

**SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MARKETING COMMUNICATION
STRATEGY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN SOUTH
AFRICAN AND SOUTH KOREAN SCHOOLS**

By

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ABSTRACT

This study explored how social media is used as a marketing communication strategy by comparing two private British-curriculum schools: the International School of Cape Town (ISCT) in South Africa and British Education Korea (BEK) in South Korea. Although both countries are globally competitive and digitally connected, they are shaped by different cultural influences. South Africa draws on both *Ubuntu* and Western values, while South Korea is influenced by Confucian traditions and strong technological development. The study addressed a gap in understanding how social media supports key marketing functions such as identity, presence, relationship building, conversation, reputation, information sharing, and group engagement within the school settings.

The research followed an interpretivist paradigm and used a qualitative approach. Textual analysis was applied to the schools' social media content in the period August 2023 to August 2024, namely X, Instagram and Facebook to examine how marketing communication was carried out in practice. Four research questions guided the comparison, focusing on similarities, differences, cultural influences, and the platforms used to support marketing goals.

The findings revealed that both schools use social media to build their brands, engage audiences, and communicate their values. ISCT used a wider range of content, highlighting academic performance, cultural diversity, community involvement, and extracurricular activities. ISCT used X alongside Facebook and Instagram for marketing communication. BEK focused more narrowly on academic achievements and arts competitions using Facebook and Instagram. These differences reflected variations in audience demographics, institutional focus, and cultural expectations.

Overall, the research contributes to discussions on digital marketing in education and shows how cultural context shapes communication strategies. It concludes that schools can improve competitiveness and stakeholder engagement by using social media strategically and in ways that reflect their specific environments.

Keywords: social media, communication, marketing, strategy, comparative study.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BEK	British Education Korea
DOI	Diffusion of Innovation
DRM	Direct Response Marketing
IMC	Integrated Marketing Communications
ISCT	International School of Cape Town
PR	Public Relations
SMET	Social Media Engagement Theory
SMMS	Social Media as a Marketing Strategy
SMS	Short Message Service

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the early 2000s, organisations started deploying social media for different operations, including marketing (Malesev & Cherry 2021). Initially, organisations used social media for social and internal communication purposes rather than for marketing communication purposes (Eagle, Czarnecka, Dahl & Lloyd 2020). Over time, social media transformed from a social and internal communication platform, into a marketing communication tool, where marketers or organisations promoted products and services to their target markets. Social media is proving to be an effective strategy for marketing communication, as out of the world population of 8.1 billion globally, 5.16 billion used the internet with 4.8 billion being active social media subscribers as of 2023 (We Are Social 2023; Statista 2023).

According to Li, Larimo and Leonidou (2021), social media as a marketing strategy (SMMS) is an organisation's integrated operations that turn data from social media connections and interactions into useful tools to achieve desired marketing objectives, essentially, to engage with potential and/or existing customers about product offerings, assessment of customers motivations for brand product use, customer interaction about product use and influences. Therefore, SMMS is a critical strategy not only in marketing but also in integrated marketing communication (IMC) contexts. SMMS is deployed to promote the "4 Ps" of marketing (place, promotion, price and product) in an IMC context.

Li et al's (2021) definition of social media marketing strategy is relevant to this study, because it encompasses the uniqueness of social media while adhering to the fundamentals of marketing strategy. Furthermore, it captures the uniqueness of the social media phenomenon while taking the fundamental premises of marketing strategy into account, and it defines the scope of activities associated with SMMS. As

a result, many organisations use social media as part of their marketing communication strategies.

The significance of social media as a marketing communication strategy lies in its ability to maximise product sales, extend market reach, and engage with potential customers. In addition, it establishes and enhances customer relationships and builds brand recognition with the target market (Barker, Barker, Bormann & Neher 2012), which ultimately brings significant benefits in the form of increased product sales and profit margins to organisations (Jussila, Kärkkäinen & Aramo-Immonen 2014).

However, to be effective, social media needs to be integrated into the overall marketing communication strategy of organisations, with a clear understanding of the target audience and campaign objectives (Barker et al 2012). Therefore, this study argues that social media in the context of marketing communication is strategic.

What this means is that social media deploys communication purposefully, essentially, to fulfil the organisation's vision and mission, align different marketing tools within the overall organisational strategy, and position the organisation's marketing offerings strategically to achieve the desired effect. The significance of social media as a strategic marketing communication strategy is, therefore, to complement and enhance the integration of other elements of marketing communication strategies within the overall organisation (Gorlevskaya 2016).

In the education industry, where schools frequently employ marketing strategies to draw in and keep students in a cutthroat environment, these strategies are crucial. In this situation, social media serves as more than just a medium for communication; it is an essential instrument for stakeholder engagement, institutional branding, and value proposition delivery. According to educational marketing literature, social media is well-positioned to assist in relationship-building and increasing a school's visibility (Sarder & Mustaqeem 2024). Social media's incorporation into educational marketing strategies thus represents a larger trend toward more dynamic, participatory, and culturally responsive channels of communication that support the goals of institutions in a range of educational environments.

This study adopts a comparative approach to explore the role, impact and implications of social media across different educational contexts. This method enables the researcher to gain in-depth insights into how social media functions as a marketing

communication tool, while contributing meaningfully to the existing body of knowledge by examining the phenomenon from multiple perspectives.

This study presented a comparison of how two schools, the International School of Cape Town (ISCT) in South Africa and British Education Korea (BEK) in South Korea, use social media networks, such as X, Instagram, and Facebook, for marketing communication. Both schools deploy a variety of social media platforms for marketing communication purposes.

1.2 CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

According to Adelaja (2013), social media has become widely used for communication and has a significant impact on communication, society, organisations, and economics. Social media is becoming more and more important for marketing communication in the 21st century, leading more and more organisations to use social media to promote their product and recruit new students.

This study set out to compare the ways in which two private schools with headquarters in South Korea and South Africa use social media as a marketing communication strategy. BEK is an international private school that operates in South Korea, whereas the ISCT is an international private school with its headquarters in Cape Town, South Africa. There are two branches of ISCT: Struben House, which serves early childhood education (kindergarten), and the main campus, which serves primary and high school students. BEK has five branches in various South Korean cities: BEK Secondary, BEK Prep, BEK Lodge, BEK Bundang, and BEK Dongtan.

Both schools are privately operated, and their organisational structures, cultural settings, and community expectations may influence how they utilise social media in their marketing strategies. South Africa and South Korea have distinct cultural and community settings, which can lead to different marketing approaches for social media in each nation.

This study primarily compares how the two institutions utilise social media to identify similarities and differences in their marketing communication tactics, and to emphasise how cultural context influences these strategies. This kind of comparison is crucial because it sheds light on how social and cultural factors affect the success of social media marketing in schools. For organisations that use social media to interact with

their target consumers, the results may provide helpful guidance that will help them better adapt their tactics to various cultural and geographic contexts.

1.2.1 The research problem

South Africa and South Korea pride themselves on being competitive economies of Africa and the Asia-Pacific regions, respectively, and their populations are increasingly interconnected through digital communication. Although the two nations have many similarities in terms of large-scale manufacturing, economic infrastructure, and valuable agricultural sectors, they differ in cultural and societal ways.

South Africa employs a mixture of *Ubuntu* (Van Dyk & Nefale 2005) and Western cultural paradigms (Kruger & Johnson 2010) in its organisational operations. The South African economy is made up of service, manufacturing, mining, and agriculture sectors. South Korean organisations embraced Western technology and homegrown technological innovations, and they employ a Confucian philosophical approach or cultural paradigm that encourages striving for improvement of organisational product offerings and has been inspired by, among others, their neighbours Japan, China, Singapore, and Taiwan (Xiao & Hu 2019). Bearing these distinct differences in mind, this explored about how social media as a marketing communication strategy was used in the two countries in the period of study to promote their product offerings.

Apart from social media marketing becoming a strategic element of marketing communication among organisations (Appel, Grewal, Hadi & Stephen 2020), little is known about how social media are used as a marketing communication strategy for functions such as (1) identity, (2) presence, (3) conversation, (4) relationship building, (5) groups, (6) reputation and (7) sharing of information. This study, focuses on ISCT and BEK and how they incorporate the seven elements into their use of social media as a marketing communication strategy.

These functions are relevant to investigate in this study, especially in the context of social media and marketing communication, because of their significant role in influencing marketing communication strategies. The knowledge obtained from investigating these functions will help marketers leverage social media platforms to engage with their target audience, build brand awareness, and drive customer engagement.

This research aimed to add to the existing knowledge about social media's role in marketing communication strategy. It also sought to compare the practical application of social media as a marketing communication strategy in both South Africa and South Korea. The objective of this research was to compare the use of social media by these two schools as a marketing communication strategy. These schools are suitable for a comparative study on the commercial application of social media marketing in the two countries, as they are both privately owned British education schools that strive to make a profit by offering educational services.

Therefore, the problem this study addresses is the issue of a lack of knowledge regarding the use of social media as a strategic marketing communication strategy by international schools in culturally different environments, particularly South Africa and South Korea.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

A research question can be defined as a question that seeks to define the problem being investigated and provide a direction for the study (Taslimi, Capari, Azaronyad, Zhu, Afzal, Kanoulas & Tsatsaronis 2025). This research was guided by the following questions.

1.3.1 Main research question

How do international schools in South Africa and South Korea deploy social media as part of the marketing communication strategy?

1.3.2 Research sub-questions

Question 1: In what ways do the South African and South Korean international schools use social media as a marketing communication strategy?

Question 2: What are the similarities and differences between the South African and South Korean schools' use of social media as a marketing communication strategy?

Question 3: What are the underlying cultural variables of using social media as a marketing communication strategy between the South African and South Korean international schools?

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

A research objective specifies the purpose of the study and is written based on the analytical intention of the researcher (Espinoza-Pajuelo & Ochoa-Pachas 2023). The main research objective of this study was to compare the ISCT located in South Africa, and BEK located in South Korea, in terms of their use of social media as a marketing communication strategy.

The following research objectives of this study were comparative, exploratory, descriptive and explanatory:

1.4.1 Main research objective

To compare how international schools in South Africa and South Korea deploy social media as part of their marketing communication strategy.

1.4.2 Sub research objectives

Objective 1: To examine the ways in which South African and South Korean international schools use social media for marketing communication.

Objective 2: To identify key similarities and differences in social media marketing communication between the two schools.

Objective 3: To analyse how cultural paradigms (*Ubuntu* and Confucianism) influence social media marketing communication strategies in both schools.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study compares two international schools, BEK in South Korea and ISCT in South Africa. In order to accomplish institutional marketing objectives, it investigates how each school uses social media as part of its marketing communication strategy. While taking into account the wider socioeconomic and technological circumstances in each nation, the study mainly focuses on the ways in which cultural paradigms—Confucianism in South Korea and *Ubuntu* in South Africa—affect how each school uses social media. The study offers a contextualised view of how international schools in diverse cultural contexts use social media for marketing communication by focusing on two case study schools.

Considering the increasing number of people all over the world using social media sites, the study examined three popular networks, namely Facebook, X and Instagram, that are used by the South African and South Korean international schools. The study deployed a qualitative textual analysis to collect data from the social media posts published by the two schools between August 2023 to August 2024 and evaluated how they used the selected social media sites as a marketing communication strategy. The reason behind deploying qualitative textual analysis is because it is suitable for analysing digital artefacts.

Thirty posts from the two schools' social media platforms, i.e., 15 from the ISCT and 15 from BEK, were selected based on their relevance to the marketing communication strategies of the two educational institutions. By situating social media as a marketing communication strategy within the context of education, this study provides insights into how social media marketing strategies are adapted across different cultures in a profit-driven, competitive educational environment. This breadth makes it possible to conduct a targeted comparative study of digital user interaction. The cultural paradigms of *Ubuntu* and Confucianism served as guides for interpreting the results of the study.

1.6 THESIS STATEMENT

Although the two schools, BEK and the ISCT, use social media as a marketing communication strategy, this study contends that their methods are influenced by the cultural paradigms of *Ubuntu*, which is practised in South Africa and Confucianism, which is practised in South Korea. Through a comparison of the two schools, the study shows that social media is not a universal marketing tool, but rather that its use and efficacy vary depending on organisational, societal, and cultural circumstances. The study demonstrates how new communication technologies are accepted, incorporated, and preferentially adopted within various cultural systems by utilising the theoretical foundations of diffusion of innovation (DoI), social media engagement theory (SMET), and integrated marketing communication (IMC). While SMET offers an understanding of how audiences interact with content in culturally specific ways, the DoI theory illustrates the different adoption trends based on perceived conformity with local values. The strategic use of social media as a component of a larger marketing campaign that is influenced by audience expectations and institutional goals is further

explained by IMC theory. This study contributes to our theoretical understanding of how new technologies are adopted and used in various cultural contexts by applying these frameworks.

1.7 DELINEATION OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to compare the use of social media as a marketing communication strategy between ISCT and BEK. Firstly, this study was geographically limited as it only focused on two international schools based in South Africa and South Korea. Secondly, these countries were chosen because they had different cultures, societies, and technologies. In addition, the research strictly focused on the education sector, especially private schools that operated to make a profit. Thirdly, the study concentrated solely on Facebook, Instagram, and X, emphasising how important these platforms are for marketing communications. These platforms were chosen because of their widespread adoption and use by South African and South Korean schools. The other social media such as YouTube, LinkedIn, Kakao Talk and TikTok sites were left out. This is due to their various primary purposes and limited cross-cultural comparability, which are outside of the boundaries of this study's marketing communication strategies focus. In addition, the study employed qualitative methods, specifically textual content analysis, to evaluate the manner in which these social media platforms are implemented and execute marketing-related strategies. This study demonstrated how marketing is done today while emphasising how technology has advanced recently.

1.8 KEY CONCEPTS

1.8.1 Social media

This is a set of information technologies that facilitate interactions and networking (Kapoor, Tamilmani, Rana, Patil, Dwivedi & Nerur 2018; Oestreicher-Singer & Zalmanson 2013). These social media can range from traditional to modern. Traditional social media includes newspapers and television, and radio, while modern social media is about social network platforms like Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn and WhatsApp that enable users to connect by sending and receiving messages.

1.8.2 Marketing

This is the process of exploring, creating, and delivering value to meet the needs of a target market in terms of goods and services (Lakshmi 2022). Besides focusing on selling, marketing also creates strong relationships with consumers while trying to influence or persuade them to stay loyal to the organisation or brand in the competitive marketplace.

1.8.3 Strategy

This can be defined as shaping the future and the human attempt to get to desirable ends with available means (Mckeown 2012). Strategy is important for people and organisations. It offers direction and coherence in every setting. It guarantees that activities are in line with long-term goals and that problems are dealt with strategically, either personally or within the organisation.

1.8.4 Communication

This is defined as an interaction between a sender and a receiver within a social context (Fatimayin 2018). Communication is important as it allows people or organisations to share ideas and information. In everyday life, good communication builds relationships and fosters mutual respect and trust, while in organisations, it is crucial because it improves productivity, collaboration, and decision-making. Sometimes the most innovative plans or ideas might fail to produce significant results if there is a lack of clear communication.

1.8.5 A comparative study

This can be defined as research based on techniques and strategies for drawing inferences about causation and/or association of factors that are similar or different between two or more subjects/objects (Coccia & Benati 2018). Its goal is to precisely compare the instances being investigated to obtain a deeper understanding of contextual factors, analyse results, or both. In domains including business, education, and the social sciences, comparative studies are frequently employed to support decision-making,

identify best practices, or produce evidence-based conclusions that go beyond an investigation of a case.

1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In the evolving realm of worldwide marketing communication, in which social media has emerged as a crucial medium for advertising, consumer connection, and organisational engagement, this study is significant for several different reasons. Through focusing on two private schools, the ISCT in South Africa and BEK in South Korea, this study adds to the growing literature of studies on social media as a marketing communication strategy by offering a cross-cultural examination.

Firstly, the study contributes to the body of information regarding the practical uses of social media for marketing in the educational sector. In contrast to previous studies that focused on big businesses or broad consumer markets, this one provided industry-specific insights into how schools effectively used Facebook, Instagram, and X to engage audiences, promote their brands, and draw in potential students and families.

Secondly, two culturally and geographically distinct contexts (South Africa and South Korea) were compared to demonstrate how cultural norms, technological infrastructure, and values influenced the adoption and effectiveness of social media marketing communication strategies. Companies looking to grow internationally or operate in culturally varied locations would particularly benefit from this emphasis on the need to adapt communication methods to the local environment.

Thirdly, this study's findings offer guidance on how to maximise social media's strategic potential, which can be helpful to educational management, marketing communication experts, and educational advertising professionals. This can lead to improved engagement outcomes, more efficient use of resources, and more successful brand positioning in competitive educational markets.

Fourthly, by showing how private schools, which typically functioned in market-driven environments, adjust to the communication demands of the digital age, the study contributes to the broader discussions surrounding the digital revolution in schools. This helps to bridge the gap between actual digital communication practices and theoretical marketing models, especially in emerging and non-Western countries.

Lastly, through the application of DOI and SMET, this study advances our theoretical knowledge of how new technologies are embraced and used in many cultural contexts.

1.10 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter 1 provides background regarding the use of social media as a marketing communication strategy, including the study's problem statement and research objectives.

Chapter 2 discusses relevant literature and answers the first research sub-question. It emphasises the significance of social media as a marketing communication strategy and how cultural variations between South Korea and South Africa impacted social media strategies used in schools. It addresses the platforms, content strategies, and the significance of cultural factors like collectivism and linguistic diversity in creating marketing strategies that are suited to the social and cultural setting of each nation.

Chapter 3 identifies and discusses the theoretical framework of this study, namely DOI and SMET, criticising and contextualising the theories for the study.

Chapter 4 outlines the research approaches, methods, and research design, while explaining how textual analysis was used to collect data. It also discusses validity, reliability, and ethical considerations experienced in the study.

Chapter 5 interprets and discusses the findings obtained from social media posts in an attempt to answer the study's research questions.

Chapter 6 concludes the study and includes a summary of the findings made in Chapter 5, a discussion of the problem, implications for existing theory, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW: SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MARKETING COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 of this study provided a comprehensive introduction and overview of the research topic, as well as justification of the study, focusing on the unique approaches of the ISCT in South Africa and BEK in South Korea, and social media as a marketing communication strategy.

This chapter of the study examines the current literature on social media as a strategic marketing communication tool. The chapter is divided into five sections that address the concept of social media as a marketing communication strategy. These sections are: the nature of marketing, the nature of marketing communication, the nature of social media, social media as a marketing communication strategy and, lastly, the cultural variables that affect the use of social media as a marketing communication strategy in South African and South Korean schools.

2.2 THE NATURE OF MARKETING

As per the American Marketing Association's (2013) definition, marketing is a managerial function that entails making strategic decisions to exchange ideas and develop and deliver product offerings that bring value to multiple stakeholders, including customers, clients, partners, and society. This definition underscores the crucial role of communication and interaction between an organisation and its stakeholders. Marketing involves a strategic process with a focus on the customer. Solomon, Marshall and Stuart (2015) emphasise the reciprocal nature of marketing, highlighting the creation and exchange of value between organisations and customers. They view marketing as a way to build strong customer relationships, ultimately gaining value from customers in return. Levy, Weitz and Grewal (2019) provide a broader perspective, defining marketing as a comprehensive set of activities involving the creation, communication, delivery, and exchange of offerings that hold value for various stakeholders, including customers, clients, partners, and society as a whole. Both definitions underscore the importance of value creation and exchange;

however, Levy et al's (2019) perspective expands the scope to acknowledge the impact of marketing on a wider range of entities beyond just the customer-organisation relationship.

Marketing strategies can vary significantly across different countries due to cultural, economic, and political factors. For instance, in South Africa, leading scholars such as Cant and Wiid (2020) consider marketing as the process of understanding the consumer in a way that allows for the customisation of products or services to meet their specific needs. These efforts often address social issues such as poverty, inequality, and access to essential services (Grier & Bryant 2005). On the other hand, in South Korea, marketing efforts tend to focus on innovation, technology, and design (Zhang 2022). The country's rapid economic growth and technological advancements have created a highly competitive market where organisations strive to differentiate themselves through unique product features and designs (Joon 2020). While Cant and Wiid (2020) stress customisation in South Africa, Zhang (2022) highlights innovation in South Korea. This contrast reflects not only market priorities but also deeper cultural underpinnings, with *Ubuntu* emphasising communal responsibility in South Africa and Confucian traditions shaping collective advancement in South Korea. However, despite these differences, both countries share a growing interest in digital marketing and the use of social media platforms to reach and engage with consumers (Dwivedi, Ismagilova, Rana & Raman 2023).

Various authors have observed that communication also plays a critical role in marketing, firstly in the organisation's ability to communicate product and service offerings (Fill & Turnbull 2019; Eagle *et al* 2020). Secondly, in building the organisation or product brand awareness (Ateke & Nwulu 2017), and, lastly, in improving brand reputation, increasing the organisation's overall sales and revenue, identifying and building relationships with organisational stakeholders, and creating and delivering value to customers as well as the overall market (Yang & Basile 2022).

This section provides a discussion on the nature of marketing and its characteristics. However, it is essential to contextualise communication within the framework of marketing, as discussed below.

2.3 THE NATURE OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION

Marketing communication is a constantly evolving and dynamic field that plays a crucial role in the success of organisations across various industries. According to Haenlein, Anadol, Farnsworth and Hugo (2020), marketing communication involves creating meaningful connections between a brand and its target audience to drive engagement, loyalty, and sales. Todorova (2015) states that an organisation's marketing communications encompass a range of measures, techniques, and methods through which information about the organisation's goods, services, or brand reaches its users. This includes various promotional activities such as advertising, public relations (PR), sales promotion, direct marketing, and personal selling (Ekiyor & Altan 2020). Renowned marketing scholars like Kotler and Keller (2012) view marketing communication as an organisation's efforts to inform, persuade, and remind their customers both directly and indirectly about the products and brands they offer.

While marketing communication encompasses various promotional tools or elements of marketing such as advertising, PR, sales promotions, direct marketing, and digital marketing, it is crucial to recognise that these tools are not meant to be fragmented (Juska 2021). Instead, they should be integrated to ensure a cohesive and consistent brand message. Integrated marketing communication (IMC) emphasises the importance of coordinating these different elements to create a unified voice for the organisation (Rehman, Gulzar & Aslam 2022). By aligning marketing communication messages across various channels and platforms, schools and organisations can reinforce their brand identity, enhance customer engagement, and ultimately achieve their marketing objectives more effectively.

Rehman et al (2022) assert that this integrated approach recognises that consumers interact with brands through multiple touchpoints, both online and offline. A fragmented approach, where different promotional tools convey conflicting messages, can confuse and alienate consumers. In contrast, IMC ensures that every interaction with the brand, whether through an advertisement, a social media post, or a customer service encounter, contributes to a consistent and positive brand experience (Camilleri 2018). This unified voice not only strengthens brand awareness and recall but also builds trust and credibility with consumers. By speaking in one voice, schools can create a more powerful and impactful brand presence in the marketplace.

The ultimate goal of marketing communication is to provide a coherent, consistent and unified rather than a fragmented promotional marketing message to the defined target market. According to Rehman et al (2022), marketers are of the view that consistent and integrated promotional marketing messages are effective at persuading consumers to take a desired action, whether making a purchase, signing up for a service, or simply engaging with a brand on social media. To achieve this goal, marketers employ various strategies and tactics tailored to their target audience's needs and preferences. In recent years, marketing communication has undergone a significant transformation due to the rise of digital technologies and the increasing importance of social media (Dwivedi et al 2023). As a result, marketers navigate a complex and ever-changing landscape to connect with consumers and achieve their organisation's objectives.

Marketing communication consists of several elements which are explained in the following sub-sections.

2.3.1 Advertising

Advertising is a crucial element of marketing communication that is a tool for informing, persuading, and influencing consumers about products or services. According to Rabindranath and Singh (2024), advertising is any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, or services by an identified sponsor. Advertising is an essential marketing communication tool that helps to increase sales, build brand awareness, and differentiate products from competitors. In addition, Zulfikar (2023) argues that advertising is a valuable tool for creating and maintaining a brand image, enhancing brand loyalty, and establishing a market position. Therefore, marketers must use advertising effectively to achieve organisational objectives and create a positive impact on consumers.

Advertising plays a pivotal role in any marketing strategy as it enables organisations to inform and persuade consumers about their products or services. It can lead to increased sales, heightened brand awareness, and a solidified market position (Albarq, Kumar, Piaralal, Bhatti & Abd Razak 2023). Additionally, effective advertising contributes to the creation of a strong brand image and improved customer loyalty (Zulfikar 2023). Therefore, to achieve organisational objectives and have a positive

impact on consumers, marketers must comprehend the art of using advertising effectively.

South Korean schools have recognised the importance of advertising as a marketing communication tool to attract potential students and build brand awareness (Kim, Chloe & Petrick 2018). Advertising assists schools in differentiating themselves from competitors and showcasing their unique strengths and capabilities to prospective students and parents (Kim et al 2018). As is evident in the advertising techniques used by big organisations in South Korea, schools also use a variety of advertising channels, including billboards, flyers, brochures, and social media platforms, to reach and engage with their target audience (Chambers 2018). Advertising helps schools to create brand awareness, establish credibility, and differentiate themselves from competitors. Additionally, advertising enables schools to communicate their educational programmes' unique features and benefits to prospective students and their parents. By emphasising their strengths and unique selling points, schools can attract students looking for specific educational programmes that match their interests and career aspirations (Zulfikar 2023).

Advertising practices vary considerably across cultures, reflecting differing values and communication styles. In Japan, for example, advertising emphasises collectivism, harmony, and emotional appeals, frequently incorporating humour and cultural references (Prieler & Kohlbacher 2016). This contrasts with the more individualistic and direct approach often seen in Western advertising. This is because Western advertising reflects an individualistic cultural orientation (De Mooij & Hofstede 2010). This is evident in its direct communication style, focus on personal benefits and self-enhancement, use of celebrity endorsements to promote individual success, and reliance on rational appeals to highlight product features and specifications.

In Africa, a diverse range of cultural influences shapes advertising practices. Storytelling, community values, and the use of music and dance are common elements (Izu & de Villiers 2022). South Africa, in particular, presents a unique advertising landscape due to its multiculturalism and complex social history. Advertising in South Africa often reflects themes of unity, diversity, and social transformation (Masito & Lappeman 2025). In both regions, the rise of digital technologies has transformed the advertising industry, necessitating a greater focus on targeted marketing and data-

driven strategies (Dwivedi, Kapoor & Chen 2015; Dwivedi et al 2023). However, ethical considerations regarding data privacy and the potential for manipulative advertising tactics remain crucial areas of concern (Martin & Murphy 2017).

Advertising also reflects cultural paradigms. In South Africa, advertising often conveys themes of unity and inclusivity, resonating with *Ubuntu* values (Masito & Lappeman 2025). Conversely, Korean advertising frequently foregrounds achievement, hierarchy, and reputation, aligning with Confucian ideals of discipline and collective success (Prieler & Kohlbacher 2016). This suggests that schools may position their advertising either around community belonging or institutional prestige, depending on cultural orientation.

The literature covers advertising strategies in great detail, as evidenced by research conducted by many scholars (for example, Zulfikar 2022; Kim et al 2018; Dwivedi et al 2015). However, there is a noticeable gap in the current literature regarding the use of social media for advertising related to schools, particularly comparing organisations in South Africa and South Korea. It is important to note that while the above scholars have a significant publication history, their primary aim is not centred on addressing research inquiries related to how schools strategically use platforms like Facebook, X, and Instagram to engage stakeholders, convey marketing messages, and differentiate themselves in diverse cultural contexts. For instance, the research by Dwivedi et al (2015) focuses solely on social media as a general marketing strategy, not specific to education marketing. Similarly, Zulfikar's (2022) work focuses on building a brand as a marketing strategy for products in general, not education.

In this section, advertising was discussed. The next section focuses on discussing sales as other integral components or elements of a comprehensive marketing strategy.

2.3.2 Sales promotion

Sales promotion encompasses a variety of marketing tactics designed to stimulate consumer demand and drive immediate sales. Huseynzade (2023) defines sales promotion as a set of short-term incentives to encourage the trial or usage of a product or service. This definition emphasises the temporary nature of these incentives and their goal of initiating or increasing product usage. Palmatier and Crecelius (2019)

expand on this concept, describing sales promotion as a direct inducement that offers an extra value or incentive for the product to the sales force, distributors, or ultimate consumer with the primary objective of creating an immediate sale. This definition highlights the direct nature of the inducement and its primary objective of generating immediate sales.

A common thread among sales promotion definitions is the use of incentives or inducements to influence consumer behaviour and drive sales in the short term. However, there is a subtle difference in emphasis by Huseynzade (2023) on encouraging trial or usage, suggesting that sales promotions can be used to introduce new products or increase usage of existing ones. Palmatier and Crecelius (2019) highlight the extra value or incentive offered, implying that sales promotions enhance the product's value proposition to make it more appealing to consumers. These recent definitions collectively portray sales promotion as a versatile tool that can be used to achieve various short-term objectives, such as increasing product trials, boosting sales, and clearing inventory (Amarray 2020). However, Huseynzade (2023) and Palmatier and Crecelius (2019) also underscore the importance of aligning sales promotions with broader marketing objectives to ensure long-term brand health and profitability.

Sales promotion is vital for schools to boost sales and foster customer loyalty. Huang (2022) and Chen, Chen, Liu, Guo and Tsai (2024) state that sales promotion generates a sense of urgency and enthusiasm around a product or service, resulting in greater sales and customer contentment. Mandolfo, Bettiga, Lamberti and Noci (2022) further emphasise that sales promotion is compelling in driving sales during uncertain economic times, as customers may be more budget-conscious and seeking bargains.

These research findings by both Chen et al (2024) and Mandolfo et al (2022) underscore the significance of sales promotion as a critical component of contemporary marketing communication, especially in the face of a constantly evolving global economy. In schools, sales promotion is used as a marketing communication strategy to attract new students and retain existing ones (Meltareza & Tawaqal 2023). Meltareza and Tawaqal (2023) point out that schools may use a variety of sales promotion techniques to achieve their marketing objectives, such as offering discounts on tuition fees, providing scholarships, or offering free trial classes for prospective

students. These techniques are often used with advertising and personal selling to create a comprehensive marketing communication strategy that effectively reaches out to parents and students.

According to Kango, Kartiko and Maarif (2021) and Klomtoosing and Chirapanda Sato (2023), sales promotion plays a crucial role in shaping the decisions of students and parents in the global education market. Schools must implement effective sales promotion strategies in a fiercely competitive industry to stand out from their rivals, establish a distinctive identity, and bolster brand recognition. By deploying targeted sales promotion tactics, schools can attract more students, elevate enrolment numbers, and accomplish their overarching goals.

Sales promotion tactics such as discounts, scholarships, referral programmes, and other incentives can effectively persuade potential students and parents to choose a particular school. By providing such incentives, schools demonstrate their commitment to student success and showcase their unique value proposition, resulting in increased enrolment and revenue (Amin & Ala 2014). Thus, sales promotion is an indispensable marketing tool for schools to achieve their objectives and remain competitive in the global education market.

Sales promotions are a ubiquitous tool in the marketing arsenal of organisations worldwide, including Western countries and Japan. These promotional activities aim to stimulate consumer demand, increase sales volume, and achieve various marketing objectives. In Western countries, such as the United States and European nations, sales promotions often take the form of price-based incentives, like discounts, coupons, buy-one-get-one-free offers, and rebates (Kotler & Keller 2016). These tactics appeal to the Western consumer's inclination towards individualism and value-seeking behaviour. Sales promotions are commonly used during specific periods like holidays, seasonal sales, or product launches to create a sense of urgency and drive immediate purchases (Blattberg & Breisch 2012).

In Asia, the sales promotion landscape is somewhat different, shaped by cultural nuances and consumer preferences (Suarez, Hugo & Paris 2020). While price-based promotions exist, they are not as prevalent as in Western markets. Instead, Asian markets, including Japanese organisations, often employ non-price incentives, such as loyalty programmes, premium gifts, contests, and lucky draws (Reddy & Han 2017;

Rasch & Qian 2018). These tactics align with the collectivist nature of Japanese society, where consumers value social recognition, long-term relationships with brands, and the element of surprise or luck. Additionally, Japanese sales promotions often incorporate elements of cultural festivals and traditions and seasonal gift-giving customs (Suarez et al 2020).

In South Korea, schools use various marketing communication strategies to attract new students. According to Lee, Kim and Lee (2020) and Kim, Jo and Jung (2020), offering discounts on tuition fees or providing scholarships to students who achieve outstanding academic results or demonstrate exceptional talent in sports or the arts are popular sales promotion techniques to attract new students. In addition, schools may offer free trial classes or provide study materials to prospective students to showcase their teaching quality and facilities. These sales promotion techniques attract new students and retain existing ones, especially in a highly competitive education market like South Korea.

According to Kim et al (2020) and Lee et al (2020), offering discounts on tuition fees or providing scholarships to students who achieve outstanding academic results or demonstrate exceptional talent in sports or the arts are popular sales promotion techniques Korean schools use to attract new students. Verma and Jain (2024) posit that schools are also using digital marketing strategies, such as social media platforms and online education platforms, to increase their visibility and attract a wider audience.

Sales promotion is a highly effective marketing strategy used by schools in South Africa to attract and retain students. Masizana and Salubi (2022) postulate that schools have increasingly adopted sales promotion techniques to gain a competitive advantage in the education industry. The study found that schools use various sales promotion techniques, such as discounts, freebies, referral programmes, and loyalty programmes, to attract new students and retain their current ones (Masizana & Salubi 2022). The research further indicates that schools that offer sales promotions have a higher chance of attracting new students than those that do not.

Masizana and Salubi (2022) confirm the effectiveness of sales promotion in attracting students to private schools in South Africa. This is because sales promotions significantly influence students' decision-making process when choosing a school. This further affirms that students are more likely to enrol in schools that offer sales

promotions such as discounts and freebies, indicating that these promotions are highly effective in attracting students to private schools in South Africa. As a result, schools are increasingly adopting sales promotion techniques to attract new students and retain their current ones (Funeka, Govender & Govender 2022; Funeka & Govender 2024). Schools can differentiate themselves from their competitors by offering various incentives and discounts and increasing enrolment rates.

In the literature on sales promotion, there is a noticeable knowledge gap. The lack of specific focus on schools' marketing and the promotion of schools within the mentioned literature indicates a research gap in the area of educational marketing. Masizana and Salubi (2022) touch on the use of sales promotions to market schools in South Africa; however, their study is not comparative in nature, which the current study is. The majority of the studies, such as Suarez et al (2020), Mandolfo et al (2022) discuss sales promotion in the context of general marketing strategies, with little emphasis on its application within the education sector. This suggests a need for more comprehensive studies specifically addressing the advertising and promotion of schools.

The absence of comparative studies between different regions, such as South Africa and South Korea, regarding schools' advertising and promotion, is another notable research gap. Though Lee et al (2020) investigate marketing in general specifically Korean Schools those studies do not provide a comparative analysis with any other country such as South Africa, which is the focus of the study. This presents an opportunity for further research into the effectiveness of social media as a marketing tool for schools.

In comparing the views of different studies such as Meltareza and Tawaqal (2023) and Lee et al (2020), it is evident that there is a lack of consensus on the specific application of sales promotion and marketing tactics within the context of schools. Some sources, such as Blattberg and Breisch (2012), provide a broader understanding of sales promotion and its role in driving immediate sales, but there is a distinct lack of tailored research and discussion related to schools' marketing strategies. This comparison highlights the need for more comprehensive and specialised studies addressing the unique challenges and opportunities in promoting schools through sales promotion in this case.

For this study, sales promotion is significant not only as a business tactic but also as a means of attracting and retaining students. The ways in which promotions, scholarships, or discounts are framed in South Africa versus South Korea provide insight into the differences between the two schools' marketing strategies, directly addressing research sub-question 2.

This section provided a discussion on sales promotion. However, it is important to focus on extending the sales promotion discussion by looking at direct response marketing (DRM) which is another important element of a comprehensive marketing strategy. This element is centred on using calls to action and customised communications to elicit quick responses from prospective clients. This strategy will be discussed below.

2.3.3 Direct response marketing

The concept of DRM is a strategic approach in the field of marketing communication that is designed to elicit a specific and measurable response from the targeted audience (Kotler & Keller 2016). Unlike traditional brand-building advertising, which is focused on building long-term brand awareness and affinity, DRM emphasises immediate consumer action and measurable outcomes (Belch & Belch 2021). The primary objective of DRM is to prompt a direct and trackable response from consumers which may include actions such as making a purchase, submitting an inquiry, or visiting a specific website. Nash (2000) highlights that DRM is centred on generating leads and sales through direct interaction with customers rather than relying on indirect methods such as mass media advertising. This direct interaction enables marketers to personalise messages, customise offers, and engage in real-time communication with consumers.

The role of DRM in marketing communication is diverse. As noted by Stone and Jacobs (2008), DRM is essential for producing immediate and measurable outcomes, which is particularly valuable in today's data-driven marketing environment. Marketers can demonstrate the return on investments (ROI) of their campaigns by tracking responses such as clicks, inquiries, and sales, enabling them to evaluate the effectiveness of their direct response efforts and make informed adjustments to enhance performance.

In the realm of educational marketing, DRM presents an opportunity for targeted customer acquisition and retention. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) highlight DRM as an interactive marketing system that employs one or more advertising media to elicit a measurable response and/or transaction from any location. This underscores DRM's capacity to engage specific audience segments with customised messages and offers, thereby amplifying the probability of evoking the desired response. Through nurturing leads and furnishing personalised offers via direct channels, DRM can significantly impact both customer acquisition and retention.

Within the sphere of schools, proponents argue that DRM strategies can be effectively leveraged to augment enrolment rates and engage prospective students. For instance, Elken and Tellmann (2019) contend that personalised emails and targeted online advertisements can effectively convey the value proposition of educational programmes and prompt inquiries or applications. Nevertheless, it is paramount to exercise ethical and responsible DRM practices, particularly when targeting younger audiences.

In the context of schools' marketing, DRM is manifested through targeted email campaigns (Hasouneh & Alqeed 2010) featuring personalised messages and clear calls to action, a tactic bolstered by the success of personalised email campaigns in elevating opening and click-through rates in educational settings (Iraj, Fudge, Faulkner, Pardo & Kovanović 2020; Belouadah 2023). Furthermore, the deployment of landing pages optimised for conversions with compelling offers and testimonials has proven effective, as research underscores the significance of lucid and concise messaging in steering desired actions (Stone & Jacobs 2008; Yuniarti, Aziz & Gani 2024). In addition, retargeting advertisements to reach individuals who have previously exhibited an interest in a school's website or programmes emerges as a pivotal technique, with studies underscoring the efficacy of retargeting in encouraging conversions and brand recall (Belch & Belch 2021).

It is essential to take into account the differences in DRM approaches in different cultural contexts. In Western countries, schools often utilise digital channels such as social media advertising and search engine marketing, along with personalised email campaigns and targeted content offers to engage with a broad audience (Kotler & Keller 2016). Conversely, in Japan, direct mail campaigns are predominant, especially

for reaching parents and families with information about schools and programmes (Belch & Belch 2021). However, there is an emerging trend towards utilising online channels and social media platforms to connect with younger audiences (Khanom 2023).

In South Africa there are unique challenges regarding DRM in education due to varying levels of internet access and digital literacy (Reddy Moonasamy & Naidoo 2022). As a result, a multi-channel approach is often adopted, combining traditional methods such as print advertising and direct mail with digital channels like short message service (SMS) marketing and social media (Simelane 2014; Issock, Mpinganjira & Roberts-Lombard 2021). The emphasis is on creating localised and culturally relevant content that resonates with specific target audiences.

The above discussion reveals a potential research gap concerning the understanding of DRM within specific cultural contexts. While the effectiveness of personalised email campaigns and targeted online advertising is evident in Western educational settings (Elken & Tallman 2019), there is limited research on how cultural factors influence the success of DRM in different regions. For example, there is a need for further research on how younger audiences in Japan respond to DRM strategies employed through digital channels, despite direct mail still being prevalent for reaching families (Belch & Belch 2021). Similarly, in South Africa, further research is needed to explore the most effective combination of traditional and digital channels for specific target audiences within the country due to varying levels of internet access (Issock et al 2021). Furthermore, while Kotler and Keller (2016) outline a general framework for DRM, there is a lack of literature exploring the specific adaptations required for successful DRM implementation in culturally diverse educational settings.

This section provided a discussion on DRM. The next section focuses on sponsorship as an integral component or element of a comprehensive marketing strategy.

2.3.4 Sponsorship

Sponsorship has transformed from a simple transactional exchange into a strategic partnership built on shared values and goals (Hessling, Åsberg & Roxenhall 2018). Recent definitions emphasise the alignment between brands and those they sponsor, seeking mutual benefits beyond financial gains. According to Alexander (2009) and

Morgan, Taylor and Adair (2020), sponsorship is defined as a strategic partnership between a brand and a property (event, organisation, individual) based on shared values and objectives to achieve mutual benefits, highlighting the importance of congruence in values and goals. Similarly, Demir and Söderman (2015) and Cornwell (2020) underscore the importance of creating genuine connections with target audiences through shared passions and interests, defining sponsorship as a collaborative marketing platform that leverages shared passions and interests to create meaningful brand experiences and build lasting relationships with consumers. These contemporary perspectives on sponsorship underscore its role in building brand equity, fostering consumer engagement, and creating a positive impact on both the sponsor and the sponsored party.

The concept of sponsorship in education in Western countries involves the establishment of partnerships between schools and corporate entities or brands, seeking to bolster their corporate social responsibility image and gain access to a lucrative target demographic (Wakefield, Wakefield, Keller & Rivers 2021; Muchira, Maore & Muriithi 2024). These collaborations encompass various forms of support, including funding for specific programmes or scholarships, as well as the provision of resources and equipment for schools. Notably, prominent organisations such as Google and Microsoft in the United States have sponsored STEM education initiatives and furnished technological resources to schools, aligning with their brand identity focused on innovation and educational advancement (Williamson & Hogan 2020).

In the context of South Korea, sponsorship in education is deeply intertwined with cultural values centred on reciprocity and community support (Lee & Yoon 2021; Huang, Chen & Horiuchi 2025). Organisations frequently engage in the sponsorship of schools' events and activities, such as sports tournaments and cultural festivals, to strengthen their connections with local communities and cultivate goodwill. This is evidenced by the enduring tradition of organisations sponsoring school excursions and field trips, thereby affording students unique learning experiences outside the traditional classroom environment.

In South Africa, corporate sponsorships in education are often geared towards addressing educational disparities and creating opportunities for underprivileged students (Blake, Fourie & Goldman 2019; Feldman 2020). Organisations may support

scholarships, bursaries, and mentorship programmes to assist students from marginalised backgrounds, thereby contributing to social development. For instance, the Allan Gray Orbis Foundation's Fellowship programme offers financial support and entrepreneurial training to high school students, empowering them to emerge as future leaders and innovators (Allan Gray Orbis, 2024).

Schools across South Africa and South Korea leverage sponsorship to supplement their budgets, enhance educational programmes, and create opportunities for students. By partnering with organisations or brands that share their core values and objectives, schools can harness sponsorship to deliver a more enriched educational experience and generate a positive impact on their communities (Kieu, Mogaji, Mwebesa, Sarofim, Soetan & Vululleh 2020). However, it is imperative for schools to meticulously assess potential sponsors and ensure alignment with their mission and educational goals, as underscored in Wakefield et al's (2020) discourse on strategic brand management.

An analysis of the studies highlighted above illustrates several research gaps in the existing literature on educational sponsorship. While authors offer comprehensive definitions and theoretical frameworks for sponsorship, there is a need for a more thorough exploration of cultural nuances and their influence on sponsorship strategies in different global regions (Cornwell 2020; O'Reilly & Horning 2013). Despite insights from Wakefield et al (2020) and Lee and Yoon (2021) on Western and Korean contexts, there is a lack of cross-cultural comparison of sponsorship practices and their effectiveness.

Additionally, Blake et al (2019) emphasise the focus on educational inequality in South African sponsorships, but there is limited research on the long-term impact of these initiatives and their effectiveness in driving sustainable change. Moreover, there is a noticeable gap in the examination of emerging trends and technologies in educational sponsorship, such as the increasing prevalence of e-sports sponsorships and the application of virtual reality in educational settings. This underscores the necessity for further research to address these gaps and to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving landscape of educational sponsorship across diverse cultural contexts.

The absence of comparative studies between different global regions, such as South Africa and South Korea, about schools' sponsorship, is another notable research gap. Some authors illustrate the utilisation of sponsorship in general and but do not focus on comparing schools in South Korea and South Africa which is the focus of this study (McDaniel & Vaughn 2021; Wakefield et al 2020; Cornwell 2020). This presents an opportunity for further research into the effectiveness of sponsorship as a communication strategy used in social media in schools.

This section provided a discussion on sponsorship. The next section focuses on personal selling as an integral component or element of a comprehensive marketing strategy.

2.4 PERSONAL SELLING

The concept of personal selling, essential to marketing and sales strategies, has been the subject of recent academic literature with varying emphasis on specific aspects. Bradford and Weitz (2009) describe personal selling as an activity aimed at building mutually beneficial, long-term relationships between salespeople and customers to uncover and satisfy the customer's needs. On the other hand, Jobber, Lancaster and Le Meunier-FitzHugh (2019) offer a more concise definition, focusing on the communication process between salespeople and potential customers to align their needs with suitable products or services. These definitions collectively highlight the multifaceted nature of personal selling, which includes relationship building, communication, need identification, and, ultimately, value creation for both the seller and the customer in today's organisational landscape.

Personal selling techniques encompass a wide range of strategies aimed at establishing connections, uncovering customer needs, and facilitating sales. The process begins with identifying potential customers, followed by comprehensive research to understand their specific requirements (Jobber & Lancaster 2009). The subsequent approach focuses on creating a positive first impression and rapport to lay the foundation for a trusting relationship (Bradford & Weitz 2009). Presentations and demonstrations are used to showcase the product or service, highlighting its features, benefits, and value proposition (Skálén, Gummerus, Koskull & Agnusson 2015). Addressing customer concerns by empathetically handling objections and providing solutions is crucial (Alnakhli, Inyang & Itani 2021). Finally, closing techniques are

employed to guide the prospect toward a purchasing decision, while post-sale follow-up ensures customer satisfaction and nurtures long-term relationships (Lockett 2018). Effective personal selling also involves active listening, adaptability, storytelling, and building trust to establish credibility and engage customers on a deeper level (Denga, Vajjhala & Rakshit 2022).

According to Kumar, Sharma, Vatawala and Kumar (2020), personal selling is an important marketing mix component, particularly in organisations-to-organisations (B2B) contexts, because personal selling is highly effective in building relationships with customers and providing customised solutions to their needs. Kumar et al (2020) further highlight the importance of training and development programmes for salespeople and the need for sales managers to provide ongoing support. Akter (2024) attests that trust is vital in establishing and maintaining long-term customer relationships. It directly impacts customer satisfaction and loyalty and is considered a crucial factor in personal selling relationships.

As an effective marketing communication tool, personal selling is not only limited to organisations but is also widely used by schools to build relationships with potential students. In South Africa, personal selling is considered a crucial component of the marketing mix in the higher education sector to attract and retain students (Funeka et al 2022). Schools in Korea also recognise the importance of personal selling, particularly in the highly competitive education market, where trust is essential for building long-term relationships with parents and students (DeChamplain 2017). It is evident, therefore, that personal selling plays a vital role, not only in the organisation's world but also in the educational sector, in developing a lasting relationship with customers and achieving organisational objectives.

The current body of knowledge on personal selling extensively discusses the fundamental principles and techniques (Bradford & Weitz 2009; Jobber et al 2019). These techniques, which include prospecting, relationship building, closing, and follow-up, are well-established in the broader marketing and sales literature. However, there is a noticeable gap in research when it comes to applying these concepts to the field of education, specifically in comparative studies of different schools. While studies such as Funeka et al (2022) and DeChamplain (2017) recognise the importance of personal selling in higher education and the Korean education market, they lack a

comparative analysis of how different institutions in South Africa and South Korea utilise and adapt these techniques.

In addition, the research gap lies in understanding the nuances and variations in personal selling strategies employed by different schools. This involves examining how factors such as school reputation, target audience demographics, and specific marketing goals influence the choice and effectiveness of personal selling techniques. Further research is necessary to explore how schools customise their approaches to prospecting, building rapport, presenting their offerings, addressing concerns, and nurturing relationships with prospective students. By delving into these areas, researchers can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of personal selling in educational marketing, allowing schools to refine their strategies and better connect with their target audiences. The following section discusses PR.

2.4.1 Public relations

PR is the deliberate, planned, and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its public (Fagbuyi 2020). This definition underscores the intentional and continuous nature of PR, highlighting the importance of nurturing relationships over time. Coombs and Holladay (2006) further elaborate by emphasising PR's role in managing reputation and shaping public opinion. The authors assert that PR is a management function that assesses public attitudes, aligns the policies and procedures of an individual or organisation with the public interest, and devises and implements a programme of action to earn public understanding and acceptance.

There has been an increasing emphasis in recent years on the role of PR in IMC, which involves using multiple channels and tactics to reach target audiences (Blakeman 2023). According to Martin (2017), IMC that includes PR can improve brand awareness, reputation, and customer loyalty. The authors argue that PR can be used to create a consistent and compelling message across various channels, such as social media, traditional media, and events, and to engage audiences through storytelling and emotional appeals.

In South Africa, PR has been utilised to promote schools and attract students to the country (Funeka et al 2022). The authors suggest that PR can help create a positive

image of South Africa as an educational destination and address concerns and perceptions about the quality of education (Funeka et al 2022). South Korea has used PR to market educational products, such as language learning programmes and study abroad opportunities (Borisova 2022). Borisova (2022) argues that PR can help create a global interest in South Korean educational products and generate demand through targeted communication and engagement with potential students.

While the definitions and applications of PR are well-established, the research gap lies in the exploration of how PR strategies can be effectively adapted and implemented across different cultural contexts when it comes to schools' marketing communication. Fagbuyi (2020) emphasise the deliberate and sustained effort required for successful PR, but they do not delve into the nuances of tailoring these efforts to specific cultural values and communication styles that are part and parcel of schools' communications. Similarly, Coombs and Holladay (2006) highlight the importance of aligning an organisation's actions with public interest, yet they do not address how this alignment might differ across diverse cultural contexts.

Martin (2017) offers valuable insights into the role of PR in IMC. However, their focus is predominantly on enhancing brand awareness, reputation, and customer loyalty within a particular cultural framework. This highlights a need to explore how PR strategies can be flexibly tailored to effectively reach and engage diverse audiences across various cultures, and how they can be integrated into schools. Moreover, while some studies offer examples of PR applications in specific contexts, they do not explore the potential challenges and opportunities of cross-cultural PR campaigns (Funeka et al 2022; Borisova 2022). This lack of research on cross-cultural PR leaves a significant gap in understanding how to effectively communicate and build relationships with diverse audiences across different cultures. Therefore, research should focus on developing a more comprehensive framework for cross-cultural PR, encompassing cultural sensitivity, communication styles, and ethical considerations. Such a framework would be invaluable for organisations seeking to expand their reach and build relationships with diverse stakeholders worldwide.

The next section discusses the role and significance of social media marketing, highlighting how it has become an important tool for people and organisations,

including schools to connect with their stakeholders, build their brand awareness and promote their services.

2.4.2 Social media as an internet marketing tool

Social media has become an increasingly important tool for organisations to connect with their target audience and promote their products or services (Jeswani 2023). According to Khanom (2023), social media marketing involves using social media platforms to create and share content that promotes organisations and their products or services. This can include text, images, videos, or other multimedia content. The goal is to engage with the target audience, build brand awareness and loyalty, and drive traffic and sales (Blakeman 2023). One advantage of social media marketing is the ability to reach a large audience at a relatively low cost compared to traditional advertising (Källbäck 2019). However, there are also disadvantages, including the potential for negative feedback and the need for constant monitoring and management (Ghafar 2024).

Appel et al (2020) present a comprehensive review of social media marketing, including its history, current trends, and future research directions. They suggest that future research should focus on better understanding the role of social media influencers, the impact of different types of content on engagement, and the effectiveness of social media marketing in different industries. Social media marketing has become an essential aspect of internet marketing, and organisations need to use it effectively to achieve their marketing goals.

This study underscores the significance of social media as a promotional tool, given its exceptional ability to bridge the gap between schools and their target audiences in an increasingly digital era. Unlike traditional marketing channels, social media provides unparalleled opportunities for interactive communication, engagement, and community building (Ki, Park & Kim 2020). Schools can utilise these platforms not only to share information but also to cultivate relationships with prospective and current students, parents, alumni, and the broader community. This emphasis is pivotal as it acknowledges the evolving nature of communication and the necessity for schools to adjust their promotional strategies accordingly.

Furthermore, the comparative examination of South Korea and South Africa presents a distinctive opportunity to delve into how cultural, educational, and technological factors influence the utilisation and effectiveness of social media in educational marketing. By exploring the similarities and differences in social media strategies between these two countries, this study can provide valuable insights into the cross-cultural relevance and adaptability of social media marketing for schools.

While the existing body of research acknowledges the growing importance of social media as a marketing tool for organisations (Källbäck 2019; Ghafar 2024 Appel et al 2020), there remains a significant gap in understanding its specific application and effectiveness as a promotional tool for schools, particularly in comparative contexts like South Korea and South Africa. Although studies such as Källbäck's (2019) explores the advantages and disadvantages of social media marketing for organisations, they do not delve into the unique challenges and opportunities faced by schools in utilising these platforms. Appel et al (2020) offer a comprehensive review of social media marketing, yet their focus remains primarily on the broader organisational landscape, neglecting the specific nuances of the education sector.

The research gap, therefore, lies in understanding how social media can be leveraged effectively as a promotional tool for schools in different cultural and educational contexts. This includes examining how schools in South Korea and South Africa utilise social media platforms, the types of content they share, the level of engagement they achieve, and the impact of social media on their overall marketing and enrolment goals. Furthermore, a comparative analysis of social media strategies between these two countries could reveal valuable insights into cultural differences, educational values, and technological adoption that influence the effectiveness of social media marketing in the educational sector.

The next section discusses the nature of social media, focusing on its invention, functions and its characteristics.

2.5 NATURE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, allowing the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). These applications include platforms

such as Facebook, X, Instagram, and LinkedIn, among many others, which enable users to connect and engage with others, share information and content, and participate in online communities. Social media has witnessed an evolution over the past few years.

The first social media site, Six Degrees, was launched in 1997, followed by Friendster in 2002, and then MySpace in 2003 (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). However, the most significant shift came in 2004, when Facebook was launched, which changed the social media landscape (Varjus 2009). Since then, social media has evolved from a platform for socialising to a tool for organisations, advertisers, and marketers. Social media has become an integral part of people's lives, with billions of people using social media every day (Olaniran & Williams 2020).

Social media has many functions. It connects with friends and family, networks with organisations and partners, shares information, and accesses news and entertainment. Appel et al (2020) state that social media has expanded beyond personal communication to professional communication, with organisations using social media to advertise their products and services. Social media has also become a tool for political campaigns, with politicians using it to connect with voters and disseminate their messages (Vergeer, Hermans & Sams 2013).

Social media has unique characteristics with a focus on integrating communication message components, such as audio, text, and video. Social media platforms can provide users with immediate feedback, allowing them to engage in real-time conversations (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre 2011). Social media channels have also become more mobile-friendly, with users accessing social media platforms through smartphones and other mobile devices (Appel et al 2020). However, sharing content on social media has made it possible for information to spread rapidly, sometimes causing misinformation and fake news to be disseminated.

The use of platforms such as Facebook and Instagram cannot be divorced from cultural context. Under *Ubuntu*, these platforms may serve as spaces for community-building and storytelling, whereas in Confucian-influenced Korea, they are often harnessed to project institutional reputation and academic discipline. Recognising these cultural orientations is essential for interpreting the schools' social media strategies.

In comprehending social media, it is important to look into the major social media platforms that are used by people, organisations and schools. These platforms are discussed in the next sub-section.

2.5.1 Major social media platforms

Social media, encompassing platforms like Facebook, X, Instagram, and TikTok, has become deeply ingrained in daily life (Auxier & Anderson 2021). It has revolutionised communication, enabling real-time interaction and global reach (Kapoor et al 2018). Individuals utilise social media for diverse purposes, including connecting with others, sharing information, expressing themselves, and engaging in entertainment (Bauer & Tian 2024). However, its ubiquity raises concerns about potential negative impacts.

Recent research has shed light on the correlation between excessive use of social media and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression (Zubair, Khan, and Albashari 2023), and concerns regarding privacy breaches and data exploitation have grown more pronounced (OK 2025). The proliferation of misinformation and fake news on these platforms presents obstacles to democratic discourse and educated decision-making (Margetts & John 2024). Thus, despite the numerous benefits that social media offers, such as facilitating social connections and amplifying the voices of marginalised groups, it is imperative to address these challenges to ensure its positive impact on both individuals and society.

Over the years, social media has gained immense popularity, revolutionising the way people communicate and interact (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). According to the Pew Research Centre, in 2021, YouTube was the most used online platform, followed by Facebook and Instagram (Gottfried 2024). Unsurprisingly, social media has become indispensable for organisations aiming to engage with their customers and market their products and services (Appel et al 2020). With a projected social media advertising spending of US\$276.72 billion in 2025 (Statista 2025b), it is evident that organisations are increasingly leveraging social media for advertising. Additionally, the prevalence of various accessible social media platforms on the internet has made it easier for individuals to engage socially and for organisations to promote their offerings (Dhanesh, Duthler and Li 2022). There are several social media platforms, as explained in the following discussion.

WhatsApp is a widely used messaging app that allows users to send text messages, make voice and video calls, and share media files. According to Bhat (2022), WhatsApp has over two billion active users worldwide, making it the most popular messaging app globally. The app's popularity can be attributed to its user-friendly interface, end-to-end encryption, and cross-platform compatibility. WhatsApp is widely used for personal and organisational communication, with the latter being facilitated by the app's enterprise version, WhatsApp Organisations (Suhaimi, Zaato, Salman & Bidin 2022). The app's popularity has led to its integration into various organisations' processes, including customer service, sales, and marketing. In educational contexts, WhatsApp has shown itself to be a flexible tool that can facilitate informal as well as formal education across a range of disciplines and academic levels (Suárez-Lantarón, Deocano-Ruíz, García-Perales & Castillo-Reche 2022). WhatsApp allows group communication, support for learning, collaborative learning, motivation and engagement, resource sharing and feedback and assessment (Suárez-Lantarón et al 2022). These components are important for schools and their stakeholders to maintain a good relationship.

Instagram is a social media platform that allows users to share photos and videos and interact with other users through likes, comments, and direct messages (Aramendia-Muneta, Olarte-Pascual & Ollo-López 2021). According to Statista (2025a) and Tazeen and Mullick (2023), Instagram has over two billion active users globally, making it a popular platform for individuals and organisations alike. The report also highlights that Instagram is especially popular among younger demographics, with 71% of its users under 35 (Statista 2025a). Individuals use Instagram for personal expression, while organisations use the platform for brand building, customer engagement, and influencer marketing. The platform's visual nature makes it an excellent tool for showcasing products and services, driving sales, and building brand awareness (Tamboli 2023; Tazeen & Mullick 2023).

Facebook is a social media platform that allows users to connect with friends and family, join groups, and follow pages of interest. According to Statista (2025a) and Tazeen and Mullick (2023), Facebook has over 2.8 billion active users worldwide, making it the most popular social media platform globally. Facebook's popularity can be attributed to its broad range of features, including messaging, live streaming, marketplace, and advertising (Raman, Tyson & Sastry 2018). The platform is widely

used by individuals for personal communication and entertainment, while organisations use it for brand building, customer engagement, and advertising. Facebook's advertising platform is especially popular among small and medium-sized organisations due to its affordability and targeting capabilities (Islam & Sheikh 2024).

X and LinkedIn are two popular social media platforms that have recently gained significant prominence. X, with its 330 million active users, provides a platform for users to share short updates and news articles, while LinkedIn, with its 660 million members, is a professional networking platform that allows users to connect with other professionals, showcase their skills and experience, and find job opportunities (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). Both platforms have different uses and audiences, with X being more commonly used for news and entertainment purposes, while LinkedIn is more focused on professional networking and job seeking. According to Okazaki, Díaz-Martín, Rozano and Menéndez-Benito (2015), organisations use X primarily for brand promotion and customer engagement, while LinkedIn is mostly used for recruitment and networking (Koch, Gerber & De Klerk 2018). Therefore, organisations and individuals should consider their objectives and target audience before using either platform or both to achieve their marketing and networking goals.

TikTok has recently emerged as a popular social media platform, especially among younger generations. According to Statista (2025a) and Jumali and Mustaffi (2023), TikTok has 1.5 billion active users worldwide, with the majority between the ages of 18-34 years making up nearly 70% of users. TikTok allows users to create short-form videos, add music and effects, and interact with other users through likes, comments, and shares. The platform's popularity can be attributed to its focus on user-generated content and its algorithm-based feed, which promotes content based on user preferences. TikTok is widely used for personal expression, entertainment, and influencer marketing. Organisations are also starting to leverage the platform for brand building and advertising, with some brands launching successful TikTok marketing campaigns.

Schools use WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, X and TikTok for announcements, updates, and event promotions (Tang & Hew 2017), to improve their students' learning experiences (Madli 2023), and to enhance their visibility, foster engagement and building relationships, and promote scholarly activities (Veletsianos & Kimmons 2016).

The platforms' capacity to provide quick responses and interesting films helps learning to become easier for both students and educators. These platforms are useful tools for educators (Madli 2023) who wish to support students' academic growth and self-efficacy (Hartung, Hendry, Albury, Johnston & Welch 2022). In addition, these platforms have grown to become a forum for educators to interact with students and exchange experiences, as evidenced during the pandemic-induced shift to digital learning (Smout 2023). Institutions can establish themselves as important figures in student education and connection by acting genuinely on these platforms (Adelhardt & Eberle 2024). Schools have moved towards using these platforms as a crucial part of academic institutions' marketing and promotion plans (Malek, Ibrahim, Hassan & Adnan 2021). For example, universities may use social media platforms like Instagram, and Facebook to provide insight into student life, which can be used as powerful marketing tools to draw in prospective students (Weller 2022).

Due to its unique characteristics and capabilities, social media has become integral to modern communication and marketing strategies. According to Statista (2024), social media usage worldwide is growing steadily, with an estimated 4.26 billion active social media users as of July 2021. That is because social media is user-generated, meaning individuals create and share content rather than rely on traditional media outlets. This user-generated content is often more authentic and trustworthy than traditional advertising, making it an effective tool for word-of-mouth marketing (Duffett 2020). Social media platforms like X and Instagram allow users to create and share their content, giving them a sense of ownership and community.

Social media is interactive and allows for two-way communication between users and brands. This interaction can help establish trust, build relationships, and provide valuable feedback and insights into customer needs and preferences (Dwivedi et al 2023). Additionally, social media is viral, meaning that content can spread rapidly and reach a vast audience (Dafonte-Gómez, Míguez-González & Corbacho-Valencia 2020). This virality is due to the ease of sharing content, the use of hashtags and other tagging mechanisms, and the ability to leverage influencers and user-generated content to amplify brand messaging (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). Social media platforms such as TikTok and Snapchat have proven to be particularly effective at creating viral content and reaching younger audiences. Therefore, their role as a marketing

communication strategy in schools can never be overemphasised. The following section will address the role of social media in communication.

2.5.2 The role of social media in communication

Social media has become a ubiquitous part of modern communication, with users engaging with a range of platforms on a daily basis. Integrating social media within communication has brought about new opportunities for individuals and organisations to connect, share ideas, and engage with communities in novel ways. According to Aichner, Grünfelder, Maurer and Jegeni (2021) and Kietzmann et al (2011), social media platforms have evolved beyond their initial purpose of connecting people. They allow organisations and users to express their identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups, which are the seven functional building blocks. These building blocks shape how organisations and users communicate, engage and create networks.

Social media platforms have become a vital tool for organisations to engage with customers and build brand loyalty (Jeswani 2023). This assertion suggests that social media communication can be used to improve customer service, increase sales, and enhance brand reputation. This highlights the importance of integrating communication within social media for organisations, as it can lead to increased engagement and ultimately improve customer satisfaction.

Alalwan, Rana, Dwivedi and Algharabat (2017) emphasise that integrating communication tools into social media platforms is essential for building and maintaining strong relationships between organisations and their target audience. This integration allows for a multi-faceted approach to engagement, incorporating visual, auditory, and textual elements that cater to diverse preferences (Dhanesh et al 2022). By utilising these tools, organisations can drive increased engagement, as evidenced by higher likes, shares, and comments, leading to greater brand visibility and a deeper emotional connection with consumers (Dwivedi, Ismagilova, Hughes, Carlson, Filieri, Jacobson, Jain, Karjaluoto, Kefi, Krishen & Kumar 2021).

The accessibility and immediacy of social media platforms also enables seamless customer service interactions, allowing organisations to address inquiries and concerns promptly and effectively, thus fostering trust and loyalty. Moreover, the ability

to cultivate online communities around shared brand experiences promotes a sense of belonging and encourages organic word-of-mouth marketing, further strengthening the bond between organisations and their customers (Zhang, Hu, Guo & Liu 2017).

As noted by Mikal, Wurtz and Grande (2021), social media has provided opportunities for individuals to connect with others who share similar interests and engage in discussions on various topics. This has led to the formation of new communities and social networks, providing individuals with a sense of belonging and social support. However, the study also notes that social media communication can have negative effects on relationships, such as the spread of misinformation and the potential for cyberbullying (Mikal et al 2021). Social media integration within communication has profoundly impacted both personal and professional spheres, highlighting the need for continued research and discussion on the topic (Iblasi, Bader & Al-Qreini 2016).

Lasi (2021) contends that social media platforms serve as powerful e-marketing tools, providing marketers with a wide range of communication options, such as visual images, audio, written text, and video formats. This diverse approach allows for the creation of engaging content and facilitates dynamic feedback through audio or written responses. Borchers and Enke (2021) postulate that communication within the social media landscape is inherently strategic. It involves the intentional selection and deployment of various communication tools to achieve specific objectives. Influencers, for instance, utilise their unique voice and platform to curate messages that resonate with their target audience, ultimately influencing behaviours and perceptions in alignment with broader strategic goals.

The works of Kerr, Valos, Luxton and Allen (2023) and Angelopulo and Rachel Barker (2012) have been instrumental in shaping the understanding of how organisations can leverage various communication channels, including digital platforms, to achieve their strategic goals within the realm of IMC. Communication via social media plays a critical role in facilitating interaction between the producers and audiences. It defies time, distance, and geographic location, and communication is instant. Events on social media are generated as they develop without the constraints of an editorial board as they are with traditional media such as television, radio, and newspapers.

The above authors' emphasis on an holistic approach to communication, where online and offline channels are integrated to create a consistent brand message, is

particularly relevant in today's digital age (Kerr et al 2023; Angelopulo & Barker 2012). They also highlight the growing importance of digital channels in IMC, recognising the need for organisations to adapt their strategies to leverage these platforms effectively (Kerr et al 2023; Angelopulo & Barker 2012). Furthermore, their focus on strategic planning and measurement underscores the importance of aligning communication efforts with overall organisation objectives, and tracking progress to ensure effectiveness (Kerr et al 2023; Angelopulo & Barker 2012). While their work does not explicitly focus on social media integration, their insights on IMC provide a valuable framework for understanding how organisations can strategically incorporate social media into their broader communication strategy.

Social media provides schools in South Korea and South Africa with new ways to engage and connect with stakeholders and communities and build their brand. Social media has grown to be an essential part of marketing communication plans. These platforms have evolved past their original social purposes to become vital resources for organisations looking to promote involvement and loyalty (Aichner et al 2021; Kietzmann et al 2011). Schools can use social media to increase their visibility and communicate with parents and students directly. Furthermore, social media allows immediateness, which means stakeholders and schools can have a quick service, which helps in effective problem-solving and building trust and loyalty. Therefore, social media is an important tool for organisations. The following section addresses the seven functional building blocks of social media

2.5.3 Functions of social media

Social media is a versatile platform that offers the opportunity to deploy strategic functions such as identity, presence, conversations, relationships, groups, reputation, and sharing. These functions play a crucial role in influencing marketing strategies and are of paramount importance to this study as they enable marketers to engage with their target audience, build brand awareness, and drive customer engagement. The purpose of this study was to delve into these functions and examine the ways in which social media can be leveraged for effective marketing communication. As highlighted in Chapter 1 under the research problem heading in section 1.2.1, these functions serve as a significant tool in marketing communication. They offer a range of essential features that enable marketers to effectively utilise social media platforms to engage

with their audience, build a robust brand image and reputation, and promote customer engagement. This thesis aimed to provide a detailed analysis of each of these functions and their role in marketing communication.

2.5.3.1 Identity

The identity function related to social media pertains to the presentation of the self by users in the realm of social media (Kietzmann et al 2011). Users create their online identities by revealing personal information such as their name, age, gender, occupation, and location (Haimson, Liu, Zhang & Corvite 2021). Thus, identity is a pertinent social media function that enables organisations and consumers to exercise control over and monitor the content that is shared on social media.

Social media has become a ubiquitous presence in the daily lives of many individuals, with Facebook being one of the most widely used platforms (Rossini, Baptista, de Oliveira & Stromer-Galley 2021). Considering the ease with which personal information can be shared online, concerns regarding the potential use of this data for mining information have emerged (Kietzmann & Angell 2010). This has in turn led to instances of privacy infringement by both individuals and organisations, resulting in legal action being taken in certain cases (Rejikumar, Gopikumar & Aswathy 2021). Furthermore, social media serves as a platform for conversation and communication, allowing users to engage in discussions and share ideas with others.

2.5.3.2 Presence

The notion of presence in social media refers to the degree of authenticity and visibility of an individual or organisation in their online interactions (Haimson et al 2021). It encompasses the representation of users, and may include information about their geographic location in the physical world (Lynn, Healy, Kilroy, Hunt, Van Der Werff, Venkatagiri and Morrison (2015). For example, some social media platforms, such as Mxit, offered an "available" status that indicated the presence of other users on the platform (Sundaram, Sharma & Shakya 2020). This phenomenon of presence is crucial for establishing credibility and fostering relationships in a digital context. Its importance for businesses and academics lies in its potential to strengthen their online reputation and influence.

Lowry, Zhang, Zhou and Fu (2009) have underscored that the use of social media platforms results in a growth in online presence. Moreover, Nair and Subramaniam (2012) have posited that active engagement on social media platforms enables organisations to establish communication channels with both their current and potential customers. This, in turn, provides customers with a platform to voice their thoughts and opinions. For organisations to gain a social media presence, it is imperative that they possess active social media accounts and consistently utilise these profiles to share updates and improve their online visibility.

Consequently, the presence function plays a critical role in the current study's evaluation of the ISCT and BEK schools' awareness of their stakeholders' locations, authenticity, and availability when communicating on social media.

2.5.3.3 Conversation

According to Kavada (2015), social media is fundamentally grounded in discussions, and its efficacy is derived from these interactions. Social media platforms are primarily designed to facilitate conversations between individuals and groups (Lynn et al 2015), thereby transforming the way consumers and organisations engage with each other, challenging traditional notions of marketing communication. These platforms have opened up new opportunities for organisations to gain a deeper understanding of their customers and establish instantaneous connections with them. For instance, X permits users to provide live commentary, express concerns, and offer suggestions in real-time, while social networking platforms such as Instagram and Facebook enable individuals to connect with friends, followers, and organisations.

Organisations such as the ISCT and BEK can effectively engage their audience through social media platforms, such as Facebook and X. However, it is imperative that they adhere to certain etiquette guidelines while facilitating and participating in online discussions (Shu & Chuang 2011). For instance, X's format only allows for short messages, which makes it an ideal platform to raise awareness about topics that may pique one's interest to investigate further (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010).

The conversation function of social media is critical in analysing the interactions that the BEK school and the ISCT have with their stakeholders and customers.

Furthermore, social media plays a fundamental role in building relationships, which is pivotal for the success of any organisation.

2.5.3.4 Relationship

Social media has become an indispensable tool for relationship-building in organisations. It facilitates the establishment and consolidation of customer relationships, enhances brand recognition among the target market, and yields significant benefits for organisations in the form of increased product sales and profit margins (Jussila et al 2014; Barker et al 2012). Furthermore, social media enables organisations to establish enduring, profitable relationships with their customers. These relationships are structured, regulated, and formal, and they serve as a vital component of an organisations' overall strategy. This study aimed to examine how the ISCT and the BEK school leveraged social media to maintain positive relationships with their stakeholders by sharing information and engaging in communication.

Given the importance of relationship building in organisational success, this study's findings hold significant implications for both the ISCT and the BEK school. This investigation has shed light on the effectiveness of the organisations' social media strategies and provides insights into how they can strengthen and solidify their relationships with their stakeholders. In the next section, the reputation function and its role in maintaining and enhancing the organisations' standing in the eyes of their stakeholders will be explored.

2.5.3.5 Reputation

According to Kietzmann et al (2011), social media reputation refers to the perception that individuals collectively hold of themselves and others on social media platforms. The widespread use of social media has enabled millions of users to create and disseminate narratives about organisations, thereby increasing their public exposure and shaping public opinion (Etter, Ravasi & Colleoni 2014). Consequently, social media has emerged as a crucial tool for organisations to safeguard and maintain their reputation by facilitating interaction with customers in the event of negative impacts that could potentially harm their reputation.

The reputation function assumes a critical role in the present study as the content shared through the social media sites of the ISCT and the BEK school can be

leveraged to manage their reputation. The two schools can use social media to mitigate reputational risks posed by individuals who harbour the intention to inflict harm on their reputations. The following section addresses the use of social media in organisations.

2.5.4 The use of social media in organisations

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) aver that social media technology encompasses various digital communication tools that enable users to create, share, and exchange user-generated content through virtual networks and communities. These platforms include social networking sites, microblogging platforms, wikis, blogs, and video-sharing sites (Quesenberry 2020). They further add that the interactive nature of social media technology enables users to participate actively in content creation and dissemination, resulting in the democratisation of information and a shift towards user-driven content creation. Social media technology has revolutionised how people worldwide, including in South Africa and other countries, communicate and share information online (Mdlongwa 2009).

This widespread adoption of social media has significantly impacted society, including changes in how people interact, consume news, and make purchasing decisions. As Hsu and Lin (2020) noted, social media has become essential for organisations to engage with customers, build brand awareness, and promote products and services. The use of social media technology has also led to new forms of communication, such as social media influencers and user-generated content, which have further transformed the marketing landscape (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). Therefore, the advancement of social media technology has changed how people communicate and how organisations operate and interact with customers.

Schools in South Africa and South Korea have recognised the importance of social media as a marketing communication strategy. Wario (2022) notes that South African schools use social media platforms such as Facebook, X, and Instagram to promote their institutions and connect with prospective students. Similarly, Yoon (2023) found that South Korean universities use social media, particularly YouTube and Instagram, to showcase their campuses, academic programmes, and student life. However, the way schools in these two countries use social media differs. Grier and Bryant (2005) observe that South African schools often utilise social media to address social issues

such as poverty, inequality, and access to essential services, whereas schools in South Korea tend to focus more on innovation, technology, and design (Zhang 2022; Ayhan 2024). Regardless of these differences, both countries share a growing interest in using social media platforms to reach and engage with prospective students and their parents.

Social media platforms have become a powerful tool for facilitating cross-cultural communication and marketing in the education sector. In the context of South African and South Korean schools, these platforms enable the exchange of information, showcasing unique schools' cultures, values, and academic programmes to a global audience (Dwivedi et al 2021). This promotes mutual understanding and appreciation between the two countries, while also allowing schools to engage with potential partners, alumni networks, and education agencies, leading to collaborative projects and student exchange programmes (Dwivedi et al 2021). Additionally, the targeted advertising features of social media provide a cost-effective way for schools to connect with prospective students and parents interested in studying or working abroad, consolidating the role of social media as a vital component in international schools' marketing strategies.

In contemporary times, social media has gained immense significance in the realm of organisations. As per the research conducted by Nkegbe and Abor (2023), organisations have leveraged social media platforms like Facebook, X, and LinkedIn to enhance brand recognition, generate leads, and foster customer engagement. The utilisation of these platforms by schools and organisations has proven to be a cost-effective method of reaching out to a larger audience. It can potentially lead to heightened customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Social media platforms like Facebook, X, and LinkedIn have become essential tools for organisations, including schools, to achieve marketing goals and connect with customers. Jamil, Dunnan, Gul, Shehzad, Gillani and Awan (2022) note that common uses include promoting products and services, sharing organisational news and updates, responding to customer inquiries and complaints, and fostering a sense of community among followers. Additionally, social media can facilitate market research, gather customer feedback, and keep organisations up-to-date with industry trends

(Dwivedi et al 2021). Social media has become a vital component for modern organisations seeking to establish a strong presence and engage with their audience.

Despite social media's benefits to organisations, it also presents some challenges that cannot be overlooked. According to Kim and Kim (2019), and Kim (2019), employees' use of social media can result in privacy breaches, data security issues, and other legal concerns. Furthermore, social media can be a major distraction for students and employees, decreasing productivity. As a result, organisations must establish clear and comprehensive policies and guidelines for their employees' use of social media to minimise these risks.

A well-developed social media strategy is imperative to maximise social media's benefits in organisations. As Bernoff and Li (2008) emphasise, a successful social media strategy should prioritise engagement, listening, and response. Additionally, organisations should utilise social media analytics to assess the impact of their social media endeavours and pinpoint opportunities for enhancement. Moreover, social media has emerged as a potent marketing communication strategy.

The literature extensively covers the use of social media in organisations (Mdlongwa 2009; Hsu & Lin 2020; Wario 2022; Yoon 2023; Grier & Bryant 2005; Ayhan 2024; Nkegbe & Abor 2023; Jamil et al 2022; Kim 2019). However, there is a noticeable gap in the current literature regarding the use of social media as a marketing communication strategy within schools, particularly comparing organisations in South Africa and South Korea.

2.6 SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MARKETING COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Strategy is a pattern of decisions that enables organisations to accomplish their goals and objectives (Mainardes, Ferreira & Raposo 2014). This definition highlights that strategy is not merely a single decision or action but rather a sequence of choices made over time that result in a consistent pattern. This pattern reflects an organisation's objectives, capabilities, and external environment, and it serves as a guide for resource allocation and action plan development to ensure long-term success. In line with this, a marketing communication strategy, as defined by Belch and Belch (2021), is a comprehensive plan that outlines how an organisation will communicate its message to its target audience. It involves defining the key

messages, selecting the appropriate channels, determining the timing and frequency of communication, and measuring the strategy's effectiveness (Blakeman 2023). This marketing communication strategy is an essential component of the overall organisation's strategy, as it aims to create a consistent and impactful brand image, build customer relationships, and ultimately drive desired actions.

According to Kruger (2017), successful strategy development necessitates a thorough understanding of an organisation's internal and external environment, having a clear vision of its objectives, and adopting a flexible approach to adapt to changing circumstances is crucial. In today's organisational landscape, social media has gained significant importance as a marketing communication strategy for organisations. Social media marketing plays a vital role in enhancing customer engagement, fostering brand loyalty, and driving sales (Luck, Barker, Sassenberg, Chitty, Shimp & Andrews 2020). Organisations can leverage social media platforms to engage with customers, address their inquiries, and gather feedback on their offerings, thereby establishing trust and loyalty, which in turn leads to improved customer retention (Blakeman 2023). Additionally, the ability to target specific demographics, interests, and behaviours through social media platforms allows organisations to ensure their marketing messages reach the right audience, ultimately resulting in higher conversion rates and increased return on investment.

Various organisations, including schools, utilise social media as a marketing strategy. Creating and implementing a marketing strategy is a crucial element of successful marketing and is widely recognised as a fundamental aspect of a prosperous marketing campaign. Morgan, Whitley, Feng, and Chari (2019) note that a strong marketing strategy establishes the foundation for fruitful marketing initiatives and enables organisations to achieve their marketing aspirations. Social media has become an indispensable aspect of marketing communication, allowing organisations to interact with their desired audience and build brand awareness. This represents a valuable opportunity for organisations to engage with their target audience and promote their products and services. In addition to its reach, social media is cost-effective compared to traditional marketing channels such as TV, radio, and print media (Luck et al 2020).

In today's digital age, social media has transformed how organisations and schools engage with their customers and students. As Jeswani (2023) points out, real-time interaction on social media is essential for building brand loyalty. Organisations can foster relationships and cultivate a dedicated customer base by connecting with customers in real time (Arshad 2023). Social media is a vital component of marketing communication, allowing organisations to reach their target audience, increase brand awareness, and connect with customers instantly. Due to its cost-effective approach and extensive reach, social media is critical for companies to promote their offerings and establish a strong brand identity (Jeswani 2023).

According to Tuten (2023), social media marketing presents certain challenges. One of the primary difficulties for organisations is assessing the efficacy of their social media marketing endeavours. Additionally, organisations need to continuously adjust to the dynamic social media environment to guarantee the relevance and effectiveness of their marketing strategies (Dwivedi et al 2021).

When comparing the marketing strategies of two schools, one in South Korea and the other in South Africa, the data presented can be utilised for analysing and assessing the effectiveness of their respective approaches to social media marketing. By examining the social media channels used by each school, the type of content they share, and the level of engagement they generate, researchers can gain valuable insights into how each school utilises social media to attract and retain students.

In applying the principles of the marketing communication strategy outlined by Belch and Belch (2021), researchers can evaluate the coherence and consistency of each school's messaging across various platforms and determine whether their social media efforts are aligned with their overall marketing goals. The challenges associated with social media marketing, such as measuring effectiveness and adapting to the constantly evolving landscape (Tuten 2023) can be used to identify potential areas for improvement in each school's social media strategy.

The following section focuses on discussing the cultural variables that affect the use of social media as a marketing communication strategy in South African and South Korean schools.

2.7 CULTURAL VARIABLES THAT AFFECT THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MARKETING COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN SOUTH AFRICAN AND SOUTH KOREAN SCHOOLS

While social media has become a popular marketing communication strategy in recent years, it is important to consider how cultural differences can impact its effectiveness in different regions (Mohamed, Ünsalan & Abdinasir 2024). Cultural variables encompass shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, and artefacts that define a group or society (Causadias 2020). These variables have a significant influence on how individuals perceive and engage with the world, including their communication styles, preferences, and consumption habits (Causadias 2020).

A study by Song, Moon, Chen and Houston (2017) revealed that the impact of cultural variables on marketing communication strategy is significant, as they shape how messages are perceived and received. Causadias's (2020) study claims that shared beliefs, values, and customs influence communication styles, with high-context cultures favouring indirect messages and low-context cultures preferring directness (Mohamed et al 2024). Values such as individualism versus collectivism can affect consumer attitudes (Causadias 2020), while cultural norms play a role in determining product preferences and consumption habits (Mohamed et al 2024). Furthermore, cultural context informs brand perception and advertising interpretation, as symbols and colours hold varying meanings across cultures (Causadias 2020). It is essential for marketers to understand and respect these cultural nuances in order to develop effective campaigns that resonate with diverse target audiences and achieve their marketing objectives (Mohamed et al 2024).

South Korea and South Africa have distinct cultural backgrounds shaped by different histories, traditions, and social norms. These cultural differences can manifest in various ways, influencing the type of content that resonates with each audience, the preferred social media platforms, and the level of formality or informality in communication. For example, the studies by Cho, Mallinckrodt and Yune (2010), Moon, Travaglino and Uskul (2018) and Vogt and Laher (2008) stated that South Korean culture emphasises collectivism, hierarchy, and indirect communication (Moon et al 2018), while South African culture is individualistic (Vogt & Laher 2008). These

differences can affect how schools in each country use social media to engage with prospective students and their families.

Studies carried out by Kim (2022), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2024), Bermeo (2014), and Jang, Hong, Yoo and Park (2018) revealed that South Korean schools tend to focus on showcasing their academic achievements, emphasising the collective success of their students and alumni. They might also use more formal language and imagery in social media posts. In contrast, Soudien and McKinney (2016) point out that South African schools tend to highlight their diverse student body, unique cultural experiences, and commitment to social responsibility and may use a more casual and conversational tone in their communication. By understanding and accounting for these cultural variables, schools in both countries can tailor their social media marketing strategies to effectively resonate with their respective target audiences. This involves not only adapting the content and tone of communication but also selecting the most relevant social media platforms and engaging with users in a culturally appropriate manner.

For example, South Korean schools might find that platforms like KakaoTalk and Naver Band are more popular among their target audience than Facebook or X (Brennan 2020). They might also need to consider the importance of visual aesthetics and storytelling in their social media content. In contrast, South African schools might prioritise platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, and focus on creating authentic content which is engaging and socially conscious (Soudien & McKinney 2016).

Song et al (2017) highlight that, ultimately, incorporating cultural variables into the analysis of social media marketing strategies is essential for gaining a comprehensive understanding of how these strategies function in different cultural contexts. By recognising and respecting cultural differences, schools in South Korea and South Africa can develop more effective and culturally relevant social media campaigns that resonate with their target audiences and achieve their marketing goals.

Duffet and Wakehan (2016) highlight the pivotal role of social media in communication and marketing in South Africa, by emphasising its transformative impact on how companies interact with consumers. Kubheka, Carter and Mwaura (2020) point out that linguistic diversity in South Africa presents a challenge for marketers utilising

social media platforms. They emphasise the need for marketers to account for the various languages spoken in South Africa and tailor their marketing communications accordingly. Furthermore, Kaffashpoor and Mirvaisi (2023) stress the significance of taking into consideration the cultural and religious sensitivities of the target audience when employing social media as a marketing communication tool in South Africa.

Similarly, in South Korea, cultural variables such as collectivism, high-context communication, and Confucianism can affect the use of social media in marketing communication (Moon et al 2018; Cho et al 2010). According to Kim and Kim (2019), collectivism, which emphasises group harmony and loyalty, can affect how social media is used in marketing communication. They found that marketers focus on building customer relationships through social media rather than just promoting their products. Additionally, high-context communication, which relies on nonverbal cues and subtle messages, can also affect the use of social media in marketing communication.

Cultural nuances are crucial in utilising social media as a marketing communication strategy in South African and South Korean educational settings. Marketers must consider these cultural differences and customise their marketing messages accordingly. This approach enables them to leverage social media effectively as a marketing communication tool in these regions.

Education-focused studies in regarding South Korea show that cultural variables strongly influence how schools use social media for marketing and institutional communication. Kwon and Son (2025) found that Korean schools maintain highly formal and structured digital communication practices, reflecting cultural expectations of hierarchy and collective responsibility. Similarly, Kartashova, Prykhodkina, Makhynia, Tymoshko, Sholokh, and Zhuravlev (2022) note that schools use social media strategically to showcase academic excellence and maintain strong relationships with parents, who expect disciplined and achievement-oriented messaging. Kim (2022) further argues that Korean schools curate their online presence to build reputational capital by emphasising orderliness, high performance, and group success. These Korea-specific education studies strengthen the comparative dimension of this research by grounding the current research in the South

Korean context which directly links cultural norms to school-based communication practices.

The literature extensively covers cultural variables that affect the use of social media as a marketing communication strategy as evidenced by various studies (Song et al (2017), Causadias (2020), Moon et al (2018), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2024), Bermeo (2014), Jang et al (2018), Soudien and Mckinney (2016), Duffet and Wakehan (2016), Kubheka et al (2020), Kaffashpoor and Mirvaisi (2023) and Kim and Kim (2019). However, there is a noticeable gap in the current literature regarding the comparison of cultural variables that affect the use of social media as a marketing communication strategy in South African and South Korean schools.

2.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided a comprehensive examination of the current literature on social media as a strategic marketing communication tool. In the chapter, literature on social marketing was reviewed through discussions on the origins and development of social marketing. In addition, the nature of marketing, the nature of marketing communication, the nature of social media, social media as a marketing communication strategy and lastly, the cultural variables that affect the use of social media as a marketing communication strategy in South African and South Korean schools were discussed in this chapter. In the next chapter, Chapter 3, the DOI theory and SMET are fully discussed as the supporting theories for this study.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the theoretical foundation for the comparative study of social media marketing communication strategies in South African and South Korean schools. It explores two key theories, namely the Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) Theory and the Social Media Engagement Theory (SMET). DOI theory provides a framework for understanding how new ideas and technologies are adopted and spread, while SMET explains the dynamics of user interaction and participation on social media platforms. The chapter begins by defining each theory and discussing its key assumptions. It then contextualises these theories within the scope of the study, highlighting how they can be applied, and analysing the adoption and utilisation of social media in schools. The chapter concludes by emphasising the importance of understanding both the technological, social and marketing aspects of social media adoption and engagement to develop effective marketing communication strategies in the educational sector. The following section discusses the DOI theory.

3.2 DIFFUSION OF INNOVATION THEORY

The DOI theory was conceptualised and developed by a sociologist and a communication scholar named Everett M. Rogers in 1962 (García-Avilés 2020). According to Sufian, Kasim, Zin and Surtikanti (2023), DOI seeks to explain the how, why, and what rate at which new ideas and technology spread. Rogers views communication and communication channels as important elements in this process as they help with spreading information about innovation from the point of development till it gets to the public (Hornor 2022).

DOI emerged as applied in agricultural, concentrating on how farmers embraced new techniques like hybrid seeds, fertilisers and farming implements (García-Avilés 2020). Subsequently, other studies adopted and applied DOI in different fields of studies that focus, for instance, on agricultural communication, public health, criminal justice, social work and marketing (Rhein 2021; Okour, Chong & Abdel Fattah 2021; Oyelana,

Kamanzi and Richter 2021; Tsai and Chen 2022; Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma 2022).

According to Sahin (2006), Rogers defined diffusion as the process by which a new idea spreads gradually across members of a social system via certain channels. Rogers' definition advances the important elements of DOI, which are innovation, communication channels, time, and social system (Hornor 2022). The definitions provided by Sahin (2006) and Hornor (2022) have innovation in communication as their central point; therefore, without proper channels, time and social systems, effective communication is not possible. In addition, Asemah et al (2022:3) describe diffusion as a "special type of communication concerned with the spread of messages perceived as new ideas". This implies that diffusion relates not solely to communication in general but specifically to spreading novel ideas or innovations among a group of people. Therefore, the DOI theory is relevant to communication theory in that it investigates how technological innovations are deployed and spread among people and organisations within a society (Menzli, Smirani, Boulahia & Hadjouni 2022).

The DOI theory posits that the adoption of innovations within a social system is a process influenced by several factors. These factors include relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability (Askarany 2016; Murray 2009; Liu, Son and Cao 2023). DOI seeks to explain how, why and at what rate new ideas and technology are deployed and spread within society (Sufian et al 2023).

In addition, central to the theory is the idea that individuals progress through five stages when deciding to adopt an innovation: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation (Rogers 1995). Furthermore, given the relatively recent emergence and deployment of social media as a marketing communication tool in the education sector, it is imperative to examine the five stages of DOI and its relevance to this study because it posits that individuals or organisations typically traverse the process of adopting an innovation: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation (Rogers 2003). This sequential model provides a valuable framework for understanding the stages these institutions undertake as they integrate social media into their marketing communication practices.

Furthermore, by exploring each stage, from initial awareness (García-Avilés 2020; Stornelli, Ozcan and Simms 2021) to persuasion and decision-making (García-Avilés 2020; DeFleur and DeFleur 2022) to implementation (Scheuer 2021; DeFleur and DeFleur 2022) and the ultimate affirmation of its value (Rogers 2003), this study sheds light on the factors that facilitate or impede the successful adoption of social media within these institutions. Additionally, the theory's emphasis on the attributes of innovation (Rogers 2003), such as relative advantage and complexity, allows for an evaluation of how these factors have impacted the adoption and use of social media in these specific educational contexts.

The first stage is called the knowledge stage. In this stage, the potential user of the innovation is exposed to it. This means the potential user learns about the innovation or new idea and how it works (García-Avilés 2020). However, the potential user does not have all the necessary information about the innovation or new idea to help them consider whether to adopt the innovation or not (Stornelli et al 2021). The second stage is persuasion. The persuasion and decision stages work hand in hand, and they influence each other. During the persuasion stage, the user seeks information on how the innovation is evaluated to lessen doubts regarding the anticipated effects of an innovation (García-Avilés 2020). Therefore, the potential users develop either a positive or negative attitude toward the innovation (DeFleur & DeFleur 2022). The third stage is the decision. In this stage, the user tries using the innovation. This stage results in one of three outcomes: rejection, full utilisation of innovation, or adoption (García-Avilés 2020). The fourth stage is implementation. In this stage, users implement a decision (Scheuer 2021). The implementation of the decision is related to the acquisition and use of the innovation on a full scale (DeFleur & DeFleur 2022). The last stage is confirmation. In this stage, the finalisation of the decision to use the innovation is made (Rogers 2003:17). Figure 3.1 and Table 3.1 summarise the five stages of the DOI process.

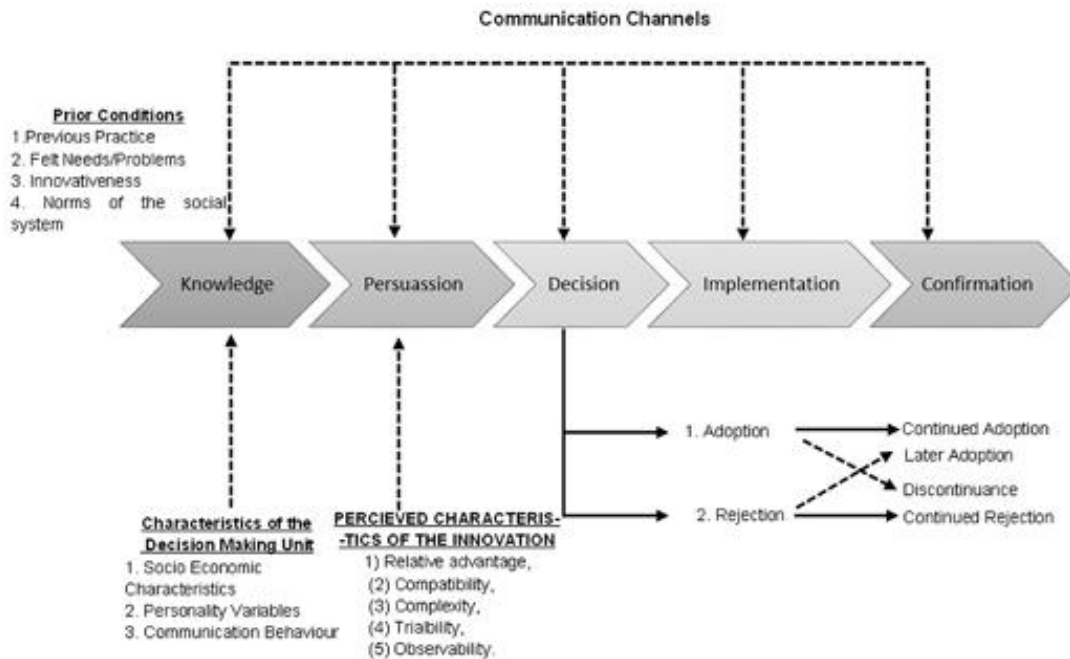


Figure 3: A Model of Five Stages in the Innovation-Decision Process

Source: Diffusion of Innovations, Third Edition by Everett M. Rogers, 1983, p.165.

Figure 3.1: The five stages of the DOI process

Table 3.1: The five stages of DOI

Stage	Action
Knowledge	Exposure to the innovation
Persuasion	Developing an attitude towards innovation. The attitude can be positive or negative.
Decision	Use of the innovation.
Implementation	Make a decision.
Confirmation	Adopt or reject the innovation.

DOI categorises people based on their innovativeness, ranging from early adopters to laggards (Rogers 2003). Early adopters tend to be young educated individuals who do not have children and are into innovation while laggards are older, and lower-level educated individuals who are slow to adopt innovation (Bösehans, Bell, Thorpe, Liao, Homem de Almeida Correia and Dissanayake 2023). Individuals who reside in rural areas tend to be laggards compared to those living in urban areas (Zulauf & Wagner 2021). The theory emphasises that the characteristics of an innovation, such as its relative advantage and complexity, significantly impact its adoption rate. Moreover, communication channels and the social system, encompassing opinion leaders and

norms, play vital roles in the adoption of the diffusion process: opinion leaders influence others' decisions by endorsing or modelling the innovation, while social norms guide acceptable behaviour and create pressure for adoption within a community (Rogers 2003). The DOI is a theory that aims to understand what stimulates the adoption of a resource, such as an idea or product, and how such a decision can affect a social structure and context (El Malouf & Bahemia 2023). The DOI describes how new ideas, options, attitudes, and behaviours spread throughout the community (Thapaliya 2023).

3.2.1 Contextualising the DOI to the study

The DOI theory provides a theoretical lens to examine the adoption and utilisation of social media technology as a marketing communication strategy within schools in South Africa and South Korea. By applying the principles and stages outlined in DOI theory, the study aims to analyse how these institutions leverage social media platforms to engage their target audiences and achieve their communication goals.

A fundamental tenet of DOI theory is the recognition that innovation is intrinsically a social process (Rogers 2003). The decision to adopt or reject a novel idea or technology is profoundly influenced by social interactions, peer opinions, and the broader social environment (Sufian et al 2023). This insight highlights the significance of understanding the distinct social context in which these schools operate and how it shapes their approach to social media. By examining the alignment between social media strategies and the prevailing social dynamics, communication channels and peer influence within their respective societies, the study aims to assess how effectively these institutions leverage social networks and norms to achieve their marketing communication objectives.

3.2.2 Criticism of the diffusion theory and its application to the study

While the DOI theory offers a valuable contribution to understanding the adoption of new technologies, its underlying assumptions and applicability have been subject to significant critique. For instance, MacVaugh and Schiavone (2010), Lundblad (2003), and Lyytinen and Damsgaard (2001) argue that the theory is premised on a homogeneous population of adopters engaging in rational decision-making. The theory fails to realise that society is diverse and/or heterogeneous. The adoption of

innovative technology is influenced among others by social norms, attitudes and values towards technology, available economic infrastructure that enables access and efficiency towards technology, risk perceptions and individual characteristics on adoption decisions (Lundblad 2003). Social demographics such as age, educational attainment and gender, significantly contribute towards the adoption of technology (MacVaugh & Schiavone 2010).

Furthermore, the DOI theory has been criticised for its oversimplification of the adoption process. The assumption of a linear progression through five stages neglects the potential for non-linear adoption behaviours, such as revisiting previous stages or skipping steps (Dearing & Cox 2018). The theory focuses on individual decision-making and underestimates the impact of organisational and structural factors on adoption within institutional contexts (Greenhalgh, Robert, Macfarlane and Kyriakidou 2004). The rigid categorisation of adopters into distinct groups may also not accurately reflect the dynamic and multifaceted nature of adoption behaviours in real-world settings, limiting the theory's predictive and explanatory power, especially in the context of rapidly evolving technologies like social media (Ferreira, Vale & Corrêa 2022).

Another significant limitation of the DOI theory is its insufficient attention to the role of power and inequality in the diffusion process (Avelino 2021). The assumption of a level playing field, where all individuals have equal access to information and resources, overlooks how social and economic disparities can create barriers to adoption for certain groups (Greenhalgh et al 2004). This oversight can lead to an incomplete understanding of the factors contributing to successful or failed innovation diffusion.

Lastly, applying the DOI theory to the adoption of social media in schools presents unique challenges. The rapid evolution of social media platforms and features can complicate the application of a framework developed in a less technologically dynamic era (Dwivedi et al 2021). Moreover, the involvement of multiple stakeholders with diverse goals and perspectives further complicates the adoption process within educational contexts (Evans 2014; Mhlongo, Mbatha, Ramatsetse & Dlamini 2023).

Despite these limitations, the DOI theory remains a useful starting point for understanding the broader patterns and influences on technology adoption. However,

its application necessitates a critical awareness of its limitations and a nuanced understanding of the specific context in which innovation diffusion is being examined.

The next section discusses SMET.

3.3 SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT THEORY

SMET, introduced by Di Gangi and Wasko (2016), is a framework for understanding how users interact and participate on social media platforms. Their research found that user engagement is influenced by both social interactions among users and the platform's technical features (Di Gangi & Wasko 2016). This theory is frequently employed in communication, marketing, and social media management to develop strategies that enhance user engagement and drive desired outcomes, such as increased platform usage (Di Gangi & Wasko 2016).

SMET offers a framework for understanding the dynamics of user interaction on social media platforms. Di Gangi and Wasko (2016) define SMET as the interplay between user experience, including both social interactions and technical features, and its impact on platform usage. Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011) and Baccarella, Wagner, Kietzmann and McCarthy (2018) highlight seven functional building blocks of social media – identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups – as key drivers of user engagement.

According to Lüders, Dinkelberg and Quayle (2022), these blocks encompass essential functionalities that foster social interaction and community building within these digital spaces. For example, 'identity' allows users to express their individuality and manage their online presence, while 'conversations' and 'sharing' facilitate dialogue and content exchange. The 'presence' block creates a sense of real-time connection, and 'relationships' emphasise the formation and maintenance of social ties. 'Reputation' management allows users to build an online image, while 'groups' create spaces for collective engagement (Dwivedi et al 2021) (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: A summary of the seven functions of social media

Functions of social media	Summary
Identity	The way users present and express themselves online.
Conversation	The way users communicate with each other online.
Sharing	The way users exchange and distribute content online.
Presence	The way users know if others are available online.
Relationships	The way users relate to each other.
Reputation	The way users view each others based on their online presence.
Groups	The way users form online communities.

Source: Lynn et al (2015).

The SMET is underpinned by several key assumptions that shape its understanding of user behaviour and interaction dynamics on social media platforms. The theory posits that a positive user experience is the cornerstone of user engagement, including both the platform's technical aspects and the quality of social interactions (Di Gangi & Wasko 2016; Jha and Verma 2023). This assumption highlights the need for platforms to prioritise user-friendly interfaces, relevant content, and meaningful interactions to foster engagement.

Another fundamental assumption of SMET is that heightened user engagement directly correlates with increased platform usage (Mummalaneni, Yoganarasimhan and Pathak 2022). When users find value in their interactions and experiences on the platform, they are more likely to spend more time on the platform and return frequently. One of the fundamental assumptions of SMET is that when users are more engaged, they tend to use the platform more (Cao, Meadows, Wong & Xia 2021; Gangi & Wasko 2016). Creating a valuable user experience can lead to increased time spent on the platform and higher return rates (Gangi & Wasko 2016; Lewis and Sauro 2021). Therefore, creating an engaging environment to drive the platform's growth is crucial.

SMET emphasises the significance of social presence and connectedness in user engagement (Kietzmann et al 2011). This means that users are likely to engage with platforms that foster a sense of community and belonging, where they can connect with others, share experiences, and build relationships. This assumption highlights the

importance of features that facilitate social interaction, such as commenting, liking, and sharing, and the ability to create and join groups or communities. The theory also recognises the importance of content relevance and personalisation in driving user engagement (Liu and Li 2011). Users are more likely to engage with content relevant to their interests and needs, and platforms that can tailor content to individual preferences are more likely to foster higher levels of engagement.

Although the literature does not explicitly state it, SMET incorporates elements of diffusion of innovation theory, suggesting that users engage in social media interactions with the goal of diffusing an innovation or a new idea (Sambrana, Pendon and Bonghanoy 2024). This could be in the form of sharing their experiences about the innovation, recommending it to others, or actively promoting it on social media platforms (Rossman 2014). This assumption highlights the importance of engaging on social media which is not only limited to communicating, but also to spreading innovations or new ideas.

3.3.1 Contextualising SMET to the study

SMET is a foundational framework for a comparative study, providing insights into the mechanisms that drive user interaction and participation on social media platforms (Jaakonmäki, Müller & Vom Brocke 2017). By understanding the principles of SMET, an analysis can be conducted on how South African and South Korean schools leverage social media to engage with their target audiences and achieve their marketing communication goals.

One of SMET's critical assumptions is that the user experience, encompassing both social interactions and technical features, directly influences user engagement (Di Gangi & Wasko 2016). This assumption is particularly relevant to the study as it highlights the importance of creating a positive and engaging social media environment for prospective students, parents, and alumni. By analysing the content, design, and interactive features of each school's social media platforms, the extent to which they prioritise user experience and foster meaningful interactions can be assessed (Koç 2023).

Furthermore, SMET posits that increased user engagement leads to increased platform usage (Di Gangi & Wasko 2016). This assumption underscores the

importance of developing social media strategies that encourage active participation and interaction from users (Koç 2023). By examining the frequency and types of interactions on each school's social media platforms, insights into their engagement strategies' effectiveness and potential impact on brand awareness and reputation can be gained.

Moreover, SMET recognises the importance of social presence and connectedness in user engagement (Kietzmann et al 2011). This assumption is particularly relevant in schools, where building a sense of community and belonging is crucial for attracting and retaining students. By analysing how schools utilise social media to create a sense of virtual community and foster connections among students, faculty, and alumni, an understanding of how they leverage this aspect of SMET to enhance their marketing communication efforts can be obtained.

SMET provides a valuable lens through which to examine schools' social media marketing strategies in South Africa and South Korea (Masiya & Lubinga 2023; Chen & DiVall 2018). By understanding the underlying mechanisms that drive user engagement, best practices and areas for improvement can be identified, ultimately contributing to more effective and impactful social media communication in the educational sector. The next section criticises the SMET and its application to the study.

3.3.2 Criticism of the SMET and its application to the study

Despite its significant contributions to understanding user behaviour in digital spaces, the SMET has encountered valid criticisms regarding its scope and applicability. One prominent critique centres on the theory's potential oversimplification of the intricate and multifaceted nature of user engagement (Trunfio & Rossi 2021). While SMET emphasises the importance of positive user experiences and meaningful social interactions, it may not fully account for the complex interplay of psychological, cognitive, and cultural factors that shape engagement behaviours. Lee and Ma (2012), for instance, argue that the theory's focus on platform features and social dynamics may overlook individual motivations, emotional states, and cognitive processes that contribute to engagement levels.

Additionally, SMET's emphasis on fostering engagement through social presence and connectedness has been challenged for its potential to disregard the diverse motivations and usage patterns of social media users (Di Gangi & Wasko 2016; Trunfio & Rossi 2021). Research suggests that not all individuals utilise social media platforms primarily for social interaction and relationship building (Smock, Ellison, Lampe & Wohn 2011). Some users may engage with platforms primarily for information-seeking, self-expression, or entertainment purposes (Chen & Peng 2023). Consequently, SMET's focus on social connection may not fully resonate with all user segments, potentially limiting its explanatory and predictive power in diverse contexts.

The criticisms aimed at the SMET underscore the necessity for a nuanced and context-specific application, particularly when examining social media adoption within schools across diverse cultural contexts like South Africa and South Korea. While SMET offers valuable insights into user engagement, its potential oversimplification of the phenomenon warrants careful consideration. Critics argue that the theory's emphasis on positive user experiences and social interactions may not fully encompass the complex interplay of psychological, cognitive, and cultural factors that shape engagement behaviours (Lee & Ma 2012).

In the context of this study, which explores social media adoption in two schools located in South Africa and South Korea, this critique emphasises the importance of considering the diverse cultural nuances that may influence how students and educators in these distinct settings engage with social media. The theory's focus on social connection may resonate differently in cultures where collectivism and group harmony are highly valued (Confucianism), such as in South Korea, compared to cultures that prioritise community, interconnectedness, and shared humanity (*Ubuntu*), as may be the case in certain South African contexts.

Furthermore, the critique of SMET's neglect of power dynamics and inequalities is particularly salient when comparing social media adoption in these two countries. The digital divide and disparities in access to technology and digital literacy may be more pronounced in South Africa compared to South Korea, potentially influencing the extent and nature of social media engagement within schools. Therefore, this study needs to be sensitive to these socio-economic and technological disparities to fully understand the complexities of social media adoption in these diverse contexts.

The next section illustrates social media as a marketing communication strategy framework.

3.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MARKETING COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

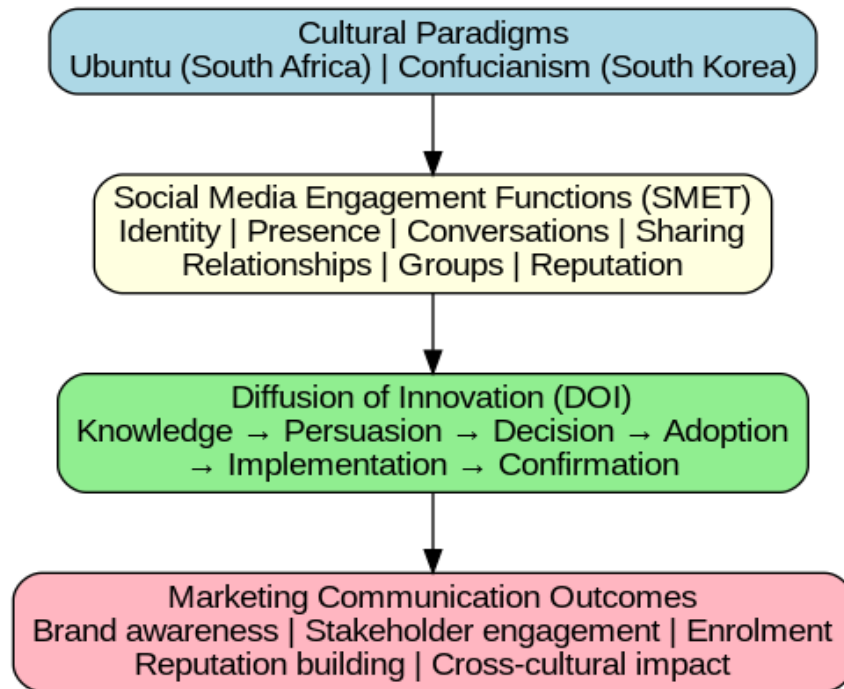


Figure 3.2: Conceptual framework

Source: Adapted from Rogers (2003), Kietzmann et al (2011), Van Dyk and Nefale (2005), and Xiao and Hu (2019)

This study's conceptual framework (Figure 3.2) incorporates the cultural paradigms of *Ubuntu* (in South Africa) and Confucianism (in South Korea), as well as the DOI theory (Rogers 2003) and SMET (Kietzmann et al 2011). When combined, these offer a multifaceted perspective for examining how schools deploy social media as a marketing communication strategy.

1. Cultural Paradigms as Contextual Filters

The *Ubuntu* philosophy places a strong emphasis on relationships, collaboration, and shared responsibility. This has an impact on how South African schools deliver marketing materials that highlight social responsibility, diversity, and community benefits.

In Confucian philosophy, power structures (hierarchy), respect, and group progress are valued. This encourages schools in South Korea to emphasise educational achievement as a whole, discipline, and academic accomplishment.

These paradigms serve as contextual filters, influencing the formulation and interpretation of social media strategies.

2. Social Media Engagement Theory

Drawing from Kietzmann et al (2011), identity, presence, conversations, relationships, groups, reputation, and sharing (the seven functional building blocks), serve as the practical elements of a social media strategy. These functions allow schools to engage with stakeholders, manage their image, and communicate their institutional identity.

3. Diffusion of Innovation

The DIO framework implemented by Rogers (2003) is relevant for explaining how social media practices become accepted and integrated in schools. The five stages of knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation provide a framework for comprehending the way schools deploy novel technologies, increase stakeholder usage, and maintain their deployment for marketing communication.

4. Marketing Communication Outcome

The combination of cultural paradigms, engagement functions, and innovation processes results in:

- Recognition of the brand and exposure.
- Engagement with stakeholders, including parents, students, and alumni.
- Admission growth
- Management of reputation
- Cross-cultural adaptability of marketing strategies

This framework study views culture as the fundamental layer, which dictates how social media functions are utilised and innovations are disseminated, ultimately influencing marketing communication results in South Africa and South Korea.

3.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter explored the theoretical underpinnings of this study, focusing on the DOI and the SMET. While both theories offer valuable frameworks, they are not without limitations. The criticisms levelled against them underscore the need for a nuanced and context-specific approach in this study, particularly given the diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts of South Africa and South Korea. By acknowledging these limitations and incorporating additional factors, such as cultural nuances, power dynamics, and individual motivations, this study aimed to develop a more comprehensive understanding of social media adoption and engagement within schools. The subsequent chapters delve into the methodological approach and empirical findings of this study, providing further insights into the complexities of social media integration in education.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The prior chapter explored the various theoretical frameworks that served as the foundation for this study. This chapter is dedicated to exploring the research methodology utilised. It encompasses an in-depth discussion of the study's research design, the research methods employed for data collection, the analysis techniques utilised, the establishment of trustworthiness in the study, and the ethical considerations upheld throughout the research process.

4.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

There are different research paradigms in the social science studies. Deshpande (1983) and Mertens (2012) describe a research paradigm as a set of assumptions that provides a conceptual or philosophical framework to underpin a world view, which enables researchers to construct and organised their studies. A paradigm is a shared worldview that represents the beliefs and values in a discipline and that guides how problems are solved (Schwandt 2001; Yong, Maizaitulaidawati, & Kamarudin, 2021; Babbie 2016; Bryman 2016). According to Junjie and Yingxin (2022) and Rhaman (2023), there are two main research paradigms in social science, namely positivism and interpretivism. They provide frameworks for understanding the nature of knowledge, reality, and the methods used to investigate it. They have a unique viewpoint on research's ontology, methodology, and epistemology. The following section discusses positivism interpretivism and the reasons for adopting the interpretivism paradigm.

4.2.1 Positivism

Positivism is rooted in the belief that knowledge can only be obtained through objective observation and measurement (Babbie 2020), emphasises the use of quantitative methods, and seeks to discover causal relationships between variables. Positivists assume that there is a single, objective reality that can be studied independently of the researcher's own experiences or biases (Junjie & Yingxin 2022). Positivism is used for

quantitative research and emphasises the use of objective observation, measurement, and quantitative methods to discover causal relationships between variables (Maksimovic & Evtimov 2023). However, this study is rooted in the qualitative research design; therefore, the adopted paradigm of this study was interpretivism as discussed below.

4.2.2 Interpretivism

The interpretivist paradigm argues that reality is socially constructed and shaped by people's meanings, experiences, and interpretations (Pervin & Mokhtar 2022; Bryman 2016). This paradigm informed not only the qualitative nature of the study but also the selection and interpretation of the social media posts. Because interpretivism prioritises understanding meaning rather than measuring frequency, the selection of posts focused on content that conveyed marketing messages rich in symbolic, cultural, and contextual significance, rather than on the quantity of posts. Only posts that reflected how schools presented themselves, constructed their identities, and communicated value to their audiences were selected, as these offered meaningful insight into the schools' intentions and social positioning. Similarly, the interpretivist philosophy guided the analysis by directing attention to how the posts communicated deeper ideological meanings—such as how each school framed excellence, community, reputation, or competitiveness within its cultural context. Instead of treating posts as neutral texts, the analysis examined the underlying interpretations, assumptions, and social messages embedded within them in relation to *Ubuntu* and *Confucianism* as well as to DOI and SMET. Through this lens, the study was able to explore how South African and South Korean schools use social media as a communicative space shaped by cultural norms, institutional values, and local expectations, thereby aligning the sampling and interpretation processes with the core principles of the interpretivist paradigm

4.2.3 Ontological assumptions

Ontological assumptions are the fundamental beliefs and assumptions that researchers hold about the nature of reality (Bryman 2016; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2012). These assumptions shape how researchers understand and approach the world they are studying therefore influence the research questions asked,

the methods employed, and the interpretation of findings. In the context of this comparative study of social media marketing in South African and South Korean schools, the ontological assumptions underlying the research can significantly impact the findings and interpretations. For example, an interpretive ontology, as discussed by Bryman (2016) and Saunders et al (2012), would assume that reality is socially constructed and subjective, shaped by people's interpretations and experiences. This approach would emphasise the use of qualitative methods to explore the cultural, social, and historical factors that influence the use of social media marketing in South African and South Korean schools. The choice of ontological assumptions would influence the research design, data collection methods, and analysis techniques used in this study. For this study interpretivist ontological assumptions treat social media marketing as a socially constructed phenomenon, shaped by cultural, social, and historical factors. This approach focuses on understanding the meanings and interpretations that people attach to social media marketing in each country.

4.2.4 Epistemological assumptions

Epistemological assumptions are the fundamental beliefs about how knowledge is acquired and validated (Bryman 2016; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). These assumptions shape the research methods used and the interpretation of findings. In the context of this comparative case study, the epistemological assumptions determined how the researchers approached the collection and analysis of data. For example, an interpretive epistemology assumes that knowledge is gained through understanding people's interpretations and experiences (Cuthbertson, Robb & Blair 2020). This approach emphasises the use of qualitative methods to collect and analyse data, such as interviews and case studies. The choice of epistemological assumptions influences the research design, data collection methods, and analysis techniques used in the study. For instance, an interpretive approach would explore the cultural and social meanings attached to social media marketing in each context. Table 4.1 provides a summary of the differences between interpretivism and positivism paradigms.

Table 4.1: Summary of the differences between interpretivism and positivism

Research Paradigm	Interpretivism	Positivism
Ontological assumptions	Multiple created realities	Reality is true and comprehensible
Epistemological assumptions	Subjectivist: Findings are generated	Objectivist: Findings are a matter of fact
Research approach	Qualitative	Qualitative

Source: Bryman et al. (2016:31) and Lichtman (2014:17)

The above section explained the research paradigm adopted by this study; the following section describes the study's research approach.

4.3 RESEARCH APPROACHES

Research approaches are the plans and procedures for research that encompass the steps from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Grover 2015). There are three types of research approaches commonly used by researchers when conducting studies (Taherdoost 2022). These are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods.

Quantitative research is a systematic approach that involves collecting and analysing numerical data to uncover patterns, trends, and relationships (Creswell & Creswell 2018). It is often used to test hypotheses, measure variables, and generalise about a larger population. Quantitative research relies on objective measurements and statistical analysis to produce reliable and generalisable findings (Ghanad 2023). Quantitative research, while offering several strengths such as reliability, objectivity, and generalisability (Creswell & Creswell 2018; Bryman 2016; Neuman 2014), also has limitations. Its structured approach and predetermined variables can limit the depth of understanding that can be achieved (Bryman 2016).

While quantitative research aims to be objective, there is always a risk of bias in the research design, data collection, or analysis (Neuman 2014). This can occur at various stages, including research design, data collection, and analysis. For instance, a researcher's personal beliefs might influence data interpretation, or a non-representative sample could skew results (Bryman 2016). Moreover, measurement errors and inappropriate statistical methods can compromise the validity of findings. Despite these limitations, quantitative research remains a valuable tool for researchers

seeking to collect and analyse numerical data to answer research questions and test hypotheses.

Mixed methods research is a research approach that strategically combines quantitative and qualitative research methods to draw on the strengths of each (Creswell & Creswell 2018). By integrating both quantitative and qualitative data, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena and answer research questions more effectively (Cresswell 2014:215). This approach is well-justified as it comprehensively explains the research problem and enables researchers to validate their findings, thereby enhancing the overall validity and reliability of the study (Wasti, Simkhada, Van Teijlingen, Sathian & Banerjee 2022; Babbie 2016). Additionally, mixed methods facilitate a more expansive exploration of research questions, providing a more holistic perspective of the phenomenon under investigation (Amadi 2023).

This study employs a qualitative research approach. While quantitative and mixed methods research offer certain advantages, they may not be the most suitable approaches for this particular study. A quantitative approach, for instance, would require access to large datasets from social media platforms, which can be both costly and technically demanding (Bryman 2016). The researcher's skills and resources may not be sufficient to effectively collect, analyse, and interpret such large datasets. However, the nature of the research question does not require large data sets; it requires depth of understanding which is more suited to a qualitative approach.

A qualitative inquiry allows for a more nuanced exploration of the social and cultural contexts surrounding the use of social media by schools (Cresswell 2014). It enables researchers to delve into the motivations, perceptions, and experiences of key stakeholders, such as school administrators, teachers, and students. By focusing on in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, researchers can gain rich insights into the complex dynamics at play and identify emerging trends and patterns. Given the above, adoption of the qualitative research approach was more appropriate for this particular study. The following section discusses the qualitative approach.

4.3.1 Qualitative research approach

Qualitative research is a research approach that focuses on understanding the meaning and interpretation that people attach to their experiences and behaviours (Bryman 2016). It involves collecting and analysing data that is rich in detail and context, such as interviews, observations, and documents. Qualitative research approach is suitable for exploring complex phenomena, understanding people's perspectives, and identifying patterns and themes within data. It involves collecting and analysing data that is rich in detail and context, such as interviews, observations, and documents. By utilising these methods, researchers can obtain complex insights into participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Sabnis, Newman, Whitford & Mossing 2023). The collected data can be in the form of texts, symbols, or meanings provided by the participants, and it is analysed thoroughly to uncover trends, patterns, and narratives.

Qualitative research relies on its strengths of approaching and addressing challenges with an open mind while questioning and challenging existing assumptions. The qualitative approach is particularly useful in qualitative content analysis studies such as marketing communication, media studies, and political communication, where knowledge of the motives and tactics behind acts is vital because it enables researchers to investigate nuances and complexity often missed in quantitative studies (Sirilakshmi, Ashwini, Gogoi, Bhuyan & Bunkar 2024; Lim, 2025). However, qualitative research has been criticised for its subjectivity and poor generalisability as well as for leading to biased results and conclusions (Walsh & Downe 2006; Carminati 2018; Mwita 2022). While this can be viewed as a weakness in research, qualitative research embraces subjectivity as a way to gain deeper insights into participants' lived experiences and perspectives (Lim 2025; Tuffour 2017; Urcia 2021).

Other challenges related to qualitative research are sample size, computation, data saturation, and generalisability of results (Bryman 2016). Researchers employing a qualitative approach must thoughtfully evaluate their sampling techniques, frequently choosing intentional or theoretical sampling to guarantee that participants can contribute valuable and pertinent data. Furthermore, examining qualitative data often demands considerable time and a significant degree of expertise and precision to guarantee that the results are both credible and significant (Neuman 2014).

Qualitative research is considered to be flexible (Bouncken, Qiu, Sinkovics & Kürsten 2021). This flexibility plays a huge role in this approach, enabling researchers to remain open and curious about unexpected events or new data that arise during the study. This is imperative and an advantage in research especially where the phenomena being examined are not thoroughly understood. Flexibility leads to a better understanding of research settings (Babbie 2016). Qualitative research has emerged as an important approach in numerous disciplines. The growing number of qualitative studies released in scholarly publications in addition to the incorporation of qualitative techniques into mixed-methods research designs (Wimmer & Dominick 2013) illustrates this change.

In the context of this study on social media marketing in South African and South Korean schools, a qualitative research approach was particularly relevant for understanding the cultural, social, and historical factors that influence the use of social media. Qualitative methods, such as document reviews from social media pages, provide insights into the perceptions and experiences of different stakeholders, revealing the underlying meanings and interpretations attached to social media marketing in the two countries under study.

4.4 RESEARCH METHOD

Research methods are the methods that are used to conduct a study. Gounder (2012) defines research methods as a range of approaches used by researchers investigating a certain topic. Ali Khan, Raman, Sambamoorthy and Prashanth (2023:19) define a research method as an organised method that researchers use to collect, analyse, and interpret data to address particular queries of a study. This study used qualitative research methods.

4.4.1 Data collection methods

This study used textual analysis as a data collection method. Textual analysis provided a broad view, examining various aspects of the schools' online communication, such as language, imagery, and interactions with followers (Caballero-Julia & Campillo 2021). By using this approach, the study gained a comprehensive understanding of how each school leveraged social media for marketing, capturing the qualitative nuances patterns in their online presence.

4.4.1.1 Textual analysis

Textual analysis can be described as a range of methods used to define, interpret, and understand texts such as words and visual images (Ayoub, Awan & Abbas 2016). This research method regards texts as a rich source of information that provides researchers with insights and meanings for a study when reviewed. Textual analysis is helpful especially when investigating complicated social events as it enables researchers to understand the complexities and nuances contained in texts (Ayoub et al 2016; Welbers, Van Atteveldt & Benoit 2017). Through textual analysis, researchers can obtain information from different types of texts such as interviews, written documents, social media posts, and other ways of communicating (Welbers et al 2017; Ayoub et al 2016). For the purpose of this study, see APPENDIX B.

Researchers employing textual analysis (focusing on words and visual images) in their studies may closely study the text, concentrating on language, organisation of the text such as images, and context to identify deeper trends and ideological meanings (Berger, Humphreys, Ludwig, Moe, Netzer & Schweidel 2020). Usually, this procedure entails categorising the text, figuring out the major themes, and analysing the information in connection with the study questions (Caballero-Julia & Campillo 2021). For example, on social media, researchers can look at the comments people make about certain problems they encounter to understand how they feel about them.

This study used textual analysis as a primary data collection method due to the inherently textual and multimodal nature of social media communication. Kress (2003) highlights the intertwined nature of visual and textual communication in meaning-making, making textual analysis crucial for examining how schools construct their online identities through language, imagery, and interactions, as well as how they navigate the "curated flows" of social media platforms (Gillespie 2014). Furthermore, textual analysis enables an understanding of the cultural nuances embedded in social media communication (Jensen 2015), allowing this study to uncover culturally specific marketing approaches and identify potential areas of convergence and divergence between South African and South Korean schools.

4.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

As defined by Bryman (2016), a research design is a systematic plan for conducting research, encompassing the specific procedures, tools, and techniques used for data collection and analysis. This aligns with the definition provided by Creswell and Cresswell (2018), who emphasise that procedures are strategies used to implement the research design, chosen based on the nature of the research question and the type of data needed to answer it. Both sources highlight the importance of research methods in ensuring the validity and reliability of research findings, emphasising their role as a crucial link between research theory and practice.

This study employed a qualitative research design focused on comprehending the use of social media as a marketing communication strategy by ISCT and BEK. This design enabled a comprehensive comparison of how these two schools constructed their messages and engaged with their stakeholders, using textual analysis methods to uncover underlying themes and patterns.

4.5.1 Population of the study

According to Shukla (2020), population is the set or group of all the units to which the research findings are to be applied. The population of a study can also be referred to as the group of individuals, organisations, or entities that the research aims to investigate or make inferences about. The population should be clearly defined and delineated, as it forms the basis for the researcher's sampling and data collection efforts (Casteel & Bridier 2021). Therefore, understanding the population of the study is important.

The population of this study was all the social media content units posted by the ISCT and BEK on their Facebook, X, and Instagram accounts between 1 August 2023 to 1 August 2024. The researcher chose these particular schools for this study because, the researcher wanted to focus on medium-sized organisations such as primary schools and combined schools, since they are communal and do not have a global footprint. The researcher chose ISCT in South Africa because it is one of the best combined schools in Cape Town and has relied on the use of technology in teaching, learning, and marketing its product offerings from primary to high school. The researcher chose BEK in South Korea because it is one of the best combined schools

in Seoul. BEK has a good image and reputation for relying on technology for teaching, learning, and marketing its product offerings. The BEK schools use English and Korean on their websites and social media pages such as Facebook, X, and Instagram. Therefore, this study compares the two schools' use of social media as a marketing communication strategy.

4.5.2 Target population

According to Willie (2022), the term "target population" refers to a specific group of the entire population that satisfies particular requirements. Creswell and Creswell (2018) define the target population as the specific population that the researcher aims to study. Participants in the population must share at least one or more attribute of interest (Bartlett, Kotrlik & Higgins 2001; Creswell 2003). The identification and selection process of the target population is crucial because the target population plays a huge role in guaranteeing the validity and generalisability of the research outcomes. By concentrating on a well-selected target population, researchers can improve both the precision and relevance of their investigations, therefore producing greater significance and powerful findings.

In this study, the target population was the marketing social media posts posted by the ISCT and BEK on their Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts from August 2023 to August 2024. This included posts, comments, and other relevant content, excluding duplicates and shared content that had any marketing information.

The reason the researcher chose August 2023 to August 2024 was that the study is cross-sectional, so the researcher wanted to capture the views and content from both schools at one specific point in time.

4.5.3 Accessible population

The accessible population consists of participants of the target population who are eager to partake and will be available at the time of the study (Asiamah, Mensah and Oteng-Abayie 2017). In this study, the accessible population was the same as the target population, being all the social media content posted by the ISCT and BEK on their Facebook, X, and Instagram accounts from August 2023 to August 2024.

4.5.4 Sampling method

Sampling is the process of selecting a subset of individuals or elements from a larger population to represent the entire group (Creswell & Creswell 2018). Sampling is crucial in research. It allows researchers to select a small number of participants from a larger population to be examined and draw generalisations regarding the entire population. Researchers employ sampling when collecting data from a larger population as it is challenging to study everyone within the population. By doing this, researchers save money, resources and time yet provide great insight into the study.

According to Taherdoost (2016), there are two main types of sampling: probability and nonprobability sampling. Probability sampling involves random selection (Pace 2021). This implies every member of the population has a predetermined chance of being chosen for inclusion in the sample (Makwana, Engineer, Dabhi & Chudasama 2023). On the other hand, non-probability sampling involves selection based on criteria other than random chance (Pace 2021). This implies that the likelihood of each member of the population being selected for the sample is not known (Makwana et al 2023).

Probability sampling allows researchers to make generalisations about the entire population, while non-probability sampling may not be representative but can be useful for exploratory or qualitative research (Shamsudin, Hassim & Abd Manaf 2024). Given that this study employed the qualitative approach, non-probability sampling was used as the sampling method. The study focused on the social media platforms of Facebook, X, and Instagram which have a strong presence in both countries and attract a large user base.

Purposive sampling was used to select social media content that was relevant to the purpose of the study. Relevance was determined through a set of specific criteria linked to the schools' marketing communication strategies. In this study, a post was considered relevant if it showed clear marketing intent, such as promoting admissions, showcasing academic or extracurricular achievements, highlighting school values, strengthening brand identity, or advertising events and programmes. Only posts that met these characteristics and appeared on the official X, Instagram, or Facebook pages of ISCT and BEK between August 2023 and August 2024 were included. Posts were excluded if they lacked marketing value—for example, routine reminders, general updates, unrelated parental comments, holiday messages without

promotional purpose, content outside the timeframe, or posts not originating from the schools' official accounts. By defining relevance in this explicit way, and applying these inclusion and exclusion rules, the study ensured that only the most meaningful and informative social media content was analysed to understand the schools' marketing communication strategies.

4.5.5 Time dimension

Time is becoming more widely acknowledged as an essential factor in research. It plays many roles in the design and execution of research (Babbie & Wagoner 2021). Time can influence and affect the study's data interpretation and results; therefore, researchers need to utilise it effectively during research.

Time dimensions in research are categorised as cross-sectional studies and longitudinal studies. A longitudinal study is a study that exists over a long period of time (Babbie & Wagoner 2021). A cross-sectional study is a study that permits single-point observation (Wang & Cheng 2020). Longitudinal studies involve repeated observation to reveal new data, patterns, and trends that cannot be revealed through cross-sectional study (Kling, Harvey & Maclean 2017).

A cross-sectional design was employed through the analyses of the social media content posted by the two schools the posted during the year August 2023 to August 2024 with a focus on comparing how the two schools used social media as a marketing communication strategy.

4.5.6 Unit of analysis

According to Gronn (2002), a unit of analysis is the nature of the entity under investigation. The units of analysis for this study are the marketing messages in the form of visual text and verbal texts taken from the Facebook, X, and Instagram pages of the two schools. These are also referred to as artefacts. This choice was grounded in the study's focus on analysing the effectiveness of marketing communication strategies employed by the schools. Social media platforms provide rich data on individual posts, making them ideal for qualitative analysis.

4.6 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Since this was a desktop study the researcher used a personal laptop with a reliable internet connection to collect data from the two schools' Facebook, Instagram and X platforms. The researcher used purposive sampling to select 30 posts from the two schools' social media platforms, meaning 15 from the ISCT and another 15 from BEK, this being five posts from each social media page. The researcher carefully selected posts based on their relevance to the marketing communication strategies of the two schools, making sure the context was related to marketing. The selected data were visual and verbal texts.

As noted by Segev (2020) texts are frequently positioned according to how well they relate to the subject investigated. In line with this, the texts in this study were placed based on their relevance. This was done to reduce bias and boost the reliability of the results, as well as enhance analytical depth. Patterns, themes, and similarities/differences between the two schools were identified by analysing the collected data. An in-depth analysis was conducted to understand the underlying meanings and implications of the identified themes.

The researcher considered the ethics, especially when it came to privacy and giving permission. As the study was a desktop study and it did not require any participation of human beings, and used social media posts that were publicly available. The researcher made sure that all the information gathered followed the rules set by social media platforms. Safe measures were taken when handling sensitive information and the researcher did not record any information that involved people's names or information from the posts that could be used to connect them to specific people when the researcher presented their results.

4.7 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY MEASURES

Reliability and validity are essential concepts in research methodology. According to Drost (2011) and Kimberlin and Winterstein (2008), validity refers to the extent to which a test or measurement accurately assesses what it claims to assess. Reliability, as defined by Drost (2011), pertains to the dependability or constancy of a test or measure over time across different raters or observers and in different situations. A

measure can be considered reliable if it consistently produces identical outcomes when used repeatedly in the same conditions.

Both validity and reliability are crucial for study findings to be accurate and reliable. Textual analysis is a valid and reliable way of collecting data because it is a systematic and objective method that allow researchers to analyse large amounts of data in a structured and consistent way (Kuckartz 2019). Textual analysis can be used to examine hypotheses, detect patterns, and generate fresh perspectives, thus proving to be highly beneficial for researchers across various disciplines.

The researcher critically reflected on their role and potential biases throughout the research process, employing reflexivity to acknowledge and address any preconceptions that could influence the study (Ide & Beddoe 2024). By recognising and transparently addressing their positionality and their potential impact on the research, the study aimed to enhance its trustworthiness and credibility (Saber 2024). These methodological approaches collectively contributed to the achievement of trustworthiness in the study, reinforcing the validity and reliability of its findings.

This study ensured the validity and reliability of its textual analysis through a combination of rigorous qualitative strategies. This included providing thick descriptions of the schools' social media communication, incorporating researcher reflexivity to acknowledge potential biases, and utilising triangulation by drawing on multiple data sources beyond social media posts (Pousti, Urquhart & Linger 2021).

4.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations pertain to the moral standards and beliefs that guide researchers in conducting their research ethically and principledly (Cacciattolo 2015). These principles ensure that research participants' privacy and rights are protected, while also promoting responsibility, transparency, and Any researcher should adhere to ethical principles to ensure the responsible and respectful conduct of their research. In this case, this study was a qualitative content analysis and did not include human beings as participants, instead focusing on analysing the content found on the social media pages of the two schools. Nevertheless, it was crucial to adhere to the relevant ethical principles and standards established for conducting a qualitative content analysis study.

The data collection and analysis methods were identified, and the research proposal was submitted to the UNISA Ethics Committee for review and approval. The research adhered to the ethical principles outlined by the committee, ensuring the ethical conduct throughout the study. The committee thoroughly reviewed the research design and methodology to ascertain that they aligned with the ethical standards and regulations governing research at the university and ethical clearance was granted (Appendix A). This collaborative process with the UNISA Ethics Committee not only upheld the ethical integrity of the research but also contributed to the credibility and trustworthiness of the study's outcomes.

The partnership with the UNISA Ethics Committee played a pivotal role in ensuring the ethical soundness of the research, from the initial planning stages to the dissemination of findings. Their expertise and oversight provided a framework for ethical decision-making and offered valuable guidance in navigating potential ethical dilemmas that could arise during the research process. The established collaboration fostered an environment of ethical consciousness and integrity, reinforcing the commitment to upholding the welfare and rights of all study participants. Through this cooperative effort, the research was conducted with the utmost ethical responsibility, strengthening the reliability and validity of the study while maintaining the highest ethical standards as prescribed by the UNISA Ethics Committee.

In this case, the primary goal of this study was to compare social media content, including written and visual materials such as posts and messages originating from the ISCT and BEK. Ethical considerations were implemented in this research, which was categorised as a low-risk study that did not involve the participation of human subjects. This research was conducted using content from the social media platforms Facebook, X, and Instagram.

4.9 CONCLUSION

In this chapter the methodological design used was clearly illustrated. It was highlighted that the study was informed by an interpretivist paradigm, which is aligned with qualitative research. Data collection methods were discussed in detail as well as the target and accessible population, units of analysis and sample methods. Validity and reliability as measures of quality in research were explained, and at the end of the

chapter, the ethical considerations in this study was outlined. In the next chapter, the data analysis and research findings of the study presented and explained in detail.

CHAPTER 5: DATA PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a comparative analysis of the social media marketing strategies employed by two international schools, ISCT and BEK, focusing on their Facebook, X, and Instagram presence between August 2023 and August 2024. Guided by the DOI theory, which posits that novel ideas or products disseminate among individuals over time, with certain individuals adopting them before others, and the SMET, which emphasises the importance of interactive and engaging content, this study examined how these schools leveraged social media to communicate with their audience.

The chapter opens with a presentation of the findings, organised around the identification of the principal social media platforms analysed in this study. Supporting evidence is provided through screenshots captured from the social media accounts of the two schools being studied. The findings are further articulated through the lens of key marketing elements, complemented by a review of relevant literature presented in Chapter 2. Notably, the concept of 'integrated marketing communication' is presented as an important finding and is explored in depth, with additional support drawn from academic sources. The theoretical framework that underpins the study is utilised to analyse and interpret the findings, serving as a foundation for a detailed response to the research questions posed.

5.2 OVERVIEW OF THE ANALYSIS

Existing literature from academia served as the foundation for the textual analysis conducted in this study in order to guarantee methodological validity and scholarly legitimacy. It is commonly acknowledged that textual analysis is a methodical and impartial approach to analysing written or visual material, enabling scholars to identify underlying themes, patterns, and meaning in texts (McKee 2003; Kuckartz 2019). Krippendorff (2018) argues that consistent analytical frameworks that are reproducible by other researchers and transparent coding practices are the foundations for trustworthiness of textual analysis. Furthermore, Schreier (2012) highlights that

creating well-defined classifications that are data-driven and theoretically informed is essential to a rigorous approach to textual analysis in order to guarantee analytical coherence. In accordance with these guidelines, this study identified recurrent themes and discursive patterns by methodically classifying and analysing social media posts according to their applicability to the research topics. The validity, transparency, and reliability of the results were improved by basing the analysis on these accepted approaches.

A textual analysis was conducted on thirty social media posts (fifteen posts from each school, which is five posts from each platform per school) across Facebook, X, and Instagram, evaluating marketing messaging, tone, content, audience interaction, and cultural integration to identify effective strategies and differences in approach between ISCT and BEK schools. The posts were carefully examined to identify patterns, themes, and trends in the schools' social media marketing strategies.

The first finding from the study is that the greatest volume of content was from Facebook in comparison to X and Instagram. This observation reflects the primary reliance of the two schools on Facebook for their social media engagement. However, it is important to note that there is also some level of engagement on both X and Instagram, albeit to a lesser extent than on Facebook.

5.3 SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS USED BY THE TWO SCHOOLS FOR MARKETING COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Key to this study is that the social media landscape has become an essential component of marketing communication strategies for organisations, including educational institutions. This finding responds to research question 1, which asked: "In what ways do the South African and South Korean international schools use social media as a marketing communication strategy?" This suggests that social media has been utilised as an IMC approach. In Chapter 2 of this study (see Section 2.2) it is noted that social media enables precise targeting, allowing marketing messages to resonate with specific demographics and interest groups, thereby maximising the impact of marketing initiatives (Loitongbam, Sorokhaibam & Singh 2023). The strategic importance of social media is evident in the online presence of ISCT and BEK, two international schools that leverage different social media platforms to engage with their audience and promote their school's product and service offerings.

The choice of social media platforms by the two schools has some similarities and differences. Specifically, both ISCT and BEK maintain a presence on Facebook and Instagram. While ISCT uses X in addition, however, BEK does not use X. This similarity in platform usage may reflect common approaches to achieving their marketing goals, with each platform offering unique opportunities for engagement and outreach. In examining the social media strategies of these two schools, the data from the selected social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram and X) suggests that the schools use social media for the same reasons, such as utilising digital platforms to connect with their audience and promote their services. The data findings are evaluated using the *Ubuntu* and Confucian cultural paradigms in order to understand the trends of the posts made by the two schools. These frameworks shed light on how social media usage in educational settings is influenced by cultural values of hierarchy, community, and dependency.

Both schools used Facebook and Instagram, and ISCT used X as well to connect with audiences and promote their services. To address the depth of cultural analysis, section 5.6 was introduced to critically examine how *Ubuntu* and Confucianism shape overall marketing strategies rather than isolated posts. *Ubuntu*, emphasising community, inclusivity, and relational engagement, influences ISCT's broader social media approach, which highlights multicultural activities, community events, and holistic student achievements. In contrast, Confucian values, prioritising hierarchy, academic excellence, and respect for institutional authority, are more evident in BEK's targeted emphasis on academic achievements and formal recognition of student success. By comparing the two paradigms, the study demonstrates that cultural values not only inform the style and content of posts but also underpin strategic choices in marketing objectives, platform selection, and engagement approaches, providing a richer understanding of how culture shapes digital marketing strategies in educational contexts.

5.3.1 Use of Facebook as a marketing communication tool

The presence of both schools on Facebook, for instance, is more active and engaging compared to the other platforms and represented by well and adequately explained profiles for both, as evidenced by Figures 5.1. and 5.2 below.

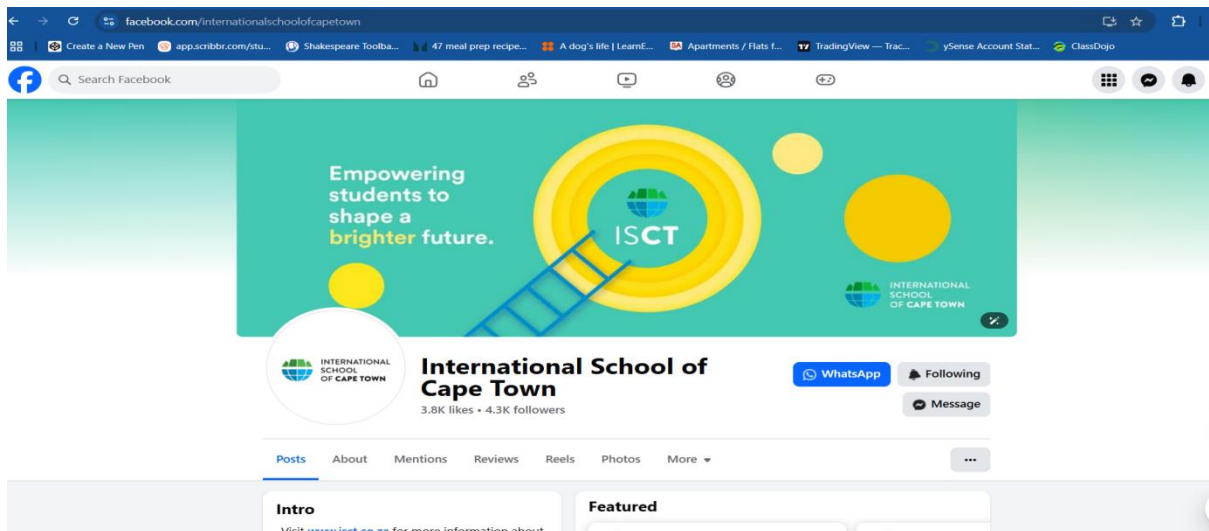


Figure 5.1: The Facebook profile page for ISCT

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/internationalschoolofcapetown>

The screenshot above depicts the ISCT's profile on Facebook. This includes their photos and contact link for their WhatsApp account. This suggests that this school uses WhatsApp as part of their marketing communication.



Figure 5.2: The Facebook profile of BEK.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/thebritisheducationkorea>

The screenshot above depicts the BEK details on their profile on Facebook. This includes their photos and contact links, such as their email, suggesting that their marketing communication is not limited to Facebook only.

The two schools use social media platforms to enable users to connect, share information, participate in online communities, and leverage these platforms (Ahmad

2024). ISCT and BEK use social media to increase visibility, engage with customers, build brand awareness, and promote their services (Hsu & Lin 2020). The use of social media platforms allows schools to have a quick service, helping in effective problem-solving and building trust and loyalty (Hsu & Lin 2020).

5.3.2 Use of X as a marketing communication tool

Differences in the use of social media platforms are evident between the two schools in the collected data. According to Randalia (2025), organisations' choice of social media platforms is influenced by various factors, including target market, target audience demographics, marketing objectives, and content strategies. The notable difference between the two schools is ISCT's presence on X, which BEK does not have. This difference may reflect distinct target audience engagement strategies. ISCT's presence on X may enable more timely and interactive engagement. Figure 5.3 below shows the presence of ISCT on the X platform.

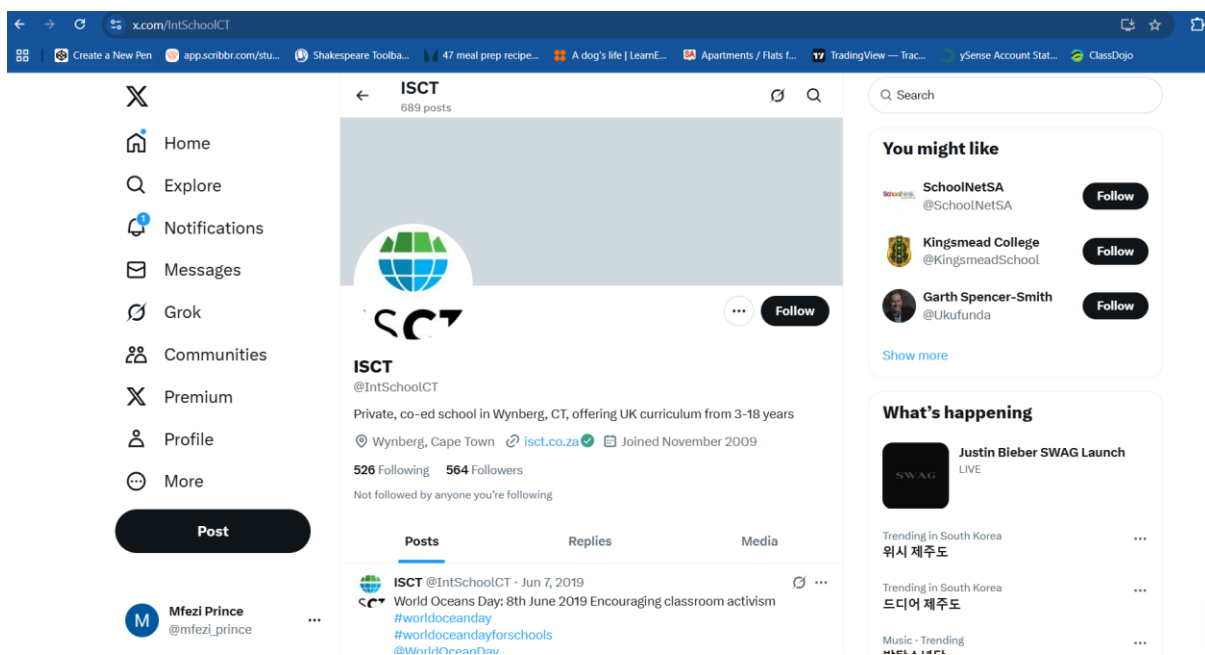


Figure 5.3: The X profile of ISCT

Source: <https://x.com/IntSchoolCT>

The screenshot above shows ISCT's X platform presence, including its address and contact details.

The findings of this study strongly support the applicability of IMC theory. The study highlights how ISCT and BEK utilise different social media platforms to achieve their marketing goals, demonstrating a coordinated approach to social media marketing.

The similarities in platform usage, such as both schools maintaining a presence on Facebook and Instagram, illustrate consistency in their marketing efforts. Meanwhile, the differences in platform usage, such as ISCT's presence on X and BEK's lack of presence on X, reflect distinct target audience engagement strategies. Yet ISCT's limited activity on X raises questions about the sustainability of their engagement on that platform.

The study's findings on social media platforms used by the two schools for marketing communication strategy also support the SMET, which posits that the interactive and engaging nature of social media platforms can facilitate a sense of community and loyalty among the audience (Hsu & Lin, 2020; Kietzmann et al 2011). The data suggests that ISCT and BEK's social media presence is associated with building strong relationships with their followers, which can lead to effective promotion of their services. In examining the school's social media interactions through the lens of these theories, the study identifies how ISCT and BEK utilise social media to build relationships, foster engagement, and promote their services.

5.3.3 Use of Instagram as a marketing communication tool

The ISCT strategically utilises Instagram for a variety of purposes, particularly focusing on influencer marketing to inspire confidence in both current and prospective students. This approach is in line with the assertion made by Tazeen and Mullick (2023) in section 2.4.2 of the literature review, which states that Instagram primarily appeals to a younger audience, particularly those under the age of 35. By featuring successful alumni and highlighting their career paths, as depicted in Figure 5.4 below, the ISCT not only seeks to attract new students but also aims to reassure parents about the school's effectiveness in preparing its students for successful futures. This dual strategy serves to enhance the school's appeal while showcasing the positive outcomes of its educational programmes.

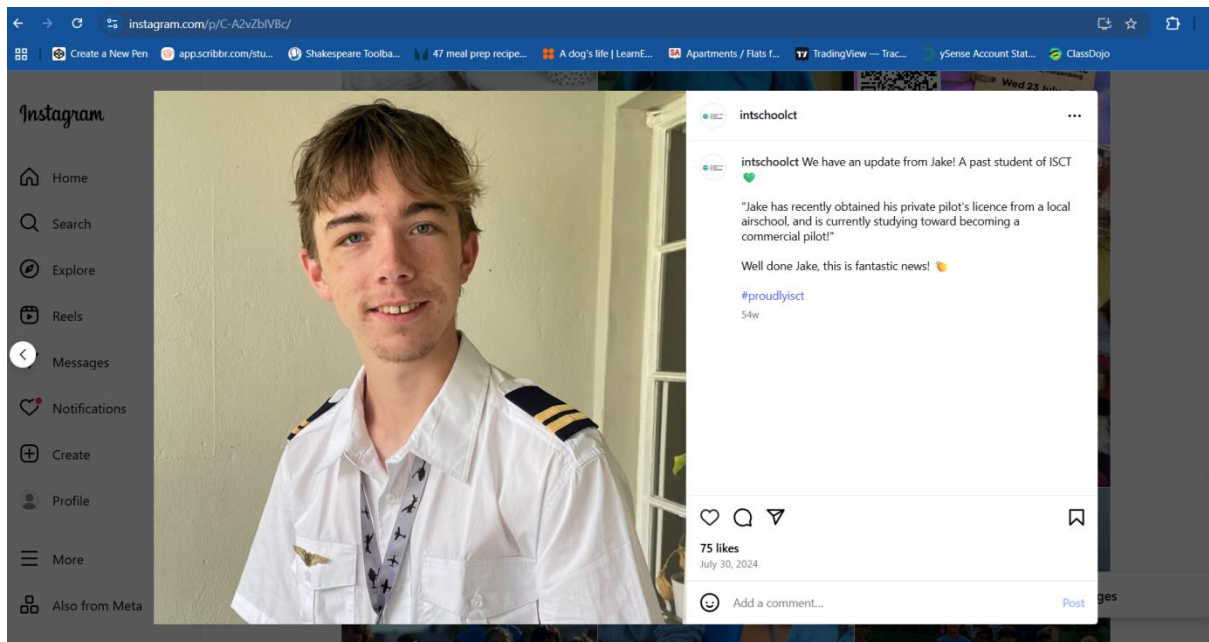


Figure 5.4: Celebrating our alumni's success: Jake earns his private pilot's licence

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/C-A2vZblVBc/>

The screenshot above shows an ISCT alumni student who just obtained his pilot licence from a local air school, and he is continuing to further his studies to become a commercial pilot.

BEK effectively utilises Instagram to inspire student confidence by showcasing its accreditation with Pearson International Education and its status as a registered centre, as illustrated in Figure 5.5 below. This strategy not only aids in attracting new students and retaining current ones but also embodies a form of influencer marketing. This approach aligns with the findings presented in the literature review (Tazeen & Mullick 2023) in section 2.4.2, which highlights how many businesses use Instagram to engage potential clients through influencer marketing.

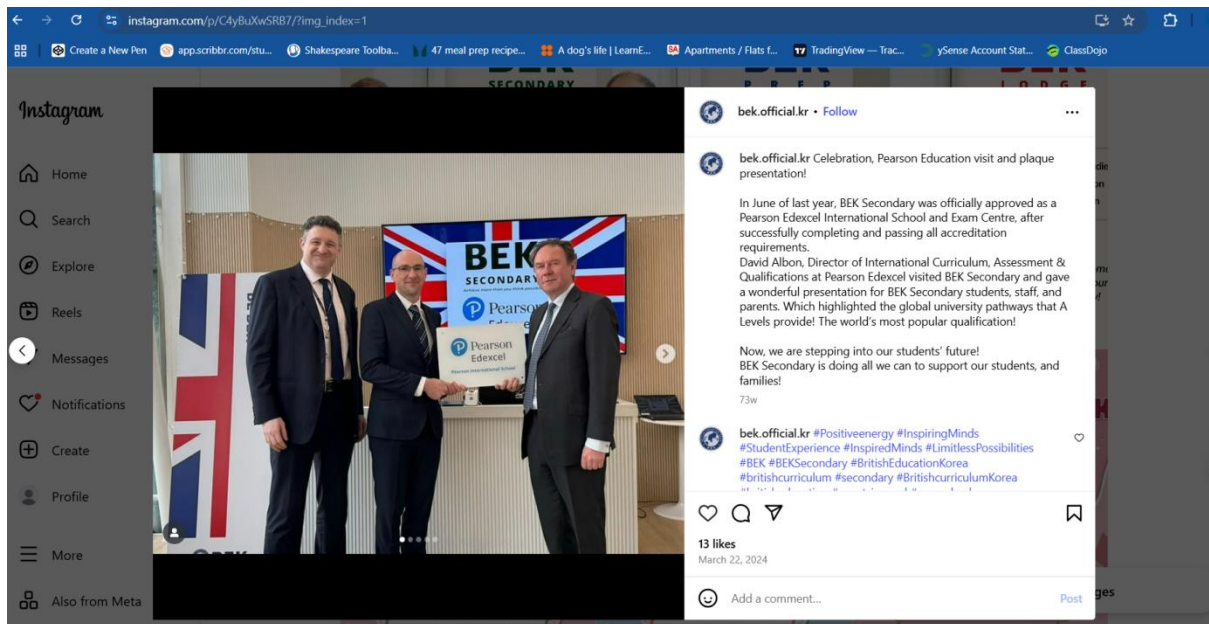


Figure 5.5: Celebrating being part of Pearson Edexcel International School

Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/C4yBuXwSRB7/?img_index=1

The screenshot above illustrates the partnership between BEK and Pearson Edexcel International. The screenshot above exemplifies the importance of, and respect for, education and leadership while maintaining professionalism, which can be regarded as Confucianism.

A key difference in the findings between ISCT and BEK lies in their utilisation of social media platforms, notably ISCT's presence on X, whereas BEK does not. This finding sought to respond to research question 2, which asked: "What are the similarities and differences between the South African and South Korean schools' use of social media as a marketing communication strategy?" According to Randalia (2025), the choice of social media platforms is influenced by target market, audience demographics, marketing objectives, and content strategies. This difference may reflect distinct target audience engagement strategies. As Mbatha (2024) suggests, adopters of new technologies are influenced by factors like relative advantage and compatibility. Chen & Peng (2023:22-26) highlights the importance of understanding the target audience in social media marketing. In this context, ISCT's presence on X can be seen as an innovative approach to engagement, potentially providing a relative advantage, underpinned by DOI, SET, and IMC principles, where consistency and coordination in marketing efforts are important.

5.4 ELEMENTS OF INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION

This section examines how particular aspects of marketing are mirrored in ISCT and BEK's social media posts, addressing research question 1 and laying the groundwork for research question 2. Social media is a key component of IMC, capable of deploying different elements of IMC, including advertising, sales promotion, PR, and DRM. The analysis explores how ISCT and BEK utilise social media to achieve their marketing objectives, guided by the principles of IMC theory, DOI theory, and SMET. The findings from the data collected from the social media platforms indicate that ISCT and BEK employ a range of marketing elements to achieve their marketing objectives, reflecting the principles of IMC theory. At the core of their marketing strategies are key elements such as advertising, sales promotion, DRM, sponsorship, personal selling, PR, and social media marketing. This finding resonates with the literature of Juska (2021) in Chapter 3 in section 2.3, which lists these aspects as important elements of marketing.

The findings indicate how these marketing elements are utilised across multiple platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and X, to create a consistent brand image, engage with the target audience, and promote services and programmes effectively. The integration of these marketing elements reiterates the importance of coordination and consistency in achieving marketing objectives. In combining these elements in a strategic manner, ISCT and BEK can leverage their marketing efforts and enhance their online presence. The core focus on these marketing elements provides important information about the schools' marketing strategies and their effectiveness in achieving marketing goals.

This study's findings also align upon the DOI theory, which posits that the adoption of new ideas or technologies is influenced by factors such as relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability (Amini & Jahanbakhsh Javid 2023). In the context of the schools' marketing strategies, the adoption of social media marketing reflects a recognition of technology's relative advantage in terms of reach, engagement, and cost-effectiveness. This strategic adoption enables the schools to leverage the benefits of social media marketing, thereby enhancing their marketing efforts.

Furthermore, the SMET emphasises the significance of interactive and engaging content in building relationships with the target audience (Di Gangi & Wasko 2016).

ISCT and BEK utilise social media platforms to create and share engaging content, thereby fostering a sense of community, building trust, and driving enrolment and loyalty.

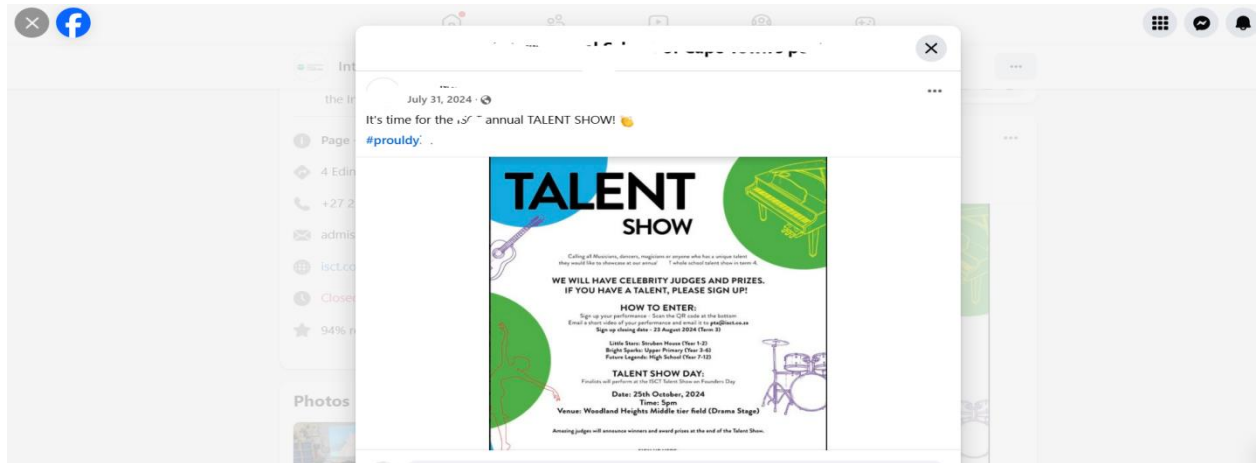


Figure 5.6: Talent show

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/internationalschoolofcapetown/posts/pfbid038LxpGU8qx9C9WPzuFMDZKgawGvzyZ7HU4LEgVPtyT7B9RLyJjo7wCMQLC1CSmcwrl>

Figure 5.6 illustrates that ISCT's use of social media marketing to engage the community and promote school events and engage the community. This screenshot illustrates *Ubuntu*, as it reflects community togetherness and support.

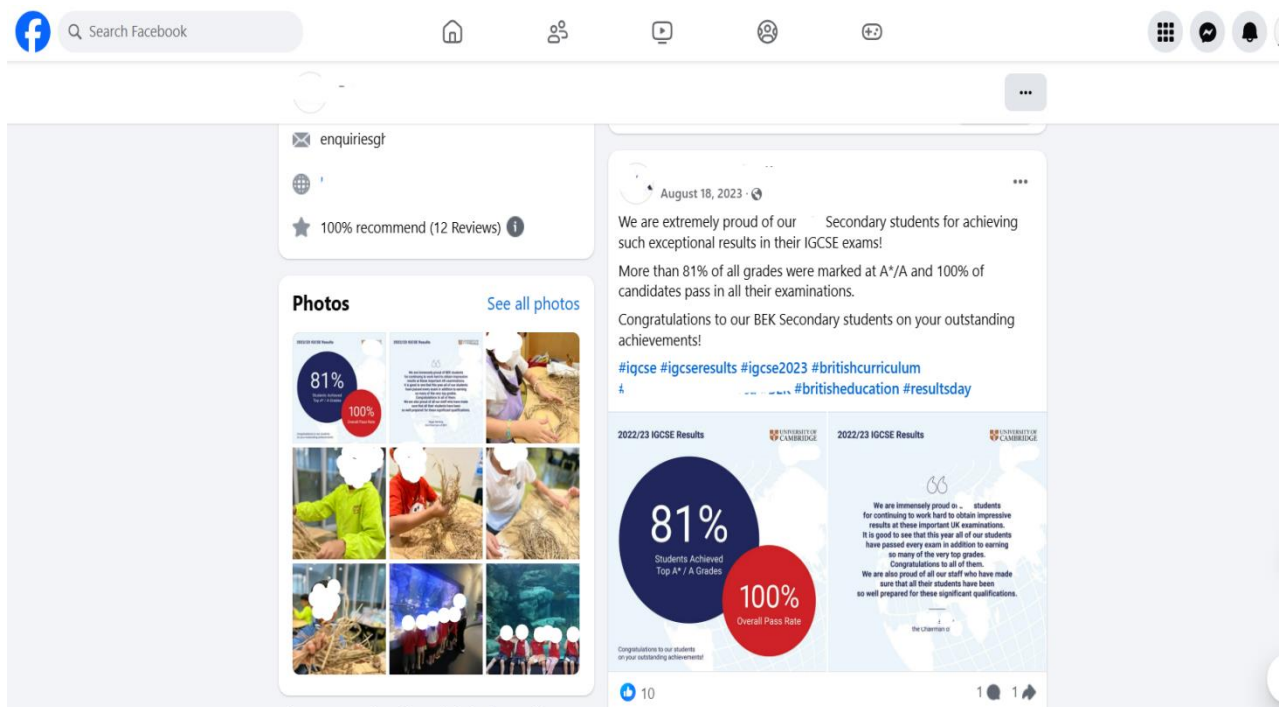


Figure 5.7: IGCSE exam results

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/thebritisheducationkorea/posts/pfbid0qbCiXwh4Saj1tRZRkHNSmoDDtsbJD52P9yxDLNuNXK1XuYWQpFC2G96X9FYPPQ2WTI>

Figure 5.7 illustrates a BEK Facebook post advertising its academic results and performance, using social media marketing to build credibility and attract prospective learners. This type of advertising shows the influence of Confucianism as Confucianism values education and respect for learning.

The visual depictions showcase ISCT and BEK's strategic employment of social media marketing to achieve their marketing objectives. Figure 5.6 illustrates ISCT's use of social media marketing to foster community engagement and promote school events, reflecting the principles of the SMET. This portrayal highlights the school's ability to create and share interactive content, thereby building relationships with the target audience and driving enrolment and loyalty. Similarly, Figure 5.7 showcases BEK's strategic use of social media marketing to build credibility and attract prospective learners by advertising its academic results and performance on Facebook. Using social media platforms in this manner, both schools demonstrate a recognition of the relative advantage of social media marketing in terms of reach, engagement, and cost-effectiveness, aligning with the DOI theory and IMC theory.

The integration of IMC, DOI, and SMET provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the schools' marketing strategies, highlighting the effectiveness of a coordinated and audience-focused approach. By leveraging various marketing elements, such as advertising, sales promotion, PR, and social media marketing, ISCT and BEK achieve their marketing objectives, enhancing their online presence and reputation. This finding is consistent with the views of Rogers (2003) and Di Gangi and Wasko (2016), as discussed in Chapter 3 (see section 3.1), who reiterate the significance of theoretical frameworks in supporting marketing efforts. The alignment with these frameworks emphasises the strategic value of coordinated marketing in driving success in the education sector.

5.4.1 Advertising

Zulfikar (2023) argues that advertising is a valuable tool for creating and maintaining a brand image, enhancing brand loyalty, and establishing a market position. Within the context of educational institutions, advertising assumes a multifaceted role, encompassing the promotion of academic programmes, extracurricular activities, sporting events, and charitable initiatives (Juska 2021). This form of communication is

critical in enabling schools to articulate their value proposition, differentiate themselves from competitors, and ultimately attract prospective students and stakeholders.

The findings reveal that ISCT and BEK harness Facebook advertising to promote distinct facets of their institutions. Specifically, ISCT showcases its academic achievements, such as an award-winning academic culture, while BEK highlights its commendable performance in art competitions. These targeted advertising efforts exemplify the schools' strategic utilisation of social media to reach and engage their target audience, thereby facilitating the attainment of their marketing objectives. This observation is consistent with Zulfikar's (2023) assertion that advertising is an indispensable tool for creating and maintaining a market position, suggesting the significance of well-crafted advertising strategies in the competitive educational landscape. Figures 5.8 and 5.9 below show evidence of this finding from both schools.

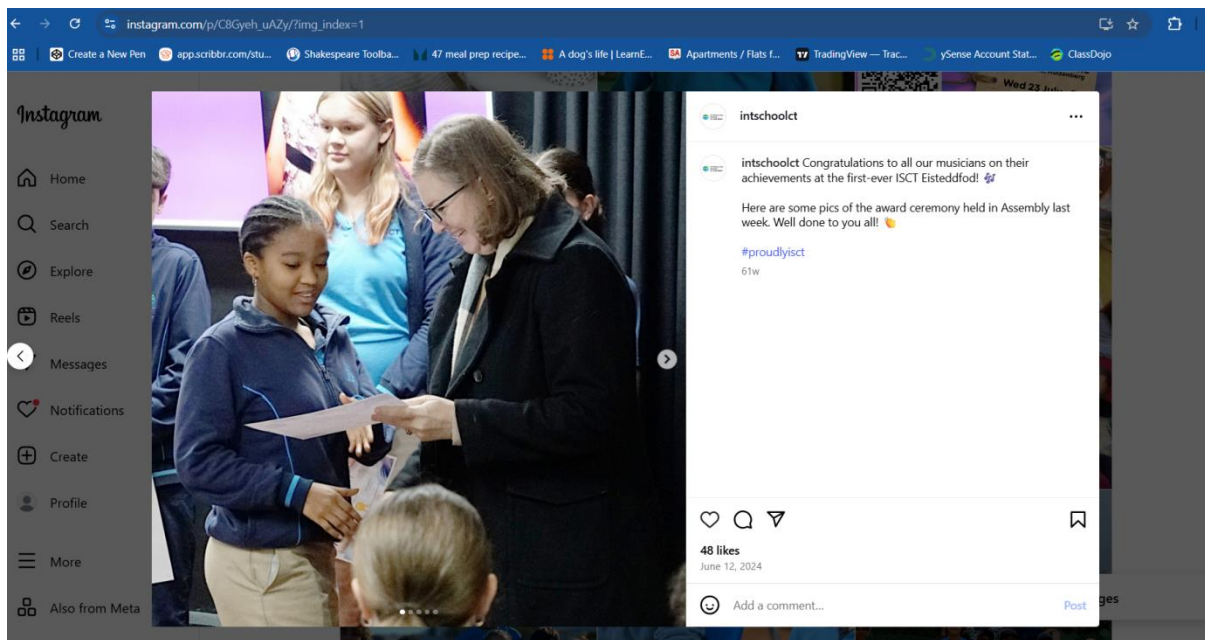


Figure 5.8: Recognising musical excellence

Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/C8Gyeh_uAZy/?img_index=1

Figure 5.8 depicts advertising in schools (ISCT) as a tool that involves the promotion of school musical activities. The screenshot shows public recognition and celebration of success through issuing a certificate which reflects *Ubuntu*.

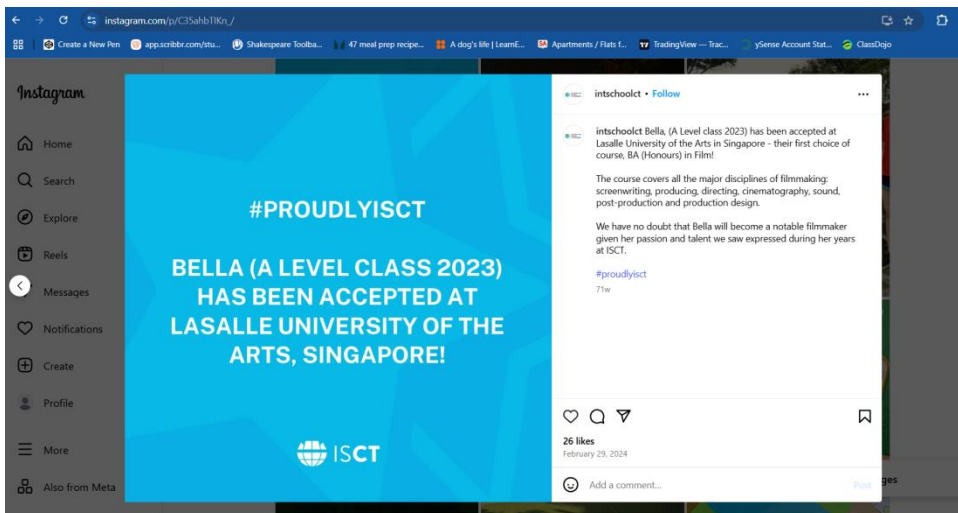


Figure 5.9: Celebrating ISCT graduate accepted to LaSalle University of the Arts, Singapore
 Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/C35ahbTIKn_/

Figure 5.9 illustrates advertising showing that one of ISCT's 2023 student Alumni was accepted to study in Singapore at Lasalle University of Arts. This informs potential students and stakeholders about the achievements of the school in terms of admission to other institutions.

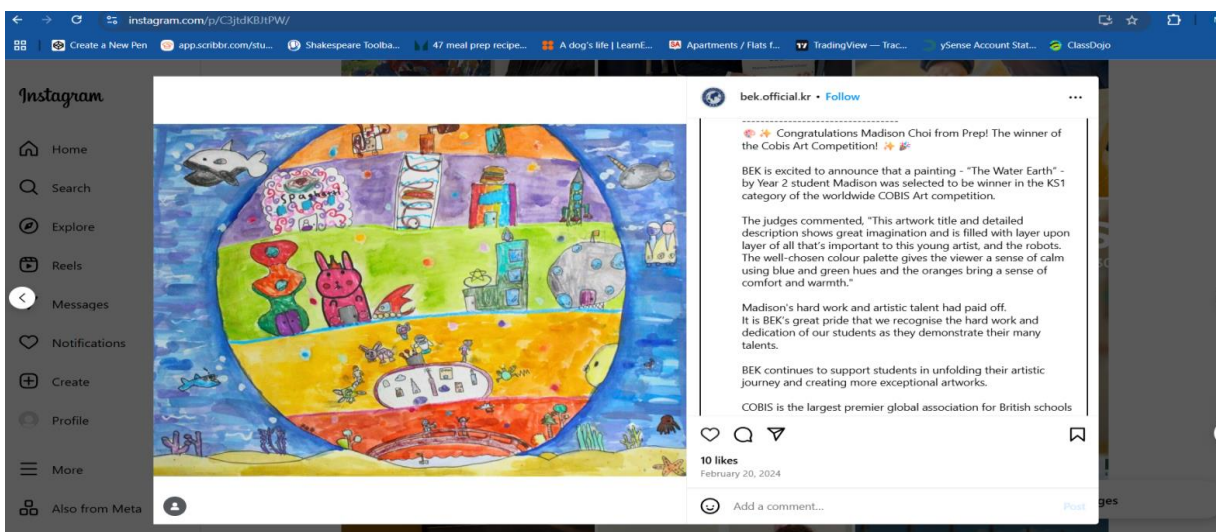


Figure 5.10: Celebrating and congratulating an art competition winner
 Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/C3jtdKBjtPW/>

Figure 5.10 shows Instagram as an advertising platform to showcase BEK students' achievements in an art competition.

The similarity in the advertising approaches of ISCT and BEK on Facebook and Instagram lies in their emphasis on academic achievements. Both schools utilise the platform to showcase their academic excellence, with ISCT celebrating award-winning

academic culture as illustrated in Figure 5.8 and BEK highlighting their students' achievement by posting their academic results, illustrated in Figure 5.7 and art competition as illustrated in Figure 5.10. This focus on academic achievement suggests that both schools recognise the importance of academic reputation in attracting prospective students and parents. By highlighting their academic strengths, both schools aim to build credibility and establish themselves as reputable educational institutions. This approach is consistent with the principles of IMC, which emphasise the importance of consistency and coordination in marketing efforts (Angelopulo & Barker 2012). The emphasis on academic achievements also reflects the relative advantage of highlighting academic success, as posited by the DOI theory. Furthermore, this approach enables both schools to create a sense of trust and authority, which is essential for building strong relationships with their target audience, as suggested by the SMET (Dwivedi et al 2021).

A key difference between the two schools' advertising approaches lies in the scope and breadth of content, with the ISCT approach being more comprehensive, incorporating multiple dimensions of school life, including academic success, cultural diversity, and community engagement, reflecting a diverse range of cultural influences that shape advertising practices, as storytelling and community values. This finding resonates with the research of Izu and de Villiers (2022b) (see section 2.3.1), which highlights that storytelling, community values, and the use of music and dance are common elements in advertising practices that shape diverse cultural influences. In contrast, BEK posts are more focused, primarily highlighting arts achievements as illustrated in Figure 5.10. This difference in approach reflects distinct marketing strategies, with ISCT adopting a more holistic approach to advertising, as illustrated in Figures 5.6 and 5.8, which is music, and BEK focusing on a specific aspect of its offerings. From an IMC perspective, the ISCT approach demonstrates a more integrated marketing strategy, combining multiple elements of marketing communication to create a cohesive brand identity.

This finding is supported in Chapter 2 by Rehman et al (2022) who argue for creating a strong brand identity. The DOI theory also suggests that the ISCT approach may be more effective in diffusing information about the school's offerings and values, as it provides a more comprehensive picture of school life. Moreover, the BEK approach is more aligned with SMET principles, which emphasise the importance of creating

engaging content that fosters a sense of community and encourages interaction (Dwivedi et al 2021).

The strategic utilisation of Facebook advertising by ISCT and BEK suggests the significance of social media in shaping the marketing narratives of educational institutions. The analysis suggests that both schools recognise the importance of social media in reaching and engaging their target audience, and their approaches are consistent with the principles of IMC and SMET.

5.4.2 Sales promotion

Huseynzade (2023) defines sales promotion as a set of short-term incentives to encourage the trial or usage of a product or service. Both ISCT and BEK use social media for sales promotion to build their brand identities and engage with their target audiences.

In this context, sales promotion is used to promote ISCT and BEK's brands and values. This is evidenced by Figures 5.11 and 5.12 below.

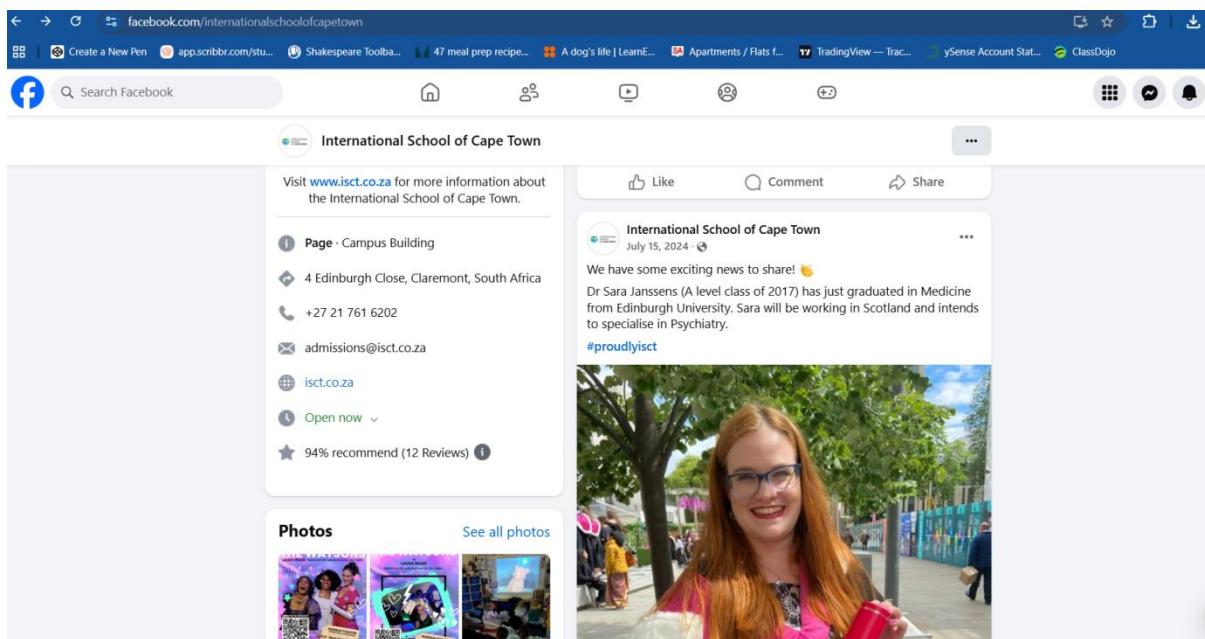


Figure 5.11: Celebrating the ISCT alumni's graduation

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/internationalschoolofcapetown>

Figure 5.11 above depicts what students can achieve by enrolling "Alumni who got into top universities or prestigious jobs".

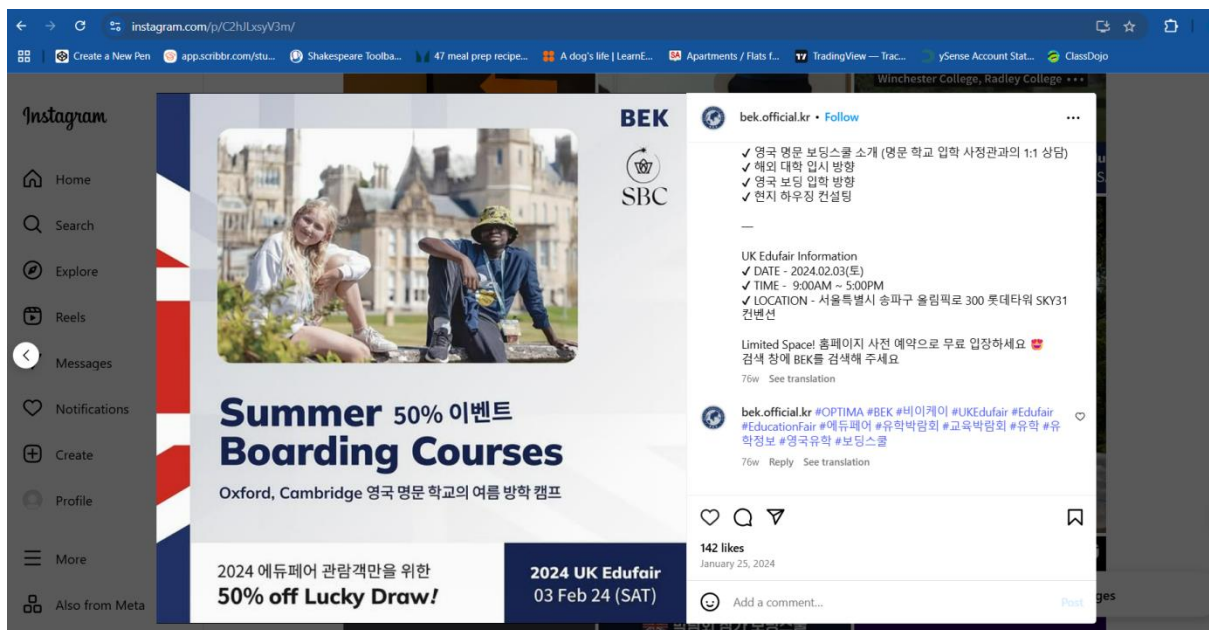


Figure 5.12: Discount course

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/C2hJLxsyV3m/>

The screenshot in Figure 5.12 depicts BEK's use of sales promotion through offering a 50% discount on their course offerings at the institution.

The strategic use of social media platforms has been posited as a crucial factor in enabling organisations to establish a robust online presence and expand their audience reach through marketing, supported by IMC principles which emphasise coordination and consistency in marketing efforts (Jeswani 2023; Asio & Khorasani 2015). This assertion is exemplified in the utilisation of social media for sales promotion by ISCT and BEK, with ISCT showcasing the achievements of its alumni who have secured positions in esteemed universities or prestigious occupations (Figure 5.11), and BEK offering a 50% discount on its courses to prospective students (Figure 5.12), demonstrating the effective application of IMC in digital marketing and highlighting the importance of digital platforms in contemporary marketing practices.

ISCT's approach to using social media for sales promotion differs significantly from BEK's approach. While BEK focuses primarily on academic achievements, ISCT showcases a broader range of school life, including cultural events and activities. The ISCT approach emphasises the school's values and unique selling points, such as multiculturalism and community engagement. This approach creates a more nuanced brand identity that reflects the school's values and mission, and an approach that is also advocated by Jeswani (2023) in Chapter 2 (see section 2.2). In contrast, BEK's

approach is more focused on promoting academic excellence. ISCT's use of social media is more diverse, incorporating multiple elements of marketing communication such as sponsorship, PR, advertising, sales and direct marketing. This approach aligns with IMC principles, which emphasise the importance of coordination and consistency in marketing efforts. Through showcasing a broader range of school life, ISCT creates a more engaging and interactive brand identity. This difference in approach reflects the distinct marketing strategies and priorities of the two schools. The ISCT approach is more aligned with the DOI theory, which suggests that innovation and experimentation are essential for effective marketing.

The ISCT approach to using social media for sales promotion is consistent with several marketing theories. The use of social media to promote multicultural education and community engagement aligns with IMC principles, which emphasise the importance of coordination and consistency in marketing efforts, as argued in Chapter 2 by Camilleri (2018). In demonstrating these aspects, ISCT effectively diffuses information about its values and offerings, aligning with DOI theory. This approach also builds a sense of community and encourages interaction, consistent with SMET principles. The use of hashtags and interactive content creates a sense of belonging among followers, which can lead to increased engagement and loyalty, as stated by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) in Chapter 2 (see section 2.4.2). ISCT's approach demonstrates a deep understanding of marketing theories and their application in practice. Using social media effectively, ISCT achieves its marketing objectives and builds a strong brand identity. This approach provides an understanding of the effective use of social media in marketing. The integration of IMC, DOI, and SMET principles enables ISCT to create a comprehensive marketing strategy.

5.4.3 Sponsorship

In Chapter 2, Alexander (2009) and Morgan et al (2020) define sponsorship as a strategic partnership between a brand and a property (event, organisation, individual) based on shared values and objectives, to achieve mutual benefits, highlighting the importance of congruence in values and goals. ISCT and BEK differ significantly in their approach to sponsorship on social media based on their Facebook posts. ISCT uses social media to showcase its sponsorship and events, such as the Inter-House Basketball Tournament and Science Expo. The Science Expo event, mentioned in a

Facebook post illustrated in Figure 5.13, demonstrates the school's ability to leverage social media for sponsorship. The post emphasises strong relational ties within the school community while showcasing its inclusive and participatory nature. In promoting events like the Science Expo, ISCT builds an emotional connection with its audience through educational activities. This approach helps attract organisations to sponsor the school for its educational activities.

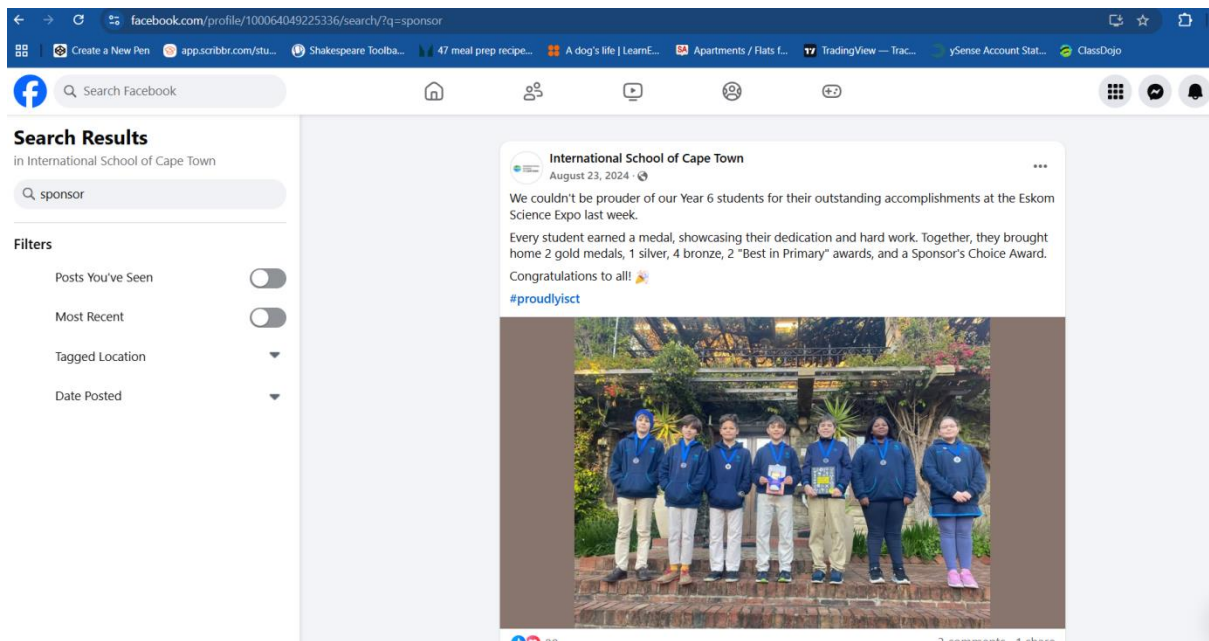


Figure 5.13: Participating at the Eskom Science Expo

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/internationalschoolofcapetown/posts/pfbid027rgbNnbVAzScj28tKKGp5SaCoBZiJhcptfTnH5cWzizby4M2PUw89gcHWanig6Cml>

The screenshot captures a group of enthusiastic young learners who actively participated in the ESKOM Science Expo, showcasing their scientific talents and curiosity. The screenshot portrays *Ubuntu* as students are celebrating as a group, sharing their success and supporting one another.

Sponsorship is important in this context because scholars such as Rossignoli Balestri, Beretta & Maggioni (2022) posit in the literature that sponsorship reduces educational inequality. In contrast, ISCT is not very active on social media, and its presence is not strong. The reason could be because of cultural differences and variables, as scholars such as Causadias (2020) have argued in Chapter 2 (see section 2.6), that the choice of marketing strategy and elements is usually influenced by different cultural values of the organisation. ISCT's approach to sponsorship is more proactive, using social

media to promote events and build relationships. This difference in approach reflects the distinct marketing strategies and priorities of the two schools. The ISCT approach demonstrates a deeper understanding of social media's role in sponsorship and community engagement.

While BEK may not be as active on social media, both schools recognise the importance of DRM in building relationships with their audience. In using DRM tactics, both schools increase audience involvement and reinforce their communication style. This similarity in approach highlights the importance of DRM in modern marketing. Both schools can benefit from using DRM to engage with their audience.

ISCT's approach to sponsorship and DRM is consistent with several marketing theories. The use of social media to promote events and build relationships aligns with IMC principles, which emphasise the importance of coordination and consistency in marketing efforts. Through leveraging social media for sponsorship, ISCT diffuses information about its values and offerings, aligning with DOI theory. This approach also fosters a sense of community and encourages interaction, consistent with SMET principles. The use of DRM tactics increases audience involvement and enhances the digital user experience, demonstrating a deep understanding of marketing theories and their application in practice. Integrating IMC, DOI, and SMET principles, ISCT creates a comprehensive marketing strategy that promotes its values and offerings. This approach provides valuable insights into the effective use of social media in marketing. ISCT approach demonstrates a proactive and engaging marketing strategy that builds relationships and promotes its brand.

5.4.4 Social media as an internet marketing tool

ISCT uses social media to promote an inclusive school culture, build goodwill, and promote its mission. Figure 5.14 illustrates this approach, showcasing multicultural activities that reflect the school's ethos and social cohesion. This finding responds to research question 3: "What are the underlying cultural variables of using social media as a marketing communication strategy between the South African and South Korean international schools?" This finding concurs with the literature of Causadias (2020), who states that social media is culturally committed and has a significant influence on how individuals perceive and engage with the world, including their communication styles, preferences, and consumption habits. In showcasing these activities, ISCT

demonstrates its commitment to diversity and community values. This approach acts as a form of sponsorship, promoting cultural awareness and institutional investment in community values. By promoting an inclusive school culture, ISCT builds a positive reputation and fosters a sense of community among its followers. This approach is consistent with PR principles, which emphasise the importance of building relationships and promoting a positive image. ISCT's use of social media to promote its mission and values demonstrates a deep understanding of PR and its role in building a positive reputation.

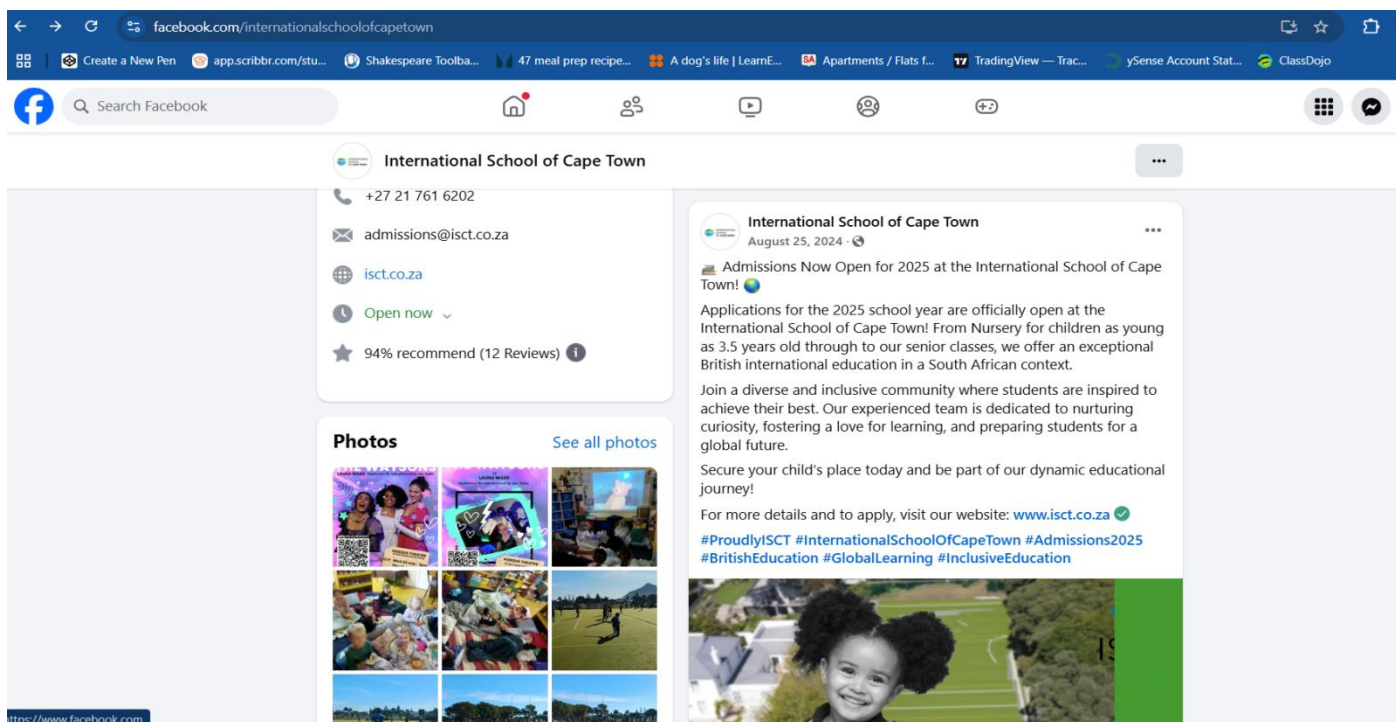


Figure 5.14: Application admission

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/internationalschoolofcapetown/videos/1984911778621210>

The screenshot depicts ISCT's inclusiveness and a culture that is diverse for its learners from age 3.5 to high school.

In contrast to ISCT, BEK's approach to social media is more focused on academic achievements as depicted earlier in Figure 5.7. While ISCT uses social media to promote an inclusive school culture and build goodwill, BEK posts are more singularly focused on promoting academic excellence. This difference in approach reflects the distinct marketing strategies and priorities of the two schools. ISCT's approach demonstrates a deeper understanding of the role of social media in building

relationships and promoting a positive image. In promoting an inclusive school culture, BEK builds a positive reputation and fosters a sense of community among its followers. This approach provides an understanding of the effective use of social media in marketing and PR.

ISCT's approach to promoting an inclusive school culture aligns with several marketing theories. The use of social media to promote diversity and community values is consistent with IMC principles, which emphasise the importance of coordination and consistency in marketing efforts. In showcasing multicultural activities, ISCT effectively diffuses information about its values and offerings, aligning with DOI theory. This approach also fosters a sense of community and encourages interaction, consistent with SMET principles. The use of social media to promote an inclusive school culture demonstrates a proactive and engaging marketing strategy that builds relationships and promotes the school's brand. By integrating IMC, DOI, and SMET principles, ISCT creates a comprehensive marketing strategy that promotes its values and offerings.

5.4.5 Direct response marketing

DRM emphasises immediate consumer action and measurable outcomes (Belch & Belch 2021). ISCT uses social media for DRM, particularly when promoting applications and registrations. In mentioning the benefits of attending their schools and providing information on the application process, both schools aim to attract prospective students and parents. This approach is consistent with direct marketing principles suggested by Nash (2000) in Chapter 2 who suggests that DRM is centred on generating leads and sales through direct interaction with customers rather than relying on indirect methods such as mass media advertising, where the goal is to promote a product or service and encourage potential customers to act. ISCT uses social media to promote applications and registrations, emphasising the benefits of attending their institutions, as evidenced by Figure 5.15. This approach aims to attract prospective students and parents by showcasing their offerings. Through social media promotion, both institutions demonstrate a strong understanding of digital marketing's role in recruitment and student acquisition. However, BEK does not have a massive presence like ISCT, as they have only one post on Facebook from August 2023 to August 2024.

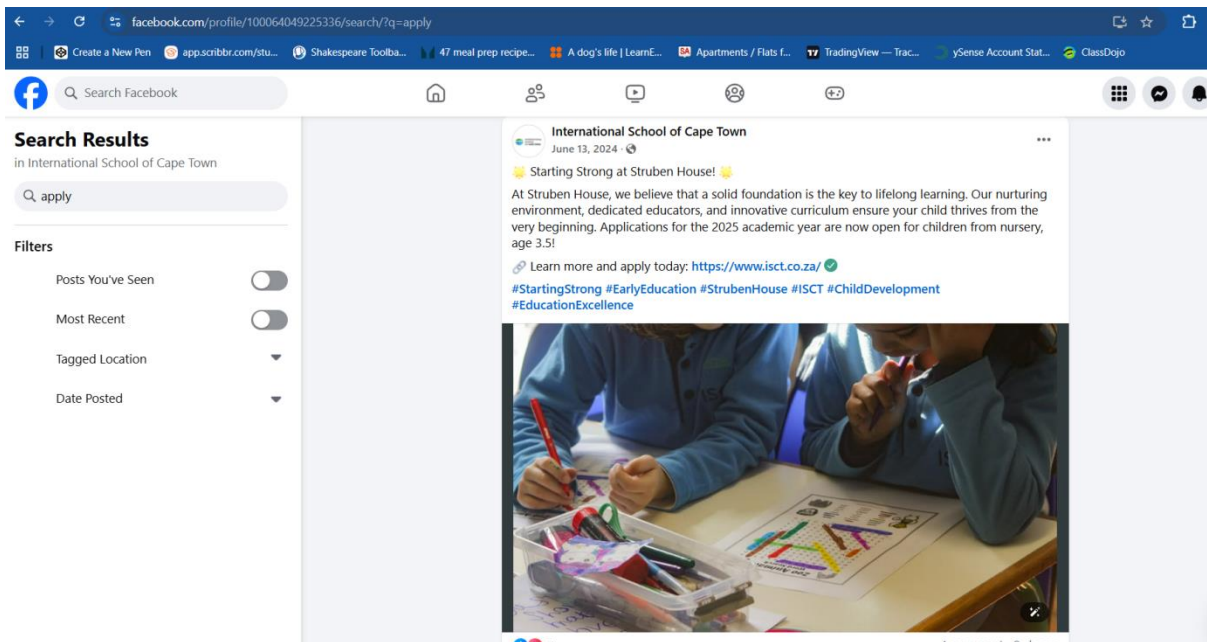


Figure 5.15: Nursery school

Source:

<https://www.facebook.com/internationalschoolofcapetown/posts/pfbid02eKhhiiZrMVKzG9gEQi48GVaLT4BbnbqdN3uWdwuYhgDbE8FcY4g7UqtPMWijX5hkl>

The screenshot above illustrates a DRM strategy, prompting prospective students to take immediate action, such as inquiring, touring, or applying. The use of social media for direct marketing by ISCT aligns with several marketing theories. IMC principles emphasise the importance of coordination and consistency in marketing efforts, which is reflected in the schools' approach to promoting applications and registrations. DOI theory suggests that innovation and experimentation are essential for effective marketing, and both schools demonstrate this by utilising social media to reach potential customers. SMET principles highlight the importance of building relationships and fostering a sense of community, which can be achieved through effective direct marketing strategies on social media.

5.4.5.1 Facebook use for public relations

According to Fagbuyi (2020), PR is the deliberate, planned, and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its public. Both ISCT and BEK use social media, including Facebook, for PR purposes. Both schools share updates, news, and events, and both aim to build and maintain a positive relationship with their audience. This approach demonstrates a proactive use of social media for PR, where both schools seek to engage with their followers,

promote their brand, and create brand identity. Martin 2017 supports this finding in Chapter 2 (see section 2.6) by suggesting that PR is instrumental in building brands online. The finding is also affirmed by visual pictures in Figure 5.16 and Figure 5.17 from Facebook of both schools.

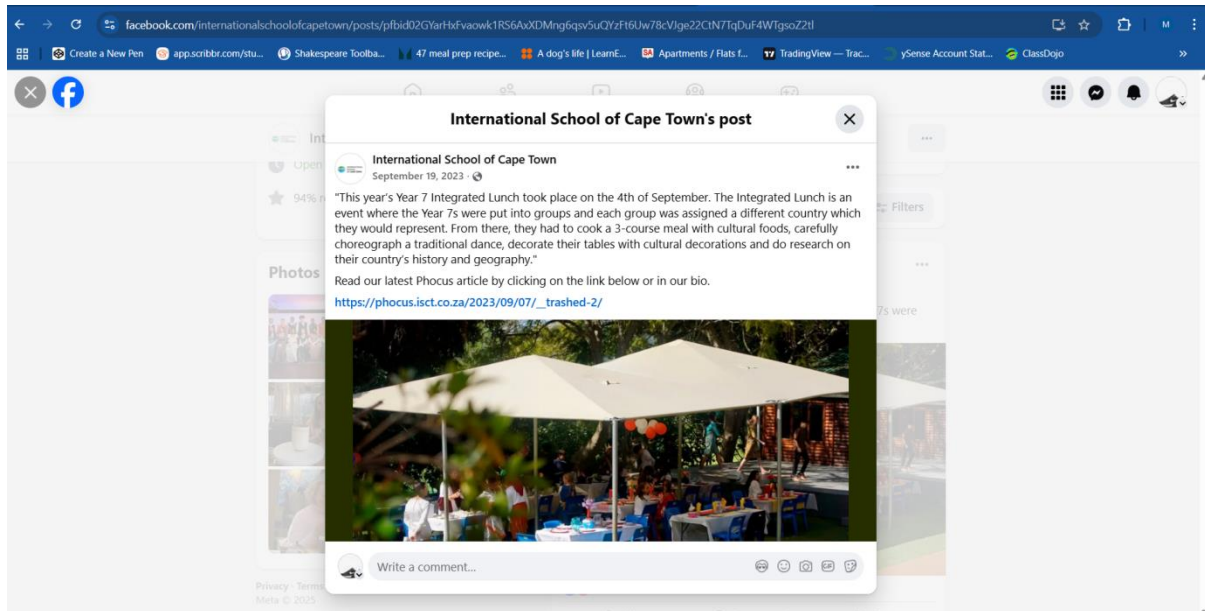


Figure 5.16: ISCT lunch

Source:

<https://www.facebook.com/internationalschoolofcapetown/posts/pfbid02GYarHxFvaowk1RS6AxXDMng6qsv5uQYzFt6Uw78cVJge22CtN7TqDuF4WTgsoZ2tl>

The screenshot above shows the ISCT using its integrated launch to achieve PR.

While both schools use Facebook for PR, they each have unique approaches. ISCT uses social media to showcase its commitment to multicultural education and community engagement, highlighting events such as the Year 7 Integrated Lunch. This approach demonstrates ISCT's focus on promoting diversity and inclusivity and its use of social media to share these values with its audience. In contrast, the BEK approach to PR on social media is more focused on academic achievements, highlighting student successes and academic awards. This approach demonstrates BEK's emphasis on academic excellence and its use of social media to promote its academic reputation.



Figure 5.17: BEK's Facebook page

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/thebritisheducationkorea>

The screenshot above shows BEK's social media use for PR, through using a captivating screenshot of their students in an attractive computerised classroom.

Despite their unique approaches, both schools use Facebook to share information, promote events, and engage with their audience, demonstrating a similarity in their PR strategy. For instance, both schools have a large followership on Facebook. Both schools have over 1 000 followers. Both schools reach a wider audience, increase their visibility, and build their brand reputation. This approach highlights the importance of social media in modern PR, where schools can use these platforms to communicate effectively with their stakeholders and promote their values and mission.

The use of social media for PR by both schools aligns with several marketing theories. IMC principles emphasise the importance of coordination and consistency in marketing efforts, which is reflected in the schools' approach to using social media for PR. DOI theory suggests that innovation and experimentation are essential for effective marketing, and both schools demonstrate this by using social media to engage with their audience. SMET principles highlight the importance of building relationships and fostering a sense of community, which is achieved through effective PR strategies on social media.

5.4.5.2 Use of Instagram for public relations

Both BEK and ISCT employ Instagram strategically as PR, showcasing their students' sporting achievements. This approach illustrates excellence in co-curricular activities, positioning the schools not only as centres of academic learning but also as institutions that nurture holistic development. For instance, BEK publicly celebrated its students' first-place victory in the 2024 National Equestrian Competition (Figure 5.18), framing the accomplishment as a marker of prestige and school identity. Similarly, ISCT highlighted the success of its students in qualifying for local basketball competitions in Cape Town (Figure 5.19), thereby reinforcing its commitment to sporting culture and community engagement. While both schools rely on Instagram to amplify visibility, BEK's strategy focuses on national-level recognition, whereas ISCT emphasises local participation and team spirit.

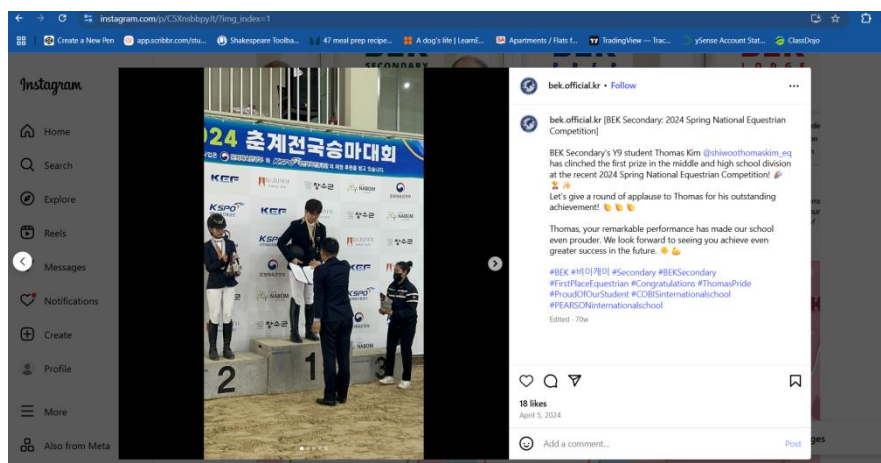


Figure 5.18: Celebrating equestrian competition triumph
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/C5XnsbbpyJt/?img_index=1

The screenshot above shows a BEK student receiving a certificate for being a champion in the equestrian competition.

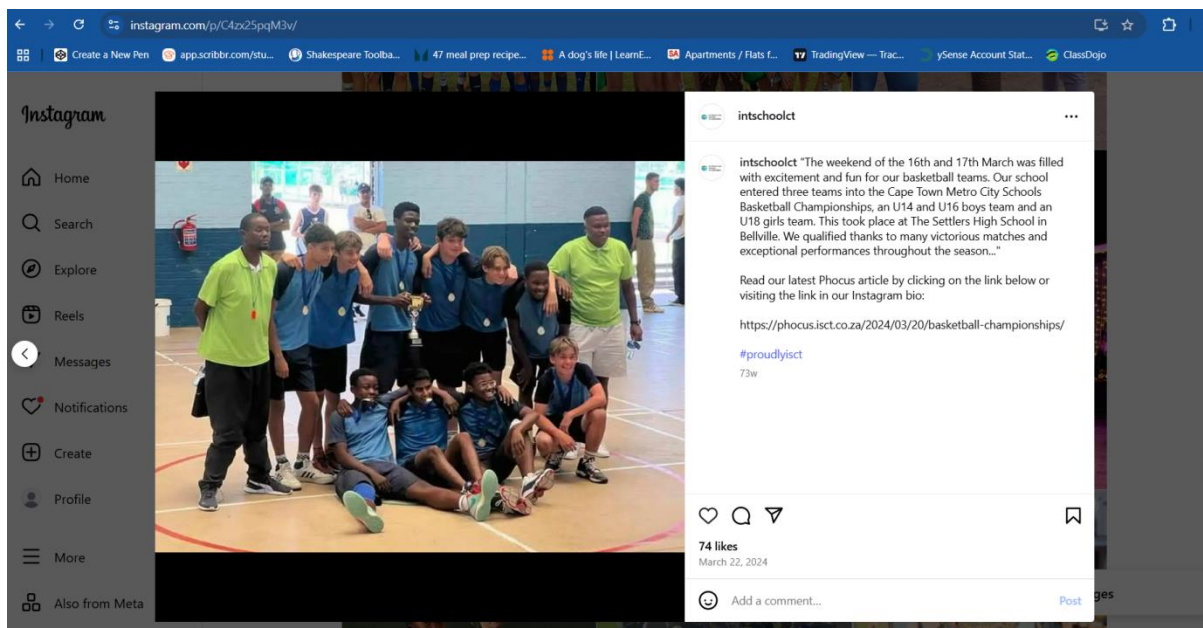


Figure 5.19: Celebrating the basketball team's achievement

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/C4zx25pqM3v/>

Screenshot Figure 5.18 showcases one of their students as a champion in the equestrian competition, while screenshot Figure 5.19 shows ISCT students celebrating their Basketball qualifier's achievement in Cape Town. This screenshot portrays *Ubuntu* as it shows togetherness and unity through sports.

A key difference in the PR approach between ISCT and BEK lies in their focus on social media platforms. While both schools use Facebook and Instagram for PR, ISCT emphasises multicultural education and community engagement, showcasing events like the Year 7 Integrated Lunch, whereas BEK focuses on academic achievements, highlighting student successes and academic awards. However, on Instagram, both schools strategically employ the platform to showcase students' sporting achievements, with BEK celebrating national-level recognition and ISCT emphasising local participation and team spirit. According to Fagbuyi (2020), PR involves establishing and maintaining mutual understanding between an organisation and its public. Both schools demonstrate a proactive use of social media for PR, aligning with IMC principles of coordination and consistency, DOI's emphasis on innovation, and SMET's focus on building relationships and community. Martin (2017) supports the importance of social media in modern PR for building brands and promoting values.

In order to more directly address research questions 2 and 3, this part summarises the previous analysis. It specifically highlights the main differences and similarities

between the schools' social media marketing communication tactics and explores how these tactics are influenced by underlying cultural ideologies, including *Ubuntu* and Confucianism.

5.5 OVERALL FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The comparative analysis of ISCT and BEK's social media marketing strategies shows that both schools use social media platforms to achieve their marketing objectives. According to Loitongbam, Sorokhaibam and Singh (2023), social media allows for precise targeting, enabling marketing messages to resonate with specific demographics and interest groups. Both schools maintain a presence on Facebook and Instagram, but ISCT also uses X, although it is limited and minimal, whereas BEK does not. ISCT's approach to social media marketing is more comprehensive, incorporating multiple dimensions of school life, including academic success, cultural diversity, and community engagement. In contrast, BEK focuses primarily on academic achievements and arts competitions. This difference in approach reflects distinct marketing strategies and priorities of the two schools.

The study's findings support the applicability of DOI, IMC, and SMET. The adoption of social media marketing by both schools reflects a recognition of its relative advantage in terms of reach, engagement, and cost-effectiveness (Pawar 2024). The use of social media also enables both schools to build relationships and foster a sense of community with their target audience (Hsu & Lin 2020). This is evidenced by the cited social media platforms such as Facebook.

The difference in platform usage between ISCT and BEK may be influenced by factors such as target market, audience demographics, marketing objectives, and content strategies (Randalia 2025). In sum, the study demonstrates the importance of coordination and consistency in marketing efforts, as well as the need for a comprehensive marketing strategy that integrates multiple elements of marketing communication. The key similarities are and differences and deduced from the finding of the summarised in table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1: Comparative table: ISCT vs BEK social media strategy

Feature	ISCT (South Africa)	BEK (South Korea)	Interpretation
Platforms	Facebook, Instagram, X	Facebook, Instagram	ISCT broader platform coverage

Content Focus	Academic, community, cultural events, alumni success	Academic excellence, arts competitions	ISCT holistic, BEK focused on academics
IMC Elements	Advertising, sales promotion, PR, DRM, sponsorship	Advertising, sales promotion, PR, DRM (limited)	ISCT more integrated
Engagement Approach	Interactive, storytelling, community-oriented	Formal, achievement-oriented	Reflects <i>Ubuntu</i> vs Confucian values
Frequency of Posts	High across platforms	Moderate to low	ISCT maintains stronger online presence
Cultural Values	Ubuntu: inclusivity, togetherness, shared success	Confucian: hierarchy, academic prestige, individual achievement	Culture shapes marketing tone and strategy

5.6 ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The study addressed the three research questions using the findings from ISCT and BEK's social media platforms. Research question 1, which asked how the schools use social media as a marketing communication strategy, was answered through the theme on social media platforms, showing that both schools maintain active profiles on Facebook and Instagram, while ISCT additionally uses X. This demonstrates that the schools use social media to engage audiences, increase visibility, and promote their services.

Research question 2, which asked about the similarities and differences between the schools' social media use, was answered through the themes of platform-specific strategies, advertising, sales promotion, direct response marketing, and sponsorship. The findings show that both schools focus on academic achievements, but ISCT also highlights cultural diversity, community engagement, and alumni success, and BEK also highlights arts and academic performance.

Research question 3, which asked about cultural influences in the schools' social media marketing, was addressed through the themes of public relations, promotion of school culture, and sponsorship. The findings show that ISCT's posts reflect *Ubuntu* values of community, inclusivity, and togetherness, while BEK's posts reflect Confucian values of respect for education and academic achievement.

The study found that differences in platform choice, content focus, and marketing strategies are influenced by the schools' target audiences, cultural contexts, and marketing priorities, while similarities in the use of Facebook and Instagram illustrate common approaches to achieving marketing objectives.

5.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented a comparative analysis of the social media marketing strategies employed by ISCT and BEK. The findings show that both schools use social media platforms to build relationships, promote their services, and enhance their online presence. The study's findings support the applicability of DOI, IMC, and SMET in understanding the schools' social media marketing strategies. Differences in platform usage and content strategies between the two schools reflect distinct marketing priorities and target audience engagement approaches. This chapter contributes to the understanding of social media marketing in the education sector, highlighting the importance of coordination and audience focus in marketing efforts. The findings have implications for educational institutions seeking to leverage social media to achieve their marketing objectives.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

6.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study examined the use of social media as a marketing communication strategy by two international schools: ISCT and BEK. A textual analysis of 30 social media posts across Facebook, Instagram, and X revealed how each school leveraged social media platforms to communicate with its audience, build brand awareness, and promote educational offerings. Both schools maintained a presence on Facebook and Instagram, while ISCT additionally used X, reflecting differences in engagement strategies and target audience interaction. Findings indicate that ISCT adopts a more comprehensive and diverse marketing approach, showcasing academic achievements, cultural activities, and community engagement. In contrast, BEK's social media strategy is more focused, demonstrating academic performance and accreditation, with limited use of X. Across both schools, social media functions were observed to support identity, presence, conversation, relationship building, and information sharing, aligning with the theoretical underpinnings of SET, SMET, and IMC.

6.2 DISCUSSION OF THE PROBLEM

The study set out to understand how social media is utilised as a marketing communication strategy in South Africa and South Korea, considering the distinct cultural paradigms of the two countries. In South Africa, *Ubuntu* and Western paradigms influence organisational practices, promoting communal engagement and relational marketing. This is reflected in ISCT's integrated approach, which blends academic promotion with multicultural and community-oriented messaging. In contrast, BEK operates within a Confucian framework, prioritising academic excellence and structured communication.

The findings demonstrate that cultural values shape the choice of platforms, messaging, and marketing priorities. ISCT's use of multiple platforms, including X, and diverse content illustrates an adaptive strategy designed to foster interaction and engagement across local and international audiences. BEK's narrower approach

reflects a targeted, performance-oriented strategy consistent with its cultural and organisational context. These differences demonstrate how social media marketing strategies are not only guided by technological affordances but also by the cultural and societal norms underpinning organisational decision-making.

6.3 ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This part summarises the manner in which the study's research questions were answered during the data collection and analysis procedures in order to make sure that each goal has been carefully met. Methodological coherence and analytical completeness are demonstrated by the results of the textual analysis, which are clearly in line with the goals and objectives of the research.

Main research question: How do international schools in South Africa and South Korea deploy social media as part of the marketing communication strategy?

This question was addressed in section 5.3. As outlined in the section, the two schools, ISCT and BEK, use social media (Facebook, X and Instagram) as a marketing communication strategy to promote achievements, increase visibility, encourage interaction, and fortify their brand identities. These findings indicate that social media is a key element of the marketing communication strategies of both schools. Nevertheless, the way and focus of deployment vary depending on their cultural contexts, audience demographics, and institutional goals.

Sub-question 1: In what ways do the South African and South Korean international schools use social media as a marketing communication strategy?

This question was addressed in section 5,3 between subsections 5.3.1–5.3.3. These sections outlined that both schools use different platforms (Facebook, X and Instagram) and they use them for marketing elements like advertising, PR, and direct engagement (community-driven vs academically focused) to achieve their marketing communication goals.

Sub-question 2: What are the similarities and differences between the South African and South Korean schools' use of social media as a marketing communication strategy?

This question was addressed in sections 5.3 and 5.5. These sections outline that the findings demonstrate that ISCT and BEK's social media usage is similar yet contextually different. Although their platforms frequency, and content focus vary, they are both dedicated to using social media for audience engagement, reputation management, and business promotion. ISCT places more focus on community and diversity, while BEK places more emphasis on academic authority and status. These distinctions are a reflection of national marketing settings, audience expectations, and institutional culture.

Sub-question 3: What are the underlying cultural variables of using social media as a marketing communication strategy between the South African and South Korean international schools?

This question was addressed in section 5.5. This section outline that based to the findings, culture has a big impact on how the two colleges use social media for marketing communication. With its use of Facebook, Instagram, and X to foster connections, promote engagement, and celebrate diversity, ISCT's strategy reflects South Africa's open and community-based culture. By primarily showcasing academic accomplishments and institutional legitimacy on Facebook and Instagram, BEK's approach, in contrast, reflects South Korea's formal and achievement-focused society. According to these differences, national and organisational cultures influence how each school communicates online, with South Korea valuing professionalism and control and South Africa favouring informal engagement. Overall, the organised, prestige-focused strategy of BEK contrasts with ISCT's creative, participatory use of social media, demonstrating how cultural norms are a major factor in directing marketing communication in international schools.

6.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR EXISTING THEORY

The findings of this study offer significant implications for marketing and communication theories. First, the application of IMC principles is evident in both schools, demonstrating the importance of consistent, coordinated messaging across multiple platforms. The DOI theory is also reinforced, as the adoption of social media and innovative content strategies reflects organisational recognition of relative advantage, compatibility, and observability in enhancing marketing impact. Moreover, SMET's emphasis on engagement is substantiated, with ISCT and BEK demonstrating varying degrees of interactive content that fosters relationship building and audience loyalty. The study contributes to theory by showing how cultural context mediates the effectiveness of social media as a marketing tool, illustrating that theoretical frameworks must account for local norms and values to fully explain organisational practices.

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Platform Diversification:** Schools should consider maintaining a presence on multiple platforms to maximise reach and engagement, as demonstrated by ISCT's use of Facebook, Instagram, and X.
2. **Content Strategy Alignment:** Marketing content should align with organisational values and audience expectations, balancing academic promotion with community engagement where appropriate.
3. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Social media strategies should be tailored to reflect the cultural context of the institution's audience, ensuring that messaging resonates effectively.
4. **Interactive Engagement:** Schools are encouraged to employ strategies that promote active audience participation, such as polls, Q&A sessions, and user-generated content, consistent with SMET principles.
5. **Integrated Marketing Coordination:** Institutions should ensure that messaging across advertising, sales promotion, PR, and DRM is coherent and coordinated, reflecting IMC best practices.

6.6 SUMMARY OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This study provides a comparative understanding of how international schools in South Africa and South Korea utilise social media as a marketing communication strategy. It illustrates the role of cultural context in shaping marketing priorities, platform selection, and content strategy. By integrating findings with SET, SMET, DOI, and IMC theories, the research demonstrates the interplay between theoretical constructs and practical implementation, offering a framework for institutions seeking to optimise social media marketing in educational settings. The study also contributes to the literature on cross-cultural marketing communication, providing evidence of effective strategies and potential gaps in current practice.

6.7 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

Despite this study's contributions, it has some limitations. The study focused on only two international schools—one in South Africa and one in South Korea—with a small sample of 15 social media posts from each school. This narrow focus limits the generalisability of the findings to other schools, regions, or countries. In addition, the study concentrated on private schools in the education sector and only analysed Facebook, Instagram, and X, leaving out other platforms such as TikTok and KakaoTalk. The absence of human participants or interviews and the small sample size further constrain the depth of analysis. Finally, cultural interpretation posed a limitation, particularly given language differences and regional social norms. These factors are acknowledged as inherent limitations of the study.

Another limitation is the limited consideration of the audience's perspective. While the study analyses how the schools construct and present their marketing messages, it does not investigate how students, parents, or community members perceive or respond to the content. The absence of audience reactions and engagement data restricts the study's ability to assess how effective or influential these social media strategies are for their intended audiences.

6.8 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Conduct longitudinal studies to examine the evolving role of social media in educational marketing over time.

- Investigate the impact of emerging platforms such as TikTok or LinkedIn Learning on marketing communication strategies in schools.
- Explore the perspectives of parents, students, and alumni to understand how social media marketing influences perception and decision-making.
- Compare additional international schools in different countries to identify global trends and cultural variations in social media marketing.
- Assess the effectiveness of specific interactive strategies, such as influencer marketing or user-generated content campaigns, in driving engagement and enrolment.
- Utilise techniques like focus groups, questionnaires, interviews, and social media analytics to reflect the viewpoints of students, parents, and other stakeholders.

6.9 CONCLUSION

This study shows that social media plays an essential role in marketing communication for international schools in different cultural contexts. The comparison between ISCT in South Africa and BEK in South Korea suggests how cultural values influence the choice of platforms, types of content, and methods of engaging audiences. The analysis demonstrates that social media is not only a channel for promoting academic achievements and school events but also a tool for building relationships, trust, and community with stakeholders.

The findings show that schools can achieve successful marketing results when social media strategies match their organisational goals and meet their audience's expectations. This study also helps explain how social media marketing interacts with cultural contexts, providing guidance for educational institutions on how to design and execute communication strategies that are both culturally suitable and engaging. Overall, this research can help schools boost their online presence and more effectively reach prospective students and parents.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethics certificate

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Appendix B: Textual analysis tool

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Appendix C: Editing certificate

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