, knee-jerk defence may portray the brand as an arrogant bully. An argument to strengthen the case for litigation, however, is that an influential parody account’s followers are also potential followers of the official account. Dismissed as “stealing our followers”, influential parody accounts are subtracting from valuable key performance online reputation metrics such as influence, reach and sentiment.

Litigation is costly, complicated and drawn out, when refuting criticism: To prove that a brand is defamed by criticism expressed in parody is resource-intensive, hence it may be counter-productive to initiate drawn-out court cases of which the outcome is often uncertain. Legislation and internet protocols vary globally and often court cases draw further unwanted publicity.

Refute by politely asking the parodist to voluntarily close down the account: When demonstrating respect, a parodist may be more willing to listen to a social media manager’s request, yet it cannot be guaranteed.

Parody accounts are created anonymously and account holders are difficult to track down, when refuting criticism: The anonymity of the internet makes it difficult to locate the true authors of parody accounts who use fake profiles and user-names, masked IP addresses and fake email addresses when registering a parody account.

Refute by requesting a social network to close down a parody account: Twitter’s user policy accommodates parody accounts and therefore requests to remove them, are often not granted.

The Streisand effect illustrates that “the internet does not like to be told what to do”, when refuting criticism: Owing to the transparent and viral principles of social media, any attempts to silence criticism or delete embarrassing criticism trigger a social media backlash where a discoverable digital footprint is rehashed, recycled and further satirised. In the process, unprecedented attention is awarded to parodies that may otherwise have gone unnoticed. Adding insult to injury, when parody mimics brand identities, it paradoxically also preserves satirised brand associations of the very same brand that it is trying to demolish. Not only does a social media backlash demonstrate the co-creation of reputation, but it also
illustrates the uncontrollable environment of social media, as the deletion of one account simply encourages the creation of more parody accounts to mock management censorship. As such, the Streisand effect reinforces the perception that parody exposes an embarrassing truth that management tries to hide.

Refute, but when management is seen as a bully, sentiment sides with the parodist as the underdog: Big, prominent brands are more at risk to be perceived as a villain when taking legal action.

As fair comment, parody accounts should not be closed down: Satire and irony are meant to be funny, yet the offensive strategies used in this genre are often misunderstood, hence, taking a parody account seriously at face value is to miss the point. For this reason, it remains problematic to uphold the democratic expression of fair criticism as also implying a right to offend. Nevertheless, the offensive strategies used in parody is a catalyst for valuable transparent debate around sensitive topics.

6.4.3.5. Interpretation and discussion of the theme: Responding to parody accounts is a calculated risk

The theme, responding to parody accounts is a calculated risk, was one of six themes related to the category, responses to co-manage reputation. In total, responding to parody accounts is a calculated risk, was expressed the third most frequently in this category, namely in 88 cases (4.94%).

Ignore initially, while listening for the right time to respond: With regard to the timing of responses to parody accounts, which participants regard as a crisis, a “brand attack” or a “reputation attack”. Most participants said “don’t just jump on the bandwagon” by responding too quickly, but rather first “learn, listen, watch”. The advantage of delaying responses is the ability to first analyse online reputation metrics, because “you’ve got to pick your fights”. Therefore, it is necessary to establish if the criticism is valid, considering that “maybe he’s even just trying to get a freebee”. This sentiment is shared in quantitative data (Q7): A timely response to a parody account is a calculated risk: it requires a careful consideration of all probabilities before taking action. Of the 150 respondents, the vast majority of 106 (70.67%) said Yes, 18 (12.00%) said No and only 12 (8.00%) were Not sure.

A carefully considered decision to take no action is not the same as passively ignoring a parody account in the hope that it will disappear: Several participants advised against merely denying, ignoring or dismissing a parody account as “a nuisance”. Instead,
management needs to “think about, first of all, do I want to respond? What are the pros and cons of me responding?” To clarify, Participant 18 explained:

“Passive reputation management tends to be response of: just let it be, ignore it and you know, hopefully it will go away which is a kind of chicken or head in the sand approach which most brands typically do.”

Similarly, Participant 13 elaborated:

“I think people shouldn’t confuse a strategic or a definite, clear decision to take no action as the same as somebody who just chose to do nothing about it. I think sometimes doing nothing is right.”

Ignore, as even honest responses to light-hearted, playful spoofs are scrutinised and may provoke criticism and unwanted visibility: Participant Three elaborated:

“So, I mean if it is a parody account that is not being harmful and is just having fun and being silly, definitely, either ignore it or you can maybe even interact with them if you are brave enough. It depends on the brand.”

During a crisis then, it is better to avoid engagement, because “as soon as you engage, you’re making it carry on for longer”. For the same reason, advertising is avoided since “it raises the negative sentiments and more negative conversation takes place”. Likewise, Participant Two explained:

“It comes back to the ‘don’t feed the trolls’ thing. Sometimes, people are just trying to troll you and the more spotlight you put on those people, they feel they are getting the attention they are striving for from the start. So, if you, lots of times, just ignore it, and just continue in your direction.”

Ignore most of the time, considering the prevalence of trolling, flaming, hating and ranting on Twitter: Official responses may be misconstrued because “people like to flame and troll and all of that, I mean, it is an internet pastime”. Participant Three elaborated:

“80 to 90% of the time it is not worth a response. Because it is just people ranting and not saying anything constructive. They are not wanting a result. They are not genuinely asking for help or assistance.”

Angry and malicious parody accounts are best ignored: Malicious parody accounts with the clear intention to troll, flame, hate or rant are deliberately ignored, because “you are not going to continue abusing a brand if you are not getting any response out of them”. Likewise, Participant 12 argued:

“So, in my experience, if you can see that there’s no way you’re going to win this battle, it’s best not to engage... And, in fact, you may risk offending or upsetting that person if you’re not saying what they want to hear from you, though it’s quite a risk for a brand.”

Ignore to a point, but refute criticism when the parody account becomes malicious and gains traction: Whereas some believed that a malicious parody account is best ignored, other participants argued that “you watch - until such time as potentially it starts to become a legal
issue or they do things where you really need to distance yourself from”. As such, Participant Eight observed:

“Ignore them to a point, but if they start to become malicious and negative and they start to kind of rally attention, then make a strategic approach towards them.”

Not knowing how to respond to parody accounts and related anger on Twitter, management may refuse to embrace social media: Often, management “stay away from social... because they’re scared to open that door, there are just too many people who want to complain about certain brands”, especially on Twitter. Not knowing how to respond parody accounts, “90% of the time, brands don’t know how to react. They get scared. They run. They run...”. Upon probing, Participant Eight described management’s response to a parody account:

“It’s normally a panicky phone call or an email saying: ‘Look at this!’ Lots of capital letters. And, ‘oh my God!’ Something along those lines. Essentially they freak out.”

Ignore a parody account when the brand cannot deliver on broken promises: Another instance that may justify a deliberate decision to withhold engagement with a parody account is “if you know that you’re not a healthy brand who treats their customers well” and therefore, already suffer from a tarnished reputation.

Findings pertaining to this section of the study agree with and elaborate on Coombs and Holladay’s (2012:412) paracrisis response strategies. To elaborate, Table 6.27 below summarises the crisis response strategies and contingencies to consider, given that responding to parody accounts is a calculated risk. The table summarises participants’ responses and supporting literature.

**TABLE 6.27: Paracrisis response strategies and contingencies to consider, given that responding to parody accounts is a calculated risk as supported by literature**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paracrisis response strategy</th>
<th>Participants’ descriptions</th>
<th>Confirmation from literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refute</td>
<td>• Ignore to a point but refute criticism when the parody account becomes malicious and gains traction</td>
<td>• Social media users’ subjective truths accumulate to form a collective truth or reputation; however, should undesirable viewpoints remain unanswered or unchecked, the situation becomes difficult to correct (Aula, 2010:46). Typically, management disassociates itself from harmful parody accounts, as confirmed in a related study (Wan, Koh, Ong &amp; Pang, 2015:384).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Ignore                      | • Ignore initially, while listening for the right time to respond  
• A carefully considered decision to take no action is not | • Analyse metrics to distinguish an isolated complaint from legitimate grievances, constructive criticism or parodies that may escalate into a social media crisis, as confirmed in a related study (Alexander & Atkins, 2015:2). Contingencies will determine the best response strategy, as it cannot be assured that a particular response is the most beneficial to reputation (Coombs, 2007c:170). |
| Ignore | Not knowing how to respond to parody accounts and related anger on Twitter, management may refuse to embrace social media | Often scared of brand parodies (Fournier & Avery, 2011:26), management needs to “learn when to speak and when to just listen” by analysing the nuances and unique culture of social media conversations, as confirmed in a related study (Veil, Petrun & Roberts, 2012:319). As such, considering the highly engaged, viral and critical principles of social media which indulge humorous parody accounts, responding to a user-generated parody may be more damaging than ignoring the issue. |
|Ignore when the brand cannot deliver on broken promises | | When venting is aimed at ridiculing a brand, it is advised to be insensitive to criticism, have a thick skin and ignore angry comments (Coombs, 2014:8). High engagement, triggered by extensive negative comments every time an official response is posted, attracts algorithms to increase the visibility and reach of the crisis, as confirmed in a related study (Ott & Theunissen, 2015:100). Conversely, withholding an official response helps to dissipate the crisis, which is contrary to traditional crisis communication principles. |
| | | Owing to social networks’ peer-to-peer, self-correcting (Bowman & Willis, 2003:25) and self-regulating ability, public lynching tends to come to an end when voices of reason emerge (Arnaboldi & Coget, 2016:3). |
| | | Brands with poor reputations before the onset of the crisis, face a higher anger, emotional involvement and pleasure derived from the brand’s misfortune, as confirmed in a related study (Ott & Theunissen, 2015:100). Ideally, such brands ignore parody accounts. Likewise, a parody that criticizes a gap |
| | | Given its anti-establishment culture, Twitter is where corporate communication messages are criticized the most (Coffee, 2015; Nitins & Burgess, 2014:295). Twitter is rife with false rumours, lynch mobs against the smallest mishap, remotely uncomfortable sentiment or slightly ambiguous statement, so that the intensity of public shaming and reputational harm are disproportionate to the initial tweet in question (Ferreira, 2015; Milnes, 2015; Sevasti Fairweather, 2015; Whitlock, 2015). |
| | | The organic principles of social media imply a high risk environment (Aula, 2010:48) where risks escalate rapidly, so that the reputational damage is significantly disproportionate to the initial issue (Pitts & Aylott, 2012:253). Once escalated into a crisis, the ensuing social media backlash can last a few hours, or may continue for several days or even weeks as conversations peaks and troughs, as confirmed in a related study (Alexander & Atkins, 2015:8). |
| | | The high prevalence of online harassment (Pew Research Centre, 2014), hating, flaming and trolling on Twitter (Bartlett et al, 2014:6; Kick It Out, 2015) may be a significant reason why management is hesitant to fully adopt social media (Pitts & Aylott, 2012:252). In fact, most users tend to remain silent out of fear for being ostracised or ridiculed on Twitter, as confirmed in a study by the Pew Research Centre Internet Project (Hampton et al, 2014). |
| | | Rather ignore a parody account as the average consumer hardly notices brand parodies as these brand attacks occur on a few, select channels (Mortimer, 2008:15). Most social media users are apathetic towards a brand’s official social media content and have a disdain for brands (Elliott & Strohmenger, 2014), as the large majority of social media users are lurkers or spectators (Bernoff, 2010:3; Brandtzaeg & Heim, 2011:41; Carron-Arthur, Cunningham & Griffiths, 2014; Van Mierlo, 2014). |
| | | Ignore when the brand cannot deliver on broken promises |
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| | | Ignore when the brand cannot deliver on broken promises |
| Ignore | Not knowing how to respond to parody accounts and related anger on Twitter, management may refuse to embrace social media | Often scared of brand parodies (Fournier & Avery, 2011:26), management needs to “learn when to speak and when to just listen” by analysing the nuances and unique culture of social media conversations, as confirmed in a related study (Veil, Petrun & Roberts, 2012:319). As such, considering the highly engaged, viral and critical principles of social media which indulge humorous parody accounts, responding to a user-generated parody may be more damaging than ignoring the issue. |
| | Ignore when the brand cannot deliver on broken promises | When venting is aimed at ridiculing a brand, it is advised to be insensitive to criticism, have a thick skin and ignore angry comments (Coombs, 2014:8). High engagement, triggered by extensive negative comments every time an official response is posted, attracts algorithms to increase the visibility and reach of the crisis, as confirmed in a related study (Ott & Theunissen, 2015:100). Conversely, withholding an official response helps to dissipate the crisis, which is contrary to traditional crisis communication principles. |
| | | Owing to social networks’ peer-to-peer, self-correcting (Bowman & Willis, 2003:25) and self-regulating ability, public lynching tends to come to an end when voices of reason emerge (Arnaboldi & Coget, 2016:3). |
| | | Brands with poor reputations before the onset of the crisis, face a higher anger, emotional involvement and pleasure derived from the brand’s misfortune, as confirmed in a related study (Ott & Theunissen, 2015:100). Ideally, such brands ignore parody accounts. Likewise, a parody that criticizes a gap
between image and reality should be ignored as management first needs to address the shortcomings, as confirmed in a related study (Berthon & Pitt, 2012:96).

6.4.3.6. Conclusion of the interpretation of the theme: Responding to parody accounts is a calculated risk

Ignore to a point, but refute criticism when the parody account becomes malicious and gains traction: Respond when it becomes necessary to disassociate or distance the brand from malicious behaviour.

Ignore initially, while listening for the right time to respond: Instead of hastily rushing to defend against criticism, it is better to first listen, learn and watch by using ORM metrics and analytics. Time is spent to establish the intent of the parody account and learn valuable lessons as the paracrisis is unfolding, but also to establish if the risks of a particular response strategy may outweigh the benefits thereof.

A carefully considered decision to take no action is not the same as passively ignoring a parody account in the hope that it will disappear: Completely evading the risks of social media are not to be confused with a clear and deliberate strategic decision made to take no action. Notably, contingencies will determine the most appropriate response strategy, yet the reputational benefits thereof cannot be assured.

Ignore, as even honest responses to light-hearted, playful spoofs are scrutinised and may provoke criticism and unwanted visibility: Traditional crisis communication response strategies emphasise prompt and frequent messages to stakeholders, whereas such immediate and continuous updates on social networks may be rather detrimental to reputation. Simultaneously increased are the reach and visibility of both the parody account and the haters’ backlash to the official response. Even when reputation is emotionally resonant preceding the crisis, official responses tend to become the fodder for escalating criticism during a crisis. It stands to reason, then, that engagement with a parody account is said to be only for the brave. Nevertheless, findings suggest that by ignoring a parody account, management relinquishes some measure of control. As voices of reason emerge, management may allow the organic tendency of peer-to-peer social networks to self-regulate, in order to shape a collective truth or reputation that is co-created and co-managed. For this reason, strategic reputation management recognise that the management of risks inherent in social media is a process whereby reputation is co-created during a paracrisis.

Ignore most of the time, considering the prevalence of trolling, flaming, hating and ranting on Twitter: A significant risk of an official response to a parody account during a
paracrisis is the opportunistic backlash of trolling, flaming, hating and ranting, especially on Twitter. Instead of constructive criticism, such hostile behaviour is typically characterised by flame wars for the sake of entertainment and to boost the egos of the most malicious off-topic, bickering commentators. Moreover, highly engaging content, coupled with the use of a mean hashtag, attract trending algorithms. Another noteworthy risk when responding to a parody account on Twitter, is its anti-establishment culture, false rumour mills and constant scrutiny of conversations. All it takes is a single hate tweet or misinterpretation of a corporate response for lynch mobs to inflict reputational harm and public shaming as conversations peak and trough, typically disproportionate to the initial issue. Consequently, hurtful backlashes increasingly silence the free and honest expression of opinions. In fact, as the vast majority of social media users are passive lurkers and are rather apathetic towards brands, chances are they may not care about or notice both the parody account and the official response.

**Angry and malicious parody accounts are best ignored:** Haters may stop abusing a brand if they don’t get the attention they seek.

**Not knowing how to respond to parody accounts and related anger on Twitter, management may refuse to embrace social media:** Being fearful of parody accounts and the risks ingrained in volatile social media communities, risk avoiding managers rather prefer to ignore social media altogether.

**Ignore a parody account when the brand cannot deliver on broken promises:** For brands with a weak reputation before the onset of the crisis, the pre-existing intensity of anger is even higher, so that the withholding of an official response is probably the best option.

**6.4.3.7. Interpretation and discussion of the theme: Respond by co-creating content**

The theme, respond by co-creating content, was one of six themes related to the category, responses to co-manage reputation. In total, respond by co-creating content, was expressed the fourth most frequently in this category, namely in 75 cases (4.21%). Participants raised the following salient points:

**Explicitly admit wrongdoing and repair relationships by collaborating with parody accounts, established influencers and brand advocates:** Having a strong relationship with an established network of influencers, these individuals could alert social communities to the existence of a parody account. In the process, brand advocates clear up the confusion over the difference between the parody account and the official account which increases engagement and positive sentiment. Collaborations with light-hearted, playful spoofs that express love for a brand may include the following:
- **Co-create user-generated content:** Encouraging parodists to “carry on supporting the brand” by praising good content, retweeting parody posts or giving out products as gifts. Giving a holiday as a gift along with cameras to record their experience. Most probably the parodist may share user-generated content of their adventure. Alternatively, products can be made available for review.

- **Trusting relationships:** Leaking privileged strategic information to a trusted parodist in order to make them feel “part of the inner circle”, thereby gaining valuable feedback. Asking a parodist for advice on corporate communication ideas.

- **Retaining a parodist to co-create content calendars:** Influential parodists are often skilled at creating quirky content and love a brand. Often loyal customers, they also understand a brand. They may be paid a retainer or employed officially to develop content calendars, campaigns or to respond to customer queries.

These findings do not concur with quantitative data (Q7): Collaborate with the parody account holder by co-creating content. Of the 150 respondents 78 (52.00%) said No, 47 (31.33% said Yes and 13 (8.67%) was Not sure. However, Other answers selected in the open-ended question concurred with this theme: “It all depends on the message of the parody account” and “Humour - banter with the parody account”.

**Humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter by taking it on the chin and playing along:** Most participants agreed that collaboration with parody accounts and their followers may strengthen the authenticity, positive sentiment, influence, top-of-mind awareness and reputation of a brand. This is especially true for prominent, much-loved brands that are often parodied, less serious brand personalities, and when encountering light-hearted, playful spoofs. Instead of being confrontational, “then it is just a case of managing it and engaging in a dialogue as opposed to coming from that perspective of, you know: ‘We are so big, we’re going to try shut you down’”. Much preferred is a brand that has a “sense of humour”, “have a laugh”, be “mature”, “be the bigger person in that conversation”, “take a joke”, and be not offended that easily. Instead, management is advised to “take it on the chin”, “play along” and engage in an authentic, human-like dialogue with parodists.

**Humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter by reciprocating with love and humour:** When bantering with a parody account, both the parody account and the official account attract new followers and extend their engagement as more communities join the conversation. In addition, the brand’s official social media account gains affinity as social media users appreciate humorous, fun, play and authentically entertaining dialogue. Moreover, playful bantering creates far more interesting content, compared to the often somewhat monotonous posts by the brand’s official social media accounts. Participant Ten articulated:
"That’s when you need to engage with that person and say: ‘Okay, it’s a very funny thing that you’ve made there, and we really respect the humour, but it’s kind of a dig at us. Why don’t you like us?’ And then he might turn around and say: ‘Actually, I love you guys, I just thought it was funny.’ And then you can have this really cool, real conversation between two people.”

In fact, when considering that parodists care about and often love a brand despite its flaws, many participants agree that all parodists may be valued as potential brand ambassadors. In other words, the brand reciprocates positive emotions by illustrating that the brand cares enough to take the “time and effort to actually try to reply to that parody”. Participant Two explained:

“A brand that can take itself less seriously online is more likely to be engaged with and also, appreciated. And also, people like it if someone is bantering with a brand account and the brand has a little bit of a laugh back or, has a little bit of a tongue-in-cheek response. People are, like: ‘Bravo, that is amazing, what a great response’. You will get a lot more kudos from your audience and your brand champions who, in turn, will spread that outside.”

**Humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter by using parody to respond to parodies:** Considering that advertising campaigns often parody one another, official responses could be in the form of satiric content to have playful engagements. One suggestion mentioned was the timely creation of targeted YouTube parody advertisements for trending YouTube parodies, especially for big, prominent brands.

Findings pertaining to this section corroborate with and elaborate on Coombs and Holladay’s (2012:412) paracrisis response strategies. However, these response strategies do not accommodate humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter as a paracrisis response, as recommended by participants in the interviews and respondents in the questionnaire. Therefore, this study adds an additional paracrisis response strategy to Coombs and Holladay’s (2012:412) classification. To elaborate, Table 6.28 below summarises responses to co-create content as identified by participants and supported in available literature.

**TABLE 6.28: Paracrisis response strategies to co-create content as supported by literature**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paracrisis response strategy</th>
<th>Participants’ descriptions</th>
<th>Confirmation from literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter | • Take it on the chin and play along  
• Reciprocate with love and humour  
• Use humorous parody to respond to parodies | • Emotions such as love, in particular, is the foundation for brand resonance (Keller, 2001:15; 2009:144; 2012:186). Love is also the characteristic of committed relationships that will outlast adverse circumstances (Fournier, 1998:365) so that brand advocates will be defend brands online when facing criticism (Roberts, 2005:105). An emotionally appealing and therefore resonant reputation is measured by authentic and visible storytelling (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:86,96). Brands attain cultural resonance when they listen to conversations, cede control and seamlessly adhere to the governing principles of social media in the age of parody (Fournier & Avery, 2011). |
• Using parody in an official response to reply to a parody, may be an effective way to engage critics (Mortimer, 2008:15). Considering the popularity and viral tendencies of user-generated parodies, advertising campaigns are best purposively designed to invite parodies of its resonating imagery, themes or catchphrases (Fournier & Avery, 2011:24; Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam & Hove, 2011:15).

• Locally, when prominent brands effectively use humorous banter by means of parody advertisements of parodied advertisements, they increase top-of-mind, authenticity, recall, entertainment and goodwill (Fisher, 2012; Granger, 2013; Nicolson, 2012a; Thomas, 2012; Vermeulen, 2010). Likewise, the most effective response strategy to light-hearted, playful spoofs without malicious intent is to laugh with consumers, as confirmed in a related study (Berthon & Pitt, 2012). Such popular and skilfully created parodies expose a brand to large potential new audiences (Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19-25). When brand stories are co-created with user-generated parodies, consumers are more likely to defend the brand against hating, flaming and ranting (Jeppesen & Pettersson, 2010:85), which implies the effectiveness of reputational halos during a crisis (Jones, Jones & Little, 2000; Shamma, 2012:151).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explicitly admit wrongdoing</th>
<th>Explicitly repair relationships by collaborating with parody accounts, established influencers and brand advocates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mutually beneficial collaborations to co-create value include: curating influencer content, publically commending and welcoming skilfully created user-generated parodies as a form of flattery, and quoting influencer opinions in brand content (Act-On, 2013:3; Edgar, 2013:9; Birmingham Mail, 2012; SAPeople, 2015). Such responses increase sentiment, reach and authenticity for both parties. Likewise, strategic reputation management engages in collaborative dialogues (Aula &amp; Mantere, 2008:210). When relinquishing some measure of control and collaborating with critics to repair reputation, brand advocates are provided with the opportunity to defend the brand during a crisis as confirmed in a related study (Ott &amp; Theunissen, 2015:100).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Influential parodists monetise their accounts by paid brand mentions, and sponsored tweets or are employed by brands to create appealing content (Alfonso, 2012; Broderick, 2014; Cutler, 2015; RhythmOne, 2015:6). Influencer marketing (Wilkins, 2013:26; WOMMA, 2013:7) recognises that user-generated content (O’Reilly, 2007:25,30) and influencers (Heinonen, 2011:360; Roy, 2015; Solis & Webber, 2012:8) are more trustworthy, compared to corporate communication. When collaborating with parodists and related critics when changing behaviour and revising the brand story, a crisis is more likely to dissipate (EURIB, 2009:1; Mortimer, 2008:15; Ott & Theunissen, 2015:100).

6.4.3.8. **Conclusion of the interpretation of the theme: Respond by co-creating content**

As illustrated in Table 6.28 above, findings from this study adds an additional paracrisis response strategy to Coombs and Holladay’s (2012:412) classification, namely, humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter. Although Coombs (2014:8) admits that the most suitable response to a paracrisis that ridicules a brand is a sense of humour, such a response is overlooked in to Coombs and Holladay’s (2012:412) classification of paracrisis responses.
Humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter by taking it on the chin and playing along: Since humour resonates with critical stakeholders, humorous bantering is entertaining while enhancing positive sentiment, reach, authenticity, top-of-mind awareness and influence for both the parody account and the official account. For less serious brand personalities, playing along with the parody account demonstrates that the brand is mature and has a sense of humour. Once again, when relinquishing some measure of control when being targeted by light-hearted, playful spoofs humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter with a parody account may optimise the emotional resonance of brand reputation.

Humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter by reciprocating with love and humour: Recognising that light-hearted, playful spoofs often express love for a prominent brand, tongue-in-cheek bantering embraces the principles of social media in the playful age of parody. In the process, authenticity, visibility, reach, engagement and sentiment are increased as mutually beneficial reputations are co-created. Having achieved brand resonance and reputational halos, parodists and other brand advocates are then more likely to defend a brand during a crisis, which is valuable on Twitter with its propensity for hating, flaming, ranting and trolling. By relinquishing some control, management allows for meaning-making to be co-created outside corporate boundaries so that emotionally resonant brands are more likely to have resilient reputations.

Humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter by using parody to respond to parodies: By embracing the principles of social media in the age of parody, official responses may be in the form of paid or organic satiric parodies. Pre-roll parody advertisements for prominent brands’ trending videos on YouTube increase emotional resonance by means of relevance and visibility.

Explicitly admit wrongdoing and repair relationships by collaborating with parody accounts, established influencers and brand advocates: When influencers clear up confusion over a parody account, their messages will be more trustworthy and authentic compared to statements by the official account which are either ignored or criticized, hence the value of influencer marketing. Yet, influencer marketing can also be extended to include relationships with influential parodists, since user-generated content as trustworthy and authentic. When co-creating content with influential parodists, these can take many paid or organic forms such as content curation, sponsored content, give-aways, product reviews, campaigns and product leaks. Since parodists are skilled content creators, and love and understand a brand, they may be retained to develop content calendars to enhance reputations that resonate with critical stakeholders, especially on Twitter. When relinquishing
some measure of control by involving critics to repair wrongdoing, the paracrisis is most likely to subside.

6.4.3.9. Interpretation and discussion of the theme: Value the insights gained from parody accounts as instigators for strategic change

The theme, value the insights gained from parody accounts as instigators for strategic change, was one of six themes related to the category, responses to co-manage reputation. In total, value the insights gained from parody accounts as instigators for strategic change, was expressed the second least frequently in this category, namely in 65 cases (3.65%). As already pointed out in the findings of Section 6.4.1.1 management is advised to recognise the strategic value of insights gained from parody accounts.

Explicitly admit wrongdoing and repair violated expectations by using insights gained from parody accounts to bring about strategic change: Participant 12 articulated:

“And own up: if you do find a parody account that is showing you up, you honestly need to stop in your tracks and sort of re-strategize, relook at everything...This parody account sort of woke us up to the fact that, you know, this is a habit that our customers have that we need to help them break. And we went through many brain storms around how do we do that.”

This sentiment is verified in quantitative data (Q7): Use the insights gained from the parody account to bring about change in policy, operations and/or corporate communication. Of the 150 respondents, the vast majority of 101 (67.33%) said Yes, 21 (14.00%) said No and 16 (10.67%) were Not sure.

Refusing the challenge by ignoring insights for strategic change gained from parody accounts: Many participants criticized management for being dismissive of social media, resisting change, reluctance to openly share information or “to fix the things that cause the problem in the first place”. A few participants reiterated that a commitment to business resources is required, including the necessary budgetary allocations for strategic and operational changes, rather than merely relying on social media management teams to give a superficial reassurance of listening. Upon probing, Participant 18 elaborated:

“I would say 70% or 80% of the brands out there will refuse to change. They’ll just dig in their heels and say, ‘no, we are the big boys, screw you guys’. But then you’ve got the 20%, 30% that are nimble enough, and are honest enough with themselves to acknowledge and they then get taken on and absolutely embraced by the market.”

Findings pertaining to this section of the study confirm and elaborate on Coombs and Holladay’s (2012:412) paracrisis response strategies. Table 6.29 below summarises responses to value the insights gained from parody accounts as instigators of strategic change, as identified by participants and supported in available literature.
### TABLE 6.29: Paracrisis response strategies to value the insights gained from parody accounts as instigators for strategic change as supported by literature

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explicitly admit wrongdoing and repair violated expectations</td>
<td>Using insights gained from parody accounts to bring about strategic change</td>
<td>- Issues addressed by parody accounts provide valuable strategic insights to address the gap between stakeholders’ perceptions and reality (Berthon &amp; Pitt, 2012:96) which determines authenticity (Fombrun &amp; Van Riel, 2004:163,165). Insights gained from parody accounts are applied to change behaviour, match expectations, change sentiment and become more socially responsible, as confirmed in a related study (Sabri &amp; Michel, 2014:243).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusing the challenge</td>
<td>Ignoring insights for strategic change gained from parody accounts</td>
<td>- Collaboration with critics to change behaviour when faced with a crisis is resource intensive, as confirmed in a related study (Ott &amp; Theunissen, 2015:100). Unless resources are in place to respond to parody during a crisis, official responses are better withheld (Gillin &amp; Gianforte, 2012:19-25). - Authenticity is initiated from within to align an organisation’s core purpose with stakeholder expectations and therefore requires leadership from top management (Fombrun &amp; Van Riel, 2004:163). However, social media remains poorly integrated with marketing strategies (Moorman, 2015:38), business models (Killian &amp; McManus, 2015:8) and top executives’ strategic priorities (Li et al, 2013:4) as these three studies confirm. Similar findings locally confirm the need to prioritise the strategic value of social media management to demonstrate measurable return on investment (Global Alliance, 2014:42; World Wide Worx &amp; Fuseware, 2013:2).</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### 6.4.3.10. Conclusion of the interpretation of the theme: Value the insights gained from parody accounts as instigators of strategic change

**Explicitly admit wrongdoing and repair violated expectations by using insights gained from parody accounts to bring about strategic change:** Criticism from parody accounts may provide valuable insights to address shortcomings in business models, policies, customer service levels and operations. As such, parody accounts making the most of the principles of social media may instigate greater transparency and efforts to close the gap between image and reality. When using these insights as the basis to repair violated expectations, reputations may resonate emotionally with critical stakeholders.

**Refusing the challenge by ignoring insights for strategic change gained from parody accounts:** When the measurable return on investment for social media management is not recognised by top management and therefore lacks integration with business objectives, the strategic value of social media is diminished. In this environment, the co-creative requirements of strategic reputation management are replaced by a more traditional, top-down approach. In these instances, it becomes imperative to commit to the resources needed to address internal shortcomings instead of shifting the responsibility to social media management teams to superficially repair a battered reputation. Considering that collaboration with critics to change
behaviour is rather resource intensive, it further confirms why the insights gained from parody accounts may be ignored.

6.4.3.11. Interpretation and discussion of the theme: Tactical responses are aligned with higher-level strategic business objectives

The theme, tactical responses are aligned with higher-level strategic business objectives, was one of six themes related to the category, responses to co-manage reputation. In total, tactical responses are aligned with higher-level strategic business objectives, was expressed the least frequently in this category, namely in 54 cases (3.03%).

Explicit reform by responding in an authentic manner that is consistent with the brand personality: Most participants agreed the social media management team's official responses to parody accounts need to be consistent with high-level strategic business objectives, which, in turn, are reinforced by the strategic communication objectives, social media strategy, brand values and brand promise. Correspondingly, tactical responses are integrated with the brand personality and authentic tone of voice. As Participant 12 explains:

“How brands respond depends on the brand personality, how humorous they usually are and how far they are willing to go... our brand doesn’t really have much of a sense of humour. It’s quite a serious brand, it’s quite a corporate brand. We don’t talk about any controversial stuff. We stay away from topics like race, religion, sexual orientation, politics... because those are all conversations where you can’t win.”

These findings were verified in the quantitative data (Q7): Respond in a manner that is consistent with the brand personality and/or promise. Of the 150 respondents, the vast majority of 113 (75.33%) said Yes, 18 (12.00%) said No while only 7 (4.67%) were Not sure.

As stated before in the findings, many participants reiterated the reputational risks associated with a social media management team that is disempowered when there is a lack of strategic integration, especially in organisations that “care more about the bottom line than they do about relationships and customers”.

Findings pertaining to this section of the study validate and elaborate on Coombs and Holladay’s (2012:412) paracrisis response strategies. Table 6.30 below summarises how tactical responses are aligned with higher-level strategic business objectives during a paracrisis, as identified by participants and supported in available literature.
TABLE 6.30: Aligning tactical responses with higher-level strategic business objectives during a paracrisis as supported by literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paracrisis response strategy</th>
<th>Participants' descriptions</th>
<th>Confirmation from literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Explicit reform              | Respond in an authentic manner that is consistent with the brand personality | ● Authentic engagements are characterised by a tone that is consistent with the brand’s personality traits and the brand voice in order to establish trust (Faust & Householder, 2009:46; Hipwell & Reeves, 2013:66; Killian & McManus, 2015:10; Murty, 2010:15; Stokes, 2011:132, 186). In turn, the brand voice is consistent with the brand promise and brand values (Hanna, 2009:26).
● Inauthentic responses that talk down to social media communities, may escalate a crisis by providing more fodder for hating, flaming, ranting and parody (Fournier & Avery, 2011:25; Ott & Theunissen, 2015:100), especially on Twitter (Coffee, 2015; Ferreira, 2015; Gillin & Gianforte, 2012:19-25; Milnes, 2015; Nitins & Burgess, 2014:295; Sevasti Fairweather, 2015; Whitlock, 2015;). An EQ score premises that an emotionally appealing and therefore resonant reputation applies integrated communication that aligns brand, strategy, and identity (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004:96,86; Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:27). The ability to form a resonating psychological bond (Keller, 2001:15; 2009:144; 2012:186). Strong attitudinal attachments and active engagements to establish a sense of community, form the foundation for brand resonance (Keller, 2001:15; 2009:144; 2012:186; 2016:5) and project feelings such as passion, love, commitment and trust, is facilitated through brand personalities that humanise and animate brands so that mutually beneficial relationships are co-created (Fournier, 1998:344; Fournier & Alvarez, 2012:177).

6.4.3.12. Conclusion of the interpretation of the theme: Tactical responses are aligned with higher-level strategic business objectives

Explicit reform by responding in an authentic manner that is consistent with the brand personality: Emotionally appealing brand personalities maintain their authenticity by ensuring that tactical responses are integrated with the brand values, the brand promise and high-level strategic business objectives. In so doing, feelings such as trust, love and commitment are co-created. Conversely, inauthentic responses are distrusted and may escalate a paracrisis as critical social media communities pursue their ranting, hating, flaming and trolling.

6.5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this chapter reported on the data analysed for the synergistic approach to mixed methods in a triangulation design. The interpretation and discussion of findings met the overall purpose of the study, namely, to establish how the EQ can be used to identify suitable paracrisis response strategies for social media management teams to maintain emotionally resonant reputations when user-generated parody accounts target brands. Qualitative themes were verified in the quantitative data by means of a multiple linear stepwise regression analysis and descriptive statistics in cross tabulation results which were reported and interpreted. In the process, qualitative and quantitative data analyses were concurrently
integrated and synthesised for interpretation. Care was taken to extensively interpret findings where significant association was found between variables. To demonstrate how findings met the research objectives, the next chapter, Chapter 7, will discuss conclusions per research objective, while also providing recommendations. Delimitations and limitations will also be provided.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter reported on the data analysed, supported by discussions and interpretations of findings. Conclusions were provided for social media managers. The main purpose of this chapter, then, is to further crystallise, integrate and synthesise conclusions as they pertain to each research objective. A second purpose of this chapter is to report on the significant finding and overall conclusion for this study. Furthermore, recommendations for education, training, continuous development and further research will be provided for each research objective. Limitations and delimitations will also be discussed.

7.2. OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Before the study commenced, it was not clear how paracrisis response strategies may maintain an emotionally resonant reputation to ultimately strengthen resilience when targeted by parody accounts. To reiterate, for complex social media management teams in the age of parody, traditional top-down reputation management and crisis communication paradigms are challenged by the disruptive nature of peer-to-peer networks.

A more suitable approach then is strategic reputation management (Aula, 2010:46; Aula & Mantere, 2013:340) whereby reputation is the result of collective truths that arise from co-created relationships on converged media channels. As such, strategic reputation management mitigates the reputational risks that arise from the continuous uncertain, profoundly public and dialogic principles of social media that are not within management's direct control. Likewise, a paracrisis (Coombs; 2014; Coombs & Holladay, 2012) is disgruntled social media users’ publicly visible accusations of wrongdoing on social media that poses the risk of a full-blown crisis owing to the engaging and viral principles of antagonistic peer-to-peer networks.

Recognising the disruptive nature of social media, social media management teams increase efforts to co-create mutually-beneficial relationships characterised by strong psychological bonds to strengthen feelings of love and affection with social media communities, also called brand resonance (Keller, 2001:15; 2009:144; 2012:186). Should communities care for a brand and resonate with its emotionally appealing reputation, it is then hoped that they will defend a brand during a paracrisis.
As the phenomenon of social media parody accounts is an emerging trend in South Africa, emotionally resonant brand reputations are increasingly vulnerable to being jeopardised by parodies that hijack strategic messages.

Even more problematic for social media management teams is knowing when to simply ignore a parody, when to explicitly admit wrongdoing and when to refute the claims made by the parody account, especially those with malicious intentions. Given the unpredictable, high-risk environment of social media management, inappropriate responses may easily spark a viral backlash. Therefore, it is important to determine the intention of a user-generated parody account, as well as establish a suitable paracrisis response strategy to maintain an emotionally resonant brand reputation.

Following a synergistic approach to mixed methods in a triangulation design, an analysis of data enabled the study to meet the over-arching research objective, namely to establish how the EQ can be used to identify suitable paracrisis response strategies for social media management teams to maintain emotionally resonant reputations when user-generated parody accounts target brands.

After analysing the data, a tangible contribution of this study is a revision of Coombs and Holladay’s (2012:412) paracrisis response strategies to enhance emotionally resonant reputations as determined by Fombrun and Van Riel’s (2004:96) EQ, when being targeted by user-generated parody accounts that are ironic imitations of the official account’s brand identities to satirise, ridicule or poke fun at a brand for comic effect.
7.3. CONCLUSIONS PER RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Both the exploratory and the descriptive objectives of the study have been met. To elaborate, Table 7.1 below summarises findings per research objective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 7.1: Summary of findings per research objective</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research sub-objective 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association between emotional resonance, the type of brand parodied and the intention of the parody account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinctiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A parody account intended for harmless fun increases distinctiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A parody account intended to expose wrongdoing decreases distinctiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Celebrity increases distinctiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A parody account intended to expose wrongdoing decreases authenticity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Politician decreases consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ignore negatively predicts consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Celebrity increases transparency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ignore negatively predicts transparency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Explicitly admit wrongdoing positively predicts transparency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A parody account with malicious intent decreases visibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To elaborate, conclusions for each research objective are provided below:

7.3.1. Conclusions for research sub-objective 1

Research sub-objective 1 was as follows: To quantitatively measure, in terms of the constructs of the EQ (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004), the emotional resonance of brands targeted by user-generated parody accounts as paracrises, and to quantitatively describe the interactions that these measures of emotional resonance exhibit with certain parody account characteristics and with specific paracrisis response strategies, as defined by Coombs (2012).
In conclusion, the ability to maintain an emotionally resonant brand reputation in social media communities where user-generated parody accounts hijack strategic messages is no easy task in an organic and disruptive environment over which management has no direct control. In this high risk environment, the most likely targeted brands are loved celebrities and politicians with tarnished reputations, as well as big brands with large customer bases and top-of-mind brands. In this sense, a parodied brand is typically top-of-mind as a result of a catchy and memorable communication message, or worse, trending on Twitter when accused of wrongdoing of some sort.

The top-of-mind awareness of highly visible brands, better known as visibility, was the EQ (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004) construct that mostly influenced the extent to which parodied brands maintained an emotionally resonant reputation during a paracrisis. Therefore, humour resonates emotionally with antagonistic social media communities since the positive emotions and pleasure derived from funny content has the ability to diffuse anger, attract attention, enhance social capital, increase engagement and provide welcome comic relief, as confirmed in related studies (McGraw, Warren & Kan, 2015:1153; Nabi, Moyer-Gusé & Byrne, 2007:38; Wills & Fecteau, 2016:33). Gaining traction through social graphs, the satiric content of an emotionally resonant user-generated parody therefore attracts algorithms to increase visibility enabled by parody hashtags, memes, virality and, ultimately, trending topics. Moreover, as the visibility of organic user-generated content is optimised for social network algorithms, the reach of a user-generated parody account may ultimately surpass the visibility of the official social media brand account. In fact, a large fraction of social media users are social skippers (Elliott & Strohmenger, 2014) who are sceptical of branded content and, instead, trust algorithms (Edelman, 2016:21) and the collective truth (Aula, 2010:46) of organic user-generated content, especially influencers, in peer-to-peer networks (Bruns & Bahnisch, 2009:27; Heinonen, 2011:360). In this manner then, an influential, well-written and highly visible user-generated parody account may, in fact, pose a reputational risk should it then be more visible, trusted and emotionally resonant compared to the brand’s official social media account.

Regardless of the intentions of the user-generated parody account, the implications for online reputation management are manifold. As already reported, highly visible, endearing and iconic brands are the most at risk of being parodied. To confirm, Fombrun and Van Riel (2004:111) point out that visibility is equated with familiarity, which is a result of extensive publicity and the top-of-mind awareness of reputable prominent brands. Correspondingly, highly visible brands may find themselves competing with popular user-generated parody accounts for social media metrics such as reach, impressions and mentions. Considering that reach is a
vital base metric for resonance, social media management teams may increasingly seek visibility as a return on investment for branded content.

Since visibility was found to be the most significant dimension of emotional resonance, it may therefore suggest that social media managers could spend more resources on vanity metrics and search engine optimisation. In fact, as organic user-generated content tends to be more search engine optimised than branded content, social media teams may increasingly resort to paid social content, especially content marketing tactics such as sponsored trends, to increase visibility. In addition, tactics such as emotionally provocative linkbait and funny memes may increase visibility.

Since humour optimises visibility in a cluttered social media environment, social media management teams may increasingly benefit from using funny content to enhance emotionally resonant brand reputations. In particular, findings suggest that visibility may be strengthened when co-creating emotive humorous content with influencers such as popular parodists and related popular culture parody genres such as stand-up comedy, spoof websites and satiric news programmes in the converged media space.

Considering that visibility was found to be the most pertinent measure of a parodied brand’s emotional resonance during a paracrisis, this study concludes that the halo effect of highly visible brands may outlast the reputational risks posed by a parody account. In this sense, findings confirm the halo effect or favourable impression bias (Jones, Jones & Little, 2000; Roper & Fill, 2012:17; Shamma, 2012:151) evident in the emotional resonance of prominent, top-of-mind brands, whereby reservoirs of goodwill may offer significant protection against compromised reputations during a paracrisis.

With regard to the interactions that the measures of emotional resonance exhibit with certain parody account characteristics associated with specific paracrisis response strategies, as defined by Coombs (2012), several conclusions may be drawn. In this instance, characteristics included variables such as the intention of the parody account, the intended audience of the parody account, the type of brand parodied, and paracrisis response strategies chosen to maintain emotional resonance.

As the intended audience of a parody account was not significantly associated with emotional resonance, the disruptive nature of user-generated parody accounts in the many-to-many, peer-to-peer converged media space was evident. Therefore, just about anybody or everybody may be exposed to the ironic imitations of the official account’s brand identities to
satirise, ridicule or poke fun at a brand for comic effect, which underlines the reputational risk of a parody account as a paracrisis.

With regard to types of brands that significantly predicted emotional resonance, it was found that parodied celebrities positively predict distinctiveness while parodied celebrities also positively predicted transparency. Distinctiveness is amplified by light-hearted, playful spoofs that are intended for harmless fun, more specifically, by a user-generated parody account targeting celebrity brands. In other words, parody accounts of adored celebrities are often not malicious, but celebrate their iconic status. In addition, it is found that celebrity brands targeted by a user-generated account also optimised transparency.

Compared to other types of parodied brands, celebrity was not only the most significant, but also the only type of brand that resonates endearingly with critical social media communities. Correspondingly, it is concluded that strong emotional attachments and relationships are easier to establish with human brand personalities that are able to reciprocate love. Therefore, inanimate corporate brands and product brands aspiring to become love marks need to ensure that their brand personalities are distinct and transparent, in order for critical social media communities to relate to, care about and ultimately reciprocate love.

As tangible celebrities are loved and seem to be open about their private lives in a radically transparent environment, it explains why user-generated parody accounts satirising celebrities are mostly intended for harmless fun. It may also explain why celebrities are easily forgiven and loyal relationships withstand accusations of wrongdoing, as their fans and followers may believe that it is merely human to make mistakes.

Findings indicated that parodied politicians negatively predicted consistency. In these instances, user-generated parody accounts satirise the disparity between the actions and promises of politicians which then injure the consistency required to maintain emotionally resonant reputations. Compared to celebrities, parody accounts of politicians tend to use harsh satire to criticize wrongdoing and indicate a breakdown in trust and shared values.

In terms of the intention of the parody account that significantly predicts the emotional resonance of the parodied brand, findings indicated that malicious intent negatively predicted visibility. Therefore, user-generated parody accounts with malicious intentions tarnish visibility. Moreover, highly visible brands, typically prominent brands or those trending on social media for wrongdoing of some sort, are more at risk of being parodied, since audiences are more
likely to find a parody funny and catch the jokes if they are adequately familiar with the brand being satirised.

The malicious intentions of user-generated parody accounts that hijack the emotional resonance of brand storytelling are two-fold. Firstly, content that is offensive, inappropriate, vulgar and sarcastic are characteristic of parody as a genre to bring attention to its claims and stimulate conversations. That, in itself, may create unwanted brand associations, especially considering the vast number of social media users that are not familiar with parody as a genre, take the satirised copycat at face value, easily mistake fake content for satire, and confuse the ironic brand identities with that of the brand's official social media account. Secondly, the malicious intentions of user-generated parody accounts are opportunistic, whereby they make the most of the principles of social media and social network algorithms to gain visibility. By constantly refreshing social media communities' memories of past crises and a tarnished reputation, they fuel anger to reach vast audiences in the converged media space.

Findings indicated that user-generated parody accounts intended for harmless fun positively predicted distinctiveness. Therefore, light-hearted, playful spoofs that are intended for harmless fun most likely amplify distinctiveness. When this is the case, human brands, corporate brands and product brands welcome a user-generated parody as the highest form of flattery, especially when targeted in well-written and clever satire. Correspondingly, the distinctiveness of a parodied brand indicates the emotional resonance of a brand that is loved, relevant, memorable, cared about, discussed, engaged and in synch with social media communities. Moreover, complimentary, cleverly-written and influential user-generated parody accounts intended for harmless fun enjoy a loyal, trusted and large following that seek out parody accounts for comic relief and entertainment, especially on Twitter. During the mutually beneficial co-creation of a parodied brand reputation, previously unfamiliar audiences may be introduced to a parodied brand while formerly neglected brand associations such as humour, fun and playfulness resonate with social media communities. Once again, these findings reiterate that humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter with a user-generated parody account is an appropriate paracrisis response strategy to co-create an emotionally resonant brand reputation when a cleverly-written parody account is intended for harmless fun.

Findings related to user-generated parody accounts intended to expose wrongdoing predicted a decrease in both distinctiveness as well as in authenticity. Correspondingly, built-up anger over unresolved and smouldering issues motivates a user-generated parody account that satirises the gap between actual experiences and distinct promises made. In an attempt to protect a tarnished reputation, management tends to rely on public relations to defend
accusations of broken promises instead of spending resources to resolve failures internally and taking steps to address operational shortcomings. When this happens, the image of public relations as a stigmatised profession is further discredited, which explains why user-generated parody accounts often include the initials ‘PR’ in their ironic Twitter handles. When there is an unwillingness to repair broken promises, trust in corporate communication declines, while more trust may be placed in search engines and user-generated parody accounts as authentic peers. Therefore, inauthentic corporate jargon is typically satirised by user-generated parody accounts that are intended to expose wrongdoing. Most concerning is that the satirised brand personalities of copy-cats may resonate more with critical social media communities, who then tend to believe that the parody account is more authentic and truthful compared to the brand’s official social media account. At the same time, the visibility of a satirised reputation exists infinitely as a digital footprint only to be intermittently shared, laughed at, remembered and further modified as new paracrises arise.

When interpreting the findings related to paracrisis response strategies and emotional resonance, it was found that ignore negatively predicted both consistency as well as transparency. Therefore, when valid criticism is raised by a user-generated parody account, evidence suggest that ignore as a paracrisis response may be detrimental to consistency and transparency. As such, social media communities are not able to relate to, care about or reciprocate strong emotional attachments when promises made in brand storytelling contradict the brand’s perceived behaviour. In the same manner, ignoring valid criticism fuels suspicion that management has something to hide. Likewise, inauthentic responses containing excuses, obfuscation, spin doctoring, deflecting from the situation and shifting blame may escalate a paracrisis into a full blown crisis. Therefore, actual measures taken to address broken promises need to be visible. As such, the necessity of integrated communication is a prerequisite for emotional resonance, especially for large and complex social media management teams that rely on several outsourced partners to meet content marketing demands across an extensive mix of converged media channels.

When affection turns into anger, transparent digital footprints are discovered and contradictions are increasingly mocked and ridiculed. Therefore, the radical transparency of social graphs implies that management could be pressurised to release information that they did not really want the public to know. Yet, social media management teams are cautioned not to hastily rush responses during a paracrisis and first take the time to listen, learn and watch by analysing ORM metrics. Evaluating contingencies helps to inform the most appropriate time and manner in which to take action, as paracrisis responses to a user-generated parody account is a calculated risk in unpredictable and organic peer-to-peer
networks. As the smallest mishap easily erupts into hating, flaming, ranting and trolling, especially on Twitter, social media managers tend to apologise, even if the brand was not really wrong, in order to diffuse anger, gain positive sentiment and to mitigate a viral backlash. For the same reasons, apologies are brief, assertive and restricted to a once-off statement to mitigate the risk for anger to gain the traction of social network algorithms.

In essence, a brand personality that hides behind closed doors and keeps quiet by dismissing the dialogical principles of social media is not trusted, thereby inflicting injury to brand resonance. Conversely, authenticity and transparency require a brand personality that is brave enough to expose its own weaknesses and place accountability in co-created relationships above economic interests.

Lastly, findings furthermore indicated that explicitly admit wrongdoing as a paracrisis response strategy positively predicted both authenticity and transparency. By explicitly admit wrongdoing when valid criticism is raised, the transparency and authenticity of a brand’s official social media account resonate mostly with social media communities. Although the vast majority are passive lurkers and spectators, they too, notice efforts to repair relationships, which is necessary for care and affection that will outlast the disruption caused by user-generated parody accounts during a paracrisis.

7.3.2. Conclusions for research sub-objective 2

Research sub-objective 2 was as follows: To quantitatively describe the interactions that certain parody account characteristics exhibit with the paracrisis response strategies, as defined by Coombs (2012).

In terms of the intentions of a user-generated parody account, findings indicated that when user-generated parody accounts are intended for harmless fun, neither refute nor explicitly admit wrongdoing are suitable paracrisis response strategies to maintain emotionally resonant brand reputations. Notwithstanding the risks of paracrises, social media managers in South Africa seem to appreciate a sense of humour. As such, they appreciate the manner in which well-written satire in light-hearted, playful spoofs intended for harmless fun are not overtly didactic and imposing, with the ability to distil issues and offer comic relief. It appears then that fighting back to refute a parody account intended for harmless fun will, indeed, outweigh the risks of escalating a paracrisis given that a parodied brand is already injured.
Regardless of its ability to hijack strategic messages then, the Streisand effect illustrates that the internet does not like to be told what to do and when management is seen as a bully, sentiment sides with the parodist as the underdog. Moreover, angry, viral backlashes tend to be rather disproportionate to the initial issue. Therefore, aggressive knee-jerk responses often become the fodder for intensified parody hashtags and memes so that satirised brand identities are immortalised in a tarnished digital footprint.

As fair comment, especially in Post-Apartheid South Africa with a history of silencing dissent, social media managers seem to value the free expression of satire when a parody is not malicious. For this reason, mature brand personalities express their sense of humour by responding with humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter during a paracrisis which communities find more entertaining and emotionally resonant compared to many other forms of branded content that saturate social media newsfeeds.

Therefore, instead of fighting back to refute amateur satirists’ playful spoofs or close down parody accounts, social media managers are more receptive to a cleverly-written user-generated parody account that raises constructive criticism compared to related malicious paracrises such as hating, flaming, ranting and trolling, especially on Twitter. In fact, popular and influential user-generated parody accounts provide valuable insights that brand personalities can apply to optimise resonance in emotionally resonant brand storytelling. These include a distinct authentic voice, strategic messages that touch a nerve or a human truth, comic relief during stressful times, a playful brand personality that reciprocates love, and brand associations such as fun and humorous entertainment.

Already, parody accounts intended for harmless fun enjoy considerable affinity and by embracing this emerging trend in the age of parody, a brand’s official social media accounts may benefit from increasing engagement, reach and sentiment to ultimately co-create brand resonance. Considering that irony is not overtly didactic and imposing, humorous brand storytelling may appeal to a vast fraction of passive lurkers, the anti-establishment culture of Twitter and those sceptical about corporate communication messages, especially inauthentic promotional content that is intrusive and paid content that is overtly commercially motivated.

### 7.3.3. Conclusions for research sub-objective 3

Research sub-objective 3 was as follows: To qualitatively explore the perceptions of social media management teams regarding paracrisis response strategies that are intended to
maintain emotionally resonant reputations when brands are targeted by user-generated parody accounts.

Findings identified three overarching categories and their respective qualitative themes, namely: (i) maintain a responsive social media governance framework, (ii) determine how parody accounts express reputational concerns, and (iii) responses to co-manage reputation.

To conclude then, the perceptions of social media management teams regarding paracrisis response strategies that are intended to maintain emotionally resonant reputations when brands are targeted by user-generated parody accounts verified quantitative data reported earlier. For brand reputations to resonate emotionally with critical stakeholders, this study confirmed all five requirements of Fombrun and Van Riel’s (2004) EQ, namely, visibility, transparency, authenticity, consistency and distinction.

However, with regard to Coombs & Holladay’s (2012) paracrisis response strategies, findings indicated that only three of the four seemed to be relevant in the context of this study. As such, the three significant paracrisis response strategies were ignore, explicitly admit wrongdoing, and refute. What was not significant, however, was implicitly admit wrongdoing. Instead of implicitly admit wrongdoing, this study recommends humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter as a paracrisis response strategy when being targeted by a user-generated parody account as further explained in the subsequent section.

With this in mind, it is further established that vulnerable brands, especially highly visible brands, require detailed risk profiling and scenario planning in ORM systems that are safeguarded by responsive social media governance frameworks to mitigate paracrisis contingencies. Yet, scenario planning is best approached with a measure of flexibility, considering the organic nature of social media where it cannot be said for certain that mitigation measures and paracrisis response strategies may, indeed, safeguard an emotionally resonant reputation. Therefore, substantial investment in ORM systems to continuously monitor metrics and gain insights from analytics is crucial.

Metrics, especially resonance, provide valuable strategic management insights and are interpreted on a case-by-case basis as not all parodies are intended for harmless fun, with some being rather malicious. As findings suggest, parody accounts are perceived as an attempt to engage brands that are being loved and cared about. Therefore, social media management teams may gain valuable insights from parodied brands when establishing the reasons why humorous parodies resonate with social media communities. Particularly worth analysing is user-generated parody accounts that satirise perceived gaps between the brand
promise and social media communities’ realities in order to address accusations of wrongdoing.

Regardless of the intention of the parody account and the paracrisis response strategy chosen, being targeted by a user-generated parody account is an opportunity to gain invaluable strategic insights and remain strategically flexible in order to maintain emotionally resonant reputations. Perceived as a mirror being held up to a brand, findings suggest that the emotional resonance of a user-generated parody account is, in fact, perceived as a brand’s reputation, to some extent. When communities simultaneously engage with both the parody account as well as the brand’s official social media account, reputation is socially constructed and co-created, which is the reason why strategic reputation management replaces top-down traditional management approaches. Likewise, if embracing the organic governing principles of peer-to-peer networks instead of traditional top-down crisis communication, the most intrusive paracrisis responses seem to be knee-jerk responses where management refutes the claims made by a non-malicious parody account by fighting back to gain control. In such cases, paracrisis may easily escalate into full-blown crises, especially considering the highly antagonistic environment of Twitter with its propensity for hating, flaming, ranting, trolling and viral social media backlashes.

In closing, this study supports the views of Diamond et al (2009:119), who maintain that powerful, emotionally resonant brands are produced by “multiple creators authoring multiple representations in multiple venues”. Moreover, this study concludes that humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter with a parody account is a suitable paracrisis response strategy when targeted by cleverly written satire in light-hearted, playful spoofs that are intended for harmless fun. Therefore, by embracing the playfulness of the digital landscape, as pointed out by Muñiz & O’Guinn (2001), Mikkonen and Bajde (2013:331) and Fournier and Avery (2011:25), official social media brand accounts that seek visibility and enhanced emotional resonance are best associated with playful and humorous brand personalities.

In the playful age of parody then, social media managers embrace user-generated parody accounts as an emerging trend in South Africa often in need of comic relief, authentic satirical social commentary, the intense emotional pleasure of laughing together at human truths and poking fun at brands that, just like real humans who are being cared for, may be forgiven when things go wrong.
7.4. SIGNIFICANT FINDING AND OVERALL CONCLUSION FOR THIS STUDY

To reiterate, the research problem was to establish how the EQ (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004) as a measure of emotionally resonant reputations can be used by social media management teams to identify appropriate paracrisis response strategies (Coombs; 2014; Coombs & Holladay, 2012) when user-generated parody accounts target brands.

Findings indicate that the paracrisis response strategy, implicitly admit wrongdoing, is not significant. In its place, this study concludes, an additional paracrisis response strategy could be added to Coombs and Holladay’s (2012:412) initial classification, namely: humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter. Although Coombs (2014:8) admits that the most suitable response to a paracrisis that ridicules a brand is a sense of humour, such a response is overlooked in Coombs and Holladay’s (2012:412) classification of paracrisis responses.

To reiterate, five constructs for emotionally resonant reputations, as determined by Fombrun and Van Riel’s (2004:96) EQ, comprise: (i) visibility, (ii) transparency, (iii) authenticity, (iv) consistency, and (v) distinction. The four paracrisis response strategies identified by Coombs and Holladay (2012:412) were: (i) refute, (ii) implicitly admit wrongdoing, (iii) explicitly admit wrongdoing, and (iv) ignore.

Having measured and analysed the aforementioned constructs, the following revised classification of paracrisis response strategies for emotionally resonant reputations in the age of parody, where social media parody is an emerging trend is suggested, namely (i) refute and defend, (ii) explicitly admit wrongdoing, (iii) ignore, but listen, learn and watch; and lastly, (iv) humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter. To elaborate, Table 7.2 on the next page provides the revised classification of Coombs and Holladay’s (2012:412) paracrisis response strategies recommended by this study, to maintain emotionally resonant reputations when brands are targeted by user-generated parody accounts.
### TABLE 7.2: Revised classification of paracrisis response strategies recommended by this study to maintain emotionally resonant reputations when brands are targeted by user-generated parody accounts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paracrisis response strategies considering the intentions of parody accounts</th>
<th>Contingencies to consider to maintain emotionally resonant brand reputations when selecting an appropriate paracrisis response strategy</th>
<th>ORM and risk mitigation for types of brands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Refute and defend</strong>&lt;br&gt;When influential parody accounts are malicious, management fights back by responding directly to the parodist. In highly regulated environments, a defensive response may be warranted. Distinguish between user-generated parody accounts and look-alike social spam, fake content and hoaxes that need to be refuted.</td>
<td>Refute is a high risk strategy for viral social media backlashes and a tainted digital footprint, as the Streisand effect illustrates that the internet does not like to be told what to do. Therefore, the paracrisis may escalate while unprecedented positive sentiment, reach, engagement and influence increase for the parody account. For this reason, parody accounts that express satire in a clever manner and are intended for harmless fun are not refuted, but regarded as fair comment. Social spam, hoaxes, fake content, cloned accounts, fraud and domain squatting, however, require pro-active mitigation through responsive social media governance frameworks.</td>
<td>Top-of-mind human brands such as politicians, as well as prominent inanimate corporate brands and product brands, are mostly at risk. These visible brands are more likely to be targeted by malicious parody accounts satirising false promises or wrongdoing. Official social media accounts for these brands require endearing brand personalities that are distinct, transparent and consistent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explicitly admit wrongdoing</strong>&lt;br&gt;When valid concerns of broken promises are expressed by an influential parody account that does not have malicious intentions. Insights gained from the parody account are applied to take concrete measures to repair shortcomings. Measures taken are communicated directly to the parody account and/or across converged media channels in general.</td>
<td>Although resource-intensive, the paracrisis is likely to subside if concrete measures are taken to address broken promises. Nevertheless, anticipate a social media backlash involving hating, ranting, flaming and trolling. Therefore, keep responses succinct and assertive while limiting an apology to a single post without further engagement. Alternatively, an apology, supported by measures taken to resolve criticism, is issued on one-way channels to distract from social media algorithms that favour high engagement. Regardless, responses need to be honest, as the transparent nature of social graphs and discoverability of digital footprints may escalate into full-blown crises where attempts to hide information are ridiculed and criticized.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ignore, but listen, learn and watch</strong>&lt;br&gt;A carefully considered decision to take no action is not the same as passively ignoring or dismissing a parody account in the hope that it will disappear. Parody accounts with malicious intentions such as hating, flaming, ranting and trolling are ignored.</td>
<td>Responding to a parody account is a calculated risk. Instead of hastily rushing to defend against criticism, it is better to first listen, learn and watch by using ORM metrics and analytics. Time is taken to establish the intent of the parody account and learn valuable lessons as the paracrisis is unfolding, but also to establish if the risks of a particular response strategy may outweigh the benefits thereof. In general, the more attention is given to malicious parody accounts, like trolls, the more their efforts intensity. The latter is therefore ignored.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter</strong>&lt;br&gt;Light-hearted, playful spoofs intended for harmless fun often express love for a distinct brand since humour resonates with critical stakeholders. Therefore, tongue-in-cheek banter with a parody embraces the principles of social media in the playful age of parody. In the process, authenticity, visibility, reach, engagement and sentiment are increased as mutually beneficial reputations are co-created.</td>
<td>When reciprocating with affection and humour, including parody in storytelling, a brand personality gains positive sentiment and brand resonance for being mature and expressing a sense of humour. Comic relief provides welcome entertainment and may break through the clutter of branded content in a rather antagonistic social media environment. Therefore, the goodwill of reputational halos may offer some measure of safeguarding during a paracrisis. By relinquishing some control, management allows for meaning-making to be co-created outside corporate boundaries and a brand is more likely to have a resilient reputation during a paracrisis. Yet, humorous tongue-in-cheek banter with a parody account still needs to be appropriate for the brand personality.</td>
<td>Top-of-mind, visible and lovable celebrities are mostly at risk. Official social media accounts for celebrities require endearing brand personalities that are distinct and transparent, while maintaining a sense of humour.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To conclude, this study recommends that humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter with a user-generated parody account is an appropriate paracrisis response strategy that embraces the principles of social media in the playful age of parody. As light-hearted, playful spoofs are intented for harmless fun, they often express love for a prominent brand. When reciprocating with affection and humour, including using parody in emotive storytelling, brand resonance is attained when mutually beneficial reputations are co-created and co-managed. For this reason, humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter invests in the goodwill of reputational halos so that brand advocates and influential parodists are more likely to defend a brand during a crisis which is valuable on Twitter with its propensity for hating, flaming, ranting and trolling.

For playful brand personalities especially, humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter embraces social media parody as an emerging trend in South Africa, while demonstrating a mature brand personality that can take it on the chin and has a sense of humour. Correspondingly, findings confirm and contribute to previous studies (Botha, 2014:372; Boukes, Boomgaard, Moorman & De Vreese, 2015:739; D’errico & Poggi, 2016:12; McGraw, Warren & Kan, 2015:1154; Nabi, Moyer-Gusé & Byrne, 2007:38,40) which concluded that skilfully created humorous content elicits positive emotions such as laughter, amusement, pleasure, fun and joy.

Not only does humour and satire provide welcome comic relief, but they also elicit positive thoughts. The more audiences care about the issue raised in a parody, the higher the emotional intensity felt. Therefore, social media management teams that playfully use humour, especially parody, when responding to parody accounts, may benefit from the social capital generated by a parody account and its engaging followers by sharing in the laughter. In the process, the official social media account, the parodist and anyone else engaging with a funny parody, are all then perceived to be more likeable and credible.

Therefore, humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter with a user-generated parody account as a paracrisis response strategy may gain communal approval for the joy and entertainment derived from sharing a sense of humour. In fact, the positive emotions experienced when laughing together not only strengthens engagement, virality and top-of-mind visibility in a cluttered social media environment, but also builds cohesion in a social graph. More significantly, a catchy and playful humorous parody, coupled with an ironic hashtag and a satiric meme, enhance the likelihood of remembering an emotionally resonant message to extend top-of-mind awareness of a brand for a considerable period of time.

By relinquishing some control, management allows for meaning-making to be co-created and co-managed outside corporate boundaries so that emotionally resonant brands are more likely
to have resilient reputations. In fact, a brave and humorous brand personality may even go so far as to respond using parody to diffuse a paracrisis and provide much-welcome comic relief where anger often trends, and hating tends to silence the engaging potential of social media.

7.5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for each research objective are provided below:

7.5.1. Recommendations for research sub-objective 1

The following recommendations may be considered for industry:

- Influencer marketing engagements may consider collaborations with strategically beneficial and trusted influencers and parodists to establish mutually beneficial relationships.
- Integrated communication remains essential to mitigate the risks associated with complex social media management teams, especially for prominent brands and service-oriented brands that encounter frequent customer complaints from their large customer base. Although it remains a challenge, flexible, responsive and adaptive processes are recommended for truly integrated social media management teams to overcome silos and ultimately gain consistency between promises and delivery.
- ORM requires extensive commitment to robust and responsive social media governance frameworks to guide prerequisites for an authentic brand personality that consistently delivers on its promises. As such, social media governance guides best practice processes and policies for professionalism, not only for the social media management team, but also for the responsible use of social media for employees and all strategic stakeholders who co-create and co-manage reputation.
- Social media governance requires integration with cross-divisional, interdisciplinary corporate governance structures and risk management at the highest strategic level, considering that reputational risks on social media permeate all channels in the converged media space. For this reason, the impact and strategic value of social media management require regular management reports to demonstrate return on investment for measurable objectives. Instead of relying on vanity metrics, resonance is recommended as a key metric from which to gain valuable analytics and insights in the rapidly changing, organic environment of social media.
- Social media management teams need to pro-actively reserve all possible ironic and malicious variations of a brand’s official social media handles, brand identities and social
media account names. This may mitigate various forms of social media hijacking such as social media cyber-squatting, social spam, fake content and parody accounts in particular.

- Moderation systems are required to mitigate social spam, fake content and trolling which breaks down the trust and goodwill of brand communities.

The following recommendations may be considered for continuous professional development, education and training:

- Education and training on social media governance best practise standards and processes are essential. This includes continuous sensitisation for complex social media management teams to mitigate the risks inherent in social media.
- Clear social media policies and social media playbooks require constant revision to be socially responsive, especially considering the dynamic environment of social media platforms, technologies, trends and issues.
- As social media parody is an emerging trend, high risk brands are advised to include user-generated parody in their contingency and scenario planning processes.
- For social media management teams, ensuring that responsive social media governance standards are maintained for the following: social media strategies, a social media management philosophy, a distinct and authentic brand voice, brand personality, responsible messaging, crisis communication planning, social media etiquette, professionalism, maintaining professional digital footprints and addressing the ever-evolving technologies, networks and platforms in the converged media space.
- An opportunity exists for South African professional bodies to establish best practise guidelines for influencer marketing, content marketing, social metrics and analytics to measure return on investment.

7.5.2. Recommendations for research sub-objective 2

The following recommendations may be considered for industry:

- Continuous search engine optimisation of owned and paid content is necessary, considering that social network algorithms are constantly changing.
- Emotive content marketing strategies and brand storytelling that maintain authentic and distinct brand personalities are called for, especially for inanimate product and corporate brands. Therefore radical transparency could entail the sharing of management challenges and even failures, so that inanimate brands are seen as being more human and authentic. Such brands may be easier forgiven for mistakes during a paracrisis.
- Embracing the governing principles of social media, where the intrusive practises of one-way, top-down promotional content may not resonate with communities who prefer authentic brand personalities.
The intentions of user-generated parodies are not fixed. Likewise, the intentions of malicious and harmless parody are somewhat overlapping. Therefore, both a qualitative and a quantitative case-by-case analysis is necessary.

As social spam may appear identical to user-generated parody, social media management teams are advised to have the necessary moderation systems in place to eradicate social spam.

Findings are inconclusive over the most appropriate manner in which to engage a disgruntled parodist in order to resolve the reasons for their anger. Social media managers are therefore advised to either contact them off-line, or publically, using social media. In most cases, findings suggest, that personal contact by the social media management team to address the underlying issues being criticized and involve the parodist in finding solutions is the most effective strategy for a disgruntled parodist to cease malice.

7.5.3. Recommendations for research sub-objective 3

The following recommendations may be considered for industry:

- Brand storytelling used in content marketing strategies may consider the use of humour, especially parody, to gain emotional resonance. Humorous branded content may be optimised when collaborating with influencers who have a reputation for being funny. Likewise, humorous branded content may be published on social media parody accounts. In fact, content marketing tactics may purposively invite user-generated content that parodies corporate communication campaigns to strengthen the distinctiveness of co-created reputations. As such, creative and catchy copywriting skills is an essential resource for the social media management team.

- Considering the volatility of antagonistic social media communities, especially Twitter, traditional one-way channels such as newspapers, radio and television may be more suitable for crisis communication responses. Since continuous updates during a crisis intensifies angry engagements and attracts algorithms, the crisis is prolonged.

- Given the ambiguous meaning, dynamic and overlapping intentions of parody, qualitative assessments would require humans, and not only ORM software systems, to interpret the context, sentiment, hidden meanings and subtlety of irony in order to establish if a parody is indeed intended for harmless fun, before deciding on an appropriate response strategy. It may very well be that upon closer examination it may emerge that light-hearted, playful entertainment is purposely used to draw attention to valid and serious criticism or express love for a brand, or, more concerning, being rather malicious.
As parody typically uses a moniker to share offensive, vulgar and sarcastic content to stimulate conversations, heated debates around the right to freedom of speech and the extent to which it safeguards the right to offend, may continue. As such, responding to a parody account that hijacks the strategic message remains a calculated risk that needs to be mitigated on a case-by-case basis, as there is no particular paracrisis response that may be apply to all contexts. In some cases, as findings suggest, a carefully considered decision to take no action is not the same as passively ignoring a parody account in the hope that it will disappear. Yet, reputational insights gained from conversations remain strategically valuable. As Participant Three articulated: “They can actually say things that you may not actually say about your brand even though it might be things that the brand thinks.”

The following recommendations may be considered for continuous professional development, education and training:

- Adequate resources and professionalism are required to demonstrate the strategic value of social media management and return on investment. This could result in truly integrated communication that mitigates the reputational risks of inadequately skilled social media management further tarnishing the image of public relations, already a somewhat stigmatised profession.

7.5.4. Recommendations for further studies

The following suggestions for further research may be undertaken:

- A quantitative study of parody in branded content and emotional branding to maintain resonance among critical brand communities in South Africa in a post-modern paradigm.
- Further studies applying the Delphi method amongst a purposive sample of social media management experts to explore the practical application of the paracrisis response strategies recommended in this study as already illustrated in Table 7.2.
- A discourse analysis among a purposive sample of brand parodists to explore emotive storytelling techniques used to hijack strategic messages.
- A quantitative study among lurkers and spectators to establish if humorous brand storytelling has the potential to stimulate engagement with branded content.

7.6. LIMITATIONS

The following limitations of the study are identified and acknowledged as such:

- The small sample may be a limitation. The use of a purposive sample implies that findings cannot be generalised to the wider population.
• Resource constraints such as time and available budget. As this is a self-funded study, the scope of the methodology was limited.

• The rapid changing and unpredictable nature of social media technologies, platforms and user patterns may imply that trends and insights are constantly shifting. In fact, in the short space of two years during which data was collected and analysed, changes in internet access, popular social media platforms and the popularity of social media parody were noticed. Yet, care was taken to incorporate the latest literature at the time of the study. Nevertheless, while platforms and their algorithms may change, the governing principles of social media as outlined in this study seem to remain somewhat stable.

7.7. DELIMITATIONS

The following delimitations of the study are identified and acknowledged:

• While several free and paid ORM monitoring software systems are available to gain insights into resonance as a social metric, these analytics were excluded from the methodology in this study. Such analytics are usually fairly easy to obtain when measuring the resonance of particular brand mentions, social media account handles or hashtags over a specific period in time. Although the use of these metrics may have provided additional useful data for this study, the focus of the study was social media management teams and the paracrisis response strategies they recommend when faced with user-generated parody accounts as a paracrisis situation. To answer the research problem for which limited theory was available, mixed methods was therefore selected in order to understand the phenomenon by collecting thick descriptions embedded in communities of practice in multiple contexts.

• Post-modernism as a theoretical paradigm is not the overarching approach for this study, although relevant. Where applicable, post-modern approaches and authors have been acknowledged in the study. Instead, integrated communication was selected as a suitable paradigm, as a review of literature and the findings of this study suggest that social media management is practised in a more modernist management approach in South Africa.

• Owing to the rather specialist topic of the study, the researcher acknowledges that a larger sample may have yielded more generalisable results. Considering the specialist topic of the study and the relatively small population of social media managers in South Africa, it was not possible to draw a representative sample. Yet, care was taken with the purposive sample of the quantitative data by extending the parameters of the sample as much as possible. Therefore, mostly local social media experts, including owners of parody accounts, were included, as they were judged to be sufficiently knowledgeable about the research problem.
• Owing to time constraints, the qualitative themes and the analysis of paracrisis response strategies recommended by this study were not submitted to participants for member checking.

7.8. CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the conclusions based on the research objectives met, as well as recommendations for the study. The chapter attempted to crystallise, integrate and synthesise conclusions as they pertain to each research objective. In essence, the chapter concluded that distinctiveness is the attribute that resonates the most with critical social media communities. Furthermore, it was concluded that brand personalities, especially for inanimate brands, require authentic human characteristics to reciprocate care, love and affection in mutually beneficial relationships that are co-created. In the process, reputation is co-managed in peer-to-peer communities. Particularly valuable for establishing reputational halos are brand personalities that embrace the transparent and authentic principles of social media. Having co-created strong psychological bonds, caring communities may defend a brand during a paracrisis.

A noteworthy contribution of the study is a revised classification of paracrisis response strategies. As such, humorous, tongue-in-cheek banter with a user-generated parody account intended for harmless fun embraces social media parody as an emerging trend in South Africa, while demonstrating a mature yet playful brand personality that can take it on the chin and has a sense of humour in the age of parody. Yet, when valid criticism is raised by well-written and clever satire, brand resonance is more likely to be maintained when responses are honest and open, while taking measures to repair broken promises. As attempts to engage the social media management team, user-generated parody accounts cannot be ignored, yet all contingencies need to be considered on a case-by-case bases instead of rushing responses. Therefore, metrics and analytics are continuously monitored. Despite the paracrisis response chosen, popular and influential parody accounts provide valuable storytelling insights, especially if they resonate more with social communities, compared to the brand’s official social media account. As a parody account co-creates reputation, it also hijacks the emotive brand story, which implies that responding to a parody account is a calculated risk for a brave social media management team with its sense of humour intact.

Lastly, the chapter included recommendations for education, training, continuous development and further research. Limitations and delimitations were also discussed.
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APPENDIX A: Short questionnaire to establish every participant's demographical profile

1. How many years' industry experience do you have?

| Less than a year | 1 – 5 years | 6 – 10 years | 11 – 15 years | 16 – 20 years | More than 21 years |

2. What is your highest qualification?

3. Which of the following social media activities describe your experience?

| Creating social media accounts for clients or management |
| Content management for social media accounts |
| Social media strategies |
| Monitoring and measuring social media |
| Preparing social media reports for clients or management |
| Advising clients or management on social media |
| Reputation management |
APPENDIX B: Initial interview guide

Hi, my name is Maritha Pritchard. I am doing research for a D Tech in Strategic Communication at TUT. The research focuses on social media parody accounts and how social media teams need to respond strategically when encountering brand parodies on social networks like Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. Please be open, honest and free to express your opinions of and feelings about the questions being asked. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. Tell me about the occurrence (in your work environment) of social media accounts created for the sole purpose of parodying or mocking a brand.

2. Tell me about the strategic responses that are used in your team to address social media parody accounts that harm reputation.

3. In your experience, how do parody accounts influence the top-of-mind awareness, also called the visibility of a brand?

4. In what ways do you think that parody accounts could have ramifications on the distinction of a brand?

5. What do you think are the consequences of parody accounts on a brand’s reputation for transparency?

6. How do parody accounts influence the consistency of communication messages about a brand?

7. In what ways do you think that parody accounts could have implications for the perceived authenticity of a brand?

8. We have chatted about some of the ways in which parody accounts may influence reputation. What else can you think of that may influence reputation when encountering parody accounts?

9. What, do you suggest, are the most important considerations for reputation management strategies when encountering brand parody accounts?

10. Is there anything else you would like to mention about parody accounts?

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview.
APPENDIX C: Second revised interview guide

Hi, my name is Maritha Pritchard. I am doing research for a D Tech in Strategic Communication at TUT. The research focuses on social media parody accounts and how social media teams need to respond strategically when encountering brand parodies on social networks like Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. Please be open, honest and free to express your opinions of and feelings about the questions being asked. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. In your work environment, tell me about the occurrence of social media accounts created for the sole purpose to parody or mock a brand.
2. Tell me about the strategic responses that are used in your team to address social media parody accounts that harm corporate reputation.
3. In your experience, how do parody accounts influence the top-of-mind awareness of a brand?
4. In what ways, do you think, could parody accounts could have ramifications on the unique promise that differentiates a brand from competitors?
5. What do you think are the consequences of parody accounts for transparent corporate communication?
6. How do parody accounts influence the consistency of corporate messages delivered across the communication mix to all stakeholder groups?
7. In what ways, do you think, could parody accounts have implications for the perceived authenticity of corporate communication?
8. We have talked about some of the ways in which parody accounts may influence reputation. What else can you think of that may influence reputation when the social media team encounters parody accounts?
9. What, do you suggest, are the most important considerations for reputation management strategies when encountering parody accounts?
10. Is there anything else you would like to mention about parody accounts?

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview.
APPENDIX D: Third revised interview guide

Hi, my name is Maritha Pritchard. I am doing research for a D Tech in Strategic Communication at TUT. The research focuses on user-generated parody accounts and how social media teams need to respond strategically when encountering brand parodies on social networks like Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. Please be open, honest and free to express your opinions of and feelings about the questions being asked. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. In your work environment, tell me about the occurrence of social media accounts created for the sole purpose to parody or mock a brand.
2. Tell me about the strategic responses that are used in your team to address parody accounts that influence corporate reputation.
   - Do parody accounts warrant a strategy committed to responding to parody or does it form part of something else, like SOPs or protocols?
3. How, do you think, would it be possible to classify and name the different types of parodies that one may encounter in the social space?
4. Do you think there is a correlation between corporate reputation and the possibility of being parodied?
5. In your experience, how do parody accounts influence the top-of-mind awareness of a brand?
6. In what ways, do you think, could parody accounts have ramifications on the unique promise that differentiates a brand from competitors?
7. What, do you think, are the consequences of parody accounts for transparent corporate communication?
8. How do parody accounts influence the consistency of corporate messages delivered across the communication mix to all stakeholder groups?
9. In what ways, do you think, could parody accounts have implications for the perceived authenticity of corporate communication?
10. We have talked about some of the ways in which parody accounts may influence reputation. What else can you think of that may influence reputation when the social media team encounter parody accounts?
11. Is there anything else you would like to mention about parody accounts?

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview.
On Nov 21, 2014 9:18 AM, "Pritchard, Maritha" <mpritchard@uj.ac.za> wrote:

Dear

recommended that I chat to you as an expert on social media, especially considering the topic of my study. I would like to ask if you would be willing to share your insights for my academic study on user-generated social media parody accounts. The study explores the ways in which social parody accounts influence brand reputation. The interview should not take more than 40 minutes and your identity will remain anonymous and confidential at all times.

The study is for my D in strategic communication. Attached is an information sheet on the study. I will also share my results with you once the research project is completed. I can do the interview at your office, or alternatively we can do the interview via Skype if that is more convenient for you. I am not sure where you are located – it seems as if you may be in the moment, so Skype may be the best option.

Hoping to hear from you.

Best wishes

Maritha
APPENDIX F: TUT official information leaflet and informed consent

INFORMATION LEAFLET AND INFORMED CONSENT

PROJECT TITLE: Exploring reputation resilience when encountering social media parody accounts

Primary investigator: Ms Maritha Pritchard, MTech (Journalism)
Study leader: Prof. DLR van der Waldt, Department of Public Relations and Business Communication, Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria
Co-study leader: Prof DP Conradie, Department of Public Relations and Business Communication, Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria

Dear Potential research participant,

You are invited to participate in a research study that forms part of my formal DTech-studies. This information leaflet will help you to decide if you would like to participate. Before you agree to take part, you should fully understand what is involved. You should not agree to take part unless you are completely satisfied with all aspects of the study.

WHAT IS THE STUDY ALL ABOUT?
Although parody is practised by many professional satirists in stand-up comedy, political cartoons, fake television news programmes and comic books, contemporary social media technologies make it possible for anyone to open a parody account to mock a brand. The ease and speed at which social media parody accounts are created and shared create a problem for strategic reputation management. This study will therefore devise a social media reputational framework to effectively respond to social media parody accounts. As a social media expert, your valuable insight will greatly assist in establishing how brands should ideally respond to parody accounts to manage their reputation.

WHAT WILL YOU BE REQUIRED TO DO IN THE STUDY?
If you decide to take part in the study, you will be required to do the following:

- To sign this informed consent form
- To be available for a one-on-one interview with me in your office that should last around 30 minutes. The interview will be recorded and transcribed. A copy of the transcription will be sent to you for verification.

ARE THERE ANY CONDITIONS THAT MAY EXCLUDE YOU FROM THE STUDY?
You will not be eligible to participate in this study if you do not have a working knowledge of social media. Also, if you are not familiar with parody accounts such as the ones that typically appear on Twitter, you will be excluded from the study.

**CAN ANY OF THE STUDY PROCEDURES RESULT IN PERSONAL RISK, DISCOMFORT OR INCONVENIENCE?**

Participation in the study involves minimal risks, discomforts and/or inconveniences that are no more than the risks, discomforts and/or inconveniences one encounters in daily living.

**WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS THAT MAY COME FROM THE STUDY?**

The benefits of participating in this study are:

- You will make a valuable contribution towards establishing a framework which will help brands to effectively respond to social media parody accounts in order to strategically manage reputation.
- You will be provided a free copy of the research results, which includes a reputational framework developed by means of the various interviews and questionnaires used in this study. You may find the results of the study valuable for reputation and social media strategies.
- You will contribute towards industry’s professional body of knowledge as it is foreseen that results of the study will be published. As such, you contribute towards the professionalisation of social media management.

**WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY FINANCIAL COMPENSATION OR INCENTIVE FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY?**

You will not be paid to participate in the study.

**WHAT ARE YOUR RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT IN THIS STUDY?**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any stage without any penalty or future disadvantage whatsoever. You don’t even have to provide the reason/s for your decision.

**HOW WILL CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY BE ENSURED IN THE STUDY?**

Confidentiality of data will be maintained - in other words, your identity will only be known to the researcher. I will remove/mask all identifying data on transcriptions and questionnaires as well as final report documents (e.g. thesis and journal articles). Thus, your identity will not be revealed during or after the study, even when the study is published or used in any format. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

**IS THE RESEARCHER QUALIFIED TO CARRY OUT THE STUDY?**

The researcher is qualified in public relations and has over 20 years’ industry experience, including experience as a social media manager. Also, I have presented several workshops and conference papers on social media, both locally and internationally. In addition, as a full-time lecturer in Media Studies at the University of Johannesburg, I have conducted research on the topic of social media in the past.

**HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?**

Yes. The Faculty Higher Degrees Committee and the Research Ethics Committee of the Tshwane University of Technology have approved the formal study proposal. All parts of the study will be conducted according to internationally accepted ethical principles.

**WHO CAN YOU CONTACT FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REGARDING THE STUDY?**
The researcher, Ms Maritha Pritchard, can be contacted during office hours at Tel. 011 559 1197, or via email at mpritchard@uj.ac.za. I can also be contacted on Twitter @CatwomanZA.

The study leader, Prof. DLR van der Waldt, can be contacted during office hours at Tel. 012 382 9911 or emailed at Vanderwaldtd@tut.ac.za.

Should you have any questions regarding the ethical aspects of the study, you can contact the chairperson of the TUT Research Ethics Committee, Dr WA Hoffmann, during office hours at Tel 012 382-6265/46, email hoffmannwa@tut.ac.za. Alternatively, you can report any serious unethical behaviour at the University’s Toll Free Hotline 0800 21 23 41.

DECLARATION: CONFLICT OF INTEREST
There is no conflict of interest that may influence the study procedures, data collection, data analysis and publication of results. There is no financial sponsor for any part of this study and nobody will gain/lose financially from the results in the study.

A FINAL WORD
Your cooperation and participation in the study will be greatly appreciated. Please sign the informed consent below if you agree to participate in the study. In such a case, you will receive a copy of the signed informed consent from the researcher.

CONSENT

I hereby confirm that I have been adequately informed by the researcher about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of the study. I have also received, read and understood the above written information. I am aware that the results of the study will be anonymously processed into a research report. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study. I had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and of my own free will declare myself prepared to participate in the study.

Research participant’s name: ___________________________ (Please print)

Research participant’s signature: ________________________

Date: __________

Researcher’s name: ___________________________ (Please print)

Researcher’s signature: ________________________

Date: __________
APPENDIX G: Extract from a transcript

Interview with Participant X on 7 July 2014

Hi, my name is Maritha Pritchard. I am doing research for a D Tech in Strategic Communication at TUT. The research focuses on social media parody accounts and how social media teams need to respond strategically when encountering user-generated brand parodies on social networks like Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. Please be open, honest and free to express your opinions and feelings of the questions being asked. There are no right or wrong answers.

In your work environment, tell me about the occurrence of social media accounts created for the sole purpose of parodying or mocking a brand.

Mmmm... it is quite tricky... it is far more complicated than that. You'll get ones that are parody accounts that are really kind of like the brand in a way. They are mostly quite often complementary to the brand. They are having a little bit of fun with it. They are not too harmful. Then you'll get ones that are very much intended to be harmful and cause reputational damage to the brand. So it is important to identify what kind of parody account it is.

I am so glad that you are bringing it up. If you don't mind, it would be very nice if can you speak about both?

Sure.

What you are saying is that some of them are celebrating the brand while others mock the brand? That would be great.

Ja, so there are different levels.

You are the first person to mention it like that, so I am very excited. I was really getting worried because nobody talks about parody to celebrate a brand. So, I thought, maybe, not in South Africa that much.

It definitely happens. So, I think you need to identify which one it is because it might not necessarily be a threat. What exactly are they doing or saying should be determining your response. There should not be an automatic rote response. It requires some kind of analysis of what that account might or might not be doing.

Let’s take each scenario... if it is a good one. How should a brand interact with a good parody?

If it was something like... there was an overseas example. This woman was a big... It was more of a fan account. It was lloveNutella or something. It was not so much parody, although what she would sometimes do is she would take Nutella material, like communications material and tweak it somewhat and make their own versions of it. And she was very much a fan, like the biggest Nutella fan. And because Nutella is run by a massive company and have a legal department who thinks they should do what they are supposed to do, they sent her a cease and desist letter because she’d used some of their communications material and re-appropriated it. Obviously, the legal team not realising that this person is actually one of your biggest brand ambassadors. The company, internally had not spoken to each other. The communications and social media departments were very happy with this person and had no problems with her. But the legal guys just did what they thought they were supposed to do.
So, if it is somebody – and sometimes it will be your biggest fan can occasionally – the reason people will follow them sometimes more than the actual brand account is because they are going to be little more honest and they are going to be a little bit more reverent about your brand. They can actually say things that you may not actually say about your brand even though it might be things that the brand thinks. So, I think it is important to... You almost need to treat those people like brand ambassadors. And even if they are not necessarily brand ambassadors, so for example, you know Barry Roux tweets. Those personal parody accounts are very common. That person does not have a problem with him – they are making light of it. James Blunt also has a lot of parody accounts. He actually takes the effort to reply to them in a humorous way saying: “You are not... I am the real James Blunt”. So, it is important to keep your sense of humour. I would actually interact with those accounts, as long as they are not saying anything damaging or harmful to the brand.

So, in other words the good parodies... how would you say... let me know answer it... how does a good parody affect reputation, is what I want to ask?

A parody account that kind of teases your brand a little bit is actually very much complimentary. You can turn that person – whoever is behind it – into a brand ambassador. And that is true, even sometimes for ones that are slightly negative, not always, but I’ve seen on a rare occasion it does happen where there will be somebody who has made a parody account that’s perhaps critical of the brand. The brand has taken the time and effort to actually try to reply to that parody to address their concerns and issues and you can turn them into a brand advocate. But that's not so much with parody accounts, that’s more a rule in terms of people who complain about your brand online is to try and respond to them and deal with that. So, I mean if it is a parody account that is not being harmful and is just having fun and being silly, definitely, either ignore it or you can maybe even interact with them if you are brave enough. It depends on the brand. You know, if you are naturally a reverent brand and is not something that is held up to a lot of regulation like financial services then you can absolutely perhaps even reply to those parody accounts. Then, when you get to the more negative ones – generally the worst thing you can do is try to take legal action, although sometimes it is necessary because you will never win the PR war if you go and do that.

Because going and attacking someone who has created a... Telkom is a good example, so you know there is a Telkom sucks website, there’s Hellkom... you know there is a whole different bunch of parody accounts. You know, it is a much maligned brand. You are not going to improve your reputation by going and attacking Joe Bloggs who has decided to start an account because he is so angry because his ASDL has not worked for a month. The exception to that is sometimes some parody account may give out very harmful information relating to a brand. It could have been confidential or it could be defamation – not necessarily the organisation – but specific people within the organisation. The Americans are lot more litigious, because in America a corporation has the same rights as a person basically. Maybe not a hundred percent but corporations have a lot of rights, so defamation of an organisation or a corporation is quite a serious thing. In South Africa, that’s much harder because we consider people to have more important rights than companies. So, for example if there is a parody account that is saying: “O, the CEO of SASOL is having an affair”, that kind of thing, which has happened, then I recommend taking some kind of legal action because it is going to be causing harm. If they are talking about stuff that is true, then you can’t take legal action. For defamation to be proven, it has to be proven that what the account is saying is untrue which is why very few people actually bother trying to sue. Defamation is a very very difficult thing to sue for. You need to prove that what that account is saying is untrue. And in that way you have to open yourself up to investigation. So, like I said, it’s got to be something that could cause your stock price to plummet.
APPENDIX H: Final questionnaire used in the self-administered online survey

Parody account questionnaire

This questionnaire aims to gather your opinions about user-generated parody accounts created on social networks. To clarify, a user-generated parody account is created by an ordinary social media user. Parody accounts are created of making fun of something or someone, usually by using humour. Parody accounts typically appear on Twitter and YouTube, and to a lesser extent on Facebook and other social networks. Some recent examples of parody accounts on Twitter include: Common White Girl, President Trump, Joel Oldsteen Ministries, AT&T Fake PR, Woolworst SA, Fake BPGlobalPR, Bored Elon Musk and Not Burlington Coats.

This questionnaire is part of an academic study that tries to establish how social media management teams need to respond strategically when a brand (an individual or organisation) is being parodied.

Please be open, honest and free to express your opinions and feelings of the questions being asked. There are no right or wrong answers. Your identity will remain anonymous and your answers confidential at all times.

Tell us more about yourself

Q1. If your home is in South Africa, in which province do you live?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Cape</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free State</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gauteng</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KwaZulu-Natal</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limpopo</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mpumalanga</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Cape</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Cape</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside South Africa (Please specify)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tell us more about yourself

Q2. Which one of the following options best describes your professional use of social media?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I engage with social media users on behalf of a brand’s official social media account/s on a day-to-day basis.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider myself as a member of a brand’s official social media management team.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I manage the team/s responsible for a brand’s official social media account/s.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I only use social media for personal networking.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am regarded as a social media expert.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Please specify)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A parody account known to you

THE NEXT FEW QUESTIONS WILL FOCUS ON A SPECIFIC PARODY ACCOUNT THAT IS KNOWN TO YOU

Q3. Think of a specific user-generated parody account that recently appeared on a social network. What was parodied?
Only choose one option:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) A celebrity</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) A politician</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Government</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) A business or organisation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) A prominent person in society</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) A brand</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) A television show</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) A movie</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Irresponsible behaviour</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j) A controversial topic in the news</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k) Other: Please specify</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A parody account known to you
Q4. Still thinking of that same user-generated parody account that is known to you: Who was the intended audience of the parody account?

Only choose one option:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Journalists</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Social media users in general</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Social media influencers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) The managers of the brand that was parodied</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Followers of the official social media account</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Public relations and marketing teams</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) Trolls</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) Activists</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) The official social media account</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j) Other: Please specify</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A parody account known to you
Q5. Still thinking of that same user-generated parody account that is known to you: What do you perceive the intention/s of the parody account to be?

You may select more than one option below:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) To provide harmless fun</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) To express love for a brand</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) To maliciously damage a brand on purpose</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) To share interesting and compelling content by using satire in an intelligent manner</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) To voice people’s unhappiness with a situation</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) To demand change in behaviour</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) To draw as much attention as possible</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) To attract followers</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) To publish spam</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j) To harm the brand and its stakeholders</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k) To hijack the brand’s strategic message</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l) To expose wrongdoing</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m) To infringe on intellectual property laws</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n) I am not sure what the intention of the parody account was</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q6. Still thinking of that same user-generated parody account that is known to you: Did you notice the official social media account responding to the parody account in the following ways?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) There was no official social media response, i.e. the parody account was ignored</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) The official response was to refute or disprove the claims made by the parody account</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) The official response was to implicitly or indirectly admit to some of the parody's claims by bringing about some behavioural changes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) The official response to the parody account's claims was to explicitly regret wrongdoing as the reasons for changing behaviour.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q7. Still thinking about that parody account that you have already identified earlier: Would you personally recommend the following options for the brand's social media team when responding to that parody account?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Request the closing down of the parody account.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Collaborate with the parody account holder by co-creating content.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) The two-way conversational nature of social media places more pressure on official responses to be honest.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Publicly acknowledge the parody account by responding once and not again thereafter.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Respond in a manner that is consistent with the brand personality and/or promise.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Use the insights gained from the parody account to bring about change in policy, operations and/or corporate communication.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) A timely response to a parody account is a calculated risk: it requires a careful consideration of all probabilities before taking action.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) Do not respond publicly, but rather contact the owner of the parody account offline.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Other: Please specify</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q8. Still thinking of that same user-generated parody account that recently appeared on a social network: To what extent do you think the parody account influenced stakeholders’ perceptions of the brand that was parodied?

Your comments are optional.
Reason for answer (optional):

b) The unique promise that differentiates a brand from competitors was strengthened as a result of the parody account.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Reason for answer (optional):

c) The consistency of corporate messages was amplified as a result of the parody account.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Reason for answer (optional):

d) The perceived transparency of corporate communication improved as a result of the parody account.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Reason for answer (optional):

e) The perceived authenticity of corporate communication improved as a result of the parody account.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Reason for answer (optional):

**Parody accounts in general**

THE LAST QUESTION WILL FOCUS ON PARODY ACCOUNTS IN GENERAL

Q9. Considering the occurrence of parody accounts in general, do you think the following options are required from the social media team to manage reputation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b)</td>
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<td>e)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Parody accounts in general**

THE LAST QUESTION WILL FOCUS ON PARODY ACCOUNTS IN GENERAL

Q9. Considering the occurrence of parody accounts in general, do you think the following options are required from the social media team to manage reputation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thank you

Q10. If you would like to receive a copy of the results, once completed, kindly leave your email address below. We promise not to spam you, share you details with someone else or send you any unsolicited mails.

Email address __________________

Thank you for your time! We value your opinions.
APPENDIX I: Hyperlink to the Survey Monkey questionnaire posted on a social network

How should social media marketing teams respond to parody accounts? Please take part in this academic study on the best strategy to use when brands are being targeted by parody accounts.

Results can be mailed to you if you wish, so just fill your email address at the end. Thank you.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/parodysurvey

Survey on parody accounts
APPENDIX J: Hyperlink to the Survey Monkey questionnaire included in a personalised email

To:

Dear John,

Thank you for sharing your authoritative and insightful article titled: Ultimate Twitter impersonation fight goes to plaintiff. I hope you would not mind that I contact you.

I am a researcher at the University of Johannesburg doing a study on parody accounts. I would really appreciate your expert opinions on how brands should best respond to parodies on social media. Please could you spare a few minutes of your time to fill in my online survey: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/parodysurvey

Results can be mailed to you if you wish, so just include your email address at the end of the survey.

Thank you very much in advance. Your expert insights will make a significant and very valuable contribution to my Doctorate.

Much appreciated and warm regards

Maritha
APPENDIX K: Initial codes and modified codes generated by Atlas.ti
APPENDIX L: Initial questionnaire used during the pilot study

This questionnaire aims to gather your opinions about user-generated parody accounts created on social networks. To clarify, a user-generated parody account is created by an ordinary social media user. Parody accounts are created for the purpose of making fun of something or someone, usually by using humour. Parody accounts typically appear on Twitter and YouTube, and to a lesser extent on Facebook, SoundCloud and other social networks. Examples of parody accounts that have appeared on Twitter include: @Woolworst_SA, @SANRALeTroll, @BarryRouxLaw, @ParodyMinistry, @vodacon_sa, @BPGlobalPR, @50ShedsOfGrey and @Caitlyn_Jennher.

This questionnaire is part of an academic study that tries to establish how social media management teams need to respond strategically when a brand (an individual or organisation) is being parodied on social networks. Please be open, honest and free to express your opinions and feelings of the questions being asked. There are no right or wrong answers. Your identity and your answers will remain confidential and anonymous at all times.

A DEMOGRAPHICS

A1 Where do you live?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Cape</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free State</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gauteng</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KwaZulu-Natal</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limpopo</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mpumalanga</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Cape</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Cape</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside South Africa</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A2 Which one of the following options best describes your professional use of social media?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am regarded as a social media expert.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I only use social media for personal networking.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I engage with social media users on behalf of a brand’s official social media account/s on a day-to-day basis.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider myself as a member of a brand’s official social media management team.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I manage the team/s responsible for a brand’s official social media account/s.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Please specify)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B QUESTIONS ABOUT A SPECIFIC PARODY ACCOUNT THAT IS KNOWN TO YOU

B1 Think of a specific user-generated parody account that recently appeared on social networks. Which one of the following options best describes what was being parodied by that parody account?
Only choose one option:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What was being parodied:</th>
<th>Option</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Celebrities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicians</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Businesses</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prominent people in society</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brands</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television shows</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irresponsible behaviour</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please specify.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B2 Still thinking of that same user-generated parody account that recently appeared on social networks: Which one of the following options best describes the audience or stakeholders that the parody account tried to attract?

Only choose one option:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended audience of parody account:</th>
<th>Option</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media users in general</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media influencers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The managers of the brand that was parodied</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Followers of the official brand account</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public relations and marketing teams</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trolls</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activists</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The official social media account</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please specify</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B3 Still thinking of that same user-generated parody account that recently appeared on social networks: Which option below would, in your opinion, best describe the intention of the parody account?

Only choose one option:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intention of parody account:</th>
<th>Option</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To provide harmless fun.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To express admiration for a brand.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be abusive.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To maliciously damage a brand on purpose.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To share interesting and compelling content by using satire in an intelligent manner.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To voice people’s unhappiness with a situation.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To demand change in behaviour.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To draw as much attention as possible.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To attract followers.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To spam.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To harm the brand and its stakeholders.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To hijack the brand’s strategic message.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To expose wrongdoing.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
B4 In what ways did the official social media account of the brand that was targeted, respond to that user-generated parody account?

Please indicate below to what extent you agree (or disagree) that each type of official response was made in reaction to that parody account. Please indicate your answer to all possibilities below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived official responses to the parody account</th>
<th>Disagree completely</th>
<th>Disagree somewhat</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Agree completely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) There was no official social media response, i.e. the parody account was ignored</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) The official response was to refute or disprove the claims made by the parody account</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) The official response was to implicitly or indirectly admit to some of the parody’s claims by bringing about some behavioural changes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) The official response to the parody account’s claims was to explicitly regret and admit to wrongdoing as the reasons for changing behaviour.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B5 In these questions we are trying to determine what responses to that parody account you would (or would not) personally recommend. Below are a number of statements that describe different ways in which a brand’s social media team could respond to the parody account that you have already identified. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement, and as far as possible, please also provide a reason for (or a qualifying comment on) your answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommended responses to the parody account</th>
<th>Disagree completely</th>
<th>Disagree somewhat</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Agree completely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Respond to the parody account only if it attracts a great deal of attention.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reason / qualifying comment for answer:
<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b) Take legal action against the parody account.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason / qualifying comment:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Ask the parody account holder to voluntarily close down the account.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason / qualifying comment:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Ask the social network to close down the parody account.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason / qualifying comment:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Persuade the parody account to become a brand advocate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason / qualifying comment:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Offer rewards such as money or gifts to the parodist.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason / qualifying comment:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) Collaborate with the parody account (e.g. by co-creating content).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason / qualifying comment:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) Use the insights gained from the parody account to bring about strategic change.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason / qualifying comment:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) If the parody account correctly highlights any wrongs, apologise for those mistakes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason / qualifying comment:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j) Take a deliberate, strategic decision to ignore the parody account.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason / qualifying comment:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k) Responses to the parody account should be aligned with strategic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason / qualifying comment:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
communication objectives.
Reason for answer:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for answer:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>l) Make a statement to inform the public that the user-generated parody account is not the official account.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reason for answer:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for answer:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>m) When a parody account appears, the official account needs to respond quickly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reason for answer:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for answer:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n) Do not respond publically, but rather contact the owner of the parody account offline</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B6 Still thinking of that same user-generated parody account that recently appeared on social networks: This question deals with the extent to which you think the parody account has influenced stakeholders’ perceptions of the brand that was parodied.

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement. Also, as far as possible, please provide a reason for each answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements on how the brand is now being perceived by stakeholders</th>
<th>Disagree completely</th>
<th>Disagree somewhat</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Agree completely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The parody account resulted in the brand being perceived as being less visible.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reason for answer:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for answer:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The parody account resulted in the brand being perceived as less distinctive.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reason for answer:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for answer:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The parody account resulted in the brand’s strategic message being perceived as being less consistent.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reason for answer:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for answer:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The parody account resulted in the brand being perceived as less transparent.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reason for answer:
The parody account resulted in the brand being perceived as **less** authentic.

Reason for answer:

### C QUESTIONS ABOUT PARODY ACCOUNTS IN GENERAL

C1 Considering the occurrence of parody accounts in general, the question can arise as to what is required from the social media team with regard to managing reputation. This question asks for your opinion on this issue:

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Considering the occurrence parody accounts, it is important for the social media team to do the following:</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) To continuously monitor social media conversations.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) To develop contingency plans that address a possible future scenario where a parody account will have to be dealt with.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) To develop professional community management skills</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) To organise integrated social media management teams.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) To effectively respond to negative comments and complaints.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) To develop social media content plans.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) To develop social media policies/guidelines.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j) To ensure that social media governance processes are in place.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other? Please specify.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualifying comment:

C2 Considering the occurrence of parody accounts in general, the question can arise as to how parody accounts influence stakeholders’ perceptions of the brand being parodied. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement below. Also, as far as is possible, please provide a qualifying comment for each answer (listing any conditions or processes that could play a role in that perception, and indicating if your answer only applies under certain conditions).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements on how parodied brands are perceived</th>
<th>Disagree completely</th>
<th>Disagree somewhat</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Agree completely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parody accounts tend to result in the brand being perceived as being <strong>less</strong> visible</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualifying comment:
| Parody accounts tend to result in the brand being perceived as being **less distinctive** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Qualifying comment: |

| Parody accounts tend to result in the brand’s strategic message being perceived as being **less consistent** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Qualifying comment: |

| Parody accounts tend to result in the brand being perceived as being **less transparent** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Qualifying comment: |

| Parody accounts tend to result in the brand being perceived as being **less authentic** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Qualifying comment: |

Thank you for participating!
APPENDIX M: Conference programme where preliminary findings were presented at the Global Business and Technology Association (GBATA) 17th Annual International Conference in Lisbon, Portugal in July, 2015

10:30AM

[CMI] CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN COMMUNICATIONS MANAGEMENT
10:30 AM to Noon

Room A

Session Chair
Ron Jallouli
Manouba University, Tunisia

Online Brand Community and Its Implications for Marketing Communications
Modina Anzorin, University of Gloucestershire, U.K.
Wilson Osem, Regent’s University London, U.K.

The Relevance of Carroll’s Corporate Social Responsibility Pyramid Model for Multinational Enterprises Operating in South Africa: The Opinions of Academics on Corporate Social Responsibility in South Africa
Amaasha Makha, University of Johannesburg, South Africa
Cecile Nieuwenhuizen, University of Johannesburg, South Africa
Herman de Bruyn, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Connecting People: Accelerating Universal Service and Access to Communications Services in South Africa
David John Bate, University of South Africa, South Africa
Goonasagree Naidoo, University of South Africa, South Africa

Co-Creating Reputation In The Age of Parody: Key Considerations for Strategic Reputation Management Confronted by User-Generated Parody Accounts on Social Networks
Martha Prince, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Discussants
Bianca Ela, North-West University, South Africa
Patricia Amelia Tomens, Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

The GBATA’s Seventeenth Annual International Conference, Peniche/Lisbon, Portugal, July 7-11th, 2015
Related to the number of followers that a parody has. Parodies gain traction, goes viral and become influential. Many people follow parodies. Parodies with many followers generate advertising income. Successful parodies with clever content have many followers are influential. Relates to top of mind awareness. Parody gains many followers. Especially by people who share the same sentiment as the one expressed by the parody (see theme: clever parody as the voice of the people). Some parodies, however, are not that influential as they have only a few followers. Relates to the category: co-create content - then brands leverage the many followers of a parody. Followers is a sensitive issue, because social media effectiveness is measured by the number of followers which a parody account could steal. Some parodies have more followers than the brand account.

Clever parody as the voice of the people. Content is clever and very funny. These parodies hold up a mirror and people relate to it and open public debate. It is not just silly and irrelevant content. These parodies represent an authentic voice of the people who relate to these parodies. There are many forms of content for parody. Some respondents said parody should not be merely malicious and contain hate speech and slander, however. Funny parodies are remembered for a long time and may even be stronger than the brand message or counteracts the brand message. Previously called: Parody relies on clever and compelling content. Brands parody themselves and people love it. Generally, participants - as individuals, not brands - said that they loved funny and clever parodies and follow a few. Clever parody relies on satire and is therefore free speech (voice of the people) that is fair comment and generally should be accommodated/tolerated. However, a few participants said that some parodists do not create good content and those parodies quickly die. Yet in some cultures, parody is not common because people do not feel free to complain. Parody can say things that people otherwise don't feel free to say.
Reference to how the community manager, social media manager needs to have appropriate skills and training to do the job properly. The community manager needs to watch their personal behaviour and not express their personal feelings. Also relates to professional behaviour of the community manager and inappropriate community management behaviour that may even trigger parody. The social media management or account handle is directly involved in influencing reputation. Interns should not be left in charge of community management. The community manager needs to know the business inside out and walk the talk - be able to respond in the appropriate tone and manner. In some cases, PR people are criticized for lacking social media skills. Some community managers still have an old media, broadcast approach to social, the way that you deal with the account.

MEMO: Resolve complaints, rants and trolls (1 Quotation) (Maritha, 2014-11-24 17:32:30)
People complaining about services and products, lashing out and being rude and irresponsible. This includes trolling. These are sometimes not worth responding to. These are not really parodies but participants placed parody accounts in the same category as consumer rants and trolls. They see consumer rants as almost the same attacks on brands as unwanted rants and trolls. People are irresponsible and say things online that they will not say face-to-face.

MEMO: Content strategies in place (1 Quotation) (Maritha, 2014-12-15 09:48:11)
Social media strategies, engagement strategies, content plans, relationship strategies in place. If this is in place, parody may not affect brand.

MEMO: Controversy triggers parody accounts (1 Quotation) (Maritha, 2014-11-23 10:29:34)
Controversy triggers parody accounts. Parody is opportunistic and leverages off controversies or things that attract a lot of social media buzz and conversations. Parody is relevant. Parody around issues in the news. Around topical events or news/top-of-mind things. Also called news-focused parody accounts. I.e. parody is also most likely when a
brand is facing a crisis and often these crises are related to some unethical behaviour - which relates to the category: parody exposes dissonance between claims and deeds. Parodies around prominent TV shows like Game of Thrones, which reflects the popular culture status of the phenomenon. I.e. big brands in the news, brands that get lots of publicity, attract parodies. Parodies appear when brands run campaigns and competitions. Also, accounts that are not active also get parodied easier. **Used to be called: parodies appear during high media impact.** Controversial stories range from hard news to human interest triggering tweeting doors, tweeting snakes, etc. Controversy also gives parodists the opportunity to attract many followers - so, it is related to the category: analyse the influence of the parody account.
APPENDIX O: Brief extract from the reflective diary

6 July 2014 - memos after transcribing two interviews

Parody accounts do not seem to have the same clout or following as in the USA in SA to damage reputation significantly.
- After two interviews, only reference to Twitter parodies were made.
- The reputational damage seems to be limited to those who are active on Twitter.
- Reputational halos may play a role. As parodies appear and disappear, their reputational harm may be soon forgotten as new ones appear. Yet, parody is addressed in crisis scenarios and warrants planning.
- As literature confirms, parody has limited potential to sway attitudes.
- Influencers play a significant role when correcting factual inaccuracies about brands. Therefore, influencer marketing is very important.
- The reputational kudos, as [ ] calls it, created with a brand banter with a parody account, enhances reputation for Twitter users.
- Low connectivity, compared to developed countries implies that a smaller number of people are aware of it.

9 July 2014

It seems as if it is not the parody per se, but the actual response of the SM team that plays a big role in how parody – either a parody to harm or celebrate the brand – influences reputation. IE – the social media team to a large extend can actually manage reputation online. Parody is issues driven (See [ ] and [ ]).

A good reputation is reflected in parodies. Companies with bad reputations (see [ ]) get parodied more. But these good reputations are founded on good service. SM does not allow you to fix it by paying lip service if, in essence, you what you do is not good.

Parody keeps companies with bad reputations on their toes. Parodies are the watchdogs of organisations that do not do good. Harmful parodies are the watchdogs of poor reputations.

19 July 2014

During my interviews, I had more of a two-way conversation instead of just asking questions. I probed, paraphrased and asked for verification of understanding. Therefore, confirming that knowledge is socially constructed.

A few participants commented on the research topic and agreed that parody accounts, are indeed a niche area of concern in South Africa currently.

Parodies are:
- Mirrors held up to brands.
- Conversation instigators (see [ ]) or conversation starters.
- Parodies highlight the gaps between marketing strategies and people’s perceived truths.
- Parodies highlight the gaps between communication promises and the real attributes of the brand (see [ ]).
- Parodies highlight that we cannot longer control all the marketing messages.
Reputation is:
- Reputation is equivalent to brand - see [ ].

26 July 2014

Juju is a parody. Even his real account reads like a parody. See [ ].
Include section on issues management and risk management in lit review.
Include example of parodied brand – see [ ] email.
I asked participants questions and sometimes verified their answers by asking other participants whether or not they agreed with certain statements. So, I did stick to the basic schedule, but also deviated where and when appropriate.
Parodies are very responsive to news, eg. snakes and OscarDoor.

10 August 2014

My interviews were more like conversations.

Parodies are:
- Reputation is co-created. See how to involve parodists, let them create content for you – [ ].
- Opportunistic – see interview [ ].
- Parody is very post-modern. Parodies are parodied. See [ ].
- [ ] and [ ] discuss how brands can rope in parodies. Targeted advertising on YouTube. Making parodies when a parodist posts a parody. Parodies of UG parodies. All depending on the brand. So brands with humorous personalities, like Nando’s and Savannah, can really optimise parodies to co-create their brand personalities, brand reputation and brand equity.
- Parodies are the user-generated voice (reputation) of a brand.
- Parodies instigate conversations and are opportunistic. They wait in the wings until fame or disaster strikes a brand and then amplify what the brand says, or does not say. It provides social commentary, reveals secrets and paradoxes in brand communication. But does it actually attract or deter from brand loyalty? That would be a topic for another study.

A company has to be good and do good to have a good reputation.

Parody may be an expression of a reputational halo, if the parody pays homage to a brand. Reputation, and the measures to celebrate (parodies) or damage (parodies), are now visible in the social space as reputations are constantly measured by the tone and sentiment of conversations. Although only a very small percentage of users are active in UGC, a large fraction are actually watching and listening, and thereby forming their perceptions of organisations.

15 August 2014

Parodies of parodies. Nando’s responses being parodied. See [ ].

Brands with a sense of humour will thrive in the age of parody.

Parodies are:
- Human truths – see [ ].