

UTILISING AN *UBUNTU*-CENTRED COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK TO ANALYSE CSR MESSAGES ON SNS

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ABSTRACT

This article is the result of qualitative research conducted on the corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication disseminated by two financial institutions, FNB and Capitec, on their social networking sites (SNSs). The research employed a phenomenological research paradigm to explore the interactions between the financial institutions and their stakeholders on Facebook and Twitter. Collected data were analysed by means of interpretative discourse analysis as well as two computer-aided qualitative data analysis software programmes, Leximancer and Centim. The authors categorised the financial institutions' CSR communication in themes and coded it according to a newly formulated theoretical framework of *Ubuntu*-centred communication practices on SNSs. It was found that FNB's CSR communication was based on *Ubuntu* values whereas Capitec's CSR communication did not exhibit key characteristics, such as the inclusion of narratives and archetypes, sound conflict resolution strategies, and the presentation of mutually beneficial solutions to societal issues. Based on the findings, it is proposed that organisation-stakeholder interactions can be facilitated when organisations disseminate CSR messages and constructively engage with stakeholders on SNSs. Moreover, culturally-specific communication management strategies, such as *Ubuntu*-centred communication, should be infused in holistic communication models to foster participatory online communities which are characterised by dialogue, mutual trust and reciprocity.

Keywords: communication management; computer-aided qualitative data analysis software; corporate social responsibility; financial institutions; social networking sites; stakeholder engagement; *Ubuntu*



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INTRODUCTION

Existing literature on corporate social responsibility (CSR) construe it as a fluid, multi-dimensional construct (Williams and Aguilera 2008, 1) dependent on specific cultural and/or societal expectations (Berens and Van Riel 2004, 168; Brønn and Vrieni 2001, 209; Husted and Allen 2006, 840), and manifests in different forms such as CSR activities, philanthropic initiatives and business practices (Dahlsrud 2008, 4). From a societal perspective, it is widely accepted that organisations have a responsibility to act in an ethical manner while exhibiting characteristics such as a moral consciousness (Assiouras, Ozgen and Skourtis 2013, 109; Rossouw and Van Vuuren 2010, 88).

While CSR has been investigated comprehensively from a number of disciplines including business ethics, corporate reputation management as well as communication management, more recently the attention has shifted to the study of social networking sites (SNSs) on which CSR messages are communicated to stakeholders and the accompanied benefits thereof. For example, when CSR communication is communicated to stakeholders on SNSs, it has the potential to build “social capital” (Kent and Taylor 2016, 66); it can be used to facilitate stakeholder engagement (Abitbol and Lee 2017, 797); it fosters organisation-stakeholder relationships (Uzunoğlu, Türkel and Akyar 2017, 990); and it cultivates a culture of connection (boyd and Ellison 2007, 211; Huang, Lin and Saxton 2016, 552).

Although a number of studies have contributed to the discourse on CSR, existing research offers limited practical implications with regard to the formulation of culturally-specific CSR communication strategies. Notable exceptions are Kloppers and Fourie (2014), who explored CSR communication in a South African agricultural organisation; Benecke and Oksiutycz (2015) who framed the LeadSA campaign as public relations activism; and Tomaselli (2016) who investigated *Ubuntu* from an intercultural communication perspective. Despite these contributions, the authors argue that descriptive, qualitative findings pertaining to the content of CSR messages that are communicated to stakeholders on SNSs in the South African context are absent from the current body of knowledge. In addition, current scholars have not thoroughly interrogated whether *Ubuntu*-centred communication practices are utilised by South African organisations, especially when CSR-related activities are communicated on SNSs.

To address this gap, the authors aim to provide a brief overview of the CSR activities that are communicated by two South African financial institutions, FNB and Capitec, on two SNSs, namely Facebook and Twitter. Secondly, the authors aim to assess whether the resultant organisation-stakeholder interactions on the SNSs can be regarded as *Ubuntu*-centred. This is achieved by employing criteria derived from a theoretical framework of *Ubuntu*-centred communication practices.

The article is structured as follows: Firstly, it unpacks the theoretical foundation of the research by providing a concise literature review on South African corporate governance and its link to CSR. Thereafter *Ubuntu*, as a culturally-grounded construct,

is explored alongside how *Ubuntu* manifests in communication management models. Following the literature review, the methodology employed to investigate the research issue is presented. The findings of the article are cross-referenced with relevant literature on *Ubuntu* to examine the organisation-stakeholder interactions between FNB and Capitec when CSR messages are communicated on SNSs. Here, extracts from the communicative exchanges between FNB, Capitec and their stakeholders are quoted to illustrate the applied communication management strategies used by FNB and Capitec. Lastly, conclusions drawn from the findings and recommendations for future research are presented.

South African Corporate Governance and Its Link to CSR

The South African CSR discourse, predominantly shaped by the King III (2009) and King IV (2016) reports on corporate governance, is closely aligned to Eurocentric interpretations of this multi-faceted construct. Notions of morality, as postulated by Hume, Kant, Hegel, Durkheim and Habermas, are crystallised in the local strain of ethics and morals, termed *Ubuntu*. This complex term has been associated with values such as “caring, sharing, hospitality, forgiveness, compassion, empathy, honesty, humility, or ‘brotherhood’” (More 2004, 156).

The result of embodying principles of *Ubuntu* in business practices, is the subsequent realisation that organisations should move away from merely acting out of moral duty and self-interest, to performing acts that strengthen societal bonds (More 2004, 157). This ties in with Hegel’s philosophy that one can realise an ethical life if there is a process of “self-reflection” (Beiser 2005, 236). It is further argued that the self-reflection process will teach an individual “to lay aside his own personal interests and opinions, so that he will find his higher freedom and self-awareness in the community” (Hegel in Beiser 2005, 236). Processes of self-scrutiny and moral introspection are evident in the CSR projects such as education and health care programmes and advancing the country’s skills base through leadership development spearheaded by South African organisations (Gleason 2011, 78).

Moreover, organisations and other societal role players reproduce ideological aspects of the CSR discourse in their communicative products. This is apparent in the framing of organisations as responsible corporate citizens who perform acts associated with triple context issues that benefit society and show goodwill towards others (Khomba and Vermaak 2012a, 3475). This is manifested in South African organisations’ annual integrated reports, messages on SNSs as well as the King III and King IV reports (King III 2009, 9; King IV 2016, 24; Porter and Kramer 2006, 81).

According to Rossouw and Van Vuuren (2010, 91), Evan and Freeman proposed in 1993 that organisations should act in the interests of stakeholders for two main reasons. Firstly, stakeholders (consumers, suppliers and employees) have legal rights that are enforceable by law. As such, stakeholders have “legitimate interests [which] grant them

legal protection” (Rossouw and Van Vuuren 2010, 91). Organisations should, therefore, take cognisance of stakeholder rights and act accordingly. Secondly, the standing of “free-market capitalism” came under scrutiny after the industrial revolution along with society’s increasing awareness of organisations’ impact on the environment and communities (Rossouw and Van Vuuren 2010, 91). Consequently, it was proposed by Freeman, Martin and Parmar (2007, 303) that organisations depart from shareholder capitalism to stakeholder capitalism. It is maintained that South African organisations follow Freeman’s stakeholder-inclusive model with regard to corporate governance (Khomba and Vermaak 2012a, 3471; Khomba and Vermaak 2012b, 3512; King IV 2016, 25–26; West 2006, 434).

The shift from the shareholder to the stakeholder model resulted in the evolution of thinking in terms of corporate governance, sustainability and accountability (West 2006, 437). In the South African context, this is evident in the changing development of stakeholder theory as expounded in the King commission’s reports on corporate governance that were published in 1994, 2002 and 2009 (West 2006, 435). The latest report, King IV, was issued by the Institute of Directors on November 1, 2016 (Deloitte 2016; King IV 2016).

Seen as South African organisations’ compass for effective leadership, “characterised by the ethical values of responsibility, accountability, fairness and transparency and based on moral duties,” the King reports are firmly situated within the discourse on *Ubuntu* (King III 2009, 8; King IV 2016, 24). To this extent, the King III report stresses that organisations’ moral duties are articulated by means of *Ubuntu*, which “involves a common purpose in all human endeavour and is based on service to humanity” (King III 2009, 17). The latest report again reiterates the ethos of *Ubuntu* by noting that the interdependence between organisations and society rests on responsible servant leadership, that is, “service to humanity” to achieve mutually beneficial results (King IV 2016, 24).

Similarly, Kayuni and Tambulasi (2012, 73) note in their study of Malawian organisations’ interpretation of CSR that emphasis is placed on “interconnectedness” between organisations and communities. This obliges organisations to demonstrate that they “car[e] for the community” instead of merely being focused on profits (Kayuni and Tambulasi 2012, 73). When analysed critically, Kayuni and Tambulasi (2012, 66; 75) argue that CSR and *Ubuntu* are based on “similar principles” and that “the practice of CSR can be seen to enhance the values of *Ubuntu*.” Since organisations cannot be separated from the sociocultural context in which they operate, a society based on “*Ubuntu* values” will have an impact on the manner in which CSR projects and CSR communication are formulated (Kayuni and Tambulasi 2012, 74). While Khomba and Vermaak (2012b, 3512) stress that *Ubuntu* is generally equated with the practice of good corporate citizenship and CSR in South Africa, it is worthwhile to investigate the sociolinguistic characteristics thereof to delineate it as a cultural construct.

Untangling the Construct of Ubuntu

In South Africa, it is generally accepted that the isiZulu word *Ubuntu* means community, humanness and unity (Broodryk 2006a, 20; Van Deventer 2015, 2). Notwithstanding that individuals commonly use *Ubuntu* in everyday conversations, it also has corresponding translations in the eleven official languages spoken in South Africa (see Table 1).

Table 1: Translations of *Ubuntu* in South Africa's eleven official languages

Official language	Corresponding translation of <i>Ubuntu</i>
Afrikaans	<i>Menslikheid</i>
English	Humanness
isiNdebele	<i>Ubuntu</i>
isiXhosa	<i>Ubuntu</i>
isiZulu	<i>Ubuntu</i>
Sesotho sa Leboa / Sepedi	<i>Botho</i>
Sesotho	<i>Botho</i>
Setswana	<i>Botho</i>
siSwati	<i>Bundu</i>
Tshivenda	<i>Vhuthu</i>
Xitsonga	<i>Vumunhu</i>

The seemingly uncomplicated word has various layers of connotative meaning entrenched in it. When investigated from a perspective of African morality and ethics, Mangaliso (2001, 24) describes the philosophical underpinnings of *Ubuntu* as an act of “humaneness” that both collective entities and individuals display towards each other. Societal members, thus, exhibit *Ubuntu* in “a pervasive spirit” to manifest “caring and community, harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness” (Mangaliso 2001, 24).

Mangaliso (2001, 31), Kayuni and Tambulasi (2012, 67) along with Van Deventer (2015, 2), argue that there are certain universal values that underscore the construct. Values such as humanity, empathy, compassion and dignity are part of the moral composition of various cultures, but *Ubuntu* emphasises a “universal humanity” and that individuals “share universal concern for one another” (Kayuni and Tambulasi 2012, 67). In this regard, Arnoldi-Van der Walt (2000) draws on the anthropological origins of *Ubuntu*. She notes that communities who had to band together for survival purposes developed strong kinship relations. Although solidarity and collective unity are universal values, *Ubuntu* is a South African culturally-grounded construct that incorporates authentic Afrocentric value-based behaviour within the socio-economic, cultural and political spheres (Arnoldi-Van der Walt 2000, 116; Broodryk 2006b, 52; Maserumule 2011, 289; Van Deventer 2015, 2).

Within the social, environmental and cultural context *Ubuntu* has a strong developmental focus that is “people oriented” and stresses “interdependence, sympathy for the unfortunate,” collective endeavour, dignity, inclusiveness, loyalty, trust, empowerment, continuous dialogue and story-telling (Arnoldi-Van der Walt 2000, 126–132). Broodryk (2006b, 52) corroborates this by listing the five underlying values of *Ubuntu* namely humanness, caring, sharing, respect and compassion.

To contextualise the values that underpin *Ubuntu*, key linguistic phrases associated with the construct have to be examined. The first core principle of *Ubuntu* is solidarity and personhood. Solidarity is evident in the phrase *munhu munhu* (a man is a man through others, or I am because we are) (Arnoldi-Van der Walt 2000, 113; 116). The complete Xitsonga phrase is *munhu † munhu hi van ’wana* (you are who you are because of other people). The same expression is found in isiZulu, namely *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person through others) (Mangaliso 2001, 24; Khomba and Vermaak 2012b, 3511). This entails that “a person becomes a person only through his/her relationship and recognition by others” (Mangaliso 2001, 24). Broodryk (2006b, 53) concurs by stating “a living human being deserves recognition by all other human beings.”

In Tshivenda, *Vhuthu* is derived from the noun *muthu* (human being or a person) (Van Deventer 2015, 3). Described as an abstract construct that is very difficult to translate, Van Deventer (2015, 3) notes that both *Ubuntu* and *Vhuthu* can only be interpreted by means of “narrative experiences, ... reflections on personal involvement, listening to stories [and] observations.” The fact that the construct cannot be delineated and/or translated without providing sufficient narration or additional linguistic content, illustrates that *Ubuntu* can only be discussed alongside qualitative interpretations thereof.

The second principle of *Ubuntu* is a continuation of the first, namely that a specific manner of conduct with regard to human relations is exhibited by communities with the aim to prioritise the safety, welfare and dignity of others before one’s own (Arnoldi-Van der Walt 2000, 113; Broodryk 2006b, 53; Khomba and Vermaak 2012a, 3472). Purposeful relationships are, therefore, forged based on values such as “respect, dignity, acceptance and care” to exemplify “a spirit of service” (Arnoldi-Van der Walt 2000, 113–114). Moreover, Broodryk (2006b, 52) notes that *Ubuntu* is expressed in the manner in which individuals treat others. This is normally characterised by the equal and respectful treatment of others with the aim of constructively developing other human beings (Arnoldi-Van der Walt 2000, 113; Broodryk 2006b, 52; West 2006, 440).

Notably, Arnoldi-Van der Walt (2000, 114) argues that *Ubuntu* only manifests by means of social actions and interactions between social agents. Broodryk (2006a, 21) contributes to this line of reasoning by proposing transparency and participation are required to create mutually beneficial relationships that exhibit characteristics such as solidarity, support, communalism and cooperation.

From a societal perspective, organisations are conceived as entities that continuously engage with members of society and have responsibilities to fulfil towards its shareholders, stakeholders and the communities in which they operate (Assiouras, Ozgen and Skourtis 2013, 109; Khomba and Vermaak 2012a, 3478). The global stance on organisation-stakeholder interactions portrays organisations that exhibit humanistic values, a sound social consciousness along with high levels of stakeholder engagement as good corporate citizens that enact CSR (Brønn and Vrioni 2001; Derwall 2007; Smith 2003; Williams and Aguilera 2008). This is also the case in South Africa although organisations specifically draw on the principles of *Ubuntu* to govern their business operations and communication management practices (Khomba and Vermaak 2012a, 3472).

Communication Management and *Ubuntu*

Arnoldi-Van der Walt (2000), Mangaliso (2001), Broodryk (2006a; 2006b), West (2006) as well as Khomba and Vermaak (2012a; 2012b) investigate *Ubuntu* as an integral part of Afrocentric management approaches. They note that the principles of *Ubuntu* can have strategic importance in organisations that fuse notions of solidarity, inclusiveness and reciprocity in both their core values and their communicative products (Arnoldi-Van der Walt 2000, 111; Broodryk 2006a, 20; Mangaliso 2001, 24). Within an organisational context, this translates into “cooperation, trust ... and co-creation” by means of instilling values such as “respect, human dignity and teamwork” (Arnoldi-Van der Walt 2000, 121).

Whereas traditional organisational management systems focus on success and “self-reliant individualist drives” that make people “competitive, ambitious and achievement-oriented,” the *Ubuntu*-based value system stresses collectivist and participatory endeavour and striving for the greater good of the community (Arnoldi-Van der Walt 2000, 119–120). This is echoed by Mangaliso (2001, 24), Broodryk (2006b, 54), Maserumule (2011, 289) and West (2006, 444) who note that individual progress and achievements are important but should never be to the detriment of other individuals.

Moreover, West (2006, 445) posits that “cultural diversity within a universalist ethical framework suggests that a society’s values be mirrored and best expressed in institutions that are consistent with those values.” As already noted, South African organisations have moved from a shareholder to a stakeholder-inclusive approach that is based on African values and the philosophy of *Ubuntu*. The manifestation of the stakeholder-inclusive approach is most clearly presented in organisations’ CSR programmes. This is linked to the expectation that organisations have to exhibit organisational “involvement” in an attempt to reach developmental targets and to fulfil their role of active corporate citizens (Kloppers and Fourie 2014, 310).

Skinner and Mersham (2008, 248) draw on Hall (1959) as well as Sriramesh and White (1992) to illustrate that communication and culture are intertwined. They contend

that communication professionals, whether public relations strategists or communication managers, are tasked with communicating CSR programmes to stakeholders. This compels organisations to critically assess how they can constructively engage with stakeholders to bring about tangible change and meet stakeholder expectations with regard to issues such as economic, social or environmental challenges (Assiouras, Ozgen and Skourtis 2013, 109; Benecke and Oksiutycz 2015, 816; King III 2009, 102; King IV 2016, 25). The onus, therefore, rests on organisations to use culturally-specific communication and public relations models that are aligned to the societal needs of countries in transition, such as South Africa (Kloppers and Fourie 2014, 309; Skinner and Mersham 2008, 249). At the core of this task is the reformulation of public relations practitioners as “change agents” who actively propagate causes and fulfil the “social purpose and social accountability dimensions of public relations” (Benecke and Oksiutycz 2015, 817; Skinner and Mersham 2008, 249).

While numerous generic communication management and public relations models have been developed in Europe and the United States of America, these models are based on “Eurocentric philosophies,” such as individual freedom and liberty that are not always applicable to African contexts (Mersham, Skinner and Rensburg 2011, 196). A number of contributions have focused on Africa. Authors such as Skinner and Mersham (2008), Mersham, Skinner and Rensburg (2011), Nkomo (2011), Khomba and Vermaak (2012a) as well as Tindall and Holtzhausen (2012) are proponents of new, hybrid and holistic communication and organisational management models that incorporate African moral philosophy. Broadly interpreted, the holistic, Afrocentric model not only stresses communication professionals’ role in bringing about change and achieving developmental goals, but also frames “communication practice as activism” (Tindall and Holtzhausen 2012, 382).

In this regard, Arnoldi-Van der Walt (2000, 196) proposes a holistic communication management model based on four universal core values, namely “respect, dignity, acceptance and care.” Although the four core values are universal, they also take on culturally-specific dimensions within South African organisations since communication not only facilitates but also strengthens interactions between stakeholders. This “audience-centred approach” incorporates humanistic values to establish “relationships based on trust, commitment, satisfaction and shared values” (Tindall and Holtzhausen 2012, 372; 375).

While the focus remains firmly on stakeholders, Mangaliso (2001, 25) argues that organisations can also benefit from humanistic models since competitive advantage can be created by means of *Ubuntu*-centred communication. This is supported by the supposition that this type of communication is based on the creation of dialogue or conversation and fostering “personal rapport” with communication participants to establish and reinforce relationships (Mangaliso 2001, 26). The resultant effects of this communication are narrowing the social distance between individuals and bringing forth

“concerted action that is adaptable” (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars in Mangaliso 2001, 25).

According to Broodryk (2006a, 22), when organisations’ values are based on *Ubuntu*, their communicative products will convey “a positive message of service and not harsh profit.” This crystallises into caring for communities by means of providing products and/or services that aim to meet the needs of the nation or specific communities (Broodryk 2006a, 22; Kayuni and Tambulasi 2012, 67; Khomba and Vermaak 2012a, 3472). It also entails doing what is morally right and acting with integrity (Broodryk 2006b, 55; West 2006, 443).

SNSs as Engagement Platforms

The preceding section offered a succinct overview of *Ubuntu*-centred management approaches and the communicative practices organisations would use, in theory, signal their willingness to address societal concerns (Dahlsrud 2008). It was noted that within an Afrocentric context, organisations should focus on culturally specific values that underscore not only their CSR activities but also their CSR messages. Following a holistic, South African communication management approach, the communal aspects that are inherent to SNSs, such as the formation of communities that share experiences, participate in open dialogue and share mutual trust, tie in with the key principles of *Ubuntu*. SNSs can, therefore, be regarded as appropriate media to disseminate information regarding CSR activities to stakeholders as SNSs reinforce the underlying values of *Ubuntu*.

SNSs afford organisations several means to facilitate communication with their stakeholders. Various theorists have highlighted the benefits of actively engaging with stakeholders on SNSs, namely organisations become sharers of experiences (Clark 2001, 264); open debate patterns are established (boyd and Ellison 2007, 211); stakeholder sentiment can be gauged that enables organisations to respond proactively to stakeholder needs (Steenkamp and Rensburg, 2016, 79; Qualman 2013, 213); core brand values and performative organisational identities are signalled to stakeholders (Hammack 2008, 234); a “culture of connection” is established between organisations and stakeholders (boyd and Ellison 2007, 211); and tightknit, online communities are formed based on mutual trust (Barrigar 2013, 26; 31).

To this extent, SNSs are not merely viewed as communication channels, but platforms on which stakeholder engagement can be achieved. Abitbol and Lee (2017, 797) highlight that CSR communication on SNSs has the potential to facilitate stakeholder engagement and the co-creation of “shared value” for stakeholders. Although their study only aggregated stakeholder engagement according to the number of comments, likes and shares of CSR communication, they found that purposeful messages, relevant topics and multimedia messages prompted stakeholders to engage with the organisation’s communication (Abitbol and Lee 2017, 803).

Similarly, Kent and Taylor (2016, 64) argue that dialogue on SNSs can only be truly achieved when there is “personalised responsiveness,” that is, when organisations “respond to questions and comments from individual stakeholders privately.” This could be achieved by means of direct messages (DM) on Twitter and Facebook although the majority of organisations still respond to stakeholders publicly (i.e. response posts are visible on public Facebook and Twitter timelines) (Kent and Taylor 2016, 64). Uzunoglu, Türkel and Akyar (2017, 989–990) also propagate “dialogical CSR” and propose that increased engagement on SNSs is dependent on “consumer participatory experience.” The latter, they propose, can be achieved through building strong relationships by means of interactivity, being reciprocal while interacting with stakeholders, using “sincere communication,” and achieving “mutual understanding” (Uzunoglu, Türkel and Akyar 2017, 990).

The various relationship and engagement-building strategies outlined here can also be related to an earlier Afrocentric communication framework formulated by Skinner and Mersham (2008) since their framework draws on similar key engagement strategies. Although this framework does not focus on interactions on SNSs, the authors use it as a basis to articulate a new framework for communicating CSR messages on SNSs.

Theoretical Framework of *Ubuntu*-centred Communication Practices

Regarded as a seminal text that provides clear translations of phrases that occur within the discourse on *Ubuntu*, the authors utilise Skinner and Mersham’s (2008, 251) three key philosophical principles of an *Ubuntu*-centred communication framework as a point of departure upon which to formulate an expanded framework. The three principles in the original framework are mutuality, respect and harmonious relations (Skinner and Mersham 2008, 251). Firstly, *isandla sigezesinye* refers to mutuality, support and reciprocity in the context of human interaction. Loosely translated, the phrase means one hand washes the other. This phrase stresses reciprocity since an individual helps to return a favour. Secondly, *ukuhlonishwana kabile* entails the reciprocation of respect (Skinner and Mersham 2008, 251). When translated, the phrase means respect breeds respect or that respect goes both ways: you respect me, therefore, I respect you. Lastly, *ukulingisa endaweni ubuhlobo babantu* is related to the creation of “harmonious world relations with others” (Skinner and Mersham 2008, 251). The direct translation of this phrase means that when a place or environment is fixed or repaired, it results in kinship or communal peace/harmony among people. Interestingly, the isiZulu verbs *ukulungisa* (to fix or repair) and *ukulingisa* (to act) can be used interchangeably in this context. As such, when one acts in a caring manner (performs the role of a mender), it results in the strengthening of communal bonds.

The authors propose that the issues outlined by Skinner and Mersham (2008) could be expanded to include additional principles that underscore that *Ubuntu*-centred

communication practices. Drawing on existing literature, the following framework aimed at communication on SNSs is presented. It lists additional communicative characteristics and practical examples related to CSR communication disseminated on SNSs:

- The creation of *mutual trust* is facilitated by showing interest in stakeholder responses and supplying adequate feedback on SNSs. This has a positive impact on corporate reputation (Walther and Bunz 2005, 831).
- *Informal socialisation* and oral communication are the norm in African cultures (Broodryk 2006b, 54; Tindall and Holtzhausen 2012, 374). When an organisation uses a friendly, sincere tone when interacting with stakeholders, it is portrayed as an approachable, social entity.
- The *inclusion of archetypes* such as the Caregiver in CSR narratives aims to elicit greater stakeholder involvement. Woodside (2010, 531) proposes that storytelling “move[s] audiences to action,” whereas only passing on information or lecturing to the audience about a certain topic elicits less visible responses.
- In an *Ubuntu-centred* culture, *conflict resolution* is addressed by listening attentively, discussing the matter, responding with empathy and by being regarded as approachable (Broodryk 2006a, 21; Broodryk 2006b, 52; Mangaliso 2001, 32). Organisations should exhibit negotiation, tolerance, patience and diplomacy when conflict situations arise on SNSs (Broodryk 2006b, 52). This is congruent to the Afrocentric notion that “transparency and trust replace suspicion and hostility” (Mangaliso 2001, 32). Acknowledgment of an individual’s needs is also crucial and is regarded as the “first step toward agreement and cooperation” (Mangaliso 2001, 32).
- Stakeholders should also be involved in proposing *mutually beneficial solutions* to socio-economic challenges. Following this line of reasoning, SNSs could be regarded as open platforms that afford stakeholders the opportunity to exhibit agency which results in the reversal of the conventional two-way model of communication (Skinner and Mersham 2008, 250; Uzunoğlu, Türkel and Akyar 2017, 990). In these instances, stakeholders communicate their “developmental” needs to organisations instead of organisations that merely disseminate CSR messages to a wide audience (Skinner and Mersham 2008, 250; Mersham, Skinner and Rensburg 2011, 200; Maserumule 2011, 293). Citizen participation, as Maserumule (2011, 293) terms it, fosters democratic societies when linked to developmental goals and offers citizens the opportunity to define, choose and achieve “societal goals.” The participatory model made possible by SNSs, therefore, provides both social agents the opportunity to engage in dialogue, identify needs and negotiate transparent solutions (Kayuni and Tambulasi 2012, 73).
- Lastly, when organisations thank stakeholders for their engagement on the SNSs, *goodwill* towards the organisation is created. Retweeting positive messages,

launching competitions and celebrating nation-specific achievements (i.e. when the national soccer, rugby or cricket team perform well), all contribute to the creation of positive sentiment. This is associated with the belief that goodwill is created by means of “periodic celebrations to punctuate achievement” (Mangaliso 2001, 32). Goodwill is also created by means of providing items for *mahala*. *Mahala* is Setswana for giving something free of charge without expecting something in return (Broodryk 2006b, 53). When organisations launch online applications such as banking apps for free and share consumer advice, reciprocity is created.

The next section of the article outlines the methodology employed by the authors to explore whether FNB’s and Capitec’s CSR communication on their SNSs exhibited characteristics of *Ubuntu*-centred communication as outlined in the proposed expanded theoretical framework.

METHODOLOGY

This research followed a phenomenological research paradigm to explore how FNB and Capitec communicate CSR to their stakeholders and to assess whether the CSR messages and interactions with stakeholders on Facebook and Twitter exhibited characteristics of *Ubuntu*-centred communication. Classified as an explorative study, purposeful, non-probability sampling was employed (Babbie and Mouton 2001, 288; Burns 2000, 389).

Sampling and Data Collection

FNB and Capitec were purposefully selected as the units of analysis since the two South African financial institutions have different missions, corporate identities and brand values. The first sampling unit was limited to FNB’s and Capitec’s CSR communication. All other communicative content not focused on CSR, such as information about products, services, careers and trading hours, was excluded from the research. The second sampling unit was the SNSs on which FNB’s and Capitec’s CSR communication was disseminated, namely Facebook and Twitter. All CSR-related messages were studied for a six-month period from September 2013 to February 2014.

The data collection process comprised of collecting data from the two financial institutions’ SNSs. FNB’s two Twitter accounts, one organisational account, @FNBSA, and one active online persona, @RBJacobs, along with its Facebook account were surveyed. In total, FNB’s accounts yielded 2 642 messages (208 original CSR messages and 2 434 stakeholder comments) that were analysed. The survey of Capitec’s official Twitter account, @CapitecBankSA, and its Facebook account provided the authors with 94 messages (17 original CSR messages and 77 stakeholder comments) that were analysed.

Data Analysis

Interpretative discourse analysis along with two text analytics tools, namely Leximancer and Centim, were used to analyse the data. Leximancer and Centim are categorised as computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) programmes that assisted in identifying main themes central to the CSR discourse used by the two financial institutions. Both programmes integrate natural language processing (NLP) to convert unstructured textual data obtained from SNSs into quantitative and visual reports (Consulta 2014, 1). The programmes were able to extract linguistic content from the surveyed SNSs, categorise the content (CSR-related communication from FNB and Capitec along with stakeholders' comments and retweets). The programmes were used alongside the manual coding categories (i.e. the identified theoretical *Ubuntu*-centred communicative practices) to verify and confirm the authors' interpretation of the data.

Interpretative discourse analysis was an appropriate second data analysis method as *Ubuntu* can only comprehensively be decoded by means of narration. The qualitative findings are also regarded as rich and meaningful as the participatory effects of CSR communication, in this context, were observed by means of stakeholders' verbal responses on FNB's and Capitec's SNSs.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FNB and Capitec's CSR Activities

The first section of the findings briefly outlines the two financial institutions' CSR activities as communicated on their SNSs.

FNB was involved in a number of CSR activities that were described in detail in its annual integrated report and on its website. Although not all of the FirstRand Foundation's CSR initiatives were communicated on FNB's SNSs, two notable cause-related marketing campaigns, "You can help" ("Stories of help") and "Ideas can help," were featured on Facebook and Twitter. The former served as a platform where non-profit organisations could feature their work and the latter was a competition for South African innovators.

The following categorisation of FNB's CSR messages is based on 90 Facebook posts, 88 tweets composed by @FNBSA and 30 tweets by @RBJacobs: 107 messages were related to the "You can help" (Stories of help) campaign; 58 messages focused on the "Ideas can help" campaign; 34 messages communicated FNB's various sponsorships such as Varsity Football, Varsity Cup rugby, FNB Johannesburg Art Fair, FNB Varsity Sports Beach Volleyball and Rugby 7s, and the #PinkShorts campaign against violence against women; five messages were about FNB's NekNomination (nominated to participate in charitable giving by donating goods to the Dlala Nje Community Centre in Hillbrow); three messages focused on consumer advice (investment advice offered by financial advisors); and one message relayed information about FNB's paper-savings

initiative (environmental awareness). The categorisation shows that FNB utilised Facebook and Twitter regularly to communicate various CSR activities to stakeholders. The regular posting of CSR messages (i.e. 208 original messages over a six-month period) on SNSs is also indicative of a concerted communication effort to disseminate frequent information pertaining to its CSR activities to stakeholders.

In contrast to FNB's CSR activities that were explicitly communicated on Facebook and Twitter, Capitec did not communicate its primary CSR initiatives to its stakeholders on its SNSs. The subsequent categorisation is based on six Facebook posts and 11 tweets on @CapitecBankSA's Twitter timeline: ten messages focused on consumer advice (understanding one's salary advice, money saving tips, smishing, and planning a budget); five messages depicted Capitec as a responsible financial institution due to its cost-saving culture; and two messages focused on its 'donation' to G4S/Cancer Buddies. Although fewer messages were disseminated, the CSR communication focused on education and leadership, financial life skills programmes, donations and community involvement.

Since only 17 original CSR messages were disseminated over the six-month data collection period, Capitec's CSR communication is regarded as parsimonious and its communication predominantly focused on "publicity" (Benecke and Oksiutycz 2015, 818; Skinner and Mersham 2008, 241). To illustrate this, Capitec widely publicised its joint donation with G4S (a security organisation) to Cancer Buddies/People Living with Cancer on Facebook. Upon closer examination, it was revealed that Capitec only exchanged 5 cent coins that G4S donated and deposited the money into Cancer Buddies' bank account without charging the organisation transaction fees. The creation of shared value for G4S, Capitec and Cancer Buddies was also lacking from the communication. This is clearly an example of pantomime CSR (Jahdi and Acikdilli 2009, 105). Capitec simply performed a charitable act and communicated it to stakeholders without it being aligned to its core CSR initiatives as listed in its annual integrated report. The act is, thus, not strategic but cosmetic since the impact and societal benefits thereof were not explicitly mentioned (Porter and Kramer 2006; Skinner and Mersham 2008).

The subsequent section addresses the final aim of this article, namely to identify whether FNB's and Capitec's CSR communication and resultant organisation-stakeholder interactions on Facebook and Twitter exhibited characteristics of *Ubuntu*-centred communicative practices. To achieve this, the characteristics derived from the theoretical framework of this article are used alongside selected verbatim quotations of the financial institutions' CSR communication and interactions on the surveyed SNSs. Since Capitec did not formulate frequent CSR messages, the majority of the verbatim quotations and examples are drawn from FNB's communication. Where applicable, additional theoretical sources are cross-referenced to support the authors' interpretation of the communication.

Informal Socialisation and the Creation of Mutual Trust

According to Broodryk (2006b, 54), informal socialisation that entails friendly greetings are the norm in African cultures. Both FNB and Capitec used a friendly, sincere tone when replying to stakeholders' comments and/or complaints. The financial institutions' messages contained a salutation ("Hi"; "Hi there"; or "Hi" along with the stakeholder's name) and a closing ("Regards" or "Kind regards"). This portrayed the financial institutions as social entities that acknowledge their stakeholders. Furthermore, FNB's online persona, @RBJacobs, was very approachable and social toward stakeholders. The persona often made jokes and used emoticons in its replies to stakeholders. For example, @RBJacobs replied to a stakeholder who asked about FNB's paper-savings initiative in a humorous manner:

FNB: Hi [stakeholder's name], Mother Nature will bless you with shade, clouds with silver linings, shooting stars, rainbows and sunsets (FNB Facebook).

FNB succeeded in the creation of mutual trust by acting sociably, as well as through sending frequent messages on Facebook and on its two Twitter accounts. Moreover, FNB's SNS administrators showed interest in stakeholder responses, supplied adequate feedback when stakeholders posed questions or posted complaints, and informed stakeholders of periods of absence during long weekends. The following serves as an example of a "humanised" response used by FNB (Cho and Huh 2010, 45):

Stakeholder: I've blocked myself from internet banking, and I've tried to reset my password numerous times but it didn't accept!

FNB: Hi [stakeholder's name], I'm sorry to hear this. Please contact 087 575 0000. They will assist you directly. Regards, RB Jacobs (FNB Facebook).

However, Capitec did not convincingly foster mutual trust between the financial institution and its stakeholders on SNSs when CSR messages are communicated. This is based on the observation that Capitec did not act sociably with its stakeholders. Its replies to stakeholders were infrequent and lacked "social content" (Walther and Bunz 2005, 831). Moreover, its replies to stakeholders were predictable (automated) and the responses were only focused on solving problems. In the following excerpts, the predictable, uncreative responses to stakeholder concerns are noticeable:

Capitec: @[Stakeholder's name] If you receive bad service, please report it & be as specific as possible so we can act accordingly.

@[Stakeholder's name] Please report it via the link provided (Capitec Twitter @CapitecBankSA).

Storytelling and the Use of Archetypes

Ubuntu-centred interactions are based on “oral communication” (Tindall and Holtzhausen 2012, 374). FNB accomplished a strong CSR narrative by employing storytelling techniques and included archetypes in its communication. The “You can help” campaign, in particular, portrayed FNB in the archetypal role of Caregiver and the communication encouraged FNB’s stakeholders to also embody the role of Caregiver. The following Facebook posts illustrate this:

FNB: At FNB we believe that we can change the world for the better, one idea at a time. Helpful ideas lead to impactful innovations that can make a difference to those around us.

Stakeholder: Dear FNB, This is a great Initiative by FNB [green building interlocking brick innovation] and I’m very much honored to take part in it... [sic].

FNB: FNB You can help: Food can help – Lillian Sekeba runs the Re Ya Gola centre for orphaned children in Ebony Park, Gauteng. The centre provides food and clothing for over 100 children. However, it is too small to house them on a fulltime basis, so at night they return to their parent-less homes. For six days a week these children are cared for – they receive food to eat, help with their homework and a caring, safe environment. See Lillian’s inspiring story of help here: [hyperlink to YouTube].

Stakeholder: Please could you advise how to contact the centre.

Stakeholder: FNB go go 4ward 2 hlp people [sic].

Stakeholder: Am so impressed with love, nurturing that is taken place there, as I also have a passion 4 kids and veterans [...] so Mum keep up the good work ... I would like to help someday [sic].

Stakeholder: Its really inspiring [sic] (FNB Facebook).

FNB fulfilled the *Ubuntu* value of caring by briefly telling stories about individuals who have overcome great obstacles with the help of non-profit organisations, for example. The active responses from their stakeholders who then decided to participate in and/or donate to social causes clearly show that FNB successfully influenced them to respond to the CSR projects with empathy, sympathy, helpfulness and charitableness (Broodryk 2006b, 52).

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution in an *Ubuntu*-centred culture is achieved by means of empathetic responses, being open and approachable, and discussing issues (Broodryk 2006a, 21; Broodryk 2006b, 52; Mangaliso 2001, 32). FNB fulfilled this role very well. By means of its online persona @RBJacobs, it empathised with stakeholders and tried to solve any problems experienced by them. Furthermore, *Ubuntu*-centred communication practices focus on negotiation, tolerance, patience and diplomacy in conflict situations (Broodryk 2006b, 52). In events where FNB’s reputation was threatened by negative stakeholder sentiment, FNB firstly apologised to the stakeholder and then aimed to

take the conversation ‘offline’ to negotiate solutions to the stakeholder’s problem away from the scrutiny of other Facebook or Twitter users. The following excerpts show negative stakeholder responses and, although the responses were not related to FNB’s CSR initiatives, the interactions are indicative of how FNB responded in a friendly, non-aggressive manner with the aim of obtaining information about what caused the negative sentiment.

Stakeholder: FNB is rubbish I hate their useless and pathetic service FNB is a no go!!!!!!!!!!!!
[sic]

FNB: Hi [stakeholder’s name], This sounds very serious. What happened? I would like to assist if I can. RB Jacobs (FNB Facebook).

Stakeholder: FNB is the new ABSA #QueuesForDays [sic]

FNB: @[stakeholder’s name] Apologies, which branch is that?

@[stakeholder’s name] Kindly inbox branch query to rbjacobs@fnb.co.za (incl ID & Tel) [sic] (FNB Twitter @RBJacobs).

Mutually Beneficial Solutions

FNB’s “Ideas can help” and “You can help” campaigns addressed serious issues such as unemployment, scarcity of potable water, and renewable energy. Not only did FNB communicate its own CSR initiatives on its SNSs, it also relayed non-profit organisations’ causes to stakeholders and introduced the “Ideas can help” competition where innovators were given the opportunity to compete for seed funding. By means of the CSR communication on its blog and SNSs, FNB created a communication space that the authors term an online or digital *imbizo*. According to Broodryk (2006a, 21), an *imbizo* “takes the form of a mass congregation or public meeting.” An *imbizo* is, thus, regarded as a formal event where important issues are discussed. Since young inventors could propose sustainable solutions to socio-economic challenges, FNB’s SNSs enabled stakeholders and innovators to discuss salient issues on a variety of public forums.

Moreover, democratic participation in the form of voting was included in the “Ideas can help” campaign. This involved stakeholders in the decision-making process and solidified the notion that stakeholders could become actively involved in identifying and solving societal needs. This was evident in how stakeholders engaged with the financial institution on its SNSs when it communicated proposed solutions/inventions pertaining to water scarcity and assistance to disabled individuals. The following conversation string serves as substantiation that FNB and its stakeholders used constructive engagement to reach “consensus” pertaining to an identified need (Skinner and Mersham 2008, 250). The online interaction or collaboration with regard to the rural wheelchair innovation showed that stakeholders actively shared information aimed at addressing a particular need and/or refining the proposed invention:

FNB: Rural Wheelchair is designed to assist and transport ill people from their homes to their local clinics. The wheelchair was built to cope with uneven terrain and narrow footpaths on hillsides that are often problematic in rural areas. [sic]

Stakeholder: think you should make it tri wheeled. [sic]

Stakeholder: Great idea indeed, our rural communities are often neglected and it a good thing that there are people who are designing things that will make their lives easier. Thumbs up!

Stakeholder: Good idea how can I get for my younger sister? (FNB Facebook).

Goodwill

The final characteristic of *Ubuntu*-centred communication that was investigated is the creation of goodwill. It is argued that goodwill is created on SNSs by means of engaging with stakeholders, showing appreciation for stakeholder support, and providing items or products free of charge. In this regard, both FNB and Capitec thanked stakeholders for their engagement on the SNSs. FNB did this exceptionally well by explicitly showing appreciation for stakeholders' interactions:

FNB: To all our wonderful customers supporting the pre-semi finals[.] Thanks for your response. [sic]

Hi [stakeholder's name] That is wonderful advice. Thanks for your comment. Regards, RB Jacobs.

Love the enthusiam [stakeholder's name] Thanks. [sic]

[Stakeholder's name] – Wise words from a wise man. Thank you kindly for your support. Much appreciated. Always here to help out and have a pleasant evening further. Regards, RBJ (FNB Facebook).

A sense of goodwill was also achieved by retweeting positive messages and by launching competitions for the best rugby or football supporters. Moreover, FNB's "Ideas can help" innovation competition celebrated extraordinary inventions and innovators. To further encourage participation, stakeholders who supported the competition could win a weekly cash prize of R3 000 if they were selected as the supporter of the week. The prizes would, in theory, not only enhance stakeholder participation but also reward stakeholders' engagement with the CSR communication and the competitions.

Additionally, reciprocity and sharing "one's knowledge," that underline *Ubuntu*-centred communication practices, were evident in Capitec's interactions with its stakeholders (Mersham, Skinner and Rensburg 2011, 197). For example, Capitec created additional value for its stakeholders by means of money saving tips, its mobile Internet banking app and consumer advice articles:

Capitec: Do you know what smishing is? ... www.capitecbank.co.za Identity theft is a real threat to the safety of your bank account. Find out more about what you can do to protect yourself from it now.

Stakeholder: I love dat. [sic]

Stakeholder: Very interesting read (Capitec Facebook).

Capitec: Clever ways to cut back on schooling costs: [hyperlink].

Stakeholder: Loving this @CapitecBankSA mobile app for internet banking! Now this is innovation...Banking made truly simple [sic] (Capitec Twitter @CapitecBankSA).

The selected interactions show that CSR communication on SNSs facilitated dialogue and contributed to fostering organisation-stakeholder relationships. It is also suggested that stakeholders found the information shared by Capitec useful and helpful.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The particular brand of corporate governance and corporate citizenship displayed by South African organisations fosters a more “inclusive” management approach when compared to corporate environments in the United States of America and the United Kingdom (West 2006, 445). This can be ascribed to the values that underpin the “communitarian nature” of South Africa’s corporate environment (West 2006, 439). In this regard various organisations incorporate *Ubuntu* values in their management and communication approaches as it is a “practical philosophy” for all societal members that aims to “restore positive social values” (Broodryk 2006b, 54).

Organisations such as FNB that employ *Ubuntu*-centred communication management strategies in their CSR communicative products, disseminate culturally-specific communication that is aligned to societal needs and aim to maximise “social benefits” (Skinner and Mersham 2008, 241; Djelic 2012, 11). The shift from individualistic management approaches to developmental and humanistic methods affords organisations various benefits. From a developmental stance, the organisation focuses on solidarity, collective endeavour and caring for people. The resultant corporate communication within the humanistic approach (*Ubuntu*-centred communication) strengthens relationships and has the ability to create mutual trust and goodwill; establish strong narratives; emphasise cohesion; resolve conflict according to specific cultural norms; and result in mutually beneficial solutions to societal challenges.

Although humanistic CSR communication can be regarded as a universal practice, this research aimed to address the gap in the existing body of knowledge pertaining to how South African organisations communicate CSR messages to their stakeholders on SNSs. It was proposed that SNSs, that have communal and collective purposes, are ideal platforms on which CSR communication should be disseminated. Within the South African context, the underlying purposes that underpin SNSs also relate to *Ubuntu* values.

SNSs, where stakeholders can be recognised and acknowledged, present organisations with new avenues to initiate CSR dialogue and conversation. This, in turn, reinforces relationships and evokes humanistic responses in stakeholders. Purposeful CSR communication, as exhibited by FNB, resulted in observable stakeholder behavioural reactions. The financial institution's concerted and strategic CSR communication guided its stakeholders to become actively involved in its CSR projects such as the "You can help" and "Ideas can help" campaigns.

The value of strong CSR messages is voiced by Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (in Mersham, Skinner and Rensburg 2011, 198) who state that "human relationships and communitarianism" make "all economic activity sustainable." As such, organisations that operate from a stakeholder approach and communicate their CSR programmes in a "more natural" manner on SNSs, create novel opportunities for enhanced organisation-stakeholder interactions (Khoza in West 2006, 444).

This article only focused on two South African financial institutions' CSR messages on SNSs. Future research studies could include other South African financial institutions such as Absa, Investec, Nedbank and Standard Bank to ascertain whether the CSR messages and stakeholder engagement strategies used by these organisations correlate or differ from the strategies employed by FNB and Capitec. Additional benchmarking studies could also be conducted in other countries to determine if developmental communication models that propagate culturally-specific CSR messages evoke the same responses in stakeholders as the *Ubuntu*-centred approach.

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