

Title:

An investigation on how brands in the mining sector can manage reputations in the context of the digital age: Harmony Gold.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The digital age has made it easier to share and receive information through the World Wide Web, ultimately breaking geographical barriers. For most companies, this has increased the difficulty of reputation management as internet users mainly consumers increasingly find themselves in control of shared information and opinions about some companies and companies find themselves proportionately having less control over bad publicity posted on the internet. This can either lead to the success of a company or lead to erosion of a company's reputation (Ott, 2013).

This study will analyse how companies in the mining sector can manage reputations online using social media platform, Twitter. It questions how the South African gold mining company, Harmony Gold managed their reputation through Twitter in the last 3 months, during and following an illegal strike staged by 1,700 workers at their Kusasaletu mine in January 2017 (Africa News Agency, 2017).

The mining industry is a very traditional one. A report generated by Deloitte based on tracking trends within the mining industry states that the need for mining companies to use social media is becoming increasingly important as it improves stakeholder engagement, enabling companies to communicate with their workers and bridge the gap between employees and management (Deloitte, 2016). An article by Mining Global, an international online mining magazine adds on to Deloitte's appeal stating that mining companies have been known to avoid social media and public exposure with regards to their mining activities. (Mining Global, 2017).

The goal of the study is to highlight the importance of online reputation management in a crisis and to explore how mining companies can adapt their online reputation management strategies in order to ultimately increase positive perceptions from the public and other stakeholders surrounding the industry.

The study will make use of the interpretivism paradigm based on the assumption that "The social world does not exist independently of human knowledge." (Maree, 2016). This paradigm plays a significant role in the study as the researcher investigates how reputations of companies within the mining sector are affected by the digital social world of Twitter and disciplines relating to how the social media platform is used by companies and stakeholders.

This study will make use of a qualitative approach towards data collection whilst taking an ontological view on how the phenomenon of online reputation management came about. Harmony Gold's recent strike concerning the payment of special bonuses at the company's Kusasaletu mine (Eye Witness News, 2017), will be used as a case study. The study will

unobtrusively conduct a historical content analysis of the company's Twitter page with the aim of understanding exactly how the company handled their online brand reputation through content creation on Twitter to address the crisis they faced as well as how this influenced the outcome with regards to relationship-driven elements of the adapted Octalysis tool by Jun Loayza on Reputation Hacks (2013).

In comparison, reputation and brand reputation, brand reputation is more stakeholder aligned encompassing the perceptions of stakeholders (consumers, investors, suppliers etc.) about a brand whereas reputation is more in-depth encompassing both a company's corporate actions (outside of a marketing perspective) and perceptions held by stakeholders (Mail & Guardian, 2016) hence the study will have a much stronger focus on reputation rather than brand reputation and take an in-depth look into the corporate actions of Harmony Gold on Twitter during the Kusasaletu strike and analyse the effect those actions have had on the public perception of the company following the incident.

Social media platforms are a way for companies to promote their offerings and internal culture whilst building relationships with their followers. There are however some negative aspects to social media, such as heightened public scrutiny for companies in times of crises, usually fueled by negative emotions held by stakeholders (Ott, 2013). The mining industry is one that has been under intense public scrutiny in South Africa over the years. Companies within this sector experience devastating internal issues connected to either human error or the mortality of mine workers illegal and legal which extends outside of the company's control (SABC News, 2016).

Harmony Gold has been under the public eye with recurring incidents involving the deaths of legal and illegal miners since 2009 (Harmony Gold, 2009) and more recently and illegal sit-in staged by 1,700 mine workers at the company's Kusasaletu Mine over demands for a "special bonus", a decision by the management of Harmony Gold which was then retracted at the last minute (Manyathela, 2017). The company had promised to pay employees a special bonus when they returned to work at the beginning of the year but once at work employees learned that the management would not be fulfilling that promise; fuelling the subsequent labour unrest (Manyathela, 2017). To ensure they acquire value for their money, investors keep a close eye on listed companies such as Harmony Gold as when they receive a negative social impact, the company's share price tends to decrease, and if the company receives positive social impact the share price increase.

The study will conduct an analysis of Harmony Gold's online reputation management through the use of Twitter with a specific reference to how the brand used the social media platform to

handle communications with stakeholders during the illegal sit-in staged by mineworkers at the Kusasaletu mine in January 2017 (Africa News Agency, 2017).

2. RATIONALE AND RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

The mining sector plays an important role in the South African economy, contributing R 263 Billion to the country's Gross Domestic Profit (GDP) and creating over 500 direct and indirect jobs respectively (Mafika, 2015). This sector is also on the receiving end of negative backlash as companies experience devastating issues, both internally through human error and externally, extending outside of the scope of their control such as the deaths of mine workers, both legal and illegal (SABC News, 2016).

Once such company, Harmony Gold has been under the public eye with recurring incidents involving the deaths of legal and illegal miners since 2009 (Harmony Gold, 2009) and more recently and illegal sit-in staged by 1,700 mine workers at the company's Kusasaletu Mine over demands for a "special bonus", a decision undertaken the management of Harmony Gold which was then retracted at the last minute (Eye Witness News, 2017). The company had promised to pay employees a special bonus when they returned to work at the beginning of the year but once at work employees learned that the management would not be fulfilling that promise; fuelling the subsequent labour unrest (Eye Witness News, 2017).

The practical relevance of online reputation management is to provide companies with a platform to defend themselves from reputation damage on social media, which is a phenomenon that the traditional mining industry is coming to grips with in order to have some of the control over the public perceptions and dialogues concerning their companies (Mining Weekly, 2015). Although there are numerous studies based on online reputation management, one study stands out, published by Zoe Mullard on Mining IQ (Mullard, 2011) focused the application of social media in the mining industry.

An improved reputation has the potential to present mining companies such as Harmony Gold in a positive light towards investors and can attract the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) that the South African mining industry so desperately needs for infrastructure development and technology system (Miningmx, 2016).

The study will conduct an analysis of Harmony Gold's online reputation management through the use of Twitter with a specific reference to how the brand used the social media platform to handle communications with stakeholders during the illegal sit-in staged by mineworkers at the Kusasaletu mine in January 2017 (Africa News Agency, 2017).

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

To analyse how Harmony Gold, a South African mining company made use of social media, particularly Twitter in the last 3 months to manage the company's reputation surrounding the recent Kusasaletu strike in January 2017 (Africa News Agency, 2017).

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does Harmony Gold use Twitter to manage their brand reputation online?
2. Did the company effectively manage their reputation on Twitter during the recent strike by miners at Harmony Gold's Kusasaletu mine against the Octalysis framework?
3. How do stakeholders interacting with the company on Twitter respond to the company as a result of their online reputation management on Twitter following the Kusasaletu incident?

5. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the effect that Twitter has on Harmony Gold's online brand reputation.
2. To analyse how Harmony Gold uses the Twitter platform to manage their online reputation against the Octalysis framework.
3. To determine the Twitter responses of Harmony Gold's stakeholders following the Kusasaletu incident?

6. LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Cilliers and Bezuidenhout (2014) describe limitations as constraints or restrictions that lie outside of the researcher's control. With regards to the study, limitations that apply to the researcher are time and access to information. Due to the time set to complete the research project, the researcher is unable to collect a large amount of information pertaining to the Harmony Gold Kusasaletu strikes.

According to (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014) a delimitation defines the parameters that the researcher has set to work within. According to the authors, the researcher does this in order to focus their attention on specific pieces of literature, specific concepts as well as relevant research methods. The main delimitation to this study is that it cannot be applied to general reputation management but rather to online reputation management alone. The researcher's investigation is based upon Twitter as well as online literature regarding the mining sector as well as online reputation management. The findings with regards to the study will be solely focused on online reputation management on Twitter, targeted solely at the

mining industry. The study is also solely focused on Harmony Gold's online reputation, therefore, excluding related terms and influencers such as brand identity and brand perception.

7. CONCEPTUALISATION

The study will be based on the following key concepts:

1. Twitter

Launched in 2006, Twitter is an online social media platform that provides users with 140 characters for the purpose of microblogging their thoughts, images, news, links and more. The mission for Twitter is to “give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information instantly without barriers” (Twitter, 2016).

2. The Digital Age

The digital age, also known as the information age is the present realm where information is presented in a digital form; a direct comparison to a time when computers did not exist (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2017). According to (Intersperience Research, 2017), the birth of the digital is a result of the accelerated development of technology, the continued development of user-friendly devices as well as more and more people across the world gaining access to the internet.

3. Online Brand Reputation Management

Brand Reputation Management is a key factor to growing a business as a positive brand, results in increased stakeholder loyalty and confidence. Due to an increase in online conversations on brands, it is important for a company such as Harmony Gold to be active and knowledgeable on the topic of online reputation management.

Online Reputation Management (ORM) is the process of shaping the public perception of an individual or company by influencing information shared about them on the World Wide Web (ten Dolle, 2014). According to (Taffesse, 2012) the phenomenon of reputation management began in the 15th century through the spoken word and from the 17th century, it gradually developed with the introduction of print media. From the 20th century, reputation management became more about persuading audiences through television; introducing brand awareness as well as brand perception.

Marketing elements that fall under online reputation management against the Octalysis framework that will prominently be used in the study include Public Relations, Search Engine

Optimisation, Social Media, Company Website, External Links, Review Sites, Blogs, Videos and Images (Loayza, 2013).

4. The Mining Sector

This is an industry concerned with the location and extraction of metal and mineral reserves. These reserves are mine to generate a profit and are used in jewelry making industrial applications as well as investments. The sector faces a number of challenges that include government regulations, environmental impact as well as the injury and sometimes death of mine of workers among other costly issues. All the challenges listed above have the potential to negatively affect reputations of companies that operate within the industry (Investopedia, 2017).

8. LITERATURE REVIEW

The digital age has made it easier to share and receive information through the World Wide Web, ultimately breaking geographical barriers. For most companies, this has increased the difficulty of reputation management as internet users mainly consumers increasingly find themselves in control of shared information and opinions about some companies and companies find themselves proportionately having less control over bad publicity posted on the internet. This can either lead to the success of a company or lead to erosion of a company's reputation (Ott, 2013). Hence the introduction of a digital method of reputation management called Online Reputation Management.

Online Reputation Management (ORM) is the process of shaping the public perception of an individual or company by influencing information shared about them on the World Wide Web (ten Dolle, 2014). The rise of the digital age and the introduction of social media inspired the development of Online Reputation as this meant that information could be shared faster amongst larger groups of people. Reputation management went from being a form of internally controlled one-way communication to becoming an externally controlled dialogue between companies and their stakeholders. The main challenge in the digital age, companies have little to no control when external stakeholders launch an attack on social media, resulting in reputation damage.

It is important to acknowledge that online reputation management does not only entail managing a brand's communication during a crisis, although that is the focus of the study. However, the online reputation management function also to ensure that a brand's online communication is identical to its core values as well as the primary needs of immediate stakeholders (Reputation X, 2017).

According to (Issa, 2011), most corporates are sceptical about becoming an active part of the social media environment, particularly signing up for a Twitter account mainly due to a fear communicating information that has the potential to be misinterpreted by their followers as well as other platform users. The author goes on to explain that these companies do not realise are numerous constructive ways to communicate on social without posting actual tweets such as sharing insightful content that attracts a relevant following. This is a form of online reputation management.

Online reputation management is of importance to the study in order to understand how brands in the mining sector can make use social media, specifically Twitter to defend themselves against attacks launched by stakeholders and publicised by the media even by users of the social media platform. The internet provides a number of platforms to carry out online reputation management including online press releases, social media and blogs all of

which can also be used alongside platforms such as Google Alerts that aid in monitoring reputation management. The mining sector is a challenging one and faces a plethora of devastating issues that serve as ammunition for the public to launch attacks on companies e.g. employee strikes and fall of ground accidents that result in employee mortality.

As discovered in the review of the digital age, the internet and available social media platforms such as Twitter play an active role in empowering today's consumers and informing the decisions they make. As pointed out by (Klopper and North, 2011) the ability for consumers to share information and express themselves on platforms such as Twitter can either contribute to a positive brand reputation or erode the reputation of the brand or company in this case. For the purpose of this study, the author will be using Twitter as a sole social media platform and information medium to analyse Harmony Gold's online reputation management process during the employee strikes in January 2017 (Eye Witness News, 2017).

The study will make full use of this platform as it is a medium preferred by influencers, journalists and bloggers from all industries which adds to the credibility of the microblogging site. The above stakeholder groups often have a large number of followers hence tweets made by these users are instantly viewed and shared by vast audiences. With the trending feature also facilitated on the platform, Twitter has also become the place to monitor the progression of crises around the world. Twitter is an information hub; if a story does not break on the platform, it will be sure to pass through. The platform has the ability to link to other social media platforms such as YouTube meaning that it combines a large amount of content from various sources across the web (Dumitru, 2014).

Through the use of the above key concepts, the researcher will have the ability to analyse how Harmony Gold, a South African mining company made use of social media, particularly Twitter in the last 3 months with regard to the Kusasaletu strike. The study will be informed by online reputation management as a process taking into the consideration tools used to manage online reputations as outlined by the Octalysis framework (Loayza,2013). The researcher will also examine the existing network that company has built with stakeholders on Twitter to unobtrusively observe the company's associations online as well as their engagement and determine the effects on the credibility of the company during and outside of a crisis. The study will also take into account that the digital realm continues to expand and the researcher seeks to develop suggestions as to how the company can survive reputational crises going forward, with a specific focus on upcoming trends in online reputation management.

9. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section of the proposal will discuss the research methodology, which is how the researcher plans to conduct their research in an effort to find answers to the earlier mentioned research questions listed in section 3.1 of this document (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014). In addition to specifying their research methods, the researcher will also elaborate on why the methods chosen are suitable for the study and how they will analyse collected data for the readers' understanding. The researcher will also elaborate on how they plan to ensure the reliability and validity of the study.

In order to effectively plan their research, the researcher also needs to consider their research design which is the overall strategy they will select in an effort to logically integrate the various components of the study. This is the blueprint for data collection and analysis (University of Southern California, 2006).

9.1. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study will make use of a qualitative approach towards data collection whilst taking an ontological view on how the phenomenon of online reputation management came about. Harmony Gold's recent strike concerning the payment of special bonuses at the company's Kusaalethu mine (Eye Witness News, 2017), will be used as a case study. The study will unobtrusively conduct a historical content analysis of the company's Twitter page with the aim of understanding exactly how the company handled their online brand reputation through content creation on Twitter to address the crisis they faced as well as how this influenced the outcome with regards to relationship-driven elements of the adapted Octalysis tool by Jun Loayza on Reputation Hacks (2013).

The researcher will identify and expand upon the research design as well as methods in which the study will collect and analyse data. The philosophical research design is used a broad approach to examining a research problem. This research design entails challenging assumptions supporting an area of study (University of Southern California, 2006). There are three ways in which the philosophical research design can be framed and these are through the following research paradigms (Maree, 2016):

1. Ontology- This is a paradigm that describes the nature of reality in order to determine what is real and what it is not as well as what part of reality is central and which part is imitative of something else.
2. Epistemology- This is a paradigm focused more on the nature of knowledge, how we come to acquire knowledge as well as how we can be confident of what we know.

3. Axiology- This paradigm is focused on values, why we hold certain values as groups/individuals as well as how these values affect certain parts of our lives e.g. our interests and experiences with regards to day-to-day life.

The ontological paradigm approach is applicable to the study in the sense that it analyses the social world and connects it to people's perceptions and differing realities which is the main foundation of online reputation management especially from an internal stakeholder perspective and an external stakeholder perspective (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014). The study will be undertaken from an ontological position of interpretivism determined by the presence of Harmony Gold on Twitter and how the company uses the social media platform to carry out online reputation management. (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014) describe the ontological position of interpretivism as fluid and fluctuates according to the alteration of peoples' perceptions.

The study will make use of the interpretivism paradigm based on the assumption that "The social world does not exist independently of human knowledge" (Maree, 2016). This paradigm plays a significant role in the study as the researcher investigates how reputations of companies within the mining sector are affected by the digital social world of Twitter and disciplines relating to how the social media platform is used by companies and stakeholders.

Scientifically, the type of research conducted by the researcher is historical-hermeneutic, which is practical and conducted with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of social media and the effect it has on the reputation management of mining companies. This type of research is connected directly to interpretivism paradigm which the researcher make use of (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014).

There are five research designs to consider when planning your research. The five approaches to qualitative research design according to (Maree, 2016) are as follows:

1. Narrative Studies/Research- This research design is focused on exploring the life of an individual and the data collection takes place in the form of interviews and documentation, analysed in the form of stories and historical content and reported in the form of full description of the life of an individual.

This research design is not suitable for the study at hand as it is not focused on a specific individual.

2. Phenomenology- This research design is focused on the "essence of experience about a phenomenon" (Maree, 2016). Data for this design is collected in the form of interview constituting of approximately 10 people and analysed through statements, meanings and relayed through a general experience of the phenomenon at hand.

This research design is not suitable for the study at hand as the focus is not on a particular phenomenon.

3. Grounded Theory- This is a design focused on the development of a theory from data grounded in a particular field. Data is collected through interviews of 20-30 participants and analysed in the form of coding. The results are relayed in the form of a theory or a theoretical model.

This research design is not suitable for the study at hand as it requires a lengthy time-period to completed and researcher has a restricted time-frame in which they must complete their study. The researcher also aims to acquire knowledge rather than develop a theory.

4. Ethnography- This research design describes and interprets various cultures or groups within society. The data is collected through interviews as well as observations and is analysed in the form of discussions, analysis and interpretation. The results from this research design are relayed in a description of the behavior of the studied culture or social group.

This research design is inapplicable to the study as it is not focused on understanding the culture within the mining industry but rather on acquiring knowledge on how the industry can make use of social media for online reputation management.

5. Case Study- This is a research design that is focused on acquiring an in-depth understanding of a case study. The data is collected from numerous sources including documents, archives and observations. It is then analysed in the form of descriptions or assertions and relayed in an in-depth description of the case and the outcome thereof.

This research design is applicable to the study as it is focused on a specific case which is the strike that took place at Harmony Gold's Kusasalethu mine in January 2017. The researcher will apply this research design in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the effect that using Twitter had on the company's online reputation management during this time.

9.2. POPULATION AND SAMPLING

According to (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014) Population and Sampling occurs when the researcher consults their research aims and questions in order to identify all elements concerning the study and their common characteristics which are referred to as the

population of the study. The researcher then goes on to select elements for analysis within the study, which are then referred to as the sample of the study.

A research population consists of a complete group of people from which information is sourced for the purpose of research. In order to determine the population in relation to this study, the researcher has to consider the research questions listed in section 3.1 of this document.

As a result of these questions, the population for this research study is identified to be Harmony Gold's Twitter followers as well as the company's stakeholders inclusive of investors and employees. These entities are all linked to the questions either through Twitter or through the fact that they were directly affected by the Kusasaletu strikes.

Employees were affected by the company's inability to fulfill their promise to pay a bonus salary as a result of workers presenting themselves to work in January 2017 (Africa News Agency, 2017). Investors would be affected by the company's share price and this would, in turn, motivate reasons to reconsider investment towards the company. The study will then work to identify a common thread between these social entities in connection to the Kusasaletu strikes and the manner in which Harmony Gold handled the crisis on Twitter.

With regards to sampling, the researcher has chosen to focus specifically on Twitter followers who made contact with Harmony Gold in relation to the Kusasaletu strike, therefore the study will have a profound focus on communication between the company and the sample chosen in the form of Tweets, replies and comments.

9.3. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data in relation to the study will be collected from Twitter. All tweets regarding the Kusasaletu incident will be sourced from Harmony Gold's Twitter page, under the headings "Tweets", "Tweets & Replies" and "Media. In terms of the framework chosen by the researcher, which is the Octalysis framework, Twitter assists combining all the elements in one platform, therefore, optimising online reputation management. Twitter allows the company to share videos and images, share external links from their website, blogs, review sites as well as press releases and monitor these elements using the "Media" tab on their website. In addition to all of this, the social media platform also plays a significant role in improving the overall ranking of the company in terms of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) (Loayza, 2017).

The study requires qualitative data collection as a methodological approach in order to understand and apply meaning to communications undertaken by Harmony Gold on Twitter. There are two forms of qualitative data collection and these are field research, which requires the researcher to observe and/or interact with participants in their natural environments within

the outside world (Creative Commons, 2012). The second form of qualitative data collection is Unobtrusive research which differs from the former in that it does not require direct contact with participants or the outside world but is rather focused on a historical analysis of human behavior and communication patterns (Creative Commons, 2012).

The researcher will search specifically for tweets concerning the Kusasaletu strikes between 13 January 2017 to 13 March 2013. Through a retrospective, cross-sectional analysis of tweets about the Kusasaletu strike by Harmony Gold mine workers.

The data will be collected in a timeous manner and separated between the three headings listed on Harmony Gold’s Twitter Page i.e. “Tweets”, “Tweets & Replies” and “Media”. The table below depicts the order, dates and time in which the researcher will conduct necessary research with regards to the study.

Tweets

| Collection Method: | Source | Date | Start Time: | End Time: |
|---------------------|------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|
| Harmony Gold Tweets | @HarmonyGoldNews | 01 June 2017 | 18h00 | 22h00 |
| Harmony Gold Tweets | @HarmonyGoldNews | 02 June 2017 | 18h00 | 22h00 |
| Harmony Gold Tweets | @HarmonyGoldNews | 03 June 2017 | 18h00 | 22h00 |

Tweets & Replies

| Collection Method: | Source: | Replies from: | Date: | Start Time: | End Time: |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|
| Harmony Gold Tweets & Replies | @HarmonyGold News | Xxxx | 04 June 2017 | 18h00 | 22h00 |
| Harmony Gold Tweets & Replies | @HarmonyGold News | Xxxx | 05 June 2017 | 18h00 | 22h00 |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|------|--------------|-------|-------|
| Harmony Gold Tweets & Replies | @HarmonyGold News | Xxxx | 06 June 2017 | 18h00 | 22h00 |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|------|--------------|-------|-------|

Media

| Collection Method: | Source: | Media Publication: | Date: | Start Time: | End Time: |
|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|
| Harmony Gold Media | @HarmonyGoldNews | Xxx | 07 June 2017 | 18h00 | 22h00 |
| Harmony Gold Media | @HarmonyGoldNews | Xxx | 08 June 2017 | 18h00 | 22h00 |
| Harmony Gold Media | @HarmonyGoldNews | Xxx | 09 June 2017 | 18h00 | 22h00 |

9.4. DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

In order to effectively analyse collected data the researcher will follow the subsequent steps (Library Web, 2017):

1. Read through tweets by Harmony Gold, the company's tweets and replies as well as mentions made about the company on Twitter by followers as well as the media. This information will be found on the company's Twitter page underneath the headings "Tweets", "Tweets & Replies" and "Media".
2. As the researcher goes along, they will make notes on information and tweets that they find relevant to the Octalysis Framework concerning online reputation management.
3. The researcher will then categorise their notes according to headings within the Octalysis Framework i.e. SEO, Public Relations, External Links, Review Sites, Company Website, Blogs, Videos and Images.
4. With regards to determining the relevance of the information to the study, the researcher will collect all of the information categories and examine each one in detail.
5. The researcher will review the categories and determine according to the Octalysis framework whether some categories may be merged.

6. The researcher will repeat the above process a second and a third time in order to ensure that the information is correctly categorised and thoroughly examined.

The researcher will not only be looking at tweets from followers either, however, in an effort to derive data from all sides, they will also examine and analyse tweets from Harmony Gold itself.

According to (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014) there are numerous data analysis methods. The authors go on to state that the purpose of data analysis is to sift through collected data in order to separate relevant and irrelevant information with regards to the study at hand as well as identifying significant patterns in order to effectively communicate what the data reveals in relation to the research topic.

In the case of this research proposal, the researcher will be making use of content analysis as both a method of data collection and data analysis. The researcher will curate data that is inclusive of tweets, images as well as press clippings relating to the Harmony Gold Kusasaletu strike. In order to analyse collected data, the researcher will organise it chronologically pertaining to Harmony Gold's communication via Twitter to all relevant stakeholders.

The researcher has decided to take a deductive approach towards their data analysis, using the Octalysis Framework to identify relevant factors within collected data to ease the process of grouping relevant data into relevant categories informed by the Octalysis framework in order to effectively analyse the data. The Octalysis Framework, developed by Gamification Guru Yu-Kai Chong, adapted by Jun Loayza on Reputation Hacks (2013) is used to measure the eight core principles of online reputation management i.e. Video & Imagery, Press Relations, Social Media, External Links, Review Sites, Blogging, Branding and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO).

The adapted Octalysis tool possesses the advantage of analysing two sides of online reputation management, a content-driven side as well as a relationship-driven side. The content-driven side consists of elements such as social media, blogs as well as review sites which serve as free-for-all platforms that brands can influence through content creation and interaction with stakeholders. In this section of the Framework, the researcher will pay particular attention to Twitter as a social media platform. The relationship-driven side of the Octalysis tool focuses on Public Relations, External Links and Branding all of which are more controlled as they have gatekeepers i.e. the company itself being Harmony Gold as well as the media as according to Reputation Hacks (2013). In this section of the framework, the

researcher will focus on external links posted by Harmony Gold as well as the sample of their Twitter followers in connection to the Kusasaletu strikes.

The researcher has chosen to use this unconventional framework as we live in a digital age where people interact with brands in a plethora of methods, increasingly on social media. What a brand communicates on social media immediately affects who they attract, their frame of reference and reaction, their value-add as well as loyalty.

In order to effectively analyse collected data, the researcher will critically consider the discourse between Harmony Gold and stakeholders on Twitter, paying particular attention to social and power relations between participating constituents, this will give the researcher a clear idea of who has control in the tweets back and forth and how the company manages to restore or maintain trust within their stakeholders. Due to the fact that the researcher will be using social media, they will also take semiotics into consideration considering the popular use of “emojis” as visual symbols that sometimes replace words online (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014).

9.5. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

The goal of the research aims to understand how brands within the mining industry can use social media to manage their reputation online. According to (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014), qualitative research data is not objectively measurable as opposed to quantitative data hence the researcher will focus on the terminology used within collected data in order to determine trustworthiness with regards to the study. The trustworthiness of the study will be determined by the following qualitative factors as defined by (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014):

- Credibility- This refers to the accuracy to which collected data is interpreted by the researcher.
- Transferability- This refers to the ability for the findings of the study to be applied to similar studies and render similar results.
- Dependability- This refers to the accuracy of the integration of research processes including data collection, data analysis as well as the findings.
- Confirmability- This refers to the level to which collected data is relevant to the findings of the study.

Credibility

The researcher will ensure that the study is credible by spending a considerable amount of time of Harmony Gold's Twitter page analysing tweets and other relevant data through external links relating to the Kususaletu strikes in January 2017. Consulting external links as well as the company's press releases, the researcher will analyse the data to ensure that there are common themes and patterns that will, in turn, inform the trustworthiness of the study.

Transferability

The study is intended to be transferable to other brands within the mining industry and not solely to Harmony Gold. Hence the researcher will generalise their finding so that they can be applied to online reputation management in the mining industry as a whole.

Dependability

In order to ensure that the study is dependable, the researcher will create a coding system based on the Octalysis in an effort to record and group collected data in such a manner that themes and consistent patterns are identified and applied throughout the study.

Confirmability

In order to ensure confirmability within the study, the researcher will specifically communicate and describe the research process from beginning to end. This will include step by step encounter detailing how the researcher went about collecting data, coding, developing data themes and patterns, data analysis as well as the findings.

10. ANTICIPATED CONTRIBUTION

A study conducted by Zoe Mullard (Mullard, 2011) talks about the application of social media in the mining industry and identifies the gaps traditional communication methods and digital methods in order to determine the integration of social media to improve information sharing. The study states that the application of social media in the mining industry would be in the form of developing marketing messages as well as managing public relations which are both forms online reputation management. The study also identifies the main challenge for mining industries making use of social media being aligning social media communication with the industry's regulatory structures.

Similar to the study mentioned above, a report compiled by Deloitte in 2015, highlights the important of integrating a digital workforce within the mining industry. The report specifically earmarks changing the nature of stakeholder communications to include the use of social media and the many ways it can assist in safeguarding the approval of mining projects against viral activist campaigns on social media; which is a form of online reputation management. The report goes on to state that in selective jurisdictions such as South Africa, disputes between mining companies and labour unions remain rife (Deloitte, 2015). Examples can be made of the Marikana Massacre which took place at one of Lonmin's mines in 2012 (South African History Online, 2013) as well as Harmony Gold with a direct connection to the Kusasaletu strike on which the study is based.

Both the study and the report discuss the integration of social media in the industry and how it can improve the sharing of information between stakeholders.

The research study contributes to this field by highlighting how social media, particularly Twitter can be used to manage the online reputation of companies within the mining industry. The study at hand will add on to the above research, incorporating an element of how to improve online reputation management through social media integration in the industry looking at how Harmony Gold managed communications with their stakeholders, particularly on Twitter during the Kusasaletu strike. It is important to not only improve information sharing during a crisis such as the Kusasaletu but to also pay attention to the public's reaction and developing reassuring messaging. Using the Octalysis Framework, the researcher will touch on each of the factors that affected online reputation management as well as how they can be incorporated during a crisis such as the Kusasaletu strike experienced and managed by Harmony Gold.

The study is targeted specifically at the mining industry hence it will be most impactful when used by mining companies and their communication teams. The researcher chose this industry as it is a relatively traditional one, also susceptible to negative public scrutiny. The

research would assist these companies in identifying the benefits of online reputation management as well as the use of tools such as social media to influence positive perceptions of the companies.

The study has the potential to encourage the use of social media in the mining industry by highlighting the benefits and correct use of tools such as social media in the Octalysis framework. The study will consider how Harmony Gold has carried out a method of online reputation management on Twitter and analyse the benefits that the social media platform provided to the company during the Kusasaletu strike. From there, the researcher will conclude as to whether Twitter positively impacted the company's engagement with stakeholders and make guided suggestions using the Octalysis framework as to how the company can improve communication on social media to positively influence their online reputation management.

11. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are

It is important for the study to follow an ethical code of conduct in order to maintain a degree of integrity. Ethical considerations in relation to the study will be to ensure that all media used to collect data are credible and factual and that communication patterns are deciphered objectively in order to avoid any bias that comes with the researcher working in the mining industry.

The researcher shall also match posts made to the company's Twitter page, as well as related posts on twitter using the identity of stakeholders with regards to media articles and press releases in order to ensure credibility.

The research is solely based on a historical content analysis of Harmony Gold's Twitter page and therefore does not warrant the participation of respondents within the data collection process. However, the research considers the followers of Harmony Gold's Twitter page. For this reason, the researcher will be sure to reference the Tweets relevant to the study according to the identities of the followers within the sample.

According to (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014) bias is the desire to achieve a specific result in conclusion to a study. The researcher takes it upon themselves to avoid bias and solely collect their information making use of the Twitter platform. The researcher will collect the information as it is and will not manipulate collected data in support of a desired outcome.

12. PROPOSED CHAPTERS

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Chapter 4: Data Findings and Analysis

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

13. CONCLUSION

As mention in the rationale of this research proposal (section 2 of the document), the mining industry plays a significant role in the contributing to the South African economy. The sector, however, received a lot of negative backlash due to the risky nature of operations which sometimes, unfortunately, result in environmental accidents and unforeseen accidents that lead to an increased mortality rate.

Harmony Gold has been under the public eye with recurring incidents involving the deaths of legal and illegal miners since 2009 (Harmony Gold, 2009) and more recently and illegal sit-in staged by 1,700 mine workers at the company's Kusasaletu Mine over demands for a "special bonus", a decision by the management of Harmony Gold which was then retracted at the last minute (Manyathela, 2017). The company had promised to pay employees a special bonus when they returned to work at the beginning of the year but once at work employees learned that the management would not be fulfilling that promise; fuelling the subsequent labour unrest (Manyathela, 2017). To ensure they acquire value for their money, investors keep a close eye on listed companies such as Harmony Gold as when they receive a negative social impact, the company's share price tends to decrease, and if the company receives positive social impact the share price increase.

We live in a digital age where people interact with brands in a plethora of methods, more especially on social media. What a brand communicates on social media immediately affects who they attract, their frame of reference, their value-add as well as loyalty. In terms of literature, there have been numerous studies conducted on online reputation management as such as those of (Tafesse,2012) and ten Dolle (2014) as well as industrial branding in the digital age by Taiminen (2015) however, these studies do not provide a direct link to the mining sector. A study conducted by (Mullard, 2011) focusing on the application of social media in the mining industry will be used as a close frame of reference for this study.

An improved reputation has the potential to present mining companies such as Harmony Gold in a positive light towards investors and can attract the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) that the South African mining industry so desperately needs for infrastructure development and technology system (Miningmx, 2016).

This study will make use of a qualitative approach towards data collection whilst taking an ontological view on how the phenomenon of online reputation management came about. Harmony Gold's recent strike concerning the payment of special bonuses at the company's Kusasalethu mine (Eye Witness News, 2017), will be used as a case study. The study will unobtrusively conduct a historical content analysis of the company's Twitter page with the aim of understanding exactly how the company handled their online brand reputation through content creation on Twitter to address the crisis they faced as well as how this influenced the outcome with regards to relationship-driven elements of the adapted Octalysis tool by Jun Loayza on Reputation Hacks (2013).

The research aims to encourage the use of social media in the mining industry by highlighting the benefits and correct use of tools such as Twitter in reference to the Octalysis framework. The research aims to educate the crisis-prone industry on how to make use of social media to improve online reputation management as developments with regards to the digital age have lead to easy access to the internet making it the first reference when people seek news or information on companies rather than consulting sources offline. The expectation is that member of the mining community will find it easier to make use of social media for information sharing purposes as well as communicating with relevant stakeholders.

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