



What you say?

Word of mouth within social media

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ABSTRACT

This paper extends the understanding of the word of mouth (WOM) concept and its new role within social media and thereafter analysing the impact that electronic WOM (eWOM) has on marketing campaigns.

Quantitative descriptive research was employed, using the tweets that were part of the Vodacom Twitter network. This data was used to analyse the differences of activity and sentiment within the tweets. The collection of tweets were then measured against a proxy, Vodacom's rebranding campaign. The researcher was able to identify the impact of the rebranding campaign on consumers through the changes in the responses before, during and after the campaign.

The research found that the rebranding campaign resulted in higher levels of engagement between consumers and the brand. During the rebranding process, negative sentiments were lowered, however the end result of the campaign left consumers with more negativity regarding the branding.

The paper advances marketing practitioners understanding of how WOM and social media play a critical role in today's marketing. Consumers are no longer bystanders in the marketing process and are instead turning to social media as a source of information as well as a platform to communicate their opinions and attitudes.

Keywords:

Word of mouth (WOM), Electronic word of mouth (eWOM), Social Media, Twitter

DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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My friends in shining armour – I couldn't have done this without you all! May the memories live on ☺

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Firms seeking to increase market share and to grow brand loyalty need to adapt to the constantly changing environment. The world has taken on new dimensions connection and communication through the widespread use of the internet through information sources and social media (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008).

As the world responds to the changes brought on by the internet, individuals embrace social media into their daily lives. Word of mouth (WOM) has taken a new step to the online space through social media. Social media serves as a tool for consumers to communicate, connect with others as well as to create and digest content (Hanna, Rhom & Crittenden, 2011).

This study is motivated by the desire to learn more about consumer WOM in social media in reaction to a specific marketing event. The study seeks to not only contribute to the field of social media and marketing in Web 2.0, but also to determine the implications of findings for marketers and brand managers who seek to build onto WOM and channel this to building loyal brand followers. The study will also enable marketers to build strong connections with the brand and consumers through effectively engaging with social media.

The first chapter of the study provides a background to the research problem by introducing the topic of WOM from the perspective of the relationships between consumers and how it affects their decisions about brands. This is followed by an investigation into the academic literature available on the topic of WOM and its movement into social media. The research problem is identified as well as the driving force of the study and its aimed objectives. The study is set in the scope and discussed according to its relevance as well as in the South African context. The first chapter is completed with an indication of the flow of the research report.

1.2 BACKGROUND

The significance of social networks extends beyond the exchange of resources and information. As consumers become short on time and are bombarded with advertising clutter, marketers are faced with the new era of the attention economy. The attention economy is the new currency for marketers whereby attention is a scarce resource. Consumers have adapted to making faster decisions through trusting other consumers through WOM (Li, Lin & Lai, 2010). Consumers rely more on WOM than on advertising (Keller, 2005). In fact over seventy-five percent of our decisions are based on WOM referrals. Furthermore, thirty percent of negative WOM comes from people who have not even tried nor tested the product in topic (Emanuel, 2009).

The spread of WOM within a community goes beyond the exchange of information. It suggests that it is essential for marketers to understand the

concept of the dynamics of WOM in a social network, its role played in consumer persuasion and its spill over into social media (Smith et al, 2007). The notion of WOM has gained wide-spread acceptance in what is dubbed according to Keller and Berry as “influential marketing” (Turner, 2002). Research has shown that one in ten people affect the people around them and how they think via WOM (Turner, 2002). Duncan Watts has however challenged this thinking and stressed that it’s not so much the influencer behind the WOM but rather how susceptible the network is to the contagion (Sanchez, 2004).”If people are prepared to be influenced, then it really doesn’t matter who’s doing it...” (Mortimer, 2008, pg 15)

In line with Watt’s thinking, it is argued that academics and marketing practioners investigating how to foster brand loyalty through positive WOM, gives inference into the benefits of investigations in these areas. Marketers need to understand what influences people and how can this influence spread within a network (Emanuel, 2009).

Offline influence is triggered by social context cues and social status, where as online influence can be determined by one’s online social status (how many followers a user has) or how many people retweet a user’s message.

Brand managers constantly need to push their brand resources further in order to enhance the return on investment (ROI). Thus many marketers turn to

influential marketing. Influential marketing infers that based on the principles of WOM, whereby marketers target the influencer in a network, who will be more likely to share experiences about brands with others, thus shaping consumer decisions.

Given that the study occurs within the paradigm of social media networks, the following section provides a brief overview of studies that have focused on social networks in the context of social media.

1.3 SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS

Social networks are connections between two individuals. Consumers form natural clusters of relations within a network and between these networks, they form various types of relationships. These relationships are influenced by the strength of the connection, also known as the tie. Ties can be weak or strong. It is through these ties that WOM exchanges occur.

Although the study of a social network is nothing new, a number of studies have used the social media network metaphor to grow our understanding of how relationships between consumers and social media platforms play out by focusing on the structure of these relationships, their affect on consumer engagement, the links between consumers, and their role in the relationship with consumers and brands (Baroncelli & Freitas, 2011).

Consumers have the freedom to share opinions and thoughts about what marketers have to say, and what is in fact the realisation of the offering. Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011) call that businesses not only have to improve their offering in order to remain competitive, but also to embrace authenticity and transparency in their communication strategy with consumers.

Understanding the conditions which give rise to the WOM conversations that consumers have with brands in social media is an important consideration for marketing and brand managers (Emanuel, 2009).

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Although marketing academicians and practitioners have exhibited a growing interest in social media networks (Emanuel, 2009; De Buryrn & Lilien, 2008; Hanna et al, 2011; Mangold & Faulds, 2009), very little attention has focused on the role of social media networks in South Africa in the context of marketing campaigns, despite the identification of WOM as a critical player in consumer decision making. This literature on WOM in social media networks is useful to inform a study of the role of social media in providing a WOM platform.

Understanding the conditions which give rise WOM events among consumers through social media is an important consideration for marketing and brand managers, as is determining the implications for leveraging brand connections and brand loyalty. The relevance of online WOM in developing targeting and

advertising strategies has been shown to trigger ‘viral marketing’ events. Hanna et al (2011) described viral marketing events as ones which multiply the reach of a message and infect it to a higher percentage within the network, and is more likely to increase the marketer’s ROI.

Given that WOM plays an important role enabling individuals to make purchasing decisions as well as to form perceptions about a brand, the current economic shift from traditional marketing environment to the Web 2.,0, marketers need to grasp the fundamental principles in order to remain relevant communicators to consumers.

To date, the majority of studies investigating WOM and social media have been conducted in the United States of America. There are is therefore a wide gap in the literature to investigate the role of WOM and social media within a South African context.

Although research has identified the importance of marketers forging online connections with consumers, the literature has paid scant focus to the topic of online WOM as it relates to brands. Specifically, no attempts have been made to predict the impact of WOM in social media in response to specific marketing campaigns.

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study is to determine how a brand event can trigger communication between consumers in social media platforms, and whether the sentiment of the conversation persuades others in the social network. The objective of the research is to review academic literature on WOM in the context of the digital landscape that surrounds consumers. Given that social media determines the consumer interaction with the tool as well as can be measured, the research questions that the study seeks to answer focus on both the connections between consumers in social media as well as the sentiment of their messages shared with each other:

- What role do consumer social media connections play in response to a marketing campaign in online WOM?
- What role does sentiment in online WOM play in response to a marketing campaign?

1.6 SCOPE AND DEMARCATION OF THE STUDY

The topic of WOM has been examined through a variety of disciplinary lenses. Given that this study focuses on consumers, the theoretical examination of WOM concentrates on the topic from the perspective of social media and the implications of online WOM for marketers.

The primary research scope is limited to a study of the connection relationship and sentiment expression shared between users in Twitter about Vodacom's

national rebranding in 2011. Vodacom is the largest cellular telecommunication provider in South Africa, closely followed by MTN and then Cell C. There size of Twitter users in South Africa consist of about 55 000 users, which is a reflection of one percent of South Africa's market, and ten percent of South African's online market. Twitter however is rated as one of the highest carriers for spread of influence within a network. The study therefore excludes consumers who do not use social media and those who do not use Twitter. Additionally, the sampling frame used further constrained the selection of consumers to consumers who engaged with the brand Vodacom in online conversation in 2011.

In order to facilitate a comparison of consumer responses, this study focused on consumers who conversed about Vodacom and engaged with Twitter users about Vodacom from 15 February 2011 to the 24 June 2011. This timeline was selected around the specific marketing campaign – Vodacom's national rebranding in response to Vodacom's merger with Vodafone in 2011. Additional information is provided in Chapter Five.

The study was conducted within a quantitative paradigm. Literature was reviewed in order to identify consumer likelihood of WOM in social media and connections within social media networks. Further details of the research methodology and design employed are provided in Chapter Four of this document.

1.7 RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

The investigation into WOM in social media was undertaken within the paradigm of determining its level of influence. Brand relationships with consumers in an online context offer academics rich opportunities to watch and measure the connections and communications that consumers have online with brands. Aspects of online relationships, such as the nature of connection, are likely to predict their influence to others, as well as role in persuasion of the brand and marketing event (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). The qualities of the online connections, specifically in terms of the tie strength, also influence a consumer's likelihood to be influenced (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). A study on the topic of social media networks contributes to building a better understanding of the roles of consumers in WOM and interactions with brands in an online setting in order to enhance forge positive connections with brands, and in so doing adopt a more scientific approach to understanding consumers and building strong brands during a specific marketing campaign.

Building an improved understanding the nature and drivers of online connections that consumers form within social media is important for marketing practitioners, consumer researchers and society at large. The drive by marketers embed and expand their brands by superior knowledge of how to positively influence the WOM communication that flows between online networks can aid marketers to build, grow and maintain brand equity. (Lambert-Pandraud & Laurent, 2010). A better understanding of how consumers influence each other through WOM will enable marketers to enhance their

brand positioning strategies as to create meaning for the companies, especially in the diverse rainbow economic market of South Africa.

WOM has been identified as an important psychological mechanism that enables individuals to make rational decisions about brands and purchases in a shorter period of time based on others referrals and recommendations. In addition to aiding marketing practitioners and academicians, an enhanced understanding of the extent to which consumers engage with WOM through social media about brands contributes to our understanding of how consumers rely on social media as a source of trusted information.

1.8 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter put forward the need for the research as well as contextualised the current environment. Furthermore the background, research objectives and problem were introduced.

The following chapter explores the social media literature landscape and provides an overview of academic and practitioner arguments concerning social networks current position in society and potential impact.

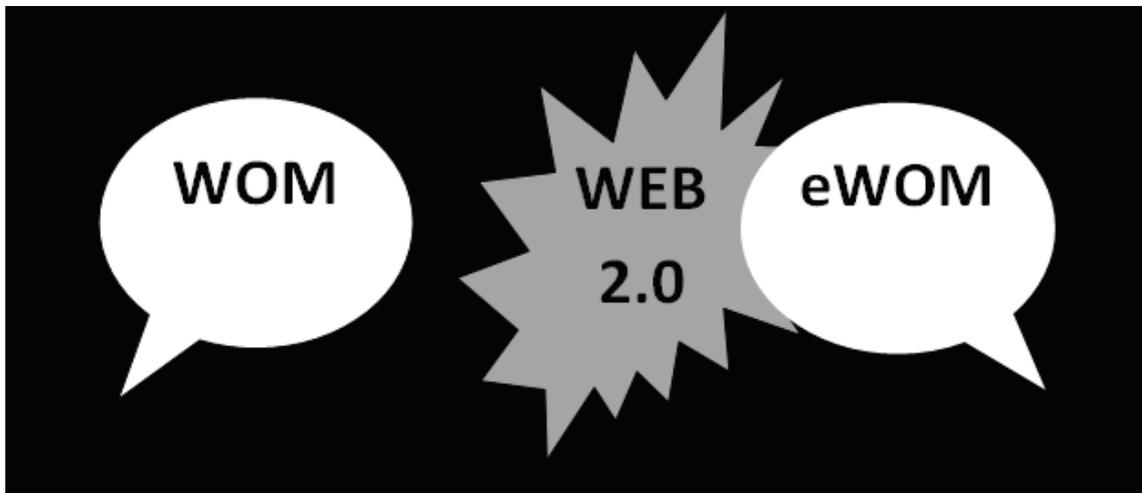
CHAPTER 2: THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

WOM has become stronger than ever before. Through social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, businesses can connect with consumers like never before through the largest ecosystems of sharing ever created. Research has shown that the best recommendation comes from a friend (Kiss & Bichler, 2007). For example, on the social platform Facebook, the average user has 130 friends, and effectively each “share”, “like” and “comment” is amplified across that network. Furthermore, a tweet on Twitter can flow into one’s news-stream, thus exposing your Facebook friends as well as Twitter network to your message. This gives brands the ability to achieve benefits of earned media at the scale of paid media with the potential audience of over five-hundred million people around the world.

The literature review will take the reader through the concepts of WOM and the role that social media plays in eWOM.

Figure 1: Literature Review Map



2.2 WORD OF MOUTH

2.2.1 OVERVIEW OF WOM

Word of Mouth (WOM) is defined as a complex and often unpredictable communication process (Keller *et al*, 2007) that occurs between two or more connected people via a social network (Doyle 2007). As these conversations occur between consumers, companies are not able to influence the message being spoken about the brand (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). With this in mind, ninety percent of consumers trust recommendations from other consumers, whereas only 56% of consumers trust recommendations from brand advertising (Gupta *et al*, 2011). “Consumers have always valued opinion expressed directly to them” (Bughin *et al*, 2010). There is therefore great power in the consumer opinion (Roberts 2010)”.

Consumers are overwhelmed by too many product choices; advertising clutter and too little time to sift through all the information overload (Bughin et al , 2010). WOM is able to cut through the advertising clutter and noise quickly and effectively (Burghin, 2010). Doyle (2007) states that seventy-five percent of consumers consult a trusted source when making a purchase decision. Furthermore Mangold and Faulds (2009) say that of those recommendations, ninety percent of consumers hold those opinions as trustworthy and reliable (Gupta et al, 2011). Research has shown that fifty-six percent of consumers, on the contrary, are likely to trust recommendations from brand advertising (Gupta et al, 2011).

A number of authors stress the importance of social structure and its role in the spread of ideas and influence (Kempe, Kleinberg & Tardos, 2003). It is generally agreed that once an idea or innovation has reached a network, it can either be squelched within the network or be adopted within the population (Kempe et al, 2003). Studies have revealed that the adoption of the idea or WOM is dependent on the dynamics of the social structure, in other words, how susceptible the network is the contagion (Kempe et al, 2003). Information diffusion is a fundamental process taking place in a network (Gomes-Rodrigues, Leskovec, Krause, 2010)

2.2.2 CONCEPTUALISING AND DEFINING WOM

WOM refers to oral communication and the exchange of information between people. One of the earliest definitions of WOM defines it as an informal

communication between consumers about the experience had with a product or its sellers (Westbrook, 1987).

Documentation of WOM has reported as far back as the 1950's and expanded the view of WOM and its role into influencing consumer decision making, expectations and post usage opinions (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). "We now mention twenty or thirty brands a day in the course of regular conversation. So the word of mouth challenge is to get people to talk about your brand." (Ferguson, 2008). In this light, we are all marketers. (Ferguson, 2008).

2.2.3 WOM MOTIVATIONS

WOM is well received from consumers for various reasons. Generally consumers are overwhelmed by too many product choices, with limited decision making time and a bombardment of marketing clutter (Bughin *et al*, 2010). WOM is able to "cut through the noise quickly and effectively" (Bughin *et al*, 2010). 75% of consumers consult a trusted source when making a decision to buy certain products or services (Doyle 2007)". The influence of WOM is highest when consumers are buying the product for the first time or when the product is expensive (Bughin *et al*, 2010). WOM therefore aids the consumer with market research and opinions (Bughin *et al*, 2010).

Experts love to buzz about products as this affirms and enhances their self image (Rosen 2009). The expert will gladly spread out positive WOM as it confirms that he is too an expert and has made another good decision by choosing the right product (Rosen 2009). This cycle encourages the expert to

continue to share his positive experience with the brand over and over. Marketers want to leverage the communication opportunity in order to positively impact their brand (Roberts, 2010). WOM is also generated by consumers with extreme emotions (De Bruyn & Lillion, 2007).

2.2.4 NEGATIVE WORD OF MOUTH

As much as marketers want to drive positive WOM, marketers also need to be concerned about negative WOM and the devastating impact it can have on a company and its target market (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). About thirty percent of negative WOM is generated from people who have never owned the product that they were badmouthing before even giving it a trial (Rosen 2009). Marketers therefore need to learn how to manage unhappy and dissatisfied clients swiftly and effectively (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Brad Nelson from Starbucks encourages businesses not to be afraid of customers, but to instead embrace the mistake by taking responsibility for the fault and then resolve the matter as soon as possible (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). It is imperative that marketers have a quick action plan in place to resolve negative WOM, as consumers are no longer just spreading the negative message to ten people, but to millions of consumers through social media (Mangold & Faulds, 2009)

2.2.5 ONLINE WORD OF MOUTH

Social media has enabled customers to talk to one another and thus is an extension of traditional WOM communication (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The online WOM is referred to as electronic WOM (eWOM). The internet and social

media had exponentially increased the reach and influence of social media, changing the dynamics of a one-on-one communication process to that of a one-to-many basis (Bughin *et al*, 2010). Marketers can generate great value from online WOM as it can be measured directly (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). Consumer generated media also provides insight into consumer preferences, such as brands and products shown in videos or photographs (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010).

2.2.6 VIRAL MARKETING

Viral marketing is a term that is often confused with eWOM. According to Kiss and Bichler (2007), viral marketing is defined as the techniques and strategies that marketers use to drive the “viral diffusion of messages” within social media and their networks.

According to Krishnamurthy (2001), the goal of viral marketing is to leverage consumer to consumer communication to propagate a brand message throughout the network rapidly and cost effectively.

In order to provide a solid understanding on eWOM, the next section investigates the digital landscape that provides the setting for social media.

2.3 THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE

2.3.1 WEB 2.0

The Internet has drastically transformed and revolutionised traditional marketing communications (17) (Hanna *et al*, 2011). The Internet has seen the developments of a passive Web 1.0 to an interactive Web 2.0 (17). Web 2.0 consists of “computer network-base platforms upon which social media applications run” (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). This interactive digital media has introduced the conversation between companies and consumers (17) through a new world of social media. Consumers have become both creators and consumers of information exchange through the Internet, and thus transforming the flow of influence among its users. (17), (Hanna *et al*, 2011). Consumer behaviour is influenced through an assortment of features, including “awareness, information acquisition, opinions, attitudes, purchase behaviours, and post-purchase communication and evaluation (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

The transformation of the digital landscape has led to a new breed of consumer – marketers and companies now need to impress and satisfy a more educated, sceptical and demanding consumer (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Creamer, 2007). These consumers are highly fragmented according to their ‘needs, wants, values, lifestyles and propensity to engage in word of mouth (WOM) behaviour’ (Keller, 2005).

Traditional Marketing is based on the principle of reach (Hanna *et al*, 2011). Before the introduction of the internet, marketers would create communication strategies intended to interrupt customers, such as through television advertisements (Bernoff & Li, 2008). Even though the marketing paradigm has

shifted, marketers still continue to interrupt consumers through mediums such as banner ads on websites (Hanna *et al*, 2011; Bernoff & Li, 2008).

The digital landscape has brought about many changes that directly influence marketing activities.

2.3.2 MARKETING TRANSFORMATION

Traditional marketing has undergone a critical shift through the new modus operandi for consumers to engage with social media (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Previously marketers could rely on means such as television to reach wider audiences – but today it is social media that provides marketers with the tools to engage with customers (Gupta *et al*, 2011). Social Media is known as “consumer generated media” (Mangold & Faulds, 2009)”. There is an online conversation taking place in these social media platforms – connecting consumers like never before – and inviting companies the opportunity to engage with consumers (Gupta *et al*, 2011; Hanna *et al*, 2011). Social media provides a platform for the dissemination of information between consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Marketers are therefore required to question their communication strategy with consumers and devise an adapting strategy to engage with consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). In order to engage with consumers, marketers have got to learn the new rules of conversation with consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Hanna *et al*, 2011), a fundamental shift from the previous one way communication that companies fed to consumers. Through learning to adapt to the new environment, marketers will be able to not only join the online conversation with consumers, but engage and deepen the interaction with users, as well as shape and influence the conversation (Gupta

et al, 2011; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). For companies who inadequately decide to stay out of the conversation, face grave consequences as there is no stopping consumer opinion online (Gupta *et al*, 2011). Through the role of social media on daily lives of consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009), the internet is transformed to a “platform of information” to a “platform for influence” (Hanna *et al*, 2011).

In understanding the digital landscape, consumers have seen a shift in power. This shift in power will be discussed accordingly.

2.3.3 CONSUMERS ARE IN CONTROL

The digital landscape paints the context in which consumers engage with the world, companies and information (Hanna *et al*, 2011). In Web 2.0, consumers are no longer passive and powerless bystanders to marketing communications and brand experiences (Hanna *et al*, 2011). Consumers have been empowered through this social and interactive digital platform that has fundamentally impacted the way consumers received and give information (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Information can no longer be dictated by companies (Hanna *et al*, 2011), but instead has a need to be transparent through the changing sources and nature of the information made available online. Consumers are empowered through their online voice whereby they connect, share, collaborate and create influence with others (Hanna *et al*, 2011) and it is this empowering that shifts the control from marketers to consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Doyle 2007). This is the setting of the twenty-four/seven collaborative world where consumers influence brand messages (Hanna *et al*, 2011). Marketers no longer control the brand message, and thus this

concludes how traditional marketing no longer suffices as a complete marketing strategy for any brand (Doyle 2007). Social media has fundamentally altered the way marketers need to engage with consumers, and thus require marketers to tap into new strategies to reach, engage and get intimate with consumers (Hanna *et al*, 2011).

2.4 SOCIAL MEDIA

2.4.1 WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

Social media is where consumers are interacting and voicing their opinions. Social media has experienced explosive growth in the last few years, with the introduction of household names such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr and LinkedIn (Bernoff & Li, 2008).

Social media are platforms for online word of mouth and are new sources of online information that is real time and instantaneous (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Social media include blogs, forums, chat rooms, wikis, social networking sites, video and photo sharing sites, new sharing portals and rating sites (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Gupta *et al*, 2011). These numerous delivery platforms allow consumers to engage with each other (Gupta *et al*, 2011) as well as with companies and brands (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Hanna *et al*, 2011). Social media provides reach and engagement with others and brands on a global scale, unlike traditional media which faces a “trade-off between reach and consumer engagement” (Hanna *et al*, 2011). Social media gives the consumer control of his/her online experience (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010).

Social media is a tool for users to create, initiate, share and recommend experiences (Mangold & Faulds, 2009) to a scaled and engaged audience (Creamer, 2007). Social media has therefore been the source of empowerment for consumers (Bernoff & Li, 2008) through customer interactivity and connectivity (20). This space is where a firm's consumers and potential customers are interacting, and influences how they think (Fisher, 2009). The content created via social media conveys a message about products, brands, services, personalities, issues and recommendations (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). In this environment, companies lose control of the content of their brand (Mangold & Faulds, 2009) as social media is not private. The content on social media is out there for anyone and everyone to see (Fisher, 2009).

Traditional media objectives are to create knowledge, awareness, recall and inevitably purchases; whereas the overarching objectives of social media is to create experiences of attention and influence (Hanna *et al*, 2011; Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). This is achieved through allowing users to converse, share, collaborate, engage and evangelise information (Hanna *et al*, 2011). It is through these objectives that users have the freedom to create and distribute targeted, interactive and personalised content (Gupta *et al*, 2011). The content on social media platforms therefore can have a much strong impact on users than that of traditional marketing efforts.

Social media utilises multi-media formats and delivery platforms. Social media can come in different forms and platforms (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). Each platform has its own unique set of rules of engagement and functionality that depict how the user utilises the platform, and therefore attracting various people to certain types of social media platforms (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011; Gupta *et al*, 2011). For example, Twitter only gives users the ability to use 140 characters in its service (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011).

Companies can tap into the value of social media by observing the visible word of mouth and networks engaging with brands (Rosen 2009; Creamer, 2007). This information is a source real-time market research that companies can learn from (Bernoff & Li, 2008). Companies can utilise the research insights to extend the reach of marketing campaign and predicting consumer needs through accelerated feedback loops (Gupta *et al*, 2011; Bernoff & Li, 2008).

2.4.2 WHY DO CONSUMERS USE SOCIAL MEDIA?

Consumers engage with social media to research products and services (Hanna *et al*, 2011). Seventy percent of customers have used social media sites as a source of information (Fisher, 2009). They are able to engage with companies that they buy from through social media (Hanna *et al*, 2011; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Users can also engage with other consumers (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010) and tap into their valuable insights (Hanna *et al*, 2011; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). This allows users to form strategic connections that

allow them to draw power from each other and to leverage off relationships (Bernoff & Li, 2008) (20).

Consumers are motivated to create and consume online content which is generally user generated as opposed to marketer generated (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). Consumers do not passively consume social media, but “actively select and exploit it for their own goals” (Thelwall *et al*, 2010). The content created is also to aid other readers and to fix each other’s problems (Bernoff & Li, 2008). Through social media, consumers are also able to control their online experience (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010) and subsequently shape and define their own perspective and insights on companies (Bernoff & Li, 2008).

2.4.3 HOW SHOULD BUSINESSES USE AND ENGAGE WITH SOCIAL MEDIA?

Businesses have various motivations for using social media. Firstly, social media is a platform for the company to engage with its target market and talk directly to its customers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). Secondly, businesses can provide opportunities via social media for their target market to engage with each other about the brand, and following on as a third motivation to encourage users to drive the brand strategy and message (Keller & Berry 2006; Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). A fourth motivation is that their competitors are already using social media (Fisher, 2009).

Businesses should embrace social media as a tool to foster long term relationships with consumers through engaging with the brand (Gupta *et al*,

2011). Companies can do this by providing users with the platform to affiliate with the brand (Rosen 2009; Bernoff & Li, 2008).

Marketers can take their brand message directly to consumers (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). This message needs to be personalised (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). Businesses must remember that social media is a platform to engage with consumers and therefore the message must be authentic, reciprocal, and conversational and must try not to explicitly close a sale with the consumer (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011).

In the online space, businesses must understand that they are not in control of their brand image (Bernoff & Li, 2008; Gupta *et al*, 2011). Therefore they must be open to finding a balance between control and engagement through the selection of social media (Keller & Berry 2006; Gupta *et al*, 2011). Social media must not be viewed as just another media channel, but instead turned to for its social ROI (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). Along with the social ROI, businesses are expected to listen to the message that consumers are giving as well as to respond to the conversation in order to successfully engage with consumers and provide them with a fulfilling experience with the brand (Gupta *et al*, 2011).

Alongside engagement with consumers, businesses should use the traces left on social media as a market research tool. Social networking sites have

transformed the web into a vast repository of consumer opinions and feedback on brand experiences (Thelwall *et al*, 2010).

2.4.4 SOCIAL MEDIA AND ROI

It has been difficult for marketing managers to adopt social media into their strategies due to the measurement of social media and its effectiveness (Fisher, 2009). For example, it may be easy to measure metrics such the number of site visitors, however difficult to put a value on a Facebook group. This has resulted in marketers sticking to traditional marketing efforts that more easily measured, regardless of their actual effectiveness to the consumer (Fisher,2009).

According to Fisher (2009), as social media is about consumers, we need to shift our focus from metrics of traditional online marketing to the actual value of a customer. Customers are valuable resources who are not just limited to how much they have spent on a brand, but also their future spend as well as their influence on others (Fisher, 2009). This perspective allows marketers to see the full value in building a relationship with consumers.

2.5 MICROBLOGGING

2.5.1 INTRODUCTION TO MICROBLOGGING

Microblogging is a form of social media, with Twitter being the most popular and dominant platform of this nature (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). As mentioned earlier, social media platforms vary in structure and utilisation – in this way microblogging only allows consumers to use 140 characters in a post (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). This structure results in the information shared to be relatively shallow with a short lifespan (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). The information transferred via micro blogging sites enables “fast, brief conversations and engagement” (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011).

Microblogging is usually recommended for marketers who need to create brand awareness and brand recall for established brands (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). This platform is a convenient and quick means from companies to convey short messages to their customers (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). The messages exchanged are made public by default (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011).

2.5.2 TWITTER

Twitter was founded in 2006, two and a half years after Facebook was established (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Twitter is an easy-to-use micro-blogging application (Mark, 2010) that has quickly become one of the most popular social media platforms (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011).

Twitter allows its users to send “tweets” of 140 characters or less to their “followers” (O’Connor *et al*, 2010, Mark, 2010). These few characters allow users to create small elements of content, such as short sentences, individual images or video links (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011) about areas of interest or about “what’s happening” in the world (Abel *et al*, 2011). This communication process is different to Twitter as with Facebook (Mark, 2010), communication occurs once there is mutual consent (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). The short bursts of information, also known as “tweets” are public, therefore anyone is able to view any tweet through Twitter (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). The broadcasting system that Twitter facilitates is also searchable by Google since 2009 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011).

The users of Twitter are on whole observers as opposed to contributors (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Research has shown that fifty percent of all Twitter accounts stem from observer behaviour (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). By 2009, Twitter had 75 million accounts in the period of three years (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Of this network, the top ten percent of the users generate over ninety percent of all tweets (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). The tweets are exchanged between the mailing list of one’s recipients/followers in real time (Mark, 2010). The formation of a Twitter network represents the small world network and its characteristics.

In order for a tweet to be retweeted by another user, the tweet content has to be interesting (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). These interesting tweets then spread

throughout the network as the information cascades from the user's network to another's network (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Therefore the initial information tweeted spreads throughout the network as word of mouth (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). In an example whereby Twitter was used to convey political information, the Twitter messages reached a much larger audience than Twitter users via traditional media Jurgens *et al*, 2011.

Marketers would select this type of social media when wanting to talk with customers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011) as well as to keep established brands top of mind (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). Marketers can leverage the opportunities of Twitter during three stages of the consumer purchase cycle (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Firstly, marketers can data mine tweets by reading what customers are saying (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). It is therefore very easy for marketers to obtain real time feedback on their products and services (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). During the purchase phase, marketers can use Twitter as part of the marketing communication strategy and for sales promotions (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Lastly, marketers can use Twitter as a channel for customer service (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011).

2.5.3 INFLUENCE IN TWITTER

"If you could imagine a platform that was ideally designed to identify influencers, it would be Twitter" Mr Watts (Edmund, 2010).

As one of the world's most popular microblogs – it is important for marketers and researchers to understand the way the online word of mouth influencers consumers and their decisions about brands.

With over sixty-five million tweets a day (O'Connor *et al*, 2010), Twitter has become a valuable real- time source of information for consumers (Carter *et al*, 2010).

Twitter, unlike Facebook, is a listening as well as a talking network – whereby users from both sides of the fence are interested in being influential (Edmund, 2010).

Kim Kardashian, for example, can trigger a large cascade of retweets to her many followers. Research has shown that “influence is spread more efficiently and more reliably when done through many to many connections, rather than through a few highly connected individuals” (Edmund 2010).

2.5.4 MICROBLOGGING ACTIVITY LEVELS

Microblogging activity levels indicate the level of engagement consumers have within social media. These levels are measured through the traditional online metrics such as one's duration, interaction and comments on a site – as well as

the velocity of a message, that is how fast a message travels in a period of time (Fisher, 2009).

In the case of Twitter, an important event can trigger more tweeting. The volume of discussion can further been used to make prediction about future behaviour from consumers and are important to study due to their role of determining consumer interest and predicting new events (Thelwall *et al*, 2010).

2.5.5 MICROBLOGGING SENTIMENT LEVELS

Activity levels in social media can show researchers events, for example, that are of interest to consumers. These activity levels show that consumers are interacting with social media about events and brands. However a new dimension has evolved in understanding the consumer better. This level uncovers the sentiment of the message, and gives marketers an insight into consumer opinion.

Sentiment identifies the consumer tone and opinion (Fisher, 2009). Social media is unlike traditional online marketing, whereby activity metrics are the key analytics. Social media lets marketers tap into what really matters – consumer opinions, voices and experiences that people exchange online with on another (Fisher, 2009). Research has shown that changes in Twitter mood levels correlate with social, politica, cultural and economic events (Fisher, 2009). A similar study analysed Facebook updates to judge “changes in mood over the year and to assess the overall emotional health of the nation” (Thelwall *et al*,2010).

Consumer feedback can provide valuable insight for businesses. Marketers can comments of consumers on social media to understand what they are saying about brands (Thelwall *et al*,2010, Fisher, 2009). Sentiment analysis is used to determine the emotion in online texts (Thelwall *et al*,2010). Twitter messages can be analysed according to their sentiment level by consumers who research a brand's sentiment before making a purchase or for companies to monitor the public's sentiment level of their brand (Go *et al*,2010).

2.6 REBRANDING

2.6.1 A DEFINITION OF A BRAND

The topic of this thesis revolves around the case study of Vodacom's rebranding in 2011. In order to understand the role of rebranding, a definition of a brand is needed. A brand is a physical embodiment of a company name and holds value and meaning to its stakeholders (Daly & Moloney, 2004). This meaning is translated into the brand promise and the brand personality and can be a valuable asset to the firm (Daly & Moloney, 2004).

Daly and Moloney (2004) stated that "the most distinctive skill of professional marketers is their ability to create, maintain, protect and enhance brands. Branding is the art and cornerstone of marketing." On this note, a brand is an evolution in the minds of consumers and is not built overnight (Stuart, 2003).

2.6.2 REBRANDING

Rebranding by definition is the change of the brand identity (Daly & Moloney, 2004) through activities such as “brand renewal, refreshment, makeover, reinvention, renaming and repositioning” (Merrilees & Miller, 2008).

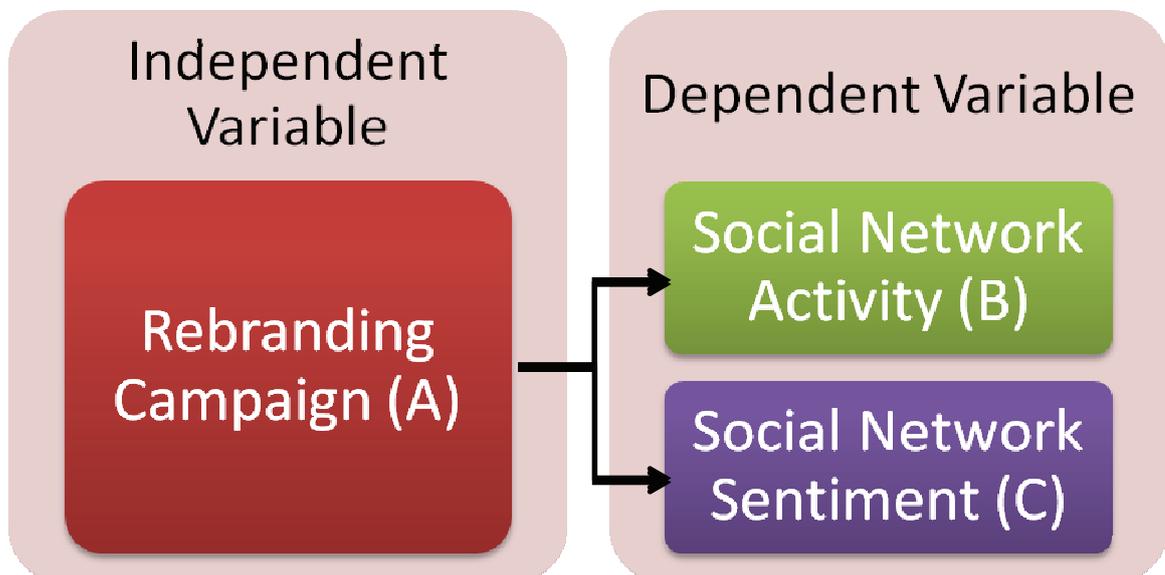
In the definition of a brand, one can understand the investment marketers put into building a brand. Rebranding can therefore seem like an ironic act at this stage of the literature, it is the causes of the rebranding that make the transition of the brand worthwhile. Many rebrandings occur as a result of mergers and acquisitions, as in the case of Vodacom, or when a brand is under performing (Merrilees & Miller, 2008, Stuart, 2003).

The rebranding strategy sends a message to stakeholders of the change the business has undergone, such as a logo change or the change of the corporate mindset and culture (Merrilees & Miller, 2008, Tang, 2009).

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The objective of this study was to determine the relative impact of a rebranding campaign on associated social network activity. Specifically the study sought to analyse the longitudinal impact of Vodacom's 2011 rebranding activities on twitter traffic and sentiment. Through a review of the literature and an analysis of twitter's social mechanisms the key research variables were identified. The research questions developed concerned themselves with the variables displayed in the figure below.

Figure 3.1 Overview of research variables



3.1 INDEPENDENT VARIABLE

The dependant variable used in the study was the 2011 Vodacom rebranding campaign (A). Vodacom underwent a national rebranding which was brought about by the acquisition of Vodacom to Vodafone.

The company went through a dynamic rebranding process from not only its logo and corporate identity colours – but encompassed repositioning the brand, redesigning the brand as well as relaunching the brand (Muzellec, Doogan & Lambkin, 2003). The Go-Red phase of the rebranding process was to align the Vodacom brand to that of the Vodafone brand. The literal transformation of the Vodacom logos can be seen in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: Vodacom Logo

	
1994 - 2011-07-19	2011

The rebranding campaign was measured by isolating key rebranding events on a historic timeline; with the intent of providing a longitudinal measurement tool for testing against the dependent variables.

3.2 DEPENDANT VARIABLE

This study employed two separate but related dependant variables; social network activity (B) and social network sentiment (C). Social network activity concerns itself with raw volume and intensity data with no inference to the sentiment behind the activity; while social network sentiment is concerned with the context of the activity.

Due to the nature and scope of this research the dependant variable is isolated to twitter activity and sentiment. The dependent variables were measured using relevant activity markers and sentiment constructs.

3.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions identified have been divided into two themes; activity and sentiment. Each theme approaches a similar but distinct characteristic of social network traffic. As noted previously, social network activity (RQ1) was concerned with volume and intensity indicators, while social network sentiment (RQ2) was concerned with changes in sentiment constructs.

3.3.1 RESEARCH QUESTION 1: ACTIVITY

Research Question 1a: *The Vodacom rebranding activities had a positive impact on the level of active social interaction with Vodacom.*

Social media has enabled consumers with the platform to express their feelings and opinions. It is critical for marketers to engage with consumers throughout their marketing campaigns, such as in the case of Vodacom's rebranding (Aleshebil, 2007). The positive social interaction of with the brand will be as a result of a well received campaign (Hanna et al, 2011). An impactful marketing campaign will translate into a new buzz and discussion topic on Twitter.

Research Question 1b: *The Vodacom rebranding activities had a positive impact on the level of passive social interaction with Vodacom.*

Consumers align themselves with brands in social media contexts that are informative and insightful (Mangold, 2009). Many consumers also prefer to

engage with brands passively, such as through following the brand (Kappler, 2011).

Research Question 1c: *The Vodacom rebranding had a positive impact on the level of active social discourse concerning Vodacom.*

Consumers engage in online conversations amongst each other that revolve around awareness, information, opinions and attitudes (Mangold, 2009). These messages and sentiments are motivated by areas of interest and buzz (Kaplan, 2010). Therefore should the rebranding be effective, this will result as a trending topic within the Twitter-verse.

3.3.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 2: SENTIMENT

Research Question 2a: *The Vodacom rebranding had a positive effect on the level of affectionate social network activity regarding Vodacom.*

Consumers tell people about things and brands to which they are emotionally connected to (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). In response to a marketing campaign that is effective and well received, consumers can share with others through social media platforms about their brand experience.

Research Question 2b: *The Vodacom rebranding had a positive effect on the level of appreciative social network activity regarding Vodacom.*

Consumers respond to market information that directly influence other consumer behaviour through sharing their satisfactory (or dissatisfactory)

experiences with others online (Mangold & Fauld, 2009). Consumers who are appreciative and content with the marketing campaign will therefore reflect this view point in the online communication.

Research Question 2c: The Vodacom rebranding had a negative effect on the level of hostile social network activity regarding Vodacom.

The rebranding process is a complex process and requires more than an advertising marketing campaign to shift consumer's perceptions of the brand (She, 2010). Therefore should Vodacom's rebranding have been successful, the rebranding would be reflected in a lowered track of hostility towards the brand post the rebranding.

Research Question 2d: The Vodacom rebranding had a negative effect on the level of bereaved social network activity regarding Vodacom.

Rebranding plays a critical role in the brand promise to the consumer (She, 2010). Should consumers feel that there is a major misalignment to the brand promise, the rebranding will mean little to the consumer.

Schweidel et al (2011), confirms that consumers engage with WOM when they have extreme product opinions, such as extreme positive or extreme negative opinions. Therefore should the rebranding be successful, this will result in a lower track of bereaved social network activity regarding the brand.

3.5 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter defined the precise purpose of the research as well as contextualised the research questions in terms of the literature. Additionally the research variables were presented and insight was provided into the variables dynamics and fundamental composition. The following chapter details the methodology used in the study and addresses its associated limitations.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 CHOICE OF METHODOLOGY

The research study employed a quantitative research methodology that made use of descriptive analysis of data. A deductive approach was applied; that made use of a previously conceived theory base to develop and test research questions against (Zikmund, 2003).

Descriptive studies designed to describe characteristics of a phenomenon and are useful when the phenomenon being described has been defined and explored in previous literature (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). While this study explores the specifics of a real-world rebranding; the notions of activity and sentiment have been well documented .

4.2 POPULATION

The population was defined as persons that used twitter to discuss or make statements regarding Vodacom. The population was further specialised using the following criteria:

1. Vodacom specific twitter traffic needed to have taken place between January and July 2011.
2. Persons were only considered part of the population if they *mentioned*, *followed* or *replied* to Vodacom (research tools are expanded upon in section 4.5).

3. Non-human data was excluded from the study.

The population criteria were set for the following reasons:

Due to the longitudinal nature of this study an equal amount of time before the Vodacom rebranding and an equal amount of time after the rebranding were used from comparative purposes. The periods were limited to provide an accurate means of comparison as well as attempted to reduced interference and dissimilarities that may occur from analysing dissimilar periods of time. Thus the period between January and July 2011 allowed for approximately four months of comparative analysis.

Mentions, follows and replies are the twitter specific tools that describe certain types of social interaction and activity and were used in this study as proxys for behaviours and social intent. They are included as population criteria as they allow for measurement and quantitative analysis and are central to data extraction and classification. Data lacking an appropriate 'tag' lacks implicit reference and thus was excluded from this study. The use of research tools will be detailed in section 4.5.

4.3 UNIT OF ANALYSIS

The unit of analysis was Vodacom specific twitter traffic. The unit of analysis was subject to the population criteria as laid out in section 4.2. Vodacom specific twitter traffic was considered to be an appropriate unit of analysis as

the study was interested in exploring twitter network activity and sentiment with relation to a rebranding campaign.

Information extracted from twitter traffic was assumed to be representative of the persons tweeting. Thus it was assumed that the majority of persons using twitter represented themselves or a group and consequently were deemed a relevant unit of analysis.

4.4 SAMPLE SIZE AND SAMPLE METHOD

This study made use of probability sampling. This was possible as all units of analysis of the population were known, accounted for and recorded. The automated nature of data collection and data processing available on social network platforms made probability sampling possible while avoiding the costs that are usually associated with probability sampling (Saunders et al., 2009). Probability sampling allows the results to be accurately extended to the population, as such it provides for stronger inference and extension.

A sample of 49,718 twitter items that met the sample and population criteria as obtained. The sample was made up of archival twitter data that was extracted from twitter and stored in a manner that maintained longitudinal attributes as well as allowed for quantitative analysis. The data collected was considered sufficient for the quantitative procedures carried out in this research project.

While a probability sampling technique was used in this study the limitations placed on the population criteria and the research projects specific application to the 2011 Vodacom rebranding, limits the extent and relevance of projection beyond the sample (Zikmund, 2003).

4.5 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Quantitative data collection was undertaken through secondary data, which collected twitter network information.

The data collected for research question 1, was raw data that was then analysed for volume and frequency variations. While the data collected for research question 2 was subject to quantitative sentiment procedures before being analysed.

The data used in this study was extracted from twitter by an automatic extraction algorithm that extracted all twitter activity that had the word Vodacom in it and that originated from South Africa. Location was established from twitters built in location information and while tweets that had the word Vodacom in them were considered to be concerning Vodacom.

The secondary data used contained the following information:

1. Content of tweet
2. Date of tweet
3. Person tweeting
4. Comprehensive follower information
5. Comprehensive followed information
6. Comprehensive favourite information
7. URL information
8. Hash-tag (#) information
9. Sentiment measurement

Persons were only considered part of the population if they *mentioned*, *followed* or *replied* to Vodacom (research tools are expanded upon in section 4.5).

Mentions, follows and replies are the twitter specific tools that describe certain types of social interaction and activity and were used in this study as proxies for behaviours and social intent. They are included as population criteria as they allow for measurement and quantitative analysis and are central to data extraction and classification. Data lacking an appropriate 'tag' lacks implicit reference and thus was excluded from this study.

The study employed a longitudinal time horizon, as it allowed for the measurement and interpretation of information over time. This allowing for the comparison of the period information before the rebranding campaign, during the campaign and after the campaign.

Due to the longitudinal nature of this study an equal amount of time before the Vodacom rebranding and an equal amount of time after the rebranding were used from comparative purposes. The periods were limited to provide an accurate means of comparison as well as attempted to reduced interference and dissimilarities that may occur from analysing dissimilar periods of time. Thus the period between January and July 2011 allowed for approximately four months of comparative analysis.

4.6 SENTIMENT CONSTRUCTS

The following proprietary sentiment constructs were used in this research were:

1. Affection_Friendliness
2. Contentment_Gratitude
3. Anger_Loathing
4. Saddyess_Grief

The definition of each construct and insight into what it is measuring is provided in table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Definitions of Sentiment constructs used in this research

SENTIMENT	DEFINITION	DICTIONARY
SENTIMENT	an attitude, thought, or judgment prompted by feeling	Merriam-Webster
	a view or opinion that is held or expressed	Oxford
	a thought, opinion or idea based on a feeling about a situation, or a way of thinking about something	Cambridge
	<u>A thought prompted by passion or feeling; a state of mind in view of some subject; feeling toward or respecting some person or thing; disposition prompting to action or expression.</u>	Webster
AFFECTION	a moderate feeling or emotion; tender attachment : fondness	Merriam-Webster
	a gentle feeling of fondness or liking:	Oxford
	a feeling of liking for a person or place	Cambridge
	<u>A settled good will; kind feeling; love; zealous or tender attachment;</u>	Webster
FRIENDLY	showing kindly interest and goodwill; cheerful, comforting; serving a beneficial or helpful purpose	Merriam-Webster
	kind and pleasant	Oxford
	behaving in a pleasant, kind way towards someone	Cambridge
	<u>Having the temper and disposition of a friend; disposed to promote the good of another; kind; favorable.</u>	Webster
CONTENTED	feeling or showing satisfaction with one's possessions, status, or situation	Merriam-Webster
	feeling or expressing happiness or satisfaction; willing to accept something; satisfied	Oxford
	Happy and satisfied	Cambridge
	<u>Content; easy in mind; satisfied; quiet; willing</u>	Webster
GRATITUDE	appreciative of benefits received; expressing gratitude	Merriam-Webster
	feeling or showing an appreciation for something done or received:	Oxford

	Showing or expressing thanks, especially to another person	Cambridge
	Having a <u>due sense of benefits received</u> ; kindly disposed toward one from whom a favor has been received; willing to acknowledge and repay, or give thanks for, benefits;	Webster
ANGER	Strong feeling of displeasure and usually of antagonism; rage	Merriam-Webster
	a strong feeling of annoyance, displeasure, or hostility	Oxford
	a strong feeling which makes you want to hurt someone or be unpleasant because of something unfair or hurtful that has happened	Cambridge
	Trouble; vexation; also, physical pain or smart of a sore, etc; A strong passion or emotion of displeasure or antagonism, excited by a real or supposed injury or insult to one's self or others, or by the intent to do such injury.	Webster
LOATHING	Extreme disgust	Merriam-Webster
	a feeling of intense dislike or disgust; hatred	Oxford
	Strong hatred	Cambridge
	Extreme <u>disgust</u> ; a feeling of aversion, nausea, abhorrence, or detestation	Webster
SAD	affected with or expressive of grief or unhappiness; downcast; causing or associated with grief or unhappiness	Merriam-Webster
	...feeling or showing sorrow; unhappy	Oxford
	Unhappy or sorry	Cambridge
	Sated; satisfied; weary; tired	Webster
GRIEF	deep and poignant distress caused by or as if by bereavement; a cause of such suffering; an unfortunate outcome	Merriam-Webster
	intense sorrow, especially caused by someone's death:	Oxford
	very great sadness, especially at the death of someone	Cambridge
	Cause of sorrow or pain; that which afflicts or distresses; trial; grievance	Webster

The sentiments constructs were created by analysing every single tweet in each data set for emotional content. This was then be averaged across the whole dataset to get an overall indication of emotional content, resulting in a number between 1 and 100; that represents the amount of sentiment that is being displayed. The sentiment scale is developed through use of an automated algorithm that employs bayessian classification.

Each tweet has such a small amount of content that it is simply not accurate to reliably extract emotional information from it, except at a most basic level. However, when analysing the combined tweets, it was possible to form a reliable overall picture.

The algorithm used requires above 1000 tweets to provide accurate indication of the scenario. This study used 49,718 tweets to analyse the sentiment and thus was considered an adequate sample size. The algorithm used has been proven to provide 70-80% accuracy.

It is accepted that the algorithm is not as accurate as a human analysis, however the sheer volume of twitter activity made that impossible and thus prompted the use of an automated algorithm. The algorithm did not (could not) account for unusual language constructs, sarcasm and inside jokes, however still provides an excellent overview of the data.

4.7 METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The following periods were used in this report to divide up the periods around the campaign.

1. **15 Jan - 15 March (pre re-brand)** – This period was used to provide a base line of the twitter activity. It was considered as the pre-brand period where the rebranding was not known to the general public.
2. **16 March - 23 April (Leak period and re-brand period)** – This period was considered as the period when the public knew about the rebranding campaign as well as the period when the rebrand took place. The leak period was considered as part of the rebranding efforts as the general public was aware of the campaign.
3. **24 April - 24 June (Post re-brand period)** – This period was used as the post-branding period and was used as comparison against the pre branding period, to provide insight into the impact of the rebrand.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The research report made use of descriptive statistical analysis to explore the sample and provide insight into sample specific concerns. This further allowed for analysis of the sample against the findings, which aided in interpretation of the findings.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The method of analysis adopted for the research questions was primarily longitudinal comparison. While additional statistical mechanisms were used, the longitudinal information was used for analysis and comparison. Percentage change over time, comparing the before, during and after rebranding was used to provide insight into the impact of the Vodacom rebranding.

4.8 LIMITATIONS

5.8.1 DATA VALIDITY

The research used proxy markers or variables (detailed above). While justification for the use has been provided, there remains an inherent validity error (Saunders et al., 2009). This error is a result of a misalignment between the variable and its proxy use in this study, however it is deemed to be acceptable for the purposes of this study.

Additionally the validity of the sentiment constructs as detailed previously have inherent errors, however as the error rate was considered acceptable. The use of a large sample aided in increasing the validity of the sentiment constructs.

5.8.1 ENVIRONMENTAL AND CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

The study took place in an environment that was effected by factors other than the rebranding campaign. Many of the environmental and contextual were not possible to be controlled for, and as a result may have impacted the results of

the study. These factors include general customer satisfactions with Vodacom as well as competitor behaviours and customer reactions to Vodacom products and services. It is acknowledged that contextual and environmental factors exist and that they may have impact the study, however are considered an acceptable limitation.

4.9 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter provided the methodology used in this research project and gave details form the population, unit of analysis and sampling method. Furthermore the method of analysis and sentiment constructs were detailed and limitations explored.

The following chapter presents the results of the descriptive statistics and research questions.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

This chapter provides the results of the statistical analysis procedures conducted during this research, as detailed in chapter 4.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The data gathered for the analysis consisted of tweets that were in conversation with or about Vodacom. In order to substantiate the conversation relationship between the Twitter users and Vodacom, the tweets had to include the following: @vodacom; #vodacom and or to follow Vodacom on Twitter.

The data collected was from the range of 15 January 2011 to 24 June 2011. These dates encompass the network pre – during – post the rebranding campaign which was launched in 1 April 2011.

The number of entries for the three reporting periods can be broken down as follows:

PERIOD	DATES	TWEETS
Pre Rebrand	15 January 2011 – 15 March 2011	11 730
During	16 March 2011 – 23 April 2011	17 800
Post Rebrand	24 April 2011 – 24 June 2011	20 188
TOTAL	15 January 2011 – 24 June 2011	49 718

5.2: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

5.2.1 AVERAGE AGE OF TWITTER ACCOUNT

The average age of twitter accounts that contributed to the sample was approximately 1.5 years. While this may appear to be a short period of time, it is an average age for South African tweeters. The sample thus was not biased to either very inexperienced or experienced twitter users

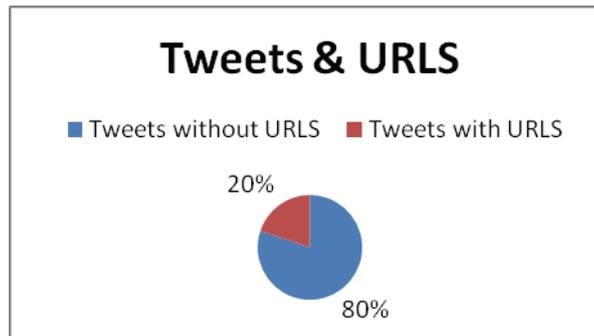
5.2.2 AVERAGE FOLLOWERS AND FOLLOWED

The average number of people that the sample followed was 26 while they were followed by 45 people. This provides insight into the relative influence that the average of the sample has. Thus while the sample size was set at 49,718 tweets, there is a possible maximum multiplier effect of 45. And thus the tweets were considered to have had high penetration.

5.2.3 USAGE OF URL'S IN TWEETS

Of the sample 80% were found to not URL's in their tweets while, 20% were found to used URL's in their tweets (as displayed in figure 5.1). This provided an indication into the amount of users linking to more comprehensive content and provides insight into the type of content or opinions being shared.

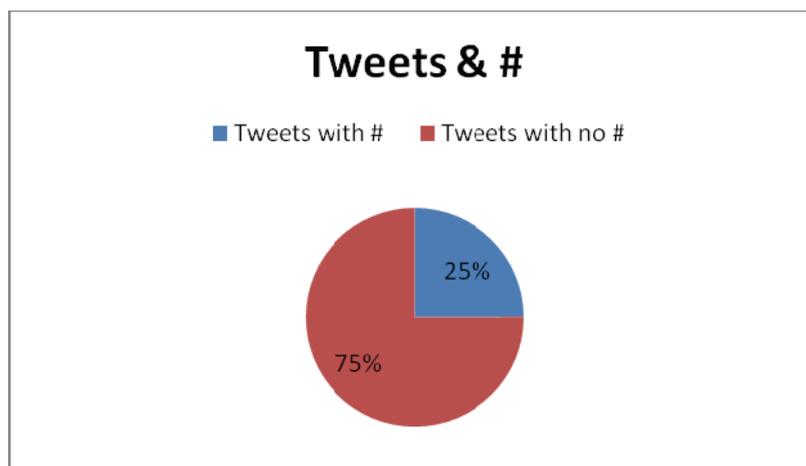
Figure 5.1: Percentage of URL's in the Sample



5.2.4 USAGE OF HASH TAGS IN TWEETS

The sample was found to primarily not use hash tags in their tweets, with only 25% of the sample using hash tags and 75% of the sample not using them when tweeting. This provides insight into the ability of Vodacom to trend during the time periods measured; and as a result attract greater attention and audience from twitter users. Furthermore it provides insight into the number of times that users discuss Vodacom however do not use the hash tag (a key metric in research question 1).

Figure 5.2: Percentage of sample using hash tags in tweets



5.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 1

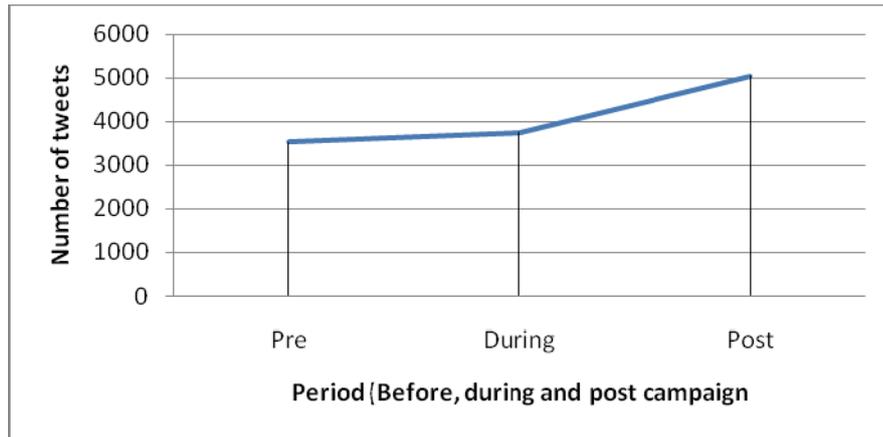
5.3.1 RESEARCH QUESTION 1A

Research Question 1a: *The Vodacom rebranding activities had a positive impact on the level of active social interaction with Vodacom.*

Figure 5.3 displays the percentage that active social interaction with Vodacom changed over time. The active social interaction users had with Vodacom through Twitter required users to use the “@” symbol and provides the outlook of the longitudinal comparison of twitter replies to Vodacom.

The level of active social interaction with Vodacom was found to increase slightly (2%) during the rebranding campaign and then sharply after the campaign (10%). This represents that twitter users began to interact more directly with Vodacom after the rebranding had taken place. While this does not provide insight into what was being discussed it suggests that people were more likely to engage directly with Vodacom post-rebrand.

Figure 5.3: Graph depicting active social activity with Vodacom change over time



5.3.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 1B

Research Question 1b: *The Vodacom rebranding activities had a positive impact on the level of passive social interaction with Vodacom.*

Figure 5.4 displays the number of Vodacom followers over time. The period during the rebrand is highlighted with a red circle. The followers were calculated by measuring the number of people that followed Vodacom over time. It allowed insight into the amount of people who passively receive content from Vodacom.

The results showed that there was a steep increase in amount of followers that Vodacom had after the rebrand campaign. The Vodacom following grew by approximately 100% from the time of the campaign until the end of the measurement period. These results suggest that the campaign had a positive effect on twitter users desire to follow Vodacom. Users were thus more interested in hearing directly from Vodacom.

Figure 5.4: Number of Vodacom followers over time



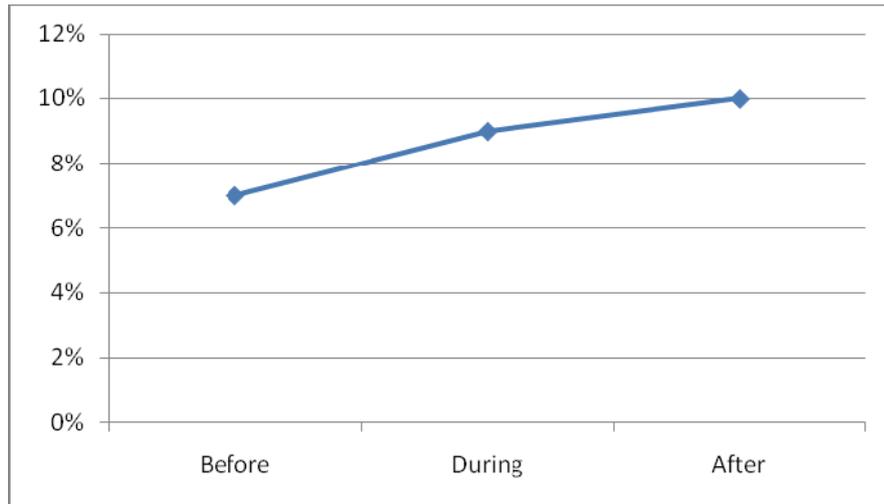
5.3.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 1C

Research Question 1c: *The Vodacom rebranding had a positive impact on the level of active social discourse concerning Vodacom.*

Figure 5.5 displays the percentage that twitter users used the hash tag when discussing Vodacom over time. The hash tag was used as a proxy for active social discourse and described in chapter 4. The active social discourse users had about Vodacom through Twitter required users to use the ‘#’ symbol before the word Vodacom. The ‘#’ provides insight into users willingness to want to discuss a topic.

The Findings of the study showed that there was a sudden increase active social discourse concerning Vodacom during the rebrand. Additionally the level of discourse continued to rise after the rebranding period; however the increase was not as steep.

Figure 5.5: Percentage change over time of hash tags regarding Vodacom



5.4 RESEARCH QUESTION 2

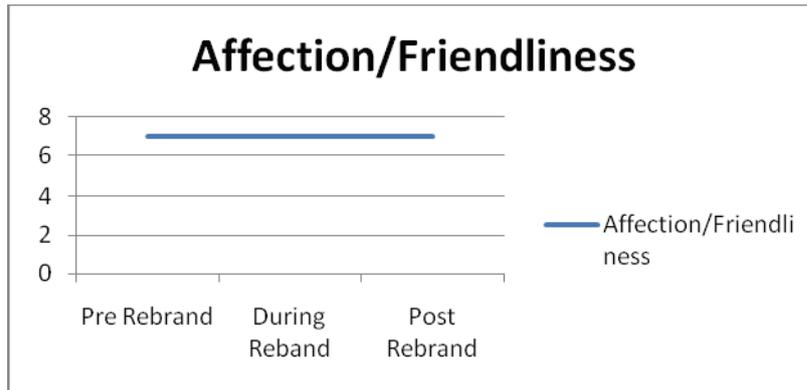
5.4.1 RESEARCH QUESTION 2A

Research Question 2a: *The Vodacom rebranding had a positive effect on the level of affectionate social network activity regarding Vodacom.*

Figure 5.6 displays the level of affectionate twitter network activity with regard to Vodacom over time. The sentiment construct measured the amount of affection that was being shown to Vodacom on twitter. The statistical procedure used an algorithm that employed bayessian classification (as detailed in chapter 4), and analysed the results over the period during the rebrand as well as periods before and after the rebrand.

The results found that the level of affectionate twitter activity remained constant over time. As a result the rebranding campaign is seen to have no impact whatsoever on the level of affectionate sentiment being expressed towards Vodacom. Affection levels were however low at 7%, thus users shoed little affectionate sentiment towards Vodacom.

Figure 5.5: Level of affectionate twitter activity over time



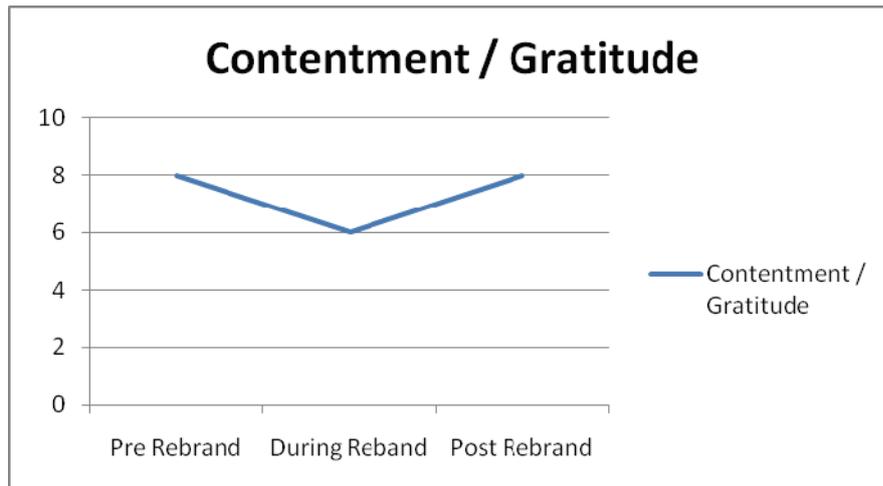
5.4.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 2B

Research Question 2b: *The Vodacom rebranding had a positive effect on the level of appreciative social network activity regarding Vodacom.*

Figure 5.7 displays the level of appreciative twitter network activity with regard to Vodacom over time. The sentiment construct measured the amount of appreciative sentiment that was being shown on twitter with regard to Vodacom. The statistical procedure used an algorithm that employed bayessian classification (as detailed in chapter 4), and analysed the results over the period during the rebrand as well as periods before and after the rebrand.

The results of the test showed that the level of appreciative sentiment dropped during the Vodacom rebrand. While a drop was observed the drop was marginal. Furthermore the period after the rebrand saw the appreciative sentiment value return to its pre-brand levels. It must be noted that the appreciative sentiment levels throughout the study were low (below 10%), suggesting that twitter users did not convey appreciation to Vodacom using twitter.

Figure 5.7: Level of appreciative twitter activity over time



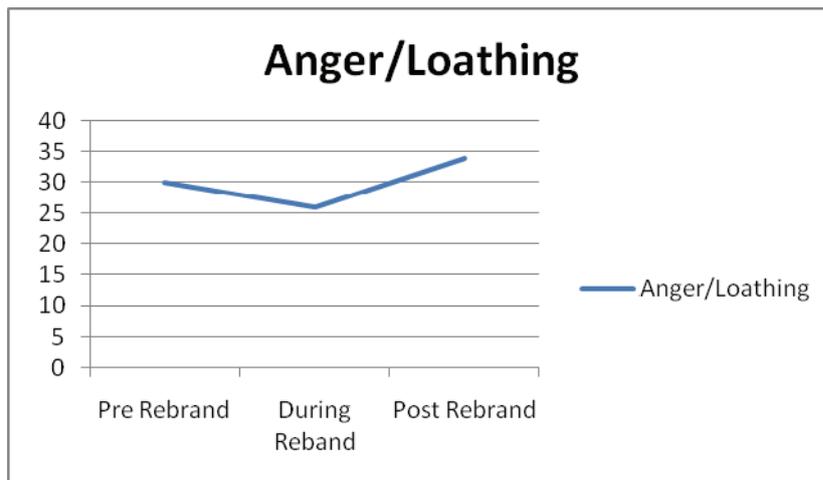
5.4.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 2C

Research Question 2c: *The Vodacom rebranding had a negative effect on the level of hostile social network activity regarding Vodacom.*

Figure 5.8 displays the level of hostile twitter network activity with regard to Vodacom over time. The sentiment construct measured the amount of hostile sentiment that was being shown on twitter with regard to Vodacom. The statistical procedure used an algorithm that employed bayessian classification (as detailed in chapter 4), and analysed the results over the period during the rebrand as well as periods before and after the rebrand.

The results showed that during the rebrand campaign the level of hostile sentiment decreased, however the levels of hostile sentiment rose in the period after the rebrand campaign. The levels of hostility post rebrand exceeded the level of the period prior to rebrand. Hostile sentiment towards Vodacom for the period of the study averaged at approximately 30%, thus the levels of hostility were much higher than the positive sentiment constructs tested in research question 2a and b.

Figure 5.8: Level of hostile twitter activity over time



5.4.4 RESEARCH QUESTION 2D

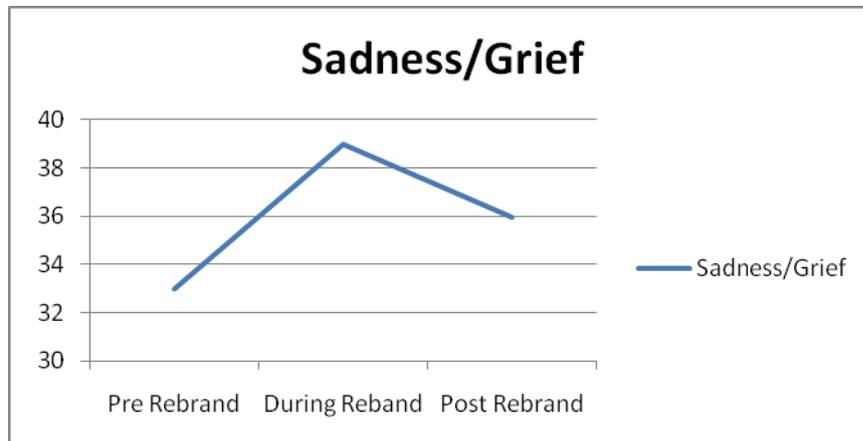
Research Question 2d: *The Vodacom rebranding had a negative effect on the level of bereaved social network activity regarding Vodacom.*

Figure 5.9 displays the level of bereaved twitter network activity with regard to Vodacom over time. The sentiment construct measured the amount of bereaved sentiment that was being shown on twitter with regard to Vodacom. The statistical procedure used an algorithm that employed bayessian classification (as detailed in chapter 4), and analysed the results over the period during the rebrand as well as periods before and after the rebrand.

The findings showed that the level of bereaved sentiment increased sharply during the rebranding campaign. In the period after campaign the level of bereaved sentiment declined. The decline however was less than the increase experienced during the rebranding; as such the level of bereaved sentiment increased when comparing the pre-rebrand and post-rebrand periods. The

general levels of bereaved sentiment were notably high when compared to the levels of the positive sentiment constructs (research question 2a and b).

Figure 5.9: Level of bereaved twitter activity over time



5.5 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the quantitative results of the research in terms of descriptive statistics of the sample and the research questions. The following chapter discusses the results of the research questions in terms of the literature.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The following chapter addresses the research questions of this study. Each research question is spoken to and insight is given into the findings in terms of the literature review. The context in which the study took place and the sample specific concerns are also taken into account.

6.1 RESEARCH QUESTION 1

6.1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION 1A: @ REPLIES

The results from RQ 1a show the change in @replies to increase significantly from before the rebranding campaign to post the rebranding. Before the rebranding, there is a light increase in @replies which steadily increases to the rebranding stage. From the rebranding period to the post rebranding period, there is a steep incline in the amount of @replies in the network.

Pre the rebranding, there were 3530 @replies to Vodacom. Post the rebranding campaign there was a significant rise in the @replies to 5045 @replies in that period. Overall since the rebranding, there was an increase of over 1500 @replies in the specified time frame.

A review of the academic literature states that social media enables consumers to talk with a brand, changing the traditional communication of company to

consumer model (Mangold, 2009). Besides Mangold (2009), Gupta (2011) also reinforces the notion that social media provides the platform for consumers to engage with the brand and further explains that it is through this platform that consumers evaluate the brand's marketing campaigns.

The shifts in the marketing environment and communication flow, is further reinstated by Hanna (2011) who stresses that consumers are no longer passive recipients in the marketing process. "Consumers expect to be active participants in the media process" (Hanna, 2011, pg 267).

The academic literature thereby is congruent to the findings of the Vodacom twitter network. There was a sharp increase in the amount of @replies post the rebranding campaign. The Vodacom twitter-verse are eagerly and actively engaging with brand, and more so since this national marketing event.

The reason for the spike in social interaction with consumers and the Vodacom brand is due to the changing nature of the marketing landscape and the new voice of the consumer. Consumers embrace their new power and voice through social media, and as seen in the Vodacom network, Twitter users were not shy to engage with the brand following the rebranding in 2011.

The rebranding event also sparked a new topic of interest for consumers to give feedback on. As consumers are no longer passive in web 2.0, the rebranding sparked a new discussion among consumers around the Vodacom brand.

The underlying principles of the literature mentioned (Mangold, 2009; Hanna, 2011; Gupta, 2011) all resonate with the consumers new desire to engage with brands through social media platforms. Therefore in conclusion to the literature on the topic, it is not surprising that the amount of @replies with the Vodacom brand increased post the rebranding.

6.1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 1B: FOLLOWS

Documentation of the results of the change in followers of the Vodacom brand show that the follower base more than doubled in the five month period. The Vodacom follower base multiplied healthily and rapidly during the rebranding period.

The notion of followers in the Twitter network refers to the passive interaction consumers have with the brand. In discussing the implications of the passive interactions that consumers have with social media, Kaplan (2010) states that fifty percent of all Twitter accounts are for passive observers. Contemporary research have shown that many consumers prefer not to produce their own content, and as in such a role as a follower, prefer to enjoy the content they receive online (Kappler, 2011).

Despite the view of the passive interactions that users have with brands online, following a brand on Twitter is still reserved as brand engagement nonetheless (Mangold, 2009).

The mentioned literature jointly affirms that the increase in followers is shown in an increase in interaction with the brand.

There are various answers as to why consumers want to engage more with a brand, and hence follow a brand on Twitter. In the case of the sample, consumers were discussing the rebranding via Twitter, and as a small world network, it is no surprise that information spreads rapidly within the network. Consumers therefore want to be connected to the brand to find out about the rebranding.

The diffusion of the buzz around the rebranding also generates more awareness to the Vodacom brand, hence encouraging users to follow the brand. The exciting content revolving around the rebranding would be another motivation as to the rapid increase in followers. Consumers want to be connected to the information source and keep up to date with trends and news, and following the source of the news is one such manner for consumers to keep informed.

The increase in followers was brought about an increase in awareness of the brand. Twitter is a great tool for fast and efficient information diffusion (Jurgens, 2011) and thus the rebranding served as an information cascade throughout the network. As Twitter serves as a platform to carry small messages with breaking news, such as the rebranding, more consumers became aware of the rebranding (Kaplan, 2010).

Literature used in social media studies stand testament that as consumer control their online experience, that they will follow brands of whom they want to align with. In a similar manner, Kaplan (2010) expressed that consumers are unlikely to read boring information, and along that vein consumers therefore will be unlikely to follow a brand with boring content.

Following the Vodacom brand allows users to passively interact with the brand whilst observing and evaluating the brand campaign (Gupta, 2011).

6.1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 1C: # MENTIONS

The rebranding impacted the Vodacom network through increasing the amount of mentions via Twitter. Pre the rebranding the amount of mentions was sitting in 808 mentions. This amount of mentions shot up to 1636 mentions during the rebranding period and then steadily increased to 2008 mentions in the period.

The fields in study of social media and its dynamics state that the level of mentions reflects the consumer's engagement and participation levels with the brand (Fisher, 2009). A manner in which consumers can engage with the brand is through mentioning the brand in conversation, such as through a #mention. This form of a mention is also known as eWOM as discussed in the Literature Review, Chapter 2. Literature has confirmed that consumers are the new media content producers (Kappler, 2011).

The shape of the findings is in response to the amount of buzz generated around the rebranding. The sharp increase in mentions doubles from the pre branding phase to during the branding phase. It is at this stage that there is a lot of excitement and buzz generated from the rebranding. As Twitter is known to ask its users "what's happening?" it is not surprising that the rebranding became a trending topic on Twitter. By the stage that sufficient users had had their say of the rebranding, the increase in mentions continues to increase, yet at a slower rate. The network at this stage is aware of the rebranding.

The market response to Vodacom's rebranding was predicted by literature. In the case of Twitter, an important event can trigger more tweeting (Thelwall, 2010). Twitter is the platform for consumers to share their growing real-time opinions (Kappler, 2011). Hence at this stage, the time of the campaign not only shows an increase in tweets about the brand, but an increase in mentions about the brand.

Mangold (2009) stated that people talk about things that they find “outrageous.” Surrounding the extreme national change of Vodacom corporate identity colour and branding, the rebranding came as a shocking and surprising event to many. Consumers would therefore be even more likely to engage in eWOM.

Throughout the rebranding process, consumers are talking with each other through the social media platform (Mangold, 2009). Building on the discussions among consumers and the information that they exchange amongst each other, new studies have confirmed that product information originates within the market (Mangold, 2009). This quick source of information is reflected in the buzz that was generated prior to the official rebranding launch.

6.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 2

6.2.1 RESEARCH QUESTION 2A: AFFECTION

The measurement of the sentiment users had with Vodacom in regards to affection show that the sentiment levels remained neutral to the rebranding at level 7. There was therefore no change in the affection level during the rebranding period.

The affection level is overall very low in comparison to other sentiment levels that consumers engage with brands.

According to Merriam-Weber, affection is a type of moderate emotion (Merriam-Weber Dictionary). Mangold (2009) stated that users are likely to be engaging with more extreme and outrageous content.

The findings show the overall low level of affection that consumers have when engaging with the brand. The consumers have recognised the good in the rebranding, but have not acted out on the neutral sentiment as it is not a spark for discussion.

Academic sources confirm the findings as neutral sentiments do not drive WOM (Mangold, 2009).

6.2.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 2B: APPRECIATIVE

The levels of appreciation with vodacom experienced a slight dip in ratings and then returned to stability at its initial level of 8 post the rebranding.

In the same manner of the affection level, contentment and gratitude are quiet sentiments (Webster Dictionary). Dobele et al (2007) stated that consumers are likely to propagate messages with emotional engagement. It therefore stands to reason that the low level of emotion will result in low levels of WOM and eWOM.

The results show that through the slight change in sentiment level of appreciation, the users felt less contentment and gratitude with the brand during the rebranding process. However the sentiment level increased after the rebranding, which shows that consumers accepted the rebranding.

In conclusion to the research question, the literature (Dobele, 2007; Mangold, 2009) conclude that the findings are as expected through the low levels of appreciative social network activity.

6.2.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 2C: HOSTILE

The findings of this question present much higher ratings than that of the positive emotions just discussed: affection and appreciation.

The levels of hostility are overall high. Prior to the campaign, the hostility levels were high at level 30. These levels dropped to 26 and then peaked at 34 post the rebranding.

The sentiment investigated demonstrates a strong, extreme and intense emotion (Oxford and Webster dictionaries). Research has shown that WOM is driven by extreme satisfaction or dissatisfaction (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). Therefore is it to no surprise that this sentiment has such high levels.

The findings show that even though people have strong feelings against the brand, the rebranding actually had a positive impact on the hostility with consumers. However this reprieve did not last long and the consumers returned to their hostile state, however at a high level. This could be reflected as consumers were hoping that the rebranding would enhance their brand experience. However post the rebranding, consumers were still not satisfied with the service from Vodacom, and as such were even more irate due to the disappointment in the rebranding.

Stuart (2003) explained that rebranding is about sending a message to the market that the company has changed. As seen in the findings, consumers were less hostile during the rebranding in expectation of the positive change. However these negative emotions returned at a higher level, perhaps due to the consumer perception of the “unsatisfactory” and “disappointing” change made by Vodacom.

6.2.4 RESEARCH QUESTION 2D: BEREAVED

The findings from the sentiment of sadness and grief showed that users are generally unhappy with the brand. Prior to the rebranding, the levels of sadness and grief with the brand are high at 33. The levels peak at a high of 39 during the rebranding and then drop slightly to 36.

Research has shown that the consumers are more likely to engage in WOM and eWOM when there are extreme emotions at play (De Bruyn and Lilien, 2008; Mangold, 2009).

The findings resonate with the consumer experience of the brand change. Consumers felt that the loss of the old brand identity and expressed their grief through the social media platform. Once the rebranding campaign was done, consumers were left more upset with the brand than they were prior to the rebranding.

The theory in place provides insight into the bereft sentiment that consumers experienced during the rebranding.

6.3 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the findings in terms of the research questions and associated literature as well as explored the sample specific concerns. The next chapter highlights the main findings of the research and put forward the management implications.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 ACADEMIC CONTRIBUTION

In hindsight, there were two interesting notes that can be made about the study.

Firstly, even though the overall sentiment was anger, the rebranding resulted in high levels of engagement with the brand. The reason for this is that the emotions experienced as a result of the rebranding were stronger and more intense. The rebranding places pressure on a company as consumers expect improvements in the company services and offering. Obviously should consumer expectation not be met, many consumers will be left disappointed with the brand.

A second area of interest was how the news of the rebranding sparked before the official launch in April 2011. The pre-branding buzz was evident in the Twitter feeds and therefore influenced the research methodology to include the pre-branding buzz as part of the initial launch. This is a true South African example of how Twitter is a platform for users to share breaking news.

A third surprising find from the study is based on the level of sentiment during the rebranding. During the rebranding, the positive emotions did not increase, which meant that consumers were not overly impressed with the rebranding from Vodacom. However also during this period, the negative sentiment of

hostility decreased in favour of the rebranding. The change in sentiment shows marketers that some consumers are optimistic that a rebranding will solve their problems with a specific brand. Unfortunately in this case, the Twitter users communicated that they were even more slightly angry with the brand post the rebranding as they did not see they change that they had hoped for.

7.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The research conducted set out to measure the impact of Vodacom's rebranding through the level of engagement that consumers had with the brand through social media. The research however confined the findings to a few sets of limitations which are discussed.

7.2.1 SAMPLE LIMITATION

The sample size selected was limited to the Twitter network only. This presents a limitation as the research set out to investigate the relationship consumers had with social media platforms in general. Therefore this research was limited to that of Twitter, and was not measured against other platforms such as Facebook and blogs.

Secondly, the sample was based around the semantics of the Vodacom rebranding campaign which occurred very recently at the time of the research process. Should the campaign had occurred a year prior to the time of the research, this would have extended the limited campaign period that was investigate, thus enabling the research to investigate an annual change in the

social network, such as a investigating a year prior to the rebrand and a year post the rebrand campaign. The campaign would therefore have encompassed a longitudinal study.

A third limitation includes the sample bias. The sample was selected according to users you mentioned Vodacom in their tweets. However it is unknown should the sample use other synonyms or abbreviations to refer to the brand name.

7.2.2 METHODOLOGY LIMITATIONS

The research was conducted on a quantitative basis in order for the researcher to run statistical tests and analysis to the findings. This method type implied limitations on the type of data that could be collected. Following the type of data collected, it is difficult to measure emotions accurately through quantitative measures. Therefore the sentiment analysis is a not an exact reflection on the level of emotion displayed, is a more used as an average or assumption to determine the sentiment.

7.2.3 INSTRUMENT LIMITATIONS

The data collected is secondary and therefore was not collected for the specific purpose of the study. It therefore has inherent limitations.

The type of date collected was divided into three types of relationships, namely: mention; follow and reply. These relationships are therefore proxies for behaviour. However the research itself was not set out to measure behaviour,

but instead to focus on the mentions in terms of volume and sentiment. This limitation was considered and it was found as an acceptable representation of the behaviour.

7.2.4 CONTEXT AND SCOPE

The research is based on a very biased and represents only a small percentage of the South African population limited to Twitter users. The Twitter universe is generally embraced by early adopters and does not reflect the majority of the world population. Therefore the Twitter platform is biased towards these early adopters.

7.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT

Social media is an exciting platform for marketing managers to engage with. It is critical the managers effectively use the platform to connect with consumers who are inviting brands to join in the conversation.

Management need to be able to understand how consumers engage with social media and how they use the various tools available to do so. Managers should embrace the opportunity of consumers willingly engaging with the brand online and give them something positive to buzz about.

As product information originates in the market place, marketers with specific campaigns, such as rebranding, need to ensure that the people tweeting about

the new offering has the right experience to talk about. South African marketers must not underestimate the power of the social tool even in this country. With a small take up of Twitter users in South Africa, these users are influential and are very informed with the news in the market place.

Once a marketing campaign has been launched, marketers must look for strategies to ensure that the brand remains engaged with consumers prior to the rebranding. Vodacom successfully become a top of mind brand for consumers during the rebranding and managed to maintain that role post the rebranding.

Successful marketing campaigns create buzz and thereby generate brand awareness. In the words of Oscar Wilde (1980): “The only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about.” Marketers need to prepare for the increase in traffic around their brand on social media platforms in response to their marketing campaign. Marketers need to ensure that they are prepared to handle questions regarding the campaign as well as to provide informative content around the relevant brand message.

In the specific case of a rebranding, marketing managers need to be aware of the consequences that a rebranding can bring about. In the South African case of Vodacom, consumers were quick to express their feelings and opinions about the rebranding. As the rebranding communicates a message of the

brand change to its stakeholders, managers need to determine if the company is ready to rebrand in anticipation of the consumer perceptions of the rebranding. In the case of Vodacom, consumers were overall not impressed with the rebrand and engaged more negatively with the rebranding. Managers need to predict these negative responses from consumers in order to respond to their uneasiness about the rebrand.

7.4 FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

As social media is a relatively new playground for marketers to engage with consumers, there future research possibilities are bountiful.

This particular study examined the influence of consumer's responses to a South African brand's rebranding in Twitter. A study that follows a more insightful approach could investigate other popular platforms of social media, such as Facebook, LinkedIn and GooglePlus.

This report looked at the output from consumers through their actions in terms of tweets and following Vodacom on Twitter. A very exciting area of research would be to investigate the actual people in the network in terms of their position in the network and their role of influence in the network. Such a study could use the open-source tool of NodeXL through which Marc Smith, part of Microsoft Research, uses to analyse social media networks in the view point of Social Network Analysis.

The last suggestion for future research would encourage the researcher to compare this study with that of Cell C's recent rebranding. The purpose of the study would be to investigate and compare the two mobile companies rebranding efforts and the impact it had on consumers.

7.5 CONCLUSION

Word of mouth (WOM) has become more powerful than ever before. Through social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, businesses can connect with consumers like never before through the largest ecosystems of sharing ever created. This paper is set to contribute to the body of knowledge around WOM communication and its role within social media and impact on marketing.

Marketers need to understand the new dynamics for consumers when engaging with social media. Consumers are turning to the web 2.0 for sources of information as well as for a platform to share their opinions and attitudes with others. Research has also shown that the best recommendation comes from a friend. In a campaign, such as Vodacom's rebranding, consumers are quick to tweet about their experiences with the campaign. Marketers must therefore be prepared for engagement with consumers, and learn how to involve social media with their traditional marketing strategies.

Social media is an exciting new platform for both consumers and brands. It gives brands the ability to connect with the potential audience of over five-

hundred million people around the world. There is a conversation going on – and it's for marketers to join in on the conversation.

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