A comparative case study of the strategic internet communication of one local and one international contemporary organisation

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Abstract:

The following study was a comparative case study of the strategic internet communication of one local and one international contemporary organisation. The study was conducted in order to assess the strategic online communication of two organisations operating in retail, in different regions. The study sought to evaluate the ways in which the respective organisations seemingly wished to position themselves towards stakeholders and shareholders of the organisations.

The population of the study involved any form of strategic internet-based communication produced by, or about, the chosen organisations. The data collection method for the study was that of desk research, a form of secondary research. Data analysis was conducted by means of content analysis. Interpreted findings noted that both organisations similarly communicated their consumer/customer consideration, their environmental and social consciousness in stated procedures and policies as well as their proud traditions, growth and market leadership.

The study aimed to contribute to the strategic organisational communication body of knowledge by employing a comparative case study for structuration of findings. Positioning theory was applied as a theoretical framework through which to view the data and underpin findings. Future studies may seek to combine the use of case studies and positioning theory to analyse strategic communication.

Contents:

1.   Introduction:

1.1.   Title:

A comparative case study of the strategic internet communication of one local and one international contemporary organisation.

1.2.   Contextualisation and rationale:

The following study is conducted as a comparative case study of the online communication strategy of one local and one international contemporary organisation. Two organisations that are currently operating in the industry of retail are specifically analysed and compared. The study aims to compare the internet communication strategy and output of the selected local/international organisations in order to note similarities and/or differences between the two in relation to their online communication approaches. The organisations analysed are Woolworths (Woolworths Holdings Limited) in the South African context and Walmart (Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.) in the American context.

The theoretical framework for the study is positioning theory. This theory is used as a lens to compare the two organisations' internet communication strategies and output. The study is conducted through analysis of organisational documents and literature that includes: Corporate websites of the respective organisations; documents online pertaining to the organisations published by parties other than the organisations themselves, such as employee reviews; selected social media accounts of the chosen organisations. While other sources that are deemed relevant to the topic or problem being researched are also consulted, they are not included as they are seemingly superfluous in terms of the level of organisational communication analysis conducted.

Important to note is the fact that the organisations analysed operate in different countries and, thus, different communication contexts. While the world as a whole is rapidly changing, the use of new technologies, such as the internet, differs from one country or context to the next. Shin (2009) states, globalisation is an inescapable feature of the world today yet globalisation is a good opportunity for some countries, while for other countries it is not. Through assessing internet communications and permeable boundaries brought about by globalisation, closer analysis of organisational operations across borders, or within their own, as well as how they utilise the internet in this global age, is analysed.

Imperative, too, is to analyse organisations in different countries so as to assess differences or similarities in organisational operations and societal expectations and perceptions as well. In noting similarities and differences between organisations in developing and developed regions of the world there are many benefits. Practitioners and academics may gain a greater sense of the importance of strategic organisational communication in relation to stakeholders and society at large. This is relative to the study of businesses and their related communicative operations in a global sense, especially in the age of the internet and globalisation.

There has been a shift from organisations in most industries from more traditional methods to include online forms of strategic communication. There has also been closer strategic consideration, in contemporary terms, as to which online forms and platforms to utilise. Heath (2013) affirms this utilisation of online media technologies in stating that online public relations supplements traditional public relations tools through the deployment of the internet and mobile wireless technologies. These technologies often fall under the banner of 'Web 2.0' and are used in order to manage communications, to advocate for client interests and to establish and maintain mutually beneficial organisational-public relationships. Croteau and Hoynes (2014) reaffirm this line of thought in stating that commercial content providers, and ordinary citizens took greater advantage of the technological capacities of the internet in light of the formation of 'Web 2.0'.

An emphasis here lies in the notion of mutual benefit – some organisations may seek to provide benefits for themselves by aiding stakeholder engagement through online communication, thus audiences viewing or hearing these forms of communication should judge them in accordance with the mutuality of benefits found therein. Therefore, for this online form of communication to be effective, the organisation must produce messages that are authentic, which will in turn produce authentic responses from audiences on these platforms. In order to gauge organisational communication authenticity and effectiveness, the chosen theoretical framework of positioning is a sound starting point. The theory takes an integrative approach to communication analysis in that it aids analysis through the lens of the 'positioning triangle', which promotes discourse and understanding through assigned meaning in relation to societal constructions of language and symbolism.

The organisations, one from South Africa and one from America, are investigated in this study. The key questions that are asked are: How do the local and international contemporary organisations position themselves through internet based communication? What similarities and differences can be seen between the local and international company? What do the findings indicate about the local and international organisations and contexts?

A comparative case study of the chosen organisations in relation to their internet communication strategies is employed. The result of this is a discussion of themes and patterns that underpinned the internet communication strategies of each organisation. The bottom line of this analysis relates to a thought posited by James (2014) in saying that communication is viewed as successful if the receiver identifies the attitude expressed in the way the speaker intends him or her to identify it. While this may seem a simplistic form of deduction in reference to communication, it is through the efforts of positioning that this is deemed a strategic goal. A large aim of organisational communication is overall stakeholder understanding and satisfaction.

The term 'public relations' has multiple meanings and conflicting interpretations. By applying analysis of organisational internet-based communication through the lens of positioning theory, a greater understanding of how, why and in what ways specific organisations communicate in relation to their targeted audiences can be obtained. James (2014) postulates that positioning theory provides links into the wider field of communication, and potentially other academic areas, which therefore fosters multidisciplinary approaches to research projects. Applying a detailed theoretical framework to a specific comparison of organisational communication practice may produce insight in areas of communication practice and audience expectations or perceptions.

Zelle (2009) states that positioning theory can capture a detailed picture of change and provide better understanding due to attention to contexts. Positioning theory allows consideration for multiple levels of social analysis, relative to people, institutions and society. It is important to utilise such a framework in order to assess markets and contexts that differ in some ways, in order to provide an analysis that is greater in uniformity as far as its approach and structure is concerned.

Insight is also gained in terms of organisational strategy in line with contemporary organisations and their motives which are often driven by profit expectations – a concept that Wilkins (2015) notes in stating that many people see the bottom line as a measure of success. It is these expectations that influence communication practices, most notably on the internet, where mass audiences are engaged with in various ways to seek satisfactory ends on the part of the organisation.

1.3.   Problem statement:

Public relations is a tool used by organisations for different reasons. These include managing stakeholders, attracting investment and communicating organisational values and positions. The omnipresent notion of public relations is the presence of

communication. Cornelissen (2014) states that contemporary organisations increasingly realise the need to communicate with their stakeholders to develop and protect their reputations. Reputation here has a close link to the position(s) an organisation would like to assert or maintain – a positive image that will realise benefits for the organisation and its stakeholders. The form(s) these communication efforts take is dependent on context and targeted audience of an organisation. The importance of efficient communication, however it may occur, is clear.

Organisations naturally operate in different countries, industries and with different objectives in mind, so their approaches to communication may differ. Alternatively, being in similar industries, some organisations approaches may indeed be similar. Important here is the industrial variations in terms of the organisation and its environment, its audience and the available channels for communicating. Another consideration in different countries involves legislation and communication ethics – what may be legal and/or acceptable in one country may not be in another. In looking at the South African and American contexts, the factors of legislation and ethics become clearer are present. However, most pertinent to the study is the manner in which the organisation in either context seeks to position themselves by means of their internet-based communications.

Globalisation, brought about by the development of the internet and its later form of 'Web 2.0' means that organisations are using the internet in new ways to communicate and engage with audiences. 'Web 2.0' has marked an era where people aren't just using the internet as a tool anymore – they are becoming a part of it. This participation correlates with the choice of theory for the study of internet-based communications. Positioning theory postulates a closer analysis of organisational communication from the perspective that communication between organisations and audiences is more discursive in nature and that organisational positions are more fluid in nature than previously thought. Organisations, more than ever, realise the value of an electronic footprint in terms of business practices such as communication.

The fluidity of an organisation's position in the mind of audiences is greater due to the development of 'Web 2.0' and its elements of more interactive corporate websites and organisational social media accounts. These participative forms of communication allow for greater audience insight and feedback, which adds complexity to the communication field. The choice by the chosen organisations on which forms of internet-based communication to utilise is both important as well as symbolic, as it highlights their strategic communicative intent.

Positioning theory is said to be a more inclusive and multidisciplinary approach to public relations. Through analysing corporate websites, social media accounts and organisational reviews online, greater insight is gained about the organisations. Insight is also gained in relation to the broader ways in which organisational communication occurs online in attempts at positioning and reputation garnering. By analysing two particular organisation's communication efforts on specific platforms and channels through a theoretical lens, comparisons are drawn so as to provide greater knowledge of organisational communication and positioning. This is a necessary endeavour, given that "positioning is often used in public relations contexts but it has been very under researched given its ubiquitous use in practice" (James, 2014, p 15).

1.4. Purpose statement:

The purpose of this study is to compare the strategic internet communication of one contemporary local and one contemporary international organisation using a case study design.

1.5. Research questions:

- How does a contemporary local organisation position itself through the use of internet-based communication?

- How does a contemporary international organisation position itself through the use of internet-based communication?
- What similarities and/or differences can be seen between the contemporary local organisation and contemporary international organisation?
- What do the findings indicate in terms of the local and international contexts of the organisations being studied?

1.6. Research objectives:

- The use of a case study design to highlight the similarities and/or differences in contemporary organisational communication and positioning practices.
- How does a contemporary local organisation compare to a contemporary international organisation in terms of the way(s) they seek to position themselves through their strategic internet communication?
- What channels or platforms of online communication do the contemporary local and contemporary international organisations use or not use?
- What position does the chosen contemporary local organisation seemingly wish to take?
- What position does the contemporary international organisation seemingly wish to take?

2. <u>Literature Review:</u>

2.1. Strategic communication context:

William E. Rothschild (Kvint, 2016, p 129) states, "What do you want to achieve or avoid? The answers to this question are objectives. How will you go about achieving your desired results? The answer to this you can call strategy."

Marchesi (2008) asks: What is an organisation? Is it a place, a process or a person? In accordance with this study, the organisation is a person – a single entity – that uses the practice of positioning via strategic communication in an attempt to place itself in a positive light in the minds of audiences. This positioning effort is carried out by means of communicational activities and is considered to be within the realm of public relations. The Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA, 2017) states that public relations has changed because of client pressure and is now much more bottom-line driven resulting in many firms branching into strategic communication rather than events. This can be seen in the adoption of a vast array of online platforms by businesses to stay present in the minds of stakeholders across these platforms, and in general.

This affirms a new line of thinking in reference to public relations as a field. There has been a move away from more traditional public relations activities that Cornelissen (2014) notes as being a somewhat linear model of communication that assumes relatively uncomplicated processes of sending and receiving messages towards more holistically discursive and truly engaging communication practices.

Strategy in the field of organisational communication is paramount to organisational integration of messages and planning – integration that may lead to more efficient communication. Effective messages and planning may often result in organisational success, or produce a basis for best practice. This success may take the form of satisfactory organisational outcomes in relation to position and reputation. Cornelissen (2014) indicates that a favourable reputational position in the minds of stakeholders determines whether stakeholders feel a desire to transact with an organisation and effectively choose the organisation over rival firms. This is especially relative in saturated markets such as the retail industry.

Communication strategy is a form of stakeholder messaging and engagement supported by the notion of organisational positioning. The basis of positioning lies not only in the rights and duties of the organisation to do so but also in the

manifestations of audience's cognitive processes. Such processes include thoughts, perceptions and preferences of the audience in relation to an organisation. There is also the element of the power an organisation has in relation to the local moral order within which it operates. By abiding by local expectations and playing to their own strengths in terms of local or regional interests, organisations may align their communication and activities with these expectations and interests.

The term 'symbolic capital' applies here, defined by Rothbart and Bartlett (2008) as the sociocultural prestige that lends to certain speakers an aura of authority in particular fields of discourse, before the relevant audience. This form of capital again alludes to the notion of the local moral order. Here we see evidence of power arising from societal perceptions and expectations from audiences in relation to the organisation. If an organisation is seen as powerful their communication efforts may be more successful, no matter what form they take. This is due to trust, understanding and/or mutual symbolism created between the organisation and audience in correlation with the local moral order and society at large.

Karnaukhova and Polyanskaya (2016) note that communication and reputation are essential for the positioning of an organisation – important points to consider in light of contemporary markets that are often saturated or highly competitive, if not both. These considerations relate to the strategic communication of the organisation. In operating in a given industry, context or region, an organisation must not only consider their target market but their surrounding societal framework at large. In relation to this societal framework, choices in terms of online communication must be made.

James (2014) defines the 'local moral order' as the understood framework of rights, duties and obligations in any social interaction as well as the cluster of collectively located beliefs about what is right and good to do and say in a given region. James (2015) mentions the term 'local moral order' when referring to the organisation and their communication and positioning efforts in relation to that organisation's

immediate societal surroundings. The local moral order limits the repertoire of possible social acts or strategic messages available to the organisation.

"A key focus of positioning theory is on the rights and duties associated with taking on a position or assigning a position to others. Positions determined, taken up and/or assigned can be seen to constrain what can be meaningfully said and done" (James, 2014, p 39). This denotes the obligatory notion of positioning that organisations must consider – communication is not a simple, straightforward exercise that is created in isolation from the environment in which it is to unfold. The local moral order that these rights and duties constitute must be understood before engaging in social interaction on the part of the organisation. The local moral order may be affected or formed by cultural, historical or demographical factors. It is pivotal to note these in planning communication and positioning efforts. Factors such as the presence of internet restriction or limitation may apply, albeit not currently in either of the regions being studied. Factors such as environmental consciousness is somewhat more pertinent in these regions, however.

It is the identification of these different organisations and their communication-positioning efforts that are important to the study. Messages disseminated by the organisation and the emphasis on societal expectation that affect these messages tell us that different regions encompass societal constructs that involve people who may think and behave differently in relation to those messages. This is important when planning and implementing messages. If the message is not in accordance with regional expectations, it may miss the mark, be misunderstood completely, or may even be construed as controversial, offensive or meaningless.

Communication efforts, objectives and goals may differ from context to context, or region to region. The strategic communication of a South African company may differ vastly from that of an American company. In analysing organisations from either nation, differing communication strategies may arise. This may include internet-based communication strategies. There may be some similarities between contexts,

too. James (2015) notes that when organisations participate in intentional strategic positioning activities, they are working to actively construct the social world – most often a social world that facilitates the achievement of their organisational goals. This applies to the contexts and societies that the organisation both operates in and seeks to influence through communication.

2.2. Theoretical foundation:

The theoretical framework for the study is positioning theory. Positioning theory is a fairly new field as far as the depth and understanding of public relations is concerned. The theory, and subsequent interpretations, grew amidst development by notable theorists. These theorists include distinguished British philosopher and psychologist, Rom Harré (2008, 2009, 2015); practitioner and senior lecturer in communication at the University of Newcastle, Australia, Melanie James (2011, 2014, 2015); Professor of Corporate Communication at VU University, Amsterdam, Joep Cornelissen (2014) and Tutor in the Faculty of Commerce at the University of Wollongong, Australia, Gregor Zelle (2009).

These theorists have provided the basis for evolutionary work in the organisational communication and positioning field. Through vast development, a greater perspective of positioning theory has been gauged and aligned with organisational communication efforts. This pertains largely to the communication strategy of the organisation.

Positioning theory postulates various 'domains' within a larger framework by which the organisation operates and seeks to conduct positioning efforts in relation to goals, objectives and planning (James, 2014). The positioning framework is a complex framework made up of concepts that aim to describe organisational communication approaches. The concepts of the positioning framework are,

according to James (2014), the 'positioning goal domain', the 'positioning type domain', the 'strategic pre-positioning domain'.

The 'positioning goal domain' involves determining the specific goal to be achieved through a public relations effort. It entails intended positions relative to desired or specific goals or outcomes. James (2014) notes that if there is no clear goal it is pointless to expend resources on positioning. The 'positioning type domain' involves evidence of self-positioning or the positioning of an entity by others. What is analysed here is whether the organisation is positioning itself or other entities for the reasons of positioning itself in a favourable manner. The 'strategic pre-positioning domain' draws from positioning theory itself. It is a strategic attempt to control agendas surrounding public discussion and terms in which discussion takes place. This domain considers intentional positioning aims and "the purposive construction of meaning with the strategic intention of an organisation achieving its goals" (James, 2014, p 63).

In considering these domains and planning communication and positioning in accordance with them, organisations may seek to more effectively position themselves in the minds of audiences. A deeper level to the positioning framework as a whole is the concept of the 'positioning triangle'.

2.3.   Theoretical concepts:

The basis of positioning theory is seen through the 'positioning triangle' that posits strategic communication as trifold. These three aspects are 'position', 'speech act/action' and 'storyline' (James, 2014). James (2015) refers to the way in which this triad is central to positioning theory - a theory which is a social constructionist approach - that defines a 'position' as a cluster of rights and duties. These rights and duties are linked to the 'local moral order'.

Harré (2008) speaks of positioning theory in the way that it contrasts to the older framework of role theory, where roles of the actor (organisation) and receiver (audience) were static. This contrast highlights the more informative nature of positioning theory in contemporary communication that is characterised by constant communication efforts and adaptability. The positioning theory triangle consists of three vertices. These are important to understand as an organisation seeks to plan, produce and implement strategic communication.

Position:

The first vertex of the triangle is 'position'. James (2014) describes this as the desired position as articulated by the party commissioning the public relations. Here we refer to the organisation. The position is essentially the point of positioning that sets "the boundaries of socially possible actions within a conversation" (Zelle, 2009, p 3). This vertex involves considering positions in relation to the local moral order – "Determining a position for an organisation or one of its services, programs or products depends greatly on the environment in which one is working" (James, 2014, p 83).

Due to the discursive nature of positioning, one must note that positions are not able to be set and simply forgotten. James (2014) notes that although it would be seen as optimal to be able to provide the formula for determining position for an organisation, this is not possible as it is not a static concept – organisational positions are dynamic. This is because people's perceptions and thoughts change, thus positioning efforts are fluid in nature and must be considered regularly. The way in which positions can play out to an audience must be considered. Whether enough information on a topic is needed must also be asked.

Role players in the positioning efforts need to be considered. All stakeholders and publics must be thought of in line with desired positions. What position to take or

assign is also of pivotal importance at this point. These considerations are important as they form the basis of the positioning effort going forward. Closer analysis is also required in the domain of online communication as, with newer variables such as instantaneous audience access to information and the means for feedback, positions may change or be affected more rapidly.

This point of the vertex is best described by James (2014) as a discursively constructed point of intentional representation from where possibilities for action are established or possibly denied in terms of the local moral order/s wherein the public relations activity is taking place. These activities are carried out for the purposes of achieving an intended outcome. Vital to note here is the stance an organisation may take in accordance with the "position" they seek to obtain through decision making and strategy employment. Adaptability in line with organisational situations and environments is also important. Thus, the position an organisation seeks to take may often change not just as a whole but more specifically in its approach to audience engagement. This is applicable in terms of all organisational communication, not least that communication that occurs online.

Speech Act/Action:

Kearns and Shane (1994) describes the second vertex, 'speech act' or 'action' as intentional, meaningful acts performed with an expression or expressions out loud, in writing or 'in one's head' and these acts are performed by "both speakers/writers and their audiences". It entails the use of words, texts and symbols to create social force through symbolism and the construction of social realities. The positions of organisations exist in the marketplace of ideas and the minds of audiences, thus speech acts have considerable power. Bazerman (2012) states that a speech act is an utterance noted and attended to, and it may be influential if audiences construct meaning in line with the intentions of those creating messages. The second vertex - 'speech acts' – seeks to enact a position through the organisation's use of words and language to influence, persuade and act out desired positions.

James (2014) postulates that the main role of speech acts is not simply conveying information but their creation is also for the purposes of action. Essentially, the position is what is considered first, while the ways and words in which to realise an outlined position is done through the use of speech acts. "The second vertex of the positioning triangle is when the desired position of the initiator of the communication activity is enacted through a speech act such as an assertion or a commitment" (James, 2014, p 103). Through identifying speech acts, the intention of the "speaker" in terms of what they want the "listener" to do may be determined.

Speech acts are seen as socially significant performances. This denotes that such acts are carried out in accordance with socially constructed norms and realities between parties involved, such as the organisation and society. Essentially, the speech act or 'action' does something, and that is create meaning. It is a performance of certain kinds of acts that involve speech elements intended to create symbolic understanding. These speech acts can be classified in one of two categories. These categories are 'illocutionary acts' and 'perlocutionary acts'.

The IIE (2017) defines an illocutionary act as the act of saying something – the literal meaning of what is being said. Perlocutionary acts are defined by the IIE (2017) as an action, or utterance, which depends on both the speaker's intentions to persuade as well as the actual persuasive effect of the utterances on the audience. We see here the cognitive emphasis on the audience adhering and attaching meaning to positioning messages. The intent of the speaker is a distinguishable factor in the implementation of speech acts. In the realm of public relations, illocutionary acts are usually intended to have social affects while resultant perlocutionary acts are a matter of trying to get the audience to form a correlative attitude or act in a certain way in reaction to a speech act. Thus, organisations employing online communication may seek to use one or both of these types of speech act categories in order to self-position.

There is considered to be a completion of the speech act when meaning formed by audiences is fully correlative to communicator's goals and intentions. Ethical communication therein would be created through engagement that promotes the initiation and maintenance of societal discourse. Pearson (1989) notes that such taxonomy was suggested as being able to drive more ethical communication between an organisation and its publics by according all communication spokespersons equal opportunity to use all categories of speech acts for their own means. An emphasis on the participative nature of 'Web 2.0' in relation to audience and organisation engagement or interaction is notable in according such equal communicative opportunity.

Neff (2008) notes that in public relations the speech act is placed at the intersection of culture, the self, the public relations episode, and the relationship component. This culmination of different factors denotes not only the interpretative potential of speech acts but also the 'symbolic capital' associated with such. However, Slocum-Bradley (2008) states that while a speech act may incite or encourage a particular action, it can never "cause" it - while organisational communication may invoke a sense of action, it cannot force an audience into literal action. "Speech acts do not convey information as such but work to change aspects of social reality" (James, 2014, p 117). Successful speech acts enact a position – it brings the position to "life". For this reason, organisations should pay careful attention to messages in order to create online communication that positions the organisation positively without any angle of coercion or forcefulness.

Storyline/Narratives:

The final vertex of the positioning triangle, 'storyline', is dependent largely on the narrative that is not only suitable to the organisation at hand but also whether or not certain storylines are available to the organisation. In an online communication sense, certain organisations may not have access to storylines conducive to online messaging styles. Online communication may even be problematic in certain regions

due to internet restrictions or a lack of technology with which an audience is able to view messages. Such problems, however, are not currently present in the South African and American contexts, as Earp, Kelly, Shahbaz, and Truong (2016) state that both countries are considered to have 'free' access to the internet.

James (2014) notes this vertex as being a style of narrative that the entity has chosen to promote to support their desired position. James (2014) notes that once the organisation itself has identified the position to be taken or assigned and the way in which to enact this position, they then turn to the supporting storylines. Messages that aim to shape target audience mind sets and constructions of reality form part of the narrative aspect of the storyline. James (2014) observes that a storyline provides context for the speech acts/actions and positions. Developed by the organisation, often in line with practitioners, these messages or storylines "help communicate a point of view, an interpretation of reality and a position at any given time" (James, 2014, p 123).

Access to storylines that may be taken or assigned is closely linked to the local moral order, which either allows or restricts proposed storylines or narratives of the organisation dependent on region. Organisations may not have the right to use a specific storyline in relation to the position it implies in accordance with the local moral order. In the study at hand, the South African and American contexts provide possibilities and restrictions. These pertain to mobile penetration, audience demographics and the industrial expectations in either country. It also links closely to what audiences expect the organisation to care for or communicate. Storylines are also more or less conducive to strategic communication effectiveness depending on aspects such as race and class issues. In a South African sense, where higher unemployment levels and racial or class issues may be greater in their ubiquity, storylines may have to be tailored. In America, race and class are also factors, but to possibly different degrees in terms of disposable income, organisational expectations or environmental expectations.

Through analysis, organisations may clearly note what storylines should or should not be used. An interesting point here is that positioning within the process of discourse may limit choices available as a conversation develops, as the positioning effort develops and moves to more mature stages of implementation. Through the collaborative participation of audiences engaging in discourse, people will naturally try to make actions and narratives socially defined and appropriate. In cross-cultural contexts, such as those of South Africa and America, this notion is especially pertinent.

Not only do storylines provide context for speech acts/actions and positions, they also link a series of actions together. "Storylines give certain actions meaning and tie them together in a manner that gives them a particular sense or rational appearance" (James, 2014, p 125). Hanlon (2011) suggests plots for organisations on which to build their narratives and these can be seen as storylines. These plots showcase the schematic representations that organisations and their public relations departments use when storytelling.

The choice and strategy behind storylines is dependent largely on desired organisational positions and societal contexts. Episodes of public relations positioning do not occur either in isolation from their environments nor in a random manner. Storylines guide the positioning events and they are tied to the actors portraying or carrying out communicative events, such as the organisation or a person within it. Storylines also have the potential to close down or open up conversations with stakeholders and audiences. Notable here is the discursive nature of online communication. Social media accounts and other interactive online communication may aid audience-organisation discussion while negative responses or a lack of any response at all may provide negative connotations for an organisation in audience minds. It is pivotal to highlight the way in which the constituents of the three vertices of the positioning triangle mutually determine one another. James (2014) notes that if any one changes then all three change.

James (2014) states how an understanding of current subject positions held by target audiences is important for organisations seeking to develop storylines to support desired positions and the formulation of messages within specific storylines is often done with an audience or addressee in mind. This aids in planning for audience responses and organisational positioning adaptation, most notably in relation to narratives and storylines. "On examination, public relations episodes invariably display storylines" (James, 2014, p 141). Scenarios in these episodes can be formulated based on how narratives are likely to play out contextually in relation to expectations and obligations of a region. Consideration for the formulation and use of these narratives in certain scenarios and contexts is pivotal, as James (2014) observes that they centre on the dynamic stability of the positioning triangle being maintained.

By creating a strategic plan for communication through the theoretical framework and vertices of positioning theory and the positioning triangle, a greater analysis can be carried out. This analysis entails message types, the chosen channel and audience for these messages, and the responses of the identified audience(s), all with consideration for the given communicative context. Harré (2015) provides a clear link between the local moral order aspect of positioning theory and a given context by saying that at any moment people are constrained by their beliefs about the moral context in which they are currently living. The moral judgements and organisational considerations for such extend beyond traditional forms of strategic communication and, more contemporarily, include the careful, measured use of internet platforms pertaining to the organisation and communication.

2.4.   Positioning theory and communication strategy:

Many fields pertaining to the organisation are rapidly changing. This is true for strategic communication. Organisations plan and disseminate messages for the sake of information-giving, reputation management and positioning on a regular basis. PricewaterhouseCoopers (2012) note how the entry of international businesses into

the South African market is further intensifies competition, placing added pressure on already thin profit margins. As competition increases in different regions, companies are being driven to introduce more efficient supply chains and advanced technology to reduce the cost of doing business as well as enhance the customer experience. Such forms of advanced technology include the use and implementation of the internet and online approaches towards strategic communication, which includes the growing adoption of online-based forms of organisational communication.

The advent of the internet for organisational operations such as communication means organisations are able to reach more stakeholders, in more places, than ever before. The use of these new media technologies must be carefully used and monitored for the sake of organisational positioning. King (2010) refers to communication strategy as a communication construct derived from the interaction between viewer response, situated context, and discursive patterns. In utilising these new media technologies, the interaction and responses of audiences must be anticipated for their worth and the context/region of the communication effort(s) must be examined. Further, the patterns of discourse must be both legible and measurable in a qualitative sense. In other words, are the symbolic interpretations of messages as intended by the organisation being received by the audience as such? Are the messages and their channels conducive to the audience and their demographics? Some online platforms may lend themselves more or less opportunities to different communicative aspects, such as video or image capabilities, concise written text or even stakeholder feedback tools.

James (2011) notes how, although it would be optimal to be able to provide the formula for determining the position of an organisation, this is not entirely possible as the concept of positioning is not static. The notion of positioning in this sense is that communication efforts are, as James (2014) states, not 'set and forget' – no matter how ordered and linear public relations practice can seem when reported in case studies, today's practice is known to be complex. This denotes the effects of new technologies, new audiences and the growing discursive nature of organisational

positioning. Thus, communication strategies and planning must be assessed on a regular basis not only for their worth, but for their channel use and structure.

The integration of strategic organisational communication and the internet has resulted in more permeable international boundaries, new ways of engaging with stakeholders and a 'culture of participation' between stakeholder and organisation. The internet has evolved in its own right to produce a form of engagement online through social media websites and applications. The new field of organisational communication and stakeholder engagement indicates a greater focus on 'Web 2.0'. This denotes a move toward a more social, collaborative and interactive internet. McNamara and Zerfass (2012) note the way in which contemporary organisations from large corporations to small businesses are increasingly adopting social media for strategic corporate and organisational communication and public relations. While this adoption has occurred in growing proportions, the majority of direct organisational information usually stems from the corporate website of the organisation.

The choice by organisations on which forms of internet-based communication to employ may denote something about that organisation in the minds of audiences. Audiences experiencing organisational messages and communication may deem the channels organisations use as significantly symbolic in representing the organisation's intentions. Audiences may ask themselves, in less conceptual terms, is the organisation trying to 'bridge' or 'buffer'? The IIE (2017) postulates that bridging in communication involves attempts to cross gaps of interest and positioning between the organisation and its environment through interactive and proactive communication, while buffering is described as an organisation creating enough impressions in the publics' minds to influence them about how to interpret the organisation and its position.

How and by what channels or means an organisation communicates may thus invoke in audiences a sense of inclusivity or, potentially, a sense of discord between

the organisation and audience members. This is an important consideration for organisations as certain forms of internet-based communication contribute to participation and engagement while other forms may seemingly promote a faceless entity.

2.5. Conclusion:

Through the organisational implementation of strategic communication in traditional and new media technology forms, organisations seek to more readily address and receive feedback from audiences. Such efforts may provide impetus for positive organisational gain in relation to positioning and reputation. Positioning theory and its conceptual elements may be an effective tool in attending to the field of strategic communication. The concern positioning theory affords to all aspects of the organisation's communications efforts and to those audiences receiving that communication is pertinent to holistically understanding the notion of strategic communication. Through its inclusion of domains and the positioning triangle, it is clearly noted that strategic communication is an all-inclusive effort that integrates research, planning, objectives, role players and audiences.

However, in stating this, McNamara and Zerfass (2012) suggest that while positioning theory and the practice of positioning itself may be effective, the use of organisational online communication and social media is not always wholly successful. This is because organisations may fail to adequately take account of potential conflict between the philosophy of openness that characterises 'Web 2.0' and organisational strategy in relation to communication. In a contemporary age, higher levels of competition in major industries translates into more power and choice for consumers. "In this era of the internet and social media, consumers are also becoming more vocal as they can compare products, prices and customer experiences online in real time" (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2012). Comparisons are not only made in relation to goods and services in this regard – organisational

stances and the implications of messages in relation to societal norms are also scrutinised by audiences.

Cornelissen (2014) affirms this increased consumer power in stating that stakeholders have, more recently, become much more active in voicing their expectations towards organisations and, empowered by new media technologies, these consumers have also started to expect more interactive and dialogue-based forms of communication. Thus, there has been an increase in the 'culture of participation' between stakeholders and organisations through online platforms but expectations still exist for further engagement and dialogue. Positioning attempts are not always successful and results of this may be instantaneously communicated by stakeholders online for all to see. This can have negative implications for the position and reputation of the organisation.

While the use of new media technologies and positioning theory may open many avenues for strategic organisational communication and analysis, the outcomes are not always positive. Cornelissen (2014) notes that this situation offers challenges but also opportunities to organisations in terms of word-of-mouth and peer-to-peer influence that strategic online communication may aid.

Harré (2009) notes that positioning theory opens up a new dimension in the psychology of interpersonal encounters, through explicit attention to the role of rights and duties in the management of action. People and organisations position themselves with respect to rights and duties to act within evolving storylines, and on the basis of claims about relevant personal attributes. If an organisation seeks to produce successful audience interaction and response, close attention must be made in relation to rights, duties and goals of the organisation in accordance with their audiences. By carefully considering channels, messages and contexts, organisations may more effectively position themselves.

3.   Research Design and Methodology:

3.1.   Conceptual approach:

"Qualitative research is designed to reveal a target audience's range of behaviour and the perceptions that drive it with reference to specific topics or issues" (QRCA, 2017). The research approach signified the nature of the study. Different approaches relate to specific or desired outcomes in terms of data looked for and obtained. Qualitative research, then, denotes research and analysis of human cognition and behaviour. Thoughts, perceptions and responses are relevant in relation to the nature of qualitative research and the study at hand. The specific issue of organisational internet-based communication was analysed through a theoretical framework – positioning theory – in order to assess organisational messages and their implied or explicit meanings, along with possible audience responses and perceptions in light of these messages. Responses to these messages may be seen through reviews or trade statistics relating to the organisation.

QRCA (2017) note how qualitative research methods originated in the social and behavioural sciences. These societal and behavioural aspects link closely with audiences of organisational communication and their resultant behaviour(s) – or lack thereof – towards organisations, in light of interaction or viewership of strategic communication, specifically communication published online.

Greenhalgh and Taylor (1997) state how qualitative methods aim to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. In speaking of the 'local moral order', it was noted how positioning aimed to "create or influence the construction of meaning in order to position in particular ways" (James, 2015, p 37). The link between an organisation's strategic internet communication and its aim to position itself lies in attempts to create societally assigned meanings in reference to those organisations. This creates understanding, familiarity and lesser disparity

between stakeholder expectations and perceptions in line with organisational aims, objectives and actions or messages. The concept of mutual benefits is an important perceptive measure of audiences here and organisations should attend to these cognitive inferences of the audiences they target.

The use of symbols and language in the organisational communication process alludes to psychological emphases in the form of symbolic capital – "Having possession of certain rights to position in certain ways according to the local moral order would be part of an organisation's symbolic capital" (Bourdieu, 1991). This cognitive and behavioural process is interactive in nature and can thus only be understood by qualitative means due to the human element that is associated with this research approach. This is because the study aimed to analyse the way in which organisations sought to position themselves in stakeholder minds through using online organisational communication, in accordance largely with the local moral order and symbolic capital the respective organisations had access to. The implied intentions of the organisations were also considered and this is something that integrates humanistic tendencies such as perceptions, thoughts and associations in their outlining.

Thus, what was analysed was how and why the chosen organisations created and disseminated certain messages to position themselves as they did, with a brief look at stakeholder reviews that may signify the success of strategic communication. The focus of the study was largely on the emotive, psychological elements of respondents towards organisational communication, indicating the qualitative nature of the study.

3.2.   Research paradigm and theoretical framework:

Nieuwenhuis (2016) states that paradigms represent what we think about the world and that our actions in the world cannot occur without reference to those paradigms.

The paradigm that was used for the study was that of interpretivism which Maree (2016) describes as the meaning that individuals and communities assign to their experiences. This construction and allocation of meaning to the phenomenon of online organisational communication is the very fabric of interpretivism.

"Interpretivism is based on the assumption that there is not one reality but many, and interpretivist researchers therefore carry out their studies in natural contexts to reach the best possible understanding" (Maree, 2016, p 39). Interpretivism affirms the psychological symbolism that audiences ascribe to organisational messages, which linked to the qualitative nature of the study. Thanh and Thanh (2015) describe how researchers believe that the interpretivist paradigm predominantly uses qualitative methods due to their favoured use of methods such as case studies and ethnography.

McQueen (2002) postulates that an interpretivist researcher seeks methods that enable them to understand in-depth the relationship of human beings to their environment. In the given context, the study focused on audiences and the organisation's strategic internet-based communication. Also included was the environment in which this occurred – the organisational and societal context that allowed or denied rights and duties in terms of communication. It should be noted that the organisations themselves were analysed as "people" in their own right. The study as a whole interpreted organisational behaviour and strategy in relation to a specific form of communication in line with the interpretations, perceptions and responses of those persons that attended to these communication efforts. While there is a clear indication between organisations and audiences, they are both deemed "people" in the study.

The theoretical framework for the study was positioning theory. This framework has multiple levels of inquiry into communicative positioning that the organisation employs. The theory is made up of a broader framework of 'domains' with deeper analysis and/or strategic planning evident in the analysis or use of the theory's

'positioning triangle'. This trifold approach to communication and positioning conceptualisation is made up of position, speech act/action and storyline. These three vertices work as parts of a whole that organisations seek to use in order to plan and strategically implement messages and narratives in order to position themselves. James (2014) notes that this framework addresses the goal directedness of public relations positioning efforts.

3.3. Methodological design:

The study took the form of a comparative case study design. Zainal (2007) describes case studies as a method that explores and investigates contemporary real-life phenomenon through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions, and their relationships. Goodrick (2014) notes that comparative case studies involve the analysis and synthesis of the similarities, differences and patterns across two or more cases that share a common focus or goal. The phenomenon highlighted in the study was the positioning efforts of the respective organisations via online communication. This research design allowed for the study and interpretation of complex topics. This related to human behaviour, thought processes and actions or responses of the entities commissioning the communication and those receiving it.

"In most cases, a case study method selects a small geographical area or a very limited number of individuals as the subjects of study" (Zainal. 2007). The case study design was implemented through the selection of two organisations in different geographical areas. While these regions were not necessarily small, they were characterised by specific stakeholder expectations and technological implications, and only organisational communication that was internet-based was analysed. Further still, while both organisations made use of multiple similar platforms, those promoting more textual messaging and clearer or more traditional positioning efforts were selected.

This was to make closer comparisons with no confusion between outright marketing (videos and pictures) and written content (corporate websites and more straightforward social media posts) that sought to position. The latter was deemed more pertinent in terms of comparing communicative inferences and positioning efforts of the respective organisations. Thus, the scope for communication was smaller in scale which resulted in a lower, or more specific, level of organisational inspection. For this reason, platforms such as Instagram and YouTube were not chosen. Twitter, another platform the respective organisations make use of, was not selected due to the platforms policy of restricting the character, or letter count, to 140 characters. This platform was not considered as it restricts organisational communication and overall expression in its concise nature. Thus, certain platforms were selected, or not selected, judged on their worth in relation to the study and the content said platforms could or could not provide (See Appendix A).

The organisations were analysed as "people" in order to gauge overall online communication. This means the individual subjects of the study referred strictly to the two selected organisations. In this way messages disseminated by the organisations were noted as being published by the organisation as a whole. Organisational reviews were accounted for as being from whoever the respective source was, while still noting that they were about the singular entity, or organisation, being spoken or written about.

The study took the form of exploratory research. Van Wyk (2012) notes that such research is usually characterised by a high degree of flexibility and lacks a formal structure. The degree of flexibility arose in the study due to the comparative component in analysing organisations in different regions and contexts, While one theoretical framework was to be applied to either one of the selected organisations, a degree of flexibility was required in analysing either one, as their online communication channel usage differed somewhat. To some degree, the analysis of either organisation was dependent on how they chose to utilise the internet and 'Web 2.0' capabilities as strategic communication tools. As noted, many of the

platforms utilised by either organisation were similar, although the choice of which platforms to analyse, too, were done in parallel.

Due to its exploratory nature, this form of research was appropriate for the study as it applied to research addressing subjects about which there were higher levels of uncertainty. The subject here was organisational communication and resultant organisational positioning. Van Wyk (2012) further states that exploratory research is useful and applicable when very little research on the subject matter exists. While the notion of positioning theory has been developed in a contemporary sense, discrepancy still exists in certain areas. This pertains not least in relation to different contexts and the study of internet-based organisational communication.

The study employed a deductive approach. Wilson (2010) posits that a deductive approach is concerned with developing objectives based on existing theory, and then designing a research strategy to test those objectives. The study sought to employ a deductive approach in analysing organisational internet-based communication and the ways in which the selected organisations used these communicative methods to position themselves positively.

The existing theory of positioning was the lens through which the study was conducted and, thus, the objectives postulated were in line with this theory. Through application of the chosen theory to the stated objectives, the research purpose was pursued through deductive measures. These deductions took the form of insight into organisational online communication and its resultant effects on audience reviews or feedback and, in turn, the possible positioning of the organisation.

The study was cross-sectional. The Institute for Work & Health (2015) note that cross-sectional studies make comparisons at a single point in time. In accordance with cross-sectional studies, this study is observational. "This means that researchers record information about their subjects without manipulating the study

environment" (The IWH, 2015). This observational aspect was apparent in that desk, or secondary research, was the basis for the data collection of the study. Two organisations were analysed as per their online communication at the present time – an important point to consider due to the ever-changing nature of online organisational communication and platforms. Due to this current analysis at a single point in time, the study was noted as being cross-sectional.

The study occurred in the context of epistemology in an interpretivist approach. The IIE (2017) describe this context as "empathic understanding" of phenomena in relation to the interpretivist approach. This understanding pertains to the human cognitive processes and behaviour – an underpinning notion of analysing audience understanding in relation to the organisation online communication that was studied.

Maree (2016) notes that an interpretive paradigm in the epistemological context is a view of what social science is – a lens through which one examines the practice of research. James (2014) further develops this thought in the context of positioning by stating that the concept of positioning in public relations sits within the social constructionist epistemology – the minds of audience are affected by societal constructs and this affects the way they position themselves and organisations.

The research was conducted by means of desk research. Dobney (2017) notes that with the widespread adoption of the internet, use of published secondary information – desk research – to scope a market is becoming increasingly common as a means of carrying out Market Intelligence. This form of research is secondary and uses the analysis and observation of primary sources in order to gain insight and information into an entity or field in order to make deductions and affirm objectives. "Desk research is the name given to finding published information which can include company details, reports, statistics or information about the issues in a marketplace including news and business relationships" (Dobney, 2017). This published information makes up the organisational online communication that was analysed, with its ties to business insight and informative communication.

3.4. Unit of analysis, population, sample and sampling method:

William (2006) states that the unit of analysis is the major entity that is to be researched in the study. One local contemporary organisation and one international contemporary organisation was proposed as the particular units of analysis. To further refine the unit of analysis, a specific industry, in two separate regions and contexts, were outlined. The specific countries to be analysed were decided upon – South Africa and America. The organisations chosen to be analysed were Woolworths (Woolworths Holdings Limited) in the South African organisational context and Walmart (Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.) in the American organisational context respectively. They were both analysed as separate entities, or as "people" so as to outline holistic entities. The unit of analysis is most commonly an individual. For this reason, the organisations were analysed as "individuals" in their own right. By noting these organisations as singular entities, they could be better defined with characteristics that aligned with, or differed from, one another. This related to the publishing of online material, as authors were not commonly listed, thus material was presumed to be produced by the organisation "itself".

"A research population is known as a well-defined collection of individuals or objects known to have similar characteristics" (Explorable, 2013). The population herein was potentially any form of strategic internet-based documents or communication produced by, or about, the chosen contemporary organisations that operated in the retail industry, in either of the chosen countries. These communication forms constitute social artefacts of the chosen organisations. By selecting these communicative efforts and artefacts, deductions were made in a general sense as to the approaches and use of online communication by the chosen contemporary organisations in different contexts.

Essentially, any published material surrounding the organisation, produced by themselves or others, were potential possibilities for the population. The choice of whether or not to analyse documents or other online communication was done in

accordance with their relevance and pertinence to the overall study. The communicative efforts that existed from either organisation online were vast, thus certain criteria such as platform and message type were outlined for content analysis. These were selected in parallel between the platforms either organisation chose to utilise.

Mugo (2002) states that a sample is a finite part of a statistical population whose properties are studied to gain information about the whole. While the population outlined any documents or communicative artefacts surrounding the chosen organisations, the sample was refined further. This refinement was produced through seeking documents and online communication with similar characteristics in relation to the retail industry, along with communication efforts and approaches towards target audiences. The sample was thus the carefully selected documents relating to both Woolworths (Woolworths Holdings Limited) and Walmart (Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.). Fundamentally, the sample "group" of the study was any chosen online information or communication by, or about, the chosen organisations.

Sampling methods involve the collection of data in specific ways that are conducive to the research design. Maree and Pietersen (2016) note that it is important for the sample to be drawn in such a way that it would be valid to generalise its results to the population. The class of sampling methods to which the study belonged was that of non-probability sampling. Bezuidenhout, Davis and du Plooy-Cilliers (2014) state how this method is used when it is nearly impossible to determine who the entire population is or when it is difficult to gain access to the entire population. Due to the fact that certain online platforms were used, with duplication and unclear authorship of content across certain platforms, the population was difficult to wholly define.

As organisations are being analysed for their online communicative efforts and are being looked at as individuals, the entire population and its elements were difficult to realistically define, therefore non-probability sampling was employed. Two types of non-probability sampling emerged – convenience sampling and purposive sampling.

Dudovskiy (2016) states that convenience sampling is a type of sampling where the first available data sources will be used for the research without additional requirements. Although data collection was performed in line with the strategic online communication of two organisations, no specific criteria were outlined. If the data produced seemingly important information, it was considered for analysis.

The second form of sampling was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a method used in "special situations where the sampling is done with a specific purpose in mind" (Maree and Pietersen, 2016, p 198). This study looked at the situational context of internet-based communication with the specific aim of comparing the communicative positioning efforts of two organisations in different regions. While convenience sampling was carried out as far as the collection of data was concerned, it was done with a set of objectives and purposes in mind.

Thus, while the sampling methods of convenience and purposive sampling may seem rather at ends with one another, it was the availability of documents that outlined samples of convenience and the application of theoretical concepts in purposively selecting specified samples from those which conveniently presented themselves in the research. Although available documents and artefacts held analytical opportunities, certain data was selected for its estimated worth towards the study and outlined objectives.

3.5.   Data collection method(s):

The data collection method for the study was that of desk research – a form of secondary research. Travis (2016) observes that desk research it is not about collecting data but rather that the role of the researcher lies in carrying out this form of research so as to review previous research findings to gain a broad understanding of the field. This was the aim of the study, as the collection of data was done by

research into organisational communication and communication about the organisation by others, which already existed online.

The objective here was to extract data from online sources in order to synthesise communication and positioning efforts of the chosen organisations. This form of research was secondary, as the data was not being collected through primary sources such as interviews or focus groups but through information disseminated previously by, or about, the chosen organisations. The research was conducted through internet searches using key terms in line with the chosen organisations and the platforms the respective organisations used. It should be noted that the same platforms were chosen for each organisation in order to provide a more uniform analysis in line with the theoretical framework. This was also done so as to aid case study design.

It was pivotal to the research study that the collection of data was done soundly in line with clear definitions, the research questions and outlined objectives. For the purpose of desk research in relation to the chosen organisations, the field of online communication entails various channels. What was analysed in a communicative positioning sense were the chosen organisations corporate websites, certain social media accounts and any relevant information published about the organisation online, such as reviews. Information published about them, not just by them, was relevant here as the notion of positioning may be carried out by an organisation positioning or it being positioned by others.

The chosen data collection method for the study lead to the formulation of a comparative case study. Nieuwenhuis (2016) states that case study research refers to an empirical enquiry about a contemporary phenomenon, set within a real-world context – especially when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

Data collection in the study was conducted largely in accordance with the theoretical framework of positioning theory and in accordance with strategic internet-based communication. The chosen theoretical framework, key study questions and the field of online communication guided the study in terms of data collection, along with the framework of a comparative case study. The data collection method, in the form of a comparative case study, entailed the use of desk research to gather insight and content. This content was then structured under organisational headings where after analysis was able to be done to draw themes from the communication analysed.

In collecting data, it was important for the researcher to ask of themselves which case study was more prudent to conduct. Given the type of case study, what Nieuwenhuis (2016) states should be assessed is whether it would be more prudent to conduct a single case study or whether better understanding would have been gained through the employment of multiple case studies. A single case study, comparative in nature, was chosen for the study. Also important to data collection was the information to be looked for while conducting data collection. Essentially, what should the researcher have asked of the 'literature'? Possible anomalies to be looked for were the message and platform types, the general online presence of the chosen organisations, the approach of the organisations towards garnering positive images in stakeholder minds and the published content about the identified organisations on review websites.

General objectives sought or questions to be asked while conducting data collection included: How did the contemporary local organisation compare to the contemporary international organisation in terms of the way they sought to position themselves through their strategic internet communication? What channels or platforms of online communication did the contemporary local and contemporary international organisations use or not use? What position did the contemporary local organisation and the contemporary international organisation seemingly wish to take?

3.6.   Data analysis method(s):

Relative to the form of desk research data collection was data analysis in the form of content analysis. While the study itself was a case study in its approach, the overall analysis was conducted by means of content analysis. Content analysis, in a qualitative sense, is defined by Mayring (2000) as a framework or approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytical rules, without rash quantification. Content analysis, then, is a controlled approach in collecting and analysing content in a given field by means of specific rules without the overgeneralisation or assumption of outcomes.

Content analysis is further described by Nieuwenhuis (2016) as a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding. Through the utilisation of coding and content analysis, an analysis and discussion of themes pertaining to online communication of the respective organisations was formulated. Positioning theory guided to a certain degree what the data was analysed for in terms of what inferences were sought with links to the theoretical concepts of the theory.

What was analysed in a communicative sense was done with the theoretical framework in mind at all times, with a range of codes emerging. While themes that emerged were not explicitly in accordance with the conceptual titles of positioning theory, the concepts within the theoretical framework were noted within the broader themes identified and they became more closely aligned with the analysis in discussing the intricacies of the themes noted. Interpretation of the findings affirmed this in noting that the general themes alluded to concepts relative to positioning, such as position and narratives.

Through analysing data by means of content analysis, closer consideration between the phenomenon of organisational communication and positioning in organisational and societal contexts was gauged. It is important to note that in the analysis of data by case study means, data sources were not treated or reported independently. The researcher aimed to integrate all data in categorical fashion, even though analysis of either organisation was carried out at slightly varying times and not necessarily in the same order as far as the chosen platforms was concerned. Despite this, uniformity was aimed for in both the presentation of findings as well as the interpretation of findings in accordance with the chosen analysis method.

Content analysis of the chosen organisations produced three themes respectively that are interpreted and discussed at a later stage. In relation to the case study design, the presentation of the findings as well as the ordering of themes was, upon reflexion, more uniform than was initially expected. This in fact aided identification of comparisons in communicative approaches and the inferences and implied messages of the organisations.

Important to note in relation to the analysis of content is the form of coding that was conducted in order to establish the themes and sub-themes. As far as coding is concerned, there is a notable distinction between emergent and priori coding. "With emergent coding, meaning units are identified following some preliminary examination of the data" (Nieuwenhuis, 2016, p 116). This denotes coding that is open in nature. In terms of priori coding, Nieuwenhuis (2016) notes that meaning units are established prior to the data-analysis based upon some theory. While these coding forms are seemingly at ends with each other, it was found through analysis of the online communication that, despite an approach with prior meaning units established in line with a specific theory, further meaning units were identified after a process of open coding.

4.   Findings and Interpretation of Findings:

4.1.   Presentation and interpretation of findings:

The following section forms the comparative case study of the research project, in line with findings obtained and the interpretation of these findings. The respective companies are profiled as an introduction to the content analysis of each. The findings are interpreted in line with the online communication produced by and about the respective organisations. The findings are conducted through data collection and coding. From this, themes are identified. Through the categorisation of the respective organisations' online communication, comparisons or contrasts are noted. What must be noted is the specific themes outlined and the theoretical framework of positioning and its concepts that are also embedded within the identified themes. The interplay between themes and theoretical concepts is highlighted in discussion of the analysed content.

Figure 1: Walmart logo (Famous Logos, 2017)

4.2.1. Walmart company profile:

Walmart (Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.) is an American retail company, formed in 1962 by Sam Walton. The organisation is based in Bentonville, Arkansas. The current CEO of Walmart is Doug McMillon. The organisation is said to have "over 260 million

customers and members… 11,695 stores under 59 banners in 28 countries"
(Walmart, 2017). It is also noted that the company employs approximately 2.3 million
associates worldwide (Walmart, 2017).

The organisation utilises various forms of online media such as a corporate website,
Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. They also have a blog, as well as environmental
and outreach programmes in the American region/context. The vast range of
platforms they utilise meant that sites perceived as more pertinent to the study had
to be chosen.

Walmart is currently the world's largest retail organisation by revenue, with a
reported $482.1 billion revenue in the 2017 fiscal year (Dhiraj, 2017). The sheer size
of the organisation, with so large a customer base, in multiple parts of the world,
denotes a necessity for providing stakeholders with the engagement they may desire
and the organisational information they may need. The following online platforms
were analysed pertaining to Walmart – their corporate website, their Facebook page,
a brief review of the organisation on a website called 'Glassdoor' and, lastly, their
LinkedIn page.

4.2.2. Walmart content analysis:

Data was collected in the form of overall desk research of online communication on
the selected platforms run by or pertaining to Walmart. Content analysis was carried
out in the form of coding in order to obtain general themes surrounding the online
communication analysed. The categorisation of online communication by Walmart
allowed for the thematic interpretation of that communication, which aided in
assessing the position the international contemporary organisation supposedly
wished to take as well as how certain stakeholders viewed the organisation. A few
general themes arose upon analysis and through the categorisation of the coded
communication. These are discussed below:

Theme 1 – Collaboration, Community and the Consumer:

Walmart, through their online communication, alluded largely to the inclusiveness of consumers. There seemed to be a great emphasis on the desire for collaboration, on behalf of the organisation, between themselves, consumers and the community at large. Through this collaboration, the organisation seemed to aim for the implementation of shareholder inclusiveness and the creation of mutual benefits – positive outcomes for both the organisation and those who engage with it.

The way in which Walmart notes membership and an "unwavering commitment" to bringing positive benefits to their customers and the communities in which they operate denotes a sense of obligation in their organisational activities. By outlining their commitment to producing benefits for those people who engage with or are in proximity to them, the organisation seems to aim to instil in audience minds an image of a retail giant that is considerate. This can be seen in the quote below:

> "Each week, over 260 million *customers* and *members* visit our 11,695 stores… It's all part of our unwavering commitment to *creating opportunities* and *bringing value* to *customers* and *communities* around the world" (Walmart, 2017).

In the example of online communication below we see Walmart imply the use of their resources and conservation activities as tools for collaboration with communities and shareholders to provide mutual benefits. This is a smart implication, in that it implies a selfless approach to retail where the organisation may use its status and power to help those around them. This is an attempt at garnering a positive image through online communication that outlines encouraging activities.

> "At Walmart, we aim to use our strengths and *collaborate with others*... within the priority areas of *opportunity*, sustainability and *community*… We believe

that our work in these areas… *creates shared value* for *customers* and *society*" (Walmart, 2017).

"Integration" is a term used by the organisation to invoke a sense of inclusiveness in readers. Again, resources and tools for the creation of positive action is mentioned. Collectivism is also highlighted, where shareholders and stakeholders are spoken of as allies in the overall organisational framework, denoting in some sense a form of business community. This is shown by the quote that follows:

"…underscores the importance of true integration into our core business, *drawing upon our* core *capabilities and strengths*, and *collective action* through *collaboration* with *supplier* and *industry partners*, and *key stakeholders*" (Walmart, 2017).

Another way in which the organisation seeks to produce benefits for their shareholders as well as engage with consumers is via their online shopping, or e-commerce, site. This is a further example of their Internet utilisation in a modern age where multiple platforms are exploited. Despite a less personal approach, the organisation still attempts to invoke in users a sense of community and mutual benefit by using terms such as "neighbourhood" and "returns". Below we see this communicated:

"Walmart.com is a lot like your *neighbourhood* Walmart store... seamlessly integrating the online and in-store shopping experiences to *meet the evolving needs of our customers* [which has] delivered growth, leverage, and *returns for our shareholders*" (Walmart, 2017).

Another case in terms of statements relative to the organisation seemingly emphasising customer benefits is noted in the organisation speaking of its founder's way of listening to the consumer. The implication here is the consumer-centric notion

of the organisation and their aim to provide for the consumer a better way of living through the provision of products at better prices. This has an element of finance about it, although the human element is carried through by emphasising the fact that they have had a goal of seemingly providing consumer benefits from their inception until today. This is noticed in the quote below:

> "Sam Walton opened the doors to the first Walmart in 1962… Sam was a firm believer in *listening to what his customers had to say*… It's just another way we're *working to give the millions of families* who shop at *Walmart* more of *what they love* – ways to *save money* and *live better*" (Walmart, 2017).

Theme 2 – Corporate Social Responsibility, Philanthropy and Sustainability:

A major undertaking in contemporary business involves activities of corporate social responsibility, philanthropy and actions that promote sustainability. Liodice (2010) notes how social responsibility can be productively coupled with sound strategies to advance goodwill, while building sustainable and impressive businesses. By not only carrying out these activities but communicating them to shareholders, organisations may seek to position themselves positively through narratives of environmental and social consciousness. Through the communication of goals and commitments related to sustainability and philanthropy, the organisation may seek to produce an image of care for the environment, its people and the market itself. Narratives of this nature may be seen in the example below:

> "Walmart continues to be a leader in *sustainability, corporate philanthropy* and employment opportunity… At Walmart, we aim to use our strengths and collaborate with others to *transform* the systems on which we all rely, including advancing our ambitious *commitments and goals* within the *priority areas* of opportunity, *sustainability* and community" (Walmart, 2017).

While a large portion of Walmart's online communication speaks of community as a whole, within this discourse is the notion of sustainability. There is also mention of their philanthropic activities and their (implied) intentions of carrying out such activities. We see this below, where financial aid is used as an example to highlight Walmart's commitment to the cause:

> "We complement and extend the impact of *Walmart's social and environmental initiatives through philanthropic efforts*… *Walmart* and the *Walmart Foundation give* over $1 billion annually *to projects* that create opportunity, *enhance sustainability* and *strengthen community*" (Walmart, 2017).

Theme 3 – Pride and Progress:

Another theme that was prevalent in analysing online communication of Walmart was that of progress and the underlying notion of pride in stating where they started and where they are now, as a contemporary organisation. From humble beginnings the organisation has become the world's largest retailer. This is a point the organisation does not hesitate to state. The facts and figures noted by the company denote their progress and, in accordance with such, an element of organisational success. Success that readers of statements such as the one below can only imagine came from garnering a positive image and doing so through consumer consideration and best practice.

> "What *started small*, with a *single discount store* and the *simple idea* of selling more for less, has *grown over the last 50 years* into the *largest retailer in the world*… With fiscal year *2017 revenue of $485.9 billion*, *Walmart employs* approximately *2.3 million associates worldwide*" (Walmart, 2017).

There is further evidence of pride in analysing their online communication to readers and, naturally, prospective shareholders. This is noted in the way the organisation speaks of their aim to save the consumer money, the fact that they are a market leader in retail and the mention of plans for a positive future. This intrinsic notion of positivity and pride seemingly underpins Walmart's attempts to maintain their status as a globally recognised brand that realises benefits for all shareholders. A case in point can be seen in the following statement:

"For *over 50 years*, saving people money so they can live better has made *Walmart the global leader* in both thought and action that we are today. As we *look forward to innovating our business* for the next 50 years, we're committed to nothing less than *transforming the future of commerce*" (Walmart, 2017).

Figure 2: Woolworths logo (Brands of the World, 2017).

4.3.1. Woolworths company profile:

Woolworths Holdings Limited is a South African-based retail group listed on the JSE Limited. The company has been listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange since 1997 (Woolworths Holdings Limited, 2017). The current CEO is Ian Moir. The company was founded by Max Sonnenberg in Cape Town in 1931. Woolworths sells

a wide range of food products, homeware, clothing and financial services in over 400 stores across South Africa.

Trade Intelligence (2017) states that despite a growing portfolio in Australasia, Woolworths remains committed to growth in South Africa and Africa. The company is noted as being a leader in innovation and technology in the South African retail sector, with the company adopting various innovative practices such as employee benefits, sell by dates and computerised merchandising systems before competitors in the South African region (Woolworths, 2017).

It is this sense of innovation and technological uptake that has seen Woolworths spread their organisational positioning efforts over multiple online platforms. This points to the study at hand and, with the analysis of online communication by the organisation on selected platforms they utilise. In noting this, the following online platforms were analysed pertaining to Woolworths – their corporate website, their Facebook page, a brief review of the organisation on a website called 'Glassdoor' and their LinkedIn page as well.

4.3.2. Woolworths content analysis:

Data for the case of Woolworths was collected via desk research of online communication on the selected platforms run by or pertaining to the organisation. The organisation here refers to Woolworths (Woolworths Holdings Limited). A content analysis was conducted in the form of coding so as to form general themes relevant to the online communication analysed. The categorisation of online communication produced by Woolworths allowed for the thematic interpretation of that communication, which aided in evaluating the position the local contemporary organisation seemingly wished to take. Some broad themes arose upon analysis, through the categorisation of the coded communication. Themes that were found are discussed as follows:

Theme 1 – Shareholder Consideration and Care:

Woolworths, across platforms of online communication, seemed to have a common denominator in terms of their intended messages. They spoke vastly of the ways in which they care for employees, consumers and the community. This denotes the consideration they seemingly wished to portray by means of highlighting their careful attention to people within and around the business. These statements are quite concrete though, despite attempts often seeming superfluous, as the organisation actually implements narratives through organisational action in the form of processes and policies. This not only enhances organisational practice and integrity but also improves trust between the business and shareholders. Examples of this consideration and care are seen below:

"Woolworths was among the *first local retailers* to *offer employees a pension fund, medical aid and maternity leave… Integrity* – doing what you say you will do: *Keeping* our *promises* is *important to us*… By being true to ourselves, we *earn the trust of our colleagues and our customers*" (Woolworths, 2017).

While the case is inclined more towards the internal stakeholders of Woolworths, there is evidence of consideration by the company for those outside the business – most notably the consumer themselves. This is of course an important area for attention as customers can be the difference between profitability and poor performance. Woolworths state that they put the consumer first, a narrative that may or may not be acted out in reality. However, given their size and seemingly likeable nature, one can imagine their position, in light of the words below, is a manifestation of real views:

"We *always think customer… Putting the customer first* is what service is all about. Whether your customer is a shopper in our stores or the store manager

who needs a vital delivery, *service* is about *understanding others' needs*"
(Woolworths, 2017).

A large degree of the online communication that organisations, or at least those
analysed, produce about themselves is via their corporate website. The growing use
of social media in a contemporary sense is often a means to aid existing, more
traditional forms of communication. This aids dialogue between organisation and the
consumer, which may provide pivotal feedback for the organisation to implement
better practices, seek to assess or change their current position or even in order to
create new, exciting narratives that may result in benefits for both the organisation
and the consumer. A way in which Woolworths seemingly seeks to obtain and gauge
this feedback and insight is by means of their corporate Facebook page. The
example below is an illustration of this strategic social media usage:

"Welcome to the Woolworths Fan Page: We run this page to *share what's*
happening in our world and *chat to you about what's happening in yours*. This
is where we can *explore your life with Woolies, together*. We *love chatting and*
answering questions, as well as *listening to constructive feedback.* So
please... *participate*" (Woolworths, 2017).

Theme 2 – Good Business Journey and Sustainability:

Woolworths speak across the spectrum of their online communication about what
they term their, 'Good Business Journey'. This approach entails business activities
and policies employed by Woolworths that aim to promote sustainability as well as
environmental and societal consciousness. The narrative of environmental
awareness is a popular one in a contemporary sense.

In a South African context, Lund-Thomsen (2005) posits that the discourse of
Corporate Social Responsibility has been promoted by certain parties, with an

emphasis on the role of companies in voluntarily contributing towards the solution of pressing social and environmental problems through partnerships with other stakeholders. A case in point is Woolworths' 'Good Business Journey' both in the actions of the policy, as well as the narrative of consciousness it promotes. A seemingly considerate organisation is one that may play on the position of such to place themselves positively in the minds of audiences who, in contemporary times, may be more sceptical or even incredulous. This being said, the online communication of Woolworths in relation to this undertaking is multi-faceted – and thus seemingly well thought out – and seems to be genuine in its approach, as noted below:

> "Our *Good Business Journey*: In April 2007, we launched our *Good Business Journey – a bold plan to make a difference* in eight key areas on our *journey towards sustainability*: Energy, Water, Waste, Sustainable Farming, Ethical Sourcing, Transformation, Social Development and Health and Wellness… *Doing business responsibly*, in the most *transparent and ethical way*, sits at the *heart of the Woolworths business. Sustainability is one of our values* as well as a *strategic imperative*. Through the collective efforts, commitment and support of our people, suppliers and customers we *continue to make great progress on our journey to leave the world and our community in a better place than we found it*" (Woolworths, 2017).

Further allusion to sustainability and the environment is spoken of by the organisation within more general online communication that doesn't necessarily fall under their specific 'Good Business Journey' narrative, although the sentiment is seemingly the same. The company speaks vividly of future plans and conservation efforts that seek to benefit the environment and society.

Again, this is a position of consciousness the organisation wishes to underpin through policies and actions that may highlight their stance as a responsible retailer. The inference here could be said to be positive intent, as the notion of mutual benefit

for shareholders and the environment alike are noted. This approach ties in with a local moral order where sustainability efforts are, contemporarily speaking, being pushed to the fore in light of environmental exploitation. Below is an excerpt that showcases Woolworths stated environmental consideration:

> "*Sustainability* – Build for a *better future*: While you may be familiar with some of our *environmental and conservation projects*, for us in a South African, and African, context, *sustainability isn't just about being 'green'*. It's about sharing expertise, *helping local enterprises to grow*, and *contributing to a prosperous, secure future for our country*… From innovation to quality and *conservation*, Woolies strives to constantly bring a better service and product to its customer, and in doing so, to *make a lasting difference – socially, environmentally and in business*" (Woolworths, 2017).

Theme 3 – Excellence and Originality:

A theme pertinent to Woolworths online communication involves statements surrounding their "first to-do" procedures and their forward-thinking ways in general. They allude to organisational excellence and market leadership. This is found in statements mentioning "superior quality", "delivering to standards" and "bringing quality to life". The ways in which the organisation communicates abiding by levels of optimal practice illustrates a narrative of the company seeking to maintain market leadership – an undertaking that audiences may see as mutually beneficial when engaging with the organisation. The positive actions posited by the company, through their communication online, is seemingly a strategic ploy to provide insight into how they operate and, in turn, how this benefits the consumer and society at large. This may be seen as a means to attract investment through a positive image garnered. This is noted in the selected communication below:

"The first Woolworths store opened its doors to the public in Cape Town in October 1931… [and it] captured the public's imagination with dynamic store policies that set Woolworths apart from its competitors… And since then we've been building on our reputation for superior quality, exciting innovation and excellent value… We love discovering new ideas, new products and new processes. We enjoy thinking 'out of the box' and finding solutions that benefit the business" (Woolworths, 2017).

The organisation does not only speak of its dynamism and unique approach to business but also of their leadership and innovation in the field of retail. Through outlining their creative and efficient procedures and policies, the organisation seemingly seeks to underpin the notion that they are ahead of trends and always considered the best practices for both the organisations and its people. This is important in securing internal stakeholder satisfaction as well as portraying to external stakeholders that the organisation does things not only before competitors but by better means. Such examples of this leadership and excellence are noted below:

"Keen to attract and retain the best retail professionals, Woolworths was among the first local retailers to offer employees a pension fund, medical aid and maternity leave… Woolworths was also an early adopter of technology… Woolworths was already using a computerised merchandising system by the early 1970s… Woolworths became the first South African retailer to introduce 'sell by' dates on food packaging" (Woolworths, 2017).

Further communication of excellence and business practice that is inclined towards superiority is mentioned by the organisation across its multiple online platforms. While the message on some platforms tends to be somewhat uniform, the elaboration of what the organisation strives for as well as stands for is made clearer through re-emphasising their goals and aims. The company mentions their range of

goods and services, which positions them as being a provider to a broad market in the South African context.

They also speak of quality and how they seek to maintain it in all that they do and produce. Again, these are statements laced with inferences that suggest peak business performance and, as a result, a seemingly attractive choice for engagement in terms of retail as a consumer. Their supposed aim of doing the best they can as an organisation at all times lends itself to a narrative of consideration and thought for every action and undertaking they are involved with. Such sentiments are seen in the quote below:

> "At Woolies we offer a unique blend of food, fashion, beauty, homeware and financial services… We are a business led by our values, with every customer we serve, every product we sell, every decision we make, bringing quality to life… From innovation to quality and conservation, Woolies strives to constantly bring a better service and product to its customer… It means giving 100%, 100% of the time… It all boils down to one thing: there's no compromising on quality, because 'good enough' just isn't good enough" (Woolworths, 2017).

4.4.   Discussion of findings:

The emergence of three themes in relation to each respective organisation was clear. However, while the themes themselves did not speak of the theoretical concepts relative to the theoretical framework by which the study was conducted in explicit terms, there was the presence of theoretical notions within the analysed content. Positioning theory, with its constituent concepts of position, speech acts/actions and storylines/narratives, was seen to be embedded within the identified themes, as opposed to being the actual themes themselves.

In collecting data from the different online platforms, it became clear in the analysis phase that certain platforms bore more informative and insightful communication than others. The most applicable platforms in both the case of Walmart and Woolworths was that of their respective corporate websites. The platforms of Facebook and LinkedIn were slightly less fruitful sources as their content involved communication that was largely a reiteration of statements on the aforementioned corporate websites.

In analysing the review site of Glassdoor, a general overview was gained in terms of general ratings of the organisations and the approval of their CEOs. This highlighted external stakeholder views and the possible underscoring of organisational reputations and positions. Also found on the Glassdoor site were pros and cons of working for either company in the form of general reviews from existing or past employees. This noted the perceptions of the organisations from internal stakeholder viewpoints. These two views were not at ends with one another but rather aided in providing a more wholesome view of the either organisation from both within and without.

It was noted that the respective themes found within one company's online communication reflected themes that were fairly parallel to those found within the online communication of the other. In terms of the analysed content it was found that Walmart produced themes of consumer-centricity and community, environmental and social consciousness as well as pride, tradition and growth. In turn, Woolworths manufactured themes of care for the shareholder, environmental awareness and a focus on social causes as well as an emphasis on their excellence, quality and high standards.

In noting these themes, it was found that both organisations stressed the importance of putting the consumer first and engaging with them. Both organisations also placed prominence in care for the environment and society at large through stated procedures and projects. Lastly, both organisations spoke of their history, their

market leadership in, at the very least, their respective regions as well as their innovative, forward-thinking ways. While it would be ignorant to assume that two organisations operating in the same market would communicate completely different agendas and messages, it was interesting to note the many similarities between the two organisations in terms of their communicative messages and intentions given the differences in region and context.

In stressing the similarities of the two organisations in terms of their strategic online communication, it was relative to understand how their efforts aligned with the theory of positioning. Cornelissen (2014) posits that a favourable reputational position in the minds of stakeholders determines whether stakeholders feel a desire to transact with an organisation and choose that organisation over rival firms. The communications of Walmart and Woolworths alluded to reputational prowess respectively.

This was seen in Walmart noting that they are the "largest retailer in the world" (Walmart, 2017) and Woolworths stating how, "Woolworths, or Woolies, as we're fondly called… is one of South Africa's best-loved and most iconic brands" (Woolworths, 2017). These sentiments highlighted the reputational positions of either organisation, in their local contexts, as being positive to the degree that they were market leaders. This is affirmed in the way Karnaukhova and Polyanskaya (2016) speak of communication and reputation being essential for the positioning of an organisation.

This market leadership ties in with the 'symbolic capital' of either organisation in conducting communication, specifically online. Rothbart and Bartlett (2008) note that symbolic capital is the sociocultural prestige that lends to certain speakers an aura of authority in particular fields of discourse and before the relevant audience. In the study itself the aura of authority is the reputational status of either company, while the particular field and relevant audience is the context or region relative to either organisation.

Less prevalent than was previously thought from the outset of the study was that of the 'local moral order'. James (2014) defines this concept as an understood cluster of collectively located beliefs about what is right and good to do and say in a given region. The contexts of America and South Africa are seemingly vast in their differences, although in an ever-globalised world mobile penetration is at an all-time high in either region. "In Africa, South Africa has the largest number of adults owning smartphones" (Africa News, 2016), while in America the mobile penetration rate is at level highs of 64% (Statista, 2017). The communication efforts online by either organisation were less tailored, then, to any specific local moral order, but rather more so with general, even global, consumers and organisational narratives in mind. This being said, it was also observed that organisational messages of either organisation were not controversial in nature and thus did not necessarily "test" the boundaries of the given local moral order in either region.

Another similarity that emerged between the two organisations was the way in which they both sought to strategically position themselves as consumer-oriented leaders and innovators. Through communicating these notions, the organisations were seen as what James (2015) terms working to actively construct the social world – a social world that facilitates the achievement of organisational goals of the respective organisations. These goals would have been communicated in the missions, goals and aims of either organisation, as well as within general communication that held inferences of a positive nature.

Of course, the position strived for by either organisation would have been that of investor buy-in, positive shareholder relationships and the effective communication of societal and environmental care. Essentially, the respective communication by either organisation would have been aimed at what James (2014) describes as the purposive construction of meaning with the strategic intention of the organisation(s) achieving its goals.

Harré (2008) speaks of positioning theory in the way that it contrasts to the older framework of role theory, where roles were notably static. It was found that the communication as well as the role players in the communication setting were not fixed in either contemporary organisational situation. The use of social media platforms, discursive in nature, highlighted this communicative message and role fluidity. McNamara and Zerfass (2012) note the way in which contemporary organisations are increasingly adopting social media for strategic corporate and organisational communication and public relations. Both organisations provided regular updates on their social media pages and provided spaces for engagement and feedback – something that alludes to more contemporary forms of stakeholder awareness and dialogue.

James (2014) notes position is not a static concept – positions changes, as do people's perceptions and thoughts, thus positioning efforts are indeed fluid in nature and must be considered regularly. Again, elements of change, and the possible need for such, in the communication area of business was addressed by either organisation in their multi-faceted approach to – and use of – online communication platforms. The use of these discursive platforms also afford the stakeholder what Pearson (1989) notes as the drive for more ethical communication between an organisation and its publics by according all communication spokespersons equal opportunity to engage.

Overall, Walmart, as an organisation seemingly sought to position themselves in a specific way through certain speech acts and actions, with outlined narratives or storylines in place. The organisation spoke of growth, from humble beginnings to becoming the largest retailer in the world. Community and collaboration was emphasised to seemingly place the organisation as a "friend" or "companion" in the minds of audiences. Their relief efforts, conservation projects and sustainability undertakings were stated in order to invoke in audiences a perception of actions that were positive, that would place the organisation positively in the memories of viewers.

While the local moral order was not of major importance in analysing the organisation in the American context, a large portion of their communication was aimed at garnering an image of being a "neighbourhood" store in the American region. Narratives employed by the organisation included a sense of community, consumer-orientation, humble beginnings, market leadership, quality products at low prices and care for the environment and society as a whole. These narratives, relayed in the form of strategic communicative efforts online – in the form of speech acts – sought to produce or maintain positive images of the organisation and, in the long term, a solid reputation as a globally successful retailer.

James (2014) states that determining a position for the organisation depends greatly on the environment in which one is working. In a region where The Economist (2015) notes how history shows that Americans are reliably angered when they believe that businesses are harming the common good, Walmart has approached the communication area of their business practice carefully and considerably, playing on their strengths as a retailer and their care for the consumer, the environment and society. In review, the general results of this communication and implemented act of positioning has produced positive outcomes, for the most part. This is seen on the review-based website, Glassdoor (2017), where the organisation has an overall organisational rating of 3.2/5 based on 30 069 reviews, while 68% of reviewers approve of the CEO based on 8 214 ratings.

In analysing Woolworths' strategic online communication, there were similarities that emerged in comparison to Walmart. Naturally, Woolworths had a specific position from the outset – that of being an innovative company that always strives to focus on the consumer as well as the wellbeing of their internal stakeholders. A major focus of the company was in communicating their constant ways of striving for excellence and quality. Through stating their forward-thinking procedures and policies, in noting that they were "among the first local retailers to…" (Woolworths, 2017), the company underpins their market leadership and care for relative parties in implementing ways of benefitting the consumer and the employee.

Much like Walmart, Woolworths speak widely of their focus on and care for the consumer. This is affirmed in the way that the organisation speaks of how they always "think consumer" (Woolworths, 2017) and the procedures they enact to provide positive experiences for those who engage with them. While Walmart focused on mass retail and saving the consumer money where possible, Woolworths' focus was more on quality and high standards throughout – "there's no compromising on quality, because 'good enough' just isn't good enough" (Woolworths, 2017). A similarity that was clear was the way in which the two organisations sought to highlight their closeness to consumers, seen in online communication such as, "Woolworths, or Woolies, as we're fondly called… is one of South Africa's best-loved and most iconic brands" (Woolworths, 2017).

Woolworths and Walmart both spoke of their history and growth from their intial start up. Both organisations spoke of their founders and local roots in terms of region. Another point of similarity was the way in which Woolworths, like Walmart, highlighted their sustainability and environmental awareness initiatives – in Woolworths' case it was their "Good Business Journey" (Woolworths, 2017), while Walmart focused more on local and regional relief efforts and charity, along with lesser-emphasised business practices. It was clear that the local moral order in both regions created a sense of obligation for the respective organisations to invest time and money in environmental and societal consciousness activities. This is a seemingly pivotal issue for contemporary organisations to address in nations, such as the two studied, where there are indeed pressures to be good corporate citizens in many respects.

Bradley (2008) alludes to the fact that while a speech act may incite or encourage a particular action, it can never cause it. In the communication of Woolworths and Walmart, it was noticeable, albeit to varying degrees, that their strategic messages in the form of company history, growth and consideration for the world at large, that they sought to elicit stakeholder investment. Whether this was association with the organisations and brands themselves, purchasing from the organisations or simply thinking and speaking better of them. Naturally, these positioning efforts were

sometimes overt and, at times, more covert, in either organisation speaking proudly of themselves and their efforts.

4.5.   Trustworthiness:

Nieuwenhuis (2016) states that where reliability and validity are key measures in quantitative research, trustworthiness is of the utmost importance in qualitative research. In line with the selected conceptual approach of qualitative research and the research paradigm of interpretivism, trustworthiness was aimed for throughout the conceptualisation and conduction of the study. Guba (1981) proposes four criteria for consideration by qualitative researchers in pursuit of a trustworthy study: Credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

"Credibility deals with the questions: How congruent are the findings with reality? How do I ensure that the reader will believe my findings?" (Nieuwenhuis, 2016, p 123). In order to ensure credibility to a greater extent involves the careful construction of methodological design relative to the issue being studied. This was strived for by the researcher in aligning the study with the conceptual approach of qualitative research, with an interpretivistic paradigm, surrounding the research area and issue up front. A clear account of research questions and objectives and the stated data collection and data analysis methods for such were also noted. Further consideration was made by the researcher for the sample and population and how those parties were involved in the study. Credibility was also ensured by the selection and application of the theoretical framework of positioning theory as well as through the detailed description of data collection and the analysis of the data.

Transferability of the study was considered through asking of the research and literature reviewed how typical the contemporary organisations involved were to the context of strategic online communication. As both organisations used multiple online platforms for communication and operate in retail, a field where there are

many competitors who exist and use online communication as well, transferability was increased. Thick description of the respective organisations being studied and their cases aided transferability. The research within the study also sought to assist in making connections between the revealed data and the contexts and regions of practice of either organisation.

In line with credibility, dependability was demonstrated through the research design and its implementation. Through the careful execution of data gathering and creation of the research design, dependability was striven for. The consistent use of research approaches and methods throughout the study, with reflexive insight and adaptation in other areas led to a study underpinned by greater certainty in its theoretical and conceptual approach, which in turn added to a greater degree of dependability in terms of the study's overall design and approach.

Confirmability is described by Nieuwenhuis (2016) as the degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the participants and not researcher bias, motivation or interest. While the researcher has no motivation or interest in misconstruing data collected and analysed, it was an area of the study that was more difficult to abide by. This was most notably because of the fact that interpretation of any body of literature is somewhat subjective in line with a researcher's worldview and symbolic understanding of the world, and phenomena therein, such as communication. The online communication of the organisations studied are also said to be made up of 'illocutionary acts' and 'perlocutionary acts'. These acts are defined by IIE (2017), respectively, as the literal meaning of what is being said – illocutionary acts – and actions performed through an utterance that depends on both the speaker's intentions to persuade as well as the actual persuasive effect of the utterances on the audience – perlocutionary acts. It was the presence of perlocutionary acts in online communication that made confirmability more problematic in relation to the interpretation of findings.

However, the majority of researcher bias was alleviated through reflexive research considerations and the aid of a research supervisor, who provided greater external, objective insight and guidance.

5.   Conclusions:

5.1.   Research questions, problems and objectives addressed in study:

The study aimed to answer a range of questions. These questions were: How did the contemporary local organisation position itself through the use of internet-based communication? How did the contemporary international organisation position itself through the use of internet-based communication? What similarities and/or differences could be seen between the contemporary local organisation and contemporary international organisation? What do the findings indicate in terms of the local and international contexts of the organisations being studied?

In interpreting the findings of the data collected in relation to the respective organisations, these questions were answered to varying degrees. It was found that the contemporary local organisation – Woolworths – sought to position itself as an innovative, forward-thinking organisation with an eye for excellence. They portrayed, or positioned, themselves as producing excellence. They also spoke proudly of their consideration for their customers and employees. Their high standards and strive for consistent excellence was also communicated. Further, their sustainability efforts and care for the environment and society was iterated. These elements all, seemingly, underpinned the organisation's attempt at garnering a positive image in the minds of audiences, both within and without the organisation.

The contemporary international organisation – Walmart – seemed to aim for a position of a "neighbourhood" store that was community-driven. They emphasised collaboration and a pride in their history and growth. They highlighted messages of

saving the customer money while caring for the environment and society. These elements all seemed to aim for an overall image of an organisation that the customer can trust.

In this way, it was noticed that both of the organisations strived, naturally, for positive images and reputations. The respective communicative efforts of the organisations were carried out in their local regions of America and South Africa. Findings indicated that either context, in a societal sense, created societal and environmental obligations for the organisations to fulfil, or at least communicate that they were trying to do so. Legal and demographic factors in either region were less pertinent, as mobile penetration is at all-time highs in each nation and this emphasised a seemingly uniform approach to communication between the respective organisations and audiences.

In terms of the overall approach to presenting and interpreting the findings, a case study design was used. Similarities were indeed found in that both organisations used online platforms such as corporate websites, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and Youtube. There was also reviews of either company on the review site, Glassdoor. Thus, the online presence of either company was found to be vast, across multiple platforms.

5.2.   Future contributions:

Studies of the organisational field may be limited or, alternatively, too complex in their approach to describing or understanding organisational communication. This may be further applicable to communication that occurs online, with new platforms emerging and the discursive nature of those platforms being a point for consideration. James (2014) states that positioning theory is a new approach in the field of communication. This notion, coupled with the ever-evolving nature of online platforms and the communication that occurs thereon, there is much room for further

research to be done into strategic organisational communication, not only generally but through the lens of positioning theory.

The study aimed to analyse organisations from seemingly different regions of the world, although mobile penetration and evidence of an ever-globalised organisational field meant that the opposing contexts were found to be similar in many ways. Future research may aim to analyse contexts with greater contrasts in terms of legislation, communication, online capabilities and/or areas certain regions place greater emphasis on in terms of organisational practices and procedures.

The study at hand was a cross-sectional look at one organisation per region, in the restricted field of retail. Only their online communication, on certain selected platforms, was analysed. These characteristics lend to future researchers and studies the chance to look at more organisations, in different or a greater number of regions, across different markets. While the study was restrictive in its approach, the combination of a case study and the theoretical framework of positioning may provide the field of organisational communication research with a combination of methodology that may prove effective in future research efforts. This could potentially underpin, in future, the importance online communication plays in terms of how, why, when and to whom communication occurs.

5.3.   Heuristic value of the study:

Upon reflection, the immediate value of the study was focused on a small area of the larger field that is strategic communication. The study itself was restricted in terms of the number of organisations and their respective regions that were analysed. The study also focused solely on strategic communication that occurred online. The use of a case study aided structure and presentation of findings, although different approaches could well be more relative for future studies.

In relation to strategic online communication, platforms analysed could be greater in number or different in nature. The element of globalisation arose in the analysis of the context-based communication, which is a positive of the study. Due to the fairly new application of positioning theory to communication content analysis, vast research should still be done in order to best how apply the theory to the interpretation of findings. This is because the theoretical concepts vary in their approach dependent on the communication setting.

Ultimately, James (2014) outlines the fact that deeper, more explicit research of strategic communication with the application of positioning theory may be conducted in future, through stating that the horizons for what should comprise data for positioning analysis in the context of public relations field are broad, and wide open for exploration.

5.4.   Ethical considerations and limitations of the study:

Gregory (2003) postulates that the ethics of research embraces moral issues arising out of the conduct of the research. As the form of research that took place was that of desk research, the study was classified as low-risk. No interviews, focus groups or questionnaires were conducted. The research was secondary in nature, thus any data collected was by means of the extraction of information from sources and texts already present on the internet.

The majority of the information collected and analysed was published and disseminated by the organisations themselves through corporate websites and social media accounts. For this reason, the data collected was public information about the selected organisations. The data analysis within the study was purely interpretive and sought to produce themes surrounding the data – no attempt was made at manipulating data or misconstruing information or communication published by or about the selected organisations.

The presence of potential bias on the part of the researcher was reduced through research supervision. Through an external moderator of the study with a purely objective stance and suggestions for the researcher in this form, no harm was directed towards either of the chosen organisations in the study. Data was collected and analysed ethically and with no outlined intentions of misdirecting the reader or doing harm to the studied organisations. An ethical clearance letter was also obtained before any data collection and analysis was conducted.

Constraints to the research conducted could be said to include a lack of generalisability of the findings to organisations in other industries or in different countries, due to the contextual nature of the study. Strategic communication analysed was purely online, which presented a further limitation in a research sense. Another constraint of the study may be the technological likeness of the selected regions in which the organisations operated.

More vast, insightful research may have been possible through the analysis of more online communication platforms. Also, the nature of desk research means that sources found online are not always as academic or factually sound as is needed for optimal research. Another constraint could have been the researcher's implicit understanding of explicit online communication, which may have affected the interpretation of the findings of the study.

The biggest limitation of the study should be noted as the use of a comparative case study in terms of strategic organisational communication. Goodrick (2014) articulates the need for the researcher to be able to embrace the complexities of each case and to employ critical reasoning in making sense of the evidence and presenting coherent arguments. Goodrick (2014) further notes that while comparative case studies can be based entirely on secondary data analysis, the quality of available evidence must be suitably strong for this to be an appropriate option. In a field as broad as strategic communication, even with a focus on that communication which occurs online, the complexities of each organisational case were difficult to

holistically make sense of due to the inferences that may or may not exist in seemingly explicit words and messages produced by the chosen organisations.

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7.1.   Appendix A: Online platforms chosen for data collection.

Company	Platform	Chosen
Walmart	Corporate website	Yes
	Facebook	Yes
	Glassdoor	Yes
	Instragram	No
	LinkedIn	Yes
	Twitter	No
	Youtube	No
Woolworths	Corporate website	Yes
	Facebook	Yes
	Glassdoor	Yes
	Instragram	No
	LinkedIn	Yes
	Twitter	No
	Youtube	No

7.2. Appendix B: Walmart online communication.

Walmart:

1 Corporate website:

2

3 "What started small, with a single discount store
4 and the simple idea of selling more for less, has
5 grown over the last 50 years into the largest
6 retailer in the world. Each week, over 260
7 million customers and members visit our 11,695
8 stores under 59 banners in 28 countries and e-
9 commerce websites in 11 countries. With fiscal
10 year 2017 revenue of $485.9 billion, Walmart
11 employs approximately 2.3 million associates
12 worldwide. Walmart continues to be a leader in
13 sustainability, corporate philanthropy and
14 employment opportunity. It's all part of our
15 unwavering commitment to creating
16 opportunities and bringing value to customers
17 and communities around the world."

18 (Walmart, 2017).

19

20 "At Walmart, we aim to use our strengths and
21 collaborate with others to transform the systems
22 on which we all rely, including advancing our
23 ambitious commitments and goals within the
24 priority areas of opportunity, sustainability and
25 community. We believe that our work in these
26 areas in not only beneficial for our business
27 bottom line, but also creates shared value for
28 customers and society.

29

30 Beyond producing a whole systems change and
31 shared value, our approach to global
32 responsibility also underscores the importance
33 of true integration into our core business,
34 drawing upon our core capabilities and

35 strengths, and collective action through
36 collaboration with supplier and industry
37 partners, and key stakeholders."

38 (Walmart, 2017).

39

40 "We can make the most significant difference
41 when we draw on our particular strengths as a
42 retailer like our 2.3 million associates globally,
43 supplier relationships, physical assets and
44 capabilities in logistics, marketing, operations
45 and merchandising. We complement and
46 extend the impact of Walmart's social and
47 environmental initiatives through philanthropic
48 efforts. Through both in-kind and cash gifts,
49 Walmart and the Walmart Foundation give over
50 $1 billion annually to projects that create
51 opportunity, enhance sustainability and
52 strengthen community."

53 (Walmart, 2017).

54

55 "For over 50 years, saving people money so
56 they can live better has made Walmart the
57 global leader in both thought and action that we
58 are today. As we look forward to innovating our
59 business for the next 50 years, we're committed
60 to nothing less than transforming the future of
61 commerce. Our everyday low price model and
62 next-generation approach to seamlessly
63 integrating the online and in-store shopping
64 experiences to meet the evolving needs of our
65 customers, have delivered growth, leverage,
66 and returns for our shareholders."

67 (Walmart, 2017).

68

69 "Walmart.com is a lot like your neighbourhood
70 Walmart store. We feature a great selection of
71 high-quality merchandise, friendly service and,
72 of course, Every Day Low Prices. We also have

73 another goal: to bring you the best shopping
74 experience on the Internet.

75

76 Founded in January 2000, Walmart.com is a
77 subsidiary of Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. Our
78 headquarters is on the San Francisco
79 Peninsula near Silicon Valley, where we have
80 access to the world's deepest pool of Internet
81 executive and technical talent.

82

83 But we think of ourselves, first and foremost, as
84 a retailer. So our ties to Bentonville, Arkansas -
85 where Sam Walton opened the first store that
86 bore the Walton name and where Wal-Mart
87 Stores, Inc., is still based - give us our
88 foundation."

89 (Walmart, 2017).

90

91 Facebook:

92

93 "When Sam Walton opened the doors to the
94 first Walmart in 1962, his goal was to save
95 people money so they can live better. Sam was
96 a firm believer in listening to what his customers
97 had to say. That tradition continues today. But
98 now, it doesn't have to end when you leave the
99 store. Through Facebook, we're able to talk to
100 you, find out what's on your mind and let you
101 know what we're up to. It's just another way
102 we're working to give the millions of families
103 who shop at Walmart more of what they love –
104 ways to save money and live better."

105 (Walmart, 2017).

106

107 Glassdoor:

108

109   "Overall organisation rating of 3.2/5 based on
110   29 636 reviews."

111   (Glassdoor, 2017).

112

113   "68% approve of CEO based on 8050 ratings."

114   (Glassdoor, 2017).

115

116   "Pros: Great work environment, great benefits,
117   good pay (in 1012 reviews)

118   Wonderful company for work/life balance (in
119   231 reviews)

120

121   Cons: Teams run very lean which leads to a
122   poor work/life balance (in 627 reviews)

123   If you want full time you need to be
124   grandfathered in or be a manager (in 1011
125   reviews)"

126   (Glassdoor, 2017).

127

128   LinkedIn:

129

130   "At Walmart, we help people save money so
131   they can live better. This mission serves as the
132   foundation for every decision we make, from
133   responsible sourcing to sustainability—and
134   everything in between. As a Walmart associate,
135   you will play an integral role in shaping the
136   future of retail, tech, merchandising, finance
137   and hundreds of other industries—all while
138   affecting the lives of millions of customers all
139   over the world. Here, your work makes an
140   impact every day. What are you waiting for?"

141   (Walmart, 2017).

7.3.   Appendix C: Woolworths online communication.

Woolworths:

1   Corporate website:

2

3   "OUR HISTORY:

4

5   The first Woolworths store opened its doors to
6   the public in Cape Town in October 1931. And it
7   was founder Max Sonnenberg who captured
8   the public's imagination with dynamic store
9   policies that set Woolworths apart from its
10 competitors.

11

12 Three years later, a second branch opened in
13 Durban, with another two in Port Elizabeth and
14 Johannesburg a year later. And since then
15 we've been building on our reputation for
16 superior quality, exciting innovation and
17 excellent value.

18

19 FIRST TO OFFER EMPLOYEE BENEFITS:

20

21 Keen to attract and retain the best retail
22 professionals, Woolworths was among the first
23 local retailers to offer employees a pension
24 fund, medical aid and maternity leave.

25

26 FIRST IN ADVANCING TECH:

27

28 Not just a forward thinking employer,
29 Woolworths was also an early adopter of
30 technology. A lease agreement for the first
31 computer was agreed to with National Cash

32   Registers (NCR) in the late 60s and
33   Woolworths was already using a computerised
34   merchandising system by the early 1970s.

35

36   FIRST TO INTRODUCE SELL BY DATES:

37

38   This dynamic thinking extends to Woolworths
39   product offering. In 1974, Woolworths became
40   the first South African retailer to introduce 'sell
41   by' dates on food packaging. Convenience, too,
42   has long been a watchword at Woolworths - we
43   were the first South African retailer to offer pre-
44   washed lettuce and machine-washable wool
45   clothing to consumers.

46

47   OUR GOOD BUSINESS JOURNEY:

48

49   In April 2007, we launched our Good Business
50   Journey – a bold plan to make a difference in
51   eight key areas on our journey towards
52   sustainability: Energy, Water, Waste,
53   Sustainable Farming, Ethical Sourcing,
54   Transformation, Social Development and
55   Health and Wellness."

56   (Woolworths, 2017).

57

58   "OUR VALUES:

59

60   At Woolworths we take our business values
61   seriously. They aren't just words in an annual
62   report - they are the foundation of our business.
63   They give us direction and guide our behaviour,
64   actions and choices. In fact, our values are so
65   important to us that we're measured not only on
66   our performance, but also by how well we live
67   up to them.

68

69 QUALITY AND STYLE - DELIVER THE BEST:

70

71 It means giving 100%, 100% of the time.
72 Whether it's making sure that a supplier is
73 delivering to the standards we set or preparing
74 a report, it all boils down to one thing: there's no
75 compromising on quality, because 'good
76 enough' just isn't good enough.

77

78 VALUE - A SIMPLE AND FAIR DEAL:

79

80 Offering real value goes beyond offering our
81 customers quality at a good price: it also means
82 offering value to each other, from sharing our
83 knowledge with colleagues and suppliers to
84 being able to evaluate how the decisions we
85 make affect the business.

86

87 SERVICE - WE ALWAYS THINK CUSTOMER:

88

89 At Woolies, we know that we have to go that bit
90 further to really make a difference. Putting the
91 customer first is what service is all about.
92 Whether your customer is a shopper in our
93 stores or the store manager who needs a vital
94 delivery, service is about understanding others'
95 needs, being willing to do more than is
96 expected, and being a good ambassador for the
97 Woolies brand.

98

99 INNOVATION - DISCOVER THE
100 DIFFERENCE:

101

102 We do it for our customers. We love discovering
103 new ideas, new products and new processes.
104 We enjoy thinking 'out of the box' and finding
105 solutions that benefit the business.

106 INTEGRITY - DOING WHAT YOU SAY YOU
107 WILL DO:

108

109 Keeping our promises is important to us,
110 whether it's maintaining confidentiality, not
111 accepting gifts from suppliers, or simply
112 listening to what others have to say with an
113 open mind. By being true to ourselves, we earn
114 the trust of our colleagues and our customers.

115

116 ENERGY - BE PASSIONATE AND DELIVER:

117

118 When you're passionate about what you do,
119 when you really care, your enthusiasm and
120 belief rub off on others. At Woolies, you're part
121 of a 23 000-member team. Being part of a team
122 means being an inspiration to others and being
123 inspired by their successes and triumphs.

124

125 SUSTAINABILITY - BUILD FOR A BETTER
126 FUTURE:

127

128 While you may be familiar with some of our
129 environmental and conservation projects, for us
130 in a South African, and African, context,
131 sustainability isn't just about being 'green'. It's
132 about sharing expertise, helping local
133 enterprises to grow, and contributing to a
134 prosperous, secure future for our country."

135 (Woolworths, 2017).

136

137 <u>Facebook:</u>

138

139 "Mission:

140

141   Welcome to the Woolworths Fan Page.

142

143   We run this page to share what's happening in
144   our world and chat to you about what's
145   happening in yours. This is where we can
146   explore your life with Woolies, together. We
147   love chatting and answering questions, as well
148   as listening to constructive feedback. So
149   please... participate, comment and post!

150

151   About:

152

153   Welcome to Woolworths – a passionately South
154   African retailer dedicated to bringing you
155   quality, style and value for the past 85 years.

156

157   Company Overview:

158

159   Woolworths, or Woolies, as we're fondly called,
160   began life as a department store in Cape Town
161   in 1931. 85 years later, Woolworths is one of
162   South Africa's best-loved and most iconic
163   brands. With departments spanning food,
164   clothing, beauty and homeware, Woolies has
165   evolved over time, but always with one, vital
166   thing firmly in place – our values.

167

168   From innovation to quality and conservation,
169   Woolies strives to constantly bring a better
170   service and product to its customer, and in
171   doing so, to make a lasting difference – socially,
172   environmentally and in business.

173

174   With over 400 stores countrywide, we're
175   growing organically and are honoured to have
176   you join us on our journey."

177   (Woolworths, 2017).

178

179   <u>Glassdoor:</u>

180

181   "Overall organisation rating of 3.4/5 based on
182   103 reviews."

183   (Glassdoor, 2017).

184

185   "62% approve of CEO based on 30 ratings."

186   (Glassdoor, 2017).

187

188   "Pros: Woolworths is a great company to work
189   for (in 5 reviews)

190   Awesome place to work, great pay (in 5
191   reviews)

192

193   Cons: Extremely bad working hours, they do
194   not care at all for any of their staff and they will
195   easily dispose of you (in 3 reviews)

196   No cons that I could see, job description was
197   accurate and as expected, very little room to
198   advance career (in 2 reviews)"

199   (Glassdoor, 2017).

200

201   <u>LinkedIn:</u>

202

203   "The Difference.

204

205   At Woolworths, QUALITY is our DNA, it's our
206   philosophy, it's how we're wired. It's what we
207   do, and how we do it, since 1931. It's our

208 passion, our obsession and the promise we
209 make to our customers and to each other.

210

211 We are a business led by our values, with every
212 customer we serve, every product we sell,
213 every decision we make, bringing quality to life.
214 Our values inform and underpin the way we do
215 business. From values based leadership to
216 passionate brand advocacy, we seek to embed
217 our values across all dimensions of our
218 business.

219

220 At Woolies we offer a unique blend of food,
221 fashion, beauty, homeware and financial
222 services with the vision to be a leading fashion
223 retailer in the Southern Hemisphere. We
224 employ over 31 000 people in South Africa and
225 over 43 000 people across the Group in South
226 Africa, Africa and Australasia to transform this
227 vision into reality.

228

229 Doing business responsibly, in the most
230 transparent and ethical way, sits at the heart of
231 the Woolworths business. Sustainability is one
232 of our values as well as a strategic imperative.
233 Through the collective efforts, commitment and
234 support of our people, suppliers and customers
235 we continue to make great progress on our
236 journey to leave the world and our community in
237 a better place than we found it."

238 (Woolworths, 2017).

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28 June 2017

Student name: Grant Lee Getkate
Student number: 13014075
Campus: Varsity College Durban North

Re: Approval of Bachelor of Arts Honours in Communication Proposal and Ethics Clearance

Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus research panel, a subcommittee of The Independent Institute of Education's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.

Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns and we hereby provide you with ethical clearance to proceed with your data collection.

There may be some aspects that you still need to address in your proposal. If this is the case, feedback will be provided to you in writing. You will need to address these aspects in consultation with your supervisor.

In the event of you deciding to change your research topic or methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure that all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethical clearance letter will be issued in such instances.
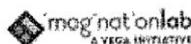
We wish you all the best with your research!

Yours sincerely,

Amanda Cox
Supervisor

Leigh de Wet
Campus Postgraduate Coordinator