A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR AN ONLINE POLITICAL BRAND PERSONA FROM A SOCIAL MEDIA-BASED POLITICAL BRAND STORYTELLING PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Little is still known in the South African context regarding how political brands can use political brand storytelling with an online political brand persona on social media to differentiate a political brand from the opposition. What is also not clear is how the online political brand persona can successfully position political issues for the political consumer. To address the current paucity of research, this qualitative cross-sectional study investigated one political brand's political brand storytelling and use of an online brand persona on social media to propose and empirically verify elements of a conceptual framework as heuristic for political parties to build their online brand personas. In doing so, the study addressed four research questions through semi-structured expert interviews and deductive qualitative content analysis.

The findings provide some invaluable insights, firstly, from communication professionals in South Africa's public relations agencies who are responsible for creating content for political party social media platforms; and secondly, from a South African political brand that is active on the Facebook and Twitter social media platforms. The final proposed elements for the conceptual framework are based on several foundational principles, namely political brand, the political brand strategy, social media political brand voice, creating the in-group, and the online political brand persona. The study's new theoretical contributions consist of three elements, which form the basis of the final conceptual framework. These elements are the foundation (political offering), the transformational process (political issue ownership, political brand strategy, and creating the in-group), and the creation of an online political brand persona. The elements of the framework change constantly because of the nature of the political environment.

Not only does this study address the current paucity of research in South African and African literature, but it also adds to the body of social media research involving South African political parties and the use of political brand storytelling with an online political brand persona on social media.

Keywords: South African political parties, Democratic Alliance, online political brand persona, political branding, political issue ownership, social media, social media-based political brand storytelling.

OPSOMMING

Min is bekend in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks oor hoe politieke handelsmerke politieke handelsmerkstorievertelling met 'n aanlyn politieke handelsmerkpersona op sosiale media kan gebruik om 'n politieke handelsmerk van die opposisie te onderskei. Dit is ook nie duidelik hoe die aanlyn politieke handelsmerkpersona politieke sake suksesvol kan posisioneer vir politieke verbruikers nie. Om die huidige tekort aan navorsing aan te spreek, het hierdie kruis-seksionele studie een politieke handelsmerk se politieke handelsmerkstorievertelling en gebruik van 'n aanlyn handelsmerkpersona op sosiale media ondersoek om elemente van 'n konseptuele raamwerk as heuristies vir politieke partye om hul aanlyn handelsmerkpersonas te bou voor te stel en empiries te bevestig. Die studie het sodoende vier navorsingsvrae deur middel van semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude met kundiges en deduktiewe kwalitatiewe inhoudsontleding aangespreek.

Die bevindinge het waardevolle insigte gelewer; eerstens, vanaf kommunikasiekundiges in Suid-Afrikaanse openbare skakelwese-agentskappe wat verantwoordelik is vir die skepping van inhoud vir politieke partye se sosiale media-platforms; en, tweedens, vanaf 'n Suid-Afrikaanse politieke handelsmerk wat aktief is op die Facebook en Twitter sosiale media-platforms. Die finale voorgestelde elemente vir die konseptuele raamwerk is gebaseer op verskeie grondslagbeginsels, naamlik politieke handelsmerk, die politieke handelsmerkstrategie, sosiale media politieke handelsmerkstem, die skepping van die in-groep, en die aanlyn politieke handelsmerkpersona. Die studie se nuwe teoretiese bydrae bestaan uit drie elemente, wat die basis van die konseptuele raamwerk vorm. Hierdie elemente is die fondament (politieke aanbod), die transformasionele proses (eienaarskap van politiese kwessies, politieke handelsmerkstrategie, en die skepping van die in-groep), en die skepping van 'n aanlyn politieke handelsmerkpersona. Die elemente van die raamwerk verander voortdurend as gevolg van die aard van die politieke omgewing.

Hierdie studie spreek nie net die huidige tekort aan navorsing in Suid-Afrikaanse en Afrika-literatuur aan nie, maar dit dra ook by tot die korpus van sosiale media-navorsing rakende Suid-Afrikaanse politieke partye en die gebruik van politieke handelsmerkstorievertelling met 'n aanlyn politieke handelsmerkpersona op sosiale media.

Sleutelwoorde: Suid-Afrikaanse politieke partye, Demokratiese Alliansie, aanlyn politieke handelsmerkpersona, politieke handelsmerk, politiese kwessie eienaarskap, sosiale media, sosiale media-gebaseerde politieke handelsmerkstorievertelling.

KGUTSUFATSO

Ho sa na le tsebo e nyenyane lehlakoreng la Afrika Borwa mabapi le hore na mekgatlo ya dipolotiki e ka sebedisa letshwao le phetang diketsahalo/dipale tsa mekgatlo ya dipolotiki ka mokgwa wa mokgatlo oo wa polotiki ka bowona ka tshebediso ya khompiyutha (online), bakeng sa ho bontsha phapang pakeng tsa mokgatlo wa polotiki le bahanyetsi ba wona. Hape, taba e sa hlakang ke ya hore na mokgahlo wa dipolotiki ka bowona, ka tshebediso ya khompiyutha (online), o ka kgona na ho bea ditaba tsa polotiki ka mokgwa o atlehileng bakeng sa bankakarolo ho tsa dipolotiki. Ho lokisa taba ya tlhokeho ya diphuputso, thuto ena e nang le boleng le dikarolo tse ngata (qualitative cross-sectional study) e fuputsa letshwao le phetang diketsahalo/dipale tsa mokgatlo o mong wa dipolotiki le tshebediso ya letshwao mokgatlong ka bowona ka mokgwa wa khompiyutha kgasong ya setjhaba (online brand persona on social media), e le ho hlahisa le ho netefatsa ka botlalo dintlha bakeng sa moralo wa mehopolo e fuputsehang hore mekgatlo ya dipolotiki e kgone ho ikaha ka boyona ka tsela ya khompiyutha (online brand persona). Ka ho etsa jwalo, thuto ena e arabile dipotso tse nne tsa diphuputso/diinthaviu tsa ditsebi (semi-structured expert) le manollo e fetohang ya dintlha tsa boleng (deductive qualitative content analysis).

Qalong, diphihlello tsena di fana ka tsebo e senang boleng, ho tloha ho diprofeshenale tsa dipuisano ka hare ho Afrika Borwa ho kemedi ya dikamano tsa botho, e nang le boikarabelo ba ho etsa dihlahiswa bakeng sa diplatefomo tsa kgaso ya setjhaba tsa mekgatlo ya dipolotiki. Sa bobedi, ke ho tswa letshwaong la mokgahlo wa dipolotiki wa Afrika Borwa o sebedisang diplatefomo tsa dikgaso tsa setjhaba tsa Facebook le Twitter. Dikarolo/dintlha tsa ho qetela tse hlahisitsweng tsa meralo ya mehopolo di itshetlehile hodima melao e mmalwa ya motheo, ka mabitso ke: matshwao a mekgatlo ya dipolitiki, leano la mekgatlo ya dipolotiki, lentswe la mekgatlo ya dipolotiki kgasong ya setjhaba, ho etsa dihlopha (in-group) le letshwao le bontshang mokgahlo oo wa dipolotiki ka mokgwa wa khompiyutha. Ditlatsetso tse ntjha tsa dintlha tsa thuto ka ho ikgetha (theoretical contributions) ke dintlha tse tharo, tse etsang motheo wa meralo ya ho qetela ya mehopolo. Dikarolo tsena ke: motheo (kabelo ya polotiki), mokgwa o fetohang wa tsamaiso, maikarabelo dintlheng/ditabeng tsa polotiki, leano la mekgatlo ya dipolotiki le ho etsa dihlopha (in-group), hape le ketso ya (letshwao la mokgatlo ka bowona wa dipolotiki ka tshebediso ya khompiyutha) (online political brand persona). Dintlha/dikarolo tsa moralo di dula di fetoha, ka lebaka la tlhaho/mokgwa wa tikoloho ya tsa dipolotiki.

Thuto ena ha e tobane feela le taba ya tlhokeho ya diphuputso dingolweng tsa Afrika Borwa le Afrika, empa e tlatsetsa le mokgatlong wa diphuputso tsa kgaso ya setjhaba o kenyelletsang mekgatlo ya Afrika Borwa ya dipolotiki, tshebediso ya pheto ya

diketsahalo/dipale tsa mekgatlo ya dipolotiki ka tshebediso ya letshwao la mokgatlo ka bowona wa dipolotiki ka mokgwa wa tshebediso ya khompiyutha kgasong ya setjhaba (online brand persona on social media).

Mantswe a sehlooho: Mekgatlo ya Afrika Borwa ya dipolotiki, Democratic Alliance, mokgatlo ka bowona wa dipolotiki ka tshebediso ya khompiyutha, matshwao a dipolotiki, maikarabelo ditlheng/ditabeng tsa dipolotiki, kgaso ya setjhaba, letshwao le phetang diketsahalo/dipale tsa mekgatlo ya dipolotiki le itshetlhehileng kgasong ya setjhaba.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
AIDA	Awareness, interest, desire, and action
AMA	American Marketing Association
ANC	African National Congress
API	Application programming interface
BEE	Black Economic Empowerment
CLAM	Character, location, action, and messages
DA	Democratic Alliance
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
EOP	Earned, owned, and paid (media)
eWoM	Electronic word of mouth
IM	Instant messaging
MCCP	Message, conflict, characters, and plot
MP	Member of Parliament
PBO	Political brand orientation
PESO	Paid, earned, shared, and owned (media/model)
PMO	Political market orientation
POEM	Paid, owned, and earned media
PR	Public relations
PRISA	Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa
ProDEC	Research problem, research design, empirical evidence, and conclusions
RSS	Really Simple Syndication
RT	Retweet
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers Union
SMS	Short Message Service
SNS	Social network site
Stats SA	Statistics South Africa
sWoM	Social word of mouth
UK	United Kingdom
UNISA	University of South Africa
US	United States
USA	United States of America
VoIP	Voice over Internet Protocol
WoM	Word of mouth

CHAPTER 1:
BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

1.1   INTRODUCTION

There is an increasing need for political parties to represent issues that set the party apart from opposition parties. In doing so, politicians and political parties have become like brands in that they portray a perception that is favoured or wanted by the public (Terblanche 2011). It is therefore argued in this study that a political brand persona has become one of the major components of the online political brand persona for a political party to successfully position political issues for the political consumer.

Similarly, Gains (2013) concurs that there is an increasing amount of evidence pertaining to the effectiveness of brand storytelling to communicate information, memorise facts, and engage political consumers. This study therefore explored the role that social media-based political brand storytelling plays in building an online brand persona from a political brand perspective.

It is thus put forward in this study that a political brand must build a strong online brand persona using social media political brand storytelling to engage the South African political consumer and to differentiate the political brand from the opposition. The broad aim of the study was thus to propose possible elements for a conceptual framework as heuristic for a political brand to adopt an online political brand persona from a social media-based political brand storytelling perspective. Political brands, like their commercial counterparts, need to achieve meaningful connections with political consumers while maintaining relevant core brand values. Considering the value of political marketing, it is likely that political parties would benefit from creating an online brand persona when using the political marketing approach (Lees-Marshment 2019).

The revised proposed elements for the conceptual framework contribute towards the body of knowledge in the fields of branding, political marketing, and political communication by providing more insight into the online political brand persona from a social media-based political brand storytelling perspective.

Chapter 1 firstly contextualises the study and presents the research objectives and goal of the study. Secondly, the chapter explains the research problem and research methodology. Thirdly, the chapter highlights the ethical considerations, and, lastly, the thesis outline is presented.

1.2   CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This study's focus was on a political party's brand within the South African context. The political landscape in South African has always been divided along racial lines (Africa 2019; Khumalo 2008). However, Moeng (2015) argues that there has been a gradual shift in the political environment and that political parties must work on their party's political brand image (as discussed in Chapter 3). As further discussed in Chapter 3, political parties have turned to brand strategies as techniques to establish their party values and to differentiate themselves from opposition parties in the form of political brand storytelling.

Although the above highlights the need for and value of this investigation, specific reasons for this undertaking are outlined in the next section.

1.2.1   Purpose of the study

The aim of this study was to, firstly, investigate how political parties can utilise social media-based storytelling to establish an online political party brand persona to differentiate the party from other political parties. Secondly, the study proposed and empirically verified elements for a conceptual framework for political parties to build an online brand persona using social media-based political brand storytelling via their owned media when representing political issues.

1.2.2   Background of the study

Literature on brand personas and political brands is well documented; however, there is still a lack of studies on the online brand persona of a political brand within the context of social media-based political brand storytelling. This study focused on one of the political parties in South Africa, namely the Democratic Alliance (DA), for reasons as explained below.

According to Johnson (2012), the DA has mapped out its narrative for the future when the former party leader, Mrs Helen Zille, repeatedly predicted that the DA would be led by an African leader. It is against this background that the study focused on how the DA's brand stories have played out with the election of Mr Mmusi Maimane in May 2015; keeping in mind that South Africa's racial fault lines are so strong that it is difficult for civil society or political parties to ignore (Africa 2019; Moeng 2015; Johnson 2012).

There are several reasons why the DA party is singled out as the focus of this study. Firstly, in the South African political landscape, the DA is at present the opposition party in a country that operates within a dominant party system (Southern 2011). Secondly, a few analytic studies have been conducted that examined how the DA brand has used symbols of South

African patriotism to promote the primacy of a non-racial South African identity, which is important for South Africans (Holling, Moon & Jackson-Nevis 2014; Aboobaker 2013; Dhawraj 2013; Ndlovu & Mbenga 2013; Southern 2011). The focus of this cross-sectional study was only on the DA party because it is the main opposition party in South Africa and has an active social media presence, which was an important consideration to verify the proposed elements. In this regard, it was important to explore how a political brand that is active on social media utilises social media-based storytelling to establish an online political party brand persona to differentiate the party from other political parties. In doing so, the study addresses an underexplored area and makes a theoretical contribution, as outlined in Chapter 8.

It is furthermore argued in this study that social media-based political brand storytelling has reshaped political communication by influencing the way politicians interact with citizens and that the online brand persona will play an important role in positioning political parties as a brand of choice. Political parties have the potential to establish long-term loyalty and relationships in the digital environment and the key to developing these relationships lies in the ability of the political party to develop a connection with the political consumer (Jain, Chawla, Ganesh & Pich 2018), with which the proposed elements for the conceptual framework can assist.

Having outlined the study and having considered the purpose of the study, it is necessary to clarify the relevance of the study.

1.2.3   Relevance of the study

The proposed elements for the conceptual framework contribute to social media communication practice in the political sector by providing guidelines on how to link the party offering not only to the online political brand persona but also to social media-based brand storytelling to frame political issues for the political consumer. The study also provided insight into what type of political stories to tell to frame political issues for the political consumer. For example, the study puts forward the idea that political brands can create more meaningful messages around a political issue if the messages are centred around the online brand persona as set out in the proposed elements of the conceptual framework (as defined in section 1.3). The proposed elements for the conceptual framework can therefore become heuristic to communication professionals responsible for creating social media-based content for political parties in that the framework can guide them to successfully frame political issues through the online brand persona for the political consumer, thereby assisting them to make more sense of their political environment.

The study also highlighted the uniqueness of the political sector in terms of telling brand stories, namely to take into consideration the issue of ownership when choosing what type of social media-based political brand stories to tell. These stories must also consider the emotions, level of engagement, and experiences of the political consumer who will read these stories on Facebook and Twitter. The study also highlighted that the political environment is constantly changing and communication professionals must therefore always evaluate the political brand stories that they tell and be able to respond to the changing environment.

As the political field migrates more towards the digital space, there will be added pressure from a South African point of view on how to best use this space for political parties to position themselves for the political consumer.

1.2.4   Relationship between the topic and the discipline of communication

This study is related to brand communication and political communication, which are fields within the discipline of communication. Firstly, this study successfully integrated branding concepts (brand strategy and brand persona) with political concepts (political offering and political issue ownership), and in doing so proposed unique and useful elements for a conceptual framework, which added a novel view to the existing body of literature. Secondly, the newly coined concept of social media-based political brand storytelling addressed the topic of social media and political branding. This provides more knowledge for political brands on how political brands can successfully tell their social media-based political stories. Another important discipline topic addressed in this study is the contribution to the limited repository of South African and African literature on the topic of online political brand personas. Furthermore, few studies have endeavoured to explore the creation of an online political brand persona through social media-based political brand storytelling. Not only does this study address the South African and African literature deficiency, but it also adds to the body of social media research involving South African political parties. However, what is more important is the fact that the study's findings and the conceptual framework can be applied to non-African settings because social media is not restricted by any type of physical border. Only the research setting must be similar.

1.2.5   Other research in the field

A cursory glance at the National Research Foundation and Nexus databases (2021) indicated that no other research was being conducted and had been completed on the topic of this study. Other studies have addressed the marketing stance within the political arena

(Bigi 2017); editorial coverage of the African National Congress (ANC), DA, and Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) local government elections in 2016 (Msiza 2017); and investigated South African political parties' communication strategies to influence voters' decision-making process (Hlungwani 2021).

1.2.6   The Democratic Alliance (DA) as a political brand

The political landscape in South Africa has always been divided along racial lines, as pointed out by Africa (2019) and Khumalo (2008); Valli (2017) therefore suggests that the DA, as the official opposition party, needs to strategically rebrand the party's image to include more non-white voters. In the following sections, the DA's brand values, brand purpose, and brand positioning are briefly explored for the purposes of contextualisation.

1.2.6.1   The DA's brand values and principles

As discussed in the literature review in Chapters 3 and 4, the political brand must be differentiated from the opposition. The DA does so by building its brand on the values and principles as explained on its official website. The DA articulates its values and principles in three terms, namely freedom, fairness, and opportunity and diversity (DA 2019c).

The party emphasises that freedom is not a favour from the government, but that it is a right. It is a right that is framed in the South African Constitution and the South African people must therefore have the maximum amount of individual freedom consistent with law and order (DA 2016).

The DA's second value, fairness, is framed by the party as societal value and fairness as individual achievements that are determined by the individual's own choices and hard work, and not by the circumstances of their birth. The DA argues that in a fair society everyone has the means to make use of their opportunities, that the strong do not exploit the weak, that there is no unfair discrimination, and that the barriers erected by apartheid must be removed. The party puts forward in its messaging that a society cannot be fair if large-scale inequality exists because a fair society requires a growing economy and access to opportunities for all South Africans (DA 2016).

The party's third value principle, opportunity and diversity, highlights that South Africa is a richly diverse society and that diversity is one of South Africa's greatest assets. The DA celebrates diversity and subscribes to the preamble to the Constitution of South Africa, which recognises the injustices of the country's past and affirms that South Africa belongs to

all who live in it, united in diversity. The party pledges to continue to take active steps to promote and advance diversity in its ranks (DA 2019c).

The party's values seem to be present in the party leaders' messages, dating back to 2004 when the leader at the time, Mr Tony Leon, said:

> In the DA, we do not say to one person or another 'This one will represent this group of people, and that one will represent that group of people.' Instead, we say 'You, and you, and you, and I – we each represent all of South Africa.' Each and every one of us serves all of the people (Khumalo 2008).

The above values were also encapsulated in the DA's 2016 Local Government Elections Manifesto (DA 2016). The DA in its elections manifesto promises that its values of freedom, fairness, and opportunity and diversity can be achieved through the DA's commitment to good governance and that the DA will become the catalyst for change in the cities that it governs in order to move South Africa forward. The DA describes its promise in the manifesto as simple. It would like to bring change in the cities or towns where it is not governing yet; it would like to bring change to everyone's cities or towns that will stop corruption and create jobs and improve service delivery (DA 2016).

As discussed in Chapter 3, political parties have turned to brand strategies as techniques to establish their party values and to differentiate themselves from the competition. However, the challenge the DA is facing is to ensure that every interaction between the DA and its membership base and between the DA and the rest of the country reflects the brand's values (Khumalo 2008). However, Africa (2019) points out that the DA's brand has struggled to maintain unity because its messaging has suffered from a lack of internal consistency.

It is therefore important to examine how the DA's brand position could utilise social media-based storytelling to establish an online political party brand persona to differentiate the party from other political parties.

1.2.6.2 The DA's brand positioning

The DA rebranded the party's image in 2008 when the party was officially relaunched at Constitution Hill to represent the DA as a forward-looking party that has no reservations about being non-racial (Southern 2011). Before the 2004 elections, the DA not only changed its party name but also its party logo. While its previous logo was orange, white, and blue (colours associated with apartheid) and considered an anathema to the black population (Archer & Stent 2011), its new logo was yellow and blue, featured a bright sun as its core element, and depicted a more positive party appearance. The DA symbolically launched its

party manifesto in Soweto and held its final rally in Durban in an attempt to break the association that the DA is a predominantly white party (Ferree 2011; Hamill 2004). This relates to how the DA sculpted its new brand (as discussed in Section 1.2.6.1). In this regard Mensah (2016) argues that political parties must clarify their political brand identity on issues and how their political stance is communicated to the political consumer.

While the 1999 election slogan, "Fight back", was often considered exclusive and aggressive, the 2004 election slogan, "South Africa deserves better", conveyed a sense of togetherness (Booysen 2005). The DA elected Mrs Helen Zille in 2007 as the party leader and underwent a rebranding process (Jolobe 2009). The campaign message moved to a more inclusive brand positioning, namely "One nation, one future". The DA's brand positioning can be summarised in two campaigns, namely the "Vote to win" and "Stop Zuma" campaigns (Daniel & Southall 2009; Jolobe 2009). In the 2014 election, many of the ANC's problems, for example, the Public Protector's report on Nkandla provided the DA with an opportunity to use the party's "Western Cape success story" campaign to position the DA as an all-inclusive political brand (Africa 2019). Consequently, the party's brand strategy initiated the "Know your DA" campaign, where the focus was on emphasising the brand's liberal and progressive roots (Jolobe 2014) and the role the brand played in the struggle against apartheid (Africa 2019). However, during 2019, the DA changed its campaign theme to "One South Africa for all", in which it urged all South Africans to help build one South Africa for all (Africa 2019). Under the new leadership of Mr Mmusi Maimane, the first African to lead the party, the DA positioned the party brand as an honest, capable, modern, and orderly political party compared to the ANC's brand, which is corrupt, old, and disorderly (Africa 2019). This indicates how the DA is building the political brand persona of the party (as discussed in Section 1.2.6.2), and anthropomorphising the brand as an honest, capable, and modern political brand persona.

To build on this argument, Southern (2011) points out that the DA presents an image of itself as paying homage to the principles of the Constitution, in the sense that the DA uses all 11 official languages in its brand communication. This is visible in the images it uses in brand communication, which attempts to do justice to the idea of "unity in diversity". This approach helps to position the brand in a post-apartheid South Africa as a brand that pays more than lip service to the core principle of non-racialism (Southern 2011). The DA displays an understanding of the value of building a positive political brand image in order to create a positive association in the mind of the political consumer with the brand (as discussed in Section 1.2.6.2).

However, although the DA has put in much effort to modify its image to be in line with the new South Africa, it is still confronted with negative perceptions among black South Africans of being a "white party" (Southern 2011). In addition, Africa (2019) points out that the challenges all South African political parties are facing is that political consumers view them through a racial lens. The DA is viewed as a party with "white" credentials that would therefore not prioritise black concerns. Political issue ownership becomes an important strategic tool (as discussed in Section 3.7) for the DA to differentiate itself from the opposition through the use of social media (as discussed in Section 4.8). The next section explores the presence of the DA brand on social media.

1.2.6.3 The DA's social media presence

The DA has successfully utilised social media in terms of the political opportunities brought by these platforms (Mzekandaba 2019). In an interview with ITWeb (business technology media company), the DA's national director of communication, Mabine Seabe (2019), confirmed that the party has a long history of using social media platforms as part of its campaign's ecosystem (as discussed in Section 4.2). Although social media platforms have proven popular among voters, Seabe (2019) points out that it is not only about popularity but about whom the party is trying to reach and the kind of content and information it is trying to disseminate (as discussed in Section 4.5.1). The DA, as a party, constantly engages on social media platforms with political consumers, because it provides the party the means to listen, to learn, and to respond to the millions of South Africans whom it serves (Mazibuko 2012).

The DA's presence on social media includes Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. However, the focus of this study was only on the DA's Facebook posts and the DA's Twitter feed because these have the most political followers. The DA built the party's presence on social media through its Twitter platform, as Linidiwe Mazibuko (2012) pointed out that they were perhaps best known for their presence on Twitter, with Mrs Helen Zille, the then DA leader, being one of the first politicians to use Twitter. The DA today has more than one million followers on Twitter and Facebook combined (Mzekandaba 2019).

The DA's Facebook page (@DemocraticAlliance) is followed by 580 272 people and the page is liked by 554 158 people. The number of people who checked into the page is 3 811. The DA joined Twitter in March 2009 and since then has built its followers to 627.4k @Our_DA. The DA tweets are a combination of official DA party tweets and tweets from DA members of parliament.

In the next section, the DA's use of political brand storytelling is examined for the purpose of contextualising the empirical measurement.

1.2.6.4 The DA's political brand story

The DA engaged in an inclusive approach towards its brand stories leading up to the 2014 elections. The DA used brand storytelling to drive the brand purpose (as discussed in Section 4.6.4). In this regard, the DA appealed to black voters through identifying with their history and attempting to reframe the DA's past through an association with anti-apartheid activists (Anciano 2016). The DA emphasised Mrs Helen Zille, and in particular Mrs Helen Suzman, and the roles they played in the Struggle (Jolobe 2014). The party also linked Mrs Helen Suzman with Mr Nelson Mandela, and used her legacy to claim a position in society as a non-racial party that has always rejected apartheid and was always active in fighting apartheid (Gumede 2019; Anciano 2016). These are examples of different types of stories (as discussed in Section 4.6.4) the DA used to pull the political consumer in to engage with its content. It is also a clear indication that the DA made use of various human emotions to build the brand persona on (as discussed in Section 7.4.5). It also indicates that the DA made use of brand identification and differentiating (as discussed in Sections 2.3.3 and 2.3.6).

However, the DA's political brand stories focused predominantly on the ANC's lack of competency and integrity. For example, Africa (2019) points out that the DA campaigns typically emphasised the following key political issues to the political consumer: firstly, that the ANC's strength should be reduced; secondly, that the ANC's policies are weak and that they have failed South Africans in several key areas; and, lastly, that the ANC lacks integrity as illustrated by high levels of corruption. Political ownership of issues can be fluid, as pointed out by Walgrave, Lefevere and Tresch (2012); the DA, through political brand stories, is therefore constantly engaged in claiming or disclaiming ownership of the issues (as discussed in Section 3.7).

Several scholars argue that there were several problems with regard to the DA's brand story messages (Africa 2019; Gumede 2019; Anciano 2016; Southern 2011). The first problem relates to the negativity of its messages that date back to the 1999 "Fight back" campaign. In 2004, the "South Africa deserves better" campaign messages were viewed by the political consumer as unpatriotic (Southern 2011). The brand stories around "Vote DA for real change" questioned whether the change from apartheid to democracy was artificial (Gumede 2019), and, more recently, the DA stories illustrated attack politics. The decision to create #TheANCIsKillingSA billboard on the back of the Life Esidimeni victims saga was

seen as insensitive towards the families and victims. Another key point, which Gumede (2019) highlights, is that the DA has struggled at times with the coherency of its stories as it attempted to appeal to diverse political consumers with opposing interests, which led to fluctuating views on key issues (Africa 2019).

Against this background, the study addressed the research questions and empirically verified the proposed elements for the conceptual framework.

1.3 CONCEPTUALISATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

The study's key concepts are briefly explained below to provide some clarity on the study's theoretical position, which is discussed in more detail in the remainder of the thesis. These concepts are political brand, political issue ownership, political brand strategy, social media-based brand storytelling, online political brand persona, and the social identity theory.

1.3.1 Political brand

A political brand refers to a brand that comprises three components: the policy, the politician, and the party (Henneberg & O'Shaughnessy 2007), which this study adopted. The concept of political brand, as a corporate or service brand, is debated in Chapter 3 (Jain, Pich, Ganesh & Armannsdottir 2017; Mensah 2016; Speed, Butler & Collins 2015; De Landtsheer & De Vries 2015; Cwalina & Falkowksi 2014). For this study, the political brand is considered a service brand.

1.3.2 Political issue ownership

Political issue ownership refers to when the political consumer perceives a given party as more capable of handling the issue than the opposition (Petrocik 1996) and has two dimensions, namely associative ownership and competence ownership. Associative ownership refers to the perception political consumers hold that a given party is the one that cares about the issue (Stubager 2018; Walgrave, Van Camp, Lefevere & Tresh 2015; Lachat 2014; Walgrave et al 2012). Competence ownership, on the other hand, is the perception political consumers hold that the political party is the best at handling the issue. Petrocik (1996) envisages that issue ownership is a mix between the associated and the competence dimension; therefore emphasising the importance of both dimensions for the political consumer, which this study adopted.

1.3.3 Political brand strategy

Although there is no single definition for political brand strategy in the literature, the concept is used to describe the various communication strategies, styles, rhetoric, and tactics used by the party in the branding of the political party (Bennett & Pfetsch 2018; Mensah 2016; Pich & Dean 2015). However, Narteh Mensah and Nyanzu (2017) confirm that from a political perspective, political brand strategy is a strategy to build engagement around political issues. There are also multiple political brand strategies available for the various political landscapes (Cosgrove 2012). This study adopted a political brand strategy from a political brand orientation strategy (O'Cass & Voola 2011) and put forward political brand storytelling as a political branding technique within the context of social media (as discussed in Chapter 4).

1.3.4 Social media-based political brand storytelling

The research proposed a working definition for this concept as these are political stories, which are created around a political issue that political parties tell on social media to pull political consumers towards their brand.

The study coined this concept since it became evident from the literature that political brands use storytelling elements to frame their political issues on social media (Leslie 2015; Jones, McBeth & Shanahan 2014); this is discussed in Sections 3.6.2 and 4.7.1. The literature review amplifies that political parties can set the agenda for political consumers around political issues. Political parties can use social media political brand storytelling as a political brand strategy to influence how the political consumer understands, remembers, evaluates, and acts upon political issues.

1.3.5 Online political brand persona

An online political brand persona refers to the emotional connection the online brand persona creates between the political consumer and the political party (Engelbrecht & Ngcongo 2018; Herskovitz & Crystal 2010). This concept constitutes an important theoretical point of departure for this study because it is argued that political parties need to develop a credible party brand persona to add value to the political brand and to differentiate the party from the opposition. This argument is made in Sections 2.3.1, 3.4.1, 3.4.2, and 4.9.2, where it is emphasised that the brand persona is a key driver of the brand identity and image and adds heuristic value to the political offering. To clarify this statement, the political brand persona is viewed as a technique to build the party's brand identity from a political brand orientation approach (as discussed in Section 4.5.1). This interlinks with the political party's

brand image, in terms of how the political consumer experiences the political party brand image through its online political brand persona.

In addition, the concept of social media political brand voice, as a subcomponent of the brand persona, is related to the need for political parties to create an online brand persona with whom the political consumer can relate. The literature indicated that the brand voice plays an important role in building the brand persona (as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4).

In this study, based on the views in the literature, in order to build an online brand persona, the brand needs to establish a brand voice, which is an important component of the brand persona (Gilbert 2017; Budden, Anthony, Budden & Jones 2011).

1.3.6　Social identity theory

The social identity theory is adopted as the theoretical point of departure for this study. In their seminal work on social identity theory, Turner and Tajfel (1986) explain that part of a person's self-concept comes from the groups to which that person belongs and associates with. This study's theoretical focus is thus also anchored in the idea of intergroup relations, such as people's political affiliation that they feel they belong to (see Section 4.10).

Having clarified the study's theoretical position, the next section explains the objectives and goal of the study.

1.4　OBJECTIVES AND GOAL OF THE STUDY

Considering the scope of the study, which is applied communication research, the research objectives provide a clear indication of the purpose and direction of the research (Rojon & Saunders 2012). The objectives of this study are both exploratory and descriptive in nature. An exploratory objective refers to research used to investigate a phenomenon to have a better understanding of the existing phenomenon, but will not provide conclusive results (Babbie & Mouton 2018), while a descriptive objective is to describe the characteristics of a phenomenon (Davies & Hughes 2014).

The research objectives of the study are as follows:

- **Research Objective 1:** To explore theoretical criteria for political brand storytelling on social media to represent political issues through an online brand persona.
- **Research Objective 2:** To explore one political brand's use of brand storytelling on social media within the context of the theoretical criteria.

- **Research Objective 3:** To explore in what way political brand storytelling techniques on social media could use an online brand persona to represent political issues.
- **Research Objective 4:** To explore how the proposed elements for a conceptual framework enhance a political brand's storytelling on social media through an online brand persona.

1.5   RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT

Little is known in the South African context regarding how political brands can use political brand storytelling with an online political brand persona on social media to differentiate a political brand from the opposition (as discussed in Sections 1.2.4 and 1.2.5). What is also not clear is how the online political brand persona can successfully position political issues for the political consumer (Banda 2016; Lees-Marshment 2014) (as discussed in Section 4.8). This study aimed to explore how political parties could utilise social media-based storytelling to establish an online political party brand persona to differentiate the party from other political parties in the South African context.

An effective research problem statement has three main purposes. These are introducing the reader to the importance of the subject under investigation; it provides the necessary context of the study; and it should ideally give some direction in terms of the framework for the results to be reported (Babbie & Mouton 2018).

The research problem statement of this study is as follows:

> To qualitatively investigate through a cross-sectional study how a political brand can use political brand storytelling on social media through an online brand persona to differentiate the party from other political parties in order to propose elements for a conceptual framework as heuristic for political parties.

1.5.1   Research questions

Research questions form an integral part of any scientific enquiry as they tend to "guide", "centre", and "address" issues in the main research problem. When formulating research questions, the researcher needs to be "clear and focused" (Patten & Newhart 2013). The formulation of a good research question should ideally steer the research journey towards the most apt research methods for the study; this includes the purpose and design of a study (Gilbert 2008:58).

This study attempted to answer the following four research questions:

- **Research Question 1:** What are the theoretical criteria for political brand storytelling on social media to represent political issues through an online brand persona?

- **Research Question 2:** How does one political brand use political brand storytelling on social media within the context of the theoretical criteria?

- **Research Question 3:** In what way could the political brand storytelling techniques on social media use an online brand persona to represent political issues?

- **Research Question 4:** How can the proposed elements for a conceptual framework enhance a political brand's storytelling on social media through an online brand persona?

1.6   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this section, the researcher introduces the methodology used for this study, including the chosen research paradigm, research design, research method, targeted and accessible populations, population parameters, sampling, data-collection, and data-analysis phases.

1.6.1   Research paradigm adopted for this study

This study adopted the interpretivist research paradigm, which was deemed best suited for the study to achieve the research objectives. The interpretivist paradigm as the adopted worldview allowed the researcher to simultaneously address a diversity of questions utilising exploratory research questions (Babbie & Mouton 2018). Furthermore, using the research tradition in interpretivism allowed a better understanding of the complexity of the social phenomena that is gained from different views and obtained from various data sources (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2011; Du Plooy 2009). The extant literature confirms that the interpretivism research tradition aims to gain in-depth understanding of human behaviour (Babbie & Mouton 2018; Teddlie & Tashakkori 2011; Maree & Van der Westhuizen 2014; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2014; Du Plooy 2009).

The interpretivist research paradigm broadly guided the study in terms of the philosophical rationale, including ontological, epistemological, methodological, and axiological assumptions. The interpretivist research paradigm maintains that these beliefs guide a research study in the following ways: firstly, the researcher believes that a single phenomenon may have multiple interpretations rather than a truth that can be determined by a process of measurement (Babbie & Mouton 2018; Creswell 2007). Secondly, the researcher believes that knowledge should not be generalised beyond the context in which the study was conducted (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2014). Thirdly, the researcher believes that the interpretivist approach favours a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis

(Du Plooy-Cilliers 2014). This methodological assumption was therefore deemed suitable for this study to collect empirical data and to test the study's conceptual framework. Lastly, axiology acknowledges the influence of the researcher's beliefs and background knowledge; thus the importance of existing values (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2014). In this regard, the researcher recognised the impact of personal views and beliefs and therefore employed both in-depth interviews and deductive qualitative content analysis to achieve objectivity in the study. Chapter 6 explores these rationales in more detail.

1.6.2   Research approach

Owing to the philosophical approach to the phenomenon under investigation, the qualitative research approach was deemed the most suitable to explore and describe the research problem from an interpretivist perspective using several data-collection methods and data-analysis processes to synthesise the findings. The research approach is discussed in more detail in Section 6.3. The next section discusses the study's research methods.

1.6.3   Research methods

As stated previously, this study was both exploratory and descriptive. Owing to the exploratory nature of the study, the literature review followed a qualitative approach that informed the key elements for the framework and thus answering Research Question 1. The study used two research methods to answer the rest of the research questions, namely semi-structured expert interviews and a deductive qualitative content analysis. The semi-structured expert interviews were conducted with public relations (PR) agencies that are responsible for creating social media content for political parties. Semi-structured expert interviews refer to an effective method of data collection used when the researcher wants to explore expert participants' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about a particular topic (Aurini, Heath & Howells 2016). The semi-structured expert interviews allowed the researcher to establish PR agencies' strategic approaches to social media-based brand storytelling. The purpose of the semi-structured expert interviews was to answer Research Questions 2, 3, and 4 to gain a better understanding of how professional communication practitioners in PR agencies use social media to drive political parties' political issues through social media brand storytelling. Secondly, through deductive qualitative content analysis of the DA's political brand stories on its Facebook and Twitter accounts, it was possible to establish how the DA's online brand persona shared and presented the political issues of the time, which addressed Research Questions 2, 3, and 4. Deductive qualitative content analysis refers to content analysis that follows an *a priori* design and allows for descriptive and inferential analysis of content (Bezuidenhout & Cronjé 2014).

1.6.4 Population

For this study, all PR agencies in South Africa that deal with political brand stories comprised the target population from which the participants (for the semi-structured expert interviews) and the social artefacts (all social media-based brand stories for the deductive qualitative content analysis) were sampled. The population is discussed in more detail in Section 6.4.4.

1.6.4.1 Target population

The researcher also set population parameters for the target population, which are defined as a list with "the shared characteristics and the number of people or social artefacts in a population" (Pascoe 2014:133). The population parameters for the participants were therefore communication practitioners who worked in a PR agency and who were responsible for creating political parties' social media-based brand stories in South Africa. The researcher also needed to set population parameters for the social artefacts. These social artefacts included the DA's Facebook posts and Twitter feeds from May 2015 to June 2016, as presented in Table 6.4 in Chapter 6.

1.6.4.2 Accessible population

An accessible population refers to the portion of the target population that can be reached or accessed for interviews or analysis (Bezuidenhout & Cronjé 2014). The researcher had to narrow down the target population to an accessible population by using a sampling method, which is discussed in the section below.

1.6.5 Sampling method and unit of analysis

The study only focused on the DA's political brand stories from the time Mr Mmusi Maimane was elected as the first African DA leader because there was a shift in the political offering. In addition the period May 2015 to June 2016 (see Chapter 6) was analysed because the DA was building up to the 2016 national elections. This allowed for enough data in order to establish how the DA has developed its online brand persona when presenting political issues using storytelling on social media. The study used a non-probability type of sampling method, which is used within a qualitative study because the nature of the study made it impossible for the research to gain access to the entire population of the study (Nieuwenhuis 2014). The researcher applied a purposive sampling method, which refers to "sampling done with a specific purpose in mind" (Maree & Pietersen 2014:178). The purposive sampling method allowed the researcher to select the elements to be included in the sample, based

on a set list of characteristics (see the detailed discussion in Chapter 6). The criteria set by the researcher specifically aimed to select a sample to ensure that the participants in the semi-structured interviews were experts in social media within the political field and were able to provide the required insight into social media political brand storytelling, which was necessary to address Research Questions 2, 3, and 4.

The researcher used the DA's online newsletter, *Bokamoso*, from May 2015 until June 2016 as a sample frame to select unique Facebook posts (327 posts) and tweets (369 tweets) according to political issues identified from the online newsletter. The corpus of Facebook posts and tweets from the DA's official Twitter handles, @Our_DA and @DemocracticAlliance, were thus purposively selected. Also, only written text was analysed and not visuals. In addition, no click-throughs to external shared links were analysed. The sampling method is explained in more detail in Section 6.4.5.

Babbie and Mouton (2018) explain that the unit of analysis refers to the "what" of a scientific study that is being researched. The unit of analysis in this study was therefore firstly the key individuals responsible for creating the political brand stories on social media. Therefore, individuals working in PR agencies who are responsible for creating political parties' brand stories on social media would serve as a source of information. The second unit of analysis was the DA's historical Facebook and Twitter feeds from May 2015 to June 2016, when there was a change in the DA's leadership (thus social artefacts).

1.6.6   Data collection

The selection of different qualitative methods compelled the researcher to consider the type of data that was needed to answer the research questions. The first set of data (semi-structured expert interviews) was the primary data because it was mainly collected by the researcher and allowed for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The second set of data (social artefact) was the secondary data because it was the social media content that was created by the DA's social media content team that was made available to the researcher. Moreover, decisions had to be made on the methods for the collection of the primary data, specifically the participants' access to the required technology, such as Zoom for the interviews due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions at the time of the study.

For the data collection for the semi-structured expert interviews, the researcher had to take into consideration that the participants had to represent PR agencies that are responsible for creating social media content for political parties in South Africa. The researcher therefore used the regional Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA) Zoom meetings to

invite PR agencies who met the selection criteria to participate in the study. PRISA is the professional body for PR and communication managers in Southern Africa. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the expert interviews also had to be considered; the researcher therefore opted to conduct the expert interviews via the Zoom platform, a cloud-based video communications application, in accordance with the University of South Africa's (UNISA) requirements for empirical research during the global public health pandemic.

The researcher deemed deductive content analysis as the most appropriate approach for the study because, firstly, data were collected by using the DA's *Bokamoso* themes to select unique tweets and Facebook posts that served as the sampling frame for the social artefacts. Secondly, the researcher wanted to explore how the DA used political brand storytelling on Twitter and Facebook to represent political issues (see the discussion in Section 6.4.63).

The researcher developed a coding scheme in ATLAS.ti as per the theoretical guidelines in Chapter 6. The study thus used *a priori* codes that were developed according to the study's proposed elements for the purpose of measurement (Bezuidenhout & Cronjé 2014) (see Table 6.8).

1.6.7   Data analysis

The researcher used reflexive thematic analysis to analyse the qualitative data of both the semi-structured expert interviews and the deductive qualitative content analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006:78), thematic analysis is a method to "identify, analyse, organise, describe, and report themes found within the data set". There are several approaches that the researcher could have used to analyse the data (Braun & Clarke 2019; Nowell et al 2017; Zhang & Wildemuth 2009; Braun & Clarke 2006; Miles & Huberman 1994). However, thematic analysis was employed because of the flexibility of this kind of analysis (Nowell et al 2017; Ibrahim 2012). In 2006, Braun and Clarke developed reflexive thematic analysis that is not about following procedures, but about the researcher's reflective and thoughtful engagement with the data and analytic process (Braun & Clarke 2006:594). The researcher therefore adopted Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive approach for the thematic analysis, as discussed in Chapter 6.

The researcher used the ATLAS.ti software package to analyse the Twitter tweets and Facebook posts of the DA, as well as the transcriptions of the semi-structured expert interviews. ATLAS.ti is computer software that allows the researcher to analyse qualitative data in a systematic and transparent way (Friese 2019). This software was primarily utilised to import the tweets, Facebook posts, and the transcriptions of the semi-structured expert

interviews, storing the data, coding the data, searching and retrieving text segments, simulating interaction with the data, and building a relationship within the data.

1.7   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher took the following ethical considerations into account when collecting data: As stipulated in UNISA's (2016) policy on research ethics, ethical clearance was obtained on 3 July 2020 to conduct the empirical part of the study (see Addendum D). This was to ensure that the research activities of this study were guided by scholarly integrity and ethical behaviour. The study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which had certain implications for the data collection. The researcher ensured that all the COVID-19 procedures of UNISA were followed when collecting the data.

The following ethical considerations were taken into consideration when collecting data for the semi-structured expert interviews with the PR agencies during the study: Firstly, the researcher agreed to ensure participant anonymity. In this regard, the researcher stated that all participants' information and responses shared during this study would be kept private and that the results would be presented in an anonymous manner in order to protect the participants' identities (Louw 2014).

Secondly, the researcher needed to obtain informed consent from the PR agencies. In order to do so, the researcher contacted each member of the PR agency individually to confirm their willingness to participate in the study. At the beginning of the face-to-face Zoom interviews with the participants, the researcher briefly explained the reasons why the research was being conducted and emphasised the fact that the participants may withdraw at any time. The researcher presented the participants with a letter of consent, in which the research process was described. The participants were given time to read the letter, ask questions for clarification, and sign the consent form if they were willing to participate in the research. The researcher also only used the audio segment of the Zoom recording and not the video feed to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

Secondly, the study analysed the DA's partially owned and shared media, which are in the public domain and the researcher therefore did not foresee any ethical implications when collecting these data. However, because the study made use of historical data, it was important to obtain the permission of the DA: Executive Director of Marketing: National Marketing Team, to source the historical data, which was obtained on 11 June 2020. The DA's social media team made the *Bokamoso*, tweets, and Facebook posts from 1 May 2015 to 1 June 2016 available to the researcher.

1.8   THESIS OUTLINE

The thesis is structured as follows:

Table 1.1: Thesis outline

Chapter	Purpose of the chapter	Research question(s) addressed
Chapter 1: Background and rationale for the study	This chapter identifies the research problem and motivates the research questions, and also motivates the study by providing background to the research problem. This chapter provides context to understand the role that political brand personas play within the South African political environment.	Research Question 2
Chapter 2: Digital branding	This chapter reviews the concepts of brands and supports the literature that a brand is a multidisciplinary concept and that there are many perspectives around what a brand is.	Research Question 1 Research Question 2
Chapter 3: Contextualising the political brand	This chapter elaborates on the concepts of brands but extends them to the concept of political brands. The chapter then focuses on political marketing, political communication, and political advertising. The chapter ends by briefly examining political brand strategies, including political brand storytelling and political issue ownership.	Research Question 1 Research Question 3
Chapter 4: Social media-based political brand storytelling	This chapter extends the brand storytelling concept as introduced in Chapter 3 by contextualising it with particular focus on social media platforms. This chapter examines the use of political brand storytelling to frame political issues on social media. It briefly examines the development of an online brand persona for social media political brand storytelling.	Research Question 1 Research Question 3 Research Question 4
Chapter 5: Proposed elements for a conceptual framework for an online political brand persona from a social media-based political brand storytelling perspective	This chapter introduces the proposed elements for a conceptual framework for an online political brand persona from a social media-based political brand storytelling perspective.	Research Question 4
Chapter 6: Research methodology and operationalisation	This chapter outlines and contextualises the research methodology and operationalisation that were adopted to empirically verify and adapt the proposed elements for a conceptual framework for	Research Question 4

Chapter	Purpose of the chapter	Research question(s) addressed
	the political brand persona within the context of a social media political brand storytelling perspective, as an outcome of the in-depth literature review in the previous chapters.	
Chapter 7: Findings and interpretation of the findings	Chapter 7 reports on the data analysis of both the semi-structured expert interviews and the qualitative content analysis.	Research Question 2 Research Question 4
Chapter 8: Conclusions and recommendations	Chapter 8 focuses on the conclusions of the study, which include formulating guidelines for an online political brand persona from a social media political brand storytelling perspective. It links the secondary research objectives and related research questions, and the main focus of the study as a whole is reiterated to indicate how the main research problem was addressed. The refined proposed framework is then presented and motivated.	Research Question 4

1.9   SUMMARY

This chapter introduced the research by outlining the overall context, rationale, key definitions, research problem, research methodology, ethical considerations, and demarcation of the study. The main thrust of this doctoral thesis is to understand the role that an online political brand persona plays within the South African political brand context by qualitatively evaluating the DA's social media-based pollical brand storytelling techniques to propose elements for a conceptual framework as heuristic for political parties to build their online brand personas.

In the next chapter, the first part of an extensive literature review starts by first focusing on digital branding.

CHAPTER 2:
DIGITAL BRANDING

2.1   INTRODUCTION

As explained in Chapter 1, the focus of this study was to explore how political brands can use political brand storytelling with an online political brand persona on social media to differentiate a political brand from the competition. In this chapter, the different meanings of the concepts of brand and branding are explained based on multiple perspectives in the relevant literature. An explanation of the different core brand and branding concepts is provided, followed by a discussion of the concepts related to digital branding.

It is argued in this chapter that it is important to establish the value of branding in that brand is a very complex concept and that branding is an ever-evolving process. It is for this reason that this chapter explores the concepts of digital branding, a digital branding strategy, and branding techniques based on several perspectives in the literature.

2.2   THE BRAND

Building on Le Roux and Du Plessis' (2014) argument, a brand is a multidisciplinary concept that has been defined and applied in various academic fields, which has resulted in numerous perspectives about what a brand is. The following sections explain the concepts of a brand and branding before finally presenting the concept of digital branding.

2.2.1   Adopting a definition for the concept of a brand

For the study to adopt a definition for the concept of a brand, it is important to first consider the evolution of the concept.

In earlier years, brands were simply used to mark ownership of cattle or other forms of livestock (Aaker 1991). During medieval times, brands served as distinguishing symbols on goods (De Chernatony & McDonald 2002). In modern times, brands function as a tool not only to express the identity of the product but also to enable the customer to experience the brand. The classical definition of a brand by Aaker (1996) focuses on the "distinctive name and/or symbol". Knox (2004:106) expands this concept by adding that a brand is not only recognised by its name or logo, but also "provides added value based on factors over and above its functional performance". Explained differently, the brand concept is thus more than just a functional performance since it represents the brand's values and culture for the consumer.

Several studies have explored the concept of a brand and focused on different aspects. For example, studies by Peng and Hackley (2009), Jevons, Gabbott and De Chernatony (2005), and De Chernatony and McDonald (2002) focus on brands as a communication device that represents the values, nature, and personality of an organisation, product, or service. It is thus evident that the concept of a brand has evolved over the years and that brands today serve as a strategic business asset, which is essential for organisations to grow and compete in their environments (Aaker 1991; Kapferer 2008; Zook & Allen 2011). Also, Dean, Croft and Pich's (2015) study of the New Labour brand in the United Kingdom (UK) focused on the emotional aspects of branding. Their study emphasised how political parties seek to control their brands through symbolic policies and initiatives such as David Cameron's call for "Hug a hoodie". Another aspect of brands, brand personality, was examined by Gorbaniuk, Kusak, Kogut and Kustos (2015) in their study that researched the personal attributes of eight Polish political parties. Their study affirmed the connections between personality traits attributed to parties and the attitudes and the political reference of voters. Lastly, Pich and Armannsdottir (2018) explored how to operationalise the external brand image of a political brand. Against this background, this study considered the different approaches to the concept of a brand as is evident in the definitions in the following sections.

There are different approaches to defining the concept of a brand, which partly stem from different perspectives, of which the consumer-orientated and company-orientated perspectives are widely adopted. Both seminal and recent literature were considered to explain the brand concept from both the consumer-orientated and the company-orientated perspectives.

When considering brands from a consumer-orientated definition perspective, Ambler (1992:15) defines a brand as "[t]he promise of the bundles of attributes that someone buys and [that] provides satisfaction ... The attributes that make up a brand may be real or illusory, rational or emotional, tangible or invisible".

A key aspect of Ambler's (1992) definition is the importance of understanding brand attributes. Brand attributes consist of "bits" of information that are linked to the brand name in consumer memory (Keller 1993). The understanding of these attributes is important in that they can be useful for strategic decision making and building strategic relationships between brands and consumers (Wood 2000). Milewicz and Milewicz (2014:234) concur that the consumer accesses a greater amount of information about brands and the organisations behind the brands, and that there is thus an expectation from a consumer's point of view that the information about the brand and the organisation should be in line.

Several scholars (for example, Maurya & Mishra 2012; Clifton & Simmons 2003; De Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley 1998) consider De Chernatony and McDonald's (1992) definition as the most comprehensive definition. This definition maintains that a successful brand "is an identifiable product, service, person or place, augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant, unique added values which match their needs most closely" (De Chernatony & McDonald 1992:18).

It is therefore clear when considering the concept of a brand from a consumer-orientated perspective that the brand values the consumer's understanding of the brand that is being evaluated from an outside-in approach.

The concept of a brand can also be defined from a company-orientated perspective. In the early 1960s, the American Marketing Association (AMA) Committee on Definitions (1960) proposed the following company-orientated definition of a brand: "A name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors."

This definition has been criticised for being too product orientated, with emphasis on visual features as differentiating mechanisms (De Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley 1998). Despite these criticisms, the definition was still accepted, although in modified form. Consequently, well-known scholars such as Watkins (1986), Aaker (1991), and Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders and Wong (2005) have adopted this definition in their work. Other definitions have been put forward such as that of Green (2009:32 cited in Mucundorfeanu 2018:43), who considers a brand in a more comprehensive manner:

> Brand is the sum of all feelings, thoughts, images, history, opportunities and market rumours that manifests itself in relation to a particular sector, group, company, product, service, idea or persona; the sum of all the details communicated by an entity and the associations that can be made with it.

Of importance is the key change to the original definition to include the words "the sum of", which allows for intangibles such as brand image or brand personality. This change in the definition alludes to the fact that brands can manage their distinct brand image in their respective markets. The particular value of this definition is the focus on a fundamental brand purpose, which is to set them apart from their competition (Rutter, Hanretty & Lettice 2015). The researcher thus adopted Green's (2009:32 cited in Mucundorfeanu 2018:43) definition for this study.

In addition, brands are sometimes defined in terms of their purpose, and often described by their characteristics (Starcevic 2015). For example, De Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley's (1998) classical study provided the marketing and communication field with a theory for the brand construct. Their findings positioned the brand as a multidimensional construct that matches companies' emotional and functional values. Through their literature analysis, De Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley (1998) classified definitions of a brand into 12 themes, namely:

> brand as a logo, brand as a legal instrument, brand as a company, brand as a shorthand, brand as a risk reducer, brand as an identity system, brand as an image in [the] consumer's mind, brand as a value system, brand as a personality, brand as relationship, brand as adding value, and brand as an evolving entity.

The following section explores the concept of branding.

2.2.2   Defining the concept of branding

To understand the concept of branding, it is important to first acknowledge the evolution of the concept. In this regard, Beaumont (2014) refers to the four ages of branding, which are still widely accepted among scholars (Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman & Hansen 2016). These four ages, according to Beaumont (2014:6), are as follows:

- **Age of identity:** The early development of branding, whose purpose was to serve as a market position identifier such as the adoption of logos, slogans, and mascots.
- **Age of value:** Companies viewed brands as valuable business assets and came to increasingly recognising that brands were not built simply through communications, but through a combination of business activities covering products and services, environments, culture, and communication; all of which create the total brand perception held by customers and employees alike.
- **Age of experience:** With the recognition of the brand's strategic values came the realisation that brands can help to build customer experiences with the assistance of the rise of technology.
- **Age of you:** Technology has created a new way of connecting businesses to people, and people to one another. Brands serve as enablers of both business and personal value creation. Brands that seek to lead in this age will have to recognise the human in the data, uncover genuine insights, and create a truly personalised and curated experience; therefore creating an ecosystem to satisfy the MEcosystem. The MEcosystem refers to an ecosystem where the individual (me) is at the centre of the communication (Muir & Verwey 2018).

The development of the concept of branding demonstrates that it is a process in which a product sets itself apart. It differentiates and separates itself from the competition to reduce consumer confusion (Brown 2016). It is important to realise that branding is an ever-evolving process that adapts to changes and the needs of the market (Mucundorfeanu 2018). In this regard, branding has been studied over the years by an ever-widening array of academic disciplines; ranging from the marketing and communication field to the political field, each with their own agendas and arguments in attempting to clarify the components that constitute an effective and efficient brand (Brown 2016). Olins (2009:43) considers branding as:

- a marketing design, communication, and human resource instrument;
- an activity that should always have an impact on the organisation;
- coordination of resources that makes organisational activities more strategic; and
- making the strategy of the organisation more visible to the target audience.

Pennington and Ball (2009) add to Olins' (2009) views by describing branding activities as identification and differentiation of the brand, maintaining consistency of the brand, and communicating existence and attributes of the brand to the consumer. However, equally important are the views that branding is the process of creating a legacy of signs in the minds and hearts of consumers through a variety of communication strategies that create specific meaning and feeling that affect consumers' lives (Mucundorfeanu 2018; Wijaya 2011, 2013).

It is clear from these arguments that the branding activity forms part of brand communication as a strategy (Wijaya 2013). The study unpacks the concept of brand communication in Section 2.3.8.

Although there are different perspectives of what the concept of branding entails, seminal scholars, such as Kotler et al (2005), reiterate that the challenge of branding is to develop a deep set of meanings or associations for the brand. There is agreement among some scholars that branding has become a top management priority because it is considered a valuable intangible asset (Farhana 2014). In this regard, Sammut-Bonnici (2014) argues that branding is a long-term strategy that includes activities related to branding strategies.

Bastos and Levy (2012) and Kotler et al (2005) therefore agree that the challenge of branding is to provide a deep set of meanings or associations for a brand.

Branding therefore seeks to add value to a product or service so that a consumer develops an emotional preference for that brand over the competition (Marland 2016). It is therefore also important to consider the role of brand management within this context.

2.2.3 Brand management

The role of the brand manager has shifted from being the guardian of a brand to that of a brand host (Lipiäinen & Karjaluoto 2015); however, scholars (Cova & Paranque 2016; Kaufmann, Loureiro & Manarioti 2016) state that brand management has moved from a transactional tool in organisations to brands as engagement entities to co-create with others.

Early literature on brand management focused on brands as, firstly, a tactical tool that facilitated selling products (Boatwright, Cagan, Kapur & Saltiel 2009). Secondly, brand management focused on the development of brand meaning, which refers to how a brand is perceived by consumers (Batey 2016). Lastly, brand management focused on the management of the brand (Dunes & Pras 2013). However, reflecting on brands today, scholars emphasise that brands are perceived as strategic assets that generate value for multiple actors, such as consumers (Cova & Paranque 2016; Kaufmann et al 2016) and internal stakeholders (Kaufmann et al 2016; Indounas & Arvaniti 2015). Several scholars (for example, Kaufmann et al 2016; Lipiäinen & Karjaluoto 2015) argue that these stakeholders' views and evaluation of a brand can impact on the target market's perception and evaluation of a brand. However, Urde and Greyser (2016) suggest that brand management teams still have most of the control and a strong influence on the development and management of brand meaning. Although this might be true because of technologies, other scholars suggest that the branding process has changed and that brand managers have surrendered the creation of brand meaning to co-creators who do not work for the organisation (Cova & Paranque 2016; Kristal, Baumgarth, Behnke & Henseler 2016; Boon, Grant & Kietzmann 2016). Building on this argument, Hughes, Bendoni and Pehlivan (2016) note that even the stories that build brand meaning have transitioned from being developed by the brand manager, namely storytelling, to being developed by the consumers, which is known as story-giving.

Given the above arguments, multiple internal and external stakeholders play a role in the development of brand meaning. It is therefore of crucial importance for organisations that the brand management team must secure consistent brand views among all of them (Biedenbach & Manzhynski 2016; Saleem & Iglesias 2016). For this study, Urde and Greyser's (2016) view cannot be supported because it is acknowledged in this study that the influence of technology on the brand, as per the views of Cova and Paranque (2016), Kristal

et al (2016), and Boon et al (2016), cannot be ignored today (see also Section 2.4). The concept of story-giving is acknowledged as put forward by Hughes et al (2016), but for this study the focus was only on brand storytelling and engagement with consumers, which are discussed in Section 2.4.3.7 (see also Section 4.7). The next section explores core brand and branding concepts.

2.3   CORE BRAND AND BRANDING CONCEPTS

In the brand management literature, researchers have placed much emphasis on the following brand concepts because they are at the core of brands and branding, and are considered an integral part of the branding process: brand image, brand identity, brand personality, brand culture, brand positioning, brand resonance, and brand equity (Nandan 2005; Farhana 2014; Avis, Forbes & Ferguson 2014; Petek & Konečnik-Ruzzier 2013). It is acknowledged in the study that the brand is established through the process of branding. Thus, within the context of this study, the next subsections review the core brand and branding concepts.

2.3.1   Brand image

Based on the literature, it can be argued that brand image relates to the consumer's perception of the brand. Kotler's (1989:197) well-known definition of brand image as "the set of beliefs held about a particular brand" supports this argument. Several studies have been conducted on brand image over several decades. For example, the classic paper by Gardner and Levy (1955) established that brands have an overall character or personality that may be more important to the consumer than the technical facts and information about the product. Later, other scholars, such as Ditcher (1985), laid the foundation for the argument that brand image not only describes the individual traits of a product but also adds value to the total impression that is formed in the mind of the consumer. A more recent view is that brand image is the total of impressions that consumers receive from many sources, all of which combine to form a brand personality (Severi & Ling 2013; Nandan 2005). This study puts forward the idea that consumers form an image of the brand in their minds. In support of this statement, Aaker (1991) states that brand image is a set of associations a consumer forms about an organisation in a meaningful way. The brand image is therefore a consumer-orientated construct.

On the other hand, it is suggested that brand image can be viewed from a company-orientated construct perspective (Nandan 2005). It is implied that consumers form an image of a brand through various brand contact points (known as brand contact points) and the

amount of contact the consumers have with the brand can influence their image of the brand (Nandan 2005). A brand contact point refers to the experience and perceptual points of brand value that consumers have through various channels. (Yang & Chen 2018). Examples of brand contact points include, among others, social media, publicity, and direct marketing campaigns, which can all be driven by brand communication (see Section 2.3.8).

As discussed above, brand identity stems from the organisation, where the brand compiles its messages in terms of brand identity, whereas the brand image is received by the consumer through the various brand contact points. Identity represents the brand's reality, while image represents the consumer's perception.

The importance of brand image and that consumers' perceptions can be influenced through various brand contact points are recognised in this study.

Over the years, scholars have considered the concept of brand identity from different perspectives. In earlier years, the concept was primarily treated through the lens of the marketing context (Farhana 2014). However, Petek and Konečnik-Ruzzier (2013) point out that some scholars (Konečnik-Ruzzier & Ruzzier 2009; De Chernatony & Harris 2000) agree that brand identity can be approached from both internal and external perspectives. It is argued in the literature (De Chernatony 2010; Konečnik-Ruzzier & Ruzzier 2009; Konečnik-Ruzzier & Gartner 2007) that, from an internal perspective, brand identity represents what the company wants the brand to stand for and is the driver of all the brand identity efforts, whereas brand image refers to the consumers' perception and interpretation of the brand's identity from an external perspective (Geuens, Weijters & De Wulf 2009). The focus is therefore on both the internal and external perspectives.

The next section discusses the concept of brand personality as one of the core brand concepts.

2.3.2 Brand personality

The evolution of the concept of brand personality is reported on in the literature as far back as the 1950s in Gardner and Levy's work of 1955 (Avis et al 2014). However, scholars agree that it was Aaker's (1997) article on brand personality that placed the concept at the forefront of academic research (Geuens et al 2009). It has been noted in the literature that brand personality is one of the most universally mentioned features of brands (Mathews 2015; Phau & Lau 2000). It is Aaker's (1997:352) work, which formally defined "brand personality" as "the set of human characteristics associated with the brand", that adapted the human

five-factor model of personality (see Figure 2.1) (Cohen 2014; Avis et al 2014; Petek & Konečnik-Ruzzier 2013; Malik & Naeem 2013; Phau & Lau 2000).

Aaker's (1997) brand personality model encapsulates human characteristics according to five broad brand personality dimensions. First is sincerity, which is associated with down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, and cheerful. The second dimension, excitement, is associated with daring, spirited, imaginative, and being up to date. The third dimension, competence, is associated with being reliable, intelligent, and successful. Sophistication, the fourth dimension, refers to upper-class and charming; and the last dimension, ruggedness, is associated with outdoorsy and tough (as per Aaker 1997:352; see Figure 2.1).

Brand personality				
Sincerity	**Excitement**	**Competence**	**Sophistication**	**Ruggedness**
Down-to-earth	**Daring**	**Reliable**	**Cupper class**	**Outdoorsy**
-family-orientated	-trendy	-reliable	-upper-class	-outdoorsy
-small-town	-daring	-hard-working	-glamorous	-masculine
-down-to-earth	-exciting	-secure	-good-looking	-western
Honest	**Spirited**	**Intelligent**	**Charming**	**Tough**
-sincere	-cool	-intelligent	-charming	-tough
-honest	-spirited	-technical	-feminine	-rugged
-real	-young	-corporate	-smooth	
Wholesome	**Imaginative**	**Successful**		
-original	-unique	-successful		
-wholesome	-imaginative	-leader		
		-confident		
Cheerful	**Up-to-date**			
-cheerful	-up-to-date			
-sentimental	-independent			
-friendly	-contemporary			

Figure 2.1: Seminal dimensions of brand personality
Source: Aaker (1997:352)

Subsequently, recent work that has been conducted on Aaker's (1997) dimensions of brand personalities reflected that only three dimensions (sincerity, excitement, and sophistication) were potentially universally relevant (Davies, Rojas-Méndez, Whelan, Mete & Loo 2018).

The concept of personification refers to "transform[ing] into a character endowed with human-like characteristics" (Cohen 2014:1). This statement suggests that brands take on animated characteristics or brands are personified to the extent of achieving a near-total attribution of human-like traits (Mathews 2015). The concept of brand personification therefore refers to the use by a brand of a character with human-like characteristics in packaging, promotion, PR, or for other marketing-related purposes (Cohen 2014).

Arguments reflected in the literature concur that brand personality can be described as a set of human characteristics associated with a given brand and it tends to serve a symbolic or self-expressive function (Gorbaniuk et al 2015; Cohen 2014; Malik & Naeem 2013; Ghodeswar 2008; Azoulay & Kapferer 2003; Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2002; Phau & Lau 2000).

The body of literature about a brand as a person has grown and developed over the last 20 years, which reflects growth in the idea that consumers can associate with brands through a set of personality traits (Lin & Sung 2013). This is done by forming trait inferences from contact and experiences with brands. Consumers think of brands as having human characteristics and personalities and therefore interact with brands in a social way (Aggarwal 2004). It can then be described as brand anthropomorphism (Aggarwal & McGill 2012; Keng, Tran & Le 2013). Figure 2.2 illustrates the widely accepted categories of humanising brands as put forward by MacInnis and Folkes (2017).

The Domain of Humanizing Brands

Human-Focused Perceptive (Anthropomorphism): Brands as having human-like..	*Self-Focussed Perspective: Brands as Like Me/ Connect to Me*	*Relationship-focused perspective: Brands as Relationship partners*
Features/Physiognomy Mind	Brand-self congruity Brand-self connections	Brand relationship types Brand attachment and aversion from betrayal
Personalities/ Traits		Brand relationship norms

Figure 2.2: Categories of humanising brands
Source: MacInnis and Folkes (2017:357)

With brand personification in mind, MacInnis and Folkes' study (2017:357) provides a broad overview of humanising brands. Their framework considers how brands through marketing humanise non-human entities for the consumer. The framework is divided into subdomains as depicted in Figure 2.2 (MacInnis & Folkes 2017). These domains are, firstly, anthropomorphism, which focuses on human-like features, human-like mind, and human-like personality. The second domain adopts a more self-focused perspective that focuses on how the brand relates to oneself; while the last domain takes a relationship-focused perspective, which examines the relationships between brands and consumers (Cohen 2014; MacInnis & Folkes 2017).

For this study, the personification of the political brand is examined through the lens of the anthropomorphism domain. However, arguments by Aggarwal and McGill (2012) point out that anthropomorphising a brand is similar to Aaker's (1997) brand personality traits.

However, unlike Aaker's (1997) personality traits, by anthropomorphising a brand, the brand becomes "a face and a name" that are endowed with human emotions. Consequently, it can be argued that Aaker's (1997) brand personality traits consider the brand's personality on the first level. However, Keller and Lehmann (2006:741) state that anthropomorphism of a brand is common in advertising messages and casual conversations. Therefore, on a second level, the study must consider the anthropomorphising of brands because this construction for political parties might encourage voters (who might be ignorant about issues or political debate) to discover more (Rutter et al 2015). With this in mind, Rutter et al (2015) established that researchers have begun to consider this approach in political brand strategies (see Section 3.5).

The following section discusses the concept of brand identity as one of the core brand constructs.

2.3.3   Brand identity

The concept of brand identity can best be explained by referring to the various brand identity models. It is acknowledged that the most cited brand identity models are those of Ind (1997) and De Chernatony (1999), Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism (see Pirvani 2009), and Aaker and Joachmisthaler's (2002) Brand Identity Model. It is further acknowledged that the Ind (1997) model focuses on strategic corporate identity, while Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism (Pirvani 2009) focuses more on customers' self-projection, reflection, and relationships. Lastly, De Chernatony's (1999) model focuses on the vision, culture, relationships, positioning, personality, relationships, and presentation of brand identity. This, however, is not the focus of this study.

This study, however, only reviews Aaker and Joachmisthaler's (2002) Brand Identity Model to understand the envisaged brand identity desired by brands. From a theoretical point of view, Aaker and Joachmisthaler's (2002) Brand Identity Model was chosen as a framework to analyse brand identity for this study, because it is a widely adopted framework that presents the concept of brand identity as a system and focuses on the brand as a product, organisation, person, and symbol. The Brand Identity System also takes into consideration values and benefits, credibility, and relationships. It is argued that Aaker and Joachimsthaler's (2002) Brand Identity System is relevant to this study because this model views brand identity with the customer in mind and how the brand identity can build a relationship between the brand and the customer. It is important to mention the other brand identity models.

Aaker and Joachmisthaler's (2002) Brand Identity Model is explained in more detail in the following section.

2.3.3.1   Aaker and Joachmisthaler's (2002) Brand Identity Model

Aaker and Joachmisthaler's (2002) classical Brand Identity Model, as depicted in Figure 2.3, clearly outlines brand identity as a unique set of brand associations, which implies that the brand identity drives all brand-building efforts and therefore should have depth.
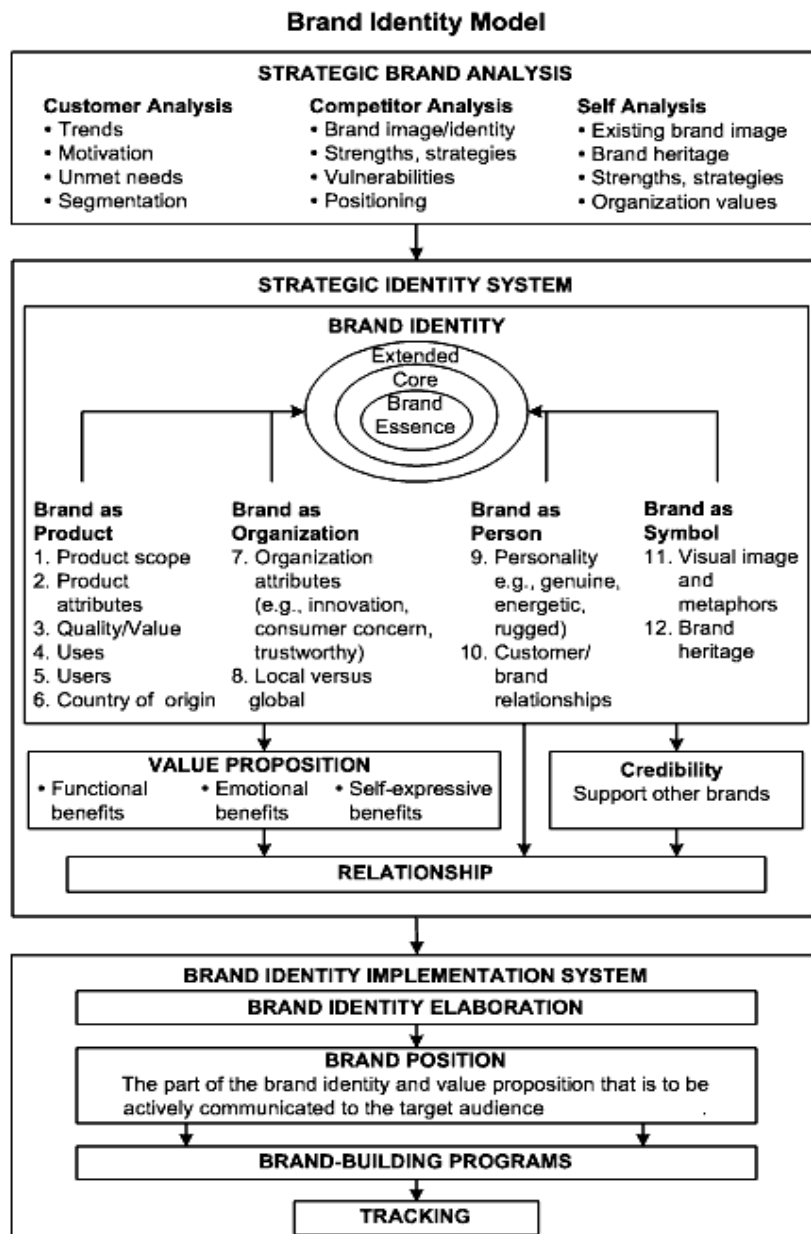
Figure 2.3: Brand Identity Model

Source: Aaker and Joachmisthaler (2002:44)

The Brand Identity Model emphasises that the core identity is the central, timeless essence of the brand that remains constant as the brand moves into new environments. In this regard, Farhana (2014:24) argues that the core identity provides a focus for the organisation. The extended identity, comprising 12 brand identity elements, sets the organisation apart from its competition. These elements are organised around the following four perspectives:

- The first perspective, brand as a product, includes the following elements: product scope, product attributes, quality/value, user experience, and users' country of origin.
- The second perspective, brand as organisation, incorporates elements such as organisational attributes and local versus global.
- The third perspective, brand as a person, includes elements such as brand personality and customer/brand relationships.
- Lastly, the brand as symbol includes elements such as visual imagery / metaphors and brand heritage.

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2002:55) point out that it is important to note that each perspective is relevant to the Brand Identity System, but virtually no brand has an association in all the categories.

When considering these elements, for an effective brand, an organisation's brand identity firstly needs to create a compelling value proposition that resonates with customers. The value proposition must provide a clear direction for the brand from a functional value point of view, namely how the product improves or solves a customer's needs; in other words, its relevance for customers. Secondly, it highlights the emotional benefits, which builds unique differentiation for the customer. Lastly, the value proposition is self-expressive and quantifies the brand value. In essence, the brand value tells the ideal customer why they should buy the product. In summary, it differentiates the brand from competitors, and represents what the organisation can and will do over time (Jones & Bonevac 2013; Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2002).

It is therefore argued that brand identity helps to create a relationship between the brand and its customers, which is in line with Aaker and Joachimsthaler's (2002) views. Of special importance is Aaker and Joachimsthaler's (2002) view (which is anchored in their Brand Identity System) that for a brand to build a relationship with customers through brand identity, it can only do so by creating a value proposition. To put it differently, Esch (2008:58) clarifies the concept of brand identity as follows: "associations are the essential characteristics and attributes of the brand", and this can lead to perceived brand personality

(Phillips, McQuarrie & Griffin 2014; Aaker 1997). Key to successful branding is thus to understand how to develop a brand identity, to know what the brand stands for, and to effectively express that identity to ensure that customers believe the brand promise. It is through the history and heritage of the brand that credibility is built (Aaker 1996).

The idea is therefore put forward in this study that it is important to have insight into the value of brand identity and how brand strategists want the brand to be perceived by consumers since the brand persona is seen as one of the brand identity elements, which forms the foundation of this study (see Section 3.4.1).

Summarising the essence of brand identity, it can be argued that brand identity works as a vision of how the brand wants to be viewed by its consumers. This supports the notion of brand identity that suggests that consumers associate with a brand due to the ability of that brand to contribute to the identity consumers would like to obtain or maintain of the brand (Phillips et al 2014; Ashworth, Dacin & Thomson 2009).

The next section discusses the concept of brand culture as one of the core brand constructs.

2.3.4   Brand culture

Brand culture refers to the cultural codes of brands, which include the history, images, and myths of the brand. These cultural codes influence the brand meaning and value in the marketplace in that brand culture is dynamic and it adapts to the ever-changing environment (Krishna 2019). Recent views are that brand culture places brands firmly within the complex cultural branding process (Cayla & Eckhardt 2008; Schroeder 2009). This suggests that if brands exist as cultural, ideological, and political objects, that brands themselves have become ideological referents that can potentially shape culture, economical activities, and social norms (Loacker & Sullivan 2016). For this reason, brand culture is viewed from a communication perspective in this study, which requires the brand to understand the brand culture in conjunction with more typical branding concepts such as brand identity, brand image, brand strategy, and brand value (Loacker & Sullivan 2016; Schroeder 2009).

Several academic papers concur that brand culture refers to the cultural influences and implications of brands in two ways. Firstly, a brand provides meaning to brand culture and brand managers thus have the power to influence society (Banet-Weiser & Sturken 2019; Loacker & Sullivan 2016; Hatch & Schultz 2009; Schroeder & Salzer-Morling 2006). Secondly, together with brand identity and brand image, brand culture provides the necessary cultural, historical, and political grounding to understand brands in context (Schroeder 2009). However, Hatch and Schultz (2009) argue that it is crucial for brand

culture to expand to the branding process. Brand culture must thus move away from only executing top management's vision and rather enact the brand's promise through alignment with the brand's culture, image, and vision (Banet-Weiser & Sturken 2019).

In the next section, the focus moves to the concept of brand positioning as another core brand construct.

2.3.5   Brand positioning

The concept of brand positioning was introduced more than 50 years ago. The concept has since been adopted and developed by academics, first as an advertising concept and later extended to a management concept (Urde & Koch 2014).

Several scholars consider that brands often use a brand persona (see Section 2.3.5) for their brand positioning, which is a key element in branding and a marketing strategy (Kapferer 2012; Keller 2012; Esch 2008; Aaker 1996). The brand strategy provides in practice the brand's strategic intent or the position the brand would like to occupy in the mind of the consumer (Urde & Koch 2014). Several scholars have put forward that the brand positioning statement summarises a story that supports the brand's persona, which in turn guides stakeholders on how they should see the brand's position (Keller 2012; Wymer 2012; Keller & Lehmann 2006; Urde 2003; Aaker 1996). However, in their seminal work, Park, Jaworski and MacInnis (1989:139) argue that the brand positioning concept provides "little guidance in managing and maintaining a consistent brand image over time". Although this might be true, Keller and Lehmann (2006) explain that brand positioning is key in establishing key brand associations in the minds of consumers over time and to differentiate the brand from the competition in the long run. Another key point is that all established brands have a position (Urde & Koch 2014).

Brand positioning results in communication themes that enable the company to set communication objectives (Ghodeswar 2008). It can be argued that brand positioning formulates the brand strategy that drives the organisation's communication (Leijerholt, Biedenbach & Hultén 2017). Successful brand positioning therefore provides the foundation for effective brand management, which is anchored in a brand's strategy (Coffie 2020).

This study does not support Park et al's (1989) view because they argue that the brand positioning concept provides very limited guidance on managing and maintaining a consistent brand image over time. Keller and Lehmann's (2006) and Urde and Koch's (2014) views are more in line with this study's theoretical point of departure, namely that brand positioning is part of branding and thus key to differentiating the brand from the competition

in the long run by using a brand persona. It is acknowledged that brand communication is an important element within brand positioning, which is explained in Section 2.3.8.

It is further argued in this study that the concept of brand positioning can be viewed from both an outside-in orientation (how brands want to be perceived by consumers) and from an inside-out orientation (how brands are projected by an organisation).

Similarly, Urde and Koch (2014) confirm that brand positioning can be seen from two approaches, namely a market-orientated approach (outside-in orientation) or a brand-orientated approach (inside-out orientation). The market-orientated approach defines and presents the intended brand positioning from a perceived brand image that is informed by customers' perceptions of the organisation. The brand-orientated approach, on the other hand, defines and presents the intended brand positioning from the organisation's point of view. Table 2.1 summarises the market-orientated positioning versus the brand-orientated positioning.

Table 2.1: Market-orientated positioning versus brand-orientated positioning

Position	Market orientated	Brand orientated
Point of departure	External market demand and industry structure	Internal strength-driven brand potential
Approach	Outside-in	Inside-out
Key concept	Image	Identity
Prominence	Market (customer) over resources (brand)	Resources (brand) over the market (customer)
Strategic focus	Positioning the brand to satisfy the needs and wants of customers and non-customer stakeholders	Positioning the brand to satisfy the needs and wants of the customer and non-customer stakeholders within the boundaries of the organisation's identity

Source: Urde and Koch (2014:483)

Further studies that were conducted by Baumgarth and Merrilees (2016) observe that there are differences between the market-orientated and brand-orientated approach to the positioning concept. Baumgarth and Merrilees (2016) put forward that there is space for organisations to be purely market orientated or brand orientated in their positioning. This means that both these approaches' strategic focus is to satisfy the customer and non-customer. However, the brand-orientated approach's strategic focus is within the boundaries of the organisation's identity in that it positions the brand to satisfy the wants and needs of the customer and non-customer. This study adopted the brand-orientated approach because it provides the necessary focus when communicating the brand's position to consumers.

2.3.6   Brand differentiation

Scholars argue that differentiation is "the essence of strategy"; it should therefore be at the core of brand management (Hollis 2013:106; Zook & Allen 2011:89). If a brand serves as a strategic asset, brand strategists must create a differentiation that will be both sustainable and meaningful (Hollis 2013; Kotler & Pfoertsch 2010; Keller 2008). Brand differentiation is, firstly, a tangible difference, which refers to what consumers can see, hear, or taste. That difference may not be substantial, but drawing attention to the tangible difference can magnify the importance of brand differentiation. Secondly, brand differentiation includes intangible differences, which resonate emotionally with consumers; for example, they need to feel emotionally connected to the brand (Hollis 2013; Zook & Allen 2011). This study therefore departs from the point of view that brand personality (as an intangible difference) is part of the brand's strategy to create differentiation through brand communication (Rutter et al 2015; Hollis 2013).

The above discussion makes it clear that brands compete for attention in a complicated environment, and differentiation can thus provide brands with the power to set themselves apart from their competition (Coelho, Bairrada & De Matos Coelho 2020; Hollis 2013; Zook & Allen 2011).

To provide consumers with a unique brand experience, brand managers need to be strategic about how they achieve brand differentiation since achieving brand differentiation is a prerequisite for the provision of a unique brand experience, which is discussed next (Rahman 2014).

2.3.7   Brand experience

Since the concept of brand experience was introduced by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) in the early 1980s, the concept has further evolved over the last 30 years. Researchers often distinguish between brand loyalty and brand experience and put forward that brand experience encourages brand loyalty by creating emotional connections by providing an engaging, compelling, and consistent context (Chinomona 2016; Zehir, Şahin, Kitapçı & Özsahin 2011; Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello 2009; Morrison & Crane 2007). The context refers to the environment in which the consumer encounters the brand and encompasses the physical and relational characteristics of the brand setting (Zehir et al 2011).

The focus of brand experience development since the 2000s has been on the various dimensions of brand experience, such as on the intellectual, emotional, social, and physical dimensions of brand experience (Dubé & Lebel 2003). For example, the seminal work of

Brakus et al (2009) identified five brand experience dimensions, namely sensory, affective, social, bodily, and intellectual. Brakus et al's (2009) work also categorised brand experience into four dimensions, namely sensory, affective, behavioural, and intellectual. Drawing on these researchers, five broad experience dimensions emerge, namely sensory, affective, intellectual, behaviour, and social. Brakus et al (2009:53) describe the brand experience as "subjective, internal (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications and environments".

The more recent work of Nysveen, Pedersen and Skard (2013) has validated Brakus et al's (2009) four brand experience dimensions (sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural), but their work has added an important fifth dimension for service brands, which is relational (Schmitt, Brakus & Zarantonello 2015). This dimension is becoming increasingly important for brands because of the growth of the social media environment (as discussed in Chapter 4). Nysveen et al's (2013) research added insight from a brand management point of view because it enhances understanding of how to improve brand personality, satisfaction, and loyalty by fine-tuning brand experiences along all five dimensions rather than in terms of a single construct.

The researcher acknowledges that the focus of the above-mentioned study is on services rather than a physical product. For this reason, the researcher puts forward that the concept of brand experience will be evoked by brand-related stimuli and therefore adopted Nysveen et al's (2013) five dimensions of sensory, affective, behavioural, intellectual, and relational for the study as set out in Table 2.2, as adapted from Schmitt et al (2015:728) and Nysveen et al (2013:406).

Table 2.2: Five dimensions of brand experience

Dimension	Brand experience: Low	Brand experience: Medium	Brand experience: High
Sensory	Brand does not appeal to senses	Find the brand interesting in a sensory way	Brand makes a strong impression on visual senses
Affective	Brand is an emotional brand	Do not have strong emotions for the brand	Brand induces feelings and sentiments
Behavioural	Brand is not action orientated	The brand results in bodily experience	Engage with physical actions when using the brand
Intellectual	Brand does not make me think	Brand stimulates curiosity and problem solving	Thinking and problem solving are involved when engaging with the brand
Relational	Brand is too complex and challenging	Brand creates an interest for the customer	Stakeholders co-create brand value

Sources: Schmitt et al (2015:728); Nysveen et al (2013:406)

Brand experience can be defined from a marketing perspective as the customer experience that originates from a set of interactions between a customer and a product, an organisation, or part of its organisations, which provoke a reaction. This experience is strictly personal and implies the customer's involvement at different levels (rational, emotional, sensorial, physical, and spiritual) (Chinomona 2016:127; Zehir et al 2011:1219; Gentile, Spiller & Noci 2007:398).

Brand experience can also be defined as "subjective, internal consumer responses and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments" (Meyer & Schwager 2007:116). This definition was widely adopted in previous studies (Chinomona 2016; Brakus et al 2009). However, for this study, Coelho et al's (2020:42) views on brand experience as a construct that plays a special role in helping to infuse human-like characteristics in brands are adopted. These views are supported given the focus on how affective, behavioural, intellectual, and relations feelings are invoked in consumers.

The next section focuses on the concept of brand communication.

2.3.8 Brand communication

In the extant literature, there are several approaches to the concept of brand communication. In the early 1980s, the importance of having a long-term integrated communication strategy that demonstrates the brand's value to the targeted consumers was the focus point (Ghodeswar 2008). In due time, a group of scholars focused on audience exposure to a brand and on brand communication's ability to build a brand's reputation (Zehir et al 2011). Chinomona (2016:126) defines brand communication as "when an idea or image of a product or service is marketed so that the distinctiveness is identified and recognised by many consumers".

Given the various definitions of brand communication, it is important to consider that communication creates an interface between a brand and consumers. This study adopted a digital marketing approach to brand communication. Royle and Laing (2013) and Wymbs (2011) put forward that digital marketing uses digital technologies to create an integrated, targeted, and measurable communication that helps to acquire and retain consumers while building deeper relationships with them. These descriptions of digital marketing are useful for this study; firstly, because it emphasises the importance of a strategic underpinning of the digital marketing approach. Secondly, it emphasises measurability of brand communication and refers to the integration of marketing and communication. Lastly, digital marketing places the focus on relationships and communication.

It is noted that brand communication needs a holistic view, and therefore cannot only focus on one-way communication (Chinomona 2016) but needs to focus on the transactional value that two-way communication offers (Royle & Laing 2013; Zehir et al 2011). Brand communication can strategically build trust between a brand and the consumer (Royle & Laing 2013; Zehir et al 2011). Building on this argument, Bresciani and Ewing (2015:324) point out that brands must earn consumers' trust and they put forward the following principles that brand communication needs to consider:

- Plan communication around the total customer journey;
- Focus on the emotional drivers in brand and communication strategy;
- Recognise the importance of the entertainment value of ideas;
- Actively design ways to get ideas into popular culture; and
- Recognise that brand actions mean more than words.

This section addressed several scholarly works that focused on the concepts of brand identity, brand personality, brand image, brand culture, brand positioning, brand experience, brand differentiation, and brand communication. These brand and branding concepts were then discussed in an attempt to contextualise the study's main concepts. The study expands on the various branding strategies from a political brand perspective in Section 3.6.

The next section discusses the concept of digital branding with a focus on digital branding strategy and techniques.

2.4   DIGITAL BRANDING

The Internet has been widely used since 1990 when Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web (Andrews 2013). The vast amount of scholarly work in the marketing communication field that focuses on digital branding is evidence of the important role the digital environment plays in brand management. The Internet has brought with it a change in the way that consumers connect with brands and with one another (Stokes 2013). The debate around the influence of the Internet on branding originated from two schools of thoughts: the revolutionists and the evolutionists (Christodoulides & De Chernatony 2004). The first school of thought, the revolutionists, argues that the Internet undermines branding and leads to a decline in brand appeal because the consumer can now search and compare brands on their own terms (Ibeh, Luo & Dinnie 2005). However, this argument has evolved beyond this view, with more scholars pointing out that the Internet has evolved the branding concept and that organisations need to embrace online branding more to stay relevant in the competitive environment (Simmons, Thomas & Truong 2010; Rowley 2009; Ibeh et al 2005).

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Lipiäinen and Karjaluoto (2015) are of the view that the Internet has provided customers with more choice and therefore adds to the debate that branding concepts (as discussed in Section 2.3) are still relevant. However, what is different is that the environment in which branding is executed is unpredictable and highly competitive and that engaging with consumers is becoming increasingly difficult (Azionya & Sitto 2018; Simmons et al 2010; Ibeh et al 2005; Rowley 2009; Christodoulides & De Chernatony 2004).

Christodoulides and De Chernatony (2004), Rowley (2009), Ibeh et al (2005), Simmons et al (2010), and Azionya and Sitto (2018) argue that since the Internet has impacted on branding, organisations must reconsider their digital branding strategies in the digital landscape. This view is also supported by this study. The concepts of digital branding and digital branding strategies are therefore explained in the next sections.

2.4.1   Defining digital branding

Branding online has been referred to as e-branding, i-branding, or digital branding and these terms are used interchangeably. These concepts refer to how online channels are used to support brands (Hennig-Thurau, Malthouse, Friege, Gensler, Lobschat, Rangaswamy & Skiera 2010; Rowley 2009; Simmons 2007). Therefore, henceforth in this study, the concept "digital branding" is used throughout the thesis when referring to online branding. The seminal work of Simmons (2007:550) provides a framework for branding in the Internet environment by presenting the four pillars of digital branding, namely marketing communications, understanding customers, interactivity, and content. However, Lilleker (2015) makes it clear that online branding is not fundamentally different from offline branding because the value of marketing communication, understanding the customer, and content are just as important for offline branding. De Chernatony (2001) and Christodoulides and De Chernatony (2004) confirm that a new concept of a brand is not needed because of the offline and online environments in which brands nowadays operate. However, scholars suggest that brand managers must adopt a different mindset to brand management within the online environment and develop an appreciation of changes in the way a brand's essence is executed (Dodwani & Agarwal 2014; Christodoulides & De Chernatony 2004; De Chernatony 2001). Although offline brands are tightly controlled (Ibeh et al 2005), brand managers have a limited degree of control over the online brand because of the involvement and greater interaction of the brand's communities on the Internet, which places more emphasis on brand managers as value managers of the brand, as referred to in Section 2.2.3 (Lipiäinen & Karjaluoto 2015). It can therefore be argued that the online environment has redefined the function of brand management and that the function has moved beyond

just representing a brand but has expanded to experiencing a brand (Kaufmann et al 2016; Indounas & Arvaniti 2015; Dodwani & Agarwal 2014; Chiagouris & Wansley 2000).

In this new communications environment, digital branding should be related to managing customer relationships (Nysveen et al 2013; Hennig-Thurau et al 2010) by facilitating conversations around the brand (Nysveen et al 2013; Christodoulides 2009), rather than pushing marketing messages through. Since there are several ways for a brand to reach consumers, it is important for brands to cut through the clutter and being able to connect with consumers and deliver relevant brand content (Azionya & Sitto 2018; Yan 2011). The environment in which the brand finds itself today is referred to as a post-digital world, where information and knowledge are important and digital technology is seen as commonplace. It is in this digital environment that consumers and brands connect in a form of collaboration, co-creation, and conversations, which have become the cornerstone of brand communication (Muir & Verwey 2018).

The next section discusses the concept of digital brand strategy.

2.4.2   Digital brand strategy

It is important to understand the digital ecosystem for brands, which refers to a range of channels through which brands can engage with their consumers (Vermaak & Wright 2018). The digital ecosystem creates a converged digital strategy, which combines the use of own media, earned media, and paid media to connect with the consumer (see Figure 2.4). Secondly, a digital marketing strategy must include content marketing, and, lastly, some online PR techniques. A converged digital brand strategy refers to collaboration and co-creation with consumers about the brand (Azionya & Sitto 2018; Coulter, Bruhn, Schoenmueller & Schäfer 2012; Yan 2011). This collaboration and co-creation therefore change how brands engage with consumers.

The Internet has changed how consumers engage with brands. The consumers are tech-savvy and expect to be reached through various digital platforms (Vermaak & Wright 2018; Rowley 2009). Several scholars concur that the digital brand strategy needs to firstly build a relationship between the consumer and the organisation; secondly, to encourage the consumer to be receptive to the brand's communication and brand values; and, lastly, to encourage the consumer to engage with the brand by means of interactive dialogue (Vermaak & Wright 2018; Coulter et al 2012; Yan 2011). Strategically, this dialogue can then help the brand to differentiate itself and find a competitive advantage. The digital brand strategy needs to inform consumers about the vision behind the brand to build differentiation for the brand; and the dialogue can act as a check on whether the brand is being understood

by the audience(s). The consequences of the dialogue are to firstly build positive brand associations and relationships; secondly, to build the perceived quality of the brand; and, lastly, to build greater awareness of the brand among consumers.

It is against this background that the next section discusses digital branding techniques to enable understanding of the digital context and trends and how brands use different techniques to collaborate, co-create, and connect with the consumer online.

2.4.3   Digital branding techniques

Within the context of digital branding strategy, the brand manager has access to several digital branding techniques to strategically drive the brand message through brand communication to engage with the consumer. The brand can use digital branding techniques, which are technology-based platforms that use the Internet to connect with consumers in order to deliver content using different interaction levels (Straker, Wrigley & Rosemann 2015).

Numerous digital branding techniques are available today and hence, because of the nature of the digital environment, these branding techniques are not static but are always evolving. However, this section discusses only the most popular online branding tactics as highlighted by numerous branding scholars (Azionya & Sitto 2018; Moran & Muzellec 2017; Zahoor & Qureshi 2017; Xu 2014; Chu & Kim 2011).

2.4.3.1 Social word of mouth (sWoM)

The word of mouth (WoM) industry, which is a form of traditional marketing, has experienced massive growth since 2004, according to the Word of Mouth Marketing Association (2017). The growth is evident because of the growth of consumer participation in online and social networking media. The concept of electronic word of mouth (eWoM) developed from the traditional form of marketing, namely WoM. In the marketing literature, the concept of eWoM is applicable to digital media; however, when it moves onto social media platforms, it is referred to as sWoM (Vermaak & Wright 2018; Moran & Muzellec 2017; Cruz & Fill 2008; Dobele, Toleman & Beverland 2007).

The concepts of eWoM and sWoM have emerged because of the nature of social network sites (SNSs) and microblogs (see Chapter 4). These platforms have greatly increased the ability of consumers to come together in groups of friends or strangers to discuss brands, share updates, offer advice, and relive experiences through what is now referred to as sWoM (Moran & Muzellec 2017). The function of sWoM is seen as a deliberate branding

technique created by marketers that encourages individuals to pass on an online marketing message to others (Devi 2015; Lekhaya 2014). Several scholars argue that sWoM is a powerful form of brand tactic that can distribute credible, controlled messages through various digital platforms (Vermaak & Wright 2018; Cruz & Fill 2008; Dobele et al 2007). There are, however, scholars who highlight that aspects such as brand credibility can affect brand-generated sWoM messages (Moran & Muzellec 2017; Abendroth & Heyman 2013; Schmitt, Skiera & Van den Bulte 2011). With this in mind, Chatterjee (2011) points out that the purpose of SNSs is to facilitate social exchanges among groups of friends. Most major SNS platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, insist on the adoption of a Real User Policy, which removes user anonymity by disclosing users' real identities. Another key function of SNSs is to encourage users to connect online with their offline friends; thus strengthening the tie between SNS-based connections (Moran & Muzellec 2017; Chatterjee 2011). Given these points, it can be argued that brand-initiated sWoM has the potential to engage users and help users to connect with the brand.

Hamed (2017:42) highlights the advantages of using sWoM: firstly, there are very few expenses for an organisation since it is the individual forwarding the brand's messages. Secondly, sWoM is voluntary rather than paid testimonials and therefore can be viewed as more credible by the recipient; and, lastly, the recipient will forward the message to people they know will be interested in it, which therefore makes sWoM more effectively targeted.

2.4.3.2 Content marketing

The concept of content marketing plays an important role in driving engagement between an organisation and customers. Potential customers are pulled (and not pushed) towards well-written, high-quality, and relevant content on an organisation's website, blog, or social media page(s) (Weiger, Wetzel & Hammerschmidt 2019; Ryan, Allen, Gray & McInerney 2017). Content marketing is described as "the marketing and business process for creating and distributing valuable and compelling content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience – with the objective of profitable customer action" (Pulizzi 2013:32). Anthony (2015) describes content marketing as creating non-product content (be it informational, educational, or entertaining) and publishing it on brand contact points with customers to attract their attention, to focus on the topic around a brand, and to pull consumers closer to learning more about a brand. In the marketing literature, content marketing is seen as a branding technique by which organisations seek to create and/or share content that is relevant to their consumers on social media, which will reinforce their brand messaging (Weiger et al 2019; Baltes 2015; DeMers 2014).

Brand storytelling, as a tool of content marketing, can be used to pull consumers towards the brand (Weber & Grauer 2019; Solomon 2013). Du Plessis (2015) points out that as a branding technique, content marketing can use several pulling techniques to attract users and generate earned media to the content of podcasts, videos, images, blogs, and social media posts, among others. This content aims to drive natural engagement between the brand, the consumer, and sWoM, and to create long-term relationships with and loyalty by customers (Pritchard & Sitto 2018:130).

2.4.3.3 Email as a relationship marketing channel

Numerous authors agree that email marketing is a widely used tool in the digital marketing context today (Speechly 2018; Zhang, Kumar & Cosguner 2017; MarketingSherpa 2016; Swink 2013). The focus of using this branding technique is to build loyalty towards a brand with email subscribers to brand content (Zhang et al 2017; Merisavo & Raulas 2004). Emails offer various ways of presenting information to and communicating with a specific target market in a personal and targeted way. It must be mentioned that content marketing also uses an email list to alert consumers to new content on an organisation's blog, website, or social media, or to present compelling content with a regular newsletter. The impact of a personalised message in the consumer's inbox is very different from any other branding technique (Speechly 2018; Swink 2013).

2.4.3.4 Digital public relations (PR)

The PR field has been part of mass media since the 20th century (Zerfass, Verčič & Wiesenberg 2016). However, in today's technology environment, the boundaries are blurred between digital PR and digital marketing, but for this study, the researcher is of the view that digital PR forms part of the digital branding strategy and is seen as a digital branding technique because the focus of this study is on the context of a brand.

The digital environment has, however, forced this field to reconsider how PR professionals not only create but also deliver online content. For this reason, today's PR professionals' reach is far beyond traditional media to include digital media users (Gendron 2017). This has given rise to the term "digital PR", which Pritchard and Sitto (2018:131) define as "the publication of digital content [and] optimising relevant online channels to maintain relationships with connected audiences".

Today, the PR field is also exploring new approaches to traditional media relations; for example, using the PESO media approach to reach consumers, which refers to paid, earned, shared, and owned media (Luttrell & Capizzo 2019; Gendron 2017). A similar

approach, referred to as POEM (paid, owned, and earned media), is also increasingly used to establish a digital strategy for digital marketing and content marketing, as explained in Sections 2.4.3 and 2.4.3.2 (Anderl, Shumann & Kunz 2016). The researcher views the PESO model as an inclusive model for digital PR, digital marketing, and content marketing because this model drives a convergent digital strategy that is inclusive of two or more media types that work in conjunction to meet communication objectives. The section below only briefly discusses the model as depicted in Figure 2.4, from a digital PR perspective, as the study views digital PR as a digital branding technique.
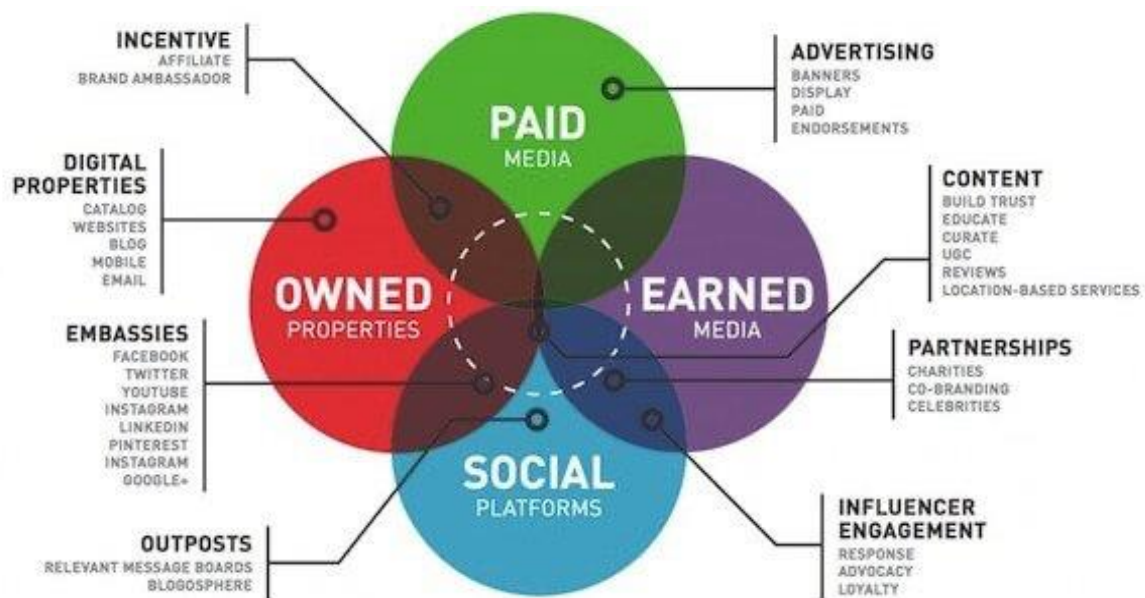
Figure 2.4: The paid, earned, shared, and owned (PESO) model
Source: Adapted from Luttrell and Capizzo (2019:19)

The PESO model can be explained as follows:

- **Paid media:** For a digital PR programme, it refers to social media content marketing or to the content appearing in the form of a function of the host platforms (native advertising, and sponsored content such as Facebook posts) (Dietrich 2018; Zerfass et al 2016).

- **Earned media:** In traditional media, it refers to getting publicity in newspapers or publications that are not paid for. In the digital environment, earned media refers to when consumers talk about the brand or brand-related content that is shared online (Azionya & Sitto 2018; Dietrich 2018).

- **Shared media:** It is also known as social media. Digital PR has started to use this as the main communication platform to engage with stakeholders internally and externally (Dietrich 2018).

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- **Owned media:** It is known as brand content that is created, owned, and maintained by a brand (Azionya & Sitto 2018; Dietrich 2018). It is content that lives on a brand's website or blog. PR controls the messaging and tells the brand stories in a way the brand would like to position itself (Dietrich 2018; Pritchard & Sitto 2018).

Digital PR puts forward that social media campaigns are built based on the PESO model, but to engage with stakeholders, it is important to drive a convergent digital strategy that is inclusive of two or more media types that work in conjunction to meet communication objectives (Azionya & Sitto 2018; Luttrell & Capizzo 2019; McLean & Wilson 2016).

2.4.3.5 Blogging

A blogger is described in the literature as someone who regularly updates a blog or an online commentary site (Du Plessis 2018; Yaakop, Seman, Taib, Zawawi, Jazimin, Dewi & Saahar 2018). Bloggers post their comments online and allow the world to comment on it, or keep an updated online personal journal (Garg & Pahuja 2020). A blog can also be seen as a "weblog" (Du Plessis 2018; Yaakop et al 2018). There are different categories of blogs, which are presented in Table 2.3 as adopted from Adams (2019), Du Plessis (2018), and Pinjamaa (2016). The category of the blog determines the content of the blog (Garg & Pahuja 2020:174; Du Plessis 2018:184; Pinjamaa 2016:6; Wallsten 2008:33), and the category therefore becomes a strategic tool for the blogger to engage with his/her audience.

Table 2.3: Blog categories

Blog categories	Descriptive
Personal blog	This is the largest group of blogs in the blogosphere. It is written by people who like to express themselves online, and they blog on various topics.
Corporate blog	These blogs drive the company's vision, mission, and business objectives. These blogs reflect the brand personality. It is also used for content marketing.
Topical blog	The focus of these blogs is to drive content on certain issues; for example, politics.
Academic blog	These blogs allow academia to expand their readership but also to make their work more accessible.
Media blog	These are blogs that focus on specific media; for example, a photoblog.
Reverse blog	In this category, the owner of the blog allows users to supply content to the blog. The content goes through an approval system to ensure that only quality content is published.
Microblog	This is a type of social media blogging that contains short messages. These blogs can include podcasts and video messages.
Low-quality blog	These blogs are purely written with search engines in mind.
Vlogs	This is where the blogger uses video as a blogging platform. It is also referred to as vlogging.
Professional blog	On these blogs, the blogger blogs for a living.

Blog categories	Descriptive
Citizen blog	This is the online version of citizen journalism. These blogs help shape opinions about what is currently happening in culture and local/global arenas. These blogs push a great deal of user-generated content and reference many other news sources.
Political blog	These blogs are described as a complex form of political participation that blends hypertext links, opinionated commentary, calls to political action, and requests for feedback in different ways at different moments in time.

Sources: Garg and Pahuja (2020:174); Du Plessis (2018:184); Pinjamaa (2016:6); Wallsten (2008:33)

Bloggers, including brands, create a blog persona, which represents the unique personality of the organisation (Du Plessis 2018). The blog persona humanises the brand (as discussed in Section 2.3.2) and drives connectivity with consumers on the blogging platform (Garg & Pahuja 2020; Du Plessis 2018). A blog persona is defined as the "unique personality or voice of the blog" (Du Plessis 2018:194). Subsequently, recent studies have highlighted the importance of using an online persona as a branding technique that strategically drives brand identity, which is discussed in more detail below (Garg & Pahuja 2020; Kheder 2015). When creating a blog persona, a blogger should consider the blog title, the language, and visual design (Dennen 2009). While Du Plessis (2018) adds that the blogger should identify character traits for the blog, which will lead to the blog's identity, Baker (2009:8) points out how the blog persona can be characterised by a "blended identity", which exceeds the differences between "anonymous" versus "real-life personas", which refer to real-life personalities.

2.4.3.6 Developing an online brand persona

As mentioned before, an online brand persona creates a long-lasting emotional connection with the brand's target audience; thus ensuring that the audience can relate to the brand (Herskovitz & Crystal 2010). Engelbrecht and Ngcongo (2018:39) define an online persona as "the character of a brand or organisation that is communicated through a digital platform". Some key characteristics of an online brand persona thus become evident. Firstly, an online brand persona drives connectivity between the brand and its audience and, secondly, the persona emphasises the brand message that should drive the brand persona (Engelbrecht & Ngcongo 2018:39).

Some scholars agree that the online brand persona is a key driver of the brand's messages (Pereira 2019; Herskovitz & Crystal 2010). The online brand persona thus plays an important role in branding. Consumers engage with the brand because the brand persona reflects the consumer's understanding of the brand's values. These brand personas will appear human to the extent that they possess recognisably human traits (as discussed in

Section 2.3.2). In this regard, Hall, Ovarrubias and Kirschbaum (2017) argue that it is essential when creating a compelling brand since it starts with a strong and well-known personality, which links to brand storytelling. Numerous scholars confirm that the link between a brand's persona and brand storytelling is important because it is fundamental in the brand's communication to initiate and drive conversations between brands and their consumers (Pereira 2019; Pritchard & Sitto 2018; Hall et al 2017; Du Plessis 2015; Herskovitz & Crystal 2010; Wolstenholme 2008). This concept is discussed in detail in Sections 3.4.2 and 4.9.

2.4.3.7 Brand storytelling

Although brand storytelling is considered a branding technique, the digital environment has forced this field to reconsider how brand managers not only create but also deliver online brand stories (Blazicek 2013). Scholars agree that the purpose of a brand story – digital or traditional – is not only to engage with consumers but also to help them to make sense of their world by creating an emotional connection for consumers with the brand (Pereira 2019; Lee & Chen 2016; Ashley & Tuten 2015). Brand storytelling can thus be described as emotive content that represents narratives of consumers' lives, which are shared and talked about (Hall et al 2017; Keller & Fay 2012; Handley 2013).

Also, recent literature explains brand storytelling as a strategic tool for content marketing, which is aimed at changing consumers' inactive behaviour through unobtrusive, engaging brand conversations in earned media (Pereira 2019; Tafesse & Wien 2017; Du Plessis 2015). Hughes et al (2016) view brand storytelling as a three-dimensional process that requires understanding the customer journey, the brand identity, and the context in which they co-exist (Pereira 2019). Brand storytelling is therefore viewed as a process that allows brands to identify their essential brand persona and craft a more authentic brand message that connects and resonates with the brand's customers (Pereira 2019; Miller 2017).

It is for this reason that this study needs to briefly distinguish between the informational and transformational storytelling approaches as set out in the seminal work of Puto and Wells (1984 in Engelbrecht & Ngcongo 2018). Informational storytelling provides the consumer with factual information, whereas transformational storytelling connects with the consumer on an experience level that distinguishes it from the competition. A transformational storytelling approach uses a unique set of characteristics that would typically be associated with the brand's persona.

Pereira (2019) and Hall et al's (2017) views on brand storytelling were adopted for this study because they argue that brand storytelling is a process that positions a brand's stories within

the social media environment to attract the interest of consumers based on relevance to their own lives. In other words, brands use storytelling as a pulling technique to attract interest to the brand. It is for this reason that the study adopted transformational storytelling for the purpose of measurement.

The study unpacks the concepts of brand storytelling as a political branding strategy in Sections 3.6.2 and 4.8. Table 2.4 presents all the viewpoints adopted in this chapter in a summarised format.

Table 2.4: Viewpoints adopted in this chapter

Concept	Definition adopted
Brand (Section 2.2.1)	Green (2009:32 cited in Mucundorfeanu 2018:43): "Brand is the sum of all feelings, thoughts, images, history, opportunities and market rumours that manifests itself in relation to a particular sector, group, company, product, service, idea or persona; the sum of all the details communicated by an entity and the associations that can be made with it."
Brand identity (Section 2.3.3)	Aaker and Joachimsthaler's (2002) Brand Identity Model: It is a widely adopted framework that presents the concept of brand identity as a system and focuses on the brand as a product, organisation, person, and symbol. The Brand Identity System also takes into consideration values and benefits, credibility, and relationships.
Brand personality (Section 2.3.2)	Personification of the brand is viewed through the lens of anthropomorphism, which focuses on human-like features, human-like mind, and human-like personalities (MacInnis & Folkes 2017).
Brand image (Section 2.3.1)	Brand image can be viewed from a consumer-orientated construct. According to Aaker (1991:109), "a brand image is a set of associations usually organised in some meaningful way". Brand image can also be viewed from a company-orientated construct. According to Nandan (2005:276), it "depends on the number of contacts consumers have with the various aspects of the product, brand and company".
Brand culture (Section 2.3.4)	This study views brand culture from a communication perspective, which requires the brand to understand the brand culture in conjunction with more typical branding concepts such as brand image, brand identity, brand strategy, and brand value (Loacker & Sullivan 2016; Schroeder 2009).
Brand positioning (Section 2.3.5)	Brand positioning is part of the branding and it is key to differentiate the brand over the competition, in the long run, using a brand persona (Keller & Lehmann 2006; Urde & Koch 2014).
Brand differentiation (Section 2.3.6)	This study adopted the point of view that brand personality (as an intangible difference) can be seen as a part of the brand's strategy to create differentiation through brand communication (Rutter et al 2015; Hollis 2013).
Brand experience (Section 2.3.7)	This study adopted Coelho et al's (2020:42) view on brand experience as a construct that plays a special role in helping to

Concept	Definition adopted
	infuse human-like characteristics into brands; given that its focus is on the feelings, affective, behavioural, intellectual, and relations it produces in consumers.
Brand communication (Section 2.3.8)	This study adopted a digital marketing approach to brand communication because it creates an interface between a brand and consumers. It is acknowledged that brand communication needs a holistic view, and this study therefore focused on the transactional value that two-way communication offers (Royle & Laing 2013; Zehir et al 2011). Brand communication can strategically build trust between a brand and the consumer (Royle & Laing 2013; Zehir et al 2011).
Digital branding (Section 2.4.1)	This study adopted the view of scholars that a new concept of a brand is not needed between the offline and online environments (De Chernatony 2001; De Chernatony & Christodoulides 2003). However, the study does agree with scholars that brand managers need to adopt a different mindset to brand management within the online environment (Dodwani & Agarwal 2014; De Chernatony & Christodoulides 2003; De Chernatony 2001) and that the focus of digital branding should be related to managing customer relationships (Nysveen et al 2013; Hennig-Thurau et al 2010) by facilitating conversations around the brand (Nysveen et al 2013; Christodoulides 2009), rather than pushing marketing messages through.
Digital brand strategy (Section 2.4.2)	Digital branding techniques are technology-based platforms that use the Internet to connect with consumers to deliver content using different interaction levels (Straker et al 2015). The study only focused on the most popular strategies: sWoM, email as a relationship marketing channel, digital PR, blogging, developing an online persona, and brand storytelling.

2.5   SUMMARY

The chapter reviewed the concept of a brand and supported the literature that a brand is a multidisciplinary concept with many perspectives. The study adopted Green's (2009:32 cited in Mucundorfeanu 2018) definition of a brand because it includes intangibles such as brand personality and it confirms the important relationship between brand identity and brand image. The chapter drew a clear differentiation between the concept of brand and branding, and established the understanding that the purpose of branding is to develop a deep set of associations for the brand. As a result, the chapter examined the role of brand management. According to the literature, the role of the brand manager has moved from a transactional tool to create brand engagement and brand co-creation, which the study adopted.

The chapter reviewed various literature in the communication, marketing, and branding field. The constructs of brand identity, brand personality, brand image, brand culture, brand

positioning, brand experience, brand differentiation, and brand communication were discussed in-depth in this chapter.

The digital environment was considered from a brand perspective. The chapter therefore also investigated digital branding and the digital branding techniques, including sWoM, email as a relationship marketing channel, digital PR, blogging, the development of an online persona, and brand storytelling.

In the next chapter, the concept of brand is extended to the concept of the political brand.

CHAPTER 3:
CONTEXTUALISING THE POLITICAL BRAND

3.1   INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 extends the brand concept as discussed in Chapter 2 and focuses on concepts such as political marketing, political communication, and political advertising within a political communication context. Lastly, the chapter briefly discusses political brand strategies, including political brand storytelling and political issue ownership, as further discussed in Chapter 4.

3.2   EXTENDING THE BRAND CONCEPT TO A POLITICAL CONTEXT

There has been growing interest in the literature in the application of brand management principles to political parties. However, Reeves, De Chernatony and Carrigan (2006) point out that the idea of applying branding principles to political parties is challenging as political parties traditionally view themselves as primarily ideologically driven. Needham and Smith (2015) counter Reeves et al's (2006) argument by stating that there is growing consensus that parties and politicians can be conceptualised as brands. The main argument that the researcher puts forward in this chapter is that political parties need to understand the value of political branding because political parties must distinguish themselves from their opposition. It is for this reason that political parties need to recognise the role that brand identity and brand persona play within the political environment (Gorbaniuk et al 2015). This viewpoint is supported by Ahmed, Lodhi and Ahmad (2017) and encourages researchers to view politics through the branding lens.

As argued in Section 2.2, brand is a multidisciplinary concept and is applied across disciplines. In this section, the brand and branding concepts are extended to the political marketing discipline.

Marland (2016) argues that branding concepts cannot seamlessly be applied to politics because, in the marketing field branding is seen as the connection between selling products or services to customers. For this reason, Lees-Marshment (2014) agrees that the political brand concept is broader than just a product. The political brand is rather about the overarching feeling, impressions, and associations the public has towards the political party, politician, or political issues. This is also acknowledged by Speed et al (2015), who agree that the concept "brand" in relation to politics cannot be examined from a purely marketing

perspective but needs to be placed firmly within the political marketing environment as the overarching discipline.

There has been a growing number of authors who have suggested that branding of politics is a helpful tool for the political consumer to cut through the communication clutter. The use of political marketing techniques to position political brands is crucial during election campaigns because individuals compete against individuals and political organisations compete against political organisations for votes (Mensah 2016; Lilleker 2015; Speed et al 2015).

The next section discusses the political brand and related concepts.

3.3   THE POLITICAL BRAND

It is argued in this study that it is difficult to create an authentic political brand identity because, firstly, of the complexity of the political environment and the relationships within the environment; and, secondly, developing a brand that political consumers can identify with is challenging (Jain et al 2018). The next section defines the concept of a political brand. Thereafter, the competing concepts, namely political marketing, political communication, and political advertising are clarified.

3.3.1   Towards defining the concept of a political brand

It is impossible to adopt a definition for the concept of a political brand without first clarifying its meaning. Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy (2007:7) define a political brand from a service perspective as follows: "A political brand comprises three components: firstly, the policy as the service offering; secondly, the politician as the tangible service offering and; thirdly, the party as the brand offering."

Firstly, this definition focuses on the three key elements (policy, politicians, and party) within a political brand. Secondly, the political brand is seen as a service brand – a view that is supported by this study. Within the context of a service brand, the emphasis is on the human performance of the brand rather than on the product performance of the brand (Kotler & Armstrong 2010; Berry 2000).

French and Smith (2010:462) view the political brand through a communication lens as follows: "The political brand is defined as an associative network of interconnected political information, held in memory and accessible when stimulated from the memory of a voter."

French and Smith's (2010:462) definition above indicates that the individual experience of a political brand is formed by the experience and communication the political consumer receives from various brand platforms. The shortcoming of this definition is that it only speaks to brand communication and does not address the elements of a brand (as discussed in Section 2.2.1).

Within the political field, Lees-Marshment (2014:104) defines the political brand from a marketing perspective as "[t]he overarching feeling, impression, association or image the public has towards a politician [or] political organisation".

This definition highlights the important role the political brand plays in creating a feeling of identity with the party or its candidates that can lead to building a trust relationship between a political organisation and the political consumer (as discussed in Section 3.5.2). This definition is different from French and Smith's (2010) definition, in the sense that it includes brand elements such as identity and relationship; however, the shortcoming of this definition is that it does not speak to brand personality and brand differentiation. Both these elements are important for this study because the study focuses on the ability of the brand persona to differentiate the political brand from its competition.

Another definition of a political brand is by Nielsen (2016:72), as follows: "Political representations that are located in a pattern, which can be identified and differentiated from other political representations."

The above definition focuses on the political entity, which can be translated to symbols, names, and policies. The two main components of this definition are identification and differentiation, which imply that the party's name is easy to recall and that it stands out from the competition. This definition does not address brand communication or brand relations, and the focus of this definition is only on identification and differentiation.

Robinston (2018:12) defines the political brand as follows: "When the same fundamental brand principles are applied to political campaigns, it has an incredible power to merge tone and voice, brand identity, brand purpose, and brand image to unify the masses."

The above definition encapsulates the fundamental principles of the brand and speaks to brand identity, brand purpose, and brand image (as discussed in Section 3.3.1). However, this definition is limited to political campaigns and focuses on the unification of the masses, which is not the focus of this study.

This study adopted Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy's (2007) definition because the political environment is different from the commercial environment, and the political brand must

therefore be considered through the lens of delivering a service to the political consumer. This definition also acknowledges that the political brand comprises three elements, namely party policies, party politicians, and the party, which refer to the political offering (as discussed in this section). The political offering forms an integrated part of the political brand because the party policies inform the politician's actions, which ultimately determine how political consumers view the party.

It is against this background that the concept of political consumer is introduced in the next section.

3.3.2   Political consumer

The concept of political consumer has been described in the marketing literature as an active agent that directs the market through acts of boycotting (Stigzelius 2018) or as a consumer that is concerned with the politics of products (Micheletti 2002). In the political field, authors argue that citizens are acting more like consumers, not just in how they vote, but also their overall attitude to politics (Lees-Marshment 2014; Pharr & Putnam 2000). Consumerisation has several effects on politics, namely what the voters demand, how the voters want to be involved, the way the voters question authorities, and how the voters scrutinise lack of service delivery (Bennett 2012:26). However, for the purposes of this study, the concept of the political consumer does not resonate within the marketing field. Thus, within the political field, Lees-Marshment (2014:65) describes the political consumer as a citizen who has new information expectations from political brands and can thus be an individualised form of political action (Berlin 2011). Lees-Marshment's (2014) view is supported by this study.

It is against this background that the concept of political branding is introduced in the next section.

3.3.3   The concept of political branding

As discussed in Section 2.2.2, this study puts forward that the process of branding provides a deep set of meanings and associations for the brand (Bastos & Levy 2012; Kotler et al 2005). The branding process can therefore also be extended to a political context. Political branding refers to the way parties identify and differentiate themselves (Mensah 2016). Several scholars agree that political brands are formed in consumers' minds (Busby & Cronshaw 2015; Smith & French 2009; Scammell 2007). Collectively, these scholars suggest that for political brands to be successful political brands, they must achieve

meaningful connections with political consumers while maintaining relevant core brand values in order to differentiate themselves from the competition (Pich & Newman 2020).

Several scholars also suggest that the process of branding is applicable to the political field (Pich & Newman 2020; Jain et al 2018; Busby & Cronshaw 2015). The next section therefore examines the concepts, namely political marketing, political communication, and political advertising to further clarify the theoretical position of this study.

3.3.4   Political marketing concepts

As discussed in Section 2.3.8, it is argued in this study that for a political brand to engage optimally with its political consumers, the brand's communication must apply an integrated marketing approach within the political environment (Papagiannidis, Coursaris & Bourlakis 2012). However, the study instead adopted a digital marketing approach to brand communication (as explained in Section 2.3.8) because the study's focus is on political brand storytelling on social media platforms. It is for this reason that the political brand is considered through a digital marketing lens since this approach uses digital technologies to integrate, target, and measure a brand's communication actions (Royle & Laing 2013; Wymbs 2011). In light of the adoption of the digital marketing approach for the study, it is thus important to clarify the concepts such as political marketing, political communication, and political advertising. Some scholars have noted that political communication and political advertising form part of the foundation of political marketing (McNair 2018; Lees-Marshment 2014; Kaid 2012). This study adopted this view, as explained in the following section.

3.3.4.1 Political marketing

Political marketing is a dynamic field and forms a substantial part of modern politics, which uses market research, branding, and PR to win and maintain support from the public (Lees-Marshment 2019). There is a common thread in the marketing literature that political marketing has a profound impact on the way the political world operates today (Lees-Marshment 2014:16, 2019; Lilleker & Jackson 2014; O'Shaughnessy, Baines, O'Cass & Ormrod 2012). It is therefore important to understand the concept of political marketing.

Several scholars agree that political marketing refers to how politics uses marketing tools to understand, respond to, involve, and communicate with political consumers to achieve their goals (Lees-Marshment 2014:2; Hughes & Dann 2009; Butler & Harris 2009). Such goals are not about making money or just about winning elections, but rather about crafting policy change, representing minorities, changing behaviour, and increasing participation by the political consumer (Lees-Marshment 2019). Although this might be true, Elhajjar (2018) and

Jost (2017) view political marketing as a process through which political actors (political parties, politicians, and governments) publicise their ideologies and their dogmas to political consumers through brand communication to gain their support. In addition, they argue that applying marketing techniques to politics produces negative connotations, which damages the political process (Elhajjar 2018; Jost 2017; O'Shaughnessy 2014). However, Scammel (2016) is of the view that political marketing seeks to influence the population about political issues and particular candidates and therefore has the potential to narrow the political agenda (Rutter et al 2015). On the other hand, Speed et al (2015) point out that the line between politics and marketing is being blurred. It should be noted that political marketing is the outcome of integration between marketing and politics as a strategy to engage political consumers (Elhajjar 2018; Scammel, 2016; O'Cass & Voola 2011).

This study departs from the point of view that both parties and individual politicians understand the importance of political marketing as an important tool in the digital marketing sphere. The study therefore agrees with the view of Elhajjar (2018) and Scammel (2016) that political marketing is an outcome of integration between the marketing and political strategy to engage political consumers. In the same way as marketing, politics uses tools to achieve goals that form the basis of the political marketing strategy, namely strategising, researching, organising, and communication (Lees-Marshment 2014; 2019).

Also, O'Cass and Voola (2011) put forward that the concept of political marketing strategy can be viewed from a political market orientation (PMO) and a political brand orientation (PBO) perspective. They argue that PMO is by nature more marketing orientated, in attempting to understand the voters. PBO is more customer-linked and PBO strategies facilitate the contribution of marketing through party offerings to the voters. Another view of political marketing is that it can be subdivided into three approaches (Lees-Marshment 2014; König & König 2011; Henneberg, Scammell & O'Shaughnessy 2009). The first approach, selling-orientated political marketing management, emphasises the ideology of the political party. The emphasis in this approach is that politicians use market research to create persuasive communication to sell the political party's ideology (Lees-Marshment 2014:10). The second approach, instrumentally orientated political marketing management, focuses on understanding the primary stakeholders to create political offerings that political consumers would be interested in. The last approach, relational political marketing management, considers stakeholders that are not directly involved, and takes into consideration the short-term and long-term trade-offs to win and maintain support from the public (Lees-Marshment 2014:10; König & König 2011:48).

Another aspect that is important in the political marketing field is the connection between political marketing and branding. As stated in Sections 2.2.1, 2.2.2, and 2.2.3, a brand can be seen as an organisation's most valuable asset. O'Cass and Voola (2011) therefore state that it can be argued that political leaders and political parties are the brands that are the most valuable assets in the political arena. It is for this reason that O'Cass and Voola (2011) and Scammell (2007) raise the point that branding strategies should be applied to political marketing. They focus on four brand capabilities that can be integrated into the political marketing field, namely distinctiveness capabilities, functionality utility capabilities, value-adding capabilities, and symbolic capabilities (O'Cass & Voola 2011; Reid, Luxton & Mavondo 2005). Distinctiveness is manifested in a political party's logo, presentation of consistent imagery, and brand communication through paid and unpaid media (O'Cass & Voola 2011). The second capability, functional utility, revolves around how the brand satisfies the rational needs of the political consumer (O'Cass & Voola 2011; De Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley 1998). Political brand functionality is delivered through a communicated offering (policies) and the actual delivery of the brand on the rational needs of the political consumers (Pich, Armannsdottir & Spry 2018; O'Cass & Voola 2011). The third capability, value-adding capability of the political brand, caters for individuals' emotional needs and social image (O'Cass & Voola 2011). Lastly, symbolic capabilities are closely related to value-adding of the political brand and relate to the emotions, personality, and psyche of the political brand. In the context of political marketing, value-adding and symbolic capabilities refer to the ability of the political brand to build key party symbolism through the party brand personality (see Section 2.3.2) to connect emotionally with the political consumer (O'Cass & Voola 2011:636).

These four brand capabilities (distinctiveness, functionality utility, value-adding, and symbolic capabilities) emphasise the importance of applying branding strategies for political parties to develop and sustain a strong brand presence within the political marketing field.

While there are various approaches to political marketing, Elhajjar (2018) and Scammel's (2016) view that political marketing is the outcome of integration between marketing and politics as a strategy to engage political consumers is supported. This will then be in line with O'Cass and Voola's (2011) PBO towards political marketing, which supports this study's focus because it is more customer orientated.

The next section explains the competing concept of political communication.

3.3.4.2 *Political communication*

Much work has been done within the political communication discipline, and it has been shaped by the assumption that the media function shapes the political environment (Bennett & Pfetsch 2018; Bennett 2018; McNair 2018). In their seminal work, Blumler and Kavanagh (1999) highlight the age of political communication to illustrate how media function has shaped the political environment. The first age of political communication spanned two decades following World War II, when the political communication focus was defined by parties and leaders whose messages appealed to strong voter loyalties and beliefs based on social group identifications. The second age of political communication (1960-1990) was dominated by television and the mass media and gave rise to professional political communication adapted to news and advertising formats. The last age, the third age of political communication, was set in the late 1990s with the expansion of television and Internet information channels. Recent work (Semetko & Tworzecki 2018; Blumler 2013, 2015) suggested that we have entered the fourth age of political communication; this age is defined by even more communication choices. During this current period, television reach has declined, politicians reach audiences without journalistic intervention, and more diversification of content, voices, and audiences shapes public communication. For this reason, Fulgoni, Lipsman and Davidsen (2016) point out that successful political communication in today's omnichannel approach is through people's social networks, where communications from friends are far more persuasive than communication directly from a brand. Contrary to this argument, Falkowski and Jabłonska (2019) indicate that political parties need to assess gatekeeping, framing, and agenda setting as means of developing persuasive brand communication and ultimately managing the party brand. Mzekandaba (2019) adds that local South African political party brands need to capitalise on these opportunities to develop political brands. Furthermore, Falkowski and Jabłonska (2019) argue that framing messages and creating favourable associations and desired imagery are strategic. They position framing as part of an ongoing process of political branding.

It is against this background and because we find ourselves in the fourth age of communication that it is important to also address concepts such as gatekeeping, framing, and agenda setting within the political communication sphere.

(a)   Gatekeeping

The classic gatekeeping model maintains that "mass media are the gatekeepers deciding which political issues and which political actors get public attention" (Schulz 2014:3). The multiple channels approach to communication proposes that content passes through multiple gates (Bennett & Pfetsch 2018; Benkler, Faris, Roberts & Zuckerman 2017).

This has led to not only journalists informing the political consumer, but it has also opened the door for politicians to communicate directly with political consumers (Schulz 2014:4) and political consumers with the political brand (Pich & Armannsdottir 2018). However, with the expansion of social media to the political sphere (as discussed in Chapter 4), there are not only more gates, but the sources and channels of information have become more scattered and networked (Bennett & Pfetsch 2018; Benkler et al 2017; Bruns & Highfield 2015). Within the context of political communication, the political consumer is seen as a gatekeeper that allows only attention-grabbing information through the channels (Deluliis 2015:10). For Shoemaker and Reese (2014), the reality of our environment is co-created. This study therefore concurs that the fourth age of political communication not only provides a voice to more diversification of political brand content but also allows for the political consumer to shape political reality.

(b)   Framing

Framing the public debate by traditional media has received significant attention during the last two decades (Moscato 2016; Entman 2007). In Goffman's (1974:56) seminal work, framing is defined as "a way of classifying information that allows people to identify, internalise, and label everyday occurrences". Gitlin's (1980:23) later work defines framing as "a cognitive process, which works through persistent patterns of selection, interpretation, emphasis, exclusion, and retention that are symbolically communicated". Within the political field, Reese (2001) adds that frames enable both a content-based (substantive) and sentiment-based (affective) understanding of an issue. Therefore, for Reese (2001), frames influence how people understand, remember, evaluate, and act upon a political issue. Furthermore, Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011) argue that social media, including social network platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (which are discussed in Section 4.3), impacted on the dynamics of framing. Meraz and Papacharissi (2013:140) refer to it as "networked framing", which is achieved through #hashtags, RT (retweet), via, and @ on social media platforms. The political consumer, as a gatekeeper, can apply these functions to amplify and raise awareness of political issues. On the other hand, a political brand can use these functions to influence how the political consumer understands, remembers, evaluates, and acts upon political issues.

It must be noted that the interactions among traditional communication sources, alternative information sites, and social media are changing the dynamics of framing from a political communication perspective (Meraz & Papacharissi 2013).

(c)   Agenda setting

The agenda-setting theory has always been media centric and, as a result, was removed from the political context (Meraz & Papacharissi 2013). McCombs and Shaw's (1972) seminal work positioned the agenda-setting theory as a theory of audience effects. The original idea of the theory was that the media determined the public agenda; in due time, the agenda-setting concept has been merged with concepts such as priming and framing (Walgrave & Van Aelst 2006; Scheufele 2000). Digital media created a breakdown in the traditional media system, and Lilleker (2015) observes that many media agendas are running through mainstream and across digital platforms and social media. In short, agenda setting is challenged by issue framing that has become "quite independent of the voice of the traditional media, official institutional spokespersons, and professional journalism" (Neuman, Guggenheim, Mo Jang & Bae 2014:211).

The proposed elements for the conceptual framework put forward by this study will contribute to a hermeneutic level with regard to political communication on how the online political brand persona through the use of social media political brand storytelling presents political issues to the political consumer. It is put forward by this study that the political brand can set the agenda for the political consumer around political issues.

3.3.4.3 Political advertising

Political advertising is seen as a dominant form of communication between the political party and the political consumer, and is not a recent phenomenon (De Gruyter 2016; Kaid 2012). As pointed out by McNair (2018), political advertising is used to transmit political messages to a mass audience, which was used long before the era of mass electronic media. It must be highlighted that political advertising has three unique characteristics that differentiate it from commercial advertising. Firstly, political advertising is focused on short-term objectives (election campaign), unlike commercial advertising that continues for as long as the product does (Hughes 2018; De Gruyter 2016; Strömbäck 2007). Secondly, political advertising has the potential to present the political brand value to a whole nation. Few products have this potential impact on society (Hughes 2018; McNair 2018). Lastly, political advertising can make use of negative advertising, which can also be seen as "attack" tactics, which focus on the weakness of the opponent(s) (McNair 2018:114; Hughes 2018:45), which is seldom used in commercial product advertising (Hughes 2018).

A common thread is presented in the marketing literature (Hughes 2018; De Gruyter 2016; Kaid 2002) that views political advertising as a tool to present political ideas and goals to political consumers. It is for this reason that political advertising can play a strategic role in

influencing political consumers' perceptions of issue ownership (as discussed in Section 3.7) and with the ultimate goal of engaging with political consumers (De Gruyter 2016; Hughes 2018).

More recently, political advertising has developed into delivering more interactive political messages on social, digital, and mobile media platforms (in particular blogs, social media, and political party websites), which saw the concepts of micro-targeting or tailored political advertising growing in academic literature (Hughes 2018; Han, Park & Khang 2018; Fowler & Ridout 2013; Kaid 2012). These new tools (such as videos and podcasts) of political advertising are no longer just about delivering the political message since the Internet has allowed for more engagement with political consumers (Hughes 2018).

It is therefore important to briefly summarise the impact of social media on political advertising, as depicted in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Summary of social media impact on political advertising

Traditional political advertising	Post-Web 2.0 political advertising
Creating awareness around political campaign issues and candidates	It developed into an enabler of relationships, stakeholder management, and engagement
One-way flow of information	It has changed how we consume media – information-intense era
Political advertising was expensive	It allows minority parties to run low-budget campaigns on Facebook and YouTube
Message content was more controlled	Very little control and it allows for fake advertising
Traditional television and radio advertisements cannot be shared	The political advertisement can be instantly shared
The media user cannot react to traditional political advertisements	The political consumer can engage with political advertisements through likes, comments, emojis, and shares

Source: Adapted from Hughes (2018:55); Fowler and Ridout (2013:60); Kaid (2012:30)

As depicted in Table 3.1, political consumers have moved from being involuntary receivers of messages to becoming active information seekers and creators at times (Hughes 2018; Fowler & Ridout 2013). Technology has allowed political advertising to become more personalised and offering deeper engagement and experiences than what a one-directional television or radio political advertisement could ever offer.

For the political brand to engage with the political consumer, Schmitt (2011) notes that the three Es (emotional, engagement, and experience) of political advertising must be present. The use of digital political advertising has allowed political brands to create an emotional response from the political consumer through personalised messaging. Scholars of political brands understand that these emotional responses can be created through developing

unique brand personalities (as discussed in Sections 2.3.2 and 4.9) (Hughes 2018; Fowler & Ridout 2013). Social media is considered the most transformative tool that has shaped political advertising since it not only changed the engagement and experience but also the emotional responses of political consumers (Hughes 2018; Fowler & Ridout 2013). The political consumer can also use social media to become content creators who co-create value with the brand (McNair 2018; Lees-Marshment 2014).

Currently, the debate around political advertisements containing false or misleading claims on social media cannot be overlooked. However, this does not fall within the scope of this study, but it is important to acknowledge that false political advertisements are part of the political landscape. In the South African context, during the 2016 provincial elections, the online news platform News24 reported that there was a rise in fake news websites and false Facebook and Twitter advertisements (Webb 2019). In the United States of America (USA), ahead of the November 2020 elections, social media platforms altered their policies in handling claims regarding false or misleading political advertisements. Table 3.2 summarises social media fake news policies for political advertisements.

Table 3.2: Social media fake news policies for political advertisements

Social media platform	Policy for handling fake or misleading political advertisements
Facebook – Social media site	Facebook has exempted politicians from its third-party fact-checking policy and therefore allow them to make false claims.
Twitter – Microblogging and social networking site	Twitter has banned political advertisements that include advertisements concerning political leaders, parties, or political issues.
Google and its video-streaming service **YouTube**	Google does not have a policy on political parties that run false or misleading advertisements. It only prohibits certain kinds of misrepresentation such as misinformation regarding public voting procedures.
Snap Inc (Snapchat) – Multimedia messaging app	Allows political advertisements, which it defines as election-related, advocacy, and issue-driven advertisements.
TikTok – Chinese video app popular among teenagers	TikTok does not permit political advertising on its platform.
Reddit – Social news aggregation, web content rating, and discussion website	Allows for political advertisements that are issue driven. It does not allow any political content outside the USA.
LinkedIn – Professional networking site	Banned all political advertisements if they are seen as "ads advocating for or against a particular candidate or ballot proposition or otherwise intended to influence an election outcome".
Pinterest – Photo-sharing site	Banned photo-sharing of political candidates or political issues if the intention is to influence an election outcome.
Twitch – Live-streaming gaming network	Does not allow political advertising, but will consider issue-based advertising.

Source: Culliford (2019:12)

Table 3.2 thus illustrates that negative political advertising is a communication technique that political parties engage in to provide value to the political consumer. It also illustrates the role social media plays as a gatekeeper of information (see Section 3.3.4.2). However, for this study, the researcher departs from the point of view that political brands are using political advertising effectively to engage and share information around political issues with the political consumer on social media.

Having clarified the competing concepts, in the next section the focus is on the key attributes of concepts relevant to the political brand.

3.4 KEY ATTRIBUTES OF CONCEPTS RELEVANT TO THE POLITICAL BRAND

The concept of a political brand is a complex construct and to suggest that a political brand is the same as commercial brands misinterprets the nature of the political brand (Jain et al 2018; Pich & Dean 2015), as discussed in Section 3.2. Furthermore, the core concepts of the brand were discussed and defined in Section 2.3, which acknowledged that these key concepts form an integral part of the branding process. Thus, within the context of this study, the next section focuses on these key concepts, but from a political brand perspective.

3.4.1 Political brand identity

Section 2.2.2 argued that brands have strategic value and are key to achieving a competitive advantage (Mensah 2016; Sammut-Bonnici 2014; Farhana 2014). Based on the literature review in Chapter 2, it is evident that the relationship between brand identity and brand image enables the political consumer to make quick and efficient choices regarding a brand. Political parties must therefore have insight into the value of brand identity because this is how they want the political consumers to perceive their brand.

It is important to emphasise that the political brand comprises complex interrelated components that are both institutional and ideological and that are embodied in the personal character of the party and the leadership (Pich & Dean 2015). A political brand is thus referred to as the political offering that comprises the party, the leader, and the policies (Kaneva & Klemmer 2016; Parker 2012; Zavattaro 2010; Needham 2006). It can therefore be argued that there is an interconnection between the party, leader, and policies, which are the sum total of the political brand, which is presented to the political consumer (Nielsen 2017; Mensah 2016; Pich & Dean 2015). Also, Mensah (2016:66) argues that political parties need to clarify political brand identity on issues and how their political stand is communicated to political consumers. This approach suggests that the elements of the political offering need to be merged as one source to form the political brand. This study

adopted Mensah's (2016) view that the concept of a political brand encapsulates the political offering.

Given the above view, Pich and Dean (2015) developed the political brand identity network framework based on Kapferer's (1992) original work on the Brand Identity Prism. Their study has expanded the Brand Identity Prism into a new framework, namely the political brand identity network, which identifies the interrelatedness of the components of the political party's brand and the candidate's political brand. The contribution of this study is to demonstrate how the brand is presented and communicated to political consumers and serves as a useful mechanism to identify consistency within the political brand and political candidate brands (Pich & Dean 2015).

It is evident from the literature that applying relevant brand concepts and frameworks to the political environment is growing. For example, Scamell's (2015) study explored how a brand identity analytical model can provide the basis for an evaluative assessment of party communication according to democratic norms. This study further puts forward the idea that it is important to differentiate between brand identity and image because this distinction allows for political analysis, which enables political parties to examine their brand communication separately from political consumers' perceptions. In another study, Lilleker (2015) argues that the political brand identity continues to be driven by the leader, policies, and the tone of communications established on social media platforms. This study therefore suggests that technology may be one of the aspects that are driving political identity away from party identity and more towards candidate-centred identities. Pich et al (2018) argue that the political party brand identity guides the development of the candidate's political brand identity. Their study builds on Pich and Dean's (2015) study to enhance the understanding of how brand identity is created, developed, and maintained in the political environment.

In addition, it is argued that the political party's brand identity is created by the brand's creator and is communicated to the political consumer and the political party's internal stakeholders (Pich et al 2017; Pich & Dean 2015; Dahlen, Lange & Smith 2010). However, it is important to remember that it is the political party brand's identity that is the overarching identity and the political candidate's brand needs to align with the party's identity (Gorbaniuk et al 2015:60).

The following section explores the online political brand persona as a branding technique to build the political party's brand identity.

3.4.2   Online political brand persona

The brand personality was discussed in Section 2.3.2, where Aaker's (1997) seminal work on personality traits was acknowledged. However, this study has adopted Rutter et al's (2015) view that political brands need to consider anthropomorphising (attributing human characteristics) to the brand. In other words, unlike Aaker's (1997) brand personality traits, when anthropomorphising a brand, the brand becomes "the face and name", which are endowed with human emotions (Rutter et al 2015; Keller & Lehmann 2006). To build on this argument, equally important is the online brand persona (as discussed in Section 2.4.3.6) because the online brand persona creates an emotional connection with the audience to ensure that the audience can relate to the brand (Engelbrecht & Ngcongo 2018; Herskovitz & Crystal 2010). The concept of the political brand persona must therefore be considered within the context of contextualising the online brand persona as an element of brand identity (as discussed in Section 2.3.3).

Several authors make the point that there is an increasing focus in the political marketing literature on brand personality as opposed to the political offering (political party, its leader, and the policies) (Kaneva & Klemmer 2016; Parker 2012; Zavattaro 2010; Needham 2006). In a recent study, Fortunato, Hibbing and Mondak (2018) analysed Mr Donald Trump's presidential campaign and his ability to differentiate himself from the other Republican candidates, partly based on his brand personality. Several studies also focused on Mr Barack Obama's presidential campaign because the Obama campaign was seen as an exception, where the candidate prioritised his brand over the party's brand (Scammell 2014; Parker 2012; Spiller & Bergner 2011; Zavattaro 2010). From a South African perspective, Govender, Herskovits and Dolan (2013) illustrate how Mr Nelson Mandela, as a brand, differentiated himself from the political party brand (ANC brand) and grew bigger than the party itself.

On the other hand, several studies have considered how political parties are using a brand persona to differentiate themselves from the competition (Rutter et al 2015; Uribe, Buzeta & Reyes 2017). These studies have pointed out, firstly, that by creating a political brand persona for a political brand, it helps to determine to what extent their brand communication supports the party's brand persona. Secondly, it allows the brand manager to assess how effective the communication of the brand persona is in building the brand persona of the party. Another key point is that the political consumer perceives political parties through human-like characteristics that they can identify with (Nielsen 2016:150). This is in line with this study's theoretical point of departure anchored in the social identity theory. The central theme of social identity theory is identity. People adopt the identity of a group they can

identify with, which is essential from a political brand persona perspective (as discussed in Section 4.10).

The relevance of the political party leader's brand is not discarded, but rather considered from the point of view that political parties must develop a credible online political party brand persona to add value to the political brand. As discussed in Section 2.4.3.6, this study adopted Pereira's (2019) view that the brand persona is a key driver of the brand message and thus adds heuristic value to the political offering. The next section explores the concept of political brand image.

3.4.3   Political brand image

The brand image was discussed in Section 2.3.1, where the study adopted the view that brand image represents the perception of the consumer, while identity represents the brand's reality. However, there is a paucity of research devoted to political brand image (Pich & Armannsdottir 2018) from the perspective of external stakeholders (Mortimore, Baines, Crawford, Worcester & Zelin 2014; Smith & French 2011; Peng & Hackley 2009; Smith 2001). Consequently, Pich and Armannsdottir (2018) point out that there are limited frameworks to operationalise brand image research. Existing political branding studies have often modified or extended existing branding frameworks to suit the political environment (Gorbaniuk et al 2015; Pich, Dean & Punjaisri 2014; Guzmán & Sierra 2009; Smith 2009). It is for this reason that Pich and Armannsdottir (2018) argue that the conceptualisation as outlined by Bosch, Venter, Han and Boshoff (2006) below provides an opportunity to explore the brand image and to assess its applicability to the political context.

Pich and Armannsdottir (2018) argue that Bosch et al (2006) developed the six-variable framework from the extant literature on brand image from an external perspective. Bosch et al's (2006) six-variable framework consists of the following elements:

- Strength refers to the extent which the consumer is able to understand the brand's image communication.
- Uniqueness focuses on the meaningful attributes that distinguish the brand from the competition, which is also the reason a consumer would engage with the brand.
- Expectations refer to prospective attributes that provide insight into the outlook consumers associate with the brand.
- According to Bosch et al (2006), perceptions and associations are ascribed by the consumer to the brand, which can refer to emotional brand image attributes.
- Experiences refer to the contact or engagement the consumer has with the brand.
- Lastly, evaluations are determined by the kind of perception of, association with, and experience that the consumer had with the brand.

In their influential work, Pich and Armannsdottir (2018) extend the application of these six elements to the political field by evaluating the UK Conservative Party during the 2010 general election under David Cameron as their leader. Consequently, the framework was adopted in the political environment, which paved the way for future studies. Their work in particular contributed to the framework by focusing on the desired outcome of each of the elements. For example, Pich and Armannsdottir (2018) also found that the evaluation element was unnecessary. The strength element is an important element that should be present because this is a desired outcome of the political brand as it would indicate if the consumer has a good understanding and awareness of the political brand communication. Successful political brands have shown consistency between how brands are communicated and how they are understood. The desired outcome of the uniqueness element focuses on the political brands' communication abilities with political consumers and their ability to link meaningful attributes to the political brand. The desired outcome of the expectations element emphasises the importance for political brands to have a clear vision of their political offering. The political consumer needs to be able to understand what can be expected from the brand once it has been elected into government. The expectations element will also allow political brands to control their vision and reduce the likelihood of political consumers listening to narratives set by political competitors. The perceptions and associations element's desired outcome refers to that political parties need to evaluate how they are currently being perceived and understood. This is important because when the external understanding of the political brand is inconsistent with internal positioning, the political parties will have to refine their position. The experiences element's desired outcome demonstrates the importance for political brands to connect with their political consumers. Not only will this help to develop the external political brand, but direct experience with the brand can also attract a broader support base.

The discussion in this section demonstrated that Bosch et al's (2006) framework, as adapted by Pich and Armannsdottir (2018), can be used to explain political brand image from an external perspective. This is important to consider this perspective because, as discussed in Section 3.2, several authors suggest that branding of politics is a helpful tool that provides a shortcut for the political consumer (Mensah 2016; Lilleker 2015; Speed et al 2015). Political parties therefore need to understand if the political consumer can associate with the political brand and whether it assists the political consumer to cut through the communication clutter. It is also important to discuss the political branding process because, as set out in Section 2.2.2, branding is the process of creating a set of meanings or associations for the brand by using branding strategies.

3.5 POLITICAL BRANDING

The concept of political branding has developed into a distinct area of research within the political field (Pich & Newman 2020; Scammel 2015). Consequently, the political branding research has focused on critically applying traditional branding concepts, theories, and frameworks to the political environment to provide differentiation among political competitors and identification between citizens and political entities (Needham & Smith 2015).

In Section 2.2.2, it was pointed out that the concept of branding refers to a process in which the brand sets itself apart from the competition to reduce consumer confusion (Sammut-Bonnici 2014; Farhana 2014; Kotler et al 2005). However, literature in the political and marketing field has described political branding as branding that creates public awareness around the political brand, political consumers' loyalty towards the brand, and associations with the political brand (French & Smit 2010; Needham 2005). More recently, scholarly articles (Kumar & Dhamija 2017; Mensah 2016; Pich & Dean 2015) noted that the notion of a political brand and branding has been widely adopted by many political parties as a strategy to differentiate themselves from the competition. It is for this reason that Nielsen (2016) argues that political branding is seen as the strategic use of branding tactics in the building of a political brand, with which the study concurs.

3.5.1 Conceptualising political branding

The conceptualisation and investigation of political brands have evolved over the last 25 years since the seminal work of Lock and Harris (1996). There is, for example, a shared understanding among scholars that political parties, pressure groups, political movements, politicians, candidates, and campaigns can be conceptualised as "political brands" (Nai & Martinez i Coma 2019; Billard 2018; Ahmed et al 2017; Meyerrose 2017; Simons 2016; Scammell 2015; Speed et al 2015; Smith 2009).

There have also been perspectives that political brands can be viewed as either service brands or corporate brands (Jain et al 2017). Political parties as service brand consist of three components: firstly, the policy as the service offering; secondly, the politician as the tangible service offering; and, thirdly, the party as the brand offering (Jain et al 2017; Mensah 2016). There are, however, numerous scholars (Speed et al 2015; De Landtsheer & De Vries 2015; Cwalina & Falkowksi 2014; Milewicz & Milewicz 2014) who view political brands as corporate brands. To illustrate, several scholars describe the political party as the corporate brand and the political candidate as the sub-political brands (Pich et al 2018; Smith & French 2009; Henneberg & O'Shaughnessy 2007). Political branding can also be viewed from a communication-centred or an actor-centred approach (Bennett & Pfetsch

2018; Stanyer, Salgado & Strömbäck 2016). The actor-centred approach focuses more on the political actors and their branding (Bennett & Pfetsch 2018), whereas the communication-centred approach focuses on the branding of the party (Bennett & Pfetsch 2018; Mensah 2016; Pich & Dean 2015).

The next section explores how branding is used for political parties and not their leaders since the focus of this study is on the political party as a brand. This study therefore adopted the communication-centred approach to branding political parties, as per Bennett and Pfetsch (2018), Mensah (2016), and Pich and Dean (2015). The communication-centred approach's objectives are to consider all communication strategies, styles, rhetoric, and tactics used by the political party in its branding.

3.5.2   Branding political parties

Political parties, just like political leaders, must have an effective brand. In this regard, Lloyd (2008) argues that party brands are longer lasting than political leader brands, and are therefore difficult to change. Building on this, Narteh et al (2017) argue that political parties have existing ideologies and thus require more time to change than political leader brands.

Today, branding plays an important role in ensuring the long-term survival of organisations, including political parties. Political parties' survival is dependent on their performance and brands are increasingly recognised as the key driving factor of performance (Narteh et al 2017:72). Branding political parties offers several advantages. For example, branding can drive strategies (Kornberger 2010); offer an opportunity to set the party apart from its opposition (O'Cass & Voola 2011); build bridges from the past to the future (Cosgrove 2012), which can provide the foundation for a consistent narrative (Conley 2014); can be seen as an opportunity to educate and inform the political consumer about political issues and party policies (Conley 2014); and can be used to engage with the political consumer (Lees-Marshment 2014).

More recently, Downer (2016:8) pointed out that when building political parties' brands, the brand should appeal to "both the mind and the heart". This means that the political party brand must address both the functionality and the emotional appeals pertaining to the political parties' brand. In the context of the political party, Downer (2016) explains that the functional appeal refers to party policies, and the emotional appeal includes brand authenticity, approachability, and attractiveness to the political consumer. This line of argument is then linked to the brand-orientated model (as discussed in Section 3.3.4.1). There are several perspectives on branding political parties in the literature.

The first perspective on branding political parties comes from the political marketing literature. Conley (2014) argues that there are four principles of political party branding that can serve as a guideline for branding. Firstly, market research becomes important for parties, because they need to develop a clear understanding of changes in public opinion, identify the segments with which the party can relate, and build a lasting relationship. Secondly, the party needs to create a brand strategy to address political consumers' needs but must keep the brand consistent with a unique history and party identity. Thirdly, brand managers must develop mechanisms through which they can test and obtain feedback on brand strategy. Lastly, brand communication is the main focal point for the political party brand and therefore needs to be able to emotionally appeal to the political consumer.

The second approach is from a marketing perspective. In this regard, Downer (2016), who modified Keller's (2008) brand equity model, focused on strategic brand management within the political environment, which follows a process that consists of four steps. The first step is to identify and establish the brand's positioning and values. Secondly, it is important to plan and implement branding programmes. Thirdly measuring and interpreting the brand performance are essential; and; lastly, growing the sustainability of the political party is of strategic importance.

A third view on managing political branding is from a brand architecture perspective. Brand architecture is a system whereby the overall brand and product relationships are clarified and structured in a manner that can be understood by all (Mensah 2016; Uggla 2006). Mensah (2016) therefore argues that the political party as a brand needs to manage the political offering (party, leader, and policy) from either the branded house approach, which focuses on the brand identity of the party, or the house of brands approach, which focuses on the individual brand identity of party members but aligns them to the party's identity.

Lastly, from a political perspective, Narteh et al's (2017) Ghanaian study viewed branding of political parties as a differentiator. They argue that political branding is an important strategy to build engagement with the political consumer through interactive communication, which can set them apart from the competition. This view is supported by the literature, which points out that political parties use a branding strategy to differentiate themselves within the political environment by utilising numerous branding concepts such as brand personality (Rutter et al 2015), political brand identity (Pich et al 2014), political ideology (Ordabayeva & Fernandes 2018), political brand image and political offering (Pich et al 2018), and political brand positioning (Newman 2019). Table 3.3 summarises the various approaches to branding political parties.

Table 3.3: Approaches to branding political parties

Political marketing perspective	Marketing perspective	Brand architecture perspective	Political perspective
Market research becomes important for parties to develop a clear understanding of changes in public opinion, to identify the segments with which the party can relate, and to build a lasting relationship.	To identify and establish the brand's positioning and values.	Political parties need to manage their political offerings.	Branding is seen as a differentiator for political parties.
The party needs to create a brand strategy on political consumers' desires but needs to keep it consistent with a unique history and party identity.	Focus on the importance to plan and implement branding programmes.	Branded house: This approach focuses on the brand identity of the political party.	Use branding strategies to differentiate themselves.
Brand managers must develop mechanisms through which they can test and obtain feedback on brand strategy.	Measuring and interpreting the brand performance are essential.	House of brands: Focuses on the individual brand identity of party members but aligns them to the party's identity.	Important strategy to build engagement with political consumers.
Brand communication is the main focal point for the political party brand, and therefore needs to be able to emotionally appeal to the political consumer.	To grow the sustainability of the political party is of strategic importance.	-	-

Sources: Narteh et al (2017:33); Mensah (2016:66); Downer (2016:42); Conley (2014:33)

Given the above discussion, it is evident that there are several views on branding political parties. However, Narteh et al's (2017) views are supported in that political party branding must be seen as a strategic branding tool to build engagement with the political consumer but must also set them apart from their opposition. This view is supported by Mensah's (2016) branded house approach, which focuses on the political party's identity.

The next section discusses political branding strategy.

3.6   POLITICAL BRAND STRATEGY

Multiple political branding strategies are available because of the various political landscapes, which refer to the current state in a country (Cosgrove 2012). In this section, political branding strategies from the branded house approach are discussed, which builds on the arguments presented in Section 3.5.2 (Mensah 2016). It is therefore reiterated that the purpose of branding is to strategically differentiate and position the political brand from the opposition (Narteh et al 2017). This is done by focusing on positioning and strategic branding of the brand values. The brand attributes must all align to create an environment for consistent brand messaging. As illustrated in Figure 3.1, when a brand is supported by

consistent brand messaging, the brand should move up the positioning ladder from specific attributes to branded house values (Narteh et al 2017; Cosgrove 2012).

Values:
These refer to the core values that the brand embrace. It works best if they have high resonance with political consumer

Benefits:
These can be tangible or intangible benefits.
What is in it for me?

Attributes:
Specific attributes that supports the benefits
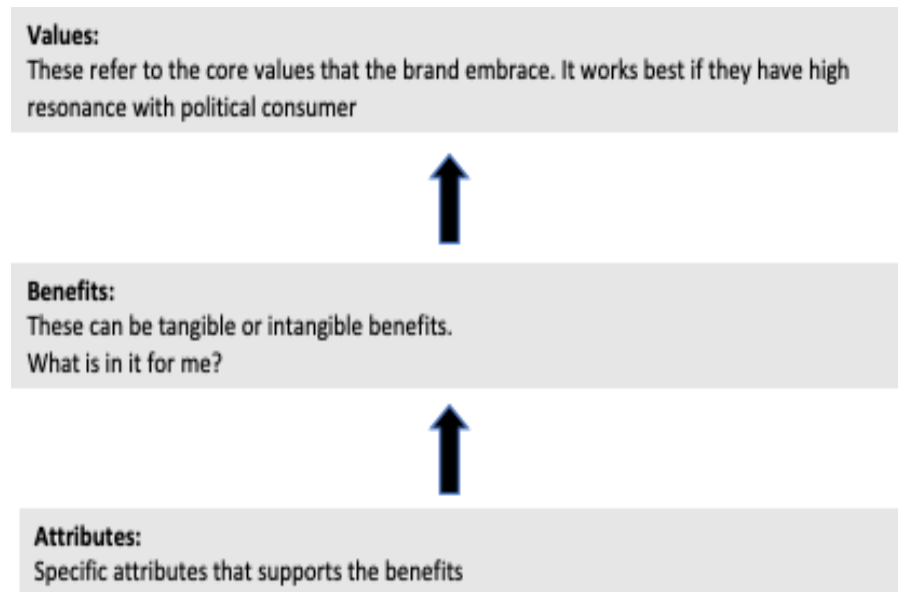
Figure 3.1: Strategic positioning ladder
Source: Adapted from Cosgrove (2012:111)

When evaluating political branding strategy from a branded house approach, which focuses on the brand identity of the party, it is important to acknowledge the advantages and disadvantages of this approach. Cosgrove (2012) and Mensah (2016) point out that the benefits of focusing on the branded house approach include consistency in messaging and efficiency in launching a new campaign because it is tied in closely with the existing brand, which is already recognised by the political consumer. The focus is thus more on the party as a whole and less on individuals. The disadvantage of this strategy is that it is more difficult to establish a unique brand identity beyond that of the party (Pich & Newman 2020:6).

As shown above, the focus on branding strategy is on differentiation and positioning, which are driven by brand communication. It is important to discuss how political strategies engage with the political consumer, and what political branding techniques are available with a specific focus on political brand storytelling, which is the main focus of this study. This is presented in the following section.

3.6.1 Political branding techniques

Political branding techniques are seen as the specialised application of traditional branding techniques (Harris & Lock 2010; Needham & Smith 2015). Multiple political branding

techniques are available; for example, political advertising, PR, guerrilla marketing, and mobile or viral marketing (Lees-Marshment 2014). As discussed in Section 2.4.3, this study departs from the point of view that political parties must leverage social media platforms as a complementary tactic to the political party's branding strategy. One of these techniques is political brand storytelling (Leslie 2015).

The concept of political brand storytelling as a political branding technique is briefly introduced below but is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 within the context of social media.

3.6.2 Political brand storytelling

Stories help us make sense of our everyday world, show us how to connect with people in different ways, and teach us lessons (Engelbrecht & Ngcongo 2018; Spear & Roper 2013). Storytelling has been an important part of the political environment and plays an important role in not only campaigning but also in building the political brand persona (Leslie 2015). However, some scholars argue that the relationship between stories and rational argument in the political environment is problematic and places the question of moral debate in the public sphere because scholars (Lilleker 2015; Needham 2006) argue that political parties are not commercial brands and should not be treated as such. This view is supported by several scholars (Leslie 2015; Rutter et al 2015; O'Shaughnessy 2014; Reeves et al 2006), who question the ethical value of storytelling in the political domain. For example, these scholars question the role of storytelling in the political field because storytelling and the rational debate have been problematic (Leslie 2015). It is therefore evident that there is an ethical debate in the political field around the function of storytelling within the political context, but this is not relevant to this study.

A review of the literature on storytelling in the political field shows that storytelling is in particular used to justify political violence (Fine 2000), to forge political identities (Kane 2000), to win policy changes (Stewart 2012), to communicate across ideological divides (Braunstein 2012), as a peacebuilding initiative (Maiangwa & Byrne 2015), and to deliberate with fellow citizens (Polletta 2015). There are, however, limited studies on storytelling as a branding technique to position or differentiate political brand personas from their opposition. A summary of the studies conducted over the last few years is provided in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4: Key studies on political brand storytelling

Authors and year	Title of study	Key summary
Björninen, S., Hatavara, M. & Mäkelä, M. (2020)	Narrative as social action: A narratological approach to the story, discourse and positioning in political storytelling	The study examined political storytelling from a narratology position. The study demonstrated that storytelling not only drives and directs political issues, but can also lead to social action.
Wheeler, J. (2019)	Troubling transformation: Storytelling and political subjectivities in Cape Town, South Africa	The study focused on how political storytelling contributes to political subjectivity. It is through political storytelling that political consumers are touched emotionally and how associations are created towards political brands.
Liebhart, K. & Bernhardt, P. (2017)	Political storytelling on Instagram: Key aspects of Alexander van der Bellen's successful 2016 presidential election campaign	The article addressed the strategic use of storytelling on Instagram in election campaigns. The study focused on the visual aspects of digital storytelling.
Vromen, A. (2017)	Storytelling and changing values	The study examined storytelling as a social movement device and explained the political use thereof via a cause-and-effect relationship. It argued that politics drives issues by retelling stories rather than appeal to logic and evidence. It built its case on the fact that stories are more focused on language and emotional frames that are used to deliver the political message.
Gregori-Signes, C. & Alcantud-Diaz, M. (2016)	Digital community storytelling as a socio-political critical device	The study focused on socio-political digital stories, which are stories that the political consumer may use as a tool to bring forward issues that may concern and affect democracy.
Page, J.T. & Duffy, M.E. (2018)	What does credibility look like? Tweets and walls in US presidential candidates' visual storytelling	The study investigated the public diary of four Republican candidates for the 2012 United States (US) presidential election campaign. It examined the visual narrative and how it added value to the messaging strategy.

What is evident from the above studies is that storytelling has become part of the political environment. The key focus points of these studies are, firstly, a focus on party leaders rather than the party (Liebhart & Bernhardt 2017; Page & Duffy 2018); secondly, emphasising the message strategy (Vromen 2017; Page & Duffy 2018); thirdly, highlighting the visual narrative on social media (Liebhart & Bernhardt 2017; Page & Duffy 2018); fourthly, the studies show the emotional engagement with the political consumer and storytelling (Wheeler 2019); and, lastly, storytelling as a means to drive political issues is highlighted (Björninen et al 2020; Wheeler 2019; Gregori-Signes & Alcantud-Diaz 2016).

It is therefore also important to discuss political issue ownership because brands position issues for the political consumer through political storytelling. The concept of political brand storytelling is discussed further in Section 4.6.

3.7 POLITICAL ISSUE OWNERSHIP

The theory of political issue ownership was developed in Petrocik's (1996) seminal work. In this work, Petrocik (1996) explains that issue ownership occurs whenever political consumers perceive a given political party as better and more capable of handling an issue than their opposition. In the political literature, some scholars have pointed out that political parties can use issue ownership to their advantage (Guo & Vargo 2015; Lachat 2014; Stubager & Slothuus 2013; Walgrave, Lefevere & Nuytenmans 2009). Firstly, when a political party owns an issue, it can have electoral advantages whenever the party drives a political issue. Secondly, issue ownership is linked to the party's ability to handle the issue. Lastly, a party's constituency can influence the issue ownership for the political party but it depends on the social basis of the party, as well as the party's historical reputation to handle certain issues.

Several scholars postulate that there is a distinction between two dimensions of ownership, namely associative ownership and competence ownership. Associative ownership refers to the perceptions political consumers hold that a given party is the one that cares the most about the issue. Competence ownership, on the other hand, is a perception that political consumers hold that a party is best at handling that issue (Stubager 2018; Walgrave et al 2015; Lachat 2014; Walgrave et al 2012). Just because a party is associated with a given issue does not, however, necessarily mean that the party is also perceived to be the most competent to address that political issue (Stubager 2018).

Walgrave et al (2015) make the point that issue ownership is fluid. This means that political parties are constantly engaged in claiming or disclaiming ownership of issues (Van Camp 2018). The current social media environment has led to a significant shift in audiences' perception of issue ownership (as discussed in Section 4.8) (Walgrave et al 2015).

Table 3.5 summarises all the viewpoints adopted in this chapter.

Table 3.5: Viewpoints adopted in this chapter

Concept	Definition adopted
Political brand (Section 3.3.1)	This study adopted Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy's (2007:7) definition of the political brand from a service perspective as: "A political brand comprises three components: firstly, the policy as the service offering; secondly, the politician as the tangible service offering and; thirdly, the party as the brand offering."
Political brand identity (Section 3.4.1)	This study adopted the view that the political party's brand identity is created by the brand's creator, which is communicated to the political consumer and the political party's internal stakeholders (Pich et al 2017; Pich & Dean 2015; Dahlen et al 2010). However, it is important to remember that it is the political party's brand identity that is the overarching identity and that the political candidate's brand needs to align with the party's identity (Gorbaniuk et al 2015:60).
Political brand persona (Section 3.4.2)	This study views the political brand persona from the point of view that political parties must develop a credible party brand persona to add value to the political brand. The study adopted Pereira's (2019) view that the brand persona is a key driver of the brand message and thus adds heuristic value to the political offering.
Political brand image (Section 3.4.3)	Political brand image is viewed using Bosch et al's (2006) six-variable framework as adapted by Pich and Armannsdottir (2018), which consists of strength, uniqueness, expectations, experience, perceptions, and associations.
Political brand strategy (Section 3.6)	For the purposes of this study, political branding is viewed from a communication-centred approach. This approach focuses on the branding of the party (Bennett & Pfetsch 2018; Mensah 2016; Pich & Dean 2015).
Political branding techniques (Section 3.6.1)	The study adopted political brand storytelling as a political branding technique.
Political issue ownership (Section 3.7)	Two dimensions of ownership: Associative ownership refers to the perception political consumers hold that a given party is the one that cares about an issue. Competence ownership is the perception political consumers hold that the political party is the best at handling that issue.

3.8   SUMMARY

In this chapter, the concept of a brand was extended to the political brand. The chapter put forward the idea that a political brand needs to create a meaningful connection with the political consumer while maintaining core brand values that are relevant to the political consumer. The chapter then focused on political marketing, political communication, and political advertising and acknowledged that political communication and political advertising fall within the political marketing field. The chapter also unpacked the core concepts of a political brand as political brand identity, political brand persona, and the political brand

image. The chapter furthermore briefly examined the branding of political parties through the lenses of the branded house approach and house of brands approach.

The chapter concluded by briefly considering the political brand strategies, including political brand storytelling and political issue ownership as political brand strategies.

In the next chapter, political brand storytelling on social media is the focus of the discussion.

CHAPTER 4:
SOCIAL MEDIA-BASED POLITICAL BRAND STORYTELLING

4.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter extends the brand storytelling concept introduced in Chapter 3 by contextualising it within the political landscape with a particular focus on social media platforms. In this regard, the chapter introduces the concept of social media-based political brand storytelling while highlighting the role of the online political brand persona for the purpose of political brand storytelling. Since this study adopted a digital media strategy as part of its digital brand strategy for the political brand, brand storytelling is also framed within the context of political branding.

4.2   CONTEXTUALISING SOCIAL MEDIA WITHIN THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

The concept of Web 2.0 emerged in the media when O'Reilly invented it in 2004, which has led to networking, participating, and a collaboration culture, and thus creating a new interest in political dialogue on online spaces (Lilleker & Jackson 2010). Web 2.0 refers to the whole idea of building event-driven user experience and participation and not just websites (Needleman 2007). Ballesteros Herencia and Díez-Garrido (2018) suggest that as early as 2006 there was an indication in the literature that there is a possibility that Web 2.0 can create a connection between politics and citizens. In the political field, reference has been made to Politics 2.0 and Democracy 2.0 (Túñez & Sixto 2011; Larsson 2016b). The reference to 2.0 focuses the attention on participation or engagement of users within the online political environment (Larsson 2016b). Within this context, a strong online brand persona is important when political brands communicate with political consumers (Gallegos 2016). It is against this background that the next section examines digital technologies and social media platforms.

4.2.1   Digital technologies

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is seen as the revolutionising of technology and it is not only about the size, speed, and scope of change, but also about how technology is reshaping how we work, express ourselves, gain information, and entertain ourselves (Schwab 2016:8). For example, digital technologies create unlimited access to information and provide the means to co-create information and content (Muir & Verwey 2018:10), which has given rise to a "me-centred" society (Schwab 2016:88). The me-centred society is often referred to as the MEcosystem, or the "age of you" (Elliot 2017:69) (see Section 2.2.2).

The MEcosystem has influenced the way that people think about, engage with, source, and react to information, which makes it crucial for brands to pay attention to how they use digital technologies and how they engage with their consumers (as discussed in Section 2.2.2) (Muir & Verwey 2018:8).

Digital technologies thus form the core of the 4IR (Schwab 2016), and social media (as part of digital technologies) has empowered citizens to choose what they read, share, and see in the context of social media; therefore shaping their political and civic decisions (Turkle 2015). Building on this statement, Lees-Marshment (2014; 2019) adds that citizens have new expectations of information and that they act more like consumers, which is why they are referred to as political consumers (see Section 3.3.2). Larsson (2016a) argues that political positioning can no longer rely on web-based platforms alone, but should turn to social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to engage with political consumers. There are several examples in the literature on how social media has become part of the political landscape, namely to be adopted to call for some political action (Bosch 2013), to promote civil and political engagement (Skoric & Kwan 2011), and to create a new generation of transparent politicians (Fenton 2012).

4.2.2 Social media and social media platforms

This section discusses the concept of social media, which is followed by a discussion of social media platforms.

4.2.2.1 *Adopting a definition of social media*

Social media is perceived as one single concept, but in reality, when the history is reviewed, it becomes clear that social media's roots were anchored in the creation of tools and systems that allowed people to talk and chat with one another across the Internet and computer systems (Colaiacovo 2017). Building on this statement, Palmer and Koening-Lewis (2009) state that social media is a network that facilitates interaction, collaboration, and sharing of content. The history makes it clear that social media is continuously evolving as new digital technologies are introduced (Colaiacovo 2017; Allen 2012; Kaplan & Haenlein 2009).

Because social media is continuously evolving as new digital technologies are introduced, there are numerous definitions for social media from different perspectives.

The most widely cited definition for social media is by Kaplan and Haenlein (2009:61), who define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological

and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content". Katz, Barris and Jain (2013:12) define social media as "digital multiway channels of communication among people and between people and information resources and which are personalized, scalable, rapid, and convenient". Thiele (2018) summarises the previous two definitions of social media by explaining that social media are Internet-based platforms that facilitate the creation and exchange of user-generated content on mobile or web-based technologies.

Thiele's (2018) definition of social media was adopted for the study because, as Lees-Marshment (2014) states, citizens have new expectations of information needs from politicians and have become political consumers.

4.2.2.2 Social media platforms

A social media platform refers to a mobile-based or web-based Internet application that allows the access to and creation and exchange of content; however, it also allows the users to connect with other users (Van Dijck & Poell 2013).

It is also important to explain how the various social media platforms that are available for political communication have evolved. Colaiacovo (2017) puts forward that the history of social media can be divided into the primitive, medieval, and golden eras of social media. The timeline provides a clear understanding of how social media has developed over time. In the primitive era (1979-1984), platforms such as newsgroups and listservs were available that allowed people to share or exchange messages. During the medieval era of social media (1988-1999), platforms such as instant messaging (IM) and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) were developed. This era pioneered the sharing of information and keeping in touch with other people and thus laid the foundation for social media as we know it today. The golden era of social media (2001-2014) made it possible for people to collaborate on wikis and introduced SNSs such as LinkedIn (professional networking) and photo-sharing sites (such as Instagram), and it made the world smaller and easier for people to stay in touch with the creation of Facebook (personal and business networking site). This era also gave rise to Twitter, which was the first microblogging site with a question-answer format and a character limit of 140, which was recently changed to 280 characters (Perez 2018). In addition, this era also introduced YouTube, which was the first organised video and photo streaming and sharing platform (Colaiacovo 2017).

4.2.2.3 South African political parties' use of social media platforms

Table 4.1 summarises South Africa's major political parties' followers of social media in 2020, which clearly shows that South African political parties are actively using social media to engage with their political consumers.

Table 4.1: Summary of major South African political parties' followers on social media

Political party	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	YouTube
ANC	589 594	74.4.7k	229k	3.41k
DA	576 039	648.7k	32.1k	21.2k
EFF	821 720	11.4k	152k	None

Sources: ANC (2021); DA (2021); EFF (2021)

In the first quarter of 2021, 25 million South Africans were active on social media, of which 23 million were active on Facebook. Forty percent of social media users' reason for using social media is to "stay up to date with current events and news" (Kemp 2021). This reiterates the importance for political brands to tell their stories on social media in order to engage with political consumers. This study focuses on the owned (blog) and shared media (social media) because it is argued that the essence of this study is to formulate a framework for an online political brand persona through the use of political brand storytelling on a party's own and shared social media.

The next section clarifies the concepts related to a political brand's digital brand strategy.

4.3 CLARIFYING CONCEPTS RELATED TO A POLITICAL BRAND'S DIGITAL BRAND STRATEGY

It is important to first clarify the related concepts within the digital media space to explain the study's position regarding a political brand's digital brand strategy. These concepts are digital platforms, and a digital media strategy's use of social media platforms.

4.3.1 Digital platforms

A digital platform is a "brand-communication platform and business channel that can be used to drive customer experiences through mobile, social media, video and the web" (Straker et al 2015:136). In the marketing environment, Trent, Denton and Friedenbera (2016) point out that there are several digital platforms for SNSs and applications such as Facebook, Flickr, Instagram, mobile apps, Pinterest, Tumblr, LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube. However, Yadav (2017) argues that the three prominent digital categories are social media (e.g., Facebook), video (e.g., YouTube), and blogs (e.g., Blogger and

WordPress). These digital platforms can be used to communicate online with political consumers, as was explained in Section 2.4.2 (Rossouw, Rautenbach, Pritchard & Sitto 2018). However, it must be noted that this study's focus is only on how political parties can use social media as a digital platform to build their online brand persona.

4.3.2   A digital media strategy's use of social media platforms

A political brand adopts a digital media strategy for its digital brand strategy as guidance when the political brand wants to engage with consumers, build communities, and create and share information (Luttrell & Capizzo 2019; Takaoka 2017).

As concluded in Section 3.4.2, a political brand persona is seen as the key driver of a brand's message in a digital media strategy. For a political party to engage with the political consumer online, political parties therefore need to develop digital media tools in the form of social media platforms so that they can drive their political brand message. Figure 4.1 illustrates the social media platforms that can be utilised by political parties in their digital media strategy. To clarify further, Garman (2016) puts forward that a digital media strategy is often seen as a trifecta of earned, owned, and paid (EOP) media. Social media platforms can be owned by the brand, and earned and/or paid for by the brand; hence the abbreviation EOP, as discussed in Section 2.4.2. However, this study adopted the PESO model because, as argued in Section 2.4.3.4, it provides an inclusive model for a political brand's digital media strategy (Luttrell & Capizzo 2019). Social media platforms enable the brand to transmit or share information with a broad audience and allows everyone the opportunity to create and distribute content (Takaoka 2017). Social media is the collective concept for the various platforms as set out in Figure 4.1, where the political brand can engage with the consumer, build communities, and create and share information (Luttrell & Capizzo 2019; Takaoka 2017; Postman 2009). Kaplan and Haenlein (2009:60) classify social media into six different categories, namely collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia), blogs and microblogs (e.g., Twitter), content communities (e.g., YouTube), SNSs (e.g., Facebook), virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft), and virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life). Regardless of the standard to classify social interactive platforms, each form of social media is equipped with certain strengths and functions. SNSs, which are an example of one social media platform, allow the brand to connect, share, and listen to their consumers (Luttrell & Capizzo 2019). SNSs thus act as a social structure for people who are joined online by a common interest (Van Dijk 2013).

Figure 4.1 summarises Luttrell and Capizzo's (2019:18) classification of social media platforms and Garman's (2016) trifecta of a digital media strategy.
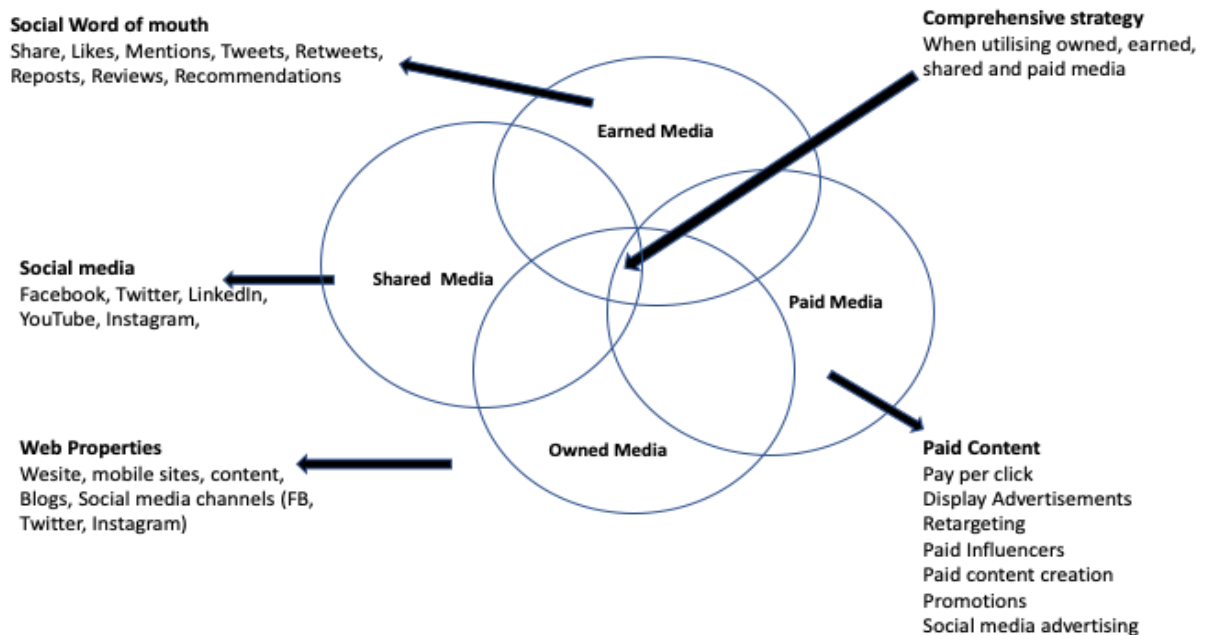
Figure 4.1: Classification of social media platforms in terms of earned, owned, and paid (EOP) media

Sources: Luttrell and Capizzo (2019:18); Garman (2016)

The classification of social media platforms as depicted in Figure 4.1 is far from exhaustive, but for this study, the focus was only on earned, shared, and owned social media platforms, namely political blogs (owned media), microblogging and Facebook (shared media) because these are the main platforms on which online political storytelling can be developed to engage with political consumers (Larsson 2016b; Larsson & Moe 2011; Kushin & Kitchener 2009). Earned media is an important element of the digital media strategy because it is through comments, mentions, feedback, and sharing of content that the brand can measure its third-party credibility among political consumers who are not paid by the brand (Kolb 2016).

The next section explains social media platforms for political brand storytelling as part of a political brand's digital brand strategy.

4.4 EXPLICATING THE DIFFERENT SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS USED FOR POLITICAL BRAND STORYTELLING

In the extant literature, there are various examples from different perspectives on how social media has been used in the political landscape. These studies range from political campaigns (Trent et al 2016), political activism (Bohler-Muller & Van der Merwe 2011), the importance of driving political participation (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan 2013; Campbell & Kwak 2011), political engagement (Vergeer, Hermans & Sams 2011), to the personalisation of

political communication (Penney 2017). However, the rapid growth of social media has instigated a change within the communication field in that political consumers are expecting the political brand to interact with them on platforms where they can control every aspect of the conversation, including the timing, the channel, and the content (Killian & McManus 2015).

There is thus a clear shift in the political environment that allows political candidates and voters to bypass traditional media and instead use social media to set the political agenda (Trent et al 2016). It can therefore be argued that not only journalists currently set the political agenda but also political parties. With more political consumers having access to various social media platforms to not only observe or experience but also to express their concerns, politicians' political agenda can be influenced (Trent et al 2016; Bosch 2013). In this regard, the political playing field has become more accessible to political consumers since it provides them with an opportunity to connect with politicians on several digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, mobile apps, Pinterest, subscriptions to Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds via political blogs, Short Message Service (SMS), LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube (Trent et al 2016:291).

Social media especially offers several platforms and opportunities for political parties to not only reach but also reach out to their specific audiences. The power of communication has moved from political parties to individuals to create, share, and consume blogs, tweets, and Facebook posts (Trent et al 2016). The following section discusses the concepts of owned (political blogs) and shared digital media (microblogging and Facebook) platforms as political branding tools to engage with political consumers, as adopted in Section 4.2.1.

4.4.1   Owned social media platforms

Owned media is a content asset for a brand since the brand's message can be controlled and can build a community around the brand (Lieb, Owyang, Groopman & Silva 2012). The purpose of owned media is to create value for political consumers by pulling them to the platform based on relevance and interest rather than pushing the product or service to them (Mosley 2020; Cochran 2009). Owned media also aims to generate earned media by encouraging comments and feedback (Lieb et al 2012). The following section discusses the strategic importance of political blogs as a type of owned digital media platform.

4.4.1.1 Political blog

There are several definitions of what a blog is, but they all refer to a blog as the online publishing of text, images, and/or videos that are frequently updated (Du Plessis 2018;

Karlsson & Åström 2016; Thaler 2016; Postman 2009). As pointed out in Section 2.4.3.5, there are many blog categories, of which the political blog is an example. BlogSearchEngine.org, a popular blog directory, currently tracks over 72 million political blogs in South Africa (BlogSearchEngine 2019).

Our understanding of what a political blog entails has developed over the years. Wallsten (2008:33) defines political blogging as "a complex form of political participation that blends hypertext links, opinionated commentary, calls to political action, and requests for feedback in different ways at different moments in time". This definition is supported in more recent work by Pettersson and Sakki (2017), who concur that political blogging is seen as a strategic approach to communication. Dean (2010) describes political blogging as political activists who challenge the establishment represented by political leaders and the media. In this regard, McNair (2012) argues that political bloggers set the news agenda for not only the media but also for citizens. However, this study adopted Wallsten's (2008) definition of political blogging, which is supported by Pettersson and Sakki (2017), because the political blog is viewed as a brand strategy to engage with political consumers, whereas Dean's (2010) definition positions political blogging as an activist's tool, while McNair's (2012) definition is more news focused, which is not supported by this study.

The definitions around political blogging highlight the use of political blogs as digital platforms to express political beliefs (McKenna 2007; McNair 2012), to interact with like-minded people (Nilsson 2012), to drive political participation in the form of mobilisation attempts, to request audience feedback (Wallsten 2008; McKenna & Pole 2007), and to use as "soapboxes" – a virtual forum where political bloggers project their opinions into cyberspace (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan 2013; Wallsten 2008).

However, not all scholars agree about the significance of political blogs. For example, one group of researchers argue that political blogging does not necessarily lead to increased engagement (Dailey, Demo & Spillman 2008) since it merely "echoes the chambers of mainstream media" (Burroughs 2007:322). Another group of scholars point out that voters rely on blogs to draw attention to politically controversial issues and perceived wrongdoings (Kaye 2010); political blogs also allow voters to engage directly with campaigns to articulate their opinions, thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Åström & Karlsson 2013). Pettersson and Sakki (2017) point out that political blogging has become a new public sphere with particular digital and communicative features that allow politicians to convey their messages in different ways than with traditional media channels. It is thus evident from the various opinions about the role of political blogging within the political landscape that political blogs can play an important role in establishing a connection between political parties and voters.

This connection between a political party and voters can be enhanced by creating a political persona, which is a unique possibility for politicians to encourage democratic dialogue (Nilsson 2012). The political blog persona drives the political party's view on political issues through political brand storytelling (see Section 3.6.2). In a similar view, Du Plessis (2018) argues that personal views should be avoided and that the focus should be on the blog persona's views. The blog persona should thus address the political consumers' interests and inform them about political issues. Vergeer et al (2011) indicate that political blogs could positively contribute to political consumer engagement with political parties and therefore create more access to political information.

The literature on blog personas makes it clear that political parties must consider their brand persona when blogging. The political persona is further discussed in Section 4.9.1.

4.4.2 Shared social media platforms

Shared media represents content that is open for the political brand's followers, friends, fans, and subscribers to contribute and to comment (Macnamara, Lwin, Adi & Zerfass 2016). The purpose of shared media is to create opportunities for the political consumer to engage with the brand through user-generated content (Mosley 2020), and it is about pulling them towards the brand (Mosley 2020; Cochran 2009). The following section discusses Twitter and Facebook from a political brand perspective as shared social media platforms that allow political brands to tell their stories.

4.4.2.1 Microblogging

Microblogging has become one of the most popular media for users to create and share information, including political parties (Nations 2019; Xu, Lu, Compton & Allen 2014). Microblogging can be defined as "a form of blogging on which one shares limited content and information" (Nations 2019:1). Microblogging platforms are limited to a certain number of characters per post (Engelbrecht & Ngcongo 2018; Van Dijck 2013; Lee & Chen 2016). Some of the most well-known microblogging platforms are Twitter, Tumblr, and Sina Weibo (Xu et al 2014).

Microblogging allows users to anonymously share and update information to a network of followers, which creates an open communication platform (Tong & Lei 2013; Larsson & Moe 2011). Twitter, as a microblogging site, has gained significance in political communication since it allows users to post and read 280-character short messages, known as tweets, after initially allowing only 140 characters prior to 2017 (Perez 2018). Launched in 2006 as an SNS (Colaiacovo 2017), Twitter has more than 321 million active monthly users across the

world at present (Statista.com 2019). Microblogging shares a set of similar characteristics, which Jansen, Zhang, Sobel and Chowdury (2009:3861) first defined as "short text messages; instantaneous message delivery; and subscriptions to receive updates". However, Tong and Lei (2013:295) describe tweets as the "fast food of communication", implying that users make a statement about political issues without evidence or reasoning. Because of its character limitation of 280 characters, Twitter structurally disallows the communication of detailed and sophisticated messages, which makes the messaging strategy from a political point of view important (Ott 2017).

Mr Barack Obama's 2008 political campaign is seen, in the literature, as the campaign that put Twitter at the forefront as a political tool (Larsson & Moe 2011; Holotescu, Gutu, Grosseck & Bran 2010). In the 2015/2016 Obama presidential campaign, more than a billion tweets related to the election were posted (Levy 2016), which set the trend for the use of Twitter during political campaigns. However, Mr Donald Trump's 2016 political campaign earned him the title of *"He is a man of his technological moment"* for the popularity of his Twitter account, @realDonaldTrump, which had 12.7 million followers at the time (Ott 2017).

This is thus a clear indication of the role that Twitter can play in stimulating political participation (Small 2011). Twitter, as a political communication tool, allows political parties to "touch" citizens (Trent et al 2016) by presenting political communication as "authentic personal communication" (Van Dijck 2013). Microblogs are becoming "listening posts" for modern democracy (Small 2011) and drive political conversations through "retweets" and "hashtags" (Larsson & Moe 2011; Small 2011). Hashtags (#s) are central to political conversation because by consistently using the same hashtags, political parties can organise tweets around the topic under discussion (Pritchard & Sitto 2018; Van Dijck 2013; Small 2011).

Twitter has thus become an indispensable tool for political parties to engage with their electoral base. Twitter allows political parties to control their messages (Van Dijck 2013) and provides a platform for political parties mainly to disseminate information (Larsson & Moe 2011). Van Dijck (2013) and Holotescu et al (2010) add that microblogging enables political parties to build communities where voters feel that they are part of the political discussion. Furthermore, microblogging serves as a communication channel for political parties to discuss or put forward their arguments simultaneously with traditional media; and, lastly, it enables political parties to create an online presence by creating an RSS feed (Van Dijck 2013).

4.4.2.2 Facebook as a social networking site (SNS)

More than 65 SNSs were available in 2019 (Spencer 2019). However, this study provides an overview of only the most prominent SNSs and their functions that can be utilised in the political environment (Takaoka 2017). SNSs can be defined as "platforms that allow users to connect with others who have similar interests, likes and experiences" (Lee & Chen 2016:184). Facebook, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Instagram are therefore categorised as SNS platforms (Takaoka 2017). In 2020, Facebook had 2.7 billion users per month (Tankovska 2021). Facebook's main function is to network with friends and relatives. However, Facebook has also created different Facebook apps to sell online, market, or promote a business, brand, and products by using paid Facebook ads. LinkedIn is a professional SNS that allows all types of professionals to connect with peers and different businesses. LinkedIn can be used to find employment and companies are using it to share brand content. This SNS currently has 750 million registered users and over 55 million registered companies (LinkedIn 2021). Instagram is an SNS that is based on sharing photos and videos. Instagram also introduced multiple filters that can be applied to photos. Instagram allows its users to cross-post onto other SNSs and has approximately one billion users per month (Instagram 2021). YouTube enables users to upload and share videos, view them, comment on them, and like them. Users can also create YouTube channels where they can share their content. YouTube currently has two billion logged-in users every month (Oberlo 2021).

As is clear from the above discussion, Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) state that analysing political-related content on SNSs cannot be ignored since such content has grown as a strategic branding tool within the political field (Page & Duffy 2018). However, for this study, the focus was only on Facebook and Twitter as political strategy branding tools.

Mark Zuckerberg launched Facebook in 2004, and Facebook entered the political arena in 2006 with "Election Plus" with a section of profiles of candidates running for federal office (Trent et al 2016). Several studies provide examples of how SNSs have been used in the political landscape. These studies focus on the use of Facebook during election campaigns (Williams & Gulati 2009), the use of Facebook to reach individuals who are less interested in politics (Utz 2009), making use of Facebook to drive online political discussions (Kushin & Kitchener 2009), positioning political issues (Baumgartner & Morris 2010), driving political involvement (Vitak, Zube, Sfmock, Caleb, Ellison & Lampe 2011), positioning party ideology (Padmanabha & Kumar 2017), and how it adds strategic value from a brand strategy perspective (Spierings & Jacobs 2019).

The role of SNSs is important for political parties and can play a strategic role in positioning the political brand among political consumers (Ceron 2018).

4.5   SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY AS PART OF A POLITICAL BRAND'S DIGITAL BRAND STRATEGY

This section discusses social media strategy as part of a political brand's digital brand strategy.

4.5.1   Social media strategy

There is consensus among scholars that a brand should have a social media strategy in place to ensure that the brand's social media communication achieves its objectives, because of the variety of social media platforms available (Luttrell & Capizzo 2019; Du Plessis 2017; Edgerly, Thorson, Bighash & Hannah 2016; Kolb 2016). The rise of social media strategy as part of the political communication function has a far-reaching impact on the political environment in that the political consumer can actively participate in the political brand communication (Nulty, Theocharis, Popa, Parnet & Benoit 2016; Ayankoya, Cullen & Calitz 2014). In the context of the political environment, the social media strategy's function is to drive the political brand from a PBO approach, as discussed in Section 3.3.4.1. O'Cass and Voola (2011) highlight the importance of a PBO approach to, firstly, drive the political consumer experience with the political brand. Secondly, the PBO approach drives political consumer engagement. In the same way that the PBO approach aims to engage the political consumer, social media strategy drives the same goal.

There are several approaches to what forms the basis of a social media strategy. One of the frameworks provided by Kietzmann et al (2011) is the honeycomb framework, which focuses on the various functions of social media. Another framework, the social media ecosystem (Larson & Watson 2011), focuses on the effects of social media on brands. It allows the brand to align its social media strategy with organisational goals and ultimately creates business value. A more recent approach to the social media strategy is Du Plessis' (2017:345) generic framework for a social media strategy. Another approach to the social media strategy is the social strategy cone (Effing & Spil 2016), which evaluates the maturity of the social media strategy. Three levels of maturity of the social media strategy have been identified: initiation, diffusion and maturity. Initiation includes the key elements of the target audience and the channel choices; while diffusion includes the elements goals, resources and policies. Maturity adds the elements of monitoring (Effing & Spil 2016). The social strategy cone was adopted in this study because when social media is applied strategically,

it can create a co-creation environment for political brands on their owned and shared social media platforms, which can lead to earned media. The honeycomb framework only focuses on the tactical application of social media platforms, while the social media ecosystem's focus is from a corporate communication perspective. In addition, Du Plessis' (2017) generic framework positions the social media strategy from a corporate organisation perspective, which is not the focus of this study. The researcher proposes the concept of social media political brand engagement as a concept that has emerged from the literature.

Table 4.2 summarises how the social media strategy can drive the PBO strategic approach.

Table 4.2: Social media strategy driving the political brand orientation (PBO) approach

PBO strategic approach	Social media strategy driving PBO approach	Measurement of social media strategy
To grow political brand awareness among political consumers	To create awareness of a political brand among political consumers	Followers and shares
To turn political consumers into active political consumers	To drive engagement between political consumers and political party content	Comments, likes, @mentions
To drive political party-owned issues among political consumers	To drive conversations between political consumers and political brands that would lead to engagement	Website clicks, sign-ups
To improve political consumer loyalty towards the political party brand	To create opportunities for the political consumer to create user-generated content; this will reflect what the political consumer thinks and feels about the political brand	Testimonials and social media sentiment

Source: O'Cass and Voola (2011:628)

As set out in Table 4.2, it is clear that many social media activities can be used to drive the political brand strategy. The social media strategy as part of the political branding strategy was adopted by this study (as discussed in Section 3.6.1). It is therefore important to acknowledge that there are several branding techniques for the development of a highly effective political brand. One such technique that is supported by the branding literature is storytelling, which enables the brand to connect with the consumer (Singh & Sonnenburg 2012; Megehee & Woodside 2010; Escalas 2004; Brown, Kozinets & Sherry 2003). Storytelling as a social media technique has extended to the political field and several scholars argue that storytelling will transform society and politics (Maarek 2014; Poletti 2011; Couldry 2008).

The use of a social media strategy has ushered the political field into a new era considering political brands. Firstly, it allows the political brand to set the conversational agenda, but it also allows the brand to frame a political issue so that it is in line with the party's values

(Nulty et al 2016; Lilleker 2015). Secondly, the social media strategy can drive political engagement (Rowles 2014); and, lastly, it emphasises the content of social media posts. In the literature, it has emerged that one of the key elements of the social media strategy is engagement (Ahmad, Alvi & Ittefaq 2019; Nulty et al 2016). As Vermaak and Wright (2018) highlight, brands must build a digital relationship with consumers to ensure engagement. Engagement can have different interpretations; for example, it can be about growing members on social media platforms or it can be about the quality of interaction that the platforms allow (Vermaak & Wright 2018; Tiago & Veríssimo 2014).

Several studies have examined the value of engagement on SNS platforms. For example, Papagiannidis and Manika (2016) investigated political engagement on social media and found that social media allows political participants to become involved in politics, express their opinions openly, and engage with political consumers through comments. Bossetta, Dutceac Segesten and Trenz's (2018) work shows that SNS content drives political engagement through likes, comments, and shares.

Social media has thus shaped political engagement (see Section 4.2.1) and has given rise to new kinds of participation by political consumers. Online participation is arguably more personal and is driven by individuals' social and political identities (Gil de Zúñiga, Veenstra, Vraga & Shah 2010).

Because of social media's influence on shaping political engagement, scholars argue that technologies are continuously changing the nature of the political organisation and shifted from traditional campaigning to a social media strategy (Page & Duffy 2018; Bimber, Stohl & Flanagin 2009). The Internet has enabled, through social media, a top-down but also a bottom-up approach to the political environment (Enli & Skogerbø 2013). This means that, in the context of the political party's communication, it is no longer owned by the party alone; instead, it is co-created by the political consumers. It is therefore important to explore the concept of political engagement within the social media environment in more detail.

4.5.2   Contextualising political engagement as a digital brand strategy

When contextualising political engagement as a brand strategy, Lilleker and Koc-Michalska (2017) highlight that social media facilitates two forms of political engagement, namely participation and mobilisation, which are explained in the sections below. Political engagement refers to political participation and mobilisation of political consumers around a political issue (Lilleker & Koc-Michalska 2017).

4.5.2.1 Political participation and social media

The political communication literature has long envisaged how technology will bridge the gap between politics and society. Social media has given political parties a new way of communicating with political consumers (Karlsson & Åström 2016). Consequently, social media has transformed political engagement from a top-down to a grassroots-level-up approach (Karlsson & Åström 2016). Political participation can therefore be defined as "communication that describes an active means of verbal political engagement, such as sending emails or signing a petition online" (Gil de Zúñiga et al 2010:44). Political participation is further described as all efforts made by citizens, in the form of petitioning governments, contacting elected representatives, taking part in demonstrations, as well as using digital platforms, to express their views to influence a decision-making process (Lilleker & Koc-Michalska 2017). Political participation is also driven by citizen-centred campaigns, which refer to issues driven by citizens. Social media has transformed the political campaigning environment to drive citizen-centred campaigns instead of candidate-centred campaigns (Trent et al 2016). Citizen-centred campaigns reflect the voluntary behaviour of citizens, which in this context means that the participation is autonomous (Lilleker & Koc-Michalska 2017; Trent et al 2016). This study's focus is on the political party and to create engagement with the political consumer through brand storytelling on social media. It is therefore argued that political participation as discussed above will not support the proposed elements of this study's conceptual framework. The following section therefore discusses political mobilisation and social media as a brand strategy tool.

4.5.2.2 Political mobilisation and social media

Political mobilisation is defined as an act by a group of people to mobilise power in an established system (the political party) in order to influence a decision-making process (Gil de Zúñiga et al 2010:40). Social media makes available different platforms for political parties to drive public opinion in a certain direction (Safiullah, Pathak, Singh & Anshul 2017), but at the same time also increases political mobilisation among citizens, who receive information via the various social media platforms and co-create and circulate information (Penney 2017).

The challenges that political parties are facing are to develop social media strategies that enable them to facilitate interaction, collaboration, and sharing of content among political consumers (Gil de Zúñiga et al 2010). Coupled with this, Kietzmann et al (2011) speculate that the reason behind these challenges is the lack of understanding of what social media is, and the various forms it can take. In this regard, Vermaak and Wright (2018) point out that

the brand needs to understand the functions of the various digital media platforms to be able to create a highly effective social media strategy.

The following section discusses the concept of political brand storytelling and specifically examines how the social media strategy has been applied in the political environment.

4.6 EXPLICATING THE CONCEPT OF BRAND STORYTELLING

As explained in Section 2.4.3.7, the concept of brand storytelling is not new and spans over several decades in different contexts for different purposes.

For example, Fog, Budtz and Yakaboylu (2005:16) state that "from Gandhi to Martin Luther King to Nelson Mandela, many political and spiritual personalities have had one thing in common: they could tell a spellbinding story that made a difference and gave meaning to people's lives". In Arendt's (1998) seminal work, she explains that storytelling is the most relevant way to relate to politics because action produces stories. It is therefore not uncommon to see an old human tradition, such as storytelling, appearing as a branding tool within the political field.

In the next sections, the concepts of storytelling and brand storytelling are first defined before contextualising political brand storytelling in Section 4.7.

4.6.1 Defining storytelling

In the literature, there is a debate around the use of the concepts of stories and narratives. Stories are suggested as having an internal temporality and coherent plotlines and characters, whereas narratives do not always have coherent plotlines or characters (Spear & Roper 2017; Cunliffe, Luhman & Boje 2004). However, in the context of the communication field, these two concepts are closely interlinked and attention therefore needs to be paid to the subtle differences between them (Engelbrecht & Ngcongo 2018; Corman 2013).

There are several definitions in the communication and marketing literature that describe storytelling: it is a cohesive narrative that inspires an emotional reaction (Engelbrecht & Ngcongo 2018:207); stories are a sequence of events (Herman 2011:67); a story speaks to both the rational and emotional needs of the audience (Herskovitz & Crystal 2010:22); and it is something told or recounted (Denning 2000:xiii). All these storytelling definitions share some common elements, namely to communicate about an event using language, images, and sound.

Stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end (Corman 2013). Stories are creative and sometimes value-laden (Haigh & Hardy 2010). Stories fulfil several functions, including the following:

- Firstly, stories convey information (Granitz & Forman 2015).
- Secondly, stories create awareness; individuals remember people, places, and events through stories (Corman 2013).
- Thirdly, a story may create awareness and an emotional connection in the minds of listeners or viewers (Cooper, Schembri & Miller 2010; Megehee & Woodside 2010).

On the other hand, narratives can take on any form, such as a story, an image, or mental picture; it has actions, characters, settings, discourse, and a plot; and the success of narratives rely on how they are communicated (Engelbrecht & Ngcongo 2018; Beemgee 2017; Corman 2013; Denning 2000).

Scholars in the communication field agree that a narrative is a representation of a story, and not the story itself (Engelbrecht & Ngcongo 2018; Beemgee 2017; Corman 2013; Denning 2000). A narrative is also seen as an open system of stories (Corman 2013). The concept of story anthology is introduced by Smith and Wintrob (2013:38), who define it as "compilations of all the stories connected to the brand". Story anthology thus refers to the narrative arch (the narrative arch provides a framework within which multiple brand stories can co-exist). Organisations thus realised that they needed to be good storytellers to pitch their brands to consumers in the form of brand stories (Cunliffe et al 2004). This study does not refer to narrative brand stories but rather to brand stories and thus adopted the concept of story anthology in that all stories are connected to the brand (Beemgee 2017; Smith & Wintrob 2013).

4.6.2   Digital storytelling

Digital stories have been seen as stories that are similar to their traditional counterparts (Tiba, Chigona & Tunjera 2015). To support this, Hull and Katz (2006:10) define digital storytelling as "a personal narrative that combines voice, sound and images into a short video developed by non-professionals". Couldry (2008:374) builds on this definition by defining digital storytelling as "personal stories being told in public form using digital platforms". However, Jiwa (2017) argues that if organisations focus on their brand stories, these stories would go beyond the use of mere words but would link the traditional storytelling to technology, thereby creating digital storytelling. The majority of scholarly work done in the political field on digital storytelling focused on the ability of digital storytelling to

bring a voice to the ordinary and marginalised groups within the public sphere (Poletti 2011; Couldry 2008; Burgess 2006).

4.6.3   Transmedia storytelling

A concept related to digital storytelling is transmedia storytelling. Although transmedia storytelling is not the focus of this study, it is nevertheless important to mention the concept because of its focus on a brand telling different stories on different platforms and not purely duplicating stories on platforms. Transmedia storytelling is anchored in the communication and marketing fields and can become important for future use in the political field.

Smith, Fischer and Yongjian (2012:104) explain that in the past, brand stories were posted on platforms that consumers used; however, the purpose of brand stories is to create connections between the consumer and the brand. Delivering transmedia brand stories may strengthen the bond and lead to positive attitudes and more entry points.

Since transmedia storytelling is anchored within the media, communication, and marketing fields (Scolari 2009; 2015) and applied in a commercial context (Ramasubramanian 2016), the application within the political field is still limited.

4.6.4   Types of brand storytelling

As explained in Section 3.6.2, brands use social media to position the brand through different types of brand stories to drive the brand purpose, which is also the case for political brands. This section examines the types of brand stories.

In the literature, it is evident that there are a number of approaches to brand storytelling. Fog et al (2005) confirm that brand storytelling has developed as a core strategic brand tool; this means that the story needs to be in line with the company's corporate brand. Brown and Patterson (2010) argue that a brand develops a core story, which expresses the key fundamentals of the brand. Stated differently, the core story drives the entire corporate brand. However, Barker and Gower (2010:301) and Fog et al (2005:36) argue that the most effective way to use storytelling strategically as a branding technique is to have a holistic approach, which means that the core story needs to form the basis of all the brand stories that should be told on external platforms (media, advertising, customer stories, or stories from partners) and internal platforms (articles in staff newsletters). Adding to this, Herskovitz and Crystal (2010) confirm that personal storytelling, as a storytelling strategy, is essential for branding since it builds an emotional connection between the brand and consumers. The AMA (2019) concurs with Herskovitz and Crystal (2010) by adding that brand storytelling has

developed into a pull-brand technique, which is a technique to pull readers in a subtle way to engage with content. To use brand storytelling successfully as a pulling technique, humanising the brand (as discussed in Section 2.3.2) occurs and the brand persona is used to achieve this. This also creates a sense of authenticity for the consumer.

Building on the idea that brand storytelling can focus on pulling in the reader, Smith and Wintrob (2013) recognise that by using heritage stories, contemporary stories, folklore stories, and vision stories, a brand can strategically get the brand message across. Spacey (2017) adds that for a brand to promote its identity, brand storytelling should focus on the mission, vision, legacy, founders and employees, organisational culture, brand personality, customers, events, and the brand's sustainable efforts. To do so, brands should decide what type of stories to tell. Delgado-Ballester and Fernández-Sabiote (2016) suggest that brands follow the basic story types as suggested by Nudd (2012) in his seminal work. These types are rags to riches, the rebirth, the quest, overcoming the monster, tragedy, comedy, voyage, and return, as explained in Table 4.3. Godfrey (2019) puts forward that brand stories can be categorised into seven basic story types, according to Booker's (2004) seminal work, as the underdog, the quest, the journey/return, rags to riches, comedy, tragedy, and the rebirth. Table 4.3 provides a comparison between the basic brand story types of the seminal work of Booker (2004) and Nudd (2012), with a description of each story type.

Table 4.3: Basic brand story types summarised

Booker (2004)		Nudd (2012)	
Name	**Focus**	**Name**	**Focus**
The underdog	These are stories about a struggle against large societal issues or big business.	Overcoming the monster	An evil force is threatening the protagonist, who must fight to overcome it. A brand using this plot makes the customer the hero, or the brand becomes the tool or weapon to overcome the monster.
The quest	These are problem-solving, goal-achieving stories over some time.	The quest	A mission from point A to point B. The quest is about progression. A protagonist sets out to acquire an important object or to reach a location, facing many obstacles and temptations along the way.
The journey/ return	Stories about being thrown into circumstances, not of your choosing. It is about transformation through learning lessons and overcoming obstacles.	The voyage and return	The protagonist goes to a strange land and, after overcoming the threats posed to him/her, returns with nothing but experience. This represents the progression from naivety to wisdom.
Rags to riches	These are stories in which the hero, against all odds, realises his/her full potential. It is where the hero moves from a novice to an expert.	Rags to riches	Rising from the ashes. In the beginning, the protagonist (the consumer, the brand) is insignificant and dismissed by others, but something happens to elevate it (the brand), revealing it to be exceptional. Brands will often leverage their own story, or even a founder's story, within this theme.

Booker (2004)		Nudd (2012)	
Name	**Focus**	**Name**	**Focus**
Comedy	These are stories about community, relationships, and clarity.	Comedy	A story with a happy or cheerful ending, in which the central motif is triumph over adverse circumstances, resulting in a successful or happy conclusion.
Tragedy	These are like public service announcements, e.g., Do not drink and drive. These stories focus on "Do not do these things or you will be sorry".	Tragedy	A story without a happy ending, which revolves around the dark side of humanity and the futile nature of human experience. It relies on a tragic flaw, moral weakness, and/or deep suffering.
Rebirth	It is a story about reinvention, renewal, creation, and creativity.	Rebirth	Brands that tell stories of renewal describe situations in which an important event forces the main character to change their ways, often making them a better person.

Sources: Godfrey (2019); Delgado-Ballester and Fernández-Sabiote (2016)

As set out in Table 4.3, there is overlapping when it comes to the basic brand storylines. Booker's (2004) earlier work is more shaped towards the political environment, whereas Nudd's (2012) work leans more towards the commercial brand. Booker's work on the seven basic types of storytelling spans over 34 years and is still relevant for this study because of his perspective that storytelling plots are underlying in politics (Mars-Jones 2004). This study therefore adopted Booker's (2004) basic brand story types framework.

Godfrey (2019), Herskovitz and Crystal (2010), and Mars-Jones (2004) confirm that when it comes to creating a strong brand story, the persona, which refers to the articulated form of the brand's character and personality, is the most important ingredient of the story; all other elements unfold from there. It is argued by scholars that a compelling brand story starts with a strong, well-drawn, recognised brand persona that creates a long-lasting emotional bond with the audience (Godfrey 2019; Engelbrecht & Ngcongo 2018; Delgado-Ballester & Fernández-Sabiote 2016; Herskovitz & Crystal 2010). The brand persona thus drives the overall brand message. However, it is also important to explain the various approaches to brand storytelling.

4.6.5 Approaches to brand storytelling

There are several approaches to brand storytelling, which are briefly discussed in this section. Approaches of brand storytelling refer to the different storytelling strategies that the political brand can employ.

The first approach is Brown's (2016) idea that a brand story can be crafted by following the character, location, action, and messages (CLAM) approach to successfully communicate the brand story.

In the second approach, Baldwin (2015) argues that a brand can make use of two methods of storytelling, namely funnel-based storytelling, and priming and reminding storytelling.

Funnel-based storytelling is based on Lewis' (1985) classic awareness, interest, desire, and action (AIDA) model, which Baldwin (2015:34) replaced with the following:

- Meet the brand – new or existing brand;
- The teaser – focus on the product; and
- The hook – focus on the call to action.

Baldwin's (2015) approach, like the AIDA model, is used in the marketing communication field. It plots the steps from when a consumer becomes aware of a product or brand to then funnelling their interest into action (Engelbrecht & Ngcongo 2018). The priming and reminding storytelling approach puts forward that brand storytelling is not a linear process and that brands use multiple platforms on which to tell and share their stories. When using this approach, brand stories on various platforms are produced to first prime the audience about the brand story and secondly to remind them about the story (Engelbrecht & Ngcongo 2018; Baldwin 2015).

Similar to traditional storytelling, Herman (2011:33) suggests that for a brand story to be compelling, it should include the following:

- Situatedness: The context in which the story takes place.
- Event sequencing: The order in which the story develops.
- Worldmaking or world disruption: What caused the story? Is it actual or fictional, realistic or fantastic, remembered or dreamt?
- What is it like: How would you feel if you lived through the story?

Fog et al (2005:42) suggest that a good brand story must include a message, conflict, characters, and plot (MCCP):

- A message: Without a clear message, there is no reason to tell a story. The central message – the premise – is the ideological or moral statement that is the underlying theme of the story.
- Conflict: Conflict is the driving force of the story – no conflict means no story. Conflict relies on human nature; we are always restoring harmony in our lives. Conflict forces us to act. Conflict speaks to our emotional need to bring order to the chaos. Storytellers use conflict to get the message across. Conflict does not need to be negative.

- Characters: A story must have different characters. The main character must have a goal to pursue, while the hero (the main character) has one or more support characters. There is always an adversary working against the hero, who creates conflict. When planning characters, the fairy tale model becomes important, which includes a benefactor, goal, beneficiary, supporter, hero, and adversary.
- Plot: The structure of a traditional story has a beginning, middle, and end. In the beginning, the scene is set for the story. In the middle, there is progression of change, which sets the scene for the conflict. In the end, conflict escalates and is resolved in the end. Once the conflict has escalated to the "point of no return", the hero makes a decision that influences the outcome.

Similar to adopting different storytelling approaches, brands can also use different strategies to structure their brand stories. Both Fog et al (2005) and Brown (2016) argue that character, messages, and plot or action play an important part in the success of the story. However, Baldwin's (2015) approach focuses more on the marketing communication strategy of storytelling by emphasising consumers' awareness of a product or brand and then funnelling their interest into action.

It is important to realise that a successful brand story may follow any of the storytelling approaches, as Brown (2016) points out, but that it is the character of the story that is the most important element that links to the brand persona. It is therefore important to examine the different types of brand persona within the storytelling context.

Table 4.4 provides a summary of the approaches to brand storytelling.

Table 4.4: Summary of approaches to brand storytelling

CLAM (Brown 2016)	Funnel-based (Baldwin 2015)	Traditional storytelling (Herman 2011)	MCCP storytelling format (Fog et al 2005)
Character	Meet the brand: New or exciting.	Situatedness: The context in which the story takes place.	A message: Without a clear message, there is no reason to tell a story.
Location	The teaser: Focus on the product.	Event sequencing: The order in which the story develops.	Conflict: Conflict is the driving force of the story; no conflict, no story.
Action	The hook: Focus on the call to action.	Worldmaking or world disruption: What caused the story, is it actual or fictional, realistic or fantastic, remembered or dreamt?	Characters: A story must have different characters.
Messages	-	What is it like: How would you feel if you lived through the story?	Plot: The structure of a traditional story has a beginning, middle, and end.

The next section discusses the different types of brand personas for brand storytelling.

4.6.6   Different types of brand personas for brand storytelling

In Section 3.4.2, the concept of the political brand persona was introduced, while adopting the view of Pereira (2019) that the political party brand persona is a key driver of political brand messages. Gains (2013) acknowledges the importance of archetypes in the use of brand storytelling across different cultures, places, and times. There are 12 core archetypes, according to the scholarly work of Jung (1959 as cited by Pera, Viglia & Furlan 2016:45). An archetype character is "an internal mental model of a typical, generic story character to which an observer might resonate emotionally" (Pera et al 2016:45). There is still a debate about whether archetype characters are genetically inherited (Jung 1959 as cited by Pera et al 2016:44) or whether these concepts are socially learned (Faber & Mayer 2009; Vogler 2007; Mark & Pearson 2001). This study adopted the latter perception that the meaning of archetypes has been defined by literature in culture, folktales, and history (Pera et al 2016; Faber & Mayer 2009). Table 4.5 provides a list of the 12 core archetype characters, with a description of each character, as adopted by Engelbrecht and Ngcongo (2018:214), Pera et al (2016:47), Gains (2013), and Faber and Mayer (2009:308).

Table 4.5: Summary of archetypes and description

Archetype	Description
Caregiver	Represented by caring and compassion. Commonly nurturing, parental, and protective.
Creator	Innovative, artistic, and inventive. Emphasises quality over quantity. Is often seen as a dreamer; looking for novelty, beauty, and an aesthetic standard.
Everyman/ everywoman	Mirrors the working-class person, the underdog, and the neighbour. Commonly persevering, ordered, wholesome, usually candid, and sometimes fatalistic.
Hero	Represented frequently by the courageous, impetuous warrior. Noble rescuer and crusader; must often undertakes an arduous task to "prove their worth" and later becomes an inspiration.
Innocent	Is the pure, faithful, naive, trusting, childlike character. Characterised by being humble and tranquil; longing for happiness and simplicity.
Jester	Represents a playful and mischievous comedian. Usually ironic and mirthful, sometimes irresponsible; a prankster.
Lover/siren	Symbolised by the intimate, romantic, sensual, and especially passionate. Seeking mainly to find and give love and pleasure.
Magician	Represented by the alchemist and the visionary. Seeking the principles of development and how things work.
Ruler	Represented by a strong sense of power and control; maintains a high level of dominance. Usually a leader, a boss, or a judge.
Sage	Represented by the truth and understanding; the expert and the counsellor. Scholarly, philosophical, intelligent; a mystical and prestigious guide in the world.
Seeker	Symbolised by a free will to discover and to gather insight.
Shadow	Mirrors the violent, haunted, and the primitive; the darker aspects of humanity. Can be seen to lack morality; a savage nemesis.

Sources: Engelbrecht and Ngcongo (2018:214); Pera et al (2016); Gains (2013:37); Faber and Mayer (2009:310)

Scholars emphasise that archetypes are not random products of culture and storytelling, but rather fundamental human aspirations for finding meaning in the world. In the political field, political actors make use of persona or characterisation to present themselves, their party agendas, and/or issues (Jain et al 2018:297; Polletta 2015:46), which are explained in the following sections. The characters play an important role in the stories in the political field. The political consumers adopt the views of the characters with whom they can identify. The literature indicates that political consumers identify with characters who are presented sympathetically to their cause (Jain et al 2018; Polletta 2015). Politically, it is the characters who win the voters over (Polletta 2015:35).

The next section therefore proposes the concept of social media-based political brand storytelling while also examining the different components of political brand storytelling.

4.7   SOCIAL MEDIA-BASED POLITICAL BRAND STORYTELLING

A review of the extant literature on storytelling within the political field shows that storytelling is, in particular, used to recruit participants for political movements (Armstrong & Crage 2006; Viterna 2013), to justify political violence (Fine 2000), to win policy changes (Stewart 2012), to make sense of defeat (Owens 2009), to decide whether to go to war (Smith 2004; Gibson 2012), to deliberate with fellow citizens (Polletta & Lee 2011), to forge political identities (Kane 2000), to communicate across ideological divides (Braunstein 2012), to commemorate the past (Khalili 2008), and as a peacebuilding initiative (Maiangwa & Byrne 2015).

This study puts forward the novel concept of social media-based political brand storytelling, which refers to how political brand storytelling is used to build a political brand persona on social media. This concept is proposed to address the limited number of studies that have been conducted on this topic. In doing so, the following working definition for the concept is proposed: Social media-based political brand storytelling comprises political stories, which are created around a political issue that political parties tell on social media to pull political consumers towards their brand.

Also important to note are the views of several scholars that place storytelling in the political domain as posing a problem within the public moral debate (Leslie 2015:27; Rutter et al 2015; O'Shaughnessy 2014; Reeves et al 2006). Proponents of this thinking pose questions on how stories argue political issues and what role they play within the political environment (Leslie 2015:29). It is therefore acknowledged that there is an ethical debate within the political field that is applicable to both communication and brand perspectives but which is not the germane to this study.

4.7.1 Elements of social media-based political brand storytelling

This section discusses the different elements of social media-based political brand storytelling. While the discussion in Section 4.6.5 focused more on the different storytelling strategies, this section focuses on how political brands use storytelling to frame political issues (see also the discussion in Section 3.7*).*

In the extant literature, scholars propose different political brand storytelling approaches but which all collectively put forward the idea that storytelling is a process that consists of certain elements.

For example, Jones et al (2014:55) identify the following four important political brand storytelling elements:

- Setting: Consists of policy consequential features such as geography, laws, evidence, and other facets of the policy subsystem. Many parts of the settings appear fixed (e.g., a country's constitution), while others are highly contested (e.g., the political party's official position on an issue).
- Characters: Are typically defined as victims who are harmed or potentially harmed, villains who are responsible for the harm or threat, and heroes who promise relief for the victim.
- Plots: Are organising devices that link characters to one another via motive and relationships and situate the story and its occupants in time and space.
- Moral: The moral of the story is the point of the story, which usually manifests as a policy solution or a call to action.

To explain political brand storytelling, Leslie (2015:66) draws on the structural work of folklorist Vladimir Propp (1975). His framework for political brand storytelling consists of the following four elements:

- Performance: Refers to visual, oral, or written storytelling. The performance is expressed through a symbolic gesture, which in turn elicits a sympathetic response from the audience. Within the performance element, the speaker/character creates a tone for the issue, which is important because it gives the audience cues as to how they are to judge what is being presented.
- Adaptation: Refers to the adaption of stories from one medium to another, but there is a secondary role of adaptation. The audience adapts the story for their use; it is how they internalise the story.
- Context: Focuses on the persuasive ends of the story.
- Iconicity: Is the use of visual images that are associated with particular issues.

The political brand storytelling elements collectively focus on the relationship between audience judgement of a story and how the political actor is making, telling, and adapting the stories. The stories can contextualise an issue and through storytelling can open the way for more rational debate around the issue.

The next section discusses the use of political brand storytelling to frame political issues in social media.

4.8 THE USE OF POLITICAL BRAND STORYTELLING TO FRAME POLITICAL ISSUES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Within our interconnected environment, political consumers draw from several sources to form an opinion about a political party. As previously mentioned, social media has empowered citizens to choose and share what they read; therefore shaping their political and civic decisions (Turkle 2015). Lees-Marshment (2014) indicates that citizens have new expectations of information and that they act more like consumers, thereby becoming political consumers. In addition, Banda (2016) argues that ownership of political issues has become important in understanding political behaviour. Ownership of political issues provides political consumers with "shortcuts" to make sense of their political environment. Ownership of political issues influences the views that political consumers hold about the party's ideology and the party's position on the issue. Issue ownership evolves, and parties can win or lose ownership (Walgrave, Lefevere & Tresch 2014).

Issue ownership occurs, as explained in the political literature, when, firstly, in voters' minds, they identify with a political party based on specific political issues they agree with. Secondly, voters also consider that the political party will be able to deal with the political issue at hand. Lastly, the emphasis is on the associations a party has with a specific issue in the mind of the political consumers (Banda 2016:660; Van den Brug & Berkhout 2015:870; Walgrave et al 2012:779). Scholarly work that builds on this idea indicates that issue ownership comprises two dimensions. Firstly, the associated dimension of issue ownership refers to the extent to which the issue is associated with the party. Secondly, the competence dimension of issue ownership refers to the perception of the ability to address the issue. The competence dimension thus refers to the competency of the party to deal with the issue (Van den Brug & Berkhout 2015:875; Walgrave et al 2012:780). In his seminal work, Petrocik's (1996) conceptualisation combines competence and associative dimensions, and he defines issue ownership in terms of competence.

Another key point regarding issue ownership that Walgrave et al (2014) make is that new research opportunities are opening up within the political field and parties need to consider

how party communication influences issue ownership. A party's credibility regarding certain issues acts as a shortcut for political consumers (Van den Brug & Berkhout 2015). Party reputations, like the leader's characteristics or "likability", therefore help to reduce uncertainty among political consumers (Holian 2004). Walgrave et al (2014) thus suggest that parties will not be successful in convincing political consumers of their ability to address issues when these political consumers do not like them in the first place. Dahlberg and Martinsson (2015) add that political parties need to strategically evaluate how they communicate about their issues.

However, limited research has been conducted within the political and communication fields using storytelling as a communication strategy to position a political party's issue ownership. This study thus addresses this gap within the field as a contribution towards the extent that political issues could be represented through political brand storytelling on digital platforms. The next section examines the development of an online brand persona for social media-based political brand storytelling.

4.9 DEVELOPING AN ONLINE BRAND PERSONA FOR SOCIAL MEDIA-BASED POLITICAL BRAND STORYTELLING

Political brand storytelling starts with a carefully crafted online political brand persona with a social media brand voice, which is explained in this section.

According to Herskovitz and Crystal (2010:25), in order to establish a powerful brand story, it is essential to build a strong, well-drawn, and easily recognised brand persona (as discussed in Section 2.3.2); this argument is also applicable to political brand storytelling. They argue that a strong brand persona creates a long-lasting emotional bond with the audience because it is something they can relate to; it is memorable, consistent, and instantly recognisable. This means that from a political party point of view, branding has become a strategic tool by the party to differentiate themselves from opposition parties. It is therefore important to first understand how the online brand persona is developed, which is followed by a discussion of an online political brand persona.

4.9.1 Developing an online brand persona

An online brand persona (also referred to as digital brand persona) can be defined as "the character of the brand that is communicated through online platforms" (Engelbrecht & Ngcongo 2018:207). The rapid growth of social media platforms that facilitate online social behaviour has significantly changed the nature of human activities, habits, and interaction (Tiago & Veríssimo 2014). For example, social relationships have migrated to the virtual

world, which allows individuals to share knowledge, entertain, and promote dialogue between the brand and the consumer (Budden et al 2011). Brands must therefore effectively position their online brand persona in terms of meeting the demands of online consumers. For organisations to successfully develop an online brand persona, they need to establish a brand voice, which is an important component of the brand persona. Gilbert (2017) clarifies that the brand voice, as a component of brand persona, is a technique to help develop a brand personality. Schwab's (2011) well-cited work indicates that the online brand persona's brand voice can be broken down into four components, and can also be extended to a political brand (see Figure 4.2).
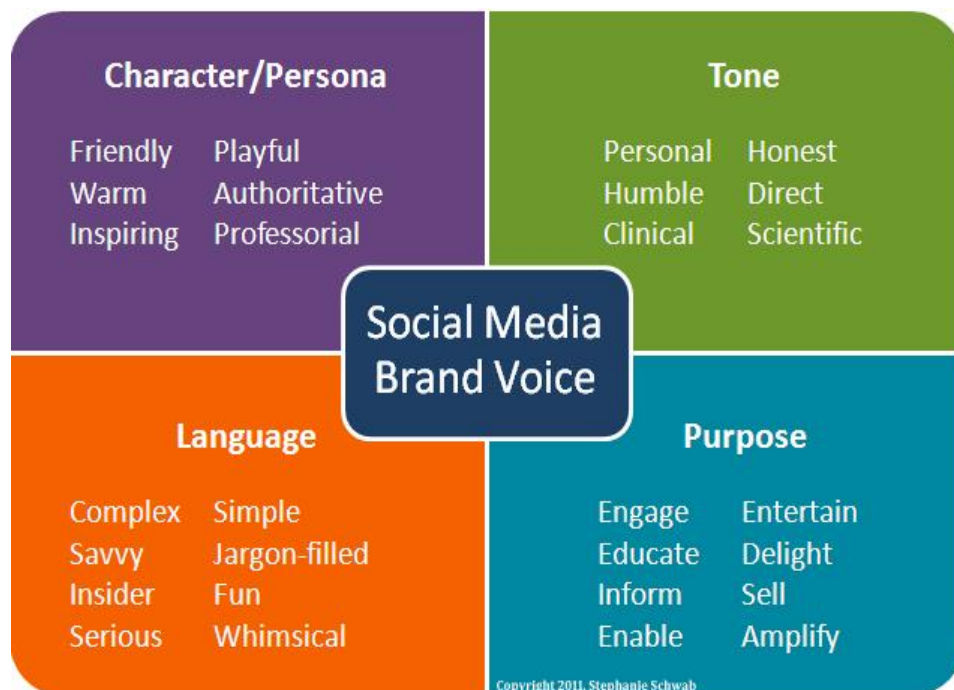
Figure 4.2: The four components of a brand persona's social media brand voice
Source: Schwab (2011)

As depicted in Figure 4.2, the social media brand voice can be explained as follows:

- Character/persona: Deals with the personality of the brand and it is important that it connects with prosumer.
- Tone: Deals with the credibility of the brand, and the tone creates the atmosphere for the brand.
- Language: Forms the cornerstone of the online conversations. The word choices can assist the brand to frame issues and engage with political consumers.
- Purpose: Addresses the reason for the brand to be online (Schwab 2011).

Another view of the brand voice that can be applied to social media is by the AMA (2014) but from an integrated communication and marketing approach, as presented in Figure 4.3. The AMA (2014) highlights that the brand's voice must be adaptable to various platforms, but must still encapsulate and build on Schwab's (2011) four social media brand voice components.

Figure: 4.3: American Marketing Association's (AMA) components of brand voice
Source: AMA (2014)

Thus, when applying Schwab's (2011) four components, the brand must use a voice on the various social media platforms which political consumers can engage with, share, and relate to.

The brand voice, as a component of the brand persona, can be extended to the political field. The political party must therefore create an online persona with which the political consumer can engage with and relate to.

4.9.2   Developing an online political brand persona

Political parties have the potential to establish long-term loyalty and relationships in the digital environment (Needham 2006). Personalisation of politics is regarded as a characteristic of social media (Enli & Skogerbø 2013). The key to developing an online political persona lies in the ability of a political party to develop a connection with political consumers (Jain et al 2018). Once the connection between the political party and the political consumer has been cemented, the political party can consolidate the support of the voters (Pich & Dean 2015; Needham & Smith 2015). Research has shown that if brand personas are carefully developed into the political strategy, they could lead to increased

likeability of the political party's brand personality (Jain et al 2018). This study therefore examined Aaker's (1997) brand personality scales (as discussed in Section 2.3.2), political brand personality, and anthropomorphism (as discussed in Section 3.4.2) applied in political studies. Brand anthropomorphism encourages political parties to ascribe human qualities to their brands. Consequently, MacInnis and Folkes (2017) argue that anthropomorphism can be extended to building a strong political brand. A limited number of studies have focused on the heuristic value of brand persona within the political field. A summary of studies that focused on the political brand persona over the last 20 years is depicted in Table 4.6 to illustrate the importance of brand persona in the political field.

Table 4.6: Key studies on political brand personas to illustrate their importance in the political field

Authors and year	Title of study	Key summary
Armannsdottir, Carnell and Pich (2020)	Exploring personal political brands of Iceland's parliamentarians	This study focused on an under-researched and under-developed typology of political branding and conceptualised politicians as personal political brands.
Chibuwe (2017)	I am as fit as a fiddle: Selling the Mr Mugabe brand in the 2013 election in Zimbabwe	The study focused on the traits of political leaders and their impact on the minds of voters.
Cornfield (2017)	Empowering the party-crasher: Mr Donald J. Trump, the first 2016 GOP presidential debate, and the Twitter marketplace for political campaigns	The study focused on key dimensions of the political brand personality framework and political campaign management. The point of this engagement is primacy and centrality of the political leader in terms of political brand personality.
Jain et al (2018)	Exploring and consolidating the brand personality elements of the political leader	The study examined the concept of brand personality and its application to political branding; more specifically the application of brand personality of a political leader. The study found that sincerity and agreeableness are key personality traits of a leader.
Rutter et al (2015)	Political brands: Can parties be distinguished by their online brand personality?	The scholars applied Aaker's (1997) brand personalities to investigate five UK political parties' websites. They found that four of the five parties used it successfully in positioning their parties.
Scammell (2007)	Political brands and consumer citizens: The rebranding of Tony Blair	The study focused on how to reconnect Mr Tony Blair in 2005 with the voters. The study focused on both the branding of hard politics (policies, issues, and record of performance) and soft politics (emotional connection and the likeability of the candidate).

Authors and year	Title of study	Key summary
Smith (2009)	Conceptualizing and testing brand personality in British politics	This study considered whether branding is an appropriate concept to apply in politics. It also focused on why brand personalities are formed in politics. The study developed a conceptual model of party political personality formation. The paper found that Aaker's brand personality scale is appropriate in the context of British politics.
Smith and French (2009)	A political brand: A consumer perspective	The study considered the party, leaders, and policies as part of the brand concept, and although the study focus was from a consumer perspective, it acknowledged the importance of the role of a party leader's brand persona as the strongest element in political branding.
Tweneboah-Koduah, Akotia, Akotia and Hinson (2010)	Political party brand and consumer choice in Ghana	This longitudinal study focused on the use of brand personality by the leaders of the National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Party in Ghana. The study revealed that sincerity and ruggedness were the most important dimensions in Ghana for political brand personality.

What is evident from the above studies is that a strong political brand persona is developed through branding elements that connect political parties (Rutter et al 2015; Cornfield 2017; Tweneboah-Koduah et al 2010; Smith 2009) and political leaders (Armannsdottir et al 2020; Jain et al 2018; Chibuwe 2017; Smith & French 2009; Scammell 2007) with a brand's personality. The purpose of this study, however, is to propose elements for a conceptual framework for political parties to utilise social media-based storytelling to establish an online political party brand persona to differentiate the party from other political parties. Evidence in the literature is mounting in support of the importance of having a strong political brand persona to differentiate parties from the opposition (Rutter et al 2015; Uribe et al 2017; Nielsen 2016). For example, Nielsen (2016) points out that a political party's brand persona can define and influence the political consumers' engagement with the political party brand (as discussed in Section 3.3.1). In this regard, several scholars argue that the political party brand is longer lasting than the political leader and harder to change (Narteh et al 2017; Lloyd 2008). It is therefore argued by Scammell (2015) that the political party brand value cannot simply be transferred to the political consumer; the political party brand needs to develop a connection with the political consumer. This can be done through brand

distinctiveness, and differentiating between brand identity and brand image, as discussed in Section 3.4.1.

This chapter concludes with a discussion of the social identity theory as a theoretical point of departure to understand how political parties can engage with political consumers to create associations for the political consumer with the political party.

4.10   SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AS THE THEORETICAL POINT OF DEPARTURE

In their seminal work, Turner and Tajfel's (1986) social identity theory explains that part of a person's self-concept comes from the groups to which that person belongs and associates with. This study's theoretical focus is anchored in the social identity theory because this theory deals with intergroup relations, such as one's political affiliation and affinity to a group.

The concept of identity is a central theme within the social identity theory and it is therefore important to outline the concept of identity. In the social identity theory, identity is tied to the social identity in terms of a person's knowledge that they belong to a social group (Lam, Ahearne, Hu & Schillewaert 2010; Stets & Burke 2000; Hogg, Terry & White 1995). A social group is a set of individuals who share the same view(s) and who can also be described as the in-group. Other comparable groups that a person does not identify with are called out-groups. This can be expressed in another way as the "us" versus "them" mentality that becomes a point of reference within the in-groups and the respective out-groups (Stets & Burke 2000; Turner & Tajfel 1986). Tajfel's (1975:3) seminal work makes it clear that the following three processes create the in-group/out-group mentality:

- Social categorisation: For people to understand other people, their social environment is divided into categories, such as black, white, teacher, student, ANC, and DA. By understanding these categories, people can define appropriate behaviour according to the group they belong to. In this regard, Tajfel (1975) explains that it provides a reference system for people that they can use to orientate themselves within society.
- Social identification: People adopt the identity of the group to which they belong, and they act in ways that are in line with the actions of the group members. For example, if a person identifies with a political party, they will most likely behave within the norms of that group. Because of their identification with that group, they will develop emotional significance to that identification, and their self-esteem will depend on it.

- Social comparison: Once people have categorised themselves into a group and identify themselves as being members of that group, they tend to compare their group (the in-group) with other groups (an out-group). To maintain their self-esteem, group members will compare their group favourably with other groups. This explains stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination since a group will tend to view members of competing groups negatively to increase their self-esteem. Stets and Burke (2000) confirm that social identification is one of the prime bases for participation in social movements.

It must also be remembered that the base of identity within the theory deals with intergroup relations. Adopting a particular social identity means being one with the group, being like others in the group, and seeing things from the group's perspective (Stets & Burke 2000). The theory is therefore important for this study because the study explores the role that an online political brand persona plays within a South African political party context, specifically the DA, by qualitatively evaluating the DA's political brand social media-based political brand storytelling techniques to propose elements for a conceptual framework as heuristic for political parties to build their online brand personas.

4.11   SUMMARY

This chapter extended the brand storytelling concept by contextualising it within the political landscape with a particular focus on social media platforms. Social media has empowered political consumers to shape their own political decisions, and it is clear within the literature that political parties cannot rely on web-based platforms alone to engage with political consumers; they also need to develop an online presence.

The chapter introduced the concepts of social media-based political brand storytelling with a focus on the online political brand persona. Brand storytelling is framed within political branding as part of the political branding strategy. Social media as a political brand strategy tool was discussed and examined political engagement through the lens of participation and mobilisation. The concept of social media was then extended to social media as a platform to implement the political brand strategy. In this study, the political brand adopts a digital media strategy for its digital brand strategy.

The chapter started by linking the different types of brand stories and discussed how they can drive and entertain the consumer. However, the literature observed that even if a brand tells a good story, it is the brand persona that is the most important element of brand storytelling. The chapter then introduced the concept of social media-based political brand storytelling, which can be described as political brand storytelling on social media used as a

political brand strategy, which influences how political consumers understand, remember, evaluate, and act upon political issues.

The use of political brand storytelling in framing political issues on social media was examined. The literature demonstrates that because of the interconnected environment, political consumers draw from several sources to form an opinion about political parties. As such, the ownership of a political issue can serve as a shortcut for political consumers to make sense of their political environment. Furthermore, the literature pointed out that issue ownership refers to how political consumers associate a political party with a specific political issue; and, secondly, that political consumers consider the ability of the political party to deal with the political issue.

In the next chapter, some elements are proposed for a conceptual framework for an online political brand persona from a social media-based political brand storytelling perspective for the purpose of measurement. The chapter also concludes the literature review.

CHAPTER 5:

PROPOSED ELEMENTS FOR A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR AN ONLINE POLITICAL BRAND PERSONA FROM A SOCIAL MEDIA-BASED POLITICAL BRAND STORYTELLING PERSPECTIVE

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets out to propose fundamental elements for the political brand persona within the context of the social media-based political brand storytelling perspective to differentiate a party from other political parties. This chapter aims to investigate the following research questions:

- **Research Question 1:** What are the theoretical criteria for political brand storytelling on social media to represent political issues through an online brand persona?
- **Research Question 2:** How does one political brand use political brand storytelling on social media within the context of the theoretical criteria?
- **Research Question 3:** In what way can the political brand's political brand storytelling techniques on social media use an online brand persona to represent political issues?
- **Research Question 4:** How can the proposed elements for a conceptual framework based on the study's findings be further refined to enhance a political brand's storytelling on social media through an online brand persona?

The elements of the proposed framework are anchored in the models that were reviewed in Sections 2.3.2.1, 3.4.1, 3.4.3, 3.6, 4.3, 4.6.4, 4.7.1, 4.9.1, along with aspects from theoretical views as discussed in Chapters 2 to 4. These elements are now proposed for a conceptual framework to be examined in the empirical part of the study and thus inform the focus of the study while setting the boundaries within which the empirical part of the study was conducted. After the boundaries for the empirical part of the study are set, they are refined into a final conceptual framework, which is presented in Chapter 8 of this study.

5.2 EXPLICATING THE PROPOSED ELEMENTS FOR THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The proposed elements discussed below are based on a comprehensive literature review in the previous chapters, which included different scholarly views and theoretical models.

The following five elements are summarised in Table 5.1, with supporting literature:

- Element 1: Political brand;
- Element 2: Political brand strategy;
- Element 3: Social media political brand voice;
- Element 4: Creating the in-group; and
- Element 5: Online political brand persona.

Table 5.1: Proposed elements with sub-elements and supporting literature relevant to the online political brand persona on social media from a political brand storytelling perspective

Proposed elements and sub-elements	Supporting literature	Sections in the thesis
Element 1: Political brand Political marketing	Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy (2007); Elhajjar (2018); Scammel (2016); O'Cass and Voola (2011)	Sections 3.2, 3.3, 3.3.4.1, 3.4.2, and 3.5.2
Political communication	Falkowski and Jablonska (2019); Blumler and Kavanagh (1999)	Sections 3.3, 3.3.4, 3.3.4.2, and 3.6
Political advertising	Schmitt (2011); Hughes (2018); McNair (2018)	Sections 3.3.4.3 and 3.6.1
Sub-element: Political offering	Nielsen 2017; Kaneva and Klemmer 2016; Speed et al (2015); Lees-Marshment (2014); Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy 2007	Sections 3.3.1, 3.4.2, and 3.5.2
Element 2: Political brand strategy	Pich and Newman (2020); Narteh et al (2017); Mensah (2016); Cosgrove (2012)	Sections 1.3.3, 2.3.2, 3.6, and 4.5.1
Sub-element: Political branding	Kumar and Dhamija (2017); Narteh et al (2017); Mensah (2016); Downer (2016); Pich and Dean (2015); Conley (2014)	Sections 3.5.1 and 3.5.2
Sub-element: Communication centred	Walgrave et al (2015); Petrocik (1996)	Sections 3.6.7 and 4.8
Sub-element: Social media-based political brand storytelling	Jones et al (2014); Leslie (2015); Propp (1975)	Sections 3.6.2, 4.6.1, 4.6.4, 4.6.5, 4.7, and 4.8
Element 3: Social media political brand voice *Sub-element: Tone* *Sub-element: Language* *Sub-element: Purpose*	Schwab (2011); AMA (2014)	Section 4.9.1
Element 4: Creating the in-group *Sub-element: Social category* *Sub-element: Social identification* *Sub-element: Social comparison*	Tajfel (1975); Lees-Marshment (2014)	Sections 3.3.1 and 4.10
Element 5: Online political brand persona	Aaker (1997); MacInnis and Folkes (2017); Pereira (2019)	Sections 1.3.5, 2.3.2, 3.4.2, 4.6.6, 4.9, 4.9.1, 4.9.2
Brand identity	Mensah (2016); Pich et al (2018)	Sections 2.3.3 and 3.4.1

Proposed elements and sub-elements	Supporting literature	Sections in the thesis
Brand image	Pich and Armannsdottir (2018); Bosch et al (2006)	Sections 2.3.1 and 3.4.3
Sub-element: Anthropomorphising of brand	MacInnis and Folkes (2017); Nielsen (2016); Aggarwal and McGill (2012); Keng et al (2013)	Sections 2.3.2 and 3.4.2
Sub-element: Creating political brand association	Pich and Armannsdottir (2018); Bosch et al (2006)	Sections 2.2.2, 2.3.1, 2.3.3.1, 2.3.5, 2.4.2, 3.2, 3.3.1, 3.4.3, and 4.8

The identified elements for the political brand persona on social media through political brand storytelling are explained in the next section based on the following theoretical aspects: political brand, political brand strategy, social media political brand voice, creating the in-group, and online political brand persona. The elements of the study's proposed framework put forward that the online political brand persona is formed through the social media political brand voice, social media-based political brand storytelling, and the creation of the in-group.

These elements are explained as follows:

5.2.1 Element 1: Political brand

This element encapsulates all the literature that was explored in Chapter 3. The literature reviewed emphasised that, firstly, because of the complexity of the political environment, it is difficult to create an authentic political brand. Secondly, it is difficult to create an authentic political brand that political consumers can identify with (Jain et al 2018). This study therefore explored the political brand and the competing concepts of political marketing, political communication, and political advertising and the role these concepts play in the process of branding. The reviewed literature revealed that political marketing is the outcome of the integration between marketing and political strategy to engage political consumers and that political communication and political advertising form part of the foundation of political marketing (McNair 2018; Lees-Marshment 2014; Kaid 2012).

It was pointed out in the literature that the political brand comprises complex interrelated components that are both institutional and ideological (Pich & Dean 2015). These are embodied in the party and the leadership, or, in other words, in the political offering (Kaneva & Klemmer 2016; Parker 2012; Zavattaro 2010; Needham 2006).

5.2.1.1 Sub-element: Political offering

This sub-element encapsulates all the theoretical aspects that would serve as a foundation for the conceptual framework because there is a need to clarify the concept of a political offering. Section 3.3.1 discussed different scholarly views on the political brand; however, not all the views incorporated the political brand as a holistic representation of the political offering (see Section 3.4.1).

The political offering forms an integrated part of a political party's brand because the political offering informs the party policies, which in turn inform the politician's actions, which ultimately determine how the political consumer views and engages with the political party (Mensah 2016; Henneberg & O'Shaughnessy 2007). This approach suggests that there is an interplay between the party, leader, policies, and the political consumer (Nielsen 2017; Mensah 2016; Pich & Dean 2015).

5.2.2 Element 2: Political brand strategy

This element summarises all the theoretical aspects that would serve as a foundation for the conceptual framework because there is a need to clarify the concept of a political brand strategy to differentiate it from the opposition.

5.2.2.1 Sub-element: Political branding

This sub-element captures the theoretical aspects of framing political messages. Framing political messages can create favourable associations and is seen as part of an ongoing process of political branding that needs to speak to the three Es, namely emotional, engage, and experience (Schmitt 2011). The political brand must therefore create an emotional response through developing a unique brand personality. The political brand can engage with the political consumer on social media platforms, and the political consumer can experience these social media political brand stories through social media platforms. The social media platforms were classified for this study on the theoretical basis of Luttrell and Capizzo (2019) and Garman's (2016) work, as discussed in Section 4.3.2, as owned, earned, and shared media.

5.2.2.2 Sub-element: Communication centred

This sub-element summarises all the theoretical aspects of the communication-centred approach to political branding. Political parties can achieve political brand alignment through a communication-centred approach to political branding (Bennett & Pfetsch 2018; Mensah

2016; Pich & Dean 2015). The communication-centred approach's objectives are to consider all communication strategies, styles, rhetoric, and tactics used by the party in its branding (Bennett & Pfetsch 2018; Mensah 2016; Pich & Dean 2015). The notion is that the political party as a brand needs to manage the political offering (party, leader, and policy) from a branded house approach, which focuses on the party's brand identity (Mensah 2016). This approach, as part of political branding, can build engagement with the political consumer through interactive communication. This can contribute towards differentiating the political party brand from the opposition (Narteh et al 2017; Mensah 2016).

Interactive communication as set out in Section 3.3.4.2 Political Communication and "networked framing" (#hashtags, RT, via, and @) on social media platforms can influence how the political consumer understands, remembers, evaluates, and acts upon political issues (Meraz & Papacharissi 2013; Kietzmann et al 2011).

This view is supported by the literature, which points out that political parties use a branding strategy to differentiate themselves within the political environment by utilising branding techniques such as brand storytelling (Wheeler 2019; Liebhart & Bernhardt 2017; Page & Duffy 2018; Leslie 2015).

5.2.2.3 Sub-element: Social media-based political brand storytelling

This sub-element encapsulates the concept of social media-based political brand storytelling. What was evident from the literature review and storytelling theories was that political brands use storytelling elements to frame political issues (see Sections 3.7 and 4.7.1) on their owned and shared social media platforms (Leslie 2015; Jones et al 2014; Propp 1975). The literature review presented several theoretical approaches to brand storytelling (see Sections 3.6.2 and 4.6.5) and collectively in terms of the character, message, and plot to form the basis of a successful brand story. Further consideration in this regard should be given to the character. Brand storytelling can use the brand persona strategically to pull in the reader. Therefore, from a political party perspective, the political consumer needs to be able to associate with the political brand persona (see Section 4.9). In this regard, equal consideration should be given to the brand message, which refers to the type of story the brand is telling. The brand message can be presented in stories of the underdog, the quest, the journey/return, rags to riches, comedy, tragedy, and the rebirth (Booker 2004).

The concept of social media-based political brand storytelling refers to how the political party is telling the story on social media and how the story is adapted to be in line with the political offering. Related to this point is the assertion that the literature confirmed that the political

consumer draws from several sources of information to form an opinion about a political party and therefore when used strategically, social media-based political brand storytelling can be used as a pulling technique for a political party (see Sections 2.4.3.2, 2.4.37, 4.4.1, 4.4.2, 4.6.4, and 4.7). It can therefore be argued that political parties can set the agenda for the political consumer around political issues and can therefore be used to drive political issues on social media (Lilleker 2015; Neuman et al 2014).

When referring to social media-based political brand storytelling, it is therefore a political brand strategy that can be used to influence how the political consumer understands, remembers, evaluates, and acts upon political issues.

5.2.3   Element 3: Social media political brand voice

This element captures all the theoretical aspects that would serve as a foundation for the conceptual framework because there is a need to clarify the concept of the social media political brand voice to present it as a component of the online political brand persona. The brand voice, as a component of the brand persona, can be related to the need for the political party to create an online brand persona with which its political consumers can engage, share, and relate to. The literature indicates that a brand's voice plays an important role in building the brand persona (see Sections 3.4.2 and 4.9.1). Given that the focus of this study is on building the brand persona, the brand voice elements were explained according to Schwab's (2011) model. The first characteristic is character/persona, which deals with the personality of the brand and it is important that it connects with the political consumer. This is discussed under *Element 5: Online political brand persona*. The rest of the elements – tone, language, and purpose – are discussed below as sub-elements of Element 3.

5.2.3.1 Sub-element: Tone

This sub-element summarises the first of the elements of the social media political brand voice, namely the tone. This sub-element deals with the credibility of the political brand's communication, which creates the atmosphere of personal, humble, honest, direct, clinical, or scientific (as discussed in Section 4.9.1).

5.2.3.2 Sub-element: Language

This sub-element encapsulates the second of the elements of the social media political brand voice, namely language. This sub-element builds on the last characteristic because it forms the cornerstone of the political brand's online conversations using a brand voice.

Word choices can help the brand frame issues and engage with political consumers (as discussed in Section 4.9.1).

5.2.3.3 Sub-element: Purpose

Lastly, this sub-element summarises the third element of the social media political brand voice, namely the purpose. This sub-element of the social media political brand voice can be divided into being engaging or entertaining, educating, delight, informing, selling, enabling, or amplifying a message for the political consumer (as discussed in Section 4.9.1).

5.2.4   Element 4: Creating the in-group

This element captures all the theoretical aspects that would serve as a foundation for the conceptual framework because there is a need to clarify the concept of creating the in-group in order for political consumers to identify with the political brand.

The concept of creating the in-group is drawn from the social identity theory, as discussed in Section 4.10. This concept is the key focal point for the political party brand because political consumers not only need to be able to identify with the political brand, they also need to feel that they belong to the group. The social identity theory, *inter alia*, stipulates that once people identify with a group, the mentality of the in-group versus the out-group (us versus them) is created (Tajfel 1975).

Furthermore, there are three elements that create the in-group/out-group mentality, as reflected in the sub-elements below.

5.2.4.1 Sub-element: Social categorisation

The first sub-element encapsulates the theoretical aspects of social categorisation. This sub-element emphasises that people categorise their social environment to define the appropriate behaviour according to the group they belong to. This point indicates that it is important for political brands to build relationships with political consumers for them to feel that they belong to the group.

5.2.4.2 Sub-element: Social identification

The second sub-element summarises the theoretical aspects of social identification. This sub-element amplifies that people adopt the identity of the group they belong to, and they act accordingly. Political consumers thus need to be able to identify with the political party's brand persona to adopt the political party's brand offering.

5.2.4.3 Sub-element: Social comparison

The last sub-element captures the theoretical aspects of social comparison. This sub-element highlights that once political consumers have adopted the group and identifies as members of the group, they then compare their group's views (in-group) against other groups' (out-group) views. This suggests that in the interconnected environment, the political consumer draws from several sources to form an opinion (Lees-Marshment 2014). Several authors (see Sections 3.7 and 4.8) have stated that ownership of political issues gives political consumers a shortcut to make sense of their political environment. Lees-Marshment (2014) describes political consumers as citizens who have new information expectations from political brands.

The above suggests that for the political brand to be successful, the political brand must achieve meaningful connections with political consumers; thus presenting political issues through social media political brand storytelling to political consumers that they can identify with.

5.2.5 Element 5: Online political brand persona

This element encapsulates all the theoretical aspects that would serve as a foundation for the conceptual framework because there is a need to clarify the concept of an online political brand persona to differentiate it from the opposition.

This element arguably forms a key component of this study because it points to the fact that political parties must develop a credible party brand persona to add value to the political brand. This assumption was made in Sections 2.3.2, 3.4.2, 3.4.3, and 4.9, where it was emphasised that the brand persona is a key driver of the brand identity and image; it adds heuristic value to the political offering. To clarify this statement, the political brand persona is viewed as a technique to build a party's brand identity from a branded house approach. The political brand persona therefore interlinks with the political party's brand image in how the political consumer experiences the political party brand image through the brand persona (Pereira 2019; Pich & Armannsdottir 2018).

5.2.5.1 Sub-element: Anthropomorphising

This sub-element summarises the theoretical aspects of anthropomorphising of a brand. The brand becomes "the face and name", which are endowed with human emotions (MacInnis & Folkes 2017; Mathews 2015; Cohen 2014). At the core of the brand persona is the emotional connection with the audience to ensure that the audience can relate to the brand.

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Several works of literature have pointed out that a political party's brand persona can define and influence political consumers' engagement with the political party brand (Gorbaniuk et al 2015; Cohen 2014; Malik & Naeem 2013). It was also emphasised that the political party brand value cannot simply be transferred to the political consumer; the political party brand needs to develop a connection with the political consumer (Rutter et al 2015). The political brand persona therefore drives brand distinctiveness and differentiation for the political party brand.

This element portrays ways in which the political party could advance towards building its brand persona. This study proposes that the political brand persona is the key attribute of the social media political brand storytelling, because the brand persona represents the political brand and how the political issues are framed. The brand persona was presented in the literature (see Section 4.9.1 and Figure 4.2) and it has been acknowledged that the political party's brand persona can define and influence political consumers' engagement with the political party (see Section 3.4.2). It is therefore argued that the brand persona plays an important role in how political consumers can identify and associate with a political brand's persona.

5.2.5.2 Sub-element: Creating an association in the mind of the political consumer

This sub-element captures the theoretical aspects of creating associations in the mind of the political consumer. It stands to reason that a successful political brand persona must create associations in the mind of the political consumer. Therefore, when reflecting on the theory, Pich and Armannsdottir (2018) adopted Bosch et al's (2006) theory that applied six variables to determine perception from an external perspective. This sub-element creates a political brand association in the political consumers' mind, which firstly focuses on expectations. Expectations refer to how the political brand clearly communicates its vision and its political offering through its social media-based political brand storytelling to the political consumer. Secondly are the perceptions and associations the political brand creates in its social media posts. Lastly, to create a political brand association in the mind of the political consumer, the political brand needs to create an experience that refers to the type of contact or engagement opportunities that the political brand creates with its social media posts for political consumers to experience the brand.

If the external understanding is inconsistent with the internal positioning, political parties will have to refine their position through evaluating the content on their social media platforms.

Table 5.2 provides a summary of the operationalisation of the proposed elements for the purpose of measurement.

Table: 5.2: Summary of the operationalisation of the proposed elements for purposes of measurement

Element 1: Political brand
● **Sub- element: Political offering:** How the DA frames the issues to create differentiation between it and the opposition.

Element 2: Political brand strategy
● **Sub-element: Political branding that needs to speak to the three Es:** ○ Emotional refers to language and images; ○ Engage refers to the number of likes, comments, shares, and sign-ups; and ○ Experience refers to marked as favourites and quotes. ● **Sub-element: Communication centred:** All communication tactics used by the party: ○ Network framing of issues #; and ○ Types of posts used (speech, photo caption, YouTube video link). ● **Sub-element: Social media-based political brand storytelling:** It is a political brand strategy that can be used to influence how the political consumer understands, remembers, evaluates, and acts upon political issues. This happens within the context of the types of stories the political brand tells, namely: ○ the underdog: these stories indicate a struggle against societal issues; ○ the quest: these are problem-solving stories or goal-achieving stories; ○ the journey/return: these stories focus on transformation through learning lessons and overcoming obstacles; ○ rags to riches: these stories position the party as the hero against all odds; ○ comedy: focuses on stories about the community and relationships; ○ tragedy: focuses on issues of what not to do or how not to behave; and ○ the rebirth – these are stories about reinvention and renewal.

Element 3: Social media political brand voice
This element is seen as a component of the political brand persona and focuses on three sub-elements: 1. Sub-element: Tone: personal, humble, honest, direct, clinical, scientific; 2. Sub-element: Language: complex, simple, jargon-filled, savvy, insider, fun, serious, whimsical; and 3. Sub-element: Purpose: engage, entertain, educate, delight, inform, sell, enable, amplify.

Element 4: Creating the in-group
The DA needs to create social categories, identification, and comparison in its social media to pull the political consumer in so that they feel that they belong to the in-group. The three sub-elements are as follows: 1. Sub-element: Social categorisation: refers to the type of categories the DA creates in its posts; 2. Sub-element: Social identification: refers to the identification the DA creates in its social posts for the political consumer; and 3. Sub-element: Social comparison: refers to how the DA communicates on political issues using the competition (out-group) to influence political consumers.

Element 5: Online political brand persona
1. **Sub-element: Anthropomorphising the brand, endowing with human emotions:** ○ Friendly; ○ Authoritative; ○ Inspiring; ○ Professional; ○ Warm; ○ Sad; ○ Anger; ○ Anticipation; ○ Fear;

- o Loneliness;
- o Jealousy;
- o Disgust;
- o Guilt;
- o Satisfaction;
- o Surprise;
- o Trust; and
- o Shame.
2. **Sub-element: Create a political brand association in political consumers' mind:**
   - o Expectations: the political brands must communicate through their social media political brand storytelling a clear vision of their political offering;
   - o Perceptions and associations: that the DA is creating on its social media posts;
   - o Experiences: the type of contact or engagement opportunities the DA creates on its social media posts for the political consumer to experience the brand.

5.3   SUMMARY

This chapter explained and operationalised the proposed elements for the conceptual framework on how a political brand can use political brand storytelling on social media through an online brand persona to differentiate the party from other political parties for the purpose of measurement. The study proposed the following elements: political brand, political brand strategy, social media political brand voice, creating the in-group, and online political brand persona. The proposed conceptual framework elements emerged from the overview of literature and theories in earlier chapters.

In the next chapter, the research methodology that guided the empirical verification of the elements of the proposed conceptual framework is outlined and justified.

CHAPTER 6:
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND OPERATIONALISATION

6.1   INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters mainly focused on a thorough literature review of elements and concepts in the literature that are of significance to this study, such as digital branding (Chapter 2), contextualising the political brand and storytelling (Chapter 3), and social media political brand storytelling (Chapter 4), which culminated into certain elements with theoretical aspects for measurement (Chapter 5).

This chapter outlines and contextualises the research methodology and operationalisation. The chapter is set out as follows: firstly, the study's research paradigm and approach are discussed; and, secondly, the research methodology is explained by discussing the research design that guided the empirical enquiry. By reflecting on the purpose and broad research objectives of this study, the progression of the study is revealed, including the broad research problem and the secondary research objectives that guided the empirical investigation. Lastly, the trustworthiness of the study's findings is discussed.

6.2   WORLDVIEW ADOPTED FOR THIS STUDY

This section explains the interpretivist paradigm and the philosophical rationales that were adopted for the study.

6.2.1   Interpretivism as a research paradigm

Researchers embark on research to investigate a phenomenon and to attempt to find solutions to a problem or answers to a particular question that is interrelated to how the researcher sees the world and acts in it (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2014). Bryman (2012:52) refers to "how the researcher sees the world" as a paradigm, which was coined by historian Thomas Kuhn (Nieuwenhuis 2014). The concept "paradigm" is mostly used in the natural and social sciences and is referred to as research traditions or worldviews (Babbie & Mouton 2018; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2014). There are several main research paradigms, namely positivist, interpretivist, pragmatic, and critical realist traditions. Du Plooy-Cilliers (2014:20) highlights the relevance of these traditions as that "every research tradition is characterised by assumptions that will guide the researcher in the way in which they will approach the phenomenon under investigation". Interpretivism has been influenced by several traditions, such as hermeneutics, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism (Irshaidat 2019; Babbie

& Mouton 2018; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2014). The hermeneutics approach is concerned with the theory and methods of the interpretation of human action (Dudovskiy 2019; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2014). The phenomenology approach maintains that human action is meaningful and that people therefore ascribe meaning to both their own and other people's actions (Irshaidat 2019; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2014; Bryman 2012).

To illustrate, Nieuwenhuis (2014) makes the point that the researcher's traditions or worldviews address fundamental assumptions taken on faith, such as beliefs about the nature of reality (ontology) and the relationship between the knower and known (epistemology). These philosophies therefore shape how the researcher sees the world and how the researcher acts in the world. Research involves understanding the relationship between theory, philosophy (ontology and epistemology), methodology, and methods (Howell 2015), which are discussed in more detail in Section 6.2.2.

Another key point is that interpretivism acknowledges that realities are fluid and subjective and that they are created through human interaction (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2014). These realities are social constructions and they are dependent on the meanings that people ascribe to their experiences and interactions with others; interpretivism therefore argues that the social reality has multiple layers and what we observe is often just the surface reality, which is only partial (Ghiara 2019). The deep structures on which social reality operates are often missed and are difficult to uncover. The purpose of this study was to obtain an understanding of the role that online political brand personas play within the South African political brand context by qualitatively evaluating a political brand's social media-based political brand storytelling techniques. The researcher therefore had to be aware of the deep structures that drive political issues in South Africa.

This study adopted the interpretivist research paradigm as its worldview because it allowed the study to address the research questions (Babbie & Mouton 2018). Furthermore, using the research tradition in interpretivism allowed the researcher to better understand the complexity of the social phenomena, which were gained from different views and obtained from various data sources (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2011; Du Plooy 2009). The research literature confirms that the interpretivism research tradition aims to gain an in-depth understanding of human behaviour (Babbie & Mouton 2018; Teddlie & Tashakkori 2011; Maree & Van der Westhuizen 2014; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2014; Du Plooy 2009).

From the above discussion, some advantages of this paradigm become evident. The first advantage is that with diversifying views to look at a phenomenon, the researcher cannot describe objects, humans, or events without deeply understanding them in a social context.

Secondly, the researcher can collect rich data that will provide the researcher with better insights into the phenomena (Hammersley 2013:24).

Considering the advantages of the interpretivist research paradigm, this approach is deemed suitable for the study because to address the research problem, an understanding of the phenomenon within the social context was necessary.

The next section explains the philosophical assumptions traditionally linked to research paradigms, after which these assumptions are framed following the interpretivist stance that was adopted.

6.2.2   The philosophical rationales for this study: Ontological, epistemology, methodology, and axiology

The philosophical rationales associated with research and the paradigm selected for this study include ontological, epistemology, methodology, and axiology (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2014). In terms of the interpretivist approach, the empirical enquiry is framed according to the ontological, epistemology, methodology, and axiology assumptions that are also evident in other existing paradigms. These are contextualised in the discussion below.

6.2.2.1 Ontology

Ontology is understood as the study of the structure of the nature of reality (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2014). In this regard, Nieuwenhuis (2014) states that its main questions deal with what reality is and how we know what is real (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2014). A simplistic explanation is given by Lichtman (2014), namely that ontology refers to what is the nature of reality. Therefore, in a more traditional view of interpretivism, ontology acknowledges that the social world is what people perceive it to be. The social world is fluid and fragile and changes as people's perceptions change. Consequently, interpretivists adopt an ontology in which a single phenomenon may have multiple interpretations rather than a truth that can be determined by a process of measurement (Babbie & Mouton 2018; Creswell 2007). Interpretivists therefore argue for a more profound account of how issues could be useful by attempting to show "what it is for [and] who it is for", as opposed to being concerned with an accurate depiction of reality (Dennis 2011:3). For example, in the context of this study, the application of social media-based political brand storytelling to a certain extent defined the topic, namely what social media-based political brand storytelling is (Dennis 2011). In the context of the political environment, it is orientated towards creating a truth that political parties experience in creating the political party's online brand persona on social media,

which inevitably requires consideration of the topic and the selection of the appropriate research methods.

6.2.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology relates to "how things can be known – how truths or facts or physical laws, if they exist, can be discovered and disclosed" (Nieuwenhuis 2014:55). Moreover, epistemology is the study of knowledge and refers to the appropriate ways in which to study a phenomenon (Babbie & Mouton 2018; Du Plooy 2009).

The epistemological position of interpretivism thus departs from the point of view that because knowledge is not permanent, it must be considered within its historical and social context. Any knowledge that researchers produce will therefore always be clouded by the researchers' values (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2014; Nieuwenhuis 2014). Interpretivism therefore argues that, firstly, everything put forward as knowledge must be scrutinised; and, secondly, that research will never produce permanent answers to a research problem (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2014; Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009). The interpretivist research paradigm therefore emphasises that knowledge should not be generalised beyond the context in which the study was conducted (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2014).

6.2.2.3 Methodology

In the literature, a clear distinction is drawn between research methods and research methodology (Creswell 2015; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner 2007; Guba & Lincoln 1989). The research method concept "focuses on the procedures of data collection, data analysis, and possible interpretation" (Creswell 2015:55), where the term "methodology" involves "everything from the worldview at the start of the research process to the last procedures of inquiry" (Guba & Lincoln 1989:55). From a methodological point of view, the researcher therefore had to consider the types of data collection and analysis methods applied to this study since the interpretivist research paradigm favours a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2014). This methodological approach was thus suitable for the study to collect empirical data and to test the study's proposed elements for the conceptual framework.

6.2.2.4 Axiology

The axiological position of interpretivism relates to researchers understanding the complexity of unique realities. Interpretivists openly discuss the values that shape their research, including their own interpretations and those of the participants (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2014).

Axiology acknowledges the influence of the researcher's beliefs and background knowledge; thus the importance of existing values. In this regard, the researcher recognised the impact of personal views and beliefs and therefore employed both in-depth interviews and deductive qualitative content analysis to achieve objectivity in the study (Chillisa & Kawulich 2012).

Owing to the philosophical approach to the phenomenon under investigation, the qualitative research approach was deemed the most suitable to explore and describe the research problem from an interpretivist worldview using several qualitative data-collection methods and data-analysis processes to synthesise the study's findings. The next section discusses the study's qualitative research approach.

6.3   RESEARCH APPROACH

Qualitative researchers aim to explore, understand, and describe qualitative data within a specific context (Strydom & Bezuidenhout 2014). However, Babbie and Mouton (2018) point out that it is important to recognise that qualitative research is about both describing and understanding. Adding to this, Keyton (2011) emphasises that qualitative researchers' aim is not to quantify, predict, and generalise a study's findings. Qualitative researchers use qualitative measures when presenting a study's findings (Strydom & Bezuidenhout 2014). Babbie and Mouton (2018) therefore maintain that qualitative research is conducted in a natural setting. Qualitative research relies on the informal knowledge gained from the experiences of researchers.

The researcher could approach the research from an emic or cultural insider perspective or an etic or cultural outsider perspective (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009). The researcher approached this study from an etic approach and therefore made a deliberate attempt to understand the natural setting. Babbie and Mouton (2018) support the etic approach and conclude that the primary aim of qualitative research is in-depth or thick descriptions and understanding of actions and events. In addition, Babbie and Mouton (2018) put forward that qualitative research distinguishes itself from quantitative research in terms of the research process that is followed. The research process from a qualitative design can be conducted from either a deductive or inductive approach. Bezuidenhout and Cronjé (2014) agree by adding that when using the deductive approach, the researcher is reasoning from a general to a specific meaning; however, when reasoning from specific to general, the researcher is using an inductive approach.

For example, Bezuidenhout and Cronjé (2014:234) point out some unique characteristics regarding qualitative research. Firstly, the data are textual when the data are collected

through interviews, fieldnotes, or observation. Secondly, qualitative research is iterative, which means the analysis and interpretation process is repeated over and over in a continuous cycle. As the researcher moves through each cycle, new insights are gained.

Qualitative research is subjective because there cannot be an absolute wrong or right answer for human behaviour. However, data-collection and -analysis methods are scientific because they follow a systematic process to transform data into findings (Bezuidenhout & Cronjé 2014). The next section focuses on the study's research design.

6.4   RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design of a study refers to the planning of scientific inquiry; thus designing a strategy to answer a study's research questions and objectives (Babbie & Mouton 2018). In the same way, Du Plooy (2009:40) defines the purpose of research design as "the specification of how data will be created, collected, constructed, analysed and interpreted to enable the researcher to draw warranted descriptive, explanatory or interpretive inference".

Babbie and Mouton (2018:72) put forward the ProDEC framework, which is a standard strategy in empirical research. This framework refers to four elements, namely a research problem (Pro), research design (D), empirical evidence (E), and conclusions (C). The study adopted this framework as a strategy to answer the research questions and objectives. In other words, the ProDEC framework was used as a systematic framework that guided the study's inquiry from the phases of collecting data to that of concluding the study. The study applied these four elements in terms of the study's research problem (as discussed in Chapter 1), the study's qualitative research design (as discussed in this chapter), the empirical evidence that is provided in Chapter 7, and the conclusion of the study in Chapter 8.

To elaborate on the research design, the subsequent sections provide a discussion of, as well as a motivation for, the chosen methods.

6.4.1   Research problem statement

As stated in Chapter 1, the research problem statement is to qualitatively investigate through a cross-sectional study how a political brand can use political brand storytelling on social media through an online brand persona to differentiate the party from other political parties in order to propose elements for a conceptual framework as heuristic for political parties.

6.4.2   Research objectives and research questions

Table 6.1 summarises the study's research objectives and research questions as discussed in Chapter 1. The table summarises the chapters in which the literature pertaining to each research question and research objective was discussed.

Table 6.1: Summary of research objectives and questions

Secondary research objective and questions	Chapter	Qualitative research design
Research Objective 1: To explore theoretical criteria for political brand storytelling on social media to represent political issues through an online brand persona. **Research Question 1:** What are the theoretical criteria for political brand storytelling on social media to represent political issues through an online brand persona?	Chapters 2, 3, and 4 Chapters 2, 3, and 4	Literature review
Research Objective 2: To explore one political brand's use of brand storytelling on social media within the context of the theoretical criteria. **Research Question 2:** How does one political brand use political brand storytelling on social media within the context of the theoretical criteria?	Chapter 7 Chapter 5	Semi-structured expert interviews with PR agencies DA's Facebook posts and tweets
Research Objective 3: To explore in what way a political brand's political brand storytelling techniques on social media could use an online brand persona to represent political issues. **Research Question 3:** In what way could the political brand's political brand storytelling techniques on social media use an online brand persona to represent political issues?	Chapters 3 and 4 Chapters 6 and 7	Semi-structured expert interviews with PR agencies DA's Facebook posts and tweets
Research Objective 4: To explore how the proposed elements for a conceptual framework based on the study's findings can be further refined to enhance a political brand's storytelling on social media through an online brand persona. **Research Question 4:** How can the proposed elements for a conceptual framework based on the study's findings be further refined to enhance a political brand's storytelling on social media through an online brand persona?	Chapters 4, 6 and 7 Chapter 8	Semi-structured expert interviews with PR agencies DA's Facebook posts and tweets

6.4.3   Research methodology

Following the interpretivist research tradition as the guiding research paradigm, the researcher deemed the qualitative methodology most suitable to investigate how social media brand storytelling is used in building the political party's online brand persona.

There are two major research methods for qualitative research design, namely field research and non-reactive research. Strydom and Bezuidenhout (2014) explain that in non-reactive or unobtrusive research, the researcher is not directly involved with the research participants and therefore has no effect on the findings of the study. In this regard, Babbie and Mouton (2018) point out that the researcher is studying social behaviour without affecting it. There are three major non-reactive research methods, namely qualitative content analysis, analysis of existing statistics, and historical analysis. Field research refers to the researcher conducting research in the field or setting of human experience by observing and participating in events or circumstances (Strydom & Bezuidenhout 2014). In this regard, Neuman (2011) points out that field research is typically conducted in various social settings and aspects of life. It is important to realise that the field research settings are selected according to a study's goals (Babbie & Mouton 2018). This study used both the non-reactive research method (a deductive qualitative content analysis of the DA's own media, namely its Facebook posts and Twitter feeds) and field research (semi-structured expert interviews with PR agencies) to answer the study's research questions.

The study was conducted in different phases. Firstly, a thorough literature review was conducted for the purposes of measurement of the study's research questions, followed by semi-structured expert interviews and a deductive qualitative content analysis.

6.4.3.1 Semi-structured expert interviews

The literature reveals that qualitative research can use different types of field research (Strydom & Bezuidenhout 2014). The main approaches in field research to collect data are focus groups and interviews, such as structured, semi-structured, and in-depth interviews, expert interviews, or unstructured interviews (Aurini et al 2016; Strydom & Bezuidenhout 2014). Since the main purpose of this study was to gain insight into the role that online political brand personas play within the South African political brand context by qualitatively evaluating a political brand's social media-based pollical brand storytelling techniques, the use of semi-structured expert interviews as a research method to obtain a deeper understanding of the topic at hand with experienced communication professionals was deemed appropriate. These experienced communication professionals shared their knowledge in order for the research to answer Research Questions 2, 3, and 4, as per Table 6.1. The differences between the types of interviews are seemingly based on a varying degree of formality and the approach adopted by the researcher (Aurini et al 2016). The purpose of using semi-structured interviews as a data-collection tool in qualitative research allowed the researcher to pose questions to the participants to learn more about their views, opinions, and beliefs around the phenomenon under study (Strydom & Bezuidenhout 2014;

Bryman 2012). The main advantage of the semi-structured interview is that it allows for further exploration of topics (Bryman 2012).

The extant literature points out a number of advantages that semi-structured interviews as a data-collection tool have. Firstly, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to ask the participant to clarify or elaborate on a point, which can provide a more detailed explanation and, ultimately, add to rich data collection by the researcher (Strydom & Bezuidenhout 2014). Secondly, it allows the interviewer to ask the participant questions to collect rich and descriptive data to help the researcher to construct social reality (Nieuwenhuis 2014). Thirdly, semi-structured interviews require the participant to answer a set of predetermined questions, and they allow the researcher to probe and clarify answers (Nieuwenhuis 2014; Du Plooy 2009). Strydom and Bezuidenhout (2014) point out that this allows the researcher more flexibility in the data-collection process. The researcher deemed the semi-structured expert interviews a fitting data-collection method for this study to empirically verify the elements of the proposed conceptual framework (see Section 5.2).

6.4.3.2 Qualitative deductive content analysis

In a non-reactive research environment, the researcher does not establish a direct relationship or interaction with the research subject, and because no direct relationship is established, the subject cannot react to the fact that it is being investigated – hence the term non-reactive or unobtrusive research (Babbie & Mouton 2018). When conducting non-reactive research, the researcher is thus not directly involved with the research participants and therefore does not affect the findings (Strydom & Bezuidenhout 2014). In addition, Babbie (2011:327) defines unobtrusive research as "studying social behaviour without affecting it". In this regard, Babbie and Mouton (2018) concur by adding that researchers do not intrude on the object of study because they do not establish a direct relationship with the research subject.

As previously mentioned, there are three major methods of the non-reactive research approach, namely qualitative content analysis, analysis of existing statistics (secondary research), and historical analysis. Qualitative content analysis refers to following a systematic process to analyse content such as text, images, or videos (Babbie & Mouton 2018). The analysis can be conducted inductively or deductively. Deductive content analysis is similar to inductive content analysis in that it is applied in qualitative research and the data-collection method aims to reach data saturation (Kyngäs & Kaakinen 2020). The difference between the two approaches, as set out by Strydom and Bezuidenhout (2014), lies in the use of an existing theoretical framework for deductive analysis, while an inductive approach to content analysis is applicable when the researcher argues from specific data

collected in a specific social setting to develop a general theory. However, the deductive approach moves from general (applicable theories) to specific (specific themes). Research in which deductive content analysis is applied usually has prior theoretical knowledge as the starting point (Kyngäs & Kaakinen 2020:44). Another key difference is that deductive content analysis is guided by a half-structured or structured coding scheme (as discussed in Section 6.4.6.3) (Kyngäs & Kaakinen 2020; Bezuidenhout & Cronjé 2014). With inductive content analysis, the reporting of results must be structured according to the identified concepts, categories, and/or themes (Kyngäs & Kaakinen 2020). However, for this study, the researcher used a deductive approach in accordance with proposed elements for the conceptual framework that was derived from the literature review in previous chapters (the general) to identify several specific codes within the text, which were grouped into themes (the specific) (Bezuidenhout & Cronjé 2014). This approach allowed the researcher to, firstly, conduct manifest analysis of the data, which refers to describing what the data are actually saying; and, secondly, it allowed the researcher to seek for the underlying meaning of the text, which is referred to as latent analysis (Bengsston 2016). This is in line with the interpretivist approach that allows for the interpretation of data with the understanding that the data may have multiple interpretations rather than a truth (Babbie & Mouton 2018; Creswell 2007).

The next section deals with the study's target and accessible population and units of analysis.

6.4.4   Target and accessible population

Population refers to all possible units of analysis, which for this study were all South African political parties' brand stories on social media (Du Plooy 2009).

It is also important to differentiate between the target population and the accessible population for research. As explained by Pascoe (2014:132), the target population refers to all the people or social artefacts from whom information is needed for the research. The population thus refers to the nature, size, and unique characteristics of the target population (Pascoe 2014; Du Plooy 2009). On the other hand, the accessible population refers to individuals of the target population who will or will not participate or who cannot be accessed during the study period (Asiamah, Mensah & Oteng-Abayie 2017).

For this study, all PR agencies in South Africa that deal with political brand stories from which the participants (for the semi-structured expert interviews) and the social artefacts (all social media-based brand stories for the deductive qualitative content analysis) were selected as the target population. The accessible population refers to the portion of the

target population that can be reached or accessed for interviews or analysis (Bezuidenhout & Cronjé 2014).

The researcher also set population parameters for the target population, which are defined as a list with "the shared characteristics and the number of people or social artefacts in a population" (Pascoe 2014:133). The population parameters for the participants were therefore communication practitioners who worked in a PR agency who were responsible for creating political parties' social media-based brand stories in South Africa. On the other hand, the researcher also needed to set population parameters for the social artefacts. These social artefacts included the DA's *Bokamoso* (web newsletter), Facebook posts, and Twitter feeds from May 2015 to June 2016. Table 6.2 indicates the population parameters for this study.

Table 6.2: Population parameters for this study

Population parameters for participants for the interviews	Population parameters for social artefacts for the deductive content analysis
The PR agency had to be responsible for the social media of a South African political party.	The DA's web newsletters (*Bokamoso*) from May 2015 to June 2016.
The PR agency had to be involved in the political communication field for at least the last 10 years.	The DA's official Facebook posts from May 2015 to June 2016.
The participant had to have worked within the political communication field for at least the last five years.	The DA's official Twitter feeds from May 2015 to June 2016.
The participant had to be involved in the creation of the social media branding strategy for the political party.	
The participant had to be responsible for creating the political party's social media stories.	

6.4.5 Sampling method and unit of analysis

Babbie and Mouton (2018) explain that the unit of analysis refers to the "what" of a scientific study. The unit of analysis for this study was therefore, firstly, the key individuals responsible for creating the political brand stories on social media (Facebook and Twitter) for political parties in South Africa. Individuals who work in PR agencies who are responsible for creating political parties' brand stories on social media would therefore serve as a source of information. The second unit of analysis was the DA's historical Facebook posts and Twitter feeds from May 2015 to June 2016, when there was a change in the DA's leadership (thus social artefacts).

As indicated in Table 6.2, the researcher had to narrow down the target population to an accessible population by using a sampling method, which is discussed below.

Sampling refers to the selective portion of the population of a study (Nieuwenhuis 2014), or a subset of the population, which is required in instances where it is impossible to include every individual in the population in a study (Pascoe 2014; Du Plooy 2009). Two sampling types can be used for a study, namely a probability and non-probability type. The probability sampling type is used in a quantitative research design because the population has an equal opportunity to be part of the sample (Pascoe 2014). On the other hand, a non-probability type of sampling method can be used when the findings of a study do not need to be generalised to the larger population, specifically in exploratory and qualitative studies (Bezuidenhout & Cronjé 2014; Pascoe 2014).

For this study, the non-probability type of sampling was used because the nature of the study made it impossible for the researcher to gain access to the entire population (Nieuwenhuis 2014). Also, the intention was not to generalise the findings to the larger population but rather to gain a deeper understanding of the topic under investigation.

Several non-probability sampling methods can be used by researchers, namely accidental, convenience, volunteer, snowball, quota, and purposive (Babbie & Mouton 2018; Pascoe 2014; Du Plooy 2009). A purposive sample was adopted for this study, which can be defined as "sampling done with a specific purpose in mind" (Maree & Pietersen 2014:178). The researcher adopted the purposive sampling method because it allowed selecting the units of analysis to be included in the sample, based on a set list of characteristics. For the semi-structured expert interviews, the criteria set by the researcher specifically aimed to ensure that the participants were experts in social media within the political field and would be able to provide the required insight into social media-based political brand storytelling. The purpose of these interviews was to gain a better understanding of how professional communication practitioners in PR agencies use social media to drive political parties' political issues through social media-based political brand storytelling. The researcher consequently conducted five interviews with PR agencies working within the political field, which represents a niche industry in South Africa (Archana 2018). It must also be pointed out that the interviews were conducted with PR agencies' staff members as opposed to individuals in their private capacity, until data saturation was reached. Data saturation in the literature refers to a point during data collection where the researcher does not collect any new information and enough data had been collected to achieve the research purpose (Braun & Clark 2019; Faulkner & Trotter 2017).

The researcher acknowledges that there is some criticism against using the semi-structured expert interview in social science. For example, Bogner, Littig and Menz (2009) point out that expert interviews offer researchers a means of quickly obtaining results without the researcher submerging him-/herself in the topic at hand. The semi-structured expert

interview as a method of qualitative empirical research has been widely discussed in the political and social research fields since the early 1990s (Döringer 2020). Several scholars explain that who is identified as an expert depends on the researcher's judgement (Döringer 2020; Yusof, Kaur, Sani & Hashim 2019; Meuser & Nagel 2009). However, Yusof et al (2019) point out that expert knowledge can be clearly distinguished from other forms of knowledge such as everyday knowledge and common-sense knowledge. In scientific research, an individual is seen as an expert because the researcher has established that the participant has knowledge that is not accessible to everybody in the field of study (Döringer 2020). For this study, PR agencies were considered experts on the topic, while the participants from these agencies represented the agencies' expert views. In addition, the study also achieved data saturation in that no new insights and information were obtained from the participants after five interviews. Table 6.3 depicts the final sample for the semi-structured expert interviews.

Table 6.3: Final sample for semi-structured expert interviews

Participant	Position	Number of years of experience
Participant A	Account director	15 years
Participant B	Managing director	15 years
Participant C	Account director	10 years
Participant D	Founding partner: Head of Strategy, Cape Town office	15 years
Participant E	Head of Strategy, Johannesburg office	10 years

For the deductive qualitative content analysis, the DA's web newsletter, *Bokamoso*, from May 2015 to June 2016, was used as the sample frame to select the DA's unique tweets and Facebook posts, as well as its historical Facebook and Twitter feeds from May 2015 to June 2016, when there was a change in the DA's leadership. This period for analysis was selected because this was when Mr Mmusi Maimane was elected as the first black leader of the party and when there was a shift in the political offering. In addition, the DA was also building up to the 2016 national elections during which it shared the party's political issues. The researcher hence used the themes as identified in Table 6.5 to select the DA's unique tweets and Facebook posts as reflected in the *Bokamoso* newsletter. A purposive sampling method was then used to select Facebook posts and tweets from the corpus of tweets and posts by the DA based on the web newsletter's themes to ensure that they met the selection criteria (see Table 6.4 for the initial sample size). These were all provided by the DA's Marketing Communications team. The final sample size is depicted in accordance with seven themes as indicated in Table 6.5. The initial sample size was narrowed down from 1 008 Facebook posts to 327 posts and the tweets from 10 000 to 369 by means of a thorough data-cleaning process.

Table 6.4: The initial sample size for the deductive qualitative content analysis

Timeframe	Social media platform	Sample size
May 2015 to June 2016	Twitter: #Our_DA	10 000
May 2015 to June 2016	Facebook: @DemocraticAlliance	1 008
May 2015 to June 2016	DA's web newsletter: *Bokamoso*	49

For the selection criteria for the final sample size, the researcher used Keyhole, which is a social media monitoring tool, to establish the amount of social media data.

Table 6.5: The final sample for the deductive qualitative content analysis

Themes identified from *Bokamoso*	Issue of *Bokamoso*	Number of unique Facebook posts	Number of unique tweets
Education Sub-themes: South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) and education; higher education and South African youth; higher education and university access	June 1, 2015 September 25, 2015 October 23, 2015 October 30, 2015 November 6, 2015 April 15, 2016	58	77
Employment Sub-themes: freedom, fairness and opportunities; entrepreneurs; job creation; job super crisis; Vision 2029	June 8, 2015 June 15, 2015 June 22, 2015 October 16, 2015 January 8, 2016 May 13, 2016 May 20, 2016 May 27, 2016	80	68
Energy Sub-themes: energy security and the nuclear deal	July 6, 2015 July 31 2015	29	36
Racism	August 7, 2015 August 28, 2015 January 15, 2016	42	38
Zuma Sub-themes: corruption; state capture; spy tapes; Zuma democracy; Zuma feudalism; pay back the money	October 2, 2015 November 13, 2015 November 20, 2015 February 5, 2016 February 2019, 2016 March 11, 2016 April 1, 2016 April 8, 2016 May 6, 2016 June 3, 2016	76	78
Economy Sub-themes: Black Economic Empowerment (BEE); a competitive player in the global economy	June 29, 2015 January 29, 2016 March 4, 2016 May 20, 2016	17	54
Water	July 13, 2015 November 27, 2015	25	18
Total unique posts		327	369

6.4.6   Data collection

This section discusses the data-collection methods, namely an interview schedule for the semi-structured expert interviews and a coding sheet for the deductive qualitative content analysis. However, the time dimension of this study is first clarified.

6.4.6.1 Time dimension of the study

It is also important to consider the time dimension that determines the type of study that is conducted. This study is a cross-sectional study, which differs from a longitudinal study (Babbie & Mouton 2018). Cross-sectional studies refer to the collection of data during one period, while longitudinal studies refer to data collection over several periods of time (Babbie & Mouton 2018). For this study, historical social media data were collected for the period May 2015 to June 2016 and for the semi-structured expert interviews once ethical clearance for the study was granted in August 2020.

6.4.6.2 Interview schedule for the semi-structured expert interviews

The semi-structured expert interviews required the use of an interview schedule, which Aurini et al (2016:94) describe as a guide with instructions for the interviewer (See Addendum A). The interview schedule provided clear topics or subject areas that the interviewer could use as a guideline to explore and ask questions to elucidate the specific subject (Strydom & Bezuidenhout 2014).

(a)   Design of the interview guide

The interview guide is a document that provided guidelines for the interview because it served to remind the researcher of the topic at hand, and also enabled the researcher to ask the participants the same questions (Aurini et al 2016; Bryman 2012; Turner 2010). To ensure successful interviews, the researcher purposely formulated 23 questions to guide the conversation and to ensure that the interview stayed within the boundaries of the set proposed elements for political brand persona and social media-based political brand storytelling, as discussed in Section 5.2. In addition, the broad research problem of the study and research questions in Section 6.4.2 served as the foundation to formulate the questions. Furthermore, the interview guide for the semi-structured expert interviews allowed the participants some flexibility in their answers and therefore provided the researcher with opportunities to follow up on issues not included in the interview guide but which were raised during the conversations.

(b)   Types of questions used in the interview guide

The researcher used open-ended questions for the semi-structured expert interviews because they encouraged the researcher to explore the topic at hand and to be provided with unanticipated insights (Babbie & Mouton 2018). Open-ended questions also allowed the researcher flexibility in exploring the topic and to collect rich data (Strydom & Bezuidenhout 2014). These types of questions also allowed the participants to engage with the researcher and to explain and qualify their responses, which contributed towards the richness of the data (Neuman 2011). As set out in Table 6.6, the researcher designed the semi-structured expert interview in such a way that the participants could contribute towards the data.

The interviews were conducted with the PR agencies responsible for creating social media content for political parties in South Africa (see Section 6.4.5). All participants met the selection criteria set for the semi-structured expert interviews.

(c)   Steps followed for the interviews

The research had to take into consideration that the participants represented PR agencies that are responsible for creating social media content for political parties in South Africa. The researcher therefore used PRISA, the professional body for PR and communication managers in Southern Africa, to invite PR agencies who met the selection criteria to participate in the study. The impact of COVID-19 on the expert interviews also had to be considered; the researcher therefore opted to conduct the expert interviews via the Zoom platform, which is a cloud-based video communications application, in accordance with the UNISA requirements for empirical research during the global public health pandemic. The platform allowed the researcher to audio record the interviews, as well as provided more flexibility in terms of scheduling interviews after working hours, and the researcher did not need to travel to conduct the interviews. UNISA's ethical clearance for the study stipulated that the interviews might not be video recorded, only audio recorded, which was adhered to.

The researcher then personally contacted the participants, who agreed to participate, and set up Zoom meetings. Before the start of the Zoom sessions, the researcher emailed the consent forms to the participants for them to read and sign (see Addendum B). The researcher also gave the participants an opportunity to ask for clarity on their involvement in the data collection. The researcher built rapport with the participants by introducing and explaining the purpose of the interview. The researcher ensured maintaining good communication throughout the interview. It was then critical to discuss the participants' anonymity and confidentiality issues, and to obtain their permission to record the interviews. The setting created an atmosphere that allowed the participants to answer the questions on

their terms. Questions were clarified and explained where necessary. The researcher employed interviewing strategies by probing, confirming, and clarifying answers. Because the sessions were audio recorded, it allowed the researcher to apply attentive listening and interaction during the interviews. The researcher also took notes, which were referred to later. Afterwards, the researcher debriefed the participants and thanked them for their time and input into the study. Table 6.6 summarises the interview process that was followed to ensure the credibility of all data collected.

Table 6.6: The strategy followed for the design and implementation of the semi-structured expert interviews

INTERVIEW PROCESS AND INTERVIEW GUIDE	
Purposively selected participants based on selection criteria and prominence in the political environment in South Africa	
Before the interview • Invitation • Participation information sheet	● The researcher telephonically contacted the PR agencies that are responsible for the social media of various political parties in South Africa. ● The researcher emailed a consent form to the participants to complete before the interview was scheduled. ● The researcher adhered to UNISA's ethical requirements, also concerning COVID-19.

During the start of the interview
● Recording of interviews (audio)
● Taking notes
	● The researcher received signed consent forms from the participants, thereby obtaining permission to audio record the interviews.
	● Once the participants were thanked for participating, the researcher started with introductory questions.
	● **Twenty-three questions** were posed to the participants – probing, directing, or interpreting the proposed elements for the conceptual framework.
	● **Introductory questions**
	  ○ Please tell me shortly about your position within the agency.
	  ○ How long have you been responsible for creating social media content?
	● **The 23 questions** to follow focused on:
	  ○ political brand;
	  ○ political brand strategy;
	  ○ social media political brand voice;
	  ○ political brand consumer; and
	  ○ political brand persona.

Concluding the interview	● The researcher asked the participants if they would like to add any additional comments.
Debriefing of the participants	● The researcher debriefed the participants after the interview. ● The researcher then thanked the participants for their time and input.
Transcribing recordings and analysis data (Chapter 8)	The researcher analysed the transcriptions according to the themes in the interview guide.
Reporting findings (Chapter 9)	The researcher reported the findings.

6.4.6.3 Coding scheme for the deductive qualitative content analysis

A coding scheme is the process of not only labelling and organising but also examining and interpreting qualitative data (Medelyan 2019). The researcher deemed deductive qualitative content analysis as the most appropriate approach for this study because data were collected by using the DA's *Bokamoso* themes, as identified in Section 6.4.5 and Table 6.5, to select unique tweets and Facebook posts.

(a)   Steps followed for the deductive qualitative content analysis

The following steps were followed during the data collection. The first consideration for the data collection was to determine the source of the data (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan 2013). Both Twitter and Facebook offer application programming interfaces (APIs) for data tracking. With the DA's permission (although the data are in the public domain), the researcher used "search API" to collect DA Twitter posts between May 2015 and June 2016; and "streaming API" to collect DA Facebook posts for the same dates. Unlike for the Twitter and Facebook data, where the researcher collected the data, the DA Marketing Communication Department made the *Bokamoso* historical data available to the researcher. The various social media data are discussed below.

Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) differentiate between structured and unstructured data in social media. Structured data (or metadata) comprise profile/user demographics and number of likes, comments, retweets, and shares, whereas unstructured data include the content of the post. For this study, the researcher only focused on the unstructured data as illustrated in Table 6.7, which summarises the coding scheme of the data collection.

Table 6.7: Deductive qualitative content coding process

Tracking	*Bokamoso*	Twitter	Facebook
Tracking source using the DA's *Bokamoso* to pull unique posts	Public: Web newsletter available in archives	Public: Twitter sphere	Public: Own page posts
Tracking method	Historical data provided by the DA Marketing Communication Department	Twitter: APIs	Facebook: APIs

Tracking output					
Unstructured data (textual data)					
	Bokamoso	**Tweets**	**Facebook posts**		
Coding process	Categories that were identified to select unique posts			Data processing: Stories that emerged from the data	Conceptual framework proposed elements
	Categories: ● Education ● Employment ● Energy ● Economy ● Zuma ● Racism ● Water	Number of tweets: 77 68 36 54 78 38 18	Number of posts: 58 80 29 17 76 42 25	Stories #BladeMustFall and #JobsforCash #DAforJobs #Vision2029 #Eskom #Nuclear deal #ImpeachZuma and #AccusedNumb #PledgeAgainstRacism #VoteForChange #DAdelivers	Conceptual framework elements: ● Political brand ● Political strategy ● Social media political brand voice ● Creating an in-group ● Online political brand persona

Table 6.7 outlines the overall coding strategy followed. During the data-collection process, three steps were followed. Firstly, the researcher cleaned and prepared the data by filtering the DA's tweets and Facebook posts through the *Bokamoso* categories identified. During the second step, the researcher developed the coding scheme (see Table 6.8), which was informed by proposed elements for the conceptual framework (as indicated in the far-right column in Table 6.7). During the third step, the researcher and a co-coder (who has a PhD in Communication) coded a sample of the tweets and Facebook posts using ATLAS.ti software to test the coding scheme, after which the researcher had to make changes to the

coding scheme. This increased the trustworthiness of the findings, as explained in Section 6.5.

After all the above steps were followed, the researcher developed a coding scheme in ATLAS.ti as per theoretical guidelines in Chapter 5. The study thus used *a priori* codes that were developed according to the study's proposed elements for measurement purposes (Bezuidenhout & Cronjé 2014), as indicated in Table 6.8. The researcher used this coding scheme to analyse the eleven stories identified in Table 6.7.

Table 6.8: Coding scheme for the deductive qualitative content analysis

Conceptual framework elements	Code	Definition
Element 1: Political brand	Political offering	**Political offering:** How the DA frames the issues to create differentiation by using the political offering to do so. The three components are: • **Policy** as a service offering • **Politician** as a tangible service offering • **Party** as a brand offering
Element 2: Political brand strategy	Communication centred	This refers to all the communication tactics used by the party: • **Network framing** of issues # • **Types of content used in post** (speech; YouTube video links and videos, link to website)
	Political branding	Using the three Es in political branding: • **Emotional** refers to images • **Engage** refers to the number of likes, comments, shares, and sign-ups • **Experience** refers to marked as favourites and quotes
	Social media-based political brand storytelling	It is a political brand strategy that can be used to influence how the political consumer understands, remembers, evaluates, and acts upon political issues. This happens within the context of the types of stories the political brand tells: • **The underdog:** Stories that indicate a struggle against societal issues • **The quest:** Problem-solving stories or goal-achieving stories • **The journey/return:** Stories that focus on transformation through learning lessons and overcoming obstacles • **Rags to riches:** Stories that position the party as the hero against all odds • **Comedy:** Stories about the community and relationships • **Tragedy:** Stories about issues of what not to do or how not to behave • **The rebirth:** Stories about reinvention and renewal

Conceptual framework elements	Code	Definition
Element 3: Social media political brand voice (this element is seen as a component of the political brand persona)	Tone	Personal, humble, honest, direct, clinical, scientific
	Language	Complex, simple, jargon-filled, savvy, insider, fun, serious, whimsical
	Purpose	Engage, entertain, educate, delight, inform, sell, enable, amplify
Element 4: Creating the in-group	Social categorisation	Refers to the categories the DA creates for the political consumer in its posts
	Social identification	Refers to the identification the DA creates in its social posts for the political consumer
	Social comparison	Refers to how the DA's communication on political issues uses the competition (out-group) to influence political consumers
Element 5: Online political brand persona	Anthropomorphising of the brand	Human emotions: • Friendly • Authoritative • Inspiring • Professional • Warm • Sad • Anger • Anticipation • Fear • Loneliness • Jealousy • Disgust • Guilt • Satisfaction • Surprise • Trust • Shame (Burton 2020)
	Association created	**Expectations:** Political brands must communicate through their social media political brand storytelling a clear vision of their political offering **Perceptions and associations** that the DA is creating on its social media posts. **Experiences:** The type of contact or engagement opportunities the DA creates on its social media posts for the political consumer to experience the brand

The next section deals with the data analysis of the semi-structured expert interviews and the deductive qualitative content analysis respectively.

6.4.7 Data analysis

The section below discusses the data analysis for the semi-structured expert interviews and the deductive qualitative content analysis.

6.4.7.1 Semi-structured expert interview data analysis

For the researcher to analyse the data collected from the semi-structured expert interviews, the researcher first had to record audio via the Zoom platform with permission from all the participants for each of the semi-structured expert interviews, which was then saved on her computer. The researcher transcribed the interviews herself to be able to submerge herself in the data. The researcher used reflexive thematic analysis because, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006:78), it is a method to identify, analyse, organise, describe, and report themes found within a dataset (Nowell et al 2017). There are several approaches that the researcher could have used to analyse the data (Braun & Clarke 2019; Nowell et al 2017; Zhang & Wildemuth 2009; Braun & Clarke 2006; Miles & Huberman 1994); however, thematic analysis was employed because of the flexibility of this kind of analysis (Nowell et al 2017; Ibrahim 2012). In 2006, Braun and Clarke developed reflexive thematic analysis, which is not about following procedures, but about the researcher's reflective and thoughtful engagement with the data and analytic process (Braun & Clarke 2006:594). The researcher therefore adopted Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive approach for the thematic analysis as depicted in Table 6.9. In addition, the table also depicts the different phases of how the interview data were analysed using ATLAS.ti, which is computer software that allowed the researcher to analyse qualitative data in a systematic and transparent way (Friese 2019).

Table 6.9: Phases of thematic analysis

Phases	Description of process
1. Familiarise oneself with the data	In this phase, the researcher needed to transcribe the data and interact with the data through preliminary scanning of the transcripts; reading, re-reading, and developing initial interpretations.
2. Coding	During this phase, labelling of data was done according to the *a priori* codes as per the interview schedule. The researcher coded the entire dataset, after which she collated all the codes and relevant data extracts for use in the later stages of analysis.
3. Generate initial themes	The researcher considered the elements that were proposed in the interview guide, and ensured that the raised topics were correctly categorised. Generating themes required the researcher to collate initial codes into potential themes and gathering all data relevant to the particular theme.
4. Review the themes	All the issues and topics were classified as emergent because if they were raised, they were raised by the participants and were related to the broader research topic. Reviewing themes was the process of ensuring whether the themes worked with the coded extracts and the entire dataset.
5. Defining and naming themes	During this phase, the researcher checked the themes against the dataset to ensure that they represent the data accurately, as well as answer the research questions.
6. Writing up	This final phase involved combining the analytic narrative and the data extracts and contextualising the analysis in relation to existing literature and the research questions.

Source: Braun and Clarke (2019:590)

6.4.7.2 *Categorisation of the data for the deductive qualitative content analysis*

The researcher used deductive reasoning for the categorisation of the data in that *a priori* codes were developed that are linked to the literature and the proposed elements for the conceptual framework (Bezuidenhout & Cronjé 2014).

The researcher used the ATLAS.ti software to analyse the DA's Twitter tweets and Facebook posts. This software was primarily utilised to import the tweets and Facebook posts, storing the data, coding the data, searching and retrieving text segments, simulating interaction with the data, and building a relationship within the data as set out in Table 6.10 (Van der Vyver 2018; Collis & Hussey 2009). The use of the software not only sped up the process but also added value by "enhancing the rigour, providing more flexible data analysis from different perspectives and allowing the researcher to reflect in greater depth by reducing the operational activities" (Oliveira, Thomas & Espadanal 2014:500). In addition, the strategy followed for the analysis ensured credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (see Section 6.5).

In doing so, the researcher also adhered to Friese's (2019) views, who suggests that researchers who use ATLAS.ti must follow a systematic approach during the analysis, as indicated in Table 6.10.

Table 6.10: Phases of deductive content analysis

Phase	Description of process
1. Read and interpret the text	During this phase, the researcher needed to clean the data through preliminary scanning of the tweets and Facebook posts; reading, re-reading, and developing initial interpretations from the data.
2. Build categories	During this phase, the researcher built categories according to the *a priori* codes as per coding schedule. During this phase, seven categories were established.
3. Code segments of the text	The researcher and her co-coder coded a segment of the text to ensure inter-rater reliability.
4. Analyse data	During this phase, the researcher coded the entire dataset, after which the researcher collated all the codes and relevant data extracts for use in the later stages of analysis.
5. Present results	During the final phase, the researcher combined the analytic narrative and the data extracts and contextualised the analysis in relation to existing literature and the research questions.

Source: Adapted from Friese (2019:2)

6.5   THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE FINDINGS

Since qualitative researchers do not use numbers as evidence, they adopt different criteria to determine the trustworthiness of the research findings, which is of utmost importance in qualitative research (Aurini et al 2016; Koonin 2014). Qualitative studies refer to trustworthiness when it comes to reporting on the reliability and validity of the findings

(Koonin 2014). To ensure the trustworthiness of the study's findings, the researcher addressed aspects such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and authenticity, which are discussed below for the semi-structured expert interviews and the deductive qualitative content analysis respectively (Koonin 2014; Nieuwenhuis 2014; Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen & Kyngäs 2014).

6.5.1 The trustworthiness of the findings of the semi-structured expert interviews

The trustworthiness of the findings of the semi-structured expert interviews were addressed as follows.

Credibility (internal validity) refers to the accuracy with which the researcher interpreted the data provided by the participants. The researcher prepared 23 questions in the interview guide. Once the researcher's supervisor had moderated the interview guide, the interview guide was tested by a communication professional employed by a PR agency that was involved in the political field. Pre-testing the data-collection method verified the credibility and validity of the interview guide. The researcher conducted a pre-test to minimise the inclusion of ambiguous questions, vague questions, and leading questions to improve the credibility of the collected data and to determine the approximate time it would take to complete the interviews (Babbie & Mouton 2018). No changes were required to the questions after the pre-test. The researcher excluded the participants who pre-tested the questions from the final sample. In addition, the interview guide was evaluated by the Department of Communication Science's Ethics and Scientific Review Committee and the College of Research and Ethics Committee respectively for both scientific and ethical issues before issuing an ethical clearance certificate. The final interview guide was also professionally edited before being implemented.

In addition, the researcher ensured that all questions were linked to the elements of the proposed conceptual framework to ensure that internal validity was achieved, as indicated in Table 6.11.

Table 6.11: Credibility of the findings of the semi-structured expert interviews

Conceptual framework elements	Interview questions
Element 1: Political brand ● Political offering	Section 2: Questions a, b, and c
Element 2: Political brand strategy ● Communication centred ● Brand house ● Social media political brand storytelling	Section 3: Questions a, b, c, d, e, and f
Element 3: Social media political brand voice ● Persona ● Tone ● Language ● Purpose: engage, entertain, educate, delight, inform, sell, enable, amplify	Section 4: Questions a, b, and c
Element 4: Creating the in-group ● Social categorisation ● Social identification ● Social comparison	Section 5: Questions a, b, c, and d
Element 5: Online political brand persona ● Anthropomorphising of the brand ● Archetype personalities ● Create an association	Section 6: Questions a, b, c, d, e, and f
Biographical and demographic data	Section 1: Questions a and b

Transferability (external validity) refers to the ability of the findings to be applied to a similar situation to deliver similar results. This study did not seek to generalise the findings within the political environment. However, to facilitate transferability in the study, the researcher provided clear descriptions of the context, selection, and characteristics of the participants, data collection, and process of analysis (Graneheim & Lundman 2004). Nevertheless, the findings of the semi-structured expert interviews would deliver insights into different realities of the brand persona of political parties that participated.

Dependability in a qualitative study is similar to reliability in a quantitative study and thus refers to the quality of the process of integration that takes place between the data-collection method, data analysis, and the theory generated from the data (Koonin 2014). In this regard, the researcher applied a strategic approach to ensure that the semi-structured expert interviews were of acceptable quality as discussed above and that the findings can therefore be viewed as dependable.

Credibility refers to when the researcher has ensured that participants in the research have been described and identified (Elo et al 2014). The researcher identified and described the participants of the study (see Section 6.4.4), which creates credibility for the study's data collection. Several scholars (for example, Elo et al 2014; Polit & Beck 2012; Guba & Lincoln 1989) have added authenticity, which refers to the extent to which the researcher has shown

a range of realities. This study's data are authentic because the study included a range of viewpoints from the semi-structured expert interviews to test the elements for the proposed conceptual framework.

6.5.2 The trustworthiness of the findings of the deductive qualitative content analysis

The trustworthiness of the findings of the deductive qualitative content analysis were addressed as follows.

Credibility (internal validity), as indicated above, refers to the accuracy with which the researcher interpreted the social artefact data received. The researcher therefore used the themes as identified in the DA's newsletter (see Table 6.5) to select unique Facebook posts and Twitter posts to ensure the accuracy of the data. In addition, the researcher then created codes in ATLAS.ti that were linked to the elements of the proposed conceptual framework to ensure that internal validity was achieved, as indicated in Table 6.5.

The following steps were taken to ensure dependability (reliability): A second coder was used to measure the level of agreement, which is known as inter-rater reliability (Koonin 2014). The researcher and her co-coder (who holds a PhD in Communication) coded a sample of 10 of the tweets and Facebook posts (as indicated in Tables 6.12 and 6.13) simultaneously to determine the inter-rater reliability in percentage agreement between the coders according to Cohen's kappa substantial agreement. The researcher calculated the number of ratings in agreement, as indicated in Tables 6.12 and 6.13. The researcher took the number of post codes, which was seven; divided the total number in agreement to obtain a fraction, which was converted to a statistic value of 0.71 (as indicated in Tables 6.12 and 6.13). According to Cohen's kappa coefficient, a substantial agreement was achieved (see Glen 2016).

The Cohen's kappa statistic varies from 0 to 1, where:

- 0 = agreement equivalent to chance;
- 0.1 – 0.20 = slight agreement;
- 0.21 – 0.40 = fair agreement;
- 0.41 – 0.60 = moderate agreement;
- 0.61 – 0.80 = substantial agreement;
- 0.81 – 0.99 = near perfect agreement; and
- 1 = perfect agreement.

Table 6.12 indicates the inter-rater reliability of the Twitter analysis.

Table 6.12: Inter-rater reliability of Twitter analysis

Categories	Coder 1	Coder 2	Agreement
Education	10	10	1
Employment	10	10	1
Economy	10	9	0
Energy	10	10	1
Water	10	10	1
Racism	10	10	1
Zuma	10	9	0
Total	-	-	**5/7**

Table 6.13 indicates the inter-rater reliability of the Facebook post samples.

Table 6.13: Inter-rater reliability of Facebook posts analysis

Categories	Coder 1	Coder 2	Agreement
Education	10	10	1
Employment	10	10	1
Economy	10	9	0
Energy	10	10	1
Water	10	10	1
Racism	10	10	1
Zuma	10	9	0
Total	-	-	**5/7**

With regard to the transferability of the findings, this study did not seek to generalise the findings within the political environment. To facilitate transferability in the study, the researcher gave clear descriptions of the context, the selection and characteristics of social artefacts, data collection, and process of analysis (Graneheim & Lundman 2004). To ensure authenticity, the researcher used the DA's *Bokamoso* newsletter as a sample frame for the Twitter tweets and Facebook posts to empirically verify the elements for the proposed conceptual framework. These data can thus be viewed as authentic because they were created by the brand itself.

6.6   SUMMARY

In this chapter, the research methodology and operationalisation for this study were discussed and explained. The use of the interpretivist research paradigm and the qualitative research approach was justified against specific realities that influenced this study, such as that political communication is a niche field in South Africa and therefore had an influence on various considerations relating to the study.

Furthermore, the various considerations relating to the study were justified. In the context of this study, the research design, the use of purposive sampling, data collection and data analysis of the semi-structured expert interviews, and deductive qualitative analysis were discussed. The study established trustworthiness in the study through reference to the credibility, dependability, and authenticity of both the semi-structured expert interviews and the deductive qualitative content analysis.

The findings and interpretation of this study are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7:
FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS

7.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a continuation of Chapter 6 and presents the findings of the empirical research, namely the semi-structured expert interviews and the deductive qualitative content analysis.

In doing so, the chapter addresses the following research questions:

- How does one political brand use political brand storytelling on social media within the context of the theoretical criteria? (Research Question 2); and
- In what way could the political brand's political brand storytelling techniques on social media use an online brand persona to represent political issues? (Research Question 3).

The aim of this chapter is thus to analyse and report on the findings to answer the above research questions. The findings of the semi-structured expert interviews are firstly discussed, followed by the qualitative findings on the DA's Facebook posts and Twitter feeds. The overall findings are also reported according to the key theoretical aspects of the study. The chapter concludes by combining key points that emerged from the theoretical chapters in this study and the findings of the empirical research.

7.2   FINDINGS OF THE SEMI-STRUCTURED EXPERT INTERVIEWS

This section presents the findings of the semi-structured expert interviews. The main reasons for choosing semi-structured expert interviews were discussed in Chapter 6, while the interview guide, which was compiled based on an extensive literature review, was depicted in Table 6.6, in accordance with the proposed elements for the conceptual framework. These are political brand, the political brand strategy, the social media political brand voice, the creation of the in-group, and the online political brand persona.

Table 7.1 indicates the proposed elements, aspects, and topics addressed in the semi-structured expert interviews(see Addendum A for the final interview guide that was administered).

Table 7.1: Proposed elements, aspects, and topics addressed in the semi-structured expert interviews

Section A (Element 1): Political brand	Topics
Political offering	Party politicians, policy, and the party as a brand – house of brands versus branded house
Political brand	Commercial versus political brand; creating an authentic political brand; the challenges
Section B (Element 2): Political brand strategy	**Topics**
Political brand strategy	The approach: communication-centred strategy Always-on strategy and campaign strategy
Social media-based political brand story-telling	Storytelling on social media Content creation
Political branding	Issue ownership Discussed the importance of the emotional connection; the engagement and the experience the political consumer has with the social media post
Section C (Element 3): Social media political brand voice	**Topics**
Tone	Deciding on the tone for the brand
Language	Deciding on the language for the brand
Purpose	Brand purpose and political issues
Section D (Element 4): Creating the in-group	**Topics**
Social categorisation	Growth of the party
Social identity	Political history of South Africa and how to create an identity
Social comparison	How to use social comparison in your favour
Section E (Element 5): Online political brand persona	**Topics**
Anthropomorphising of the political brand	Building a brand persona that is authentic and credible
Associations and perceptions	Association/conversations
Biographical data	

All the participants were senior public relations practitioner with 15 years' experience, except for two participants who had 10 years' experience. All the individuals were responsible for creating, managing, and coordinating social media content for a political brand. The participants' positions and number of years of experience are indicated in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2: Participants' positions and number of years of experience

Participant	Position	Number of years of experience
Participant A	Account director	15 years
Participant B	Managing director	15 years
Participant C	Account director	10 years
Participant D	Founding partner: Head of Strategy, Cape Town office	15 years
Participant E	Head of Strategy, Johannesburg office	10 years

The interviews allowed for new insights and rich detail into the topic at hand, as discussed in the section below.

7.2.1   Section A: Political brand

The purpose of the questions in Section A was to explore the concept of a political brand within the South African context, to discuss the concept of the political offering, and to determine the approach of a political brand towards the positioning of the political offering. All these elements are linked to the fundamentals of the political brand that emerged from the literature review chapters.

The following two themes emerged from the data:

- **Theme 1: Political offering's accessibility to political consumers**

Theme 1 encompasses discussions considering social media content for a political brand, and that the political offering's three elements – leader, policy, and party – play an important role in driving the political brand. Theme 1 thus encompasses the idea that through social media political consumers have accessibility to the political candidates, information, and the political brand. The discussion also considered the reverse, namely that social media has given political parties access to political consumers.

Most of the participants felt that it was relevant to consider the nature of social media and how it is used in the political environment. Participant B commented as follows:

> *"Politics are becoming more accessible to the ordinary people through social media, and politicians themselves are not feeling demean [sic] ... On social media, what becomes really important is your accessibility."*

As mentioned in the literature review, the shared, owned, and earned digital media are the main platforms on which online political storytelling can be developed to engage with political consumers (see Section 4.3.2).

Despite the impression that accessibility was viewed as important for dialogue with political consumers, there was agreement that branding the political offering had a clear measurable goal to ensure that the party receives the vote. This view surfaced mainly in respect to the branded house versus the house of brands discussion. As established in the literature, several perspectives were offered on political brands (see Section 3.5.2); however, this study adopted the branded house approach because the argument was put forward that when launching new campaigns, it would extend the consistency of the message of the brand, which is already recognised by the political consumer. This discussion led to

exploring the various approaches to the political brand; what emerged from the data is that it depends on several elements: firstly, the political party's philosophy; secondly, the political party's policies; and, lastly, the leadership – ultimately, as communicators, they need to decide what would be the most compelling brand element to lead with to receive votes. Participant D said:

> *"The ANC has a very strong organisational history that is generational; it has a strong emotional heritage. So, it would make sense to lead with a message from the ANC – The ANC is backing you."*

Where that is not necessarily the case in the smaller opposition parties,

> *"[t]he DA's brand is a barrier for some voters and therefore it is best to lead with the Mmusi Maimane as the brand".*

Another participant E pointed out that

> *"[w]hen it comes to the opposition parties, you need to understand what the barriers for someone is to vote for the opposition".*

What is evident in the data is that there is a place for different approaches to political branding. Participant C pointed out:

> *"You can use both approaches, but it depends on your objectives and what is going to be the most successful for the party to be accessible and to engage with the political consumers".*

- **Theme 2: Authentic political brand**

This theme emerged during the discussion around political brands and the difficulty to create a political brand because of the complexity of the political environment and the challenges political brands face in building a brand that the political consumer can associate with. The participants were of the view that building an authentic political brand has several challenges.

The first challenge that the participants pointed out was to get consensus on how the brand would react to certain issues, as highlighted by participant A:

> *"Political brand is different from a commercial brand; what you find in a political brand is that politicians can pull the brand into two different directions. It does not happen in a commercial brand."*

The second challenge was to present the party's ideology as something tangible and meaningful for the political consumer: *"Simple stuff. So that every South African can vote for"* and *"What are we going to put forward as our thing, our offer?"*

The last challenge was to give meaning to words and messages going out to the political consumer. Participant C pointed out:

> *"[W]ords needed more meaning, and to have more meaning for a voter, they [the words] got to stand for something that you want to ... [T]he difficulty with politicians are [sic] that they are politicians first and communicators last."*

There seems to be a clear link between these challenges and building an authentic political brand. Participant D commented:

> *"So, when communicating on behalf of the political brand, you need to look at what is at the core of the party, what does the policy say, is your communication in line with the political offering? ... You need to stay true to the values of the party, otherwise your party can come across a bit schizophrenic."*

As discussed in the literature, the researcher acknowledged that the political brand is different from the commercial brand and therefore examined the political brand through the lens of delivering a service to the political consumer (see Section 3.2). The study adopted Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy's (2007) political brand definition because the definition alludes to the fact that the political brand comprises the three elements of party policies, party politicians, and the party, which all refer to the political offering. It is thus argued that the political offering forms an integrated part of the political brand, which needs to be authentic and true to the political brand.

7.2.2   Section B: Political brand strategy

The purpose of the questions in Section B was as follows: firstly, to discuss the various approaches to developing a political brand strategy; to discuss storytelling as a political brand strategy technique, as well as the role of issue ownership in storytelling; and, lastly, the questions in Section B sought to discuss the importance of the emotional connection and the engagement and experience that the political consumer has with the social media post. All these elements are linked to the fundamentals of the political brand strategy that emerged in the literature review chapters.

These proposed elements in the theoretical aspects were explored in the literature review, and the topics selected for the interview specifically aimed to provide more detailed information from a South African perspective on the theoretical aspects of this element.

7.2.2.1 Political brand strategy

During the interviews, the questions in this section aimed to explore the various approaches to political brand strategies. The themes that recurred throughout the dataset were political brand differentiator and political brand engagement:

- **Theme 3: Political brand differentiator**

This theme encompasses the various discussions around how the political brand can differentiate itself from the opposition. The literature review (see Section 3.5) indicated that there are several approaches available to the political brand strategy; however, the purpose of all these approaches is to strategically differentiate and position the political brand in relation to the opposition (Narteh et al 2017). Despite a variety of views among the participants on strategy approaches (leadership driven compared to party driven), there was consensus on the significant value of a brand strategy and that it should ultimately lead to differentiating the party from the rest. There was an agreement among the participants that the brand values and brand attributes need to be aligned in order to create an environment for consistent brand messaging. The ultimate outcome of a political brand strategy is to build specific attributes that can be presented as a tangible benefit. These benefits then ultimately drive the core values that the brand embraces. As indicated in the literature, Cosgrove (2012) argues that these core values need to resonate with political consumers to ensure association and differentiation. Participants B said:

> "Your strategy needs to be built around issues people are interested in, then you can develop a host of communication that speaks to them ... [B]rands are built on certain values, make sure that these come through in a way that acknowledges what these are, in order to make a difference ... [T]he brand needs to ultimately embrace their values."

When probed on the various branding techniques available on social media platforms, participant D commented:

> "In different parts of a campaign, you would like to have more conversations and at certain parts of the campaign, you would like to drive home key messages."

Participant A pointed out:

> *"FB [Facebook] is a good place to broadcast messages, therefore push messages, while Twitter is a great place to pull messages ... [Y]es, it is about pulling and pushing messages, but at the end your messages need to differentiate your brand."*

The use of hashtags (#) came up in the discussion, as well as the importance of "sign-posting" messages to the audience:

> *"It is important to help the public make sense of the political issues; hashtags can become a campaign [and] can help the public to connect with the message."*

The interviewees highlighted the importance of using network framing as a strategic tool to assist the political consumer to understand, remember, and act on issues.

The responses indicated that political parties differentiate themselves from the rest through using various branding techniques and that a political party's social media is used as part of the political brand strategy.

- **Theme 4: Political brand engagement**

This theme encompasses all the discussions around how political parties can engage political consumers. As emphasised in the literature review, engagement is the core of the political strategy. The Internet has enabled, through social media, a top-down approach, but also a bottom-up approach, which means that political parties can engage with political consumers. It was established that engagement takes two different forms that can be classified as participation and mobilisation. According to the literature, political participation is citizen centred and driven by citizens, where political mobilisation can be created in the following ways: to drive public opinion in a certain direction through social media, to co-create and circulate information, and for political parties to facilitate interaction, collaboration, and sharing of content among political consumers (see Section 4.5.2.2). Participant C stated that the DA brand used participation effectively:

> *"Mmusi tweets: 'I'm going to do a town hall on Tuesday, meet me on Twitter every Tuesday. You can ask me anything and I will answer it live.' There is engagement."*

Participant D pointed out:

> *"Twitter polls are a good example of engaging the political consumer on issues."*

It was clear that the participants agreed that engagement was key to the success of a political brand:

> *"Without engaging your political consumer, you are then just flooding cyber space with noise ... [Y]ou need to talk to your political consumer to be a successful political brand, you need their buy-in."*

One unanticipated finding was that the DA used gaming to engage political consumers, as participant E explained:

> *"It was a mobile game called 'democrat-city'. You could create a character and build your city using the DA's policies to do so. The whole game was structured around what a city would look like if it was run by DA policies. And what it did, it was a very engaging way of educating people about the DA policies."*

It was obvious from the discussion with the participants that the political parties were driving engagement through social media platforms to support the parties' point of view, and that political parties understand that the success of the political brand depends on the engagement with the political consumer.

7.2.2.2 *Social media-based political brand storytelling*

The questions in this section aimed to explore the various approaches to storytelling on social media. The two themes that recurred throughout the dataset were political brand storytelling as a strategy and social media political brand storytelling resonance.

- **Theme 5: Political brand storytelling as a strategy**

This theme encompasses all the data relating to the various approaches to storytelling as a strategy. The literature emphasised that political brand storytelling is seen as a branding technique. Hence, the various approaches to storytelling on social media were explored. It was established that political brand storytelling can be a visual narrative on social media, political brand storytelling can emotionally engage the political consumer, and political brand storytelling can be a means of framing political issues. All the agencies had a designated full-time content team:

> *"[W]e have an internal content team who looks at the various hooks the party can talk about, and what are key messages that they can talk about. We develop our content around it."*

Several issues were identified in the discussion around the creation of political stories on social media. The first issue was how to decide on what story to tell. There were a number of views on this issue, but three participants were in an agreement that depending on where the brand stands on the issue, the brand can decide from which angle to tell the brand's story.

However, two other participants felt that it is difficult to get a story out there as

> *"[s]ocial media gives us an opportunity to listen to the various stories, but it is critical to understand your audience"*

and

> *"[t]here is not only one true story"*.

Applied to the focus on political brand storytelling on social media, it is useful to mention that one participant pointed out that political parties are consistently involved in political consumer research and their views on the issues: *"The DA had incredible research and data"* and these informed "*what story*" you tell. Participant E suggested that political parties use storytelling to frame the political issues for political consumers:

> *"The research was always politically motivated, so of course they wanted to know how to frame it [the issue] for them."*

The second issue that emerged from the discussion was how, through storytelling, political parties contextualised political issues. Participant D pointed out:

> *"We need to find a way to make these issues relevant for them."*

Another participant (C) said:

> *"You need to make the content unique."*

Compared to the argument in the literature review (see Section 4.7.1), political parties seem to understand the relationship between the political brand story and the political consumers' judgement of the story. Political parties use storytelling to contextualise the issue and through storytelling they open the way for a more rational debate around the issues, for example:

> *"Unemployment is a huge issue in South Africa. The DA created stories around the issue and tried to engage people in the discussion to find a solution. On social media*

they've posted the question: 'Has unemployment affected you? Submit your story here.' Well, the response was overwhelming. People needed to be heard."

Storytelling is deemed to add value to the political brand and assists the brand to open a dialogue between the political brand and the political consumer.

The last issue that emerged from the discussion was the importance of issue ownership in storytelling. In the interconnected environment, the political consumer draws from various sources of information to form an opinion on an issue. Therefore, as stated in the literature, ownership of political issues provides political consumers with a shortcut to make sense of the political environment. There was consensus among the participants that issue ownership was key:

"Issue ownership is important, but it is difficult to control."

It emerged from the discussions that ownership is important but controlling ownership was difficult. The literature review established that issue ownership evolves and that parties can win or lose ownership; issue ownership has two dimensions: associated dimension and competence dimension; and, lastly, how the party's communication about the issue can influence ownership. One unexpected finding was that although the participant felt that issue ownership was important, the participant alluded to the fact that in the South African context, the issue ownership is driven by emotions:

"The driver of SA political decisions is emotional. It is based on history and heritage. And that is why, despite the DA having years and years of clean audits, you go and ask any member of the population, do you want an efficient government? – Yes – Who is the most efficient government? The DA. Would you vote for them? – No. You have to win the emotional battle before you win the rational one. The DA does not understand that."

This response from the participant emphasised that the political brand's history and heritage helped to reduce uncertainty among the majority political consumers in South Africa. As pointed out by Walgrave et al (2014), political parties will not be successful in convincing political consumers of their ability to address issues when these political consumers do not like them in the first place.

The following theme emerged from the data:

- **Theme 6: Social media political brand storytelling resonance**

This theme encompasses all the discussions around social media political brand storytelling as a strategy. A recurrent theme in the interviews was a sense among the interviewees that the story needed to resonate with the political consumers. Participant A pointed out:

> *"The stories you tell need to resonate with the audience, but still be true to the brand ... My advice to my client is no matter what type of story you are trying to tell, try to find a way to resonate with your follower ... Every time there is a story to be told, we need to make sure that the story is accessible and that it resonates with the people."*

All the participants agreed that for brand stories to resonate with political consumers, the stories need to be authentic; for example:

> *"[I]n leading up to the 2016 elections, we used Mmusi a lot, it was a credible story. He was born in Soweto, a black South African, voted for the ANC, you know, has married a white lady, believes in diversity. People could relate to this story."*

This illustrates that for a story to be successful, the story needs to be credible for it to resonate with the political consumers.

7.2.2.3 Political branding

The questions in this section aimed to explore the various approaches to political branding. The theme of emotional connection with political consumers recurred throughout the dataset.

- **Theme 7: Emotional connection with political consumers**

This theme encompasses all the elements of political branding that were explored. When probed about the approaches to political branding, the participants felt that it was important, given the political history of South Africa, to consider the emotional connection people make with the brand:

> *"We wanted to orientate ourselves around his idea of what do you need to get life working. Simple stuff. So, every South African can vote for that."*

Compared to Downer's (2016:8) assertion that when building political parties' brands, the brand should appeal to "both the mind and heart" of the political consumer, it emphasises the functional and the emotional appeal. Views expressed in the literature supported the

notion of the emotional appeal that political parties can create through their branding strategy (see Section 3.5.2).

In addition, it became apparent that for agencies to create engagement between the political brand and the political consumer, they need to create content that leads to an emotional response from the consumer:

> *"So our job was to tell their [the political brand] stories, to write the script in a way that it is compelling ... [T]he stories have to be real and it had to make that emotional connection."*

It became evident that the agencies saw social media as a tool that allows the political brand to engage with the political consumer, to create an experience for the political consumer, and to create that emotional response from the political consumer. The following comments were made:

> *"[Y]ou choose to content needs to stand out to drive engagement."*

> *"[I]t was important to present them [the brand] as diverse."*

> *"[W]hen somebody speaks to you like that, you can see where the power of authenticity and conviction come from – people will share content like that."*

Taken together, these results suggest that there is an association between the success of the engagement and the emotional connection that the political consumer makes.

7.2.3   Section C: Social media political brand voice

The purpose of the questions in Section C was to examine the brand tone, language, and purpose, and to understand how these link to the political issues. All these elements are linked to the fundamentals of the political brand strategy that emerged from the literature review.

These proposed elements in the theoretical aspects were explored in the literature review, and the topics selected for the interview specifically aimed to provide more detailed information on how the agencies decided on what type of brand tone and language to use in their brand storytelling. The discussion also focused on the purpose of the brand voice and if it could be a driver for political issues. It was relevant to discuss these topics from a South African perspective because the political environment in South Africa is an emotionally driven environment.

The following theme emerged from the data:

- **Theme 8: The political brand voice as the core of the online brand persona**

This theme encompasses all the elements of political brand voice, namely tone, language, and purpose. The brand voice is central to building a political online brand persona and thus, as previously stated, it forms an essential element when creating powerful online brand personas on social media. It is argued that the brand voice creates a long-lasting emotional bond with political consumers through brand storytelling (see Sections 3.6.2 and 4.6.6). It therefore stands to reason that political parties should consider their brand voice when communicating on political issues on social media.

With respect to brand voice, the participants were asked to express their views on whether they consider brand voice in terms of tone, language, and purpose when creating social media content.

The participants felt that the tone sets the atmosphere for the online brand to exist in:

"On social media, what becomes really, really important is your tone and your voice."

The participants felt strongly that the tone deals with the brand's credibility and it is directly linked to how you want the political consumer to deal with your brand:

"Brand voice and tone echoed the brand people are dealing with."

With the focus on brand language, there was consensus among the participants that language plays an important role in framing the political issues for political consumers. One participant commented:

"We look at the party's views on issues and we make sure that when we create content that the language we use comes across as authentic."

The impression was that the view of the party on a political issue will influence the language:

"[I]t ultimately dictates the language and tone of message."

Another point that was raised was that the type of language should also complement the political party's brand persona:

"[T]he language choices should reflect the brand persona which the political brand has adopted."

An interesting finding that emerged from the discussions was on word choices. Participant A made the point of reflecting on word choices when framing a political issue:

"I think at the end of the day, you do not think about these elements [tone, language, and purpose] in isolation. When you create content on behalf of the political brand, you become the brand and therefore word choices become crucial in ensuring that the messages come across credible. It should sound like something the DA or Mmusi would say."

The last aspect of brand voice was the purpose, and the discussion around this was understanding the "why" of the post, or, stated differently, the reason for creating the post. There was a general understanding that the purpose of posts can have different reasons, such as journalistic focus, conversational focus, or a marketing focus. Participant B said:

"It is not just about broadcasting messages, it is about knowing what you would like to achieve with the post ... [W]hen you craft content for social media, it is about creating some sort of engagement – a like, a comment, a share."

Two participants pointed out that content was clearly discussed around what posts were meant for engagement on social media, and what will be used for promotion purposes on social media:

"[F]or the DA's #Vision2029 we've created a promotional video that could be used across the social media platforms, and yes, we wanted the public to have conversations around the future of South Africa."

What stood out in the interviews was that all the participants emphasised the importance thereof that tone, language, and purpose as elements of brand voice need to work together to develop a brand voice that political consumers can engage with, share, and relate to. The points raised here provided insights into the importance of the brand voice, because, on social media, the brand voice fulfils an important role in building an authentic online brand persona.

7.2.4   Section D: Creating the in-group

The purpose of the questions in Section D was to establish how, through social media, content social categorisation, social identification, and social comparison were used to create an association for the political consumer around the political brand. All these elements are linked to the fundamentals of the social identity theory and political brand strategy that emerged from the literature review.

These proposed elements in the theoretical aspects were explored in the literature review, and the topics selected for the interview specifically aimed to provide more detailed information on how the agencies decided to use social media brand storytelling to create a sense of belonging. The discussion also focused on how, through political party comparison, a political party can differentiate itself from the competition.

The following theme emerged from the data:

- **Theme 9: Political consumers identifying with the political brand**

This theme encompasses all the discussions on how political parties can engage with political consumers to create associations for the political consumers with the political party. The literature emphasised that the political party brand value cannot simply be transferred to the political consumer, and that the political party brand needs to develop a connection with the political consumer (Scammell 2015).

In regard to social categorisation, an interviewee said:

> *"Brands need to understand the different communities they would like to reach, and they need to understand what they [the communities] want to know about the issues and how they see the issues. But more importantly, how does the issue impact on them? This is where social media is important, it helps us to curate what we hear."*

This is an important point that was raised because it indicates the important role that social categorisation plays in helping political consumers to make sense of the political environment. Another interviewee supported this:

> *"We found that people will engage on the issue, when the issue directly affects them. You got to make the content relevant to them."*

Subsequently, another interviewee pointed out that by using language, social categories can be created:

> *"[W]e carefully consider our word choices when it comes to creating a connection with the political brand; you almost create a map for the reader."*

Compared to the social identity theory (see Section 4.10), categorisation helps the voter to understand the political environment, in that it provides a system of orientation within the political environment.

The second element, social identity, was a very important element of creating the in-group. The literature pointed out that once people have adopted the identity of the group, they act in

ways that are aligned to the group. There was a view that through using language and images that resonate with the people, people will develop an emotional attachment to the brand.

Interviewee D pointed out:

> *"We wanted to position the DA as a new party, a modern party. And to a certain extent we got it right. And it started to feel different ... Certainly, the use of 'I and we' were aimed to create a togetherness. To let people feel it. That needs to come through when Mmusi delivers his state of the nation."*

Another participant (C) said:

> *"You try and make them feel part of a group, and we did that by using images that would resonate with them, or we tap into that basic human nature of belonging."*

An interesting point that was raised was the use of political issues to create a connection between the political brand and the political consumer. Participant D said:

> *"We were always talking about the rally issue, what are the things that we can all agree on, every single person in South Africa? We can agree on that children should not be dying in pit toilets at school. I don't think that there is a single South African that would disagree with that statement. Now, if your political brand can own this and drive it, surely your voters can identify with that."*

However, it was clear that it was difficult for party members to agree on how to frame it so that the political consumer can identify with it. Participant (E) said:

> *"[W]hat is the factual context? Guys, here is the Education Department that has wasted X million and X million on this and this. Here is our plan. And we tried to get very clear issues that everybody could agree on. And we struggled to get there."*

This point raised by the interviewee indicated that agencies have limited decision-making power:

> *"[P]olitical parties are like any other client, you can only advise them what to do, the choice is theirs."*

The discussions around the last element, social comparison, focused on the viability of the "us versus them" approach in a social media context. The feedback from the participants was that the majority felt that in the political environment it is not beneficial for brands to build their campaigns on the failures of the opposition.

Participant (B) pointed out:

> *"[W]hen you are the opposition, it does not mean that you are pointing fingers the whole time at the ANC's shortcomings ... I think political parties underestimate the voters; there is no need to point fingers … [I]t is such an old way of politics."*

Social comparison can lead to stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination against group members (as discussed in Section 4.10). For example, participant (E) stated:

> *"In South Africa, taking into consideration our history, we as agencies need to be aware of the power of social media and that it can lead to incitement, it can turn ugly, and I do not think that is what politics are about."*

It is worth noting this point, because, as discussed in the literature review (Section 4.8), political consumers have new expectations from political parties, and political consumers create a perception on grounds of the ownership of an issue a political party holds. To state it differently, it refers to how competent political consumers perceive the political party is in dealing with the political issue.

What emerged from the discussions was that the agencies had difficulty in establishing a firm point of view on the direction the social media content should take, as voiced by interviewee (D):

> *"[W]hat is it going to take to shift people's alliance of political party? If we have that kind of conversations, we can lead somewhere ... And I think why it lost its moments was that the DA become obsessed with the ANC. And that it was how they [the DA] believed you win voters and an election. And maybe they are right. I'm not a politician. But I just think that it leaves people wanting. Because I go, what is the lasting equity that you have built? What is the lasting reason to choose this party? And that I think that was unfortunate … [W]e tried to put forward a very different face of the DA. Not one that is anti-ANC."*

7.2.5 Section E: Online political brand persona

In Section E, the questions focused, firstly, on exploring the importance for political brands to have an online political brand persona, and, secondly, on exploring if the political brand persona created more conversations. All these elements are linked to the fundamentals of the political brand strategy that emerged from the literature review.

The following theme emerged from the data:

- **Theme 10: A political brand persona's ability to connect with political consumers**

This theme encompasses detailed information on how the agencies decided to create the online political brand persona through social media brand storytelling.

The online political brand persona is central to this study; it therefore forms an essential element when creating content for political brand stories on social media. It is argued that an online political brand persona has the potential to establish long-term loyalty and relationships in the digital environment (see Section 4.9.2). It therefore stands to reason that the key for political parties to successfully develop an online political brand persona lies in the ability of the party to develop a connection with political consumers (Jain et al 2018). The majority of the interviewees felt that it would be difficult to create meaningful brand messages around issues if they are not centred around the brand persona, while participant (B) considered that

> *"there can be a danger in building a brand persona potentially because then the focus moves to how would the persona reacts instead of how would the party react".*

This finding was unexpected and suggested that the participant only viewed brand persona according to Aaker's (1997) five broad brand personality dimensions (as discussed in Section 2.3.2). However, for this study, the focus on brand persona was centred on the ability of political parties to provide human qualities to the brand (see Sections 3.4.2 and 4.9.2). This was supported by participant (C) in the following statement:

> *"Of course, it is important to be very clear about what is the brand, and what the brand is about, and we tried to shift that to a brand that was much more about destination. Our destination, what are we asking people to follow us to?"*

The theme of the brand persona to connect with political consumers emerged a number of times. Participant A commented:

> *"[T]he brand persona plays an important role in connecting the brand with the political consumer ... [T]he brand persona has a human element in it, we would like to connect with people on social media not a logo ... [T]he party's brand persona is vital to ensure that connection."*

Key discussion points that came up during the interviews were points such as ensuring that the brand persona resonates with political consumers, that the brand persona adds to the credibility of the brand, and that the brand persona comes across as authentic.

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These discussions suggested that the brand persona needs to come across as credible and authentic for political consumers to connect with the brand.

The discussions also focused on the use of the brand persona as a differentiator. Interviewee (A) stated:

> *"The brand persona plays an important role in differentiating the brand."*

This response indicates that the agencies view the brand persona as a branding strategy to set the brand apart from the opposition. There was a sense of evaluation among the participants. They felt that it was important for political parties to evaluate their current brand persona and how it is perceived by the political consumers. Interviewee (E) stated:

> *"[T]here is a huge amount of research and polling that goes into South African politics – specifically the DA. They are constantly polling people throughout the country on a daily basis on different issues and on their perceptions of the party."*

This response indicates that evaluation forms an important part of ensuring that there is consistency between the political brand persona and the political consumers, as indicated in the literature (see Section 3.4.1). Political parties must refine their position to correct any inconsistencies when it comes to the brand strategy.

In the next section, the key findings of the deductive qualitative content analysis are presented.

7.3   FINDINGS OF THE DEDUCTIVE QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

In this section, the data are presented according to the analysis process the researcher followed during content analysis. The findings are discussed and interpreted according to the predetermined categories (as set out in Table 7.3), which were informed by themes in the DA's *Bokamoso* newsletter (as discussed in Section 6.4.7) to select unique tweets and Facebook posts. A total of 696 posts were analysed. The researcher used ATLAS.ti to establish the frequency of each category in the dataset, as well as the number of cases that each category represented in the data. Seven categories emerged, as depicted in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3: Predetermined categories for qualitative content analysis as per unique posts selected

Category	Description	Frequency	Codes (%)	Cases
Category 1: Higher and basic education in South Africa	SADTU and education; higher education and South African youth; higher education and university access	135	19%	55
Category 2: Employment crisis in South Africa	Freedom, fairness, and opportunities; job super crisis; Vision 2029; entrepreneurs; job creation	148	22%	100
Category 3: Racist attitudes in South Africa	Claims of racism in the DA	110	12%	42
Category 4: The Zuma saga	Corruption; state capture; Spy tapes; Zuma democracy; Zuma feudalism; pay back the money	154	23%	68
Category 5: Energy issues in South Africa	Energy security and the nuclear deal	65	9%	25
Category 6: Economical downgrading of South Africa	BEE; a competitive player in the global economy	62	8%	21
Category 7: Water issue in South Africa	Water security; Day Zero	43	6%	15

Within the categories presented in Table 7.3, 15 subcategories emerged from the data, as depicted in Table 7.4.

Table 7.4: Categories and subcategories data

Categories	Subcategories
Higher and basic education in South Africa	● Removal of the Minister of Higher Education ● Funding by the Department of Higher Education ● Selling education positions
Employment crisis in South Africa	● The DA's plans to create jobs ● The DA's vision for 2029 ● The DA's call for change
Racist attitudes in South Africa	● The DA standing up against racism ● The DA distancing itself from racist comments
The Zuma saga	● Zuma accused of racketeering ● Zuma's misuse of public funds for personal gain in the form of Nkandla ● Zuma seen as not fit to act as president of South Africa
Energy issues in South Africa	● Reforming the energy sector ● The nuclear deal
Water issue in South Africa	● The DA brand delivers
Economical downgrading of South Africa	● A fragile South African economy

The researcher used the *a priori* codes (as per the coding schedule in Table 6.8) to analyse the datasets. Table 7.5 indicates the application of the *a priori* codes to the data to all the subcategories that ensured that there was consistency in the analysis of the data across all the categories.

Table 7.5: Example of subcategories, codes, and sub-codes used in the analysis of social media content

Subcategories	Removal of Minister of Higher Education	
	Name of codes	**Description of code**
Code	**Political offering**	
Sub-codes	Politicians	DA members of parliament
	Policy	Reference made to DA policies on political issues
	Party	Identifying when speaking on behalf of the DA
Code	**Political brand strategy**	
Sub-codes	Network framing	#of issues
	Types of posts	Types of post: Speeches, link to YouTube or websites
	Social media-based storytelling	Types of stories: • The underdog • The quest • The journey/return • Rags to riches • Comedy • Tragedy • The rebirth
	Branding elements	Emotional – refers to images in post Engage – number of likes, comments, and shares Experience – post mark as favourite
Code	**Social media political brand voice**	
Sub-code	Tone	Personal, humble, honest, direct, clinical, or scientific
	Language	Complex, simple, jargon-filled, savvy, insider, fun, serious, whimsical
	Purpose	Engage, entertain, educate, delight, inform, sell, enable, amplify
Code	**Creating the in-group**	
Sub-code	Social categorisation	Types of categories the DA created in posts
	Social identification	Types of identification the DA created in posts
	Social comparison	How the DA uses the competition to position political issues
Code	**Online political brand persona**	
Sub-code	Anthropomorphising: Human emotions	Friendly, authoritative, inspiring, professional, warm, sad, anger, anticipation, fear, loneliness, jealousy, disgust, guilt, satisfaction, surprise, trust, shame
	Creating association	Expectations the DA created for the political consumer – communicating a clear vision of political offering
		Perceptions and associations that were created for the political consumer around the DA brand persona
		Experiences created in the post to engage with the DA brand persona

The section below presents the data of the seven categories (higher and basic education in South Africa, employment crisis in South Africa, racist attitudes in South Africa, the Zuma saga, economical downgrading of South Africa, energy issues, and water issue in South Africa) and the subcategories within each category.

7.3.1 Category 1: Higher and basic education in South Africa

Category 1 encompasses all findings relating to higher education and basic education in South Africa. During the period of May to June 2015, education in South Africa went through a period of turmoil. The first political issue that presented itself was the #FeesMustFall campaign. It was the biggest student protest since 1994 in South Africa (Filhani 2019). These protests took place across South Africa on all major campuses, where students from poor communities marched for the right to higher education. Mr Blade Nzimande, the Minister of Higher Education and Training at the time, was prominent in the data and the subcategory "Removal of the Minister of Higher Education" therefore emerged from the data.

7.3.1.1 Removal of the Minister of Higher Education

This subcategory is encapsulated in the hashtag #BladeMustFall and deals with the call for the removal of the Minister of Higher Education. What was evident in the data was that the DA used the politicians (53%) and the DA brand itself (43%) to tell the story of #BladeMustFall. As depicted in Figure 7.1, the post is an example of using the DA brand but at the same time telling the story of a party on a quest. The party leader, Mr Mmusi Maimane, was *"on the ground with solutions"*. Figure 7.1 is also a good example of how the DA used social media to create the in-group since it positioned the ANC in an unfavourable light; thus using social comparison to illustrate to political consumers that the ANC has not *"set a foot on campus"*, while the DA engaged with students.
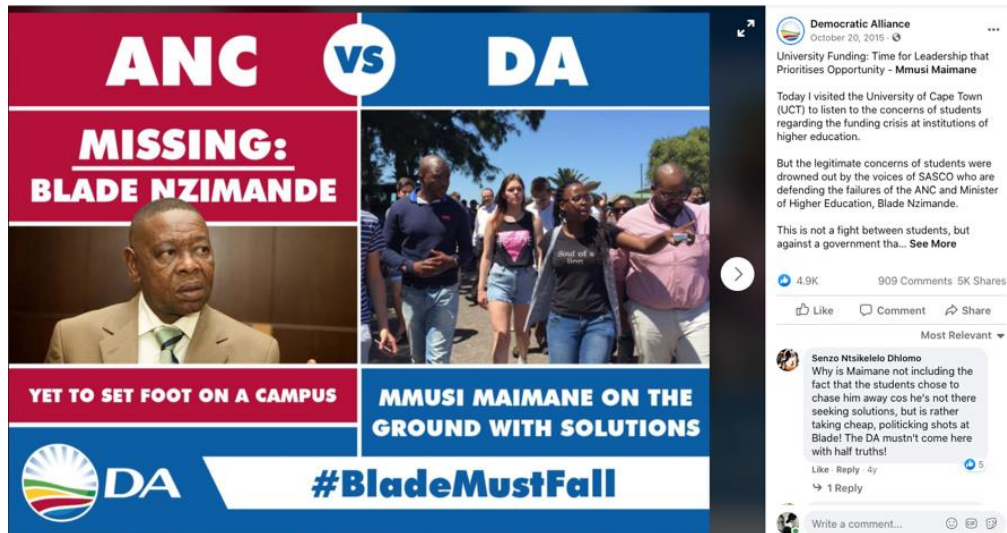
Figure 7.1: An example of social comparison: Us versus them

(Image used with permission of the DA)

Through social media-based political brand storytelling, the DA framed its quest (as illustrated in Figure 7.2) as a political party that had the answers to the higher education financial crisis. The DA presented its stories visually to political consumers. Most of the social media-based political brand stories the DA told used simple language, and the tone was informative by providing information on what could be done in higher education. The DA's social media-based political brand stories also amplified the lack of the ANC government to address the political issue. The DA, through its social media-based political brand stories in #BladeMustFall, created a human emotion of "inspiration", namely an online political brand persona that inspired political consumers. This was evident in the images the DA used (see Figure 7.1), which showed the DA leader engaging with political consumers. The DA's posts clearly created the association in the mind of the political consumer that the DA is a political brand that can deliver. Through all the DA's posts, it effectively used network framing and managed to create a brand experience by asking the political consumer to *"Join us as we march to Blade Nzimande's door-step to protest ..."*, as illustrated in Figure 7.3.

Figure 7.2: An example of the quest as a social media political brand storytelling strategy

(Image used with permission of the DA)

Figure 7.3: Twitter example of creating experience

(Image used with permission of the DA)

7.3.1.2 *Funding by the Department of Higher Education*

This second political issue that emerged from the data is related to the removal of the Minister of Higher Education and was labelled *Funding by the Department of Higher Education*. This subcategory is encapsulated in the hashtag #FundStudents. The DA

addressed the issue of funding in higher education and drove the importance of funding through the #hashtag #FundStudents. However, what was different from #BladeMustFall in this subcategory is that the DA used a series of posts to tell its story, and this story took on a tragedy approach. The social media-based political brand stories focused on the misuse of public funding and that the ANC viewed the purchase of *"office furniture, bulls and vehicles"* (illustrated in Figures 7.4 to 7.6) as more important than funding students' futures.

Figure 7.4: Post 1 in the series of posts amplifying the African National Congress' (ANC) lack of commitment to higher education funds

(Image used with permission of the DA)

Figure 7.5: Post 2 in the series of posts amplifying the ANC's lack of commitment to higher education funds

(Image used with permission of the DA)
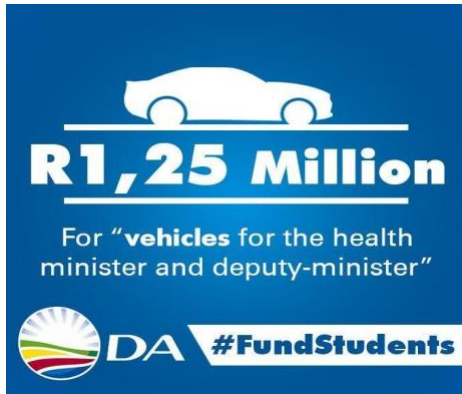
Figure 7.6: Post 3 in the series of posts amplifying the ANC's lack of commitment to higher education funds

(Image used with permission of the DA)

7.3.1.3 Selling education positions

The third political issue that was revealed in the data was #JobsForCash. SADTU was accused of selling teachers' and principals' education positions for money. The DA framed the issue on its Facebook page: *"SADTU really has hijacked the education departments in six of South African's nine provinces."* Interestingly, in this subcategory, the DA used network framing in only 29% of all its communications to frame the issue for the political consumer. What was striking in this subcategory was that the DA made use of mostly press statements, links to its website, and a YouTube link to the DA's *Bokamoso* newsletter (as illustrated in Figure 7.7); the DA did not use any images to support its tragic social media-based political brand stories.
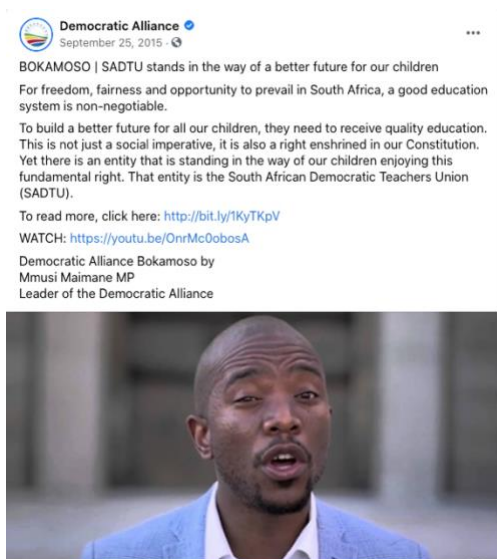
Figure 7.7: Link to the DA's *Bokamoso* in posts

(Image used with permission of the DA)

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Table C1 in Addendum C depicts a summary of the three subcategories and codes for Category 1. The researcher used ATLAS.ti's co-occurrence feature to establish the frequency of the codes in this category.

7.3.2   Category 2: Employment crisis in South Africa

Category 2: Employment crisis in South Africa encompasses all findings relating to the high unemployment rate in South Africa and the launch of the DA's Local Government Elections Manifesto in 2016. The subcategories that emerged from the data were the DA's stories of "The DA's plan to create jobs", "The DA's vision for 2029", and "The DA's call for change".

7.3.2.1 The DA's plan to create jobs

This subcategory is encapsulated in the hashtag #DAForJobs. What emerged from the data was that the DA used the quest approach and the underdog approach in its social media-based political brand storytelling and used a series of posts to tell its social media-based political brand story on its five-point job plan on Twitter and Facebook (see Figure 7.8). The DA created engagement through telling political consumers' stories (see Figure 7.9). The DA's posts in its five-point job plan stories were problem-solving orientated towards the unemployment political issue; however, in the #voices of unemployment stories, it framed the social media-based political brand stories as the underdog. Examples of the quest approach in the DA's tweets are as follows: *"Step 1 of the DA's plan to create jobs, is to improve education! #DAforJobs. Read our plan: https://t.co/uBgWb6l5lF"* and *"Step 2 of our jobs plan – Education! Govt just work to give ppl the edu & skills needed to get a job #DAforJobs https://t.co/xZPVyiFnft"*.

Figure 7.8: Example of the series of #DAforJobs five-step plan post
(Image used with permission of the DA)

Interestingly, in this subcategory, the DA political brand engaged with the political consumers to tell their stories of how unemployment affected them; for example: *"Has unemployment affected you? We want to take your unemployment stories to Parliament to fight for the solutions that will build an inclusive and prosperous economy. Let's force Zuma to listen! Submit your story here:"*

Out of this engagement, the stories of Siyabonga, Tasneem, Nomthandazo, and Cherise, to name a few, emerged and their stories were told from an underdog approach (see Figure 7.9). Through these social media-based political brand stories, the DA's online brand persona came across as caring and warm; these social media-based political brand stories created in the mind of the political consumer an online political brand persona that cares about them and that listens to their concerns. These types of posts also gave political consumers an opportunity to engage with the brand. The elements of social media political brand voice in these posts were, firstly, that the tone was personal; for example: *"We want to build a South Africa ..."*; secondly, the language was simple; and, lastly, the purpose of these posts was to amplify what the DA brand can offer: *"Under a DA government, we would pay employers back for the money spend on training."*
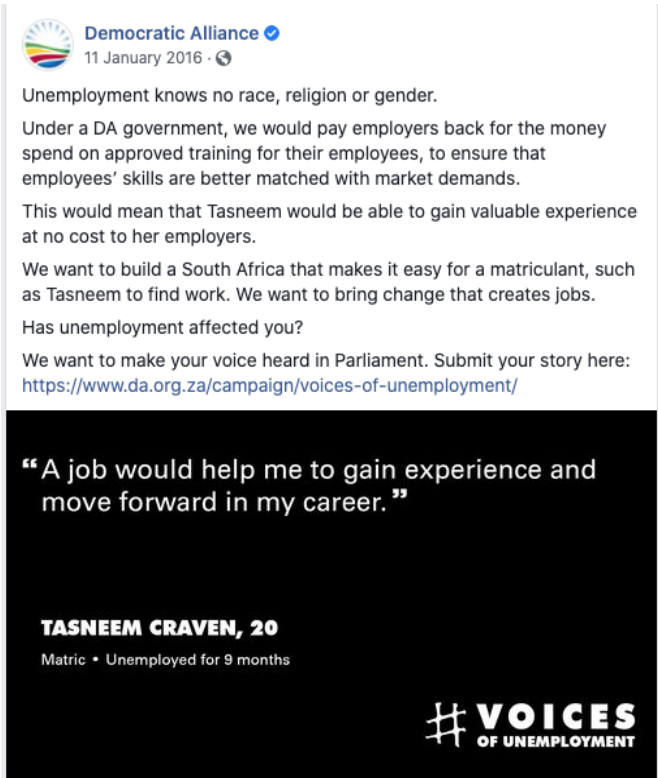
Figure 7.9: An example of stories told by political consumers

(Image used with permission of the DA)

In this subcategory, the DA created the in-group through, firstly, social categorisation; for example: *"the DA's plan"* and *"our labour laws"* and *"jobless South Africans".* Secondly, through social identification by focusing on the metropolitans where the DA governs (see Figures 7.10 and 7.11): *"While South Africa saw a rapid spike in unemployment – bringing the figure to 8.9 million – the DA-run City of Cape Town created 40055 jobs"* and *"We believe we need to incentivise job creation"*. Lastly, through social comparison: *"While the #ANCmarch on itself is deeply ironic, they should reflect on their dismal performance in ensuring the economy grows and jobs created ... which the ANC and President Jacob Zuma have failed to provide."*

Figure 7.10: An example of the DA creating social identity

(Image used with permission of the DA)
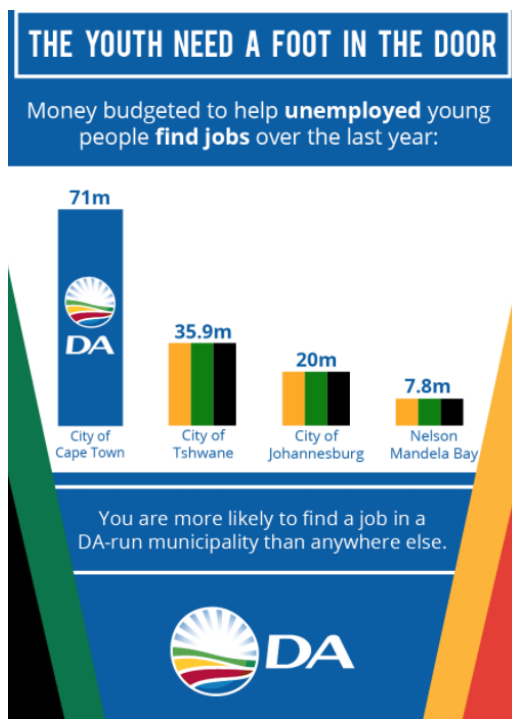
Figure 7.11: Another example of the DA creating social identity

(Image used with permission of the DA)

What stood out in this subcategory was that, compared to other subcategories, this subcategory addressed most of the other political issues; for example: *"#DAforJobs: Tackling the Economic Crisis: Five steps to stimulate the Economy;"* and *"#DAforJobs: Since President Zuma took office, 1.7 million South Africans have joined the ranks of unemployed"*, and *"Step 2 of our jobs plan – Education!"* and *"#DAforJobs: The core focus of the DA's 5-point plan is simple: to get South Africa working!"* It is evident that the DA used this subcategory as a golden thread to address other political issues.

7.3.2.2 The DA's vision for 2029

The second subcategory in *Category 2: Employment crisis in South Africa* is encapsulated in the hashtag #Vision2029. The DA successfully used the journey storytelling approach in its launch of #Vision2029. The DA told social media-based political brand stories that focused on transformation through learning lessons and overcoming the obstacles South Africans have faced in the #Vision2029: The DA's video #Vision2029 was used across the platforms to promote its vision (see Figure 7.12). The DA created an opportunity for political consumers to engage with the brand through, firstly, inviting political consumers to *"Contribute to the DA's #Vision2029. For more info click here: https://youtu.be/MrsrPXPim1LI"*. Secondly, it created a Twitter Town Hall, during which Mmusi Maimane was available to engage with political consumers (see Figure 7.13).

Figure 7.12: DA#Vision2029: The Journey
(Image used with permission of the DA)

Figure 7.13: The Twitter Town Hall post to create engagement with the brand
(Image used with permission of the DA)

The DA positioned the online political brand persona as a friendly and warm persona, as illustrated in Figure 7.14. The DA tweets during this period always included images of Mr Mmusi Maimane; thus using the party leader to drive the issue, but what was interesting is that the party leader was positioned as "to engage with". The DA also used the launch of its #Vision2029 to, firstly, create social categorisation *"in the municipalities where the DA governs"* and *"that children in South Africa …"* Secondly, the DA created social identification: *"This will change under the DA"*; and, lastly, the DA created associations in the minds of the political consumer: *"After 10 years of DA government, what will South Africa look like?"* and *"What will the DA national government achieve and how will it change all South Africans' lives for the better?"*

Figure 7.14: Example of images in tweets positioning the online political brand persona as warm and friendly

(Image used with permission of the DA)

7.3.2.3 The DA's call for change

The third subcategory that emerged from this dataset is encapsulated in the hashtag #VoteForChange. What was evident in this dataset was that the DA's approach to the #VoteForChange journey stories was two-fold: firstly, to drive the issues through a series of "Did you know" posts, such as *"DID YOU KNOW: DA-led WCape has highest proportion of homes getting free basic water, elec, sewerage/sanitation #VoteForChanges"* and *"DID YOU KNOW: DA-led WCape has the highest access to water, flush toilets and electricity in SA #VoteForChange"*; and, secondly, the DA made promises to the political consumer about

what they can expect when they vote for the DA, such as: *"We'll work hard to place housing developments close to education, workplaces & public transport"*, *"The sad state is the QUALITY education is a privilege for some. We will change that ..."*, *"A DA government in Tshwane will bring the change that this City"*, and *"We won't make promises and not act. We will act"*.

What stood out in this dataset was that the DA made use of social comparison (see Figure 7.15); for example: *"Where we govern, we create jobs! Where the ANC governs, 'unemployment opportunities' thrive ..."*, and *"The ANC in Tshwane does not care about quality of life of its residents, and instead work only to enrich themselves ..."* Social categorisation was also clear in some of the DA's other posts; for example: *"President Zuma serves the ANC"* and *"South African people have a strong, unbreakable spirit"*. In this category, the DA established a social identity among political consumers; for example: *"My fellow South Africans"* and *"I am glad that we have this opportunity to engage ..."*
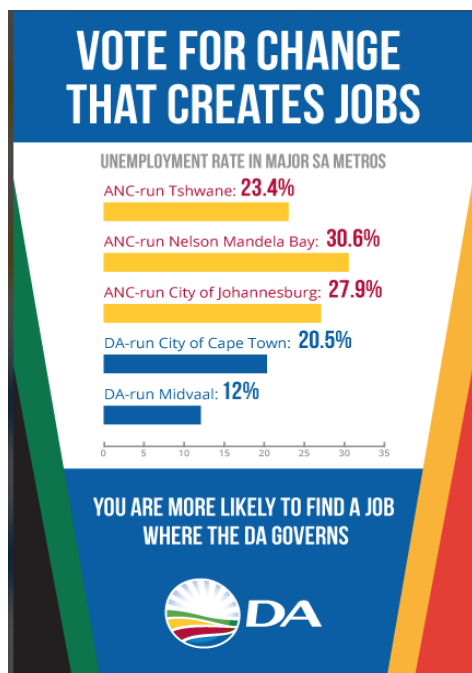
Figure 7.15: Social comparison post
(Image used with permission of the DA)

In addition, the tone of the posts was personal; for example: *"I am glad that we have the opportunity to engage"*, while the language was simple. The DA amplified to the voters why they should support the DA; for example: *"Use your vote to elect a government that puts you first."*

Table C2 in Addendum C depicts the subcategories and codes for Category 2. ATLAS.ti's code co-occurrence feature was used to establish the frequency of the codes in this category.

7.3.3   Category 3: Racist attitudes in South Africa

Category 3 encompasses all findings in the data relating to racism in South Africa. It is important to acknowledge that racism is a sensitive political issue in South Africa because of the history of the country. The subcategories that emerged from the data were therefore *The DA standing up against racism* and *The DA distancing itself from racist comments.*

7.3.3.1   *The DA standing up against racism*

This subcategory is encapsulated in the hashtag #PledgeAgainstRacism. This dataset was a good example of how the DA took ownership of current issues in South Africa. In 2016, Mrs Penny Sparrow compared black beachgoers to monkeys in a Facebook post that sparked outrage over racist attitudes more than 20 years after the end of apartheid (Hauser 2016). The government welcomed the court's decision to fine Ms Sparrow. As reported by *The Guardian* (2016), the culture minister, Mr Nathi Mthethwa, tweeted: *"The #PennySparrow ruling serves as a warning to those who perpetuate racism, that there will be serious consequences for their action."*

The DA used the tragedy approach to its social media-based political brand stories; for example: *"Racism demeans us. All of us, black and white. It opens the wounds of its victims, and exposes the ignorance of those who perpetrate it. It robs us of the dignity that so many fought for."* The DA clearly indicated that there was no place for racism within the DA and the online brand persona took on an authoritative human emotion: *"Let us send out a message that racism has no place in our politics. #PledgeAgainstRacism"*, *"I will not tolerate racism in the party I lead"*, and *"Racism is not welcome in the DA"*. The DA illustrated this by writing a letter to Penny Sparrow and terminating her DA membership. The DA Federal Executive members (see Figure 7.16) all signed the #PledgeAgainstRacism and they engaged not only the political consumers to *"SHARE if you support this #PledgeAgainstRacism. Sign the pledge here:"* (see Figure 7.17), but they also challenged the opposition parties to join the initiative of a pledge against racism: *"We challenged all political parties to do the same. Let us send out a message that racism has no place in our society."*

Figure 7.16: The DA's Federal Executive signed the #PledgeAgainstRacism

(Image used with permission of the DA)

Figure 7.17: The DA requesting political consumers to sign and share the anti-racism pledge

(Image used with permission of the DA)

7.3.3.2 *The DA distancing itself from racist comments*

This subcategory is encapsulated in the hashtags #MmusiOneRace and #NotInOurName. What was unexpected in this category was that the DA led approximately two-thirds of the posts with Mr Mmusi Maimane, as illustrated in Figure 7.18. It therefore created the #MmusiOneRace and #NotInOurName hashtags; thus indicating that for certain issues, the

DA chose to lead the social media-based political brand stories with the party leader, which provided goal-orientated stories using the quest approach.

Figure 7.18: Example of driving the #MmusiOnRace
(Image used with permission of the DA)

Another interesting finding in this dataset was that the DA used a series of video clips (see Figure 7.19) on its social media feeds to address the race issue under the #NotInOurName, in which Mr Mmusi Maimane was the narrator. The first social media-based political brand story focused on racism in South Africa, while the second story addressed the issue that certain people fuelled racism and would like to see South Africa stay divided. The third social media-based political brand story was an inspiring story about humans, and that it is the only race that matters, and in the last social media-based political brand story, Mr Mmusi brought it all together that the DA is building a party for all South Africans and that there is no place for racism in *"their name"*.

Figure 7.19: Twitter series of #NotInOurName

(Image used with permission of the DA)

It is then not surprising that in this dataset the DA used social identity; for example: *"the DA's"* and *"Together, we will build One Nation with One Future"*. Social categorisation was also evident in this dataset; for example: *"the DA's Pledge Against Racism"*, *"political parties to do the same"*, and *"South Africans have a shared responsibility"* to create the in-group among the political consumers. The elements of the social media political brand voice were represented in all the posts. It was evident in the tone of the posts that was personal and direct. The language was simple and serious and the purpose of the social media political brand voice was to amplify the DA's views on racism, but the brand voice was also used to engage the political consumer: "*RETWEET if you support this #PledgeAgainstRacism*" and *"Sign the pledge here..."*.

Table C3 in Addendum C depicts the subcategories and codes for Category 3. ATLAS.ti's code co-occurrence feature was used to establish the frequency of the codes in this category.

7.3.4 Category 4: The Zuma saga

Category 4 encompasses all the findings relating to former president Jacob Zuma during May 2015 to June 2016 in South Africa. The issues were, firstly, Zuma's corruption charges; secondly, the misuse of public funds; and, lastly, the Gupta-Zuma state capture. The three subcategories that emerged from the data are "Zuma accused of racketeering", "Zuma seen

not to be fit to act as the president of South Africa", and "Zuma misusing public funds for personal gain in the form of Nkandla".

7.3.4.1 Zuma accused of racketeering

This subcategory is encapsulated in the hashtag #AccusedNumber1. This dataset is a good example of how the DA, through its social media-based political brand storytelling, drove the political issue of Zuma's corruption charges. In this dataset, the DA brand made use of telling a tragic social media-based political brand story of *"53 years ago, one of the ANC's greatest leaders was known as 'Accused number 1' because his name was first on the charge sheet at the Rivonia trial. In the context of the struggle against apartheid, this was a badge of honour. Today, the ANC is again led by 'Accused Number 1'. But this time it has nothing to do with noble and selfless struggle. It is because Jacob Zuma is the biggest beneficiary of the R70 billion arms deal, and stands accused on 783 counts of corruption, fraud, money laundering and racketeering".*

Through the DA's social media-based political brand storytelling, the DA's political brand used a number of branding strategies; for example, the first one was network framing, which was present in all its posts; secondly, images used presented Zuma as a criminal (see Figure 7.20); thirdly, the political brand stories were told as tragedies; and, lastly, the DA drove engagement with posts such as: "*RETWEET if you think #AccusedNumber1 – Jacob Zuma – MUST have his day in court. The man is a thief!"*

The social media political brand's tone was direct and used simple language, which amplified that Zuma had to have his day in court, as illustrated in Figure 7.21.

Figure 7.20: The DA's brand strategy

(Image used with permission of the DA)

7.3.4.2 Zuma misusing public funds for personal gain in the form of Nkandla

A finding that stood out in this subcategory was that the DA brand meticulously reported its battle for former president Jacob Zuma to be held accountable for the presidential residence at Nkandla (see Figure 7.21). In this subcategory, the DA online brand persona spoke with authority on the political issue, and created the perception among political consumers that the DA would hold Zuma responsible for *"looting of R246 million of taxpayers' money"* and that *"The DA will not allow the President to get away with the theft of public funds"*.

An interesting finding was that no social networking tools were used in these posts (such as hashtags); however, these posts all used images or posters to make an emotional connection with the political consumers. The social media-based political brand stories in this subcategory were told from an underdog perspective. In this regard, the DA's online brand persona struggled to overcome the ANC's *"playing judge, jury and executioner"*. It was, however, a story that ended with an outcome in that the DA had started the process of impeaching Zuma on 31 March 2016. This served as an important social identification for the DA political brand.
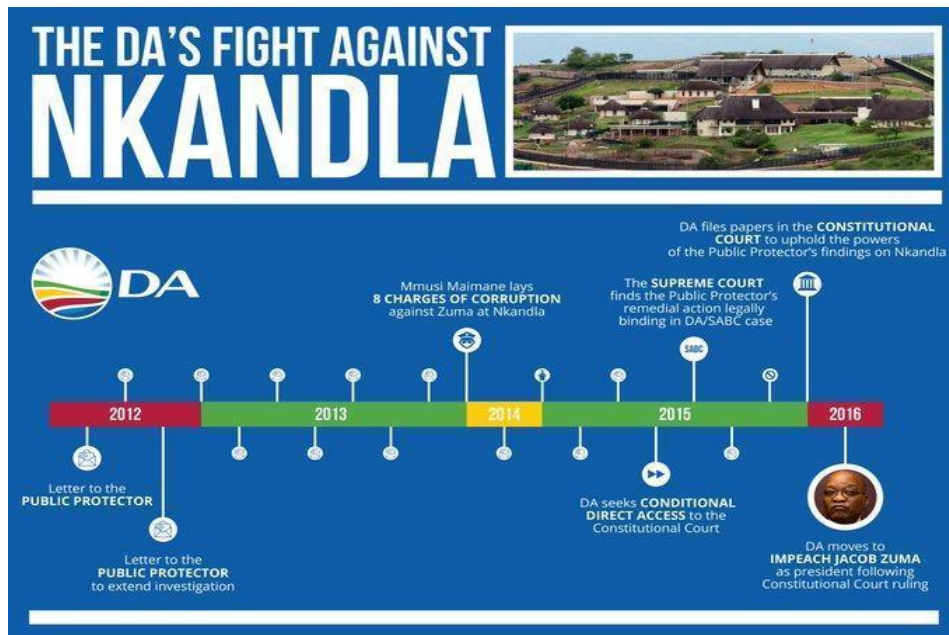
Figure 7.21: Timeline of the DA's fight against President Zuma

(Image used with permission of the DA).

7.3.4.3 Zuma seen not to be fit to act as the president of South Africa

This subcategory is encapsulated in the hashtag #ImpeachZuma. In this subcategory, the DA positioned its online brand persona among political consumers as trustworthy and as a party who had South Africans' best interests at heart. The social media-based political brand stories were told from an underdog perspective; for example: *"We must protect the foundation of our Constitutional Democracy"* and *"This is the list of MPs [Members of Parliament] that represent YOU, but voted AGAINST #ImpeachZuma; AGAINST the Constitution"*. This dataset also presented two-thirds of the posts to drive engagement among political consumers; for example: *"Your voice MUST be heard! Sign the petition in support of the Motion of No Confidence here"*, *"Write to ANC MP's and urge them to put South Africa first and Zuma last"*, and *"RETWEET to urge MP's to #ImpeachZuma. Remind them that they serve the ppl of SA; the constitution, not Jacob Zuma"*. An interesting finding in this dataset was that the DA brand exposed the MPs who voted for Zuma, which created the ultimate "out-group", and labelled them as *"putting Zuma before the Constitution and the people of South Africa"*, as illustrated in Figure 7.22, in comparison to the DA political brand creating a social identity in which the online brand persona was positioned as fighting to uphold South Africa's Constitution (see Figure 7.23).

Figure 7.22: An example of creating an out-group

(Image used with permission of the DA)

Figure 7.23: An example of creating social identity

(Image used with permission of the DA)

In addition, the social media political brand voice presented urgency in the tone that was used: *"Your voice MUST be heard!"* and *"Write to ANC MP's and urge them ..."* The language was personal and the posts amplified the importance of the matter: *"If your courage fails you today, President Jacob Zuma will wreck the economy and he will wreck South Africa"*.

Table C4 in Addendum C depicts a summary of the three subcategories and codes for Category 4. The researcher used ATLAS.ti's code co-occurrence feature to establish the frequency of the codes in this category.

7.3.5   Category 5: Energy issues in South Africa

Category 5 encompasses all the findings relating to the energy issues present in South Africa between May 2015 and June 2016. These issues were, firstly, Eskom's supply monopoly in the energy sector; secondly, Eskom's tariff increases; thirdly, the nuclear procurement; and, lastly, the Russian nuclear deal. The subcategories that emerged from the data are "Reforming the energy sector" and "The nuclear deal".

7.3.5.1 Reforming the energy sector

In the subcategory "Reforming the energy sector", the data clearly showed that the DA used the quest social media-based political brand storytelling approach, where the stories are problem-solving stories: *"We need to diversify our energy mix so we can create enough power for growth"* and *"reform the energy sector and open it up to increased competition"*. In this subcategory, what stood out, as in *Category 2: Employment crisis in South Africa*, was that the DA used the Western Cape to illustrate its solution to the energy issue (see Figure 7.24). The DA successfully created the in-group through, firstly, social identification: *"The Democratic Alliance (DA) has today argued against …"* and *"The DA has long advocate ..."*; secondly, through social categorisation: *"Eskom's supply monopoly"* and *"the Deputy President's actions"*; and, lastly, through social comparison: *"to Deputy President, Cyril Ramaphosa, as to how he, and his 'war room', have not overseen the drafting of plans regarding coal supply"* and *"the Deputy President's inaction is both disturbing and telling"*. The DA used its social media political brand voice to amplify the party's ability to drive the reform of the energy sector; the tone was direct, and used serious language, as seen in this tweet: *"The time has come to break the #Eskom monopoly, reform the energy sector and open it up to increased competition."* What stood out in this subcategory was that the DA used an authoritative online political brand persona to communicate its messages to the political consumer. The DA also created the perception that it was driving accountability from the government; for example, in this Facebook post: *"Contingency plan needed as Eskom reveals it has no 'plan B'. The DA will request that the Minister of Public Enterprises, Lynn Brown, table a contingency plan ..."* and *"NERSA should tell Eskom that enough is enough. The DA has today argued ... Eskom cannot continue to rely on state bailouts and exorbitant tariff increase to fund its continued mismanagement"*. An interesting finding in this subcategory was the lack of consumer engagement, where in previous categories, the political consumer was asked to share or sign petitions; in this subcategory there was very little engagement.

Figure 7.24: DA-run Western Cape as an example of an energy solution

(Image used with permission of the DA)

7.3.5.2 Nuclear deal

The second subcategory in Category 5 focuses on the nuclear deal that emerged from the data. For this subcategory, the data illustrated how the DA as a brand created perceptions among political consumers that the DA political brand hold government accountable, as illustrated in these Facebook posts: *"DA calls for full disclosure of procurement process for R1 trillion nuclear deal"*, *"The DA notes that today's media briefing by Energy Department (DoE) … contained no new answers to pressing questions on a multi-trillion Rand nuclear project"*, and *"DA calls on Energy Committee Chairperson to summon Tina Joemat-Pettersson over Nuke Deal"*. The DA thus used the underdog approach (as discussed in Section 4.6.4) in the post, in which it is struggling against the societal issues – government *"secretiveness and lack of transparency leaves it vulnerable to undue political influence"*, as indicated in a Facebook post. The DA's posts created a sense of an authoritative online political brand persona with a social media political brand voice that amplified the DA's role as opposition to keep the government responsible for its actions and how it impacts on the political consumer, as illustrated in this tweet: *"Acting on the energy crisis by scrapping the proposed Russian nuclear deal, and supporting independent Power Production."* This subcategory lacks the use of images within the posts and overwhelmingly used a link back to the DA's website.

Table C5 in Addendum C depicts the two subcategories and codes for Category 5. ATLAS.ti's code co-occurrence feature was used to establish the frequency of the codes in this category.

7.3.6   Category 6: Economical downgrading of South Africa

Category 6 encompasses all findings relating to the economy in South Africa. During 2015 and 2016, Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) reports indicated that the South African economic growth was dangerously slow and South Africa was trying to avoid a sovereign ratings downgrade (Stats SA 2016). In this regard, "A fragile South African economy" emerged from the data as a subcategory.

7.3.6.1   A fragile South African economy

This subcategory is encapsulated in the hashtag #EconomyCrisis. The DA's online political brand persona came across as highlighting the government's inability to deal with the political issue, as indicated in this Facebook post: *"On Wednesday, our deputy president stood in the National Assembly and said, with no irony, that our economy is heading in the right direction and that we have nothing to worry about. This is very much a minority view, everyone else is in agreement that the South African economy is in a dire situation."* Another example is: *"Details of chairpersons' 'spin classes' need to be made public. The DA notes and is not surprised by the ANC Chief Whip, Stone Sizani's statement regarding Parliament's upcoming programme."* However, the dataset illustrates that the DA did not take ownership of the issue as the underdogs. Instead, it amplified the government's inability through creating social comparisons; for example: *"Has yet again demonstrated that he cannot be trusted to grow the economy"* and *"One thing was made clear tonight – President Zuma has not one shred of legitimacy when it comes to the economy"*. This created very little social identity around the DA brand itself.

There were a few interesting findings in this subcategory. Firstly, in the previous subcategories, the DA online political brand persona was inspiring and the stories were mostly problem-solving stories. However, in this subcategory, the DA's online political brand persona did not create the perceptions or associations that the DA political brand had all the answers for this political issue; for example: *"Our fragile economy will struggle to recover from being downgraded to 'junk' status"*, *"We'll be lucky if we can break through 2% GDP [gross domestic product] growth this year, following a dismal 1.5% last year"*, and *"We stand fully by our previous assertions that Parliament has cancelled two sittings, and a third of this week's portfolio committee meeting. This is worthy of a strong condemnation when there are so many issues of national importance, including the dire state of our economy, which this Parliament should be focused on"*. The second interesting finding was that the DA's online political brand persona did not create engagement opportunities among the political consumer through *"Let us know"* or *"Share our stories"*.

Table C6 in Addendum C depicts a summary of the subcategory and codes for Category 6. The researcher used ATLAS.ti's code co-occurrence feature to establish the frequency of the codes in this category.

7.3.7 Category 7: Water issue in South Africa

Category 7 encompasses all the findings relating to the water issue in South Africa. At the time, the metros faced challenges relating to water supply maintenance, water leakages, and water waste. The subcategory "The DA brand delivers" emerged from the data.

7.3.7.1 The DA brand delivers

This subcategory is encapsulated in the hashtag #DAdelivers. In this category, the DA built its social media-based political brand stories around the success of the DA government and most of the stories thus took on the journey approach. These social media-based political brand stories focused on the successful management of municipalities where the DA governs: *"#DAdelivers: 99.1% of WC households have access to piped water, 93,4% have access to electricity; 90.5% have access to flush toilets"*, *"The Western Cape showed the highest proportion of consumer units that benefited from free basic water at 75.7%"*, and *"#DAdelivers: Western Cape exemplifies good waste water management"*. What makes this interesting is that the DA provided objective proof of its ability to govern, as illustrated in this post: *"DA delivers: 9 out of 10 best municipalities in SA are DA governed. The DA welcomes the release of the government Performance Index, compiled by research and advocacy group Good Governance Africa (GGA)."*

The DA political brand used its success to create a perception among political consumers that if they vote for the DA, the DA will deliver essential services: *"The supply of clean water is one of the most essential services, it is a necessity for life. When the DA wins and governs in Metros across South Africa, we will put in place proper measures to conserve water and direct it to the people who so desperately need it as we have done and continue to do in the City of Cape Town and Midvaal where we govern. #DAdelivers."* These posts were accompanied by posters, as shown in Figure 7.25, to visually illustrate to political consumers that the DA brand delivers.
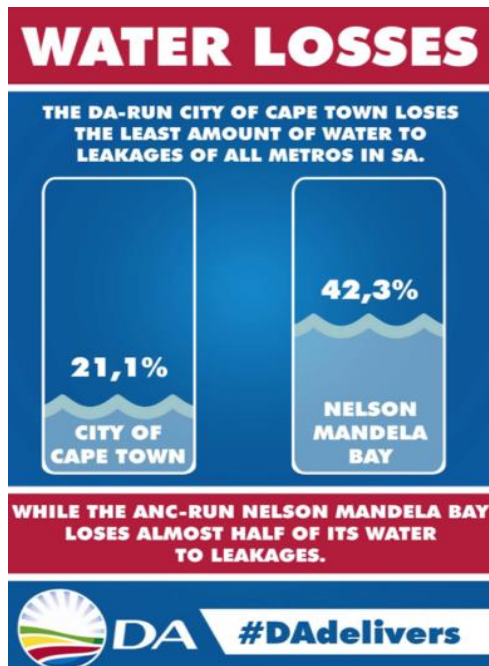
Figure 7.25: An example of the DA using social comparison to position the DA brand as capable of managing the issue

(Image used with permission of the DA)

In this subcategory, the DA brand used photos taken at specific places to emphasise the social comparison for the political consumer between a DA-run metro (see Figure 7.26) and an ANC-run metro (see Figure 7.27). The social media-based political brand stories successfully created an in-group by focusing on the social identity; for example: *"The DA-run Midvaal Municipality ..."* and *"Good Governance Africa (GGA), which found that 12 out of the 20 best run municipalities in the country are governed by the DA, with 9 of them in the top 10. In contrast to this, the worst 20 performing municipalities are all governed by the ANC"*. The DA's social media-based political brand stories also created perceptions in the mind of political consumers that *"The supply of clean water is one of the most essential services, it is a necessity for life. When the DA wins and governs in Metros across South Africa, we will put in place proper measures to conserve water and direct it to the people ..."* and *"This demonstrates that the DA's continued dedication and commitment to the poor is improving the quality of life for all citizens where we govern ..."*.

Figure 7.26: DA: Western Cape water works

(Image used with permission of the DA)

Figure 7.27: ANC: Modimolle toxic water works

(Image used with permission of the DA)

In this subcategory, the social media political brand voice tone was personal, used simple language, and the purpose was clear to amplify the DA's ability to govern South Africa: *"When the DA wins and governs in Metros across South Africa, we will put in place proper measures to conserve water."*

Table C7 in Addendum C depicts a summary of the subcategory and codes for Category 7. The researcher used ATLAS.ti's code co-occurrence feature to establish the frequency of the codes in this category.

7.4   DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this section, the findings of the semi-structured expert interviews and deductive qualitative content analysis are triangulated to capture different dimensions of the topic under investigation. This is done by referring to the proposed elements for the conceptual framework as discussed in Section 5.2 and shown in Table 5.2.

7.4.1   Element 1: Political brand

The findings of the semi-structured expert interviews and deductive qualitative content analysis indicate that *Element 1: Political brand* must be an important consideration when creating dialogue with political consumers.

The findings revealed that the politicians were presented as a tangible service offering and the party as a brand offering. The research, through the literature review, considered the political brand as a service brand, which focuses on the political offering. The political offering refers to the policy, politician, and party (Jain et al 2017) (see Sections 3.3.1, 3.4.1, 3.4.2, and 3.5.2). This supports the view of the branded house approach (see Section 3.5.2), which suggests that the focus is on the brand identity of the party. It is therefore important to note that most of the posts were presented by the party. The data therefore made a clear contribution to the literature, which indicated that the political brand, just as the political leaders, must have an effective brand. These findings affirm Lloyd's (2008) argument that party brands are longer lasting than the political leaders' brands. However, it is important to note that in the semi-structured expert interviews, the participants were of the opinion that political parties need to take into consideration a number of elements: firstly, the political party's philosophy; secondly, the political party's policies; and, lastly, the leadership. Ultimately, as PR agencies, they need to decide what would be the most compelling brand element to lead with on that specific issue.

Another pertinent issue that was present was political brand authenticity as an important element of creating a successful political brand in the complexity of the political environment. Section 2.3 discussed the core brand and branding concepts, and Section 3.4 discussed the key attributes of concepts relevant to the political brand. What was evident in the literature was that the brand's value proposition gives clear direction of the relevance of the brand to the consumer. Esch (2008:58) supports this by stating that "associations are the essential characteristics and attributes of the brand". In regard to the political brand, Downer (2016) affirms that when building political parties' brands, it should address both the functionality (party policy) and the emotional appeals (authenticity, approachability, and attractiveness of the party). It was clear from the participants that political brands have certain challenges with appealing to political consumers' emotions. These include how to frame the political brand's reaction to certain political issues, to present the party's ideology as tangible and meaningful, and to give meaning to political messages that go out to political consumers. As pointed out by the expert interviewees, their role was to translate the DA's ideology and policy into tangible offerings for the political consumer. The DA was successful in the subcategories "The DA's plans to create jobs", "The DA's vision for 2029", and "The DA standing up against racism". In these subcategories, the DA presented the party's policies and ideology in a tangible product to political consumers.

The findings in the subcategory "Removal of the Minister of Higher Education" revealed that the DA told the story using the politicians and the party but there was no reference to the DA's policy on higher education. This poses a challenge to the DA because the data reveal that the DA was building its "Removal of the Minister of Higher Education" story around the emotional appeal and did not consider the functional appeal. However, in the categories "The Zuma saga", "Racist attitudes in South Africa", "Employment crisis in South Africa", and "Energy issues in South Africa", the stories made reference to both the functionality and emotional appeal. It was evident in the expert interviews that the agencies had a challenge with building authentic political brands because of the complexity of the political environment, as well as to present the parties' ideology into something tangible.

7.4.2   Element 2: Political brand strategy

The findings of the semi-structured expert interviews and deductive qualitative content analysis indicate that *Element 2: Political brand strategy* must be an important consideration when it comes to differentiating the political party from the opposition.

Section 3.3.4.2 discussed the age of political communication. What was evident in the literature was that communication in the political field has moved into the fourth age of

communication. The fourth age of communication suggests that the political consumer has access to a choice of communication platforms that provide diverse content. Network framing was considered as a technique that political brands can use to amplify or raise awareness of an issue for the political consumer. Network framing was evident in the data where the DA used #hashtags to influence the political consumers' perception and their understanding of the political issues and therefore set the agenda for political consumers. These findings were supported in the expert interviews in that the participants made it clear that #hashtags were used to signpost content for political consumers. The data therefore made a clear contribution towards using network framing as a brand strategy.

Subcategories were encapsulated in hashtags, for example #BladeMustFall, #JobsForCash, #DAForJobs, #Vision2029, #VoteForChange, #PledgeAgainstRacism, #MmusiOneRac, #NotInOurName, #AccusedNumber1, #ImpeachZuma, #EconomyCrisis, and #DAdelivers, which demonstrated that the DA made use of framing to influence how political consumers understand, remember, evaluate, and act upon these political issues (as discussed in Section 3.3.4.2).

The second focus point in this element was political branding. These results took into account the emotional connection that was established with the political consumers through, firstly, what type of images were included in the post; secondly, through driving engagement by analysing the action that was required from the political consumer in the form of likes, comments, shares, or sign-ups; and, lastly, the data were examined from an experiencing-the-brand point of view, which was understood as when political consumers marked the posts as favourites. What was evident in the data was that tweets with an emotional connection translated to higher engagement and experience from the political consumers' point of view. It was highlighted in the expert interviews that a successful political brand uses social media platforms to create participation among political consumers. In the literature review, the concepts of PESO were discussed in Sections 2.4.3.4 and 4.3.2, which supported the important role that social media platforms play in the political brand strategy. However, in the Facebook posts, a higher engagement rate as opposed to a brand experience was expected, due to the nature of the platform; nevertheless, the engagement on this platform was not linked to the emotional appeal but rather to the content of the posts. The Facebook posts that received the most action or engagement from political consumers were on posters where the DA provides a solution for the funding crisis in higher education, and "Share the post", where the DA suggests that if the political consumer would like to be part of change, they need to take action. The data support Luttrell and Capizzo's (2019) view on SNSs (such as Facebook and Twitter), which allow the brand to connect, share, and listen to the political consumer. The DA successfully used its shared media to emotionally

connect with the political consumer, but the DA also gained insight into the views of the political consumer on issues. This is supported in the thematic analysis, where the participants clearly argued that the political brand strategy should enable the political brand to differentiate itself from the opposition. These findings were supported by the expert interviews, which indicated that the political parties cannot only drive the political agenda through social media platforms, but political parties must understand that the brand success depends on the quality of engagement the political brand generates among the political consumers.

The third focus point in this element was social media-based political brand storytelling, which is seen as a political brand strategy. The study proposed a working definition for the concept as being political stories, which are created around a political issue that political parties tell on social media to pull political consumers towards their brand. This happens within the context of the types of stories the political brand tells, as discussed in Section 4.6.4. As the official opposition party in South Africa, the data revealed that in the seven categories, the DA, to push and pull content, used the underdog approach five times, the quest approach appears in three subcategories, the journey approach appears in three subcategories, and the tragedy approach appears in four subcategories. Booker's (2004) seminal work explains the underdog approach as stories that focus on struggles against large societal issues or big business. The DA has taken up the position of struggling against the government and the societal issue in the categories "Higher and basic education in South Africa", "The Zuma saga", "Energy issues in South Africa", and "The economical downgrading of South Africa". This is followed by the tragedy approach, which focuses on political issues of what not to do or how not to behave in the categories "Higher and basic education in South Africa", "The Zuma saga", and "Racist attitudes in South Africa". The data indicated that the DA's storytelling focused less on problem solving; the quest approach appears only in three of the seven categories: "Higher and basic education in South Africa", "The Zuma saga", and "Racist attitudes in South Africa". The journey stories that focused on offering solutions appear in three of the seven categories: "Water issue in South Africa", "Employment crisis in South Africa", and "The DA brand delivers".

These findings revealed that storytelling as a strategy was emphasised in the thematic analysis. It also alluded to the fact that the political brand's position on the issue will determine the type of story the brand will tell, which was evident in the qualitative content analysis of the DA's Facebook and Twitter posts. What emerged clearly from the expert interviews is that political parties use storytelling to frame political issues for political consumers, and it is therefore clear that political issue ownership will determine the type of story.

7.4.3   Element 3: Social media political brand voice

The findings of the semi-structured expert interviews and deductive qualitative content analysis indicate that *Element 3: Social media political brand voice* must be an important consideration when creating a successful online political brand persona.

The brand voice was discussed as part of the political brand persona (see Section 4.9.1). The literature discussion illustrated that for a brand to build a successful online political brand persona, it needs to establish an authentic brand voice (Gilbert 2017; Budden et al 2011). The results of the qualitative content analysis showed that the DA used a personal tone in its posts; however, the language is serious, which drives the DA's purpose of amplifying the political issue within each category; for example: *"Step 1 of the DA's plan to create jobs, is to improve education! #DAforJobs"*, *"Under a DA government, we would pay employers back for the money spent on training"*, *and "Use your vote to elect a government that puts you first"*.

Comparing the findings from the expert interviews and the qualitative content analysis, both datasets indicated that the tone of the posts was important in driving the social media brand voice, as illustrated in the qualitative content analysis: *"We want to build a South Africa …"* and *"My fellow South Africans, I'm glad that we have the opportunity to engage …"*. Turning to the expert interviews, what stood out in them was that all the participants stressed the importance thereof that tone, language, and purpose as elements of the brand voice need to work together to develop a political brand voice that political consumers can share, engage with, and relate to. This was an important finding because it emphasised the importance of social media brand voice as it fulfils an important function in building an authentic online brand persona; as Gilbert (2017) emphasises, brand voice is a technique to build an authentic brand persona.

7.4.4   Element 4: Creating the in-group

The findings of the semi-structured expert interviews and deductive qualitative content analysis indicate that *Element 4: Creating the in-group* must be an important consideration when creating an authentic online political brand persona.

The focus of this element was to examine how the DA used social media to create a positive association between the party and the political consumer. This element is built on the social identity theory, as discussed in Section 4.10. This element's three categories were extracted from the social identity theory. The first category is social categorisation, which refers to the categories the DA created for the political consumer in order to help the political consumer to

make sense of the content. The second category is social identification, which refers to the identity the DA created in its posts so that the political consumer can identify with the DA. The last category is social comparison, which the DA used in its posts to create the "in-group" versus the "out-group" for the political consumers.

Within the code "social categorisation", the findings revealed that the DA categorised the political consumer as "qualifying students", "South African leaders", and "minority of young South Africans". This helped to contextualise the political issues in each subcategory for the political consumer. The DA used these subcategories to establish who the role players were in this issue, and, as suggested in the literature, the political consumer can thus define appropriate behaviour according to the group they belong to (Lam et al 2010; Stets & Burke 2000).

Through the brand voice, the DA created a social identity of "we" and "us"; therefore driving a sense of belonging to the political brand. This is supported by the literature, which indicated that the political party, as a brand, needed to clarify the political party's identity on an issue and how its political stand is communicated to the political consumer, as discussed in Section 3.4.1 (Mensah 2016; Hogg et al 1995; Turner & Tajfel 1986). The DA, through social media, created an identity of caring for the youth's education, which is evident in how it framed its messages: *"We must empower young people through education ..."* and *"Join us tomorrow as we demand accountability ..."*. The results of the expert interviews showed that social identity is not limited to word choices, but the participants indicated that the use of images resonates with people. This was visible in the DA's use of images in the subcategories "The DA's vision for 2029" and "The DA's plan to create jobs". It can be argued that if the DA can successfully create such an "in-group" out of "disenchanted citizens" who find accommodation with the DA's message platform that they can extend their support base, as discussed in section 1.2.6.

The above then creates the foundation of creating the "in-group"; however, the DA used the "out-group" to illustrate the government's shortcomings on the political issue in the subcategories "Funding by the Department of Higher Education", "The DA call for change", "Zuma accused of racketeering", "Zuma misusing funds for personal gain", and "Zuma seen not to be fit to act as president of South Africa". The expert interviews raised an important issue in relation to using the "out-group" approach. The participants felt that in the political environment it is not beneficial for the opposition party to build its campaigns on the failure of the opposition. This results in only taking associative ownership of the political issue, which refers to the perception the political consumers hold on how much the political party cares about the issue. It can be argued that social comparison can only lead to stereotyping,

prejudice, and discrimination against group members (Stets & Burke 2000) (as discussed in Section 4.10).

7.4.5   Element 5: Online political brand persona

The findings of the semi-structured expert interviews and deductive qualitative content analysis indicate that *Element 5: Online political brand persona* must be an important consideration when connecting with political consumers.

The political brand persona was discussed in the literature (see Section 4.9.2). It was argued that before the 1990s, ideological issues drove political party engagement; however, with technology, the focus on the political party persona supersedes the ideological views of the political party when driving political issues (Jain et al 2018; Needham & Smith 2015; Pich & Dean 2015). The results of the expert interviews showed that most of the participants felt that the brand could not create meaningful messages around a political issue if it was not centred around the brand persona. From the data it is apparent that the DA anthropomorphised its posts by endowing human characteristics to the brand persona of inspiring, anticipation, and professionalism. These are brand characteristics that support the DA's political offering. The findings revealed that the DA, as the opposition party, differentiated itself from the other political parties by creating an inspiring brand persona through *"We hope to provide students with ..."*; an anticipating brand persona through *"Racism is not welcome in the DA"*; and, lastly, the brand persona came across as professional through *"The DA notes the long overdue statement from Minister Blade Nzimande"*.

In Section 3.4.3, the literature considered the value of the brand persona. Pereira (2019) postulates that the brand persona is a key driver of the brand message and thus adds heuristic value to the political offering. The findings show that the DA's brand persona created expectations for the political consumers on how the DA would have dealt with each political issue presented in the subcategories. The DA's posts confirmed that it created perceptions and associations in the mind of the political consumer. The posts created the perception that by "sharing" the post, the political consumer would be part of the drive for change and the association with the DA will therefore be created. This type of post also drives brand experience and creates participation from the political consumers' perspective (as discussed in Section 4.5.2.1). It can thus be argued that the DA's brand strategy enables the political brand to facilitate interaction, collaboration, and sharing of content among political consumers.

These results, as reflected in the subcategories, suggested that the DA built its online brand persona through network framing the content through the underdog storytelling approach. The DA told the story through an inspiring brand persona and the brand voice correlated with the brand persona. However, the results indicated that the DA only created associative ownership of most of the political issues, except for "The DA's vision for 2029", "The DA standing up against racism", and "The DA distancing them from racist comments". In these subcategories, the DA owned these political issues.

7.5   SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to report on the data and interpretation of the findings of the semi-structured expert interviews and the deductive qualitative content analysis of the DA's Twitter and Facebook posts.

The discussion in the semi-structured expert interviews specifically focused on gaining insight into the elements that were linked to the proposed elements for a conceptual framework for an online political brand persona from a social media political brand storytelling perspective. The analysis of the qualitative content analysis specifically focused on pertinent issues that emerged from the DA's *Bokamoso* newsletter, which were linked to the proposed elements of the framework.

The findings from both the semi-structured expert interviews and deductive qualitative content analysis were analysed and interpreted according to the five proposed elements for a conceptual framework. These were the political brand, political brand strategy, the social media brand voice, creating the in-group, and the online political brand persona. The chapter concluded with an in-depth discussion of the overall findings based on triangulation.

The last chapter focuses on the conclusions of the study, and includes formulating guidelines and a conceptual framework.

CHAPTER 8:
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1   INTRODUCTION

This last chapter focuses on the conclusions of and recommendations by the study after empirically testing the proposed elements for the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 7.

The first section of this chapter explains how the research questions were answered. Thereafter, the refinement of the elements of the proposed conceptual framework is presented and motivated in accordance with the literature and also with regard to each element. The refined elements of the conceptual framework are also graphically illustrated, followed by a concise overview. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study and suggestions for possible future research on the topic.

Section 8.2 provides a synopsis of the study and explains how the research questions (as identified in Chapter 1) were addressed.

8.2   ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main objective of the research was to explore proposed elements for a conceptual framework for an online political brand persona through social media brand storytelling for political parties in South Africa. Hence, the findings of the research, as well as the secondary research objectives and research questions, were addressed. The next subsection provides a summary of these findings and the insights gained.

8.2.1   Research Question 1

This research question – "What are the theoretical criteria for political brand storytelling on social media to represent political issues through an online brand persona?" – was addressed in Chapters 2, 3, and 4. To explain the theoretical criteria for social media brand storytelling of the study, it was important to investigate the concepts of social media brand storytelling and brand persona as the foundation of the study, including within a political context. An extensive literature review revealed that the philosophy underlying social media brand storytelling indicates that the current environment has led to a significant shift in political consumers' perceptions of issue ownership through brand storytelling. The literature further amplified that political parties must develop a credible party brand persona to add value to the political brand offering. Clear definitions of political brand, political brand

persona, and social media storytelling were formulated to demarcate these concepts in context. These key thrusts were favourable in the data and support these key concepts. What stood out in them was that all the participants of the expert interviews emphasised the importance thereof that tone, language, and purpose as elements of the brand voice need to work together to develop a social media political brand voice that the political consumers can share, engage with, and relate to. This was an important finding because it emphasised the importance of a political brand voice, as part of the political brand persona, on social media as it fulfils an important function in building an authentic online brand persona through social media storytelling.

8.2.2   Research Question 2

Research Question 2 – "How does one political brand use political brand storytelling on social media within the context of the theoretical criteria?" – addressed the focus point of this study, namely social media-based political brand storytelling. Chapter 1 explored the DA as a political brand. The literature review revealed two important issues. Firstly, it became clear that the DA explored several approaches to framing its brand stories. For example, the DA shared the brand's journey against apartheid and used storytelling to present its future in the political environment (Africa 2019; Jolobe 2014; Southern 2011). It was evident in the thematic analysis in Chapter 7 that social media-based political brand storytelling as a strategy was emphasised. The findings also indicate that the DA's brand's position on the issue will determine the type of story the DA brand will tell. To further the storytelling element, the data that emerged from the expert interviews clearly indicated that political parties use storytelling to frame political issues for political consumers. This is an important finding because there is a clear indication that political issue ownership will determine the type of story. However, the second point in the literature review alluded to the fact that the DA utilised "attack politics" (see Section 3.3.4.3) to point out the ANC's shortcomings, which led to the brand stories predominantly focusing on the ANC's lack of competence and integrity regarding political issues (Africa 2019; Gumede 2019; Anciano 2016). This was also recognised when analysing the data. The expert interviews raised an important issue in relation to using the "out-group" approach. The expert interview participants felt that in the current South African political environment it is not beneficial for the opposition party to build its campaigns on the failure of the opposition. This results in only taking associative ownership of the political issue, which refers to the perception the political consumers hold on how much the political party cares about the issue. It can thus be argued that social comparison leads to stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination against group members (as discussed in Section 4.10).

8.2.3   Research Question 3

To further address the main research problem, Research Question 3 was formulated as follows: "In what way could the political brand's political brand storytelling techniques on social media use online brand persona to represent political issues?" This was discussed in Chapters 3, 4, and 6. To answer this research question, it was firstly necessary to explain the concepts of online brand persona and social media-based political brand storytelling to ultimately identify possible elements for a conceptual framework, which was achieved in Chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3, firstly, conceptualised the concept of a political brand; secondly, it considered the key attributes of the political brand concepts; thirdly, it analysed political branding strategies with the focus on political brand storytelling; and, lastly, attention was paid to political issue ownership. Consequently, the data confirmed that the DA political brand used social media-based political brand storytelling to frame the political issues for its political consumers, and it therefore became clear that political issue ownership would determine the type of story.

Chapter 3 laid the foundation for Chapter 4, in which the concepts of social media and political brand storytelling were contextualised within digital media. Chapter 4 went on to present the use of political brand storytelling to frame political issues on social media platforms, which was confirmed within the data. The investigation, up to this point, included the knowledge gained through Research Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4, which provided an overall idea of possible elements that could be proposed for the conceptual framework for the role that an online political brand persona plays within a South African political brand context by qualitatively evaluating a political brand's social media-based political brand storytelling techniques. Possible elements were thus deductively identified, together with the theoretical perspectives explored in Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Chapter 6 dealt with the research methodology by clarifying the research paradigm, research design, and data-collection methods used to measure the proposed elements. The data-collection methods were then applied. PR agencies that were responsible for creating political parties' social media brand stories in South Africa were invited to participate in the study. Valuable contributions were made, which allowed for the measurement of the proposed elements. The deductive content analysis of the DA's Facebook and Twitter accounts confirmed that most of the elements were present.

8.2.4   Research Question 4

The final research question dealt with the main contribution of the study, namely to propose elements for a conceptual framework that political parties or PR agencies could apply when

creating social media-based political brand storytelling for a political brand. Research Question 4 was formulated as follows: "How can the proposed elements for a conceptual framework based on the study's findings be further refined to enhance a political brand's storytelling on social media through an online brand persona?" This question was based on all the insights collectively gained from the literature reviews in Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5. The initial elements of the conceptual framework were political brand, political brand strategy, social media brand voice, creating the in-group, and the online political brand persona (as indicated in Figure 8.1). The findings and interpretations from the empirical research discussed in Chapter 7 also added to the insights and the conceptual framework elements that were adapted (as indicated in Section 8.4). The proposed elements for an online political brand persona, from a social media-based political brand storytelling perspective, is then proposed with the specific aim of filling the existing void regarding the political context in South Africa.

The refined elements for the proposed conceptual framework, as based on the findings, are presented in the next section. This discussion is supplemented with the identification of specific considerations for political brand communication on social media. The discussion is arranged according to the literature review and the theoretical point of departure for the study, namely the social identity theory.

8.3 THE REFINED ELEMENTS FOR THE PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR A POLITICAL BRAND PERSONA ON SOCIAL MEDIA THROUGH POLITICAL BRAND STORYTELLING

The refined elements for the proposed conceptual framework discussed below represent a synthesis of the literature review and the empirical research through exploring the phenomenon of an online political brand persona. The refined elements of the conceptual framework represent how the particular concepts in the study connect, as flowing from the introduction, literature review, data analysis, to the conclusion of the research journey (Regoniel 2015).

The proposed elements for the conceptual framework were refined after careful analysis and interpretation of the findings in Chapter 7. This supports the interpretivism philosophy of the study, which appreciates that realities are fluid, as well as differences in the political offerings in the political sector (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2014). It is hoped that communication professionals would be able to implement the framework according to their clients' or the political party's political offering relating to the political issue presented. Consequently, it was

necessary to highlight the importance of political issue ownership in order to accommodate the online political brand persona. This is justified and explained in the section below.

The suggested framework is intended to guide communication professionals in their use of social media political brand storytelling when positioning the political issue through the online brand persona for the political consumer.

A noteworthy refinement of the framework relates to the concept of political issue ownership and the distinction between the associated dimension and the competence dimension of issue ownership. The associated dimension refers to the extent to which the issue is associated with the party, while the competence dimension refers to the perception of the ability to address the issue (Walgrave et al 2012; Van den Brug & Berkhout 2015) (as discussed in Sections 3.7 and 4.8). It is worth mentioning that both these dimensions carry equal weight when it comes to issue ownership.

The brand strategy uses network framing and social media political brand stories to engage with political consumers. The social media political brand stories need to take into consideration, firstly, the social media political brand voice; and, secondly, the online brand persona in order to position the political issue for the political consumers. It therefore creates an in-group for the political consumers that they can identify with. It must be stated that all these elements of the proposed conceptual framework had their genesis in the entire data-analysis process of this study.

These refined elements for the proposed conceptual framework are illustrated in Figure 8.1.

Element 1: Political brand is holistically represented by the political offering, which informs the political policies and determines the politicians' actions.

Element 2: Political issue ownership is divided into two subcategories: associated and competence dimensions.

The *associated dimension* of ownership: the extent to which the issue is associated with the party.

Competence dimension of issue ownership: the perception of the ability to address the issue.

Element 3: Political brand strategy, which includes:

Network framing of the issue

Social media political brand storytelling (the underdog, the quest, the journey, rags to riches, comedy, tragedy, and rebirth) in order to create emotional engagement and experience for political consumers to pull or push messages.

Element 4: Creating the in-group through creating social categories and a social identity that political consumers can identify with. The in-group can use social comparison (out-group) on political issues to influence the political consumer.

Element 5: Online political brand persona, which includes the human emotions given to the brand and the brand voice to create an association in the political consumer's mind.

Figure 8.1: Revised proposed elements for the conceptual framework based on the findings

8.4   VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE REVISED ELEMENTS OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 8.2 is a visual representation of the revised proposed elements of the conceptual framework. The visual depiction is followed by a concise overview of the different elements of the framework.
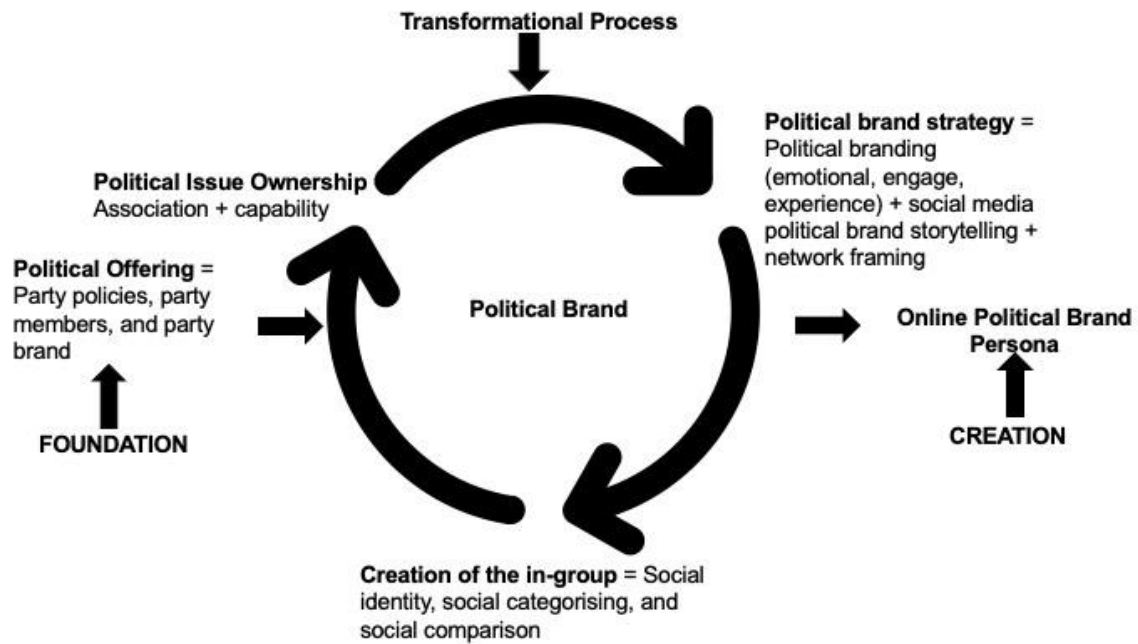
Figure 8.2: A visual depiction of the proposed conceptual framework for the online political brand persona from a social media political brand storytelling perspective

A concise overview of the visual depiction of the proposed conceptual framework for online political brand persona from a social media-base political brand storytelling perspective of the different elements is provided in the next section.

8.4.1 A concise overview of the visual representation of the revised proposed elements for the conceptual framework

The foundation of the conceptual framework is represented as a system, as Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy's (2007) definition (as adopted for this study in Section 3.3.1) illustrates that the political offering forms an integral part of the political brand because of the political party's inter-dependability. Strong evidence of a system approach was evident in the expert interviews, which suggested that the elements of the proposed framework are inter-dependable and interconnected. To illustrate: *"It depends on where the brand stands on the issue, the brand can decide from which angle to tell their story."* These findings were further supported by the literature discussion on issue ownership (see Section 4.8), which referred to the interconnected environment in which political consumers draw from various sources of information to form an opinion on an issue. The proposed elements for the conceptual framework thus consist of three elements, namely the foundation, the transformational process, and the creation. The proposed elements for this framework should be a unified system that is fluid because of the nature of the political environment. The researcher therefore acknowledges that all the functions and activities are interrelated and can impact

one another. The elements of this framework are also subject to constant change because of the nature of the political environment. The elements of the framework consist of the foundation (political offering), transformational processes (political issue ownership, political brand strategy, and creating the in-group), and the creation (online political brand persona). As stated earlier, as in line with the literature review, the proposed framework was based on the political brand, which is represented as the core of the framework. The political offering is presented as the foundation and input into the framework. The reasoning is that political parties must consider the following: firstly, the party's policies regarding the issue; secondly, the politicians as a tangible service offering on the issue; and, lastly, the party's political brand philosophy on the issue. With regard to this element, it is important to decide which approach (house of brands or branded house) the political brand would like to make use of when positioning the issue for political consumers.

The transformational process was an unexpected finding in the data. The data suggest that this process must be carefully designed to ensure that the political brand engages the political customer and therefore ultimately meets the political party's objective of framing the issues using the online political brand persona for the political consumer. In the transformational process, there are three elements that interrelate, namely political issue ownership, the political brand strategy, and creating the in-group. The first element, namely political issue ownership, needs to consider how political consumers view the party's ability to deal with the issue in relation to the association dimension and the capability dimension. This is important to determine because this will impact the rest of the transformational process. The empirical data confirmed that it depends on both the political offering and how it translates to issue ownership and that the political brand can use both these approaches to frame the issue for the political consumers through the brand strategy (social media-based political brand storytelling) and the creation of the in-group.

Concerning the second element, the political brand strategy, the ultimate goal is to frame the political party brand favourably with regard to the political issue at hand. The empirical findings confirmed that, through using network framing and social media-based political brand stories, the political brand can frame political issues for the political consumers. The political brand strategies were dealt with in the preceding literature chapters and form the foundation of the proposed elements for the conceptual framework. Social media-based political brand stories, as part of the political brand strategy, must consider the concept of issue ownership when choosing what type of story to tell. These stories then need to consider the 3 Es the political consumer will experience when reading these stories on Facebook and Twitter. The last element, creating an in-group for political consumers to identify with and that they feel they belong to, is important for the political party brand to pull

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the political consumer to social media-based political brand stories to feel a sense of belonging with the group and hence wanting to engage with the political brand.

The final element is the creation, which encapsulates the online political brand persona. The researcher then departs from the view that the transformational process elements ultimately impact the success of the online political brand persona. There needs to be synergy between all the elements in the transformational process and in the online political brand persona to come across as an authentic brand. The empirical findings indicated that the type of human emotions and the brand voice need to fit the type of story the online brand persona is telling. This will enable the brand to create an association in the mind of political consumers by, firstly, expectations they can have regarding the political offering; secondly, framing the perceptions and associations for them through the type of stories the online brand persona tells; and, lastly creating positive experiences with the online brand persona for the political consumers.

It is firstly important to acknowledge that feedback from the political consumer is important for the political brand because the framework is fluid and it consists of various elements that are interrelated and that can impact one another. Secondly, the political environment is not a static environment and the political brand therefore needs to be able to respond to the constantly changing political environment.

8.5   CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

It was envisaged in Chapter 1 that the primary contribution of this study would be in the fields of brand management and political communication in South Africa in particular.

The main contribution of this study is the formulation of the revised proposed elements for the conceptual framework to guide communication professionals in their use of social media-based political brand storytelling when positioning political issues through their online brand personas for political consumers. The study could therefore be extended from the communication science discipline and successfully integrate elements from another discipline into a comprehensive framework, namely political communication. For the communication science discipline, the brand communication field of study was the focus.

The next section emphasises the contribution of the study on a theoretical level.

8.5.1 Theoretical contributions

The following theoretical contributions were made by this study:

Firstly, this study has successfully integrated branding concepts (brand strategy and brand persona) with political concepts (political offering and political issue ownership) and in doing so proposed a unique and useful conceptual framework that adds a novel view to the existing body of literature.

The second theoretical contribution is the newly coined concept of social media-based political brand storytelling, which provides more knowledge on how political brands can tell their stories on social media. This point was debated in the literature review in Section 4.7. Furthermore, the literature indicated that the social media-based political brand story can contextualise political issues for political consumers and can open a way for a more rational debate. As illustrated empirically, the theme of social media political brand storytelling resonance has emerged from the semi-structured expert interviews. The participants pointed out that the political stories on social media need to resonate with the political consumers, but, more importantly, the stories need to be authentic. The concept of social media-based political brand storytelling as a strategy was evident in the deductive qualitative content analysis. Social media-based political brand storytelling as a strategy alludes to the fact that the political brand's position on an issue will determine the type of story the brand tells, and that was evident in the DA's tweets and Facebook posts.

Another important theoretical contribution of this study is the contribution to the limited repository of South African and African literature on the topic of the online political brand persona. Furthermore, few studies have endeavoured to explore the creation of an online political brand persona through social media-based political brand storytelling. Not only does this study address the South African and African literature deficiency, but it also adds to the body of social media research involving South African political parties. However, more importantly, is the fact that the study's findings and the refined elements for the conceptual framework can be tested in non-African settings because social media is not restricted by any type of physical border.

Several new discoveries were also made to add to the literature. There was strong evidence of a system approach in the expert interviews, which suggested that the elements of the proposed framework are inter-dependable and interconnected, as discussed in Section 8.4.1. The new theoretical contributions that the study adds are thus the three elements of the foundation (political offering), the transformational process (political issue ownership, political brand strategy, and creating the in-group), and the creation of an online political

brand persona. The elements of the framework are in constant change, because of the fluid nature of the political environment. The transformational process can be seen as the core element that needs to be carefully designed to ensure that the political brand engages the political customer and therefore ultimately meets the political party's objective of framing issues using the online political brand persona for political consumers (as discussed in Section 8.4.1).This framework adds academic value to the existing current traditional models, which do not fit neatly for campaigning in the new age of social media.

Lastly, the findings of this study will not only stimulate more academic debate on the topic but will also encourage further testing of the revised proposed elements for the conceptual framework by other scholars.

8.5.2   Practical contributions

This section highlights the most pertinent practical contributions of the study.

The conceptual framework contributes to the communication practice in the political sector by providing guidelines on how to link the party offering to the online political brand persona, and using social media-based brand storytelling to frame political issues for political consumers. The study also provided insight into what types of stories to tell for framing political issue for political consumers. For example, the study put forward the idea that political brands can create more meaningful messages around a political issue if the messages are centred around the online brand persona, as set out in the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework can therefore become heuristic to communication professionals responsible for creating social media-based content for political parties in that the framework can guide them to successfully frame political issues through the online brand persona for the political consumer, thereby assisting them to make more sense of their political environment.

The study also highlighted the uniqueness of the political sector in terms of telling brand stories, namely to take into consideration the issue of ownership when choosing what type of social media-based political brand stories to tell. These stories must also consider the emotions, level of engagement, and experiences of the political consumers who will read these stories on Facebook and Twitter. The study also highlighted that the political environment is constantly changing and communication professionals must therefore always evaluate the political brand stories that they tell and be able to respond to the changing environment.

As the political field migrates more towards the digital space, there will be added pressure from a South African point of view on how to best use this space for political parties to position themselves toward political consumers.

8.6   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although the study contributes towards research on the overall topic of online political brand persona, certain limitations must be considered. The study has the following limitations:

- The researcher acknowledges that political parties use a plethora of social media platforms to reach their political consumers. Social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, blogs, and other platforms should therefore not be discarded. This study only focused on the DA's Facebook and Twitter posts.
- This study was a single-country, single-party, cross-sectional study. The data are thus not representative of all South Africa's political parties and can therefore not be generalised to other political parties. However, it must be emphasised that the study was exploratory in nature and the objective was therefore not to generalise the findings, nor to seek external validity.

8.7   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In terms of future studies, research could include more political parties to open further opportunities for debate on the topic. This study only considered the main opposition party in South Africa and data should also be collected from broader party research. The following recommendations for further research are made:

- Owing to the ambiguous nature of social media and political branding, there is potential for further in-depth research on the relationship between these concepts and the possibility of applying them to the South African context.
- While the visual analysis was not part of the scope of this study, future studies could include both textual and visual analysis of the Facebook and Twitter posts for greater depth.
- Furthermore, the role of fake news should be probed more because of the potential impact on the online political brand persona and the political consumer.
- It is also recommended that quantitative research should be conducted on ways that the conceptual framework could be adapted to specifically accommodate other digital media platforms.
- Lastly, the revised elements for the conceptual framework must be rigorously tested among more political parties in future studies using different methodologies.

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ADDENDA

Addendum A: Interview Schedule

Semi-structured expert interviews with public relations (PR) agencies

Before the interview

The researcher will personally make contact with the PR agencies that are responsible for the social media of the various political parties in South Africa. The purpose of the study will be explained to the participant, and the researcher will email a consent form to the participant to complete before the interview will be scheduled.

During the interview

The researcher will ask the participant permission to record the interview, in order for the researcher to transcribe the data. The researcher will also take notes during the interview.

The questions asked in the interview will be informed by the proposed elements of the framework for the study. These elements are political brand, political brand strategy, political brand voice, political consumer, and political brand persona.

Semi-structured interview questions

1. Introductory questions:
    a. Please tell me shortly about your position within the agency.
    b. How long have you been responsible for creating social media content?

2. Questions around *political brand*:
    a. Would you describe your client as a brand? If not, why not?
    b. When creating content for your client on social media, do you consider the political party's view(s) on the issue?
    c. When creating social media content, do you take into consideration the end users' view on the issue?

3. Questions around *political brand strategy*:
    a. When creating social media content for your client, would you describe your approach to content as communication centred?
    b. How would you describe your approach to branding your client on social media?
    c. Do you feel that the party identity guides your social media content?

d. Do you use storytelling as a technique to convey content on social media? If not, why not?

e. What types of stories do you tell on social media?

f. Do you think there is a link between the type of issue that you are driving and the type of story you are telling?

g. Do you think that by telling social media political brand stories, the end user will understand the content better?

h. Do you think that by telling social media political brand stories, the end user will remember the content better?

i. Do you think that by telling social media political brand stories, the end user will act on content better?

j. How do you measure your social media political brand stories?

4. Questions on *political brand voice*:

a. When creating your social media political brand stories, do you consider the *political brand voice* in terms of:

   i. Persona
   ii. Tone
   iii. The type of language you use
   iv. The purpose

b. Do you feel that the *political brand voice* is static? Or does it depend on the political issue?

c. If the *political brand voice* is driven by the political issue, can you explain to me how you decide which voices go with which issue?

5. Questions on *creating the in-group* (the concept will be explained to the interviewee):

a. Do you feel that the political consumer places pressure on political parties for information?

b. Do you think your social media political brand stories help the political brand consumer associate with the party?

c. Do you think your social media political brand stories help the political brand consumer to identify with the political party's brand persona?

d. Do you think your social media political brand stories help the political brand consumer to compare political issues with the opposition?

6. Questions on *political brand persona*:
    a. In your social media political brand stories that you tell, do you give your brand human emotions?
    b. If you have to choose a human emotion that describes your client's brand, what would it be and why?
    c. Do you feel that creating a political brand persona strengthens the position of the political brand in the mind of the political consumer?
    d. Do you feel that creating a political brand persona creates a uniqueness for the political consumer to link the political party's brand persona meaningfully to what the brand represents?
    e. Do you think that because a political party has a brand persona, that it creates certain expectations from the political consumer?
    f. How do you, as the agency for the political party, evaluate how the current brand persona is being perceived?
    g. How do you measure what type of contact or engagement the political consumers have with the political brand persona?

After the interview

The researcher will ask the participant if he/she would like to add any additional comments. The researcher will then thank the participant for his/her time and input.

Addendum B: Example of Zoom Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____, confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, and potential benefits of participating in this research, as well as anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or it was explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publication(s), and/or conference proceeding(s), but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the interview via Zoom due to COVID-19 restrictions.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant name & surname……………………………………… (please print)

Participant signature……………………………………….. Date…………………

Researcher's name & surname: Helena van Wyk

Researcher's signature:　　　　　　　　　　　Date: 29 July 2020

Addendum C: Chapter 7 Findings

Table C1: Summary of subcategories and codes for Category 1: Higher and basic education in South Africa

Subcategories	Removal of the Minister of Higher Education	Funding by the Department of Higher Education	Selling education positions
CODE: POLITICAL OFFERING'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA			
Politicians	57%	76%	56%
Policy	0%	8%	0%
Party	43%	16%	44%
CODE: POLITICAL BRAND STRATEGY'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA			
Network framing	100%	29%	69%
Type of post: Poster	15%	0%	23%
Type of post: Speech	0%	0%	0%
Type of post: YouTube link	9%	29%	0%
Type of post: Press statement	3%	29%	0%
Type of post: Website link	74%	29%	30%
Emotional: Images	49%	20%	53%
Engage: Likes, shares, comments	52%	80%	30%
Experience: Marked as favourite	50%	20%	46%
Stories: The quest	26%	0%	0%
Stories: The underdog	66%	78%	0%
Stories: Tragedy	0%	20%	46%
Stories: Journey	0%	0%	0%
No stories	8%	2%	34%
CODE: SOCIAL MEDIA POLITICAL BRAND VOICE'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA			
Tone: Personal	37%	29%	15%
Tone: Honest	29%	18%	30%
Tone: Direct	0%	29%	0%
Language: Simple	34%	14%	0%
Language: Serious	54%	57%	46%
Language: Scientific	5%	0%	0%
Language: Jargon	3%	29%	0%
Purpose: Engage	17%	18%	0%
Purpose: Inform	37%	35%	34%
Purpose: Educate	3%	7%	0%
Purpose: Amplify	43%	40%	46%
CODE: CREATING THE IN-GROUP'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA			
Social categorising	23%	24%	23%
Social identification	27%	32%	31%
Social comparison	50%	44%	46%
CODE: ONLINE POLITICAL BRAND PERSONA'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA			
Authoritative	5%	7%	8%
Inspiring	25%	29%	0%
Anticipation	13%	13%	8%
Professional	11%	12%	10%
Anger	10%	23%	23%
Caring	0%	16%	0%
Warm	0%	0%	0%
Expectations	23%	22%	15%
Perceptions	53%	53%	41%
Experience: Let us know	0%	0%	0%
Experience: Share	10%	16%	0%

Table C2: Summary of subcategories and codes for Category 2: Employment crisis in South Africa

Subcategories	The DA's plan to create jobs	The DA's vision 2029	The DA's call for change
CODE: POLITICAL OFFERING'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA			
Politicians	37%	63%	63%
Policy	20%	2%	4%
Party	43%	35%	33%
CODE: POLITICAL BRAND STRATEGY'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA			
Network framing	45%	80%	10%
Type of post: Poster	55%	30%	23%
Type of post: Speech	0%	0%	20%
Type of post: YouTube link	25%	45%	33%
Type of post: Press statement	0%	0%	10%
Type of post: Website link	100%	100%	30%
Emotional: Images	76%	73%	33%
Engage: Likes, shares, comments	80%	80%	82%
Experience: Marked as favourite	20%	10%	33%
Stories: The quest	46%	0%	25%
Stories: The underdog	34%	0%	0%
Stories: Tragedy	0%	0%	0%
Stories: Journey	0%	100%	75%
CODE: SOCIAL MEDIA POLITICAL BRAND VOICE'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA			
Tone: Personal	37%	45%	54%
Tone: Honest	19%	25%	20%
Tone: Direct	10%	30%	26%
Language: Simple	46%	43%	440%
Language: Serious	54%	57%	56%
Language: Scientific	0%	0%	0%
Language: Jargon	0%	0%	0%
Purpose: Engage	34%	18%	0%
Purpose: Inform	23%	35%	34%
Purpose: Educate	0%	17%	0%
Purpose: Amplify	43%	40%	56%
CODE: CREATING THE IN-GROUP'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA			
Social categorising	23%	30%	43%
Social identification	27%	62%	64%
Social comparison	50%	8%	24%
CODE: ONLINE POLITICAL BRAND PERSONA'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA			
Authoritative	0%	7%	8%
Inspiring	25%	29%	45%
Anticipation	23%	13%	18%
Professional	10%	10%	25%
Anger	0%	0%	0%
Caring	20%	34%	0%
Warmth	22%	27%	26%
Expectations	43%	44%	33%
Perceptions	57%	56%	67%
Experience: Let us know	0%	0%	0%
Experience: Share	34%	16%	0%

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Table C3: Summary of subcategories and codes for Category 3: Racist attitudes in South Africa

Subcategories	The DA standing up against racism	The DA distancing itself from racism
CODE: POLITICAL OFFERING'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA		
Politicians	42%	63%
Policy	15%	2%
Party	43%	35%
CODE: POLITICAL BRAND STRATEGY'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA		
Network framing	100%	100%
Type of post: Poster	75%	62%
Type of post: Speech	0%	4%
Type of post: YouTube link	0%	0%
Type of post: Press statement	0%	0%
Type of post: Website link	100%	100%
Emotional: Images	36%	0%
Engage: Likes, shares, comments	80%	80%
Experience: Marked as favourite	20%	10%
Stories: The quest	0%	73%
Stories: The underdog	0%	0%
Stories: Tragedy	76%	0%
Stories: Journey	0%	100%
CODE: SOCIAL MEDIA POLITICAL BRAND VOICE'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA		
Tone: Personal	57%	60%
Tone: Honest	10%	20%
Tone: Direct	33%	20%
Language: Simple	46%	43%
Language: Serious	54%	57%
Language: Scientific	0%	0%
Language: Jargon	0%	0%
Purpose: Engage	34%	18%
Purpose: Inform	23%	45%
Purpose: Educate	0%	20%
Purpose: Amplify	43%	35%
CODE: CREATING THE IN-GROUP'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA		
Social categorising	51%	30%
Social identification	37%	62%
Social comparison	12%%	8%
CODE: ONLINE POLITICAL BRAND PERSONA'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA		
Authoritative	30%	37%
Inspiring	25%	30%
Anticipation	27%	13%
Professional	10%	10%
Anger	0%	0%
Caring	20%	34%
Warmth	22%	27%
Expectations	57%	44%
Perceptions	43%	56%
Experience: Let us know	0%	0%
Experience: Share	34%	16%

Table C4: Summary of subcategories and codes of Category 4: The Zuma saga

Subcategories	Zuma accused of racketeering	Zuma using public funds for personal gain in the form of Nkandla	Zuma not seen to be fit to act as the president of South Africa
CODE: POLITICAL OFFERING'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA			
Politicians	20%	18%	16%
Policy	17%	18%	18%
Party	63%	64%	66%
CODE: POLITICAL BRAND STRATEGY'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA			
Network framing	100%	0%	100%
Type of post: Poster	54%	100%	60%
Type of post: Speech	10%	0%	2%
Type of post: YouTube link	21%	0%	2%
Type of post: Press statement	15%	0%	0%
Type of post: Website link	54%	80%	80%
Emotional: Images	36%	50%	60%
Engage: Likes, shares, comments	80%	80%	58%
Experience: Marked as favourite	20%	10%	15%
Stories: The quest	0%	10%	15%
Stories: Tragedy	76%	8%	15%
Stories: The underdog	0%	77%	70%
Stories: Journey	14%	5%	0%
CODE: SOCIAL MEDIA POLITICAL BRAND VOICE'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA			
Tone: Personal	27%	40%	44%
Tone: Honest	29%	25%	20%
Tone: Direct	44%	34%	36%
Language: Simple	56%	50%	55%
Language: Serious	44%	48%	45%
Language: Scientific	0%	0%	0%
Language: Jargon	0%	2%	0%
Purpose: Engage	7%	15%	44%
Purpose: Inform	37%	24%	20%
Purpose: Educate	13%	15%	13%
Purpose: Amplify	43%	56%	34%
CODE: CREATING THE IN-GROUP'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA			
Social categorising	23%	20%	24%
Social identification	22%	20%	20%
Social comparison	55%	60%	66%
CODE: ONLINE POLITICAL BRAND PERSONA'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA			
Authoritative	5%	30%	40%
Inspiring	25%	15%	22%
Anticipation	13%	22%	22%
Professional	11%	25%	25%
Anger	10%	15%	15%
Expectations	33%	30%	44%
Perceptions	43%	44%	23%
Let us know	14%	10%	8%
Share	10%	16%	10%

Table C5: Summary of subcategories and codes of Category 5: Energy issues in South Africa

Subcategories	Reforming the energy sector	Nuclear deal
CODE: POLITICAL OFFERING'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA		
Politicians	57%	46%
Policy	0%	18%
Party	43%	36%
CODE: POLITICAL BRAND STRATEGY'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA		
Network framing	10%	10%
Type of post: Poster	35%	2%
Type of post: Speech	20%	10%
Type of post: YouTube link	9%	29%
Type of post: Press statement	13%	40%
Type of post: Website link	74%	100%
Emotional: Images	5%	1%
Engage: Likes, shares, comments	72%	80%
Experience: Marked as favourite	30%	20%
Stories: The quest	73%	32%
Stories: The underdog	13%	68%
Stories: Tragedy	0%	0%
Stories: Journey	14%	0%
CODE: SOCIAL MEDIA POLITICAL BRAND VOICE'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA		
Tone: Personal	37%	29%
Tone: Honest	13%	18%
Tone: Direct	62%	29%
Language: Simple	34%	40%
Language: Serious	54%	57%
Language: Scientific	5%	0%
Language: Jargon	3%	3%
Purpose: Engage	10%	10%
Purpose: Inform	47%	35%
Purpose: Educate	3%	7%
Purpose: Amplify	43%	48%
CODE: CREATING THE IN-GROUP'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA		
Social categorising	40%	24%
Social identification	47%	32%
Social comparison	23%	44%
CODE: ONLINE POLITICAL BRAND PERSONA'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA		
Authoritative	35%	37%
Inspiring	5%	29%
Anticipation	15%	13%
Professional	21%	22%
Anger	2%	0%
Caring	5%	9%
Warm	0%	0%
Expectations	23%	22%
Perceptions	53%	63%
Experience: Let us know	0%	0%
Experience: Share	10%	0%

Table C6: Summary of Category 6: Economical downgrading of South Africa

Subcategories	A fragile South African economy
CODE: POLITICAL OFFERING'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA	
Politicians	57%
Policy	0%
Party	43%
CODE: POLITICAL BRAND STRATEGY'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA	
Network framing	20%
Type of post: Poster	0%
Type of post: Speech	9%
Type of post: YouTube link	11%
Type of post: Press statement	6%
Type of post: Website link	74%
Emotional: Images	5%
Engage: Likes, shares, comments	72%
Experience: Marked as favourite	30%
Stories: The quest	6%
Stories: The underdog	76%
Stories: Tragedy	8%
Stories: Journey	0%
CODE: SOCIAL MEDIA POLITICAL BRAND VOICE'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA	
Tone: Personal	37%
Tone: Honest	29%
Language: Simple	34%
Language: Serious	54%
Language: Scientific	5%
Language: Jargon	3%
Purpose: Engage	17%
Purpose: Inform	37%
Purpose: Educate	3%
Purpose: Amplify	43%
CODE: CREATING THE IN-GROUP'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA	
Social categorising	27%
Social identification	5%
Social comparison	68%
CODE: ONLINE POLITICAL BRAND PERSONA'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA	
Authoritative	25%
Inspiring	5%
Anticipation	13%
Professional	11%
Anger	10%
Expectations	13%
Perceptions	13%
Let us know	0%
Share	0%

Table C7: Summary of Category 7: Water issue in South Africa

Subcategories	The DA brand delivers
CODE: POLITICAL OFFERING'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA	
Politicians	57%
Policy	10%
Party	33%
CODE: POLITICAL BRAND STRATEGY'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA	
Network framing	100%
Type of post: Poster	60%
Type of post: Speech	1%
Type of post: YouTube link	20%
Type of post: Press statement	17%
Type of post: Website link	84%
Emotional: Images	45%
Engage: Likes, shares, comments	88%
Experience: Marked as favourite	34%
Stories: The quest	16%
Stories: The underdog	18%
Stories: Journey	66%
Stories: Tragedy	0%
CODE: SOCIAL MEDIA POLITICAL BRAND VOICE'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA	
Tone: Personal	77%
Tone: Honest	23%
Language: Simple	64%
Language: Serious	24%
Language: Scientific	0%
Language: Jargon	12%
Purpose: Engage	8%
Purpose: Inform	37%
Purpose: Educate	10%
Purpose: Amplify	45%
CODE: CREATING THE IN-GROUP'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA	
Social categorising	23%
Social identification	37%
Social comparison	58%
CODE: ONLINE POLITICAL BRAND PERSONA'S REPRESENTATION IN DATA	
Authoritative	35%
Inspiring	25%
Anticipation	13%
Professional	11%
Anger	10%
Expectations	33%
Perceptions	43%
Let us know	0%
Share	0%

Addendum D: University of South Africa's (UNISA) Ethical Clearance Certificate

UNISA COMMUNICATION SCIENCE ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date 03 July 2020

Dear Ms Helena van Wyk

NHREC Registration #: Rec-240816-052

ERC Reference # :2020-COMMSCIENCE-CHS-58558942

Name: H van Wyk

Student/Staff #: 58558942

Decision:
Ethics Approval from 03 July 2020 to 04 July 2025

Researcher(s): Ms Helena van Wyk

Supervisor (s): Prof Charmaine du Plessis

Department of Communication Science

University of South Africa

dplestc@unisa.ac.za

012 429 6525

Working title of research:

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR POLITICAL BRAND PERSONA WITHIN SOCIAL MEDIA FROM A BRAND STORYTELLING PERSPECTIVE

Qualification: PhD in Communication

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by Department of Communication Science Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for five years.

The **low risk application** was **reviewed** by the Departmental Ethics Review Committee on **25 June 2020** in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment. The decision was tabled at the Committee meeting on **03 July 2020** for approval.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.

2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the **Communication Science Ethics Review Committee**.

3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.

4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.

6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance.

7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date (**04 July 2025**). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number **2020-COMMSCIENCE-CHS-58558942** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Signature :

SM MFUPHI

Mr Siyabonga M Mfuphi

Ethics Chair :

Communication Science Ethics Review Committee

E-mail: mfuphsm@unisa.ac.za

Tel: (012) 429-6661

Signature :

EEN DUBE

Dr Elijah EN Dube

Ethics Chair : CREC

E-mail : Dubeeen@unisa.ac.za

Tel: (012) 429 3892

URERC 25.04.17 - Decision template (V2) - Approve