



Inaugural lecture by Professor Ekanjume Beatrice

RECONTEXTUALISING COMMUNICATION:
LEVERAGING SOCIAL MEDIA TO EFFECT
TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE IN AFRICAN
UNIVERSITIES

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PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Mr. Vice Chancellor, an inaugural lecture is a rare opportunity given to professors to increase both their research and academic visibility, and I feel so honoured and humbled to have been given such an opportunity. I am aware that professors use this opportunity to expound on their past, present, and future research endeavours, but allow me Mr. Vice Chancellor to deviate from this norm. The topic of today's lecture COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY: LEVERAGING SOCIAL MEDIA TO EFFECT TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE IN AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES is a product of cultural exertion, psychic imagination, life experiences, as well as tutelage from formal and informal situations.

Before I delve into the lecture proper, allow me to briefly introduce myself. I am a typical English speaking Cameroonian born of humble parents who are ardent members of the Roman catholic church, with my father being a former catholic school teacher. I obtained my First School Leaving Certificate in 1986, Ordinary Levels 1991, and Advance Levels in 1993. That same year, I was privileged to study in the university of Yaoundé 1 where I obtained a BA in General and Applied Linguistics 1996, an MA in the same field in 1998, and a second MA in Theoretical Linguistics in 2000. Then I took a break to nurse my daughter who was born in 2000, while at the same time started my career in the world of academia as a graduate assistant. In 2003 I enrolled for my PhD in the University of Yaoundé 1, which I obtained in 2006 with a distinction (Trés Honourable).

As I indicated above, I started my career in academia when I got engaged as a graduate assistant in the Department of African Languages and Linguistics of the University of Yaoundé 1 in 2000. In October 2003, I joined the University of Burundi as a lecturer – the same year in which I registered for my PhD. I left Burundi in 2007 and joined NUL as a lecturer, where I evolved to the current rank of FULL PROFESSOR.

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is the process of creating and ascribing meaning (Fatimayin, 2018). It is the interaction and sharing of ideas among individuals or group members. Many of us communicate with people every day, whether in person or on the countless digital platforms available to us. But how much of our communication actually reaches the intended audience or person the way we hoped, is a different story. Being an effective communicator in one's professional and personal lives involves learning the skills to exchange information with clarity, empathy, and understanding. For communication to be effective, it must take into consideration the 5 C's of communication namely clarity, correctness, completeness, conciseness, and compassion, though these may vary depending on different factors. Effective communication thus requires that we exchange ideas, thoughts, opinions, knowledge, and data in a way that will allow for the message to be received and understood with clarity and purpose (Ekanjume 2012). When we communicate effectively, both the sender and receiver feel satisfied.

While the effectiveness of communication can be difficult to measure, its impact is hard to deny. According to one study, surveyed companies in the United States and United Kingdom with at least 100,000 employees lost \$62.4 million per year on average due to poor communication. On the flip side, companies led by effective communicators had nearly 50 percent higher total returns to shareholders over companies with less effective communicators at the helm (Holmes Report, 2011).

The benefits of communication effectiveness can be witnessed in the workplace, in an educational setting, and in the lives of individuals. Learning how to communicate well can be a boon in each of these areas. In the workplace for instance, effective communication can help in managing employees and building teams, grow the institution more rapidly, retain employees, benefit from enhanced creativity and innovation, and build strong relationships that attract more opportunities for the institution. In the area of personal life, effective communication can lead to improved

social, emotional, and mental health, deeper existing connections, new bonds based on trust and transparency, and better problem-solving and conflict resolution skills.

Despite these facts, communication is facing challenges in recent times with the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) and various social media platforms. The AI and social media have brought in a new wave of complexity and irregularities in communication which sometimes leaves much to be desired. This is even more complex when it comes to institutions of higher learning.

Nowadays, information and communication technologies in general, and Web 2.0 technologies in particular, have become the first concern of young people as well as adults, notably in the university milieu. Social networks have taken the lead in terms of number of users on all continents. Their use is often associated with the exchange and sharing of different content, with Internet users. Since 2010, the African continent has recorded an explosion in the use of mobile phones, gravitating around 65% according to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU, 2018). The mobile phone has thus become an essential tool for Internet users who wish to have access to technological innovations, communicate with their friends, and share diverse contents. Despite this, in the field of digitalisation and the acceptance of technologies, African universities are seriously behind the movement of their counterparts in Europe, the USA, and Asia (Mogaji et al, 2020). This is supported by Altbach, et al (2019) who argue that European and American universities are widely in the lead in terms of marketing strategies and communication via social media and that African universities are lagging behind.

Social media has taken over the academic world and education for more than a decade. Some universities, institutes, and training centres have created some kinds of social media intending to simplify communication, better-coordinating exchanges and learning, with relevant stakeholders (Gachago & Ivala, 2012; Watat, Wamba, & Kamdjoug, 2018). As Junco et al (2011) put it, social media has demonstrated its strengths in connecting several stakeholders, including students to each other,

teachers to themselves, students and teachers, all the entities in the university, as well as external actors.

Despite these facts, very few African universities have communication strategies and are present on social media, whereas Africa has one of the highest rates of social media use, given that young people are strongly represented. Research has revealed that social media is exponentially invading many parts of African society, and education is the most affected sector. For many African institutions, social media is limited to entertainment and friendly exchanges. The 'strategic communication' aspect is strongly neglected.

2. THE ART OF COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY AT THE WORKPLACE

Effectively communicating with others is crucial to implant purpose into the workplace. Once purpose is put at the heart of any organisation or institution, there is usually a cultural shift from doing business as usual, which may even lead to some positive change in all stakeholders. As with all significant changes, it is vital to communicate in inspiring, authentic and engaging ways to all stakeholders. Communicating effectively changes the behaviour of others toward support and loyalty and to even embrace change.

Embedding a new purpose in an institution is an iterative and continuous process, and it often takes time for a change to be felt across the board. Communicating such a purpose effectively becomes imperative. This requires university leaders to ensure that the expectations of the leadership teams are well managed and that they are supported with the necessary communication tools. Above all, the communications strategy and process for embedding new purpose(s) should be clearly defined, with a series of specific tactical steps to ensure effective communication at the workplace.

Communication is an inseparable aspect of daily life and we cannot live without communicating with anyone, either through in-person communication or through

various social media platforms (Ekanjume and Kolobe, 2023). In addition, communication can occur in multiple forms namely verbal, non-verbal, written, and visual. However, effective communication is something that needs to be addressed properly. As we communicate with an infinite number of people daily, we do not know how well our communication reaches the desired audience.

By definition, effective communication is the process of exchanging or transmitting ideas, information, thoughts, knowledge, data, opinion, or messages from the sender through a selected method or channel to the receiver with a purpose that can be understood with clarity (Ekanjume 2012). The process of effective communication is a cyclic process that starts with the sender and also ends with the sender, as the sender receives a response or feedback from the receiver.

While the effectiveness of communication can vary, it affects professional areas in various ways. As institutions of higher learning, effective communication is vital because it can help in the building and managing of an efficient team, as well as in enhancing innovation and creativity. Through effective communication universities are able to retain more and more sincere employees, build strong relationships among employees, increase the engagement of employees in their work, and also establish responsibility toward their team. With effective communication, decisions can be easily made and discussions that are goal oriented carried out, leading to increase in stakeholder satisfaction.

Communicating with a person is a skill as well as an art that comes with experience and constant practice. However, some predetermined skills are known as the key to effective communication. These include:

Sharp observational skills. It is expected that individuals should observe what is happening in and around their organisation so that they can gain more information and knowledge and convey messages to their team members appropriately.

Clarity and Brevity. Messages should be drafted in understandable and simple words, so that employees can have clarity about what is being communicated.

Listening and Understanding. A key aspect of good and effective communication is that the receiver must be a good listener so that s\he can properly understand what the sender is trying to say or communicate. The receiver should be alert in grasping the message of the sender and interpret the message properly.

Emotional Intelligence. Emotional awareness and intelligence are some major requirements for effective communication. As professionals, employees must have the ability to emotionally influence others so that they work towards the organisational goals from within and not only for the sake of their own interest.

Self-Efficacy. To achieve the goal of effective communication it is important for professionals who have responsibility for their team members to have faith in themselves that they can achieve the communication goals. Self-efficacy will lead to a better understanding of the goals of the organisation and how to achieve them.

Self Confidence. While trying to communicate a message to another person, people have to be confident enough in what they are trying to communicate. Self-confidence will enable the speaker to have a clear vision of the purpose of the communication so that the receiver can also interpret the message clearly.

Respectfulness. To enhance the essence of effective communication it is important that while delivering a message, the speaker must respect the ideas, values, beliefs, and conceptions of the receiver. The speaker should maintain courtesy so that the receiver may interpret the message as intended by the speaker.

Selection of the Right Medium. There are multiple media available for speakers to communicate their messages. It is therefore important to choose the correct medium for a message. This will depend on various factors including: the nature of the message, the priority of the situation, the choices of the receiver, and so on.

Providing Feedback. To successfully have effective communication it must be a two-way process. So to understand the perspective of the other person, the sender and the receiver must give feedback to one another depending on what they think or want to say about the message.

These and other factors, when properly addressed, will cater for effective communication, and enable institutions or universities to send out the right messages to the right receivers through the right channels at the right time and place and with the right feedback.

Communication is one of the major concerns at the workplace. Creating and maintaining a positive work environment comes with effective workplace communication. Often, effective communication defines organisational goals and helps co-workers to collaborate. This is a step towards a fundamental practice for a committed and productive workforce.

Claude Shannon, regarded as one of the Fathers of Communication due to his groundbreaking work in the field of information theory, is also highly acclaimed by humanitarian academics for his celebrated quote 'Information is the resolution of uncertainty' (Lih, 2012). To Shannon, effective communication used to inform, to express feelings, to imagine, and to influence, serves good causes.

Communication is invaluable in providing services that tackle education, health concerns, development and poverty alleviation, the fight for social justice and non-discrimination, etc. Beyond the words, phrases and literal characters, communication transcends cleavages, geo-anthropological differences, and political affiliations. The language of communication is Love, Respect, and human Dignity.

Therefore, this lecture advances that higher education institutions in Africa must consider effective communication as one of their top priorities. Their communication must go well beyond promoting the university's opportunities to potential new students, the pursuit of potential donors and outreach to policymakers; to engaging

all aspects of internal academic life and seeking the engagement of the larger society. Increasingly, higher education has to defend its purpose, integrity and legitimacy in a climate of growing neo-nationalist and populist movements (Knobel, 2022). A comprehensive communication plan should therefore include a deep revision of the University's core values and practices, better teaching and learning strategies, as well as modern internal and external communication tools, including all sorts of social media.

Political communication, otherwise the interaction model between politics and the people also fashions causes in communication, including public participation, which englobes freedoms of expression, assembly, and opinion-holding. For how would the fostering of democratic practices and the respect for human rights be pursued if not through effective communication?

2.1. Theories/Models of Communication

Communication is a complex process, and it is difficult to determine where a communication encounter starts and ends. Models of communication simplify the process by providing a visual representation of the various aspects of a communication encounter. Some models explain communication in more detail than others, but even the most complex model still does not recreate what we experience during communication encounters. All the same, models serve a valuable purpose in communication because they allow us to see specific concepts and steps within the process of communication, define communication, and apply communication concepts. When we become aware of how communication functions, we can think more deliberately through our communication encounters, which can help us better prepare for future communication and learn from our previous communication.

Behind the art of communication lies a rich landscape of theories/models that help us to better comprehend its intricacies. Understanding these theories does not only enhance communication skills but also provides valuable insights into how information

is shared, interpreted, and processed. Five of these theories/models are presented in this lecture to help provide the necessary guidance for effective communication.

1. Transmission Model of Communication

The Transmission Model of Communication developed by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver in 1948 stands as a cornerstone theory in the field of communication, shedding light on the fundamental elements of communication. This model presents communication as a linear process, involving a sender, a message, and a receiver. It describes communication as a one-way process in which the speaker intentionally transmits a message to the receiver. The sender encodes the message, which is then transmitted through a channel and decoded by the receiver. This model emphasises the importance of clarity and accuracy in conveying information. By understanding the basics of the Transmission Model, we gain insights into the sequential flow of communication and the essential components that contribute to effective message delivery.

Sender-Receiver Process: Encoding, Transmission, and Decoding

Within the Transmission Model, the sender plays a crucial role in encoding the message, converting thoughts and ideas into a format that can be transmitted to the receiver. The process of encoding involves selecting appropriate words, organising thoughts, and considering non-verbal cues. Once the message is encoded, it is transmitted through a chosen channel, such as verbal conversation, written text, or digital media. The receiver then decodes the message, interpreting the transmitted information based on their own understanding and context. This sender-receiver process showcases the intricate dynamics involved in communication, highlighting the significance of clear encoding and accurate decoding for effective message transmission.

While the Transmission Model provides a foundational understanding of communication, it has its limitations and criticisms. Critics argue that this model

oversimplifies the complex nature of communication by presenting it as a linear and one-way process. In reality, communication is often characterised by feedback loops, where the receiver becomes the sender and vice versa, leading to a more dynamic and interactive exchange. Additionally, the Transmission Model neglects the influence of context, cultural factors, and individual interpretations on the communication process. By recognising these limitations, we can expand our understanding of communication and seek out more comprehensive theories that account for the multifaceted nature of human interaction.

Despite its limitations, the Transmission Model of Communication offers practical applications in various contexts. In professional settings, understanding this model can help individuals refine their message delivery, ensuring that information is transmitted clearly and effectively to colleagues, clients, or stakeholders.

2. Social Learning Theory of Communication

The Social Learning Theory of Communication delves into the role of observational learning in shaping our communication skills and behaviours. This theory, first introduced by Albert Bandura in the 1960s, posits that individuals acquire and refine their communication abilities through observation, imitation, and modelling of others. We learn how to communicate by observing those in our immediate environment, as well as through media representations.

According to the Social Learning Theory, social reinforcement plays a significant role in shaping our communication choices. Positive reinforcement encourages the adoption of effective communication strategies, while negative reinforcement discourages ineffective or inappropriate behaviours. This implies that by observing and imitating individuals who employ clear, respectful, and impactful communication, we can enhance our own communication skills and foster positive social interactions. On the other hand, avoiding and distancing ourselves from negative communication models can help us steer clear of detrimental communication habits.

Embracing the Social Learning Theory of Communication highlights the importance of seeking out positive role models in our communication journey. Positive role models can serve as inspiration and provide examples of effective communication techniques. They can be found in various domains, such as public speaking, interpersonal relationships, or professional contexts. By observing and modelling their communication styles, we can adapt and incorporate their successful strategies into our own repertoire, ultimately enhancing our ability to convey messages clearly and foster understanding.

Applying the Social Learning Theory of Communication requires conscious awareness and active engagement in the learning process. By recognising the influence of social reinforcement, we can evaluate our own communication choices and behaviours. Through self-reflection and assessment, we can identify areas for improvement and actively work on adopting more effective communication strategies. This may involve consciously selecting positive role models to observe, seeking feedback from others, and actively practicing and refining our communication skills in various contexts.

3. Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM)

The Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) theory was developed by W. Barnett Pearce and Vernon E. Cronen in the mid-1970s, and explores the intricate process of meaning construction in communication. According to this theory, communication involves not only the transmission of information but also the co-creation and navigation of shared realities. It assumes that two individuals who are engaged in an interaction each constructs their own interpretation and perception of what the conversation means, and later negotiates a common understanding or meaning by coordinating with each other. CMM emphasises the role of context in shaping meaning, acknowledging that communication is profoundly influenced by cultural norms, social roles, and situational dynamics.

Central to the CMM theory is the recognition of context as a guiding compass in communication. Context encompasses the broader social and cultural factors that

influence how we interpret and understand messages. By considering the context in which communication occurs, we can attune ourselves to the multiple layers of meaning embedded in our interactions. This heightened awareness enables us to navigate diverse cultural landscapes, adapt our communication style accordingly, and foster deeper understanding and fruitful collaborations.

CMM highlights the dynamic process of creating shared realities through communication. It enables individuals to engage in a continuous negotiation and coordination of meaning, co-constructing interpretations and understanding through their interactions. The theory emphasises that meanings are not inherent in words or messages but are actively constructed through social interaction. By recognising the collaborative nature of meaning-making, we can approach communication with a mindset of openness, curiosity, and willingness to understand different perspectives.

Interpretation is a crucial element within the CMM framework. Individuals bring their own subjective interpretations, experiences, and cultural lenses to the communication process, shaping the meanings they derive from messages. The theory underscores the importance of recognising and respecting diverse interpretations, as well as engaging in dialogue to clarify and reconcile differing viewpoints. By fostering an environment of open and respectful communication, we can bridge gaps in understanding and create shared meanings that transcend individual perspectives.

4. Cognitive Dissonance Theory

The Cognitive Dissonance Theory of Leon Festinger explores the psychological tension that arises when individuals hold conflicting beliefs, attitudes, or behaviours. According to this theory, the discomfort caused by cognitive dissonance motivates individuals to reduce the inconsistency and restore a sense of internal harmony. It delves into the processes by which individuals rationalise, change, or modify their beliefs and behaviours to align with their self-perception.

Cognitive dissonance theory highlights the inherent discomfort experienced when individuals encounter inconsistencies between their attitudes, beliefs, or actions. This theory suggests that humans have a natural drive to seek consistency and coherence in their thoughts and behaviours. When confronted with conflicting information or contradictory actions, individuals experience a state of cognitive dissonance, which generates psychological tension. Recognising this conflict prompts individuals to actively seek resolution and reduce the dissonance through various cognitive and behavioural processes.

In an attempt to alleviate cognitive dissonance, individuals often engage in rationalisation and justification. This involves reinterpreting or reframing conflicting information or behaviours to reduce the perceived inconsistency. For example, someone who holds environmentally conscious beliefs but frequently engages in environmentally harmful behaviours may rationalise their actions by emphasising other positive contributions they make or downplaying the impact of their behaviour. By engaging in these cognitive processes, individuals attempt to align their beliefs and actions, reducing the discomfort of cognitive dissonance.

The theory suggests that individuals may also resolve cognitive dissonance by changing their beliefs or behaviours. This can involve actively seeking new information or adopting new attitudes that align with their existing actions or adjusting their behaviours to align with their beliefs. For instance, someone who experiences dissonance between their belief in the importance of exercise and their sedentary lifestyle may be motivated to start exercising regularly to align their behaviour with their beliefs. By making these changes, individuals reduce the conflict and achieve a state of internal consistency.

Cognitive dissonance theory has significant implications for communication and persuasion. Recognising that individuals are motivated to reduce cognitive dissonance, communicators can strategically utilise persuasive techniques to influence attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours. Presenting information that challenges pre-existing beliefs or

introducing inconsistencies that create dissonance can prompt individuals to re-evaluate their positions and potentially adopt new attitudes or behaviours that align with the desired message. By understanding cognitive dissonance processes, communicators can effectively craft persuasive messages that leverage this theory to promote behaviour change and attitude shifts.

5. Diffusion of Innovations Theory

The Diffusion of Innovations Theory developed by E.M. Rogers in 1962, explores how new ideas, products, or practices spread and are adopted within a society or social system. This theory examines the factors that influence the diffusion process, identifying key elements that contribute to the successful adoption of innovations. By understanding the diffusion of innovations, we can gain insights into the dynamics of change and the factors that shape the adoption or rejection of new ideas.

The Diffusion of Innovations Theory emphasises the role of innovation characteristics in influencing the adoption process. Innovations that possess certain attributes are more likely to be adopted by individuals or groups. These attributes include relative advantage (perceived benefits over existing alternatives), compatibility (fitting with existing values and practices), complexity (ease of understanding and use), trialability (ability to be tested on a small scale), and observability (visibility of results). By considering these characteristics, innovators and change agents can tailor their strategies to enhance the adoption potential of their innovations.

The theory also identifies adopter categories, classifying individuals based on their propensity to adopt innovations at different stages of the diffusion process. These categories include innovators (venturesome early adopters), early adopters (opinion leaders who embrace new ideas), early majority (pragmatic adopters who follow early adopters), late majority (skeptical adopters who adopt after the majority), and laggards (tradition-bound individuals resistant to change). Understanding the characteristics and motivations of these adopter categories can help innovators develop targeted approaches to maximize diffusion and accelerate adoption.

Communication channels play a critical role in the diffusion of innovations. The theory highlights the importance of interpersonal networks, mass media, social media, and other communication channels in disseminating information about innovations. These channels serve as conduits for transmitting knowledge, influencing opinions, and facilitating the adoption process. Effective communication strategies, including persuasive messaging and engaging storytelling, can help bridge information gaps, create awareness, and generate interest in innovations, ultimately fostering adoption and diffusion.

The Diffusion of Innovations Theory recognises the influence of social system factors on the diffusion process. Social systems, such as organisations, communities, or societies, have their own norms, values, and structures that can either facilitate or hinder innovation adoption. Factors such as leadership support, social norms, institutional barriers, and cultural values can significantly impact the diffusion process. By understanding the dynamics of the social system and adapting strategies to address these factors, change agents can navigate the complexities of diffusion and facilitate the successful adoption of innovations, through effective communication.

From the foregoing, one can argue that although communication models may not be complex enough to truly capture all that takes place in a communication encounter, they can help us examine the various steps in the process in order to better understand our communication and that of others. In the realm of communication, the above theories act as beacons, guiding us through the complex pathways of effective interaction. From the linear structure of the Transmission Model to the intricate layers of meaning construction in CMM, each theory brings forth valuable knowledge and perspectives. By delving into the realms of social learning, cognitive dissonance, and the diffusion of innovations, we uncover the mechanisms that shape our communication landscape.

2.2 Communicating Effectively in the era of Artificial Intelligence and Social Media

Human communication is a social interaction process, and is an essential part of our daily life. It is fundamental to the existence and survival of individuals, groups, institutions, societies, and nations. Effective communication between individuals, organisations, institutions, and even families is critical for providing safe and quality life, education, healthcare, etc. It is crucial for communicating successfully with others, and enables people to build and maintain relationships and accomplish goals, objectives, and tasks.

However, with the advent of the artificial intelligence (AI) and the great progress witnessed in the last decade with social media, a new question has emerged which is: How will humans beat the perfection of communication between AI systems, and the effect of social media on communication?

1. Effective Communication and AI

Given the rising importance of digital communication, individuals, organisations, institutions, businesses, etc. are increasingly turning to Artificial Intelligence technology to optimize their internal communication procedures. AI refers to the development of computer programmes that can perform tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and language translation (Russell & Norvig, 2016). According to Davenport (2019), AI involves using algorithms and statistical models to enable computers to learn from data, recognise patterns, and make decisions based on the input received. Unlike traditional software that follows pre-programmed instructions, AI can continually analyse and modify its processes based on new data, making it more flexible and versatile.

The increasing capabilities of artificial intelligence systems to learn non-stop and flawlessly transfer knowledge, regardless of complexity, will have a profound impact on humanity. As AI becomes more advanced, it will transform industries and lead to

unprecedented levels of efficiency and productivity. However, it also raises questions about the future of work ethics, and the role of humans in a world increasingly dominated by machines (Siau & Wang, 2018). While AI has the potential to solve some of the world's most pressing problems, it is crucial that we approach its development and implementation with caution and responsibility to ensure that it benefits society as a whole.

Think about the knowledge transfer between a professor and a student. Regardless of their cognitive abilities and their skillsets, it is difficult or even impossible to get a full transfer of knowledge between the two (the professor and the student). This is because the knowledge transfer process is dependent on several factors including the amount of time the professor and the student spend together and the pedagogical techniques in use. For humans, the complexity of transfer of knowledge increases with the complexity of the knowledge to be transferred. This is, however, not the case with AI.

AI is reforming various industries, including internal communication within companies, organisations, and institutions. Getchell et al. (2022) emphasise that AI technology is gaining popularity in the business world due to its various advantages. On the one hand, the adoption of AI-powered communication tools can enhance the speed, accuracy, and efficiency of communication within organisations. Fountaine et al. (2019) suggest that AI can help companies analyse and interpret large volumes of data, providing valuable insights into communication patterns, employee engagement, and organisational performance. According to Olan et al. (2022), incorporating AI into internal communication can have significant benefits for organisations. The authors conducted a study on the role of AI in knowledge sharing and found that it can lead to faster and more accurate communication, automation of routine tasks, and improved organisational performance.

On the other hand, the adoption of AI in internal communication also presents some challenges. George et al. (2023) suggest that the use of AI-powered communication

tools may lead to concerns around data privacy and security. As AI systems collect and analyse large volumes of data, there is a risk that sensitive information could be compromised, potentially leading to reputational damage for a company, institution, or organisation. There are worries that AI will result in job displacement, loss of human touch, and privacy concerns (Siau & Wang, 2018), especially when it comes to sensitive data. Furthermore, Gunkel (2012) highlights the potential for AI to enhance communication processes while also posing challenges such as biased algorithms and the risk of technology replacing human interaction.

Farhi et al. (2022) identified various advantages of AI, including enhancing communication effectiveness, reducing communication gaps, and facilitating collaboration. However, they also recognised that AI implementation requires a clear strategy, ethical considerations, and employee readiness to adapt to new technologies.

Despite the concerns, AI has made communication more accessible in several ways, from virtual assistants and Chatbots to language translation and personalised communications. By breaking down language barriers, improving accessibility, and automating routine tasks, AI is helping to create a more connected and efficient world. The question that remains is whether or not effective communication still means what traditional definitions provided before the advent of AI, and whether or not humans will still be able to communicate effectively amidst the AI functions.

2. Effective Communication and Social Media.

Social media is a collective term for websites and applications that focus on communication, community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. This implies that social media are interactive technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, interests, and other forms of expression through virtual communities and networks. More than 4.7 billion people around the world use social media. In 2022, the number of social media users worldwide grew by 137 million, or about 3% (Data Portal, 2022).

According to Dijck (2013), the term social in regard to media suggests that platforms are user-centric and enable communal activity. As such, social media can be viewed as online facilitators or enhancers of human networks, that is, webs of individuals who enhance social connectivity. Users usually access social media services through web-based apps on desktops or download services that offer social media functionality to their mobile devices (e.g., smartphones and tablets). As users engage with these electronic services, they create highly interactive platforms in which individuals, communities, and organisations can share, co-create, discuss, participate, and modify user-generated or self-curated content posted online (Schivinski et al. (2020); Boyd & Ellison (2007); Kietzmann & Hermkens (2011)).

Additionally, social media are used to document memories, learn about and explore things, advertise oneself, and form friendships along with the growth of ideas from the creation of blogs, podcasts, videos, and gaming sites (Schurgin & Clarke-Pearson (2011). This changing relationship between humans and technology, according to Dennis (2017), is the focus of the emerging field of technological self-studies.

The rapid growth of Web 2.0 technologies has drastically changed the attitudes and habits of end users when using the internet (Selwyn, 2012). This digital revolution is taking up more and more space in several areas of everyday life. Social media has become a dynamic and convivial space, enabling conversations between online users, groups or virtual communities (Camilleri, 2020), leading to the development of many-to-many relationships.

Effective communication is the cornerstone of any successful interaction, be it in the physical or digital world. In light of altercations on social media, the principle of effective communication plays a crucial role in reducing conflicts and promoting healthy discourse. According to Busuyi et al (2020) the use of social media can lead to positive outcomes and enhanced communication skills if utilised appropriately. It is therefore necessary to observe the principles of effective communication during social media interactions.

The first principle of effective communication is clarity. It is essential to express oneself clearly and concisely to avoid misinterpretation and misunderstandings. On social media, where messages can be easily taken out of context, being clear in one's communication becomes even more imperative. When engaging in online discussions or debates, it is vital to stay on topic and avoid making sweeping statements that may be misconstrued (Ekanjume 2011).

Another crucial principle of effective communication is active listening, which means paying attention to the words of the other person and trying to understand their point of view. It involves asking clarifying questions, paraphrasing the other person's statements, and acknowledging their feelings. When communicating on social media, active listening can be challenging, as it is easy to get caught up in one's own thoughts and emotions. However, taking time to listen to other people's opinions and perspectives can lead to a more productive and respectful discussion on social media.

Respect is another key principle of effective communication. It is important to treat others with respect, even if we disagree with their opinions (Ekanjume, 2012). Name-calling, personal attacks, and other forms of disrespectful behaviour only serve to escalate conflicts and make productive communication impossible. It is important to remember that the people we are engaging with on social media are real individuals with their own thoughts and feelings. Therefore, it is important to maintain a respectful tone and avoid making assumptions about the other person's intentions or beliefs.

In addition to clarity, active listening, and respect, effective communication also requires empathy, which means putting oneself in the other person's shoes and trying to understand their feelings and motivations. It involves acknowledging that everyone has their own unique experiences and perspectives that shape their beliefs and opinions. When communicating on social media, it can be easy to dismiss someone's point of view as misguided or ignorant. However, taking the time to understand why someone holds a particular belief can lead to a more constructive conversation.

Finally, effective communication requires flexibility which is the act of being willing to adjust one's communication style based on the needs of the situation. On social media, this might mean recognising when a discussion has become unproductive and choosing to disengage, or recognising when someone else's opinion has merit and being open to changing one's own perspective. Being flexible in one's communication style can help prevent conflicts from escalating and can lead to more meaningful and productive discussions.

Therefore, observing the principles of effective communication is crucial when engaging in discussions on social media. By being clear, actively listening, showing respect, being empathetic, and being flexible, we can promote healthy discourse and prevent conflicts from escalating. Effective communication is not always easy, especially in the fast-paced and often anonymous world of social media. However, by striving to communicate effectively, we can help create a more respectful and productive online community.

2.3 What Effective Communication SHOULD Mean

Effective communication means that the ideas and concepts of an individual are being heard and people are acting upon them. It also means that an individual is able to listen, understand, and take action on what other people say (Ekanjume, 2012). The exchange of information is only one aspect of effective communication. Understanding the motivations and feelings that underlie the information is important.

It seems obvious that good communication would come naturally. But far too frequently, when we try to interact with others, something goes wrong. Misunderstandings, dissatisfaction, and disagreements happen when we say one thing and the other person hears something different.

The hard part about understanding what effective communication means is that people often do not know that they are not conversing or communicating clearly. It is

therefore, important for individuals to identify and eliminate possible communication-bad habits, so that they better connect with others and convey their meaning in a clear manner.

Today, effective communication is more difficult than in the past because there are so many more ways to connect. People think that getting their point across would be easier, but that is not the case. This makes it crucial to develop effective communication skills to ensure others understand what we are trying to say.

With text messages, emails, instant messages, Slacks, Teams, and cellular phones, the options to communicate are overwhelming. To keep up with and respond to so many sources complicates the effective communication process. In addition, the habit of multi-tasking has completely derailed good listening skills as people pay attention far less while trying to do more than one thing.

With so many more choices of how to effectively communicate, it is important that people choose words carefully because things can get easily misinterpreted. Once you are unclear about a message, be sure to ask for clarification to avoid any confusion. For constant effective communication, people always have to stay engaged and make sure to listen in order to understand others. Whether a message is sent face-to-face, over the phone, or through an email, slack, or text message, each of these methods can lead to miscommunications of varying degrees. Effective communication is essential for conveying a message, and strong listening skills are required for understanding that message.

When communication is face-to-face, the receiver can see the sender's facial expressions and body language, which increases effective communication. He or she can also hear the tone of the sender's voice. This gives more context to the conversation. It also allows the sender to determine whether the message has been received as intended by reading the recipient's facial expression. All the same, the positives of face-to-face communication do not eliminate the negatives.

Texts, emails or slack messages lack a great deal of the context we get from visuals (body language, facial expressions) and vocals (tone of voice). The person reading a message sent in any of these forms will read it in their own tone of voice, which may or may not be what the sender intended.

There are many ways a message can be misunderstood or misinterpreted. Each person enters a conversation with their own filters, through which they send and receive messages. Our filters are affected by many factors, such as our education, our culture, our background, our biases, our knowledge of the topic, and our mood. Thus, these can affect how the message is interpreted.

How can you ensure your message is received the way you intended?

The first step to effective communication is to make sure you are being as clear as possible. You should plan your message in advance, especially if the conversation is a significant one. Ask yourself, what outcome am I trying to achieve? When the conversation is over, what do I want the other person to think, feel, or do? The clearer your intentions are, the more likely you are to achieve your goal of effective communication.

The next step toward effective communication, is to check for understanding. There are a number of ways to accomplish this. The simplest is to ask. "Was I clear?" "What do you think about what I said?", "Do you have any questions?" This is not 100% effective, because sometimes the receiver might "think" they understand, but still get it wrong. However, it helps to ask such questions.

With in-person communication, it is important to also keep an eye out for cues in people's body language and facial expressions. For instance, if there is tension between the eyebrows, that could mean that the listener is confused or maybe upset. The different body language will provide cues of whether or not the communication is being effective.

Communicating effectively requires that the speaker provides context from the onset. Too often people jump into a conversation mid-thought. For instance, their morning might have been filled with nothing but thoughts about what they wanted to talk about. That means the context is crystal clear to them. The listener(s), however, may have been thinking about something entirely different, and may take a bit of time getting up to speed. For communication to be effective, the speaker has to give a bit of background on what s/he will discuss at the beginning of the conversation.

But, of course, sending the message is only half the battle. Receiving the message is equally important. So, what can you do to be the best listener?

First of all, the listener should be able to remove all distractions (phone, computer, and slack notifications) during a conversation. Listeners should always clear their minds of other issues. They should listen to understand, and ask questions to confirm understanding and ensure effective communication.

The job of a listener is to be 100% present, which is not as easy as it sounds. We are humans and it is almost impossible to be 100% present. Most often while listening to someone, many issues cross our minds and we stop listening as effectively as we should. In addition, the habit of multi-tasking has completely derailed effective communication skills and good listening skills as people pay attention far less while trying to do more than one thing. For instance, if an individual is reading emails while listening on the phone, it is obvious that s/he will miss important details. It may feel like it is more efficient to multitask, but in actual fact it is not when it comes to effective communication because the best we can do is to rapidly process between the other task and the conversation.

With so many more choices of how to communicate, it is important for people to choose words carefully because things can get easily misinterpreted. If someone is unclear about a message, be sure to ask for clarification to avoid any confusion. As

stated earlier, one of the traits of effective communication is staying engaged and making sure you listen to fully understand.

3. COMMUNICATION AND TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE IN UNIVERSITIES

Communication is a fundamental responsibility of institutions of higher learning, to connect, to engage and actively participate in the public sphere as a reliable and unbiased source of information (Knobel, 2022). As well, universities must improve internal and external communication strategies. They must engage the community with broader institutional goals and cultivate in students and staff, the capacity to examine information critically. They must actively contribute to social recognition of neutral and evidence-based knowledge, informing the public and private sectors.

On this score, universities are vicariously responsible for the advancement cause in communities (Fonlon, 1987). The genuine intellectual ought to view society ceaselessly with a critical eye, relentlessly challenging the status quo and the establishment with the aim of providing empirical evidence on aspects that need a change in the Law, History, Healthcare, Education, the Military, foreign affairs and nationhood, thereby aspiring to create transformational change.

3.1 What Transformational Change is

Transformational change occurs in response to, or in anticipation of, major irreversible changes in an environment, technology, global or local policies. Such was the abolition of the slave trade in the late Nineteen Century, or women suffrage at different times in nations, or the current fight to stop the climate disaster. These deep changes often are associated with significant revision of strategy, which in turn may require modifying internal structures and processes as well as its corporate culture to support the new direction (Cummings and Worley, 2009).

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, higher-education operating models were under tremendous pressure. COVID-19 came to exacerbate the pressures that higher education faces. Universities are experiencing significant declines in tuition and auxiliary revenues as well as increasing budget shortfalls. Student enrollment has greatly shrunk and these institutions are suffocating under underlying structural concerns created by factors such as discrimination (as to ethnicity, gender and disability), financial constraints, and undue political influence in the academic space, just to mention a few.

Kurshan (2020), prescribes Disruptive Transformation, as a way to change higher education. This refers to a transformation approach that enables institutions to operate more flexibly and resiliently in the long term as to support the emergence of institutions on a stronger footing from today's challenges and brace for those of the future. To achieve this goal, higher education institutions need a total commitment to innovative digital transformation, and this will require patient, careful work with staff, students and other stakeholders if new higher education models are to take root and thrive.

Digital technologies will transform how services are developed and delivered, including communication; and funding models that will allow both service providers and learners to balance their budgets. They are occasioning universities to adopt remote and online training, create innovative learning spaces where learning is experimented, and transforming old-fashioned transcripts into block chain technology to ensure the content is understandable, reliable, controllable, and scalable. These solutions will take time to develop, and even longer to show a payoff. However, some institutions are already developing initiatives better suited to the long-term needs of students in the post-pandemic normal (Kurshan, 2020). The success of such initiatives will rely mostly on how effectively they are communicated to the various stakeholders. Hence, effective communication and transformation go hand in hand.

3.2 The need for Effective Communication in Universities

As humans, we are drawn to one another and communicate with each other in various capacities. There are several roles that each individual fills on a daily basis, depending on the context of an interaction. What every interaction has in common is the need for clear and effective communication. There are several elements that are involved in creating and maintaining lasting and genuine relationships through communication, two of which are recognising body language cues and using effective listening skills. In correctly making use of these elements, one can see an improvement in the quality of social interactions, as well as increased confidence in engaging with others in a social capacity. These benefits can be essential tools in a work environment and building lasting relationships.

Communication within universities is very important in that it helps in establishing trust with all stakeholders (especially the student and staff) and ensuring the solidity of the institution's reputation. It goes without saying that good communication is essential for any learning environment, this includes remote or hybrid situations. As more universities are moving to a fluid learning platform with some learners attending in person and others in an online environment, the universities themselves have become a platform for outreach, engagement, and of course, learning. Like any business, universities have customers who are the students. Mapping the student's journey across interactions is important to ascertain how well the university is meeting the needs of all students. Using complex information technology such as networks, print and document management systems, predictive analytics, and data analysis can help universities to better understand the needs of student and how to communicate effectively. Good communication helps drive core strategies such as student retention and helps integrate services for consistent quality and a better educational experience.

Within the university, communication is key to reaching goals successfully. It is important to help employees understand the tasks of the job and how work is completed. Throughout the university, communication occurs and flows in different ways when employees in different hierarchical levels interact. Communication can flow

upward to management, downward to employees, diagonal to employees at different levels, and horizontal across the same levels. In the university setting, we can have horizontal fertilization between staff, between students, and between management. Similarly, we can have vertical fertilization between staff, students, and university management.

3.2.1 Horizontal Fertilization/Communication

Horizontal communication refers to the interactions that occur between individuals who work or engage at the same hierarchical level. Also known as lateral communication, this type of communication includes employees who work together in the same area, as well as employees who work in different departments but at the same level. According to Postmes, (2003), horizontal communication is both task-related and informal and occurs between people on an equal footing in the hierarchy. In the university setting, this will extend to students at different levels. Horizontal communication is commonly used when employees or peers collaborate on projects. This type of communication is important in universities in facilitating efficiency in the workflow. Having clear communication within the team can help to reach university goals effectively.

Horizontal communication also allows the flow of information to move more easily between team members, departments, and divisions, regardless of the hierarchical level in the staff of the university. In the horizontal form of communication, the free flow of messages promotes a less formal communication structure, allowing employees to exchange ideas and strategies with greater independence. In companies that practice horizontal communication, lower-level employees can communicate directly to implement top-level decisions better.

Furthermore, horizontal or Lateral communication channels can inspire teamwork. Teamwork is one of the chief advantages of horizontal communication. Co-workers speak to, meet with, and ideate alongside people from different departments, allowing them to develop problem-solving strategies more easily. Therefore, universities can

use this form of communication to improve problem-solving skills among staff and students, boosts creativity in the institution, coordinate teams and tasks easily, empower staff and students, and boosts transparency.

In addition, there is the creation of healthier workspaces. This communication process can promote a healthier work environment. Downward communication can make employees feel stuck in their roles, but lateral communication offers more flexibility and equality in the office. This can lead to stronger institutional morale and individual job satisfaction. Communication flows more quickly with horizontal communication.

Despite the advantages of horizontal communication, it has some drawbacks and this is why larger companies generally do not use this more informal communication strategy. When employees communicate with different departments, it can be more challenging for management to know or predict who is strategising with whom and when. Horizontal communication without explicit strategies or best-use practices can lead to an unruly system — and one in which there is a lack of discipline in how co-workers behave together or report to their superiors. If two departments do not get along, lateral communication will be useless. There must be goodwill between workers of different departments for this communication strategy to be effective.

Therefore, in order to maximize the horizontal communication technique for efficiency and workplace wellness, universities should share information freely. This will promote teamwork and a university-wide sense of unity, and decrease misunderstandings because the same information is shared with everyone.

3.2.2. Vertical Fertilization or Communication

As the name suggests, vertical communication follows a linear system where information flows from one person to the next based on their titles. This type of communication is mostly reserved for sensitive information or if a university follows a hierarchical structure. Vertical communication is sharing information hierarchically — from top to bottom or bottom to top. This includes for instance Senior management

sharing information like budgets, objectives, feedback, and goals with middle managers, who then share this with their teams. Decisions are made at the top, then the results and outcomes are filtered down. It could also include the flow of information the other way round, where for instance a team works together on a project, then reports back to the manager, sharing progress, difficulties, and improvements. The manager passes this information on to the people at the top. They then use this to make decisions, and the information filters back down again. As Bartels et al. (2010) put it, the more positively employees assess the vertical communication that occurs within their organisation, the more strongly they will identify with their organisation.

Therefore, vertical communication can be both downward or upward—depending on the type of information. This type of communication is mostly in a written format—emails, reports or memos—to keep track of the information. However, spoken vertical communication is also a significant aspect because it is a more direct form of conveying ideas or messages.

Vertical communication is good when dealing with sensitive information. When the information is of a sensitive nature, it is better to first share it with senior management than the entire university. For instance, it may be related to new investments, employee oversights or performance reports. In addition, vertical communication helps maintain relationships and mutual respect in the workplace. It makes people aware of the need to go through their team leaders before communicating with their managers. This way the team leader will appreciate the initiative of the members, which in turn will lead to the strengthening of rapport between the parties. Also, it helps in creating an error-free work, since reports go through various hierarchy for scrutiny, and even editing and proofreading before final approval. This helps universities to stay on track and avoid setbacks.

Furthermore, with vertical fertilization, communication channels are well-defined and strong, leading to established authority and accountability. Decisions are often

reached faster because there is less discussion involved, and individuals know who to contact to discuss grievances.

Despite the positive aspects, vertical communication may cause employees to start sleeping on work quality with the belief that it will be reviewed by others in the hierarchy before being finalised. This could lead to complacency in the workplace where employees stop making extra effort and rather rely on others to take care of their tasks. In addition, it can be subject to misinterpretations. Messages that are shared verbally are open to different interpretations. The way the sender moves, speaks and acts can impact the way the message is received. This can lead to confusion, misinterpretation and a lapse in judgment. Also, vertical fertilization sometimes leaves institutions with disgruntled employees. Oftentimes, employees at the lower level feel left-out or overlooked because of a hierarchical flow of communication. They may want to share their ideas with senior management but the layers of authority may end up discouraging them.

Implementing a system to track vertical communication can help universities reap some benefits. Keeping a check on how information is being shared internally is important for learning and development. It can have a significant impact on universities that overlook the need to monitor the authenticity of communication.

It goes without saying that universities need to communicate effectively. According to Chen and Wei (2020) vertical communication is positively related to leader-member exchange while horizontal communication is positively related to team-member exchange, and both are positively related to employee performance. However, every institution is different, and therefore the form of communication may also differ from one university to another. While one university may embrace horizontal communication structures based on its vision, mission, culture, and other variables, it may not be the best choice for another institution. Universities should choose the method that works with their values, and not against them. Most often, universities embrace a blend of both, for effective management.

4. SOCIAL MEDIA AND GLOBAL COMMUNICATION

Many scholars have defined what global communication is all about. According to Castells (2009), global communication refers to the flow of information, ideas, and cultural expressions among different societies and regions of the world. For Lull (2014) global communication involves the transmission of messages, information, and ideas between people and organisations in different parts of the world. Based on these definitions, one can safely define global communication as the act of transferring information, ideas, and messages between individuals or groups in a nature that is worldwide or international.

One of the most important aspects of global communication is its function in encouraging cultural interchange and understanding. It enables individuals from all over the world to learn about each other's cultures, values, and ways of life, fostering mutual respect and understanding. Global communication has also aided in the expansion of education by allowing for the global sharing of knowledge and resources.

4.1. Evolution of Global Communication

We live in times of great change and transformation. The development of communication technology and numerous social and cultural revolutions over the last decades have been globalizing the world into a closely interconnected society. Two major trends account for the emergence of globalization in human society: technology development and economic transformation.

Historically, global communication may be traced back to the dawn of human civilization, when individuals exchanged information using various means of communication such as gestures, signs, and writing (McChesney, 2013). In the 15th century, the printing press transformed worldwide communication by making it feasible to mass-produce books and other written materials, making information more freely available. The invention of the telegraph in the nineteenth century was a watershed moment in the history of global communication because it facilitated the speedy transmission of messages over large distances. The emergence of radio and

television in the twentieth century was also critical in the history of global communication, as they enabled individuals to transmit and receive information in real-time (McChesney, 2013).

The rapid development of communication technologies over the past century has fundamentally transformed human society by linking every part of the world into an interconnected network. The introduction of telegraph in 1844 launched the first steps of change on the planet. This was followed by the development of the telephone system by Alexander Graham Bell in 1875, and the successful installment of submarine telephone cable in 1956. In 1960, the first telecommunications satellite was introduced, and by 1977 the fiber optic communications system was use. Then came recent electronic mail systems such as e-mail, bulletin boards, computer conferencing, and web pages, and finally the development of modern communication technologies that have given rise to various social media platforms. The advancements have caused people with different cultural backgrounds around the world to be interconnected locally, regionally, and globally for education, business, travel, and social interactions. Communication technology development has made globalization inevitable and irreversible (Eichengreen, 1999).

The internet makes the most significant contribution to the global interconnectivity. With the extensive use of Web 2.0 interphases, internet has blurred the line between mass and interpersonal communication and enables both personal and public messages to flow across national boundaries faster and more easily by providing an opportunity for acquainted and unacquainted individuals to communicate on a regular basis (Larson, 2000). It has been absorbed into our daily activities and integrated into the routines and structure of domestic life. The transformation of physical settings and social situations due to the usage of internet not only redefines the concepts of space and time, but also creates a global town square in which people can enjoy the freedom of expressions.

The trend of globalization, formed by the rapid technology development is ceaselessly moving into the human society in waves. And so today, increasing interconnectivity is creating corresponding global interdependence among people and societies.

4.2 Social Media Recontextualising Global Communication

The importance of social media in communication is a constant topic of discussion. Online communication has brought information to people and audiences that previously could not be reached. It has increased awareness among people about what is happening in other parts of the world. Social media is a powerful communications medium, with widespread influence over cities as well as remote areas, and has changed the way people communicate (Ekanjume-Ilongo and Adesanmi, 2019).

Social media has taken over several sectors including the business sphere, the advertising sphere and now, the education sector. It has had a long-lasting impact on the way people communicate and has now become an integral part of people's lives. For instance, WhatsApp has redefined the culture of IMs (instant messaging) and taken it to a whole new level. Today, you can text anyone across the globe as long as you have an internet connection. This transformation has not only been brought about by WhatsApp but also Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram, etc. Movements, advertisements, and products are all being broadcasted on social media platforms, thanks to the increase in the number of social media users. Today, businesses rely on social media to create brand awareness as well as to promote and sell their products. It allows organisations to reach customers, irrespective of geographical boundaries. The internet has facilitated a resource to humanity that has unfathomable reach and benefits.

Social media has a great influence in the way we communicate in that everything, including news, is practically just a click away. The ease of access that social media provides has taken over the traditional methods of reading news, communicating, and even studying. Education too has incorporated forums and social media chat rooms to

increase interactivity among students and staff, conduct webinars and promote events and courses.

Social media influence has given rise to a different genre of communication, where conversations are quick and information is easily relayed (Ekanjume and Kolobe, 2023). Due to its widespread impact, employers are seeking professionals who are well-versed in social media platforms to take on important roles within their organisations.

Global communication has undergone a profound upheaval as a result of the emergence of social media. The days of just being able to interact with individuals from other regions of the world through traditional means of communication like letters and phone calls are long gone. We now have access to a wide range of social media platforms and technology, which enable us to instantaneously and simply connect with anyone, wherever in the world. The development of social media has been influenced by a wide range of technologies and platforms, making it a rich and diversified area. These new technologies, which range from the telegraph to virtual reality, have had a profound effect on society and will continue to influence how we interact and receive information in the future.

Furthermore, the proliferation of social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram in recent years has significantly changed how individuals communicate and exchange information (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Additionally, these platforms have altered how companies and organisations interact with their clients and the general public. In effect, mobile apps have significantly changed how people get information and interact with one another (Lenhart, 2015). These applications have become a vital part of many people's daily lives since they enable users to stay connected and informed at all times.

More recently, the use of virtual reality technology in everything from entertainment and gaming to education and training is gaining popularity (McGrath, 2018). This

technology can completely change how we interact with the world around us by enabling users to experience realistic, immersive simulations (Chen, 2016).

In the last 25 years, the traditional communication medium has slowly faded from our memories. Do you remember when we used to message each other using the hundred-SMS-per-day scheme? The fear of losing out on important information and not having any other means to message made each text more meaningful. But those days are long gone. No restrictions on the quantity of SMS exist today, nor restrictions on the number of texts. We no longer have to worry about an incorrect message because today there are many ways to delete or edit messages. In less than a generation, social media has evolved from direct electronic information exchange, to virtual gathering place, to retail platform, and to a vital 21st-century marketing tool.

The introduction of smartphones and other mobile devices for digital communication means that social media platforms are now in the palms of the users at any time and practically any place. Today, there are a tremendous variety of social networking sites, and many of them can be linked to allow cross-posting. This creates an environment where users can reach the maximum number of people without sacrificing the intimacy of person-to-person communication.

Based on the foregoing discussions, one can say that the evolution of social media has been fueled by the human impulse to communicate and by advances in digital technology, which in turn has transformed global communication. It is a story about establishing and nurturing personal connections at scale. Social Media, as we see today, has taken a different shape than before. It has grown to become a tale of scaled-up interpersonal connections. Universities are therefore called to embrace this new phenomenon in order to be more productive, visible, and relevant in this changing world of technology.

5. SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN UNIVERSITIES

Strategic communication is a specialised approach to distributing and receiving information. It means communicating the best message, through the correct channels, to the right people, at the right time and using feedback from this process to stay focused on the goals of the institution or organisation. It is a method of intentionally delivering calculated and purposeful content. This involves planned, tactical forethought and implementation, as well as correct positioning around the mission of the institution. This is supported by Hallahan et al (2007) who opine that although the specific activities of institutions and organisations can be conceptualised in various ways, all of these require an organisation to communicate purposefully in order to advance its mission. This is the essence of strategic communication. It further implies that people will be engaged in deliberate communication practice on behalf of their organisations and institutions.

This organised practice enables the best message, be it internal or external, to be communicated, and means feedback can be monitored against clear-cut organisational and communication-targeted goals. Strategic communication provides consistent, relevant information within a company and externally to all stakeholders.

Communication is no longer merely a transmission of information. With the development of strategic communication systems, effective communication is viewed as a critical organisational management tool. With the onset of the digital revolution, there are now numerous ways to message and communicate, be it to one person or thousands of people.

5.1 Strategic Communication in Universities

The concept of strategy in communication englobes a broader implication of information sharing. Strategy would include a legal framework within which communication is effected. The sub-components would include statutes (e.g. laws and rules that govern communication...) and procedures (e.g. guidelines prescribed by

internal rules ...). Strategy also connotes the specific choices made and the underlying reasons for these choices during information sharing (e.g. during a strike action, it could be easier to reach out to the wider student body via social media platform....).

The term strategic is associated with power and decision making. When used in conjunction with communication, strategic implies that communication practice is a management function. Nowadays, strategic communication, or the practice of using communication in a strategic way to achieve goals, is being used for both internal and external exchanges. Universities have several stakeholders and to reach out to each effectively, they need to be intentionally strategic. Strategic communication recognises that purposeful influence is the fundamental goal of information exchanges by institutions.

It is no secret that important changes in public communication are being driven by technology and by media economics. Technology is converging communications channels. With the proliferation of social media platforms comes a flood of messages sent on a daily basis to various individuals on different devices. It is therefore necessary and useful for messages from universities to be strategic. Social media is changing how organisations are communicating with their stakeholders. In order to ensure a positive image perception among its different stakeholders, there is a need for universities to have effective and coordinated communication.

The evolving social aim of the university has led to the emergence of new classes of university stakeholders. Some of these include internal (students and staff), external (governing entities, clientele, suppliers, communities, joint venture partners), and third parties (AI, donors, government regulators, non-governmental regulators, financial intermediaries (Benneworth & Jongbloed, 2010)). Recognising this growing list of stakeholders and opportunities for engagement (Chapleo & Simms, 2010), this lecture encourages African universities to explore strategic communication with stakeholders through various channels, and especially that universities should consider

social media as a vehicle for real-time conversation and engagement with stakeholders.

Strategic communication processes help universities to effectively communicate and engage with key audiences by distributing compelling and consistent messages. The ideal outcome of such communication promotes the achievement of specific goals and objectives. It aids universities to establish and maintain strong relationships with key participants, builds trust in the workplace, and promotes transparency and accountability. Similarly, it can be used to guide internal communication advantageously within the university. This can include building support for a particular policy or initiative, shaping public opinion, or managing a crisis.

Not only does effective strategic communication make messages visible to specific audiences, it also builds and sustains strong relationships with customers, promoting reliability, responsibility and accountability. Internally, clear, targeted messaging used to uphold and achieve company goals has a positive effect on employee engagement. It can prevent the circulation of erroneous information and empower employees to work from and maintain a single source of truth, and this is imperative for consistent, reliable messaging. There is therefore a need for every university to have a strategic communications plan.

An effective internal strategic communications process also provides the potential for steady, consistent expression of the mission and vision of the university and provides the tools for employees to do this. When leaders and employees communicate around the goals of the university, this exposes the best thinking.

In a collaborative workspace, where quality communication flows freely, employees feel engaged, valued, and secure. Externally, customer satisfaction is heightened by tailored communications and services provided by an engaged employee. Quality communication is the backbone of a healthy university culture. Employees are engaged, productivity is increased, and employee turnover reduced. All these contribute to a healthy bottom line.

To utilise the power that effective, strategic communication brings to a university, intranets are key. These play a large part in helping to engage employees across the institution regardless of their role, department or location. Creative communication through videos, contests, polls, social posts and others, encourages two-way communication and engagement. By utilising an intranet, a university's strategic communication plan can increase employee engagement, and this ultimately contributes to the success of the university.

All in all, a well-planned strategic communications strategy is a critical part of the success of any university. Once in place, universities will be able to monitor the developments around targeted communications and use the feedback to adapt and grow to impact progress.

5.2 Social Media and Transformational Change in Universities

Observers have noted a wide range of positive and negative impacts that come with the use of social media. One of the main advantages of social media is that it can help to improve an individual's sense of connectedness with real or online communities and can be an effective communication (or marketing) tool for corporations, institutions, entrepreneurs, non-profit organisations, advocacy groups, political parties, and governments.

The domination of Web 2.0 technologies and social media has led Internet users to encounter a vast amount of online exposure, and one of the most important is social networking. Social networking through online media can be understood as a variety of digital sources of information that are created, initiated, circulated, and consumed by Internet users as a way to educate one another about products, brands, services, personalities and issues (Chauhan and Pillai 2013). Universities can thus leverage social media for transformational change and educate the world on their offerings and services.

Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have drastically enlarged the reach and scope of communication, allowing people all over the world to connect and share information (Kim & Lee, 2018). This has made it simpler for people to stay in touch with friends and family members who live far away, as well as with people who share common interests. Thus, universities can leverage on such platforms to build a community based on their programmes, products, and services. By being involved with the right communities, or making a community out of its offerings, a university can create the most loyal of stakeholders.

Another way that social media technologies can help universities is by allowing for real-time communication. Messaging apps like WhatsApp, WeChat, and others have enabled users to interact in real-time, regardless of their location (Chen et al., 2019). This has made it easier for people to communicate with one another and coordinate plans and activities. Universities are now able to communicate with peers around the globe and learn from each other.

Social media can also be utilised by universities to disseminate information and news globally. Many individuals now rely on social networking platforms and messaging applications for information, particularly about current events and news (Patel & Lee, 2016). This has made it easier for people to keep informed about what is going on around the globe and to participate in critical discussions. Almost all news channels have an internet and mobile version through which viewers and listeners can tune in to get news on the go and even contribute to the news by submitting eyewitness reports, thereby drastically upturning the landscape of global news and information dissemination.

Universities can equally utilise social media to hold more and more virtual events and gatherings, in addition to encouraging cultural exchange. People can now engage in events and debates from anywhere in the world thanks to social media platforms and messaging apps (Kim & Lee, 2018). Staff and students can now attend meetings, seminars, workshops, and conferences without having to travel, saving time and

money. Google Meet, Zoom, loom, Lighthall, Clubhouse, skype, etc., are a few examples of platforms that epitomize the harnessing of social media for meetings, conferences, events, and global congregation purposes, for the betterment of universities and other organisations.

Universities can use social networking profiles to boost and direct inbound traffic to their websites. They can achieve this, for example, by adding inspiring visuals, using plugins and shareable social media buttons, or encouraging inbound linking. Almost 75% of the world industries say they have used social media to drive traffic into their websites. It is indeed an ideal way to create brand awareness and visibility, and stay in contact with customers. Universities should therefore do the same and increase their website traffic, and thus visibility.

In addition, universities can make use of social media to develop and maintain professional networks. Thanks to social media platforms and messaging apps such as LinkedIn, university staff can now easily communicate with colleagues and peers from all over the world. This has helped them to broaden their professional networks and stay in touch with others who can help them advance in their careers.

Social media platforms and messaging apps have made it simpler for people to interact in their native languages, even if they do not speak the same language (Ekanjume and Kolobe, 2023). Apps like google translate, Duolingo, and Speaky have made it easy to translate and learn new languages, and this has enabled people all over the world to communicate and exchange ideas and information. Universities can leverage this to market their offerings and services in different languages to reach diverse groups of people.

A good way of leveraging social media is for universities to see it as a means of promoting international collaboration and cooperation. Staff from universities around the world can now collaborate on projects and efforts thanks to social media platforms and chat apps (Zhang et al., 2021). This has enabled individuals to collaborate and exchange resources on a worldwide scale. Project management has been immensely

improved and globalised with social media. Project management Software and apps like Zoho Projects, Monday.com, GitHub, slack, Jira board, Trello, team viewer, etc. fall under this category. Universities should be able to take advantage of these platforms to increase collaboration and cooperation across the globe.

E-learning and distance education can also be facilitated by social media technologies, which allow students from all over the world to access educational resources and participate in classes remotely (Zhao et al., 2021). Students can now access educational opportunities and complete their studies and get certified, even if they are unable to attend traditional in-person classes. Udacity, Udemy, Allison.com, Edx, LinkedIn Learning, Class Central, MaterClass and Coursera are examples of E-learning social media platforms. This was largely leveraged during the Covid-19 pandemic across the world, when many cities were on lockdown, and people could not attend school or take classes physically. Social media saved the day, as universities, colleges, secondary schools and even primary schools across the world used it to continue to run their programmes, deliver lectures, and administer exams, tests, and assignments. Universities are encouraged to leverage social media in this area.

Social media platforms can also help researchers from all around the world to collaborate and communicate their discoveries, facilitating the interchange of scientific and technological knowledge (Duan et al., 2019). The world of empirical, scientific, and theoretical research has been streamlined and compressed into a single ecosystem through the use of social media technologies. Researchers all over the world can now easily find trends, experts, new voices, data, findings, and recommendations in their fields of research and specialisation, as well as collaborate with their peers from different countries. Years of research work from across the globe can now be easily collated, catalogued, put in an e-library and accessed from anywhere by any interested researcher. Journal publication, peer review, gatekeeping and standardisation have also been made easy. Intellectual fraud and theft in research have been curbed and checked, using social media platforms and technology, enabling researchers to build on one another's work ethically and push the boundaries of

scientific understanding. Some examples of these Platforms and technologies are Google Scholar, Academia.edu, Researchgate, PubMed, Turnitin, Grammarly, Zotero, Scite, Research Rabbit, Jstor, Google Books, Digital Commons Network, Science.gov, Worldcat, Rdiscovery, etc.

In a nutshell, this lecture advocates that social media can be leveraged in numerous ways for transformational change in universities. From facilitating language translation and virtual exchange programmes to promoting and facilitating international research collaborations and business development, social media technologies have greatly expanded the reach and scope of communication, allowing people from different parts of the world to connect and exchange ideas and information. These technologies have also played a significant role in promoting cultural exchange and understanding, fostering a greater appreciation of other cultures and contributing to a more connected and globalised world. Overall, social media technologies have greatly enhanced the ability of people to communicate with each other on a global scale and have played a vital role in facilitating global communication, and still have the potential to do even more.

6. THE CASE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN LESOTHO

There is a fundamental shift in the education system whereby the learning environment is becoming decentralised, shifting from instructor and institution to one where learners direct their own learning, building knowledge by engaging in networks away from the formal setting and finding their own information (Delello, McWhorter & Camp, 2015). Kitchakarn (2016), argues that Facebook is a learning platform that makes it possible for students to exchange ideas, enable self-study, give comments, and submit the assignments in order to improve their grammar knowledge and writing ability. Similarly, Delello et al, (2015) are of the view that Twitter does not only increase students' engagement and improve their grades, but also increases collaboration with peers and instructors for deeper interactive associates. The authors

go on to say that using Twitter in a classroom environment permits student interaction to be fast and natural, facilitates social presence, sustains discussions after the semester, and permits for the construction of meaning over communication. Generally, students are of the view that Twitter assists them to appreciate and acquire course material and attained competency in the subject matter, and that they can use twitter to find future employment.

One of the advantages of using social media as an academic tool is its viral marketing which comes with the voluntary sharing of information between users. YouTube, for example, offers an opportunity for student-generated media and viral advertising (Delello et al. 2015).

The use of social media by students for academic purpose is also positively affected by the user-friendliness it is associated with, as compared to complex e-learning sites. Due to this factor, social media has a popularity for educational purposes, and contribution to group communication (Balakrishnan, Teoh, Pourshafie & Liew, 2017). It can improve communication not only between students and teachers but also between students. The latter can use social networks to talk to each other about upcoming assignments or exams. They can get details from their classmates about the material to be covered on the test or the requirements for one or more assignments. If students are having trouble with a particular topic, they can go to classmates on social networking sites for help, and thus successfully increase interactivity among themselves.

Studies have shown that the successful implementation of any learning experience depends on many things, one of which is effective communication between teachers and their students. The closer the relationship between teachers and their students, the more likely teachers are able to help students learn quickly and at a high level. Given that people use social networks mostly to keep in touch with friends, colleagues, peers and family, it is important to explore such platforms as modern education tools to enhance communication between different actors in the education system.

Platforms such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, among others, can serve as backchannels for communication between students and between teachers and students within or between classes. Teacher-student interaction will definitely contribute to understanding various related learning difficulties and solving them in a shorter time.

Again, social media is easily available for the dissemination of important course information to students (Akakandelwa & Walubita, 2017), and get them more engaged in educational activities. This is supported by Tohara (2021) who says that social media tools are also an effective way to increase student engagement. It is not a secret that social features of social media resources have attracted the attention of millions of people around the world. These same features can therefore be used to draw students' attention to the learning opportunities available. Using tools like Google Apps for Education will allow students to have access to valuable learning resources regardless of time and place. Collaborative and participatory tools like Wikis, blogs, Google Docs can encourage students to become active participants or even co-producers rather than passive consumers of content.

Despite the above facts, various challenges are militating against the successful integration of most social media for strategic communications in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. The first of this challenge is the motivation to engage. There appears to be a lack of motivation by institutions of higher learning in Lesotho to engage actively with their teaching and learning activities, and communicate strategically on social media. There are challenges with the content to be updated, the frequency, and the relevance of the content. Marketing to reach prospective students is often limited when it comes to social media usage.

In addition, content creation poses another challenge. Universities in the developed world showcase their facilities, campuses, and students having a good time around their campus. However, there is a challenge with African universities in general, and institutions of higher learning in Lesotho in particular with regards to what they can

showcase. The institutions are facing funding challenges, and their facilities are often in poor state which cannot be showcased. This lecture recommends that HEIs in Lesotho be equipped with state of the art facilities, and that funding be increased and diversified.

There is also the issue of limited technical skills and low internet bandwidth in higher education institutions in Lesotho. This is supported by Olaleye (2017) who highlights the limited technical skills by African universities to adopt social media for effective communications with stakeholders, and the issue of internet bandwidth which is underdeveloped. Africa is still considered an emerging market, with the rate of Internet penetration still quite low as compared to her Western counterparts. While the universities are willing to engage, the challenges of Internet bandwidth inhibit the stakeholders, especially the prospective students who have limited access to the Internet. This is the case with Lesotho HEIs. There is therefore need for the internet bandwidth to be increased to meet the needs of the HEIs in Lesotho.

Another militating factor against the full adoption of social media for teaching and learning and strategic communication by HEIs in Lesotho is inappropriate language. Some lecturers are of the view that the introduction and growth of social media has fueled bad language among the students, ranging from syntax, spelling, to vocabulary. This is because the textual online content of social media is often misspelled, informal, and highly unstructured (Chen, Zhu, Zhou & Xu (2012), Ekanjume and Thuso (2023)). Wilson (2018) is of the view that the usage of social media by students affects their spelling ability negatively more particularly when writing letters and examinations, which in turn affects conventional techniques of writing. While Akakandelwa & Walubita (2017) blame the damage to language skills such as grammar and spellings by students on their exposure to an excess of social media. In fact, some social media platforms have created their own new meta-language which has altered the English Language to some extent, and this negatively affects academic writing. To mitigate this negative effect, I propose that HEIs should have clear guidelines on the usage of social media.

There is also the problem of internet availability and connectivity that staff and students of HEIs in Lesotho face. One of the social media requirements is internet availability and connectivity. The Internet provides ways of accessing, interacting and connecting with people and content (Goodwill Community Foundation, 2013). According to a report from the Lesotho Communications Authority (2017); 78.7% of Lesotho residents own mobile phones, but only 32.5% of the population has access to the internet. In the absence of access to internet making use of social media effectively remains a nightmare. This lecture thus advocates that a special scheme be made available for internet availability at a high speed for both staff and students, at least when they are on campus.

Similarly, most staff and students need computer support, training and skills, which comes at a high cost for some (if not all) of the institutions. They need technical skills to enable them configure, maintain and troubleshoot their devices, so that they can connect, share, chat, save, and upload information. As Alabdulkareem (2015) posits, both educators and learners need training in order to evaluate and boost their abilities to use available social media platforms. This is supported by Schmucki, Hood & Meell (2009) who argue that teachers need supervision, teaching, and specialised development on how to use social media as they too are becoming part of the social network. This is supported by the Public Media Alliance & UNESCO (2017) report which states that social media is not only a central part of the business plan but also staff and participants of social media require sufficient resources and training which includes technical training.

Social media is computer-based technology that enables the sharing of information and ideas through building of virtual networks and societies (Dollarhide, 2019). Users participate in social media via smartphones, tablets, and computers. Like any other computer-based technology, not every user is familiar with the use and utilisation of social media platforms. In cases like that, organisations and institutions provide with help-desk to support such users. This means IT support desk could assist to ease students' lives by offering them with regular trainings. Ghavifekr et al (2016) found

that one of the top obstacles to ICT use in education is the absence of technical assistance in institutions. In addition, Suryani (2010) believes that schools do not afford enthusiastic support for teachers and student to use technology in class.

It is thus recommended in this lecture that the ICT department of the various HEIs in Lesotho should play a vital role in training staff and students on the use of social media for strategic communication, which includes teaching and learning. It is further recommended that HEIs in Lesotho should rethink the adoption of social media platforms for strategic communication with all stakeholders and put in place policies and guidelines for its adoption and usage.

7. CONCLUSION

This lecture recognises the importance of social media in communicating with stakeholders, and that for effective communication to take place, it is essential to identify the key players within the communication cycle. A university has many stakeholders with varying interests and commitments. Thus, identifying the right communication media for a specific stakeholder is essential to elicit stakeholder engagement (Payne & Calton, 2017). For instance, there are communications geared towards prospective students and their parents. The aim of communicating with these stakeholders is to recruit students. Universities may use their social media profile to provide prospective students and their parents with relevant information so that they can make an informed choice. For prospective students, this may include the support available for filling out the application form, invitation to Open Day, comments and testimonies from present students, sharing images of the campus and the student life, sharing the story of a successfully alumnus, etc. This also includes an opportunity for prospective students to ask questions and engage through messengers, chatbot or reply to comments or tweets.

Similarly, there are communications geared towards stakeholders who are already within the university. This includes the staff and the students. The present students are considered the most significant stakeholder in the university. They need to know the events and activities that are going on within the campus. They need to be informed in case of an emergency. Dabner (2012) reported how the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, used social media as a channel to carefully control their response to an earthquake that affected their city. This provides further evidence that social media can effectively support information sharing, communication and collaboration in higher education contexts, particularly in times of crisis. Likewise, staff need to be engaged with as part of this group of stakeholders. This includes sharing the research activities and achievements of staff on social media.

In addition, there are communication aimed at stakeholders that need to be updated about the progress within the university. These include alumni that need to know what is going on within the university and how best they can contribute back to the university. Besides, the funders, research partners, and other key stakeholders need to be updated about research and other activities of the university. These are groups of stakeholders that have interest in the university and can contribute positively to its wellbeing. There are possibilities for engaging such stakeholders on social media.

It is essential to recognise that these stakeholders have different expectations from the university, and the university should be able to communicate with them almost at a personal level, which includes sharing information that is relevant to each group. A prospective undergraduate student, for instance, may not find tweets about the latest research findings very relevant, compared to a tweet about the Open Day. While recognising this broad spectrum of expectation, universities need to understand that their presence on social media is not just for marketing purposes, but for engagement. This lecture is thus advocating for a dialogical engagement between the university and its stakeholders.

There are different social media platforms for different purposes, and universities need to choose the platforms upon which they want to engage with their stakeholders. Farinloye et al (2020) present a glossary of seven social media platforms used in universities for stakeholders' engagement. These are: Facebook, Twitter (now X), WhatsApp, YouTube, LinkedIn, SnapChat, and Instagram. These different platforms remain strategic because they have diverse outreach, different options on how to impute content, and pieces of legislation that regulate their use in order to guarantee privacy rights, authenticity of information, physical and moral integrity of users. I advocate through this lecture that these platforms be adopted in our context, with guidelines on their usage.

It is worth emphasising that universities in Europe, the USA, and Asia are far ahead of their African counterparts in the field of digitalisation and the acceptance of technologies in education. They have realised that social media is a powerful and effective way to promote their activities and thus significantly improve the sector, especially at this time when universities in different continents are facing increasing competition. This lecture is thus recommending that African Universities should strongly consider the use of social media in the higher education sector both for strategic communication and teaching and learning, based on clear policy and guidelines. I recognise the fact that African universities may face specific challenges vis-à-vis social media adoption and usage, but this can be mitigated with the implementation of best practices for social media communication strategies.

In view of various technological evolutions and the expansion of teaching using technology that is more and more adapted to realities, and in view of the ever-increasing rivalries between universities and higher education institutions, it has become imperative for universities (especially those in Africa) to review the methods used to implement cutting-edge communication strategies so that they can better position themselves in the minds of their stakeholders, regardless of the geographical area in which they are located.

Building an active and strong community through social media is an ideal option if African universities want to attract more students and retain them so that they can, in turn, spread the reputation of the institutions. Through social media, universities will perfect the experiences of their students, since they will adapt to the realities and tools they use widely (Bosch, 2009). They will also improve their communication with former students and other stakeholders and thus increase the development of their brand. Social media for transformational and strategic communication is, therefore, the way to go.

THANK YOU / KEA LE BOHA

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Finally, I will like to end by once more thanking the ALMIGHTY GOD for seeing me thus far. My standing here today is a testimony that GOD is the ONE who can truly bring meaning into our lives and situations. To HIM alone be all the praise and glory. Amen.

As we come to the end of this lecture, I leave you all with this song:

**When upon life's billow you are tempest tossed
When you are discouraged thinking all is gone
Count your many blessings name them one by one
And it will surprise you what the LORD has done.**

**Count your blessings name them one by one
Count your blessings see what GOD has done
Count your blessings, name them one by one
And it will surprise you what the LORD has done.**

Thank you once more

Kea leboha

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