

The Facebooked Organisation

A critique of corporate social media in New Zealand

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Doctor of Philosophy

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No one ever got broke by underestimating the intelligence of the American people.

- PT Barnum

Abstract

The research illustrates that people on Facebook communicate with organizations as though the organisations are people too. Furthermore, organisations induce this behaviour through promotional materials that persuaded the follower to engage with them as friends. I began my research as it appeared that organisations hid potentially ruthless profit motives behind a smiling face of friendship on social media networks, particularly on Facebook, which I used daily.

Facebook may be a relatively new technology, having been first developed only a decade ago, but it has dramatically changed the way the global society communicates. In New Zealand alone it is estimated half the population uses the tool¹. Due to this, Facebook is surrounded by a kind of hysteria: in one form or another Facebook makes the news on a near-daily basis, from the celebrification of its founder, to panics over privacy. The dramatic impact Facebook has had in such a short period of time means many remain curious, uninformed and often fearful of how this tool will impact the future. In the last few years, Facebook has added functionality that now enables businesses to have a presence in this forum, which has made it possible for customers to interact with businesses in an entirely new way. This has resulted in hype in the business world, over the untapped potential of this new marketing tool.

The aim of my research was to critically explore the relationships between “Facebooked” organisations and the private individuals who interact with the businesses online and with this purpose in mind, I established four research questions to guide the thesis. The first investigates the nature of Facebook interactions between corporations and followers, and the second investigates the multiple realities on the Facebook Pages of the three corporations. The third

¹ As indicated in a New Zealand Herald article (Wade, 2013, January 17).

research question asks how corporations use their Facebook Pages to build follower identification, and the final, overarching research question asks—what is the nature of the “Facebook effect”?

My research uses three New Zealand corporations well-known for their social media use as case studies; ASB Bank New Zealand Limited, Vodafone New Zealand Ltd and Air New Zealand Limited. The research takes a critical perspective and is divided into two parts. The first uses thematic analysis to code and categorise both followers’ comments on the business Facebook Pages and the response to the comments from the corporations. The second part of the research reviews the promotional materials that feed into the Facebook Page and which encourage follower participation, by conducting both a Monin-style close reading (2004) and also a rhetorical analysis using Cheney’s (1983a) rhetorical identification typology.

The research indicates that followers are exhibiting extremes of emotion in their comments in a way that appears specific to the online forum of Facebook; individuals speak to the business as if it were a person and show attachment as though it were a friend. Within the Page, the corporation does not encourage such attachment, or respond in like fashion, however the promotional elements they use do so. Such campaigns gave visitors a promise of connection, of friendship and sharing. In my conclusion, my research found that Facebook, though created to achieve utopian ideals of genuine human connection, has, through its focus on profit generation, delivered dystopian results in terms of business-to-individual interaction.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or writing by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Gumbley', with a large, stylized initial 'S'.

Sarah Gumbley

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Chapter One: Overview

The purpose of this research is to critically explore the relationships between three “Facebooked” organisations and the private individuals who interact with the businesses online. The research proceeds on the assumption that Facebook (and other social media platforms, of course) has allowed a radical change in the way businesses communicate with existing and potential customers, and further, that the change is worth studying. Facebook, with its global reach of over one billion users and continued expansion (Lincoln & Robards, 2014) is easily the largest enabler of business-to-customer social media interactions and is glorified by Kirkland (2010) for the international reach of the “Facebook effect”. However, the term obscures the possibility that a “Facebook effect” may be multi-faceted, and so this research undertakes a more nuanced analysis of the “Facebook effect”.

In conducting this research I accepted that, to the users, their Facebook communication is often significant and even urgent, but that at the same time it is possible to see it as banal and mundane. Banality however, does not lessen the value of these messages to understanding the online aspect of social life (Jensen, 2010; Knapp & Daly, 1993). Thus, the research focuses on the communication of people who follow the organisations’ Facebook Pages² and grew from an observation I made some time ago that organisations regularly present themselves online as warm-hearted, “down-home” and approachable, hiding their

² ‘Pages’ is capitalised here as I refer to the term as defined by Facebook for their platform that enables businesses and other organisations the ability to build a closer relationship with their audience and customers as can be found on <https://www.facebook.com/pages/create/>. Where I refer to another form of pages, such as in a book or on a website, the term is presented in lowercase form.

profit motive behind an expression of friendship that seemed to me to nothing but illusory.

The companies whose Facebook Pages captured my attention are Vodafone New Zealand Ltd (<http://www.facebook.com/VodafoneNZ>), ASB Bank Limited (<http://www.facebook.com/ASBBank>) and Air New Zealand Limited (<http://www.facebook.com/AirNewZealand>), three of New Zealand's largest companies. These companies were not chosen for any particular characteristics they exhibit in terms of organisational culture or business direction. Their selection was the result of a convenience sample: simply, they are big enough to have the disposable funds to invest in a comprehensive Facebook presence. The individuals whose interactions with the companies have been preserved may be customers or potential customers of the companies, or may have no business connection with the organisations at all.

I surmise that they followers are likely to be New Zealand residents, given that they are interacting with New Zealand corporations, but they may not necessarily be New Zealanders. In fact, their sex, their nationality and ethnicity and their status as customers (or not) was unimportant to me: rather, what interested me was the communication that occurred within the "Facebooked" relationship, and the forms of identity construction that have become fundamental to online communication between individual and organisational users.

"Social media" is one of those expressions that is used frequently and correctly, that most people could nevertheless not define accurately nor explain technically. For the purposes of this research, the term "social media" refers to web-based and—more recently—mobile technologies, which ostensibly foster dialogue between users and among

communities (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The popularity of social media is without question, but it is not the all-powerful and extremely recent development suggested by the hyperbolic terms that are so often used to describe it (Li & Bernoff, 2008; Qualman, 2009). In fact, social media began in 1979 with the creation of Usenet, which enabled Internet users to post messages as part of a worldwide discussion system, but it was the development of two social networking sites, MySpace (2003) and Facebook (2004) that stimulated the popularity of a communication tool that did not require any technical knowledge and could be used for daily socialising with friends. It was around this time that the term “social media”³ began to be widely employed (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) and research began into the many applications of the technology.

Whether or not users can define what they mean by the term, social media are strongly present in nearly all aspects of life in the 21st century. Statistics New Zealand (2010) showed that 80% of the population of New Zealand use the Internet, and Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) suggest that at least 75% of Internet users engage with some form of social media. For instance, Facebook alone lists about half of all New Zealanders as users of its platform (Wade, 2011, January 4). These numbers reveal that social media is not a game for young players only, but rather, that the people who occupy the social media spaces must be as heterogeneous as the content they produce. The wide adoption and frequent use of social media has been a boon to marketing departments the world over: businesses can achieve direct, and more importantly, *directed*, communication with users and can

³ In the business world, “social media” is also referred to as “consumer-generated media” (Agarwal, Mondal & Nath, 2011) and in ordinary speech, it is sometimes called “social network[ing] sites”. For the purposes of this research, the term “social media” will be used for consistency.

thereby draw them into a new sort of commercial relationship. I use the expression “a new sort of commercial relationship” advisedly here because I contend that the social media presence means that for the first time, the commercial relationship never stops. Instead, enabled by mobile technology, it goes everywhere with users, and furthermore, users are always available to businesses. It is precisely this element of “everywhere, everywhen” that renders social media mundane, and invisible, and therefore important to interrogate.

I have so far introduced the notion on which this research is based. In the rest of this chapter, I will, first, outline the way that Facebook works, situating it within the wider concept of social media. The first part of this section is necessarily based on my own experience and observations rather than published literature. Not much has been written about how Facebook actually operates: users seem to master the platform intuitively. The second part of the chapter sets out the organisation of the thesis, showing how each part contributes to the overall answering of my research questions. In this section, I will also explain my research questions and relate them to the purpose of my research.

Social media: the background

The burgeoning of social media into its present form was made possible by Web 2.0, a new generation of Internet use where purpose shifted from information availability to social interaction online. In the Web

2.0 world, content is user-generated, as people contribute, or are able to contribute, to their online communities. A good example of user-generated content can be seen in the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia, founded in 2001. Wikipedia depends for its existence on the donated time and knowledge of individuals who participate in collaborative authorship where anyone can add or amend information. All information provided is free to readers (Benkler, 2006; Bruns, 2008). Another example of user-generated content is Second Life, which was launched in 2003 and within its first month of existence secured thousands of subscribers who chose to inhabit avatars to live an online "life" in virtual villages. Second Life users created ninety-nine percent of the buildings, clothes, gadgets or shops in their Second Life environment (Benkler, 2006; Bruns, 2008) and were prepared to spend real money to buy virtual commodities.

Focusing on Facebook

A quick examination of the Internet (June 2014) shows that tens of thousands of social media sites exist, but perhaps fewer than a hundred are used globally. Of these, Facebook, is perhaps the most widely-used and recognized, with more than a billion active users worldwide (Kiss, 2012, October 4; Schultz & Peltier, 2013). Like MySpace, Facebook probably owed a good deal of its early popularity to its flexibility and easy usability, but it would never have become as popular had it not discarded its elite beginnings as an online Yearbook for Harvard University students and gradually opened its space for a wider groups of users. Facebook began as a space for a relatively homogenous group of young people, and when it widened its audience, it was again the young who were its earliest adopters, which may have contributed to

building its fashionable status. Flexibility, usability and youth appeal may explain the mass uptake of Facebook, but they do not, however, explain its long term success, for many social media sites offer the same features. Facebook continues to be popular, I think, because it simultaneously encourages users' exhibitionism (Carpenter, 2012; Panek, Nardis & Konrath, 2013) through the ability to post as many personal images and opinion-based comments as they desire, as well as satisfying their voyeuristic appetites (boyd, 2011; Marwick, 2012), by enabling them to delve deep into another person's life, reading their thoughts, following their relationship status updates and perusing photo albums of their lives.

During the fairly short time that my doctoral research has been in progress, the user Profile⁴ in Facebook has changed substantially, but although the design and layout have been modified, the functions, purpose and uses of Facebook remain largely unchanged. The site began as a university Yearbook, and so has always been a repository of significant personal information about the course of an individual's life. For instance, users may record details of their romantic relationships, changing religious and political convictions, interests and activities, favourite quotes, movies and music, where they work or study, comments, photos, videos, and links to favourite websites and, significantly, connections to other Facebook users. In line with its origins as a Yearbook, users are obliged to post at least one photograph of themselves on their Profile, but they may include entire albums of their activities if they wish. The heavier emphasis on images came from the recent move to the Timeline design, which actively encourages users to upload photographs, turning Facebook into an online 'village green' in the sense that it has become a space in which communities

⁴ See glossary on page Glossary of online terms for a full explanation of terms.

get together, talk and gossip and ogle. Sadly, village greens are not uniformly benign places of harmless exchange. They can also be places where the dirty laundry is aired in public.

Facebook began as an enabler of friend-to-friend networking, but now supports a deep commercial involvement. Commercial entities engage Facebook's communication capacities for purposes that are very different from those of private users. The aim is to gain Likes and to entice as many personal users as possible to their Pages. In short, though the rhetoric of the Pages may contain a simulation of personal communication, it is likely to be for marketing, sales or public relations purposes, and designed with the bottom line in mind.

In an echo of Facebook's Yearbook origins, private individual users set up Profiles. Commercial users, on the other hand, occupy the Facebook space on Pages. In the case of celebrities and their Pages, the distinction between private individuals and commercial entities is somewhat blurred, because on Facebook, celebrities, though single individuals, are essentially human brands and so share the same status as groups such as schools, charities, churches, businesses, and so on. Just like Profiles, Pages enable conversations, and one of those conversations—arguably the most important, at least from the point of view of the business—is about being a fan.

Fandom is not a new concept (Coppa, 2014) but until Facebook, people were not "fans" of businesses. They may well have been loyal and long-term customers, they may have spoken highly of the service they received and the products they bought, but they were not fans. The business relationship has changed in a way that is not merely skin-deep—or, as it happens, word-deep—because fanship implies a degree

of acceptance of, and belonging to, a group mentality that is not indicated by the concept of “the loyal customer”. Fanship, with its implicit qualities of identification, admiration and aspiration is closely aligned to the formation of social identity (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010; Tajfel, 1978; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987) than the simple status of “customerhood”, even if that custom is long-term and loyal. Thus, the identities constructed for “fans” on Facebook Pages are important not just to commercial activity but also to the social “being” of the followers. In fact, by pressing “Like”, Facebook users enter a virtual culture, with all the normative rules and orthodoxies of any ethnic or national culture (Varner & Beamer, 2011) and while there is nothing necessarily sinister in this, it is fair to say that the commercial motivation of the Pages is sometimes obscured by the tone of relentless friendliness that pervades the presentation of the businesses.

Streck (1998) posited that the online world is a straightforward continuation of offline existence, and in terms of the normalising elements of group membership, perhaps it is. However, I believe that Web 2.0 was the technological enabler of a fundamental change in communication, and I do not believe that the effects of that change are clear yet. This research will examine the significance of the change in relation to businesses and their communication with customers through Facebook.

Social media in research

The bulk of academic research into Facebook so far has been into aspects of interpersonal communication (Piotrowski, 2012). There has

been a strong focus on privacy and identity construction (Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008), self disclosure (Park, Jin & Jin, 2009; Special & Li-Barber, 2012) and relationships (boyd [sic] & Heer, 2006; Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007). Many scholars (Al-Saggaf, 2011; Amiel & Sargent, 2004; Foster, Francescucci & West, 2010; Ross et al., 2009; Sheldon, 2008) have been interested in the motivations that underpin social media profiles, and have shown that peer pressure, social connectivity, relationship maintenance, passing the time, entertainment and curiosity are among the most prevalent reasons for setting up Facebook Profiles. Other research (Gangadharbatla, 2008; Leung, 2001; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010) has focused on the gratifications obtained from using social media, and have found that people use it as a pastime, to gain affection, to share problems, to follow a fashion, for sociability and for social information. Ross et al. (2009) examined the effect of personality on social media use, and a lot of research (Baker & White, 2010; Lampe, Ellison & Steinfield, 2006; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Shao, 2009) has investigated the purposes which underpin setting up social media Profiles and Pages.

To date, most of the research on Facebook has examined the Profile dimension of the site, and such research as has been done on Pages has largely been from the perspective of growing the business and the associated threats or benefits of having a Facebook presence (Schultz & Peltier, 2013). This body of research tends to focus on the utility of Facebook as a promotional tool in the marketing mix, and often adopts an uncritical attitude towards its convenience and flexibility. Few studies have investigated the Pages as expressions of interpersonal communication, and that is the gap my research will fill: I will treat Pages as though they are Profiles, not as marketing material (though it is that as well, of course), but as interpersonal communication between

businesses and individuals, and will show how the relationship offered by businesses to customers may be changing as a result of Facebook.

Even without my overarching interest in the way that the market is reaching people, I think this is a worthy approach to take. Although the motivation of the Pages is commercial, most Pages use forms and styles familiar from the Profiles. In other words, the style, tone, content and visual set-up of Page messages are not dissimilar to those of Profile messages. I was interested to see whether this similarity was imposed on the businesses by customers, or whether it was a ploy by businesses to use familiar forms to encourage users to “like” them. The crossovers between business and personal forms of communication became a secondary, but still very real, point of interest in the research.

Evolving “The Facebooked Organisation”

Given the critical tenor of my research, perhaps it is surprising that I spent much of my life and career being a proponent of such technologies as Facebook and the online world in general. I was growing up at the same time as social media was, and I am, in fact, the same age as Facebook founder, Mark Zuckerberg. Along with many others of my generation in the days before the online world was as commercialised as it is now, I began by holding a rather uncritical, even a utopian, vision of social media, believing in the communication potential of the new technologies. Until blogging began in the early 2000s, I saw computers as devices for typing school assignments and playing two-dimensional games which were extremely pixelated and banal by today’s standards. However, for my friends and me, the emergence of blogging took the Internet from being a place to waste

time in anonymous chatrooms to being a way to express creativity and communicate with each other in an online space that was all our own. I set up a site, designed the layout, and wrote weekly blogs about current events or issues I was interested in. It seemed to me that I had made a new world which I could share with my friends and new technologies like Bebo and MySpace grew and waned for us in the context of this new world. Loyalty to the technology was not part of our thinking: we approached each new platform with unabashed enthusiasm and eventually found our way to Facebook and stayed there. So many peers were already on Facebook that it was a matter of simply convenience to become a Facebook user too, participating in all its now celebrated benefits such as sharing photos and comments. The more sinister aspects of social media technologies were not well-researched then, and the worst criticism was that age-old argument that “the young” should be spending time face-to-face, rather than talking to one another on computers.

Just as the dark side of social media was not explored in the early days, neither was a commercial ethos thought of and in fact, it was not until Facebook opened the Pages facility that social media acquired a business presence similar to that which was prevalent on the wider Internet. When I saw how social media were enabling commercial activity, I established a consultancy teaching businesses how to use social media to their advantage and am now considered by some to be a sophisticated user⁵ on how social media can be used to increase sales and establish a brand. I did not specifically seek this career, but I

⁵ I have been interviewed for BBC Radio’s Digital Human Series (2014) as well as by the British Psychological Society (2014) and I speak at a number of conferences and events throughout New Zealand such as the New Zealand Festival (2014). I have taught the ‘Introducing Social Media’ course at Auckland University (2011, 2012) and run online marketing workshops including at the New Zealand Trade and Enterprise (2012, 2014), the New Zealand Institute of Chartered Accountants (2011) and the New Zealand Society of Authors (2010, 2011). Furthermore I run two marketing and publicity businesses that specialise in these areas.

realised that I was a sophisticated user in comparison with many of the owners of small businesses, and that my knowledge could help them enter the new environment which was, increasingly, offering commercial opportunities. My clients used (and still use) Facebook as a low cost medium that enables them to have a voice in large, competitive markets, and they were sincere in posting straightforward messages that focused on customer needs.

I began this research thinking that, like many others, I would use my doctorate to examine the utility of Facebook as a marketing tool, but I had not gone very far into my exploration of Pages before I noticed that the often sincere nature of postings by small businesses was not apparent in the Pages of the large corporations I was monitoring. In fact, perhaps unsurprisingly, the big companies had a stronger Facebook presence and formulated complex messages designed to appeal to the market in a number of ways, including through the use of language and messages that seemed strongly reminiscent of the highly personal postings in Profiles. I began to experience a sense of unease when I perused my Facebook Newsfeed, and finally determined that the reason was not the presence of commerce in this space that had begun as personal, but rather the extent to which the commercial content could encroach upon people's lives.

The research design

This research analyses the social media "speak" posted by both corporate entities and individual users on the Facebook Pages of three large companies. The research falls into two parts. The first part is a thematic analysis, of 35,335 posts and responses on the Facebook

Pages of three of New Zealand's biggest corporations. The second part of the research is a close examination of promotional elements on the Facebook Pages of the three corporations which were early, and arguably successful, adopters of social media in general and of Facebook in particular. The three organisations are Air New Zealand Limited, Vodafone New Zealand Ltd and ASB Bank New Zealand Limited, and thumbnail sketches of the companies' social media engagement follow. The thumbnails support the findings of Quan-Haase and Young (2010) that "users do not embrace a single form of social media but tend to employ a range of tools for communication" (p. 351). All three organisations that I am interested in operate and run Facebook, Twitter, blogs, discussion boards and Pinterest, but not all social media are created equal. For instance, at 916,663 followers, the Air New Zealand Facebook Page has over 174 times more followers than its Pinterest page (www.pinterest.com/airnewzealand) at 5,239.

Air New Zealand Limited (Air New Zealand)

Air New Zealand's forays into social media have received much media attention. Inasmuch as Air New Zealand won the Best Use of Social Media award (Stemson, 2010, August 5) in 2010, the company was also severely criticised when a Facebook marketing campaign went wrong a year later ("Air New Zealand Facebook flight promo fails to take off", 2011, June 7). Air New Zealand's social media engagement includes YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/user/airnewzealand>), FourSquare (www.foursquare.com/v/air-new-zealand--the-hub/4b745bddf964a52097d72de3), Twitter (www.twitter.com/flyairnz) and Facebook. At the time I was gathering and analysing my data, Air New Zealand's Facebook Page showed 161,585 followers, and by the time of submission, the number had grown to 916,663. Because

settings of Air New Zealand's Page allowed public access, I am able to tell that most users are Auckland residents, between 25 and 34 years of age. The Page featuring the Air New Zealand Fairy is one of the Pages I submitted to close analysis in the second part of this research. At the time I was carrying out my analysis, it had 38,404 Likes and by the time of submission, the Likes had reached 86,332. Again, most of the "likers" live in Auckland and are in the 25–34 age bracket.

ASB Bank New Zealand Limited (ASB)

Also a 2010 winner of a Best Use of Social Media award (Nicholson, 2010, October 14), ASB's nationwide marketing campaign is promoted through social media: the company uses YouTube (www.youtube.com/asbbank), Instagram (www.instagram.com/asbbank) Twitter (www.twitter.com.com/ASBBank) and Facebook and even operates a Virtual Branch on their Facebook Page. When I began my data gathering and analysis, ASB had 21,774 followers of their Facebook Page and by the time of submission, 127,975. Again, the Page shows that most followers live in Auckland, most fall into the 25–34 age range.

Vodafone New Zealand Ltd (Vodafone)

Vodafone is not only active on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube but also operates its own blog and an online forum where they "chat" with customers. At the time I was undertaking my data analysis, Vodafone New Zealand had 41,480 followers of their Facebook Page. By the time of submission this number had reached 210,618. Like the other two companies, most of the followers live in Auckland, but the most common age range of users is a little younger, at 18–24 years.

My perspective on the Facebook Pages has been critical, in the sense that “‘critical’ implies showing connections and causes which are hidden” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 9). I thought it important to peel back the hidden layers of meaning within the fragments of conversations between businesses and individuals to show the way that the individuals are positioned in relation to the commercial drive of the organisations and also, to show the way that customers respond to the opportunities to interact with the businesses.

The critical framing has been achieved through the application of three different methods: first, a thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006) of more than 35,335 comments by followers of the Pages of the three corporations, together with the corporations’ responses. The use of thematic analysis allowed examination of the details of the followers’ everyday lived experiences in relation to the companies, and captured them in “thick description” (Geertz, 1973). The second part of my research, which consisted of a Monin-style close reading (2004) of a specific Facebook campaign from each organisation, used Cheney’s (1983a) rhetorical identification typology to uncover the persuasive techniques behind the companies’ efforts to build identification among their followers. Taken together, the two sections allowed me to answer the research questions that guided my investigation into the communicative behaviour of corporations in what is deemed, by most users, to be a private communication space and to show how the online environment is causing corporations and individuals to re-define and re-negotiate their commercial relationships.

The four research questions below have guided my research, investigating the Facebook behaviour of three corporations and their followers. These are outlined further in chapter three.

1. What is the nature of Facebook interactions between corporations and followers?
2. What are the multiple realities discernible on the Facebook Pages of the three corporations?
3. How do corporations use their Facebook Pages to build follower identification?
4. In terms of business-to-follower communication, what is the nature of the "Facebook effect"?

Limitations of this research

The first limitation of the research is one of scope: there are tens of thousands of forms of social media, and this research has dealt with only one. When I restricted my study to Facebook, I was mindful of Kunz and Hackworth's (2011) study which found that Facebook was "the most popular social media platform for both retailers reviewed in this study, and their respective consumer followers. Greater affinity, or familiarity with this social network may be why both groups show higher levels of activity on Facebook" (p. 15). My own experience as a business consultant convinced me that Kunz and Hackworth's finding was applicable in the New Zealand environment, but of course, many other social media sites are popular enough to be worthy of analysis. However, the space and time available for doctoral research imposed a choice, and my choice was Facebook, mostly because of its popularity

and the appealing notion of user “affinity” (Kunz & Hackworth, 2011), but also, in part, because of my own familiarity with the platform.

A second limitation is that Facebook itself underwent considerable alteration in the course of my research (moving, for instance, to the Timeline design) and technological improvements will no doubt continue for the site. Improvements and expansions to the site mean that there are many elements⁶ on the Pages that I have not had space to examine. In fact, only the Wall posts were analysed because of the large quantity of data that I obtained from the sites. In the future, the elements I have listed in footnote six would provide a rich source of data, but for the purposes of this research, the Wall posts allowed the best insights into the conversations taking place between members of the public and the organisations.

A third limitation was time. The three corporations I studied were present on Facebook before my research began, and continue there now my research is over, but doctoral research has a necessarily finite timespan, and the process of my research allowed me to gather data over a one year period only. The promotional elements I chose for the close readings had a limited lifespan, and it is very possible that the direction of the organisations’ promotions could now be very different. A more longitudinal study of the organisations’ promotional communication would be desirable, but that study lies outside the scope of this research project. Of course, all research requires operational decisions of what to include and what to exclude, which brings me to another limitation: my choices of the specific campaigns

⁶ Some of the elements I had to ignore were the events, photo albums and videos sections, the Vodafone ‘top up ur bill’, ‘ask a question’ and ‘do your thing better’ Apps, and ASB Bank’s Apps like ‘experience ASB’, ‘social collect’, ‘grad programme’, ‘ASB careers’, ‘ASB like loan’ and ‘ASB savings superheroes’, or Air New Zealand’s ‘book your flights’, ‘careers’, ‘find us’ and ‘Father’s Day’ Apps, and integrated Apps from their other social media sites. For instance, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram all feed into Air New Zealand’s main Facebook presence.

(the “Share Everything Day” video, Air New Zealand Fairy and ASB Virtual Branch) as representative of the companies’ promotions left aside other campaigns that would also have been worthy of analysis.

Last, the Likes facility in relation to individual comments and posts is a significant feature of Facebook’s setup and design, but my investigation did not drill down further than the “please like me” capability on Pages and the organisations’ reporting on the number of Likes they garner. Research into the Likes directed at specific comments would provide rich understandings of another aspect of Facebook but require a larger scope than the confines of a doctoral thesis.

The organisation of the thesis

This thesis is organised in a fairly standard pattern for an academic investigation. This first chapter has introduced the concept of the research, explained its origin and formulated four research questions that will guide the investigation. In particular, the chapter has defined and explained Facebook within the wider context of social media and has briefly accounted for its status as a globally popular tool of communication. The chapter has also traced the incursion of a commercial ethos into what was previously a space for personal communication.

Chapter two reviews current research on social media, across a spectrum of “the good, the bad, and the worrying”. Here research ranges from the confident promotion of the potential of social media, through to the much darker side, the “fears, uncertainties and doubts” of the new technology. Chapter two provides a theoretical framework

for my own work, which sits somewhere between the two schools of thought, accepting the positive potential of social media but seeing also its capacity for abuse. Chapter three takes a more focussed, methodological turn setting out the three methods that were used for capturing and analysing the data, after which, the research process and results are presented.

Overall, the research essentially falls into two parts. Each part takes a different perspective on the conversations occurring between “Facebooked” businesses and their customers. The first part of the empirical research (chapters four and five) analyses Facebook posts between followers and businesses, describes the coding process and presents the themes that the coding reveals. The discussion in chapter two of commercialised culture on Facebook becomes particularly relevant here as each organisation pushes its business agenda at private users, as does the chapter two discussion of the ranges of emotion and human connection that account for the reasons for using social media. The second part of the empirical research in chapters six and seven set out to explain the phenomenon found in the first part, offering a forensic reading of the promotional messages being sent to customers to entice them into “liking” the organisation.

The organisation of the thesis, then, largely reflects the chronological stages of the research. For instance, the literature review in chapter two foreshadowed key ideas that drove my first research focus, and the examination of the Page posts made me curious about the organisational communication that stimulated and shaped customers’ responses.

Summary

This chapter has briefly outlined my research concept and the limitations of the research. The next chapter offers a more detailed survey of the literature on social media.

Chapter Two: The new world of social media—the good, the bad, and the worrying

This chapter covers key themes about social media from both academic (Benkler, 2006; Bruns, 2008; Turkle, 2012) and sources that I am calling “popular” (Dimos, Groves & Powell, 2011; Kirkland, 2010; Li & Bernoff, 2008; Malone & Fiske, 2013; Qualman, 2009; Scoble & Israel, 2006). “Popular” sources may seem to sit oddly in an academic thesis, but I consider that they needed to be included in the literature review because they offer insights that are sometimes the freshest and most significant into the trends in the rapidly-evolving field of social media. I believe that some of the “landmark” ideas about social media are appearing in journalism as well as in academic journals. Furthermore, it is the “non-academic” (for want of a better description) sources that are likely to exercise the strongest influence over general ideas about social media, and for this reason alone are worth studying.

It is impossible to avoid the technological euphoria that is often associated with social media. Among the more extravagant claims that have been made for its power as a place for human connection, social media have been promoted as a vital part of human survival in terms of Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs (Dimos, Groves & Powell, 2011) as a universal ‘truth’ (Li & Bernoff, 2008), and as a utopian revolution in human communication (Li & Bernoff, 2008; Qualman, 2009; Scoble & Israel, 2006). The words of Li and Bernoff (2008) sum up this school of thought: “This is the movement we call groundswell. And while you can’t stop it, you can understand it. You can not only live with it; you can thrive in it” (p. 9). Whether social media is revolution or merely the outcome of a technological evolution (or both, perhaps), it is certainly generating considerable assertion and debate among both the

“popular” and the academic commentators. In this section of the chapter, I will examine the most common ideas, with particular attention to their applicability in the business world, and will move towards discussion of the argument that social media could be the perfect public sphere (Habermas, 1962) which enables an equal voice for all individuals.

Social Media: a place for human connection...or not

The usefulness of social media to forming and maintaining social connection is so obvious that it is perhaps a truism to comment on it, but proponents of social media communication (Li & Bernoff, 2008; Qualman, 2009; Scoble & Israel, 2006) nevertheless make much of the relationship between what is seen as an innate human need for social interaction and the enabling functionality of the technology for making new friends and keeping up with old ones (Benkler, 2006; Li & Bernoff, 2008). Social media developments are often touted (for instance, see Kirkland, 2010) as an *entirely new* platform for human connection. Dimos, Groves and Powell (2011) make even more of the convenience of the technology by connecting social media with Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs. They argue that “social media is a technology applied to support a basic human need: the need for belonging and connecting with others” (p. 3).

This overwhelmingly optimistic view has its detractors, however. For instance, Jenkins (2006) found that the online world often provides a lower value of community than the offline world, because unlike family, school or work groupings (for example), not only is membership of online communities voluntary, but also the groups can be formed or

disbanded with relative ease. For instance, it takes little effort to disable a community Page on Facebook or to delete a Twitter account, and when membership can be dismissed so lightly, it is also, apparently, less valued. Turkle (2012) sees social media as even more harmful of relationships than does Jenkins, arguing that virtual communities cannot offer the truly satisfying relationships that the offline world can. Her rather bleak discussion ranges over the idea that although offline relationships carry greater risk than those in the online world, they also offer greater potential for deep connection. In a rather bleakly eschatological argument, Turkle (2012) predicts that social media will play a part in the demise of true social connection.

Many social media evangelists (see, for instance, Godin, 2011; Li & Bernoff, 2008; Qualman, 2009; Scoble & Israel, 2006) see a new significance in the connections that form between businesses and their customers. They contend that social media allow businesses to promote themselves without adopting the techniques of interruption marketing (Acquisti, & Spiekermann, 2011). In fact, these proponents of social media maintain that the relationships between businesses and customers have been equalised in a way not previously possible by allowing a return to real discussion and personal contact (Benkler, 2006; Foster, Francescucci & West, 2010; Li & Bernoff, 2008). As Dimos, Groves and Powell (2011) put it:

Social media isn't a one-way broadcast of messages to the masses, but a conversation taking place between many individuals and which, unlike the real world, can have many others observing and consuming the content, not just during the conversation but practically forever into the future. (p. 1).

The truth of the business-customer relationship may be somewhat different, however. Perhaps there is potential on Facebook Pages for

true dialogue (Habermas, 1962). For instance, Walther (1992, 1996, 2006) has postulated the possibility of a truly intimate online relationship, despite the lack of social cues and the additional time needed to develop relational intimacy because of the asynchronous manner of the communication. Walther maintains that the technical affordances of online relationships can either enable the same qualities as face-to-face relationships or can exceed them. However, although Walther (1992, 1996, 2006) has theorised the possibility of rich online relationships, what generally seems to occur on business Facebook Pages are one-way messages that appear on followers' Newsfeeds. The capability of the technology is therefore mostly subsumed into standard interruption marketing (Sevier, 2001) techniques, and this is probably because technological capacity seems seldom to be matched by business willingness to bear the financial cost of developing dialogue. In the social world of Facebook, peer-to-peer conversations take place because the parties enjoy the social connection, but businesses focusing on the bottom line cannot operate on enjoyment: there has to be a return on the investment of the resources required to "connect" with customers, even if they are labelled as "friends". The low cost of entering social media (it is nearly always free) is lost in the expense of dedicating staff time⁷ to monitoring and maintaining the forums.

The costs of developing and running social media increases the importance of generating and measuring the return on investment in social media. Dimos, Groves and Powell (2011) emphasise the importance of monitoring social marketing, stating that once a social medium has been created, "the marketer must then monitor and

⁷ Seek (2011) suggests that entry-level salaries are around \$45,000; team managers would earn approximately \$100,000. Direct salary costs, together with all the indirect costs associated with employing people (for instance, office equipment, savings schemes and ACC levies) mean that maintaining a social media presence could be expensive.

measure the response in order to determine its effectiveness, diagnose potential problems and adjust and re-allocate investments accordingly” (p. 2). Macnamara and Zerfass (2012) found in their research that social media specialists advocate the development of deliberate strategies with objectives, methods of measurement and key performance indicators to guide the presence of organisations on social media. On the other hand, Scoble and Israel (2006) argue that since there is no return on investment required of websites, press releases, or conference attendance, similarly, no return on investment should be required of social media because the value of the presence in social media is inherent. Despite Scoble and Israel’s (2006) argument, however, it is likely that businesses will wish to be able to measure the results of their expenditure. As Bruns (2008) says, “Business adoption of social media is growing and accelerating. With the use of social media for marketing, businesses will still demand results that show on the bottom line” (p. 270).

Evaluating the return on social media investment is likely to be difficult because social media were not designed for a business function, but rather, for conversation and social interaction (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). “Liking” in the private online world is easily understood and its value derives from, and contributes to, human connection. In the social media environment, Likes have become a form of currency, a kind of legal tender that is evidence of a wealth of popularity. How does this apply in the marketplace? Changes on Facebook, such as the implementation of Facebook Store and a general loosening of restrictions on the platform, have made it easier to drive followers to a place where they might make a purchase, and therefore there could be a financial outcome for the business. As I have already pointed out, over the three year period of this research, the Likes for Vodafone, ASB

and Air New Zealand have increased fivefold, and these facts have been proudly touted as evidence of the success of the businesses. Like these big corporations, many businesses seem to believe that a click on the Like button means that “the consumer is then well disposed to a brand, and their propensity to buy it in some form is increased” (“Yet another article about Facebook: Forget the hype: what works, what doesn't and the deeper approach”, 2012, p. 18). No research, however, proves that Likes convert into business transactions (Schultz & Peltier, 2013) and in fact, the relationship of profit, Likes and “conversation” is coming under scrutiny:

Not everyone is completely sold on the potential social media has for profit enhancement, not least the dearth of investors in the aftermath of the Facebook initial share offering (IPO) in 2012...[also] many small businesses in particular struggle to find any sense in the application of new forms of communication. (“Yet another article about Facebook”, 2012, p. 18)

Proponents of the value of social media in the marketplace tend to quote examples like American Eagle, whose Facebook followers allegedly spend 57% more on online products than non-followers (Taylor, 2011). This simple statistic does not, however, prove the argument. For instance, individuals who become Facebook fans of this brand (or any other for that matter) are likely to be its most eager buyers in any case. Their “fan” status indicates that they are probably more connected to the brand than the average purchaser. Furthermore, individuals who become Facebook followers are likely to be adept at online technologies and therefore more likely to represent the online purchasers. Finally, promotions such as special discounts for fans of the Facebook Page could affect interpretation of the value of Likes. The American Eagle website, for instance, promotes this message: “Be a part of the AE community and be the first to get exclusive discounts and

special promos. You'll always be in the know of all things AE.” (American Eagle, 2013). Claims about business success due to a Facebook presence are rarely fully contextualised and a full account of the methods that drove results is seldom made (Gilfoil & Jobs, 2012).

The word *engagement* is often associated with customer relations on social media, and the concept of *engagement* has become troublesome in the ongoing conversation about the commercial value in social media arenas. In this environment, *engagement* has lost its true meaning and has instead become a buzzword used to justify the corporations' continued use of social media when questions of return on investment cannot be answered (Kemp, 2013, March 12). A statement that customers are *engaged* with the corporation is unassailable: who could be against the evidence of *engagement* when individuals have “liked” the Page, are writing on the Wall, posting comments back or sharing posts and so are part of a conversation. It is not unreasonable to ask, however, to what extent the responses are merely phatic communion (Coupland, Coupland, & Robinson, 1992), those unthought politeness signals that acknowledge another's existence. If many of the Likes fall into the category of phatic communion, they do not equate to longer-term conversation with corporation as the word *engagement* suggests. In this context, the word *engagement* has become trivialised because its meaning has been stretched.

The ‘truth’ of social media

Arthur Schopenhauer famously said⁸, “All truth passes through three stages. First it is ridiculed; second it is violently opposed; third, it is accepted as being self-evident”. Li and Bernoff (2008) argue that social media sit on the third rung of Schopenhauer’s ‘truth’ ladder. I dispute this claim, at least in part: the three stages cannot be seen as mutually exclusive phases because examples of each stage can be seen in society at all times across different strata.

It is true, however, that ridicule—the first stage—occurred most intensely when social media was just being developed, around 2005. At that time, Facebook and MySpace, both recently released, were gathering followers but there was considerable opposition from people who saw users as idlers who chose to stay indoors “glued” to their computer screens. Despite the widespread acceptance of social media, this first stage not only continues today, it thrives. In popular sources, an example of the continuance of Stage One can be seen in an article in Britain’s *Daily Mail* about social media making children more self-centred, lacking the ability to communicate with others and suffering from shorter attention spans (Derbyshire, 2009, February 24). Among academic commentators, Turkle’s (2012) stance also shows a Stage One sensibility. Society sits in the first part of Schopenhauer’s truth continuum as much as it sits in the other two phases.

Schopenhauer’s second stage—violent opposition—can be seen most readily in the aftermath of the sporadic moral panics (Cohen, 2011) induced by the coverage given to social media by other forms of mass media. The coverage that ignites moral panic tends to label social

⁸ As noted by Li & Bernoff (2008).

media as “dangerous”, suggesting that individuals’ privacy is at risk and that children are prey for anonymous paedophiles who inhabit the forums. Stories with themes such as these arose in the first few years of the development of social media, but the phase continues today in the plethora of articles that portray social media as dangerous⁹. Reports of the “dangers” of social media range from its capacity to allow gangs to recruit online (“Gangs adopt social media for recruiting, boasting, and inciting”, 2011, September 8) to the way it distracts employees from their work, as noted in the *Hindustan Times* (Tikku, 2011, August 11). CBS News in the United States labelled social media dangerous because of its use in organising flash mobs (Blackstone, 2011, August 16). Most prominent among the “social media is dangerous” reports was the coverage of the 2011 riots that occurred in London and elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The reports were made by the BBC, the *Telegraph* and the *Guardian* (Douglas, 2011, August 9) in the United Kingdom, CNN in the United States (Greene, 2011, August 25), as well as others in Canada (Bulman, 2011, August 11) and India (Associated Press, 2011, August 10).

The moral panic induced by the press coverage led the British Prime Minister to announce his intention to ban riot suspects from social media, and these draconian measures were welcomed (Halliday, 2011, August 11). The *Times Online* (Bennett, 2010, January 27) has remarked on the growing disparity between rich and poor in Britain over recent years, but social media in the hands of a few citizens with Blackberry messaging systems made convenient targets of blame. For the United Kingdom and the United States to designate social media as “dangerous” when it is used on their home ground is in strong contrast to the way it is represented as a tool for igniting political unrest in

⁹ See, for instance, the *Telegraph* (Johnson, 2010, July 21).

Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain. Social media have been talked up in Western media as an important part of the Arab Spring (Schillinger, 2011, September 20) which prompts a vision of “backward locals” in problematic countries taking on Western technologies to finally install democracy in their regions. In a strikingly similar reaction to the reactions of leaders during the London riots, both Egypt’s Mubarak and Libya’s Gaddafi attempted to shut down social media altogether to suppress insurgency in their countries (MacMillan, 2011, January 31; Hay, 2011, February 28) and Syria’s President Assad used social media to identify and track down his critics (“Syria’s embattled dissidents grapple with government hackers, wiretappers and imposters”, 2011, June 1).

Society may sit in the first two stages of Schopenhauer’s “truth” model, but it also sits contemporaneously in the third stage—acceptance. For many, it is indeed self evident that social media are a fully integrated and indispensable part of society, to the point that a person who is sceptical about the importance of social media may quickly be labelled as a Luddite who does not understand the new technology (Hill, 2012, June 8). Evidence of Schopenhauer’s Stage Three can be found in the flurry of business books such as *Groundswell* (Li & Bernoff, 2008) *Socialnomics* (Qualman, 2009) and *The ROI of Social Media* (Dimos, Groves, & Powell, 2011) which all emphatically express their belief that businesses cannot and will not survive without participating in social media. Dimos, Groves and Powell (2011) warn businesses that “not participating may also be risky. By not entering the conversation early, a competitor’s brand may reach critical mass, making it difficult or expensive for a late entrant to catch up” (p. 2). Li and Bernoff (2008) even go so far as to say that now, “If you have a brand, you’re under threat” (p. 212). One of the threats to a brand is that social media

allows uncontrolled conversations to take place and customers (or non-customers) can discuss the brands or organisations they like and dislike, and by sharing their experiences, can influence others' opinions. Li and Bernoff (2008) and Dimos, Groves and Powell (2011) believe that these conversations will occur regardless of whether or not organisations have a social media presence. They contend, however, that if businesses are early adopters of social media, they have more opportunity to set up their own spaces in the social media environment and gather people there, and thus provide a space where it is possible to monitor and control conversations about their brand.

Opinions of social media, then, exist at all points along the continuum of Schopenhauer's vision of social truth. At any time, it is a truth that social media are simultaneously mocked, rejected and accepted.

The potential of social media as a public sphere

Much discussion has centred on whether the online world could fulfil Habermas's (1962) conceptualisation of the public sphere, a utopian vision of a society in which all members participate with an equal voice about the *most pressing matters* of the day. The political engagement that Habermas visualised demanded that the public sphere permits freedom and equality in communication so that citizens can discuss, debate and reach consensus on matters of importance.

Commentators (Johnson, 2006; Rheingold, 1994, 1998; Thornton, 1996; Webster, 1995) argue both for and against the Internet as an environment that may just allow a real public sphere to exist and flourish, but Habermas himself dismisses the possibility, referring to the

Internet as nothing more than a “series of global villages” (Goode, 2005, p. 106). Overwhelming scholarly critique (Fernback & Thompson, 1995) tends to the conclusion that the Internet has failed to provide a Habermasian public sphere, but there has not so far been much discussion about the possibilities of the newer development of social media to do so. Social media are, after all, forums that allow individuals to exchange opinions, knowledge, and critiques and furthermore, they provide a space where consensus can be developed (Isofidis, 2011). There is a sense in which social media are modern simulacra of the seventeenth and eighteenth century coffee houses in England where rich and poor could gather, or the salons in France where the latest news could be discussed: background and wealth in these historical assemblies were less important than wit, reason and information. In the 21st century, the coffee houses and salons are no longer applicable, but social media offer an environment where similar sharing can take place (Boeder, 2005), and among all the available social media, one forum leads the way, through its proliferation and its power: Facebook.

However, the “social media as a public sphere” concept is probably flawed from inception, because the nature of social media detracts from long, intense discussion and encourages fractured, sporadic messaging. It is easy to find inflammatory, provocative posts on social media sites, but difficult to locate rounded, analytical argument. Bad behaviour such as trolling or flaming has become a significant problem as individuals attempt to aggravate or provoke intense conflict with other members of online communities (Shachaf & Hara, 2010). Furthermore, Facebook conversations occur mostly as written messages, and even with the newly-established conventions of “txt speak” and the use of emoticons, written messages do not contain the

wealth of non-verbal cues that are so important to establishing meaning (Birdwhistell, 1970). A rich part of sending and receiving messages is therefore absent, and so perhaps full discussion is simply not possible. However, despite these problems, social media perhaps gets closer to the possibility of a public sphere than any other technology has allowed in the half century since the idea of a public sphere was first promulgated.

Habermas (1962) promoted the public sphere as a place of political debate, but, following Iosifidis (2011), there is no reason why the meaning of the concept should not be widely extended. In a broader interpretation, then, the public sphere can embrace discussions between consumer/citizens about the corporations that have assumed so much power (Deetz, 1992). This version of a public sphere is particularly relevant to my research: in this sense, the public sphere could be a corporation's Facebook Page where consumers are able to gather to discuss the good, bad or ugly behaviour of a corporation, to "fight back" or "reach consensus" over what the corporation says or does.

The "corporate public sphere" assumes that the Pages contain genuine conversations and that the communication is an open and uncensored. A question has to be asked about how much *conversation* originates in public relations departments and so is guided and controlled by communication technologists ("discourse technologists" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 8). Khodarahmi (2009) maintains that there is no single definition for public relations, but for the purposes of this discussion, I will define it as "management of communication between an organisation and its publics" (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 6) and see it as a "management function that establishes and maintains mutually

beneficial relationships between an organisation and the publics on whom its success and failure depends” (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2006, p. 1). Given, then, that the purpose of public relations is to *manage* communications and create *mutually beneficial relationships*, organisations will consider it “important to adopt an appropriate approach which does not offend anyone, if not satisfying everyone” (Khodarahmi, 2009, p. 530). Public relations, therefore, whether exercised in the online or offline world, has at its heart a focus on communicating managed messages rather than engaging in free—uncontrolled—conversation. An argument circulates through the public relations world about whether social media can establish two-way symmetrical communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) between organisations and individuals. Symmetrical communication suggests a certain amount of “shared understandings, honesty, listening, and genuineness” (Pieczka, 2010, p. 108) and this is simply not possible if organisations set out to control the conversation (Wells & Spinks, 1999).

In summary, it is my contention that although social media have the ability to provide two-way symmetrical communication between organisations and individuals, the ideal is seldom put into in practice. Public relations may be full of practitioners who consider that their managed messages, when sent through social media become two-way symmetrical communication. In contrast to Marshall McLuhan’s (1964) famed comment, the medium is not the message in this sense.

Fears, uncertainties and doubts?

In the previous section of the chapter, I examined the potential for the positive effects of social media. In this section, I will consider the potential for negative effects, concentrating my attention on speeded-up life (Leccardi, 2007), the colonisation of private life by work and commercial organisations (Deetz, 1992), the erosion of fundamental personal freedoms such as the right to privacy (Krotoski, 2013) and finally, the creation of spectacle (Debord, 1994).

The real time debate

A frequent criticism of social media arises from a school of thought that sees the doom of the human race in the constant connectivity that can be achieved in the networked world. The criticism has coalesced into a debate about the importance of real time and clock time (Hope, 2006). The gist of the argument is that social media push individuals away from the clock time of the “real” world, which is organised around schedules set within time zones and days, weeks and months (Hope, 2006). In the world within social media, people instead enter “real time”, and are constantly connected, on call and unable to switch off (Hassan, 2007; Leccardi, 2007; Tomlinson, 2007) from the immediate and the constant present. Critics (Castells, 1996; Hope, 2006; Hongladarom, 2002; Virilio, 1995) of real time claim that people lost the leisure they need for reflection and analysis of the past or consideration of the future. Clock time is still relevant, of course, but social media developments such as instant messaging in Facebook, twenty-four hour Twitter updates or blogs that connect readers and writers across the globe mean society has shifted into a kind of “detemporalised instantaneity” (Leccardi, 2007) which creates an expectation of new content in a constant flow.

Friendships are also reckoned to suffer in real time because people feel pressured to stay in continuous contact with their connections (Turkle, 2012). As Wark (1997) argues, in the days of paper letters, the delay between posting a letter and receiving a reply allowed time for pause and thought. Message exchange on social media can be almost instantaneous, and since the average person has over two hundred Facebook friends (Tong, Van Der Heide, Langwell & Walther, 2008), meeting communication obligations could well be burdensome.

Real time can create unreasonably demanding work conditions for employees in companies that set up business-to-consumer communication on social media platforms (Fuchs, 2014). Some companies, for instance, expect continuous monitoring of social media space so that there is no delay in responding to requests or queries from other time zones. Workers may therefore be constantly on call, both as employees and as private users of social media, which can increase expectations of what and how individuals can deliver without additional reward (Fuchs, 2014). Real time is thought to be a factor in workplace burn out (Stern, 2012, May 21) as meeting the high expectations created by instant communication is not sustainable in the long term.

Product or user? The dual role of individuals on Facebook

Social media began as a tool for personal communication, but this is no longer its sole purpose as commercial interests take hold of the space. Schultz and Peltier (2013) say, "...fearing to be left behind in the race to win the social media battle, the vast majority of businesses have ventured into the social media world, often with little or no strategic

thought or plan” (p. 87). Businesses everywhere display the familiar signs requesting customers to follow them on Twitter or Facebook. In short, social media has been colonised by business and *is* big business (Fuchs, 2014) especially since some social media sites have enabled advertising to be shown to their users. Indeed, most of Facebook’s profit now derives from advertising (Team, 2014, July 25). Individual followers are now not simply users of a communication technology but have become, instead, a commodity sold to businesses on behalf of Facebook (Fuchs, 2014). As the saying goes “If you are not paying for it, you’re not the customer, you’re the product being sold”.

Facebook makes money by selling followers to businesses that want to achieve targeted advertising, and yet those same followers enable Facebook’s existence as a social medium. Facebook works on the premise that people set up content-rich profiles for communicating with other Facebook users. Without the pictures, comments and videos that are posted, there would be no interaction, and without the interaction, Facebook’s primary purpose would cease. It is reasonable to assume that users would accept a little advertising or commercially-driven content appearing on their Newsfeeds, but without social interaction with friends and family, Facebook would be like watching a television channel that played only advertisements.

The concept of “produsage” (Bruns, 2008, p. 2) is relevant to any discussion of social media content. The term denotes the situation which currently prevails on social media, in which users both produce creative content and also consume it. Bruns focused chiefly on Flickr and Wikipedia, both of which depend on peer-to-peer production, but the concept can be extrapolated to all social media platforms, because they all rely on user interaction.

Fuchs (2012, 2014) views produsage as exploitation, because, in his view, private users are encouraged to use their talents and devote their passion to making content that has commercial value. There is no argument about the psychic reward for creators (Amabile, 1997) but Fuchs argues (2014, p. 117) that the commercial value added to business sites should earn business-like compensation: money. Fuchs (2014) points out that the web of connections on Facebook means that every user's contacts, communication, posts, pictures and personal data are monitored, providing specific data for Facebook to sell on to businesses so that closely targeted advertisements will appear on individual Newsfeeds. Fuchs is entirely right in his argument: produsage allows Facebook to take profits from the unpaid labour of users.

Privacy: privilege, right or misnomer?

boyd (2008) asserts, "Facebook gives the 'gift' of infinite social information, but this can be like the One Ring—precious upfront, but destructive long-term" (p. 19), and it is the abundance of personal information building up on social media sites that gives rise to one of the biggest concerns about social media in general and Facebook in particular: privacy, and its possible disappearance (Fuchs, 2012; Kirkland, 2010). There is no clarity about the degree of privacy a person can obtain or expect on Facebook: it is not known where all the millions of petabytes of information on Facebook goes, who has access to it, and for what purposes (Fuchs, 2013). Krotoski (2013) defines privacy as a sense of control over information; how it is shared and with whom it is shared, and this seems as good a definition as any. It also seems that Krotoski's (2013) concept is vulnerable: there is a sense

in which users have already surrendered some of their rights to privacy (if, indeed, it is a right) by disclosing personal material on a social forum, even with controls in place. As boyd (2008) says in relation to this matter, “Information is not private because no one knows it; it is private because the knowing is limited and controlled” (p. 19).

If privacy is a right, then it is not unfair to argue that material posted to a Page that has privacy controls in place should not be harvested for commercial purposes. However, as Kirkland (2010) says, “...on Facebook users are forthcoming with accurate data about themselves, because they are confident the only people who will look at it are those they approve as their friends” (p. 266). One of the problems in conceptualising privacy on social media sites therefore appears to be that users operate in blithe confidence: despite numerous media reports of horror stories—employers checking workers’ posts for derogatory comments or bad behaviour, and the like—Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn and Hughes (2009) found that Facebook users leave their personal Profiles largely public because they are either uninterested in making their online world more private, or do not know how to do so.

Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, holds a personal belief that privacy is irrelevant (Kirkland, 2010). Zuckerberg argues that privacy must be destroyed in order to create a more open, transparent world that enables individuals to be true to themselves and that the new openness will lead to a more just, more accepting society (Kirkland, 2010). When Facebook was a straightforward, friendship-based tool of communication, Zuckerberg’s utopian vision may have been a perfectly acceptable philosophy for the original design and function of Facebook, but its shift towards a profit-driven commercial enterprise surely changes the acceptability of “no privacy” as an operating

principle. Kirkland (2010) reports Sheryl Sandberg (second-in-command to Mark Zuckerberg) as saying, “It [Facebook] is the first place where consumers have ever said, ‘Here’s who I am and it’s OK for you to use it” (p. 266), but it seems unlikely that very few users have much idea what they are agreeing to. Studies of user awareness of Facebook privacy around 90% of those surveyed had never read the Facebook Privacy Policy or Terms of Service (Debatin et al., 2009). Few even made any adjustments to the limited privacy controls available within the forum, but relied instead on inadequate automatic settings (Debatin et al., 2009). Under those circumstances, Sandberg’s remark seems disingenuous at best and outright cynical at worst.

Because Facebook is a private company, it can change its Terms of Service without warning, so what is private one day could become public information the next. For example, in 2009 Facebook changed its policy so that lists of friends and affiliations became public in spite of deployed privacy controls:

The reality is that nothing on Facebook is really confidential. The company’s own privacy policy is blunt on this score. Any of your personal data “may become publicly available,” it reads. “We cannot and do not guarantee that User Content you post on the site will not be viewed by unauthorised persons.” (Kirkland, 2010, p. 204)

Not only does the privacy policy render personal information vulnerable, but mistakes also happen. Andrews (2012) reports that Facebook and other social media companies have sometimes inadvertently (and occasionally, deliberately) allowed sensitive personal information to reach the wrong hands, and furthermore, that sites like Facebook are protected from almost any liability related to individuals’ postings. Perhaps users are not aware of social media as

commercial enterprises and do not realise that the main objective is to increase revenue by any means, including selling private information. As Dwyer (2011) says, “When companies sell information for a living, privacy is not a priority” (p. 60). Every post on every site is therefore fair game. In a climate in which personal information is turned into dollars, it is small wonder that the founders of Facebook should believe (or, at least, claim to believe) that privacy is an outmoded notion (Andrews, 2012; Fuchs, 2012).

Privacy issues do not end with the financial gains that can be made by selling personal information. During 2013, Edward Snowden blew the whistle on Facebook. He revealed that every month, Facebook receives and complies with thousands of requests from government departments for information on the Facebook accounts of persons of interest, even when strict privacy settings are in place. No information is actually private, in the true sense of the word, if a sufficiently powerful enough organisation was interested in accessing it. Fuchs (2012) seeks to rectify privacy imbalances in the following way:

Facebook should reveal what data the platform stores about its users, and users should be protected from Facebook’s economic exploitation of their data. This requires a differentiated concept of economic privacy which distinguishes the roles of consumers, workers, and companies in a capitalist economy. (p. 143)

Fuch’s suggestion is idealistic, but ultimately unrealistic: Facebook has no need to change anything it does, unless it is forced to do so by government legislation. Since it is now one of the most powerful companies in the world, with a population of users that would make it the third largest country in the world, it has enough “pull” to resist attempts to regulate it. The company need not worry about answering

to governments because it is in the interests of governments everywhere to maintain close relationships with a company that can provide so much valuable information about citizens.

Dwyer (2011) takes privacy to be a fundamental part of intellectual, political, and religious freedom but it is also, according to boyd (2008) not a right, but a privilege in need of social and structural protection. Societies will have to decide whether privacy is something to support and fight for against the insidious incursions of commercially-driven organisations (boyd, 2008).

Summary

This chapter outlined key ideas about social media, with particular attention to Facebook. The ideas have been sourced from both academic and popular sources and range from the most optimistic perspectives to dire predictions about the effects of social media on the future of society. The review of the literature about social media has shown that it is a relatively new development that has the power to allow human social interactions, but that those interactions may come at the cost of privacy and the colonisation of private exchanges by commercial interests.

The literature in this chapter provides a context for my research, placing a frame around the research questions, which ask how corporations and individuals shape their own and each others' identities on social media. In the next chapter, my attention will move to setting out my approach to research and to showing how the research was conducted.

Chapter Three: Methodology and method

The purpose of this research is to investigate the way that Facebook is used by organisations and their followers and the nature of the communicative relationships that are sought and established by both parties. The literature review in the previous chapter suggested that there are widely divergent positions on the impact of social media on individuals and that the relationship between what is personal and what is commercial is a contentious one. I have approached my research from a critical perspective because the Facebook phenomenon seems to present scope for peeling back the layers of language that obscure the underlying intentions of users. By this I mean that the public face of Facebook Pages overwhelmingly presents an image of open dialogue, friendliness and one-to-one conversation, that is at odds, however, with the purpose and intentions of businesses where profit generation and mass broadcasts of sales-focused messages are necessary to maintain commercial viability.

To achieve the purpose of my research, I have developed four research questions that guided my investigation into the Facebook behaviour of three corporations and their followers:

Research Question One: What is the nature of Facebook interactions between corporations and followers?

Personal and commercial users have different goals and intentions with their use of social media and particularly Facebook. Although commercial users actively entice private users to click on the Like button and join their Facebook communities, their efforts to persuade

and influence are, of course, met with a range of responses. Some followers will always consider that the corporations have the same status as other Facebook “friends”, but others respond to commercial self-interest with their own attempts to gain a benefit. This question structures my investigation of the posts by corporations and followers over a 12-month period.

Research Question Two: What are the multiple realities discernible on the Facebook Pages of the three corporations?

I submit that most followers would accept the content and tenor of the corporate Pages without concern, enjoying the cheerful optimism that is obtained from a quick or uncritical reading of the material. However, because the Pages situate the companies and the followers in a particular relationship, I maintain that it is worthwhile to study the elements of the Pages to see what lies beneath. This question is explored in chapter six, in which I record the results of a close reading of the three Facebook promotional materials, using Monin’s (2004) three-tiered approach to engage with the texts.

Research Question Three: How do corporations use their Facebook Pages to build follower identification?

Follower identification with organisations is advantageous to commercial enterprises because the sense of belonging that emerges from identification is likely to engender customer loyalty and produce beneficial buyer behaviour. This question therefore investigates the ways in which commercial organisations entice, and how they position, people within the Facebook communities they set out to build. To investigate the matter raised by this question, I applied

Cheney's (1983a) rhetorical identification typology to three corporate Facebook pages. The analysis is documented in chapter seven.

Research Question Four: In terms of business-to-follower communication, what is the nature of the "Facebook effect"?

This research was guided overall by a persistent curiosity about what was really happening on Facebook. The overwhelmingly enthusiastic reception that Facebook has received does not entertain negativity, while at the same time, its detractors have painted a pervasively black picture of the social changes that could possibly ensue from living a "Facebooked" life. Both standpoints have their truths, and both are largely theoretical. My interest is in knowing the Facebook effect from examining the actual behaviour of corporations and followers, and to this end, the four chapters of data analysis show what is taking place on the Pages. This last research question guides the discussion in chapter eight, bringing together the findings of my investigation and showing their significance.

Although these questions could apply to a large longitudinal investigation that might aim to generate results that could produce generalised Facebook "laws", I am focusing my analysis on a limited sample of the business Pages on Facebook. The deep examination of a small sample will yield data from which it will be possible to extract the qualities of the interactions that took place on Facebook over the course of a year between Air New Zealand, ASB and Vodafone, and their followers. Because my enquiry concentrates deeply on a narrow sample, it is placed in the category of qualitative research where the emphasis falls on "the socially constructed nature of reality, the

intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10). In qualitative research, the processes by which new meaning is made are at the forefront, placing researchers squarely within the enquiry as they endeavour to discover how the social world is created (Charmaz, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research, therefore, must acknowledge and account for researchers’ convictions about the social world and how it should be conceptualised and investigated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Not only does the researcher need to be placed within the research, but also, moreover, the participants must be understood as continuously emerging and changing, not as “perfectly observable” entities (Bailey, Ford & Raelin, 2009, p. 19). In terms of this research, therefore, a Facebook Page cannot be seen as a static text, but must be read within the wider context of organisational aims with the understanding that those aims can alter rapidly as the external and internal environments shift. Similarly, single posts by followers have to be situated within the larger group of exchanges, which in turn sit within a host of personal motivations and intentions that may never be other than semi-transparent to an observer.

A qualitative research orientation fits within the interpretive research paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) which, as Burrell and Morgan (1979) maintain, considers the fluid nature of social relationships. Thus, people who work in this paradigm aim to apprehend the world subjectively by examining the shifting but unending processes of social interaction (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Mumby, 1988). Denzin & Lincoln (2005) and Mumby (1988) assert that research conducted within the interpretive paradigm valorises individuals’ contributions to the construction of the social world, and data should therefore be gathered

that allow the investigation of individuals' viewpoints. Further to this point, interpretive researchers need to gain personal knowledge of the research topic (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) if they are to understand the social world from the individual's viewpoint.

Deetz (1982) said "...talk and writing are [...] much more than the means of expression of individual meaning; they connect each perception to a larger orientation and system of meaning" (p. 135). In this research, therefore I took "posting"¹⁰ on the Pages by both the corporations and also their followers to be purposeful engagement with that part of the social world made accessible through Facebook, and the posts and responses¹¹ formed the bulk of my raw data. Following the precepts of the interpretive paradigm, I did not begin my research process with a ready-made hypothesis about the meanings of the texts I proposed to analyse, but rather, let patterns of meaning cohere into rich themes (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). My data sets captured a moment in Facebook time—a year of posts and responses to and from three corporations—but the interpretation allowed meanings to emerge and also accommodated the rapidly-changing nature of the online world where not only is the social significance of the technology still fluid, but technological improvements also frequently alter the purpose and possibilities of the medium.

One aim of this research is to show the differences between the explicit self-presentation of the corporate users and their implicit drive towards commercial success, and it thus adopts a critical perspective in the sense that "critical" means uncovering false consensus, the gaps

¹⁰ Under the general label "posting" I here include everything from written messages to photographs, videos and music.

¹¹ Not all responses may be posts, for example, "silence" is still a response but does not exist as a post.

between espoused and actual corporate practices, and the hidden connections between language and power (Bullis, 1997; Deetz, 1982; Fairclough, 1989). Deetz (1982) maintains that a critical perspective within the interpretive paradigm is not just possible, but actively desirable and should reveal the differences between espoused positions and practices, and the underlying realities of everyday engagement. I have chosen to adopt a critical interpretive approach because I see a great deal of “hype” about the possibilities of Facebook, together with an accompanying lack of critique about the real business-to-follower established online relationships. A further motivating factor is that a critique drawn from empirical data will make an important contribution to achieving a balanced assessment of the social impact of tools such as Facebook.

Like much research sitting within a critical interpretivist paradigm (Bailey, Ford & Raelin, 2009), this research operates from a relativist ontological perspective in that it takes the view that there are no absolute truths or uncertainties (Hugly & Sayward, 1987). Unlike researchers who work from a realist standpoint, I assume there is no single objective version of the truth waiting to be discovered. As much as I attempt to suspend my own personal beliefs and experiences in order to understand others’ comments and behaviours, I have to acknowledge my own rather sophisticated knowledge of Facebook and the possibility that it will lead me into biased judgments. My answer to this possibility has been to apply three different approaches to unravelling the Pages in order to attain consistency and detachment.

In the preceding section, I have introduced the philosophical basis of the research, and have specified that I am adopting a critical interpretive approach to my data. The rest of the chapter presents the three methodological tools I employed: thematic analysis, close reading and rhetorical analysis. The discussion is structured into sections according to the order in which each tool is used in the thesis, and each section begins with a theoretical explication of the particular method and its applicability to this research, and continues with a detailed account of the way the method was operationalised.

Methodological tools and operationalising the research

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) recommend the use of multiple methods to triangulate the research and obtain a deep understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Accordingly, this research is designed around “mixed methods” (Testa, Livingston & VanZile-Tamsen, 2011) to ensure a deep enquiry into Facebook behaviour. The first data gathered were 35,335 posts and responses to posts of the Pages of Air New Zealand, Vodafone and ASB. This data set was examined using thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Leininger, 1985; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

Thematic analysis

Although I decided in the end to apply thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006) to my raw data, I was greatly attracted to and influenced by the philosophy and processes of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1988; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1965, 1967, 1968; Heath & Cowley, 2004). Grounded theory enables

the researcher to develop an explanation of a particular phenomenon, and has been identified as appropriate for dealing with large amounts of textual data (Charmaz, 2014) such as the tens of thousands of Facebook posts and responses that form the bulk of the data from the first phase of my research.

The aspect of grounded theory that strongly appealed to me was that researchers should begin data analysis with no expectations of what will be found, and thus, findings are grounded in the raw data and not in any favoured preconceived theory. Also, there is an immediacy to grounded theory research that I like: researchers gather data and start coding straightaway, immersing themselves in the material by reading and re-reading each datum, comparing it to the others, coding and grouping coded data into key concepts until trends emerge and some general insights can be established. However, true grounded theory imposes a multi-layered administrative system of memoranda, notes, and other schemes for ensuring orderliness, and although I can accept that a large part of understanding grounded theory lies in the actual process of carrying it out (Heath & Cowley, 2004), I finally rejected the full method while retaining the essence of the underpinning philosophy.

Thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Leininger, 1985; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) allowed me to work within the philosophy of grounded theory in a way I found less burdened by a pre-designed system. That is not to say that my coding of the data was not systematic, but rather, that I felt free to develop a method that suited my own style of working. Braun and Clarke (2006) who are proponents of the method, assert that thematic analysis is so useful it should be “a foundational method for qualitative analysis” (p. 78), but

at the same time, they admit it is not well defined. Practitioners therefore seldom agree with one another about what thematic analysis is and how to carry it out. The danger of using a method that is still being defined is that the research is rendered vulnerable to accusations that it lacks rigour. To counter that possibility, the research design must be specific and transparent in both operationalisation and write-up (Constas, 1992; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Tuckett, 2005).

Perhaps the most straightforward way to conceptualise thematic analysis is to see it as a process of coding the raw data to find patterns substantial enough to be called themes (Aronson, 1994; Attride-Stirling, 2001; Lacey & Luff, 2001). More specifically, a theme is “a pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4) and therefore captures a facet of the data that allows categorisation and interpretation. Manifest themes are those which are unambiguously present in the data and latent themes underpin the phenomenon and so are less obvious (Boyatzis, 1998). Whether the themes are manifest or latent, thematic analysis should locate and classify them so that their implications can be assessed. Thematic analysis therefore has utility in peeling back layers of meaning in texts, and as Braun and Clark (2006) observe, provides a way “both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of ‘reality’” (p. 81).

The capacity of thematic analysis to build “rich description” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83) from a data set is useful in this research, because, while personal Profiles of users are moderately well-researched, by contrast, corporate Pages are under-researched. This research is opening up a new line of enquiry, and I therefore wish to follow

Geertz' (1973) recommendation that qualitative analysis should generate "thick description" (p. 10) of the data. Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012) and Lacey and Luff (2001) have found that thematic analysis is useful for richness of the findings it can generate, particularly when the field has been subjected to only limited research. Thematic analysis suits my research because it will facilitate thick description of the Facebook posts, and by identifying the "similarities and differences across the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 97) will permit understanding of the behaviour on Facebook Pages. Moreover, thematic analysis is accessible. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis is straightforward and does not require as much time as other methods of qualitative analysis, making it an effective research method given the bulk of data the Pages have yielded. As well as offering effective analysis and efficiency, thematic analysis does not exclude researchers from other fields from the findings. My research will therefore be available to anyone with an interest in the way Facebook affects social life.

Thematic analysis is sometimes criticised because the processes of conducting the research can seem vague (Aronson 1994; Tuckett, 2005) and it is because of a certain elusiveness about the details of a project that Boyatzis (1998) has argued that thematic analysis should be seen as a tool in multi-disciplinary projects rather than as a method for an individual project. Braun and Clarke (2006), however, disagree with that assertion, claiming that thematic analysis is strong enough to be used on its own, as long as the coding system is well documented (Aronson, 1994; Constan, 1992; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The next section of this chapter therefore sets out with some specificity the means by which I came to the nine themes into which my data are organised.

Coding the data

Thematic analysis, according to Boyatzis (1998) moves through three phases: “recognition”, “encoding” and “interpretation” (p. 1), but both Boyatzis (1998) and Braun and Clarke (1998) stress the absolute need to clarify the research design before any work begins. Further, decisions need to be made about the theoretical framework of the research and the purpose of the research, for these will influence the choice of sample. I have already explained the theoretical orientation of this research, and I was clear as I set out to gather my data that I wanted to examine a substantial number of real posts in order to form an idea of what corporations and followers focused on and expected of one another. I limited the scope of the data set to posts made on the Wall settings (this is the automated setting followers see when they look at the Page for the first time) mostly because the volume of data was so large. I also felt that the Wall posts were an accurate representation of what a user within Facebook sees and that a general acquaintance with the Wall settings might influence follower behaviour. The Wall settings seemed to me to be a likely location of typical Facebook interactions. In all, I captured and stored some 35,335 separate comments or responses for later analysis. By “captured” I mean that I copied and stored all the messages into one searchable file which I could examine closely for the patterns and themes.

Braun and Clark (2006) insist also that researchers need to be clear about the type of thematic analysis they will undertake. I chose to conduct inductive thematic analysis because both the field of the research and the theoretical framework in which it sits meant that I could obtain the best thick description of Facebook behaviour if I did not deviate from the raw data. Here I should note that the researchers

who adopt an inductive approach are guided by the data and do not attempt to “make it fit into a preexisting coding frame” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). A warning accompanies this style of research: Braun and Clarke (2006) stress the importance of reflexivity in inductive thematic analysis because “data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum” (p. 84). Researchers, in other words, are not outside the research (Constas, 1992; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) and need to be aware that they may not be free of existing allegiances to theoretical and epistemological positions.

With Braun and Clarke’s (2006) caveat in mind, I began the coding process by reading through followers’ posts several times, and at some point during my preliminary readings, began to colour code for the ideas that seemed to recur in the data, both within and across posts. By noting the range of key words associated with the different ideas, I quite quickly built up a picture of the main purposes behind follower’s interactions on the Pages. During this process, it became clear that a single *purpose* could attract a range of key words that were not synonyms for one another but did nevertheless belong in a class together, and I have recorded the key words at the head of each theme in chapter four. The purposes were not identical from follower to follower, of course, but there was enough similarity that I felt that coherent themes were emerging, and that they encapsulated the multiple reasons followers expressed their feelings and hope on the Pages.

This simple but practical method of coding allowed me to develop a strong familiarity with the data set, but it did not deal with my persistent worry that the co-locating of key words was not a sufficiently rigorous, defensible way to claim the existence of a *theme*. This vexing

point resulted in a re-examination of my spreadsheets, at which point I realised that the key words were related to *repetition*, *recurrence* and *passion*. By this I mean that I had not designated an utterance as a key word unless it occurred within certain parameters demarcated by repetition—the follower repeated the idea within a post; recurrence—many followers mentioned some aspect of this idea, so that it recurred in many posts; and passion—even if the idea was found only a few times, it was accompanied by such intense feeling that it could not be ignored. I did not at any point intend to argue that there was some unspecified yet telling number that, once reached, tipped the posts from being incidental comments over into the status of a theme. I did, however, want to be able to defend the particular themes I believe are there, and I feel I can defend the themes on the grounds of my meticulous coding for key words associated with the *purpose* of the posts that appeared in the posts with *recurrence*, *repetition* and *passion*.

At the same time, I developed a notation system for locating the posts I wished to quote for illustrative purposes as I wrote up the rich descriptions of the themes. Quotes from the posts are presented naturalistically in the write ups. In other words, to follow through on my wish to examine the true communication activity on the Pages, I presented the posts as they occurred, and did not attempt to clean up the spelling and grammar that followers deem acceptable, even when the post was close to incomprehensible:

I'll even take ur crapiest ph c0z it cnt gt any crapiier then myn. I g0t da suckiest ph owt ov al my m8z and famz. My lil sis has g0t a beta ph grr".

Translated into Standard English, this post reads:

I will take your crappiest phone because it can't get any crappier than mine. I have got the suckiest phone out of all of my mates and family. My little sister has got a better phone, grrr!

I am aware that another researcher might have taken another angle in the coding process, but *purpose* seemed to me to satisfy the focus of my first research question, "What is the nature of Facebook interactions between corporations and followers?" Though my coding and categorisation are valid and reliable in relation to my research question, I cannot forget that Corbin and Strauss (2008) wrote, "there are multiple interpretations that can be constructed from one set of data" (p. ix), and I am sure that my views and sophisticated knowledge of Facebook have somewhat coloured the outcome of my investigation. However, as Corbin and Strauss (2008) say, "Our biases are there, the important thing is to be able to recognise them and to be aware when they intrude upon the analysis" (p. 80). One of the aspects of myself as a researcher that has possibly influenced the determination of the themes is my experience in building Facebook Pages as promotional tools for businesses. I cannot entirely set aside my "insider" knowledge of business practices and intentions, in the sense that I am aware of the actions that businesses are likely to have taken with regard to things like deleting displeasing posts by followers and understanding that Pages, no matter how friendly they seem on the surface, are a means to a profitable end. This reflection underwrote the care I have taken to code in relation to the research question, so that became the guide in my search for key words. It was also behind the consistency of my coding practice in searching for ideas that came up in the data with repetition, recurrence and passion.

By co-locating related key words, I discovered nine themes, and I then set about naming them in ways that portrayed the qualities

encapsulated by the range of key words. The nine themes that emerged from the followers' posts are written up in chapter four. The process of gathering the posts, coding them and finding themes relating to user purpose was repeated with the messages posted by the corporations, and these themes are recorded in chapter five. Thematic analysis is not a numbers game, but patterns are hard to discern if the data set is slender. In all, 17,465 follower comments were analysed, and 17,870 responses by the corporations, and the period of the data gathering took place over a calendar year. The nine themes in each chapter represent clear patterns rather than mere happenstance.

The preceding section set out the philosophy and process of the thematic analysis that forms chapters four and five. The following section lays out the system of close reading that I used for my preliminary examination of significant promotional Pages of Air New Zealand, Vodafone and ASB. During the time of the data gathering, each of the three corporations embarked on campaigns to win followers and promote the companies. Each of the campaigns was marked by an overlap between the worlds of the personal, the virtual and the corporate and each aimed to establish a particular kind of relationship between the companies and their followers. In the case of ASB, I chose to examine the creation and promotion of their Virtual Branch, which enables customers to complete their banking needs via Facebook and is accessed through their Facebook Page. Vodafone's big promotion was their "Share Everything Day", which culminated in a compilation video made from content supplied by followers and uploaded to the Facebook Page. Separate to the corporation's main Facebook Page, Air New Zealand opened a Page for the Air New Zealand Fairy, a creation who grants wishes and gives followers treats related to Air New Zealand. Access to these Pages was predominantly

through Facebook, but the promotions were also placed on other forms of social media and mass media¹². I have concentrated solely on the Facebook presence of the campaigns.

Close reading

Before I applied Cheney's (1983a) rhetorical identification typology to the texts of the promotional campaigns, I decided to conduct a close reading of each page. This is because using the typology necessitates a fine-grained analysis at the level of the sentence, which often means that the overview of the text is lost. A close reading, by contrast, deals with texts more holistically, progressing inductively from observation of some striking feature to a reasoned conclusion (Jacobowitz & Lippe, 2012; Kain, 1998). A close reading, therefore, "is a mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a view to deeper understanding of its meanings" (Brummett, 2010, p. 3) and is frequently used to obtain a critical appreciation of advertisements, books, film and television and other cultural texts. Therefore, it seemed appropriate to extend the range of application to the relatively new cultural development of Facebook Pages.

The close reading permitted a broad description of the promotional material and a focus on the design, purpose and overall message to customers. Though each Page is strikingly similar in its purpose (enticing people to have a more intimate online relationship with the organisation) and style of approach to the customer (that of friendliness), their design was significantly different, featuring, as they did, a video that is a not-quite "home movie", an online bank branch and a fairy. The similarities and the differences make a close reading

¹² Appendices i to iii give a visual representation of this promotional flow.

valuable to me because I can determine the details of how each Page works, how customers discover it and how they interact with it. It also enables me to discuss the design of the promotional element, as well as significance of the colours, layouts, and logos.

Although close readings depend on researcher intuition and sensitivity to the text, I sought a degree of consistency so that I could apply the same system over all three texts. The search for a systematic approach brought me to Monin (2004) and her structured method for accessing texts. Monin recommends three levels of reading: first, a dominant reading, which deals with objective surface elements; second, a critical reading, in which the intention is to uncover hidden connections and assumptions; and third, a reflexive reading, which engages the reader's reactions. At the beginning of chapter five, I have written in more detail about Monin's (2004) approach because it seemed logical to locate the theoretical material as close to the data as possible.

Monin's (2004) orderly approach made the process of carrying out the close readings both easier and harder. The easy aspect of the process was the layered design of the system, which directed and organised the analysis and it was a simple matter to examine the texts for the elements that seemed to belong to each stage of the reading. Thus, I read the texts several times, then worked through each dimension of the close reading, making notes and trying not to let the layers "bleed" into one another. The difficult part of applying Monin's (2004) system was, in fact, making sure that the elements did remain separate. Some merging was inevitable: for instance, I was always likely to find the critical readings and reflexive readings a little hard to keep separate, because my reactions to the Pages tend naturally towards the critical. Although Monin's (2004) approach specifies the three levels of

analysis, the readings do not take place in the linear fashion that the write up suggests. In other words, the experience and resources of researchers begin to suggest interpretations from the first reading. Overall, however, the consistency of the approach was beneficial to the close readings because all three pages were examined for the same elements and provided substance for answering the second research question, “What are the multiple realities discernible on the Facebook Pages of the three corporations?”

Rhetoric and rhetorical analysis

The Monin-style close reading (2004) provided a useful insight into the Pages as whole documents within the wider context of both the corporations and New Zealand life but did not allow me to interrogate the texts for the organisations’ efforts to build identification with their followers. The textual analysis had already shown me that followers expected the corporations to behave like friends, and I became interested in why that would be. It seemed too facile to conclude that followers’ expectations of friendship from the corporations derived from Facebook’s origins as a friend-to-friend forum: humans, after all, are highly adaptive to situations and well able to moderate their behaviour to fit appropriately into new social conditions. For the third phase of my research, then, I used Cheney’s (1983a) rhetorical identification typology to discover the scope and nature of the targeted efforts to persuade followers to identify with the companies. The organising principle of the third phase of the research was the question, “How do corporations use their Facebook Pages to build follower identification?”

Theories on rhetoric are complex and diverse, and range from the straightforward art of persuasion to social constructionism (Sillince & Brown, 2009). Heath (1992) positions rhetoric at the heart of an organisation's relationship with its environment, while Hartelius and Browning (2008) assert that "rhetoric is a strategy of the powerful, a form of control" (p. 33). For the purposes of this research, my interest in rhetoric is its capacity to form engagement between organisations and their Facebook followers. Here, I see engagement as activities engendered by some degree of identification with the organisations' interests.

Rhetoricians use symbols to induce desired attitudes and actions in their audiences (Foss, Foss & Trapp, 2002; Hochmuth, 1952). In the hands of a social benefactor, the manipulation of symbols can bring about healing of social division, but as Burke (1969) argues, rhetoric can also be used to perpetuate social hierarchies with all their concomitant entitlements (Cheney, 1983a; Cheney, 1991; Foss et al. 2002; Tompkins, Fisher, Infante & Tompkins, 1975). However, although the power of rhetoric can be abused, it can also build identification in social structures (Cralle, 1990) such that parties will share common purposes and act in one another's best interests. Sharing purpose and interest comes from what Burke (1969) called "consubstantiality" (p. 21), which, in Cheney's (1983a) words is "[A]n area of 'overlap'—either real or perceived—between two individuals or between an individual and a group; it is a basis for common motives and for 'acting-together'." (p. 146).

Consubstantiality increases the chances that an audience will accept persuasion directed to them, but it does not require the members of the audience to retain their sense of self. Rather, as Burke (1969) explained,

it means that if A identifies with B, A has become “substantially one” (p. 21) with another person. Burke (1969, 1972) alludes to three techniques that can be used to achieve consubstantiality: common ground can be found with the audience, antithesis can be directed to groups constructed and perceived as outsiders, and the targeted group can be drawn together by the use of the *transcendent we*, which subtly delineates the disparate members of the audience as a single body. These techniques for building consubstantiality were extended by Cheney (1983a) when he developed his rhetorical identification typology out of Burke’s (1969) work. I have written in more detail about the different elements of Cheney’s typology in chapter seven, because it seemed logical to place the explanation close to the data where the typology was applied.

Cheney (1983a) and DiSanza and Bullis (1999) offer reasons for counting the number of occurrences of each strategy in the typology, and include examples of each in their write up of the analysis. I have discarded the practice of counting the instances of (say) the use of the *transcendent we*, because my study does not depend on a single, static text. The elements of the Pages are complex, overlapping and fluid, and they are varied in the sense that they are discussed, presented and promoted in a range of contexts. Counting occurrences is therefore problematic. A count would almost certainly be inaccurate because of the difficulty in placing parameters around the texts.

Cheney’s (1983a) rhetorical identification typology offers some strong advantages as a research tool: its flexibility means it can be useful in analysing a wide range of texts and furthermore, allows the researcher to focus narrowly on a single, salient element of identity work (Adler, 1995; Ahmed, 2009; Chreim, 2002; DiSanza & Bullis, 1999; Turnage,

2010). While it can show evidence of the use of the identification strategies, the typology does not, however, suggest how such findings should be contextualised in terms of what the practice might mean to the audience. The researcher, therefore, must look beyond the textual analysis to find a wider meaning for the research findings, which is why I have formulated a fourth and over-arching research question: “In terms of business-to-follower communication, what is the nature of the ‘Facebook effect?’”, which shapes the discussion in chapter eight.

Another limitation of Cheney’s (1983a) typology is that public documents (in this case, Facebook Pages) is one field of rhetoric that organisations may employ when they encourage customers to identify with them, but there is little empirical evidence that measures the effectiveness of the public persuasion (Dimos, Groves & Powell, 2011). In other words, followers may read the Pages quite cynically, pressing Like or submitting a post, less because they have internalised the goals of the organisation and more because they are wondering “What’s in it for me?” Despite Cheney’s (1983a) discussion of the ambiguity of public documents like the Pages, he notes that organisations commit considerable resources¹³ to developing them. Clearly, it suits organisations (and especially marketing departments) to believe that Pages can develop identification even if the number of hits on the Like button (for instance) is poorly understood.

To conduct the analysis of the Pages, I worked systematically through the elements of the typology one by one, noting each occurrence as I found it. It was tempting to work Page by Page rather than strategy by strategy, because once I entered a Page, I could see more elements of

¹³ As an estimate, I would imagine there are teams of three to five full time permanent staff employed to work on the social media presence for each of the corporations analysed in this research, and that this is typical of most organisations of their size.

the typology in play than the one I happened to be coding for. However, I intended to present the analysis according to the order of the strategies, and I felt, too, that it would be easier to gain a sense of the presence of the whole typology on the Pages by applying the strategies to the texts rather than the reverse. Chapter seven, therefore, was inherent in the data in a significant way as the typology revealed the use of identification strategies on the Pages.

Summary

This chapter has set out and provided a brief rationale for the research questions that shaped this research, and has also outlined both the theoretical orientation of my research and the three methodological tools that I used to analyse the raw data. The chapter also contains sketches of the straightforward but consistent application of the methods to my data sets. My intention in the chapter has been to make the research process transparent so that the four data chapters that follow this are framed both in theory and process. In the next chapter, I set out phase one of the research, the first of two chapters of thematic analysis. The thrust of all the data chapters is to examine how, as Boyd and Waymer (2011) put it, “organisations attempt to earn the profit and how they use external rhetoric to achieve that end” (p. 486).

Chapter Four: Conversing with the corporations

This chapter sets out the first of the data that emerged from analysing the posts on the Facebook Pages of the three corporations. I found nine distinct themes, and the chapter is organised as nine themes, from the biggest—that is, those that contained the most posts (though not necessarily the most passionate expression)—through to the smallest. The difference in the size of the themes does not mean that the smaller ones are less important in understanding the Facebook behaviour of both the users and the corporations: rather, each theme that is presented here offers insights into both the communication behaviour and the attempts at identity construction (Altheide, 2000; Goffman, 1959; Turkle, 1995; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008) of the parties who interact on the Pages.

Getting started: nine themes of mortal men...

I have called the theme with the largest number of posts *Classroom question time*. It contains the responses that followers gave to the questions the corporations placed on the Pages and was the largest group of responses in all three of the organisations whose Pages I studied. The second largest category, *Love or something like it*, includes all comments that showed a positive emotion towards the corporations ranging from affection, devotion, sympathy, helpfulness or admiration to approval. *Hell hath no fury like a Facebook follower scorned*, which contains all the negative comments posted about the corporations, is only slightly smaller than the *Love* category: opinions about the

corporations appeared to be fairly polarised. The fourth and fifth categories are *The lonely hearts club*—quite personal self-disclosure on corporate Pages—and *Contacting the corporate call centre*.

The other four categories were far smaller. *Greed is good*, for instance, comprises only 2–4% of the postings for each organisation. The *Greed* theme is made up of posts that beg: followers asked the corporations for “freebies” or assistance as though the organisations were charities rather than businesses. *The customer is always right* is where followers’ suggest how to improve products or service, and the last two categories, which are composed of less than 1% of the posts, are *Spam*—the name is self-explanatory—and *Conversations with others*. In *Conversations*, Facebook followers spoke directly to each other on the Pages, rather than to or through the organisation.

Classroom question time

Followers give answers to generic, trivial questions in posts made by the organisation on their Facebook Page, just as a teacher responds to students in the classroom.

Key attributes: single word posts, digits, yes or no responses, statements rather queries, factual rather than emotional responses.

The *Classroom question time* theme draws a deliberate analogy to school and classrooms, in most part because the Pages occasionally assume an instructive tone not unlike that achieved in the didactic relationship between teachers and pupils. Companies sometimes use their Pages to pose a series of simple questions or other straightforward puzzles to followers. The questions function somewhat the way a “fun” quiz does in a school classroom when questions are used less to test

pupils' knowledge and more to enthuse them and focus them on a new topic. However, although engaging pupils by setting them to answer questions is an ancient teaching technique (Bloch-Schulman, 2012) it is possible to see classroom quizzes in a more sinister light as a technique of coercive power (Alderman & Green, 2011) that sets success and failure within the quite narrow parameters of good recall memory, quick response and (perhaps most importantly) co-operation.

Extending the classroom analogy to Facebook Pages of companies is such not a stretch as a first reading might suggest. For instance, ASB celebrated the 2011 ASB NZ Maths Challenge by asking its (presumably adult) followers to solve the following equation: " $X + - 7.2 = -2.6$. $X=?$ " This was followed by the question: "A jar contains 4 orange, 2 pink and 10 yellow jellybeans...What is the probability of selecting a yellow then a pink jellybean without replacements?" These particular problems are probably too difficult for younger pupils, but they serve the same purposes as classroom quizzes, which encourage children to memorise and to apply knowledge even as they simultaneously reinforce the subordination of the majority to a single expert who can pronounce the right answers, commend or reward correctness and (possibly) punish or mock wrong ones. ASB could, and almost certainly would, defend the maths questions as "harmless fun", just as any quiz or puzzle is fun. There is a difference, however, between an adult's choice to pass time by solving Sudoku (for instance) and facing compulsory fun on a Facebook Page. Regardless of any claim of "fun" that can be made, the Bank's approach to its followers tends to position them as inferior in the communication relationship.

Although it is hard not to see the ASB quiz as somewhat infantilising its audience, the first question earned ASB 50 responses and 24 Likes. The

second question received 66 responses and 18 Likes. Furthermore, it created strong engagement among followers: people debated with one another, defending their own answer as the correct one, until the discussion was terminated by the bank, who wrote, “Thanks mathletes. The correct answer is 4.6...” and assigned a prize to a winner chosen from among the followers who had given the right answer. The quiz confined and constructed the identities (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008) of followers in two ways. On one hand, the “cutesy”, good-humoured label “mathletes” expresses approval of the effort put into problem solving. On the other hand, however, the label simultaneously patronises participants for needing to be athletic at mathematics when the Bank holds not only the one right answer, but also the power to close down the conversation and award a prize. The prize is comparable to the gold stars that good pupils earn at primary school. In this case, the reward is for more than a straightforward correct answer: it also remunerates people whose compliance with brand-building is demonstrated by joining in corporation-organised fun and engaging with the company (Ind & Bjerke, 2007; Urde, 2003).

In some cases, instead of being general knowledge brain-teasers, the quizzes are thinly-disguised exercises in gathering marketing information, taking the form of, “How often have you used x product?” Quizzes like these elevate the status of followers’ product knowledge and generate followers’ visible engagement with the companies. The power of the question to engender engagement is very strong. For instance, when ASB was promoting its new scheme to save customers money, it asked, “How much money have you saved?” The question may well have been intended as rhetorical, but many people replied with the exact amount, saying (for example) \$61.25. The question and responses to it provide a form of word-of-mouth advertising, which

cannot be said to be free, because as noted in chapter two, the costs of Facebook can be high. However, the very act of answering such a question is likely to cement the benefits of the scheme in followers' minds and secure their loyalty to the corporations.

The organisations sometimes pose questions that are simply unanswerable, such as, "Who will win the game tonight?" and it is questions like these that reveal most clearly the companies' desire to engage followers. In instances such as these, the organisation seems like teachers who try to align themselves with "the kids" in order to gain popularity (Alderman & Green, 2011). The question shows the organisations demonstrating—perhaps rather clumsily—that they are aware of the public's interests (rugby, league, netball) and want to talk about it, because it shows they are people too, and have a human side that followers can relate to. Organisations, however, are not people, and their efforts at achieving likeability are the work of "discourse technologists" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 8) behind the scenes, not the genuine conversational gambits of real people.

Vodafone in particular used questions to encourage followers to engage. At different times, the Vodafone Page asked the followers these questions:

Go the All Blacks! What do you predict will be the final score between the AB's and Argentina tonight?

What is one thing you wish you were smarter at?

Lets go Vodafone Warriors, bring it home! What's your score predictions?

HUGE CONGRATULATIONS to the All Blacks, awesome! What was your defining moment of the game to see the boys seal the victory?

Bring it home tonight boys! Go the All Blacks! Who do you think will be the player of the match?

Vodafone was not alone in using this strategy to humanise its public face. In an egregious example of self-approval, Air New Zealand drew attention to its generosity “We've given away a little happiness at Auckland and Wellington Airport” and then asked followers to respond to this question “Which airport in NZ should we visit next?” The question prompted many followers to write and explain why their town deserved the next expression of Air New Zealand’s generosity. In all probability, the next town was already selected, but the question certainly stimulated “conversation”.

The next question has the same purpose as the others, but it could be considered a rather cruel technique, asking as it does for followers to confess to something perhaps embarrassing or shameful in order to ensure a treat for “some very special kids”: “What do you ... I Wish I Hadn't? Done or said something you wish you hadn't? Tell all at www.iwishihadnt.co.nz and help make some very special kids' wishes come true.” This invitation to self-disclose personal information seems particularly dubious, given the issues with disappearing privacy on Facebook (Fuchs, 2012).

ASB also used the “we question, you answer” technique to win engagement and Likes, but its questions were affiliated to celebrity culture (Cashmore, 2006) and the likelihood that followers would all desire to mingle with famous people, even if that interaction could only be virtual: “If you could chat with someone famous via our Virtual Branch, who would it be?” and “If you could be Facebook friends with a famous rugby player, who would it be?” In school, a *Classroom question time* session elicits instant, spirited responses rather than thoughtful deliberation, and the effect on Facebook is the same. At the same time, however, *question time* reinforces the power distance

between teachers and pupils: only the teacher asks the questions, picks someone to answer, and says which answers are right and which are wrong. The classroom analogy prevails here: the organisations direct and monitor exchanges and followers are caught up in the moment, wanting to count in the chorus of voices though ultimately the answers serve no other purpose than to achieve engagement with the brand.

Sometimes *Classroom question time* incorporated incentives such as being able to enter a draw for a prize in return for answering the question. The rules of these competitions would usually allow entrants to follow a link and enter privately, but a large number, perhaps as many as hundreds of followers, chose to answer in public. Of this number, some followers may not have understood how to keep their answers private, and others may have been willing to exhibit details of their personal lives, but for either reason, the questions have generated considerable self-disclosure. An underpinning reason for this behaviour may be a conditioned reaction to the power imbalance inherent in teacher-pupil relationships.

Followers occasionally used *Classroom question time* to criticise the organisations, taking the position of the rebel student who makes snide remarks about the teacher. The “rebel” attitude was most obvious in response to the Air New Zealand “I wish I hadn’t...” question. “Bad attitude” answers included “Whose rico? [Rico was the Air New Zealand mascot at the time] Wish i hadnt asked that question” and:

I wish I hadn't booked my flight thh Air NZ, who then smack me with an excess fee for being 2kg over my luggage allowance. That was bad enough, but the attitude of the snotty woman checking me in will remain stuck in my mind the next time I have to spend thousands on a flight ticket!

ASB also generated bad attitude. The bank asked, “So you want to be a star?” and one person replied, “I’d rather not go down in another failed IVF ad thanks”, which referred to the controversial ASB advertisement which promoted loans for couples who wanted In Vitro Fertilisation. The “bad attitude” answers express anger and frustration, and probably stems from the resentment of the asymmetrical power between organisations and individuals. The asymmetry is present in teacher pupil relationships too. As Jamieson and Thomas (1974) point out in their work on power and conflict in teacher—pupil relationships,

With little or no formal power, students are excluded from participating in most decisions that affect their fate in the system. When students are frustrated by what is being done or said, there are few channels or forums available to them for confronted teachers or administrators. (p. 323)

Relations with big organisations can be as disempowering for customers as classroom relations are for pupils (Jamieson & Thomas, 1974): in schools, pupils are excluded from the decisions that affect their learning (Bentley, 1998) in business, customers requiring particular decisions can be frustrated by generic customer service policies. The parallel can be extended: alienated pupils might make *sotto voce* comments at the back of the classroom; angry customers express their opinions in spiteful remarks on Facebook.

Overall, the *Classroom question time* theme showed that despite organisations’ friendly overtures on the Pages, they did not relinquish control of the “conversation”, and so were not enacting true friendship behaviour. At the same time, the theme showed that respondents never questioned why they should supply companies with answers to questions about (for instance) their mothers’ best attributes, how much money they had saved or imminent important events. Followers

handed over much valuable information about their personal lives even though the companies had not posted their privacy policies.

There are two parties in this analysis: the three corporations and “the followers” the collective noun I use to designate the totality of the individual users who interact on with the companies on Facebook. I have already made it clear that the corporations’ implementation of *question time* is less about achieving “symmetrical communication” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) and more about a sustained effort to achieve visible follower engagement with their Pages. In seeking follower engagement, the corporations deliberately or inadvertently took on an authoritative role to which followers mostly responded willingly, much as pupils do in their subordinate role in the classroom.

Love, or something like it

Definition: Followers express positive emotions towards the organisation, including approval, affection, devotion, sympathy or admiration.

Keywords: love, like, thanks, amazing, cheers, thankful, best, good, happy, proud, wonderful, beautiful, awesome, sweet, friend, excellent, congratulations, lol, excited, fun, luck, awesome, fantastic, brilliant, generous, helpful, cool

As the title suggests, the theme *Love, or something like it* is the accumulation of followers’ positive messages to the three corporations. Although I could see from the beginning of the coding process that an over-arching category of “love” was clear in the data, what was not initially clear was how to analyse the theme. My desire was to reveal the nature of the love messages posted by followers, and in this regard,

it also seemed that there were some differences in the types of love messages posted. I therefore sought a system that would allow the messages to be classified in a more finely-nuanced way than the broad category love. In this I depended heavily on Neto (2008) and particularly on Hendrick and Hendrick's (1986, 1989) expansion of Lee's (1973) work. I initially separated the posts into the six sub-categories outlined in the typology, which certainly provided nuanced insights into different aspects of love. After carrying out that exercise, however, I felt that most of the messages could be adequately discussed according to a range of shared general characteristics but that two sub-categories from the typology afforded useful distinctions. To this end, *Love, or something like it* is organised in three sections: first, a discussion of the general features of the messages, and followed by two separate sections: *Eros* (passionate love) and *Pragma* (It's love, but what's in it for me?)

The love-like emotions expressed by followers tended to personify the organisations:

"LOVE YOUR WORK ASB"

"Thanks so much! Love ya Vodafone!"

Here, using the company name as a form of address is intimate and compresses the complexity of a large organisation so that it can be comprehended and considered as a single entity and addressed intimately as though by a given name. The followers here behave as though a personal relationship exists, and this is enhanced by the use of the second person pronoun: the organisations are not "the company" or "the business", but have taken on the attributes of a person. Fairclough (1992) calls this form of address "the simulation of private, face-to-face

discourse in public mass-audience discourse” (p. 98) resulting from the extension of conversational language into all aspects of public life.

Given that there is a general acceptance of informal and vernacular language, there is nothing in the current social milieu that seems particularly incongruous about these strongly-worded messages of love being expressed in public, except that the intense language is addressed to corporations rather than to people. In these posts, the corporations appear to be treated as objects of quite passionate emotion poured out by the followers who presumably can have little expectation of a response of any kind, and no expectation at all of a response in a similar vein. The love is one way, and is known by the “lovers” to be one way, which raises the question of the function of such messages. From the corporations’ point of view, the love posts are presumably satisfactory indications of follower engagement with the Pages, but it is harder to see what followers gain from this level of hyperbole, except, perhaps, the satisfaction of “being there”. *Love, or something like it* seems to be full of what I am coming to think of as the “Facebook effect”: overstated messages whose purpose seems mainly to establish a presence in the crowd.

The examples I have already given show that the *Love* messages were effusive, and in fact, this was the case throughout the theme:

“Oh Air New Zealand! Love you, love you, love you. You're amazing. With you all the way. All the best. Cheers”

and even the less extreme messages were often quite fulsome:

“Youve certainly been doin heaps vodafone n i 4 1 am very thankfull for it all”

Although the subject matter of posts like this one is ostensibly approbation for the actions and attitudes of the corporations, the followers also seem to be acting out of a need, not just to belong, but to belong in the right way, but expressing their messages in recognisably “cool” language. In this respect, the posts function for followers as efforts in self-construction (Fairclough, 1992) and attempts to establish identity in relation to a powerful other (Pratt, 2000).

According to Hendrick and Hendrick (1986, 1989), blind love is the basis of worship, and some of the posts in *Love, or something like it* do contain elements that approximate to worship. The following post expresses love that has not been earned through personal experience but rather as a faith in the loved one: “I’ve never flown you guys yet, but i still think your ace.” A different sort of worship appears in the love in this obituary for a real person, although one who is unknown to the writer. After the death of Steve Jobs, inventor of Vodafone’s best-selling phone, one follower wrote:

Rest In Peace Steve, for you have been one of the creators of the modern world we live in. You have enriched our lives immeasurably and given us amazing technology. Some may have not liked you but you have helped change the world in so many ways. The human race has benefited from your existence and now the world has you back in it's arms. Rest peacefully and know that you have given the future generations hope for a better place to live. Thank You you were a true visionary.

The follower obviously could not expect any personal connection with Steve Jobs, but saw him instead as an emblem of Vodafone, which in turn earned secondary admiration as the stockists of his Apple products. Steve Jobs is here described in godlike terms as a “creator of

the modern world”, who has “helped change the world” in so many ways that the “human race has benefited” from his existence.

Some of the posts seem to express spontaneous approval rather than love that is an abiding condition of the followers' lives, as some of the previous posts aim to suggest. These posts were stimulated by specific actions of the corporations and are typified by these comments in response to ASB's announcement of its donation to the Pike River fund after the mining tragedy of 2010:

“Good on ya ASB, what a way to make your country proud of you!!!”

and for Vodafone:

“Great stuff Voda. Keep em coming.”

In these cases, the corporations are addressed in the second person, as “you”: for the purposes of receiving praise, they have become a person. These reactions to specific actions of the corporations do not offer the corporations unconditional love, but instead emphasise the trigger and the heat of the moment. To continue to earn these messages of approbation, the corporations will need to produce more grand gestures.

The *Love, or something like it* posts assumed equal power relationships between the corporations and the followers, which may have been a function of the putative love relationship the followers were delineating. Perhaps, therefore it is unsurprising that many contained the word “friend”: “ASB is not just our ordinary bank, it's our friend at all times” and that friendship was extended to the corporations at times

of celebration, "... a very merry christmas to ALL Air New Zealand staff around the globe from my family to all of your family's".

When Air New Zealand wished its Facebook followers a happy Father's Day, one person replied, "Thanks for remembering your the only one" which sounds as though the respondent was seeing Air New Zealand as a friend who was thoughtfully remembering an important date. A hallmark of friendship is forgiveness of the other's mistakes, and one follower, realising that ASB had made an error in an account wrote, "Nah it's okay, i love ASB bank lol." The sociable banter of "lol" ("laugh out loud") indicates acceptance and a lack of annoyance that betoken friendship.

The general characteristics of *Love, or something like it* that I have set out above occurred frequently in the data, but there was one dimension of love that was a surprise: *eros* (Neto, 2008). As I began my data analysis, I did not anticipate that people might use passionate language to a business, because, as Neto (2008) explains, *eros* occurs when people are "looking for a psychologically intimate and open relationship as well as a passionately expressive one" (p. 21). Achieving a relationship at such an elevated level seems hard when the love object is perforce an internalised notion, but some of the posts are so strongly worded that they could be labelled "The real thing" or "Friends with benefits". For instance, the Air New Zealand promotional video prompted one follower to write, "Ooh I love you too!" Here, it is the exclamatory "Oooh" that connotes the heightened level of excitement that suggests *eros*. This exclamation is not the only example of the language of *eros*, however: followers used words typical of passionate physical relationships, as in the post on the Page of ASB, where a follower wrote that the ASB website is "...sexy and sleek", and even

“beautiful”. Another follower remarked, as though to a lover with new hairstyle or dress: “I love your new identity ASB”.

Emoticons were plentiful, especially the heart (♥) and smiley (☺) icons. Followers availed themselves readily of these easy demonstrations of positive emotion and often combined them with the scream of full block letters, in this way: “We LOVE Kashin¹⁴ ☺”

Sometimes, in a more laconic style, followers simply “hearted” the organisations by posting “♥”, but the heart was commonly used in conjunction with a message such as: “Good on you Vodafone! Thanks heaps for this ♥”. Valentines Day engendered several heart messages along the following lines:

“Awesome! Happy Valentines Day Air NZ ♥”

“Love you AirNZ! ♥”

“Happy Valentines Day, Video is so sweet! ♥”

Some followers wanted to share their personal stories as if in a courtship ritual: “Some time i will share my Christmas 2003 story with one of the best airlines in the world. Air New Zealand! I've traveled back and forth from Canada on Air NZ. I think 12 times... the best! Merry Christmas!” and other posts attributed particular characteristics to the companies in much the same way that a lover might. Thus, Air New Zealand is singled out for having a typically “kiwi” thoughtfulness, and earns this praise: “What a wonderful idea...only the Kiwi's would think of such a lovely thing to do for those who are not with their loved ones....Good on ya Air New Zealand.....(^ ^,)♥♥WE LOVE NEW ZEALAND(^ ^,)♥♥.”

¹⁴ Kashin was one of the elephants at Auckland Zoo and long-time symbol of the ASB.

Eros can go even further than simple passion: Gana, Saada and Untas (2013) define a form of love that is obsessive, and within *Love, or something like it*, there are posts that appear to fit this more extreme category. These posts often use repetition to achieve their effect, such as this one to Air New Zealand: “Oh Air New Zealand! Love you, love you, love you. You're amazing. With you all the way. All the best. Cheers”. Other examples leave the impression that followers want to their custom and support to make them part of the organisation: “Proud to be an Air New Zealander!”.

As well as the *eros* category, a second dimension emerged that did not quite fit the general characteristics of *Love, or something like it*. A grouping of posts showed love tempered by an element of self-interested practicality, to the point that I called the sub-theme *It's love, but what's in it for me?* Before I began my data analysis, I had thought this would be the most likely category to discover because it is a straightforward, business-like response to a business organisation that has provided satisfactory goods or services, and I expected far more posts of this type than I found. *What's in it for me?* is typified by this post to Air New Zealand: “... never had any problems flying with you guys, always looked after even when we couldn't get to our destination airport, you got us home.”

The pragmatic posts usually employ more moderate language than the other categories and have a noticeable absence of emoticons, screamers, or other forms of emphasis,

“...I have always had great service, keep up the good work ASB”

and were usually some sort of commendation for good work that affected the individual follower's well-being:

“Thanks ASB for your commitment to service and fronting up to unforeseen events”

and

“Nice to see virtual branch back again it’s a really useful tool ☺”

One way or another, all of the posts in *Love, or something like it* are unsolicited testimonials for the three corporations, and generally, the tone is one of careless exuberance although the final sub-group *What's in it for me?* comes close to ‘traditional’ statements of social relations with organisations. Here, by ‘traditional’ I mean those carefully worded messages of approbation and gratitude that sometimes appear in advertisements and serve two purposes: first, obviously, to promote the organisation or product, but second, to show that the power was in the hands of the public to bestow or withhold recommendations for future customers. The unedited, hyperbolic messages in the rest of the theme seem by contrast to be mere exclamations, although they effectively belong in the ‘testimonial’ genre of communication.

Hell hath no fury like a Facebook fan scorned

Followers post negative messages about or towards the organisation.

Keywords: hate, angry, pissed off, fury, bad, sad, upset, appalling, desperate, pathetic, rip off, suck, fail, expensive, unfair, cancel, shame, listen, disappoint, joke, crap, ignore, rubbish, fake, dislike, scam, explanation, publicity, marketing, stupid, [competitor's name], rude, loyal.

I did not set out to study corporations whose core business fits closely into the categories that provoke the most online complaints, but as Tripp and Gregoire's (2011) research revealed, after complaints about vehicles (11% of the total number), the most common subjects for complaints were "large retail purchases (10.5%); credit, debt and mortgage services (10.3%); cell phone providers (9.5%)" (p. 39). In the context of this research, Air New Zealand falls into the category of "large retail purchases"; ASB matches "credit, debit and mortgage services" and Vodafone, of course, fits the "cell phone providers" grouping. When customers feel aggrieved about their purchases in these categories, the Pages show, as Champoux, Durgee and McGlynn (2012) remarked, that "hell hath no fury like a Facebook fan scorned" (p. 22). Facebook enables individuals to have a voice, or as one ASB fan put it, to "shout loudly", and perhaps inevitably, some of that shouting is negative. Inasmuch as many followers took the trouble to post their love (or something like it) on the Pages of the three corporations, other people used Facebook as a facility to vent their anger, frustration and disappointment. In line with the Yum and Hara's (2006) findings, the posts in this theme showed more "verbal aggression...and conflict-inducing behavior" (p. 136) than is typical of face-to-face interaction. Some comments included offensive or indecent language though most of these were removed by the organisation. Some that were left on the Page included: "Fuckn do a

deal for contract custys, fuck prepay and no i dont want a discount off a fone i just need more fuckin txts than my 600 i get”.

Overall, although the emotions that engendered the *Hell hath no fury* were just as intense as those in *Love*, the *Hell* theme was a slightly smaller category: for Air New Zealand and ASB, it contained the third largest number of posts and for Vodafone, the fifth largest. Malone and Fiske (2013) say that humans have a “general predilection ... to expect good things from most people” (p. 75), which may account for the smaller number of posts in the *Hell hath no fury* theme. On the other hand, though it may be cynical to suspect that the number of posts is smaller because the companies removed messages that were damaging to their images, it is nevertheless a fact that organisations can preserve their public image by deleting the negative comments posted to their Pages, and this ability may also account for *Hell hath no fury* not figuring as the theme with the highest number of posts.

The following complaint suggests that at least one organisation did in fact delete negative comments: this message on the Vodafone Page is from a user complaining about the lack of transparency about prices and the difficulty in obtaining a satisfactory level of response from the company:

I have been trying to post on your page but it doesnt let me.
I am so pissed off with vodafone right now. I am a prepaid customer who has been using my iphone to log onto fb. I topped up on wednesday and was txted to say i had run out of credit which i couldnt understand as i hadnt gone onto 3rd party sites. I once again rang up as this is not the first time this has happened. I was told, by daisy that it costs to logon, to look at photos, look at you tube and 3rd party sites. I was then told all the details are on Vodafone site. This is the first time i had been told any of this, in all the calls I have made. I then went to the site and it says there photos are ok to look at. Now

this is where i got really pissed off. I used some of my left over balance to go to your site to see exactly what it says. No one seems to be A) willing to tell you anything and to tell you exactly what is correct. I live on a benefit & as i am disabled i dont get out, so fb is the way i keep in touch with friends and family. What I want to know is exactly what i can or cant do. I cannot afford to top up again, for at least two weeks which means i wont be able to keep in touch with anyone, as i need credit to txt. I have been with you guys since you started and supported you no matter what, now i feel very let down, by you and your customer service team.

This customer has used Vodafone's Facebook Page to express her anger and sense of injustice, addressing in the complaint not only the communication style of the company (all the details are on Vodafone site) but also her own life problems (on a benefit; disabled) to add strength to the pressure she was exerting on the company. The last sentence of the post contains an interesting linguistic separation: the follower feels "very let down, by you and your customer service team". The differentiation of "you"—the company, a person in the customer's mind, perhaps—from "the customer services team"—the visible and human part of the notional being, Vodafone—shows here a sense of connection to the concept of a responsive being, and goes some way, perhaps, towards explaining the often highly personal content in the posts. On Facebook Pages, followers seem to "talk" a personal relationship into being.

The *Love* posts are more or less straightforward testimonials, and it would be easy to place *Hell hath no fury* as the "hate" theme at the opposite end of the continuum, but the category is more complex than that. Reynolds and Harris (2005) carried out research into the varied nature and causes of customer's responses to service failures, but where they found four main forms of illegitimate complaining and six main

motivations for such behaviours, the anger and frustration expressed in *Hell hath no fury* originated in two sources. The first source of complaints might be called “righteous anger”, and as the post quoted above shows, was the response to organisations that were perceived to have duped their customers by making false promises or delivering faulty goods.

The second source of complaints appeared to be a generalised anger with a particular organisation or with the wider business world, to the point that even innocuous communication from the corporations was a catalyst for a vicious response. Many of the posts in this theme were directed at the companies’ marketing and promotion: “Stupid crap.give your marketing head a shake, Air New Zealand”. And “...only 49 comments. Marketing strategy getting a little old?”. On the Vodafone Page one follower wrote: “I like it.... not even a single positive feedback. Your customers are telling that you [Vodafone] moving to wrong direction ... Open your eyes ... Or you maybe out of the game in no time”. Some posts contained veiled threats hinting at the future downfall of the corporation for not fixing faults that were obvious to the follower: “... What an embarrassment our 'national airline' is! Rico will be your downfall in the global marketplace. Embarrassing your own staff with your puerile campaign. Embarrassing we expatriates who held you once in high esteem.”

Some of the posts were lengthy and elaborate, possibly requiring considerable time and effort, as the one below shows. Warsaw went a step further than many other followers with her diatribe against poor marketing campaigns in general and the Rico promotion for Air New Zealand in particular, but the heavy sarcasm in her post was typical of others in the category:

Warsaw: ONCE UPON A TIME... a bunch of people in suits, got together one day, one bright spark said " ooh, I know what we can do..... lets have a mascot... and not just any mascot, a furball that looks like he's smoked far too many ciggies and his face now regrets it, a furball that looks like a squirrel, because you know squirrels are so rampant in NZ. THEN let's have him come from some whole other country like Italy.... or somewhere else in the northern hemisphere (Then someone else chimes in, wanting his five seconds of fame, says "because afterall, NZ is a culturally diverse country, a virtual melting pot of ethnic diversity")... THEN, says the first suit, not wanting to be out done by the last sap, because his ego IS humungous afterall.... Let's have him fly New Zealand's planes (because Air NZ is a trusted brand... and perhaps we can do something to fix that?) and have him sit in the seats, unbelted, flirting with the Air NZ staff...and let him have his own 'virtual' talk show (which will just be a glorified ad campaign - says the quiet suit in the corner).... and have Lindsay Lohan come in and join Rico on the couch... LLO...is perfect... ok so she's currently under house arrest and so OK she has never EVER been to New Zealand and can only mention that she's heard about NZ's great beaches.... and of course the 'show' will be advertised in the middle of winter, when no one really goes to the beaches.....BUT he says with enthusiasm and you just know it is going to be a wonderful finish.... IT WILL STILL BE GREAT... all agreed? And all the suits agreed.... so the ugly, nonsensical little ad campaign was born and the suits all climbed back into their caves where they would not see the light of day or the real NZ... until they get an idea and climb out of their caves and straight back into the board room..... and the people of NZ lived unhappily ever after, listening and watching crap like an Air New Zealand Marketing campaign. THE END

Personal attacks were rife in the theme. Rico, for Air New Zealand, provoked particular wrath: Washington wrote, "...a furry hairball puppet speaking in a weird accent representing New Zealand with Hollywood has beens - yeah I get it - not!" ASB incurred sarcasm and displeasure when they posted an image and asked followers to guess what it was. Answers included, "A big machine that sucks money out of peoples accounts then come up with creative excuses as to why"

and “Something to process all the money you make in bank fees?” Even the employees behind the marketing campaign were sometimes criticised:

Their SM strategist either needs a pay rise or to be burnt at the stake. It's certainly the last time I 'like' an AirNZ facebook fare frenzy. Want someone who can create actual social currency in your media? Let me know.

Some posts in this theme were written by followers who are happy with the organisation's products or services but feel victimised by a particular incident such as being overcharged, cheated by faulty goods or services, or not receiving as much attention or respect as they deserve. In these posts, the followers present themselves as victims of villainous and greedy corporations that use their positions of power to abuse their customers, and the posts express a mix of depression, anxiety, humiliation and anger, all of which are elements of what Best (1997) called the “widespread ideology of victimization” (p. 9) that has, he argues, taken hold since the 1960s.

An example of this sort of post occurred on the Air New Zealand Page. The follower does not pause between points but instead, writes a paragraph-long diatribe about the unpleasant experience of flying Air New Zealand.

Air NZ is the best when things go well, but when your put onto a bus for 5 hours after flying for 8 hours already that day and they dont give you any food, (was on a little plane for 1 of the flights), and the only food you do get is 1 little snack pack of dried fruit on each of the other flights, and you were planning to pick something up in one of the airports but they dont let you off on a fuel stop and before they put you on the bus they dont even give you 5 mins to get any food, wel they really suck. that said ive had some good

experiences and some bad experiences, all in all about 50/50. and i fly to and from uni a lot.

As the post above shows, followers who positioned themselves as victims of the organisation tended to utter a bitter complaint tempered by a positive comment, perhaps in an effort to appear objective and therefore a more credible victim. The following post on the ASB Page is organised in the same way: strong complaint followed by finding positive attribute to about the bank, but what notable in this post is the real sense of betrayal:

This post actually makes me angry. I have not found ASB bank to be supportive AT ALL of my small business... after 13 years of being a loyal customer to the ASB I am ready to move banks. I feel really upset watching the ad with the guy with a frog app get "help" for his business. Don't get me wrong, the customer service when one of our companies was putting lots of money through was brilliant. But, as a small business, I have been VERY let down by the ASB.

Tripp and Gregoire (2011) found betrayal to be a characteristic of online complaints, and my data substantiate their findings. In this case, the betrayal seems to stem from the follower's belief that his or her business should be important to the bank because in "13 years of being a loyal customer" the business had put "lots of money" through the bank. Again, the victimhood expressed in the post contains an aggrieved element that derives from a feeling of being denied due respect and attention, as does the following:

NZs best? So long as you do not speak of thier dismal appalling attempt at insurance services? ASB insurance are quick to sign up and take money yet when there is a problem they easily cuff you off to IAG themselves. spoke with ASB supervisor Luke about this issue last week.

However, a marked change of tone occurred in followers' posts when victims were "heard" by the organisations, even if the response was largely lip-service rather than a genuine attempt at reparation. The organisations mostly ignored the anger directed at them and instead presented a concerned "face" which often caused the "victims" to retract their comments or modify their angry stance. Hughes (1993) maintains that "fake pity and euphemisms" (p. 4) are prevalent in modern society, and certainly the standardised "sorry" responses from the organisations seem to fit that description.

An example of this sort of exchange follows:

In short my experience with ASB insurance is sad. I invite comments on the points mentioned in a general sense. Why fob clients to IAG? Ask Luke. Steph at your call centre bitched to me I should have increased the limit. I said I am the lay person and you are the insurance (so called??) experts and had duties to represent correctly ... ahhhhh ASB..... so if it needed to be increased to cover the stereo wouldnt one lay person expect the insurance company to say so? Or nnot say one is covered when they are not?

However, ASB's response, thanking him for posting about his unsatisfactory experience and offering an apology, softens the user's position, and he replies:

"In fairness your other banking services have been great .. thank you."

And then

"The rest very good indeed actually (I am not just a moaner!)"

Champoux et al. (2012) hold out the hope that "...this new, silent-but-digital forum for public outrage may benefit companies by exhibiting

feedback, pressuring needed change and holding companies accountable for their actions” (p. 22) but I did not see any evidence of induced change in my examination of the posts, and conclude that that these scholars are over-optimistic because complaint posts are simply too easy for the corporations to ignore or delete to engender real change. In fact, I suspect that in many cases, the motivation behind the posts is as much to achieve catharsis as to gain redress: as Champoux et al. (2012) wrote, “Indignant individuals may feel that by typing a few livid sentences on a company’s Wall and hitting ‘share’, they have done their part to make the world a better place—a form of modern ‘slackivism’” (p. 24). The followers’ readiness to accept apologies from the corporations, even though that apology might be rather more for form than for action, seems to indicate that the followers can be appeased fairly easily.

The lonely hearts club

Followers make comments towards the organisation that serve no other purpose than to self disclose and reveal personal information about themselves or their family.

Keywords: I, me, my, husband, daughter.

The lonely hearts club theme comprises posts that disclose details of followers’ personal lives, and perhaps reveals an acute element of loneliness and isolation in New Zealand society. The followers who post about themselves perhaps lack face-to-face interaction and any other satisfying sense of community, and so seek a form of sociability in the online environment in general and the corporate Pages in

particular. As Cooper and Sportolari (1997) showed, Facebook allows a sense of anonymity that encourages self-disclosure and what Walther (1995) called “hyperpersonal” communication (p. 5) In *Love, or something like it*, I signalled the tendency of followers to seek hyperpersonal relationships with the corporations, offering personal devotion as a way, perhaps, of achieving a feeling of closeness, and *The lonely hearts club* extends the hyperpersonal into other aspects of followers’ lives. In fact, *The lonely hearts club* strongly resonates with Turkle’s (2012) view of a society in which individuals expect more from technology and less from each other, constantly posting intimate details of their lives in social media, but lonely in their offline worlds. For some followers, perhaps, the corporate Pages offer a feeling of friendship, and the corporations function as a “low risk lover”.

The lonely hearts club comments range from the unnecessarily detailed: “...was on one tonight, thought it was cool finally introducing wifi busses :) it was the 6.50pm 471 going to manukau, ...” to the dramatic: “I have a stinking migraine, a 3yr old who has no idea how to lower her voice and quite frankly Im losing the will to live” ...”: to the inane: “...had a dream this morning.i dreamt that i was falling off a cliff. Woke up and i was on the floor.Lol.” Whatever the content, all *The lonely hearts club* comments reveal deeply personal information that is (according to usual social practice) inappropriate for indiscriminate consumption in a public forum.

Sometimes the availability of a prize motivated the extreme self-disclosure, which in this context might be seen as a form of emotional blackmail. The following posts all occurred in relation to a competition: “...my wife left me and made my life miserable and my phone is playin up and i cant afford a new one”. Less sad, but just as a

personal were the messages promoting the worthiness of a partner to win the prize:

I would like to enter my partner to win a new phone, he has dropped his old nokia and it keeps resetting itself and waking us up in 2am and he deserves one, he is the most amazing person I know who never asks for anything but does everything for his family and friends, just a great good kiwi person that should win :).

Seattle said:

My husbands car was broken into this afternoon. He didn't want to take it in with him to his customer but unfortunately I was having an operation and the surgeon tried to get hold of him. The phone wasn't that user friendly for him so he couldn't have a profile that was east to adapt to ring on VIP calls :(He deserves a decent phone he has helped and looked after me for over a year while I have been very sick. He also works and has more or less managed our 3 very active teenage kids by himself :)

Posts like the ones I have quoted above fit with Attrill and Jalil's (2011) surprise at the extent to which followers are willing to reveal personal details to unknown others in Internet-based communications, especially in light of concerns over identity fraud or even, more simply, social humiliation. Attrill and Jalil (2011) argue that whereas "...the individual might consider the potential of online crimes...it is unlikely that s/he will associate the same concerns with voluntarily revealing basic information to a potential friend or partner" (p. 1640). I have observed elsewhere that the corporations adopt a tone of informal chattiness on their Pages, and perhaps the simulation of friendship leads some followers to abandon caution as they talk about their lives. Certainly, the number of posts containing highly personal material far exceeds comments relating to fears about the loss of privacy.

On the one hand, the prevalence of personal material suggests that followers perceive the corporations as trusted friends, but on the other, an argument can also be made that individuals simply lack sufficient knowledge of the digital world to understand how public their messages are and the consequences of that. Livingstone's (2008) research shows that teenagers—the “born digital” generation—have found nuanced ways to conduct intimate relationships via social media while maintaining and controlling elements of privacy. By contrast, “digital converts” may not appreciate with any real depth and understanding how to be intimate in a digital environment, and many of the followers whose posts are classified as belonging to the *The lonely hearts club* may be “converts” rather than “natives”.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of *The lonely hearts club* is the number of messages that support another follower's train of thought:

I used to work in the eftpos industry... it happens with ALL BANKS! If you think customers are bad when they can't access their funds, you should see what shopkeepers (merchants) are like when their eftpos isn't working... very very abusive...

The function of the post above (and others like it) is to affirm and extend the sentiment in a previous post in the turn-taking typical of any conversation, on or off-line. This post builds a form of friendship: it creates a sense of shared experience and unity amongst followers and thus, the beginnings, perhaps, of a community, a follower-to-follower friendship in the presence of the corporation, but not directly with the corporation. Again, the primary motivation for the post is most likely to be loneliness.

Contacting the corporate call centre

Followers request assistance from the organisation, usually in the context of free products or services but could also be in terms of entering online competitions run by the organisation.

Keywords: how, help, need, issue, technical, problem, slow, error, blank, screen

Corporate call centres have long been a cost-efficient source of information for customers, and it seems that, at least in the minds of the public, Facebook Pages should function with the same the purpose, even if the Page was not set up to replace the call centre. This theme, *Contacting the corporate call centre*, consists of the general enquiries that are increasingly posted to Facebook.

Irish (2000) found preferred forms of communication differ, and that, "For some transactions many people will always want to communicate directly with another human, others would prefer to converse with a machine" (p. 71). Facebook perhaps provides the perfect blend of human and machine, permitting followers both the technology-based efficiency of avoiding more time-consuming forms of communication such as phone calls, emails or store visits, while nevertheless providing a human ambience of friendly informality. However, enquiries to a Facebook Page replace private discussions by telephone (for instance) with a public "conversation" that allows reaction not just from the organisation, but also from any other followers who may be interested. Facebook enquiries may well compromise privacy, because both possessions and patterns of consumption become obvious through the issues with which followers request help. This behaviour seems to confirm and extend my earlier observation that the organisations are

regarded as a species of friend and confidant with whom all discussions are safe.

Most of the posts in this theme were mundane feedback on technical matters, such as, "The link appears to be broken or doesn't work at least on firefox/", or the more detailed:

I'm using Mozilla Firefox Beta 8, and when I finished typing in my entry, and clicked the button, the page refreshed, and I saw the same message there if I were to scroll down. I think the entry does work, it's just that there's no notification stating that your entry was entered when you submit it.

Requests for assistance received an often prompt answer in the form of a redirection to a phone number or private email address. A typical exchange was this one, in which a follower asks Air New Zealand about an issue loading a competition entry form: "air nz am doing it from the coumputer and it still doesn't allow you to fill in any entry form", and receives a response only 15 minutes later. This theme also contained many questions about competitions: "How do I enter this I click the link & it returns me to your FB page?" and ways to simplify the followers' lives: "Can we use fastnet to donAte coz I'm to busy to go to my asb branch".

Inasmuch as most posts in *Contacting the corporate call centre* dealt with commonplace questions, some were more moving and serious. The following post was made to ASB:

my application was rejected on serious illness/ i was ask to go for hardship after going to hardship ur trustees rejected my application again asking me to used my son education money / buy now the monwy is not in my control i got no money i will be filling a case in the claim court against ur trustees/ ceo with cost / with mental stress iam going in hardship/

I have already remarked on the degree of self-disclosure evident in some posts, and this is another example of hyper-personal (Walther, 1995) in which the follower divulges considerable personal information and directs strong anger and blame towards the organisation, regardless of the actual lack of private intimacy on the site.

The emergence of this data category shows that for followers, the simple existence of a Facebook Page makes it a logical and convenient place to direct straightforward enquiries, but the “redirect response” from the organisations, however, indicates that despite the potential for efficient handling of frequently asked questions, organisations preferred to keep the Pages free of general questions. The redirections to specific email addresses and phone numbers presumably allowed questions to receive longer and more detailed replies than the often brief, unedited comment that is acceptable on Facebook.

Greed is good

Followers ask or demand the organisation gives them special treatment, usually in the context of free products or services.

Keywords: desperate, win, please, me, deserving, pick, need, free, yes, choose, customer, loyal, would, cash, prize.

When Gordon Gekko, the character played by Michael Douglas in the 1987 film *Wall Street*, made the famous “greed is good”¹⁵ speech, he summed up a societal attitude of narrow individualism and wealth accumulation. Well over two decades later, greed is no less good, which is perhaps surprising, given events like the Global Financial Crisis of 2009 (Simpson, 2010). An attitude that greed is beyond reproach was evident on all three of the Pages, and forms the basis of this theme, *Greed is good*. I have taken greed to be an “excessive desire for acquiring or wanting more than one needs or deserves” (Webster's New World Dictionary, 1964), and I relate it to “acquiring or wanting possessions with an almost wanton disregard for the feelings of others” (Kaplan, 1991, p. 504), or as Klein (1957) puts it, an insatiable craving and ruthlessness towards getting what is desired.

The posts in the *Greed is good* theme showed that followers expected the businesses to give them the products or services they wanted, simply because they wanted them. Followers’ responses to often innocuous comments by the corporations often included statements like, “It's mine!!!” or “Free cash please” or “Choose me please !” and “Give me a phone first.” For instance, when ASB asks its followers how much change they have saved with the new Save the Change scheme, one post was, “not enough, want to give me some more?”. Furthermore, when ASB asked whether people wanted to win a new phone, many people simply replied “yes” (which was classified as a response) but others sought to upgrade the prize with, “Can I have something that runs Android instead?” When Air New Zealand offered a competition with the prize of tickets to an All Blacks game, the

¹⁵ According to Winarick (2010, p. 326) the full quotation is ““greed is good, greed works, greed is right, greed clarifies, cuts through and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed in all its forms ... has marked the upward surge of mankind and greed, mark my words, will save not only Teldar Paper (the company he is trying to get control of), but that other malfunctioning corporation called the U.S.A”.

following post appeared, showing desperation for the tickets and a lack of awareness of other participants: "PICK ME Air NZ pleeeeeease!!! You have no idea how much I want to WIN!!! Im stuck in Australia and my Aunty says that I would be the most Staunchest All Black Supporter in Oz!!!!"

This theme is not one of the largest, showing only 2-4% of posts on the three corporate Pages, but its very existence suggests a real sense of unembarrassed entitlement in some followers. The followers who made these posts were not all from the infamously hedonistic and narcissistic Generation Y (Alexander & Sysko, 2012; Deal, Altman & Rogelberg, 2010; Hershatter & Epstein, 2010), but were, I think, a range of ages, which shows, perhaps, that real sense of "something for nothing" and "me first" is prevalent in New Zealand society. The personality characteristics revealed in this theme are unappealing: the posts show their writers to believe they are entitled to free money, free phones or free flights, simply for pleading, demanding or 'shouting' the loudest on the Page. Followers also beg for extra product and service availability that would serve their personal convenience. For example, one follower requested Air New Zealand even make changes to its flight routes: "Air NZ- start a flight service to major Indian cities, pleeeeeeeez", and when ASB opened a new branch in Mosgiel, one post stated, "I would like one in Te Anau please." Winarick (2010) characterises greed as a "narcissistically expansive" (p. 321) trait. I suggest that the childlike repetition in the following post is evidence of that:

I want one sooooo bad I already love it more than a fat kid loves cake !!! And it's my birthday next week and the crazy snake game I have been playing on my \$49 phone I got for my birthday last year is getting a bit boring so Please please please Please please please please Please please please please

Please please please please Please please please please Please please please
please Thankyou

Winarick (2010) argued that Gordon Gekko saw people partly as objects to be used and manipulated and many posts contained a strong element of manipulation, of which the following is typical: “HI VODAFONE i just want to tell you that I really really want a phone because i am deperate to get one I probably have had liked heaps of phones”. Here the follower speaks to Vodafone as though to a person, able to be persuaded into giving away a phone, simply because this person “really wants one”.

Some greed was connected to a more noble cause, and so was ostensibly more subtle: one follower asked Air New Zealand, “Can I have return tickets to Christchurch to do charity work please?” shortly after the earthquakes in the city, and another wanted votes to win a competition “Please vote for me! I've just returned from Uganda where the needs amongst orphaned children are massive. I've been assisting abandoned children around the globe for the last 7 years. This award would enable us to extend our work to caring for children in Uganda! Thanks sooooo much”. However, without corroborative evidence, the expressed desire to carry out charity work is simply another form of manipulation. Kaplan (1991) sums up greed this way: “I want what you have and what I have not” (p. 511). The posts in this category show that the followers see the organisations as people, and as people, moreover, who have more than they do and who should therefore share some of what they have with the individuals who are loud enough and lucky enough to be heard.

The customer is always right

Followers suggested ways the organisation could improve their products, services or marketing collateral.

Keywords: should, suggest, you.

The posts in this theme showed an assumption on the part of followers that they knew what was best for the corporations, reflecting the mantra “the customer is always right” or “the customer is king” that is prevalent in many contemporary capitalist economies (Bishop & Hoel, 2008; Edwards, 2000; Macdonald & Sirianni, 1996). Followers clearly felt free to suggest ways that products could be improved, but never offered credentials for their insights: in this category, the posts showed that followers felt that being a customer or a member of the Facebook Page gave them sufficient status to offer reliable and worthwhile opinions. As with all the posts on the Pages of the three corporations, there seemed never to be any doubt among followers that Facebook was an appropriate forum to express their opinions and ideas:

I like the new site, but you should make the picture when you bookmark a direct link for fastnet for your homescreen more in keeping with the ASB brand. Also I don't really understand why you are making an iOS app, what advantages does it actually offer over the mobile website?

One Vodafone follower suggested “On Account should get more of a bonus/advantage, we have agreed to commit to vodafone for a certain amount each month for 12 or 24 months, where as pre pay can come and go as they please”. Comments like these were mostly met by either silence or polite acknowledgement from the corporation and perhaps

such a measured style of response from the organisations encouraged followers to continue their suggestions. Sorell's (1994) opinion is that:

There are occasions when consumers are overdeferred to for the sake of more business or overprotected at the expense of business. To recognize this... does mean thinking twice about how much is justified by the bare fact that a lot of consumers want a thing or the fact that someone who asks for something has the status of a consumer. (p. 913–914)

Facebook enables customers and followers to present their judgment on products and online presence whether or not the businesses have solicited opinions and whether the opinions are useful and justifiable from a business perspective.

Spam

Comments made by followers to the Page that were nonsensical, in a foreign language or with no clear purpose.

Keywords: first, foreign language text.

Spam is not a theme as such, but I developed the coding category so as to account for the comments that had no place anywhere else. It was a relatively small category overall, no bigger than 1% of the posts for any of the organisations, although it is almost certain that the organisations periodically tidied up their Pages by deleting most of the *Spam* posts. *Spam* consists of comments so incoherent that I was unable to decipher any meaning. For example, the Air New Zealand Page has a post, "Haka must put plane". Sometimes the use of "txt" language, combined with below-average spelling and grammar added to the difficulty of

making sense of the posts: “Not dis tym. Hope ur promo wil repeat n BER months... pls? & wd \$100 off...” *Spam* also includes foreign-language posts that would have needed a translator for certain understanding. For example, Prague posted on the Air New Zealand Page, “Felicitari Nora :) Frumoasa asa cum te stiam. Sa aveti parte de multa fericire!” On the other hand, foreign language posts that were easily translatable, such as “Allez Les Bleus” during the 2011 Rugby World Cup as France played against New Zealand, were not coded as spam. At the time I was analysing my data, Facebook offered a short-lived development that allowed people who were the first to respond to enter the word “First” in the comment box. This trend had no value for my analysis, other than the curious fact that some people derived pleasure and satisfaction from being the first to see a post by a company, and I classed the “First” or “Second” posts as spam.

In some cases the Wall was “hijacked” by a person promoting other goods or services, such as the case on the ASB Page where a user promoted the selling of gold bullion a number of times. Other examples included Philadelphia on the Air New Zealand Page, writing:

Join me in making LOTS of \$\$\$, i live in the united states and i'm currently doing network marketing to promote MONA VIE, the revolutionary drink(s) and dietary supplement that it taking over the world and NEW ZEALAND!! Inbox me to sign up and i'll give you more exciting details.....

Another case of hijacking was:

“Go Rarotonga.co.nz mention Facebook and airnz and will take 20% off accom rates at the house!” and also 45% OFF TRAVEL INSURANCE – visit www.statetravel.co.nz and enter PROMO CODE: SpecialLM - already save 25% online plus 20% using promo code.”

Posts about followers' own businesses that seemed relevant to general tenor of the "conversation" were coded in the main themes, but hijacking was included in *Spam*.

The last type of *Spam* post was from opportunistic followers who saw the Page as a chance to gather friends for their Profile. Oslo, for instance, wrote, "Hi everyone!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Add me, plssssssss!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Conversations with others

Followers to the organisation's Page post messages directly addressing in both name and content, other followers to the Page who have previously posted public messages, usually within the same conversation on the same date.

Keywords: addressed direct to person with either the @ symbol or their name.

Facebook conversations on the Pages were not limited to followers and the corporations, but also occurred among followers. For example, the following conversation between Munich, Mumbai and Nashville on the Air New Zealand Page:

Mumbai: so how many seats were sold

Mumbai: you also need to read you facebook for the comments good and bad as to how and what people would like to see

Mumbai: @ Air New Zealand you said you DO share numbers so cough them up read your own commetn

Munich Lesson learned Air NZ I guess, can't be fantastic all of the time. Mumbai, you sound like one of those self important characters. have fun with that ;)

Nashville: arn't you special Mumbai! what makes you think rob would give his time and day to an un-loyal idiot like yourself. Air new Zealand has bigger things to worry about than you! It would take a lot more than one page getting overloaded for me to choose another airline!

The conversation that developed among these three followers took on a sarcastic tone, containing more judgment and personal attack than would be usual in a chance face-to-face conversation among strangers. Many followers appear to take the "Facebook opportunity" to share their forthright opinions of other people in a way that does not resonate with prevalent standards of social intercourse. The conversations could, of course, remain quite good-humoured, even when the participants refused to yield any ground. Another example is the following conversation between Venice, Vienna and Moscow on the Vodafone Page.

Venice: dont make me laugh as if the warriors will win the grand finial

Vienna:^^ jealous mucchh.. coz bronco's lost??? hahaha UP THE WARRIORS...!!! ♥

Venice: ill put my money on the sea eagles to whip the warriors by 10 points and to win the grand final gooooooooooooo eagles

Moscow: Hahahaha Vienna of course thats y Venice is throwing negative comment on here cos, broncos not in the final,haha,, GO WARRIORS, WARRIORS,WARRIOS

Sometimes the posts to other followers were not responses to a particular individual, but to the group at large. For example, the

following comment expressed irritation and a sense of moral superiority:

That's great, you can all keep complaining and saying you won't trust it again or check for cheaper flights, If you can afford to purchase flights at a higher price and not save \$200 then why did you look in the first place? I expect you will all be clicking the unlike button then?? Grow up and understand that it was a glitch, this was the first time they tried it and they encountered a problem, how big of you all not to act like primary school children because you didn't get your own way Who's casting the first stone? not me

Overall, the posts in the *Conversations with others* theme ranged from agreeing on a topic, denigrating a fellow user, debating on sports scores or connecting over a shared frustration with the organisation itself. The Facebook Like facility is a significant aspect of Facebook development, and can be used as a form of online phatic communion (Coupland, Coupland & Robinson, 1992; Miller, 2008; Wang, Tucker & Rihll, 2011) to show a connection among followers. In the *Conversations* theme, some comments received as many as 65 Likes, showing considerable follower-to-follower engagement.

The number of posts in the *Conversations* theme was not large, and considering how easy it is to use Facebook, I am surprised that so few people actively engaged with one another. The lack of engagement suggests that followers are not “listening” to each other in the sense of reading and considering other people’s posts or engaging in the debate which makes for a public sphere (Macnamara, 2012). It is true that Likes do indicate some sort of acknowledgement of comments between individual followers, they should probably be classed more as a reaction than a response, and require none of the depth of thought that indicate full participation in a conversation. Followers, it seems, largely view Pages as places to contact the corporations, and the fact that

Facebook is actually a public forum is less obvious or less important to them.

Summary

This chapter has outlined nine themes that resulted from my thematic analysis of follower posts on the three corporate Pages over a 12-month period. The first theme, *Classroom question time*, revealed the followers positioned as a “student” in a didactic teacher-pupil relationship. The following two themes, *Love, or something like it* and *Hell hath no fury like a Facebook fan scorned*, illustrated extremes of emotion occurring on the Page, ranging from obsession and adoration to fury and betrayal. The fourth theme, *The lonely hearts club* consisted of hyperpersonal comments individuals made to the organisations. The fifth theme of *Contacting the corporate call centre* showed that followers used the Facebook Page as an easy solution to product or service queries. *Greed is good* echoed the words of Gordon Gecko from the Wall Street film, with followers demanding “freebies” or discounts at a whim. *The customer is always right*, also with narcissistic overtones, was a theme where followers instructed the corporations on how to improve their businesses or associated products and services. The final two themes *Conversations with others* and *Spam* are simply, as their name suggests.

The following chapter also uses thematic analysis to examine the corporate response to these follower posts.

Chapter Five: Responding to followers

In the previous chapter, I grouped the messages followers posted about and to the organisations into nine key themes, and it became evident in that chapter that followers approached the organisations as though they were friends, lovers, benefactors, and sometimes even enemies, but seldom as an inhuman, impersonal corporate entity. This chapter analyses the organisations' responses to the posts with a view to showing whether the corporate replies were filled with reciprocal emotion or with the detachment that could be expected from a corporation that cannot act as a single person.

Kunz and Hackworth (2011) claimed, "The challenge for companies is learning how to use social networks to the greatest benefit" (p. 2). They argue that companies have begun to realize that their Facebook Pages need to deliver what customers want to see, what the company wants to communicate, and the utility of the fan Page in conveying their message. The Pages I have studied for this research suggest that the challenges to which Kunz and Hackworth (2011) allude are possibly not yet resolved, because the three corporations are still developing their Facebook presence and deciding which comments to respond to and which to ignore. Facebook has not been an unqualified communication success for any of the three corporations: the satisfaction each company delivers via Facebook seems somewhat haphazard, and customers are sometimes left disgruntled, with unanswered questions. Often the corporations' Facebook responses are no different from what a call centre would offer, so the "Facebook effect" falls short when it is separated from orchestrated marketing and promotion.

Like the posts from followers to the corporations, the corporate responses fell into nine themes. This was not an intentional contrivance on my part, but simply what emerged from the raw data. The nine themes were derived by the same process of coding for key words and repeated concepts as I used to establish the themes in the posts from followers of the corporate Pages. If followers posted multiple messages about the same matter, I counted the corporate response to each post. Thus, unless the corporate replied individually to eleven posts, the coding would record (say) one response and ten silences, and this system appeared to give an accurate record of the data by avoiding double-ups or miscounts. Corporations often dealt with only one of the points made in sets of multiple messages, as the conversation between Dubai and ASB shows:

Dubai: Andnew company did not want me to take the vehicle for a costly valuation!!!!!!!

Dubai: And I found out the redbook value is far greater than the 7000 they were only covering for

Dubai: Why do ASB insurancepeople say talk to IAG? What do they earntheir agency money for?

Dubai: In short my experience with ASB insurance is sad. I invite comments on the points mentioned in a general sense. Why fob clients to IAG? Ask Luke. Steph at your call centre bitched to me I should have increased the limit. I said I am the lay person and you are the insurance (so called???) experts and had duties to represent correctly...ahhhhh ASB.....so if it needed to be increased to cover the stereo wouldn't one lay person expect the insurance company to say so? Or nnot say one is covered when they are not?

Dubai: We are not permitted to speak with Tania the Sales Manager. Why?

Dubai: Why did it take so long on the phone to even get to speak with Chamini?

Dubai: Is this normal for the ASB? If not what happened in this instance?

ASB: Hi Dubai, thanks for taking the time to post about your unsatisfactory experience, and we are very sorry that you have found it so disappointing. We'll look into the specifics tomorrow and come back to you. Thanks again for letting us know.

Some comments, of course, straddled the coding categories and in these cases the post was coded for what seemed to be the most powerful emotion expressed. ASB's message to Miami is an example of this. The post gives basic information about a service then quickly pushes the enquirer into a moving banks:

Miami Hi, ASB is currently the only bank that offers the Save the Change service. It's easy to switch to ASB- take a look at our website for more details:<http://asb.co/gLBbid>. Feel free to give us a call on 0800 803 804 or pop in to our Virtual Branch on Facebook to chat about switching to ASB. Thanks.

The post to Miami could have been coded as basic information, but the promotional content was a stronger element of the message and it was therefore coded as a marketing push.

Conversations that began between one follower and an organisation sometimes grew until several people were submitting posts, and these group conversations often developed into acrimonious disagreement. On occasion the corporation would step in, as though a stern parent, breaking up the fight and instilling calm back into the online

community. The conversation on the Air New Zealand Page is one such example, where Air New Zealand makes no comment until the following dispute arises then moves quickly to dampen the issue.

Marrakech: isnt it great how the haters waste space on this wall, which is all about a great opportunity for young people. There are many many worse airlines out there and I applaud air nz as our national carrier for creating a great opportunity like this

Memphis: @Marrakech - not a hater, just a very very disappointed customer. Its all very well to have initiatives like this - its a great opportunity as you said - but if NZ staff treat customers poorly then what's the point? And if the airline is so good then open criticism and questions should be welcome. If I was CEO I would always be looking for ways to improve and would welcome negative comments as a chance to improve.

Air New Zealand: @memphis - if you would like to email us a detailed account of what occurred with your experience, we will look into it for you - pls email socialmedia@airnz.co.nz - thank you

The following Vodafone message, to dispel disagreement between followers over treatment by Vodafone of their on-account versus prepay customers also illustrates this point: "Vodafone: We don't have favourites – we have different offers for different customers all the time ... so keep watching this space, there will be more where that came from. ^CK."

In this introduction, I have alluded briefly to the coding process by which the themes of corporate response were established. In the following section, I set out the details of the themes, together with illustrative quotes from the Pages.

The nine themes of corporate response

The silent treatment: the auto-response from corporates

The corporations ignore the posts made by their followers, even when a response seems appropriate or necessary.

Key attributes: silence.

Among the nine themes of corporate response, one was by far the biggest: silence. Mostly, the corporations ignored followers' posts, or at least, offered no public response at all. The "silence" response was the same whether the follower posed a question, begged a favour, offered insights or simply stated a personal truth.

In relation to the Web 2.0 world, Grinnell (2009) was insightful when she stated, "... consumers have a new role. They are now not-so-silent partners in a business relationship" (p. 577). Although Facebook allows consumers to post messages, however, that is not necessarily the same as being heard, and in fact, the customary response from the corporations to followers' comments, criticisms or compliments was silence, even when the matter seemed vital to a follower's interest. Silence is an interesting response, given the abundance of enthusiastic rhetoric elevating Facebook followers to the status of a "brand's storytellers and the new brand ambassadors" (Booth & Matic, 2011, p. 185).

As a form of communication, a silent response is easy to observe but difficult to analyse, because it is impossible online to determine nuances within silence. The reason for *The silent treatment of*

customers is unclear, but one possible reason is that workers monitoring the Pages have insufficient time to write back to all posts. For example, Air New Zealand received 472 replies when followers were asked to complete the sentence “I miss...”. People conversing face-to-face expect a response to their comments, but face-to-face conversations, of course, do not take place on such a scale, so perhaps expectations about online conversations need to change. Facebook offers two-way communication capability, but *The silent treatment* means that followers are essentially talking to themselves, in contrast to Malone and Fiske’s (2013) argument that the Relationship Renaissance in the online world has enabled commercial entities to “take on the character of the traditional one-to-one business relationships” (p. 74). Certainly, *The silent treatment* appears to run counter to advice from scholars and commentators like Booth and Matic, who argue (2011) that followers, who have become brands’ storytellers, “... must be leveraged and cultivated as part of a firm’s social media strategy” (p. 185).

The silent treatment may also be the result of uncertainty amongst staff about response protocols, but whatever the reason, the overwhelming majority of follower posts do not engender a reaction from the business, and remarks that would normally provoke a response in face-to-face conversations were left unanswered by the corporation. For example, the mother of an employee posted, “Wellington!! with my gorgeous daughter (who just happens to work with you :-)” but her enthusiasm and family connection to the business are ignored rather than fostered as a small, brand-enhancing story (Booth & Matic, 2011). The Christchurch earthquakes in 2010 and 2011 triggered many requests for help, but most (such as the example below) were left unanswered:

“Christchurch Please to see my mum in the rest home...she is very scared of all the earthquakes and Im stuck here in California and need a ticket....please.....”

Air New Zealand ran a marketing campaign based around the concept of CEO for a Day:

We are looking for the country’s most promising young leaders to take part in the annual CEO for the Day programme. Ten senior high school students will be chosen to join our award-winning CEO Rob Fyfe and his executive team for an inspirational day behind the scenes at the national carrier.

A disgruntled customer posted:

“And what will they learn? How to treat customers badly? How to tell staff to tell customers who are delayed for 48 hours "you are not our responsibility?”

The customer is given *The silent treatment*. Of course, the CEO for a Day campaign is generic marketing aimed at the corporation’s broad market, but followers replied to this and similar posts from the corporations as if the messages were directed to them personally, and almost certainly expected a personalised reply.

The silent treatment raises questions about the “interpersonal rewards and costs, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, gained from interaction with others” (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 6). If the bonds in a relationship are largely reliant on information exchanges and communication, and relationships strengthen only as more personal information is disclosed (Walther, 1995), then the expectations for the occurrence of two-way communication are bound to increase (Yum & Hara, 2006). However, *The silent treatment*, delineating as it does communication that is predominantly one-way, suggests that Facebook may not be an ideal medium for facilitating strong relationships between consumers and

organisations, despite its capacity for both breadth of topic (see chapter four) and depth of personal disclosure (see the theme *The lonely hearts club*). The corporations' Pages are carefully designed to fit organisational performance goals by offering orchestrated, upbeat communication that will engender brand loyalty and storytelling (Booth and Matic, 2011), but not the deep personal relationships that followers' posts seem to expect. *The silent treatment* from organisations seems to be normative: a control mechanism for followers whose posts lie outside the communicative behaviour desired on the corporate Pages, which exhibit, but do not enact, a form of friendship. Honest and deliberate self-disclosure on Facebook may not in fact lead directly to increased intimacy between followers, and my research suggests that the same limit is in place between followers and organisations.

A new kind of call centre...or not?

Corporations respond with standard responses that show no "human" or "conversational" approach, but are for the purposes of solving user product or service issues only.

Keywords: thanks, computer, mobile, press, log query, apps, webpage, updates users

The second biggest theme comprised responses relating to product or service issues, and in this sense, corporate communication on the Pages strongly resembled a call centre, dealing with basic queries about bank accounts, flight bookings or mobile phone purchases. As Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) put it:

Call centres are as Cameron says 'communication factories' in which communication is commodified and industrialized. This is linked to the

overwhelming focus on 'skills' in education and training, including the sort of 'communication skills' which are demanded for this (sic) sort of work (p. 73).

To accept that call centres are "communication factories" is also to assent to the disheartening reflection that organisational drives for efficiency can institutionalise human communication. If industrialisation (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012) can occur in voice-to-voice connections, it is unsurprising that the data in this research should show that the computer-mediated communication on Facebook is equally susceptible to the factory analogy. *A new kind of call centre...or not?* was by a large margin the biggest theme after *The silent treatment* and its size seems to show that answering mundane inquiries briefly is a more pressing concern than maintaining the "like-us, we-are-your-friend" approach of the main Pages.

In fact, the differences in the approaches to customers is so marked as to indicate a lack of coherence in the communication: on the one hand, the Pages are rather "come hither-ish", asking questions about how followers' days and lives are going, offering little gifts and setting up conditions for sometimes startling personal disclosure; on the other hand, the responses to general enquiries are brusque and efficient, which tends to impart a "Here's what you want, now get off our Page" air to the communication. In other words, the "friend" behaviour that aims to turn customers into followers and followers into "brand storytellers" (Booth & Matic, 2011) is not sustained throughout the organisations' communication efforts. Perhaps the disjoin in styles is happening in response to advice from scholars like Champoux, Durgee and McGlynn (2012) who suggest, "Companies can direct complaints or discussions to different websites in order to mitigate wall clutter and return to the normal posting schedule with the next topic." (p. 29).

Some businesses attempt to avoid the clash of communication styles by dedicating a separate section of their Facebook Page to answering enquiries. For instance, ASB's Virtual Branch, which is accessible through their Page, allows customers to discuss their banking needs with a real person, but online. The ASB Page also offers Experience ASB, where people who are thinking about joining the bank can "experience" ASB's version themselves before signing up. Similarly, Vodafone's Facebook menu bar includes a tab entitled "Cust. Service", which directs customers to links to blogs and forums where staff can answer product enquiries. Despite these facilities, however, a significant proportion of follower posts are questions about products, and most replies from corporations are answers to those enquiries. Rarely did either ASB or Vodafone point out the Facebook tabs to followers, but instead, directed them to the phone lines or emails when issues could not be solved on the Page.

The difference in the length and frequency of followers' and corporations' posts is further evidence of the drive to use the Pages efficiently. For instances, followers would sometimes write posts the equivalent in length of an A4 page, but the corporate response was seldom longer than a single paragraph. Dubai posts seven angry messages to ASB, and receives a standard, one paragraph response in return:

Dubai: Andnew company did not want me to take the vehicle for a costly valuation!!!!!!!

Dubai: And I found out the redbook value is far greater than the 7000 they were only covering for

Dubai: Why do ASB insurancepeople say talk to IAG? What do they earntheir agency money for?

Dubai: In short my experience with ASB insurance is sad. I invite comments on the points mentioned in a general sense. Why fob clients to IAG? Ask Luke. Steph at your call centre bitched to me I should have increased the limit. I said I am the lay person and you are the insurance (so called???) experts and had duties to represent correctly...ahhhhh ASB.....so if it needed to be increased to cover the stereo wouldn't one lay person expect the insurance company to say so? Or not say one is covered when they are not?

Dubai: We are not permitted to speak with Tania the Sales Manager. Why?

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Dubai: Is this normal for the ASB? If not what happened in this instance?

ASB: Hi Dubai, thanks for taking the time to post about your unsatisfactory experience, and we are very sorry that you have found it so disappointing. We'll look into the specifics tomorrow and come back to you. Thanks again for letting us know.

You're all the same: generic messages

Messages that are posted to reach "anyone and everyone". There is no distinguishing between individual followers to the Page. Such posts resemble a "mass broadcast" rather than a one-to-one "conversation".

Keywords: all, everyone, let us know, good luck, great news.

Following *A new kind of call centre*, the next biggest theme was "generic" messages broadcast to all followers. Sometimes a 'general applicability' message was posted in response to frequently asked questions, and raises uncertainties about the feasibility of establishing even imitation personal relationships, given the size of the follower

base. Most of the messages were promotional, even when the promotion was disguised as an activity with an outcome beneficial to the followers, such as competitions or announcements of cheap products. One obvious feature of the generic messages is a synthetic friendliness intended to make followers feel that the communication that has appeared on their Facebook forum has a personal meaning and intention.

The posts in the *You're all the same* theme covered a range of topics. Many announced competitions:

ASB: Good news: we've extended the entry period for submissions to the ASB Christmas Card competition. The closing date is now October 16 2011 (5pm). For full details see: <https://www.asb.co.nz/christmascards>. Good luck.

and others were feel-good messages that showed the corporations' ability to connect with the life of the nation:

Air New Zealand: Well done All Blacks!!

while others were simple updates on the status of problems:

Vodafone: Hi all, should all be working now, so enter away! Any problems let us know and we will get onto it! Good luck! ^S

Win, win, win

Corporations respond with information on their competitions including, announcements, draw updates, entry criteria and entry troubleshooting.

Keywords: win, prizes, giveaway, competition, comp, enter, click, submit, apps, announce, random, draw.

The next largest theme was general information about competitions, which were a major feature of the Pages of all three corporations. Not only did each organisation run several competitions during the research period, but competitions were also a prime focus for followers, whose posts were often about dates, rules and entry criteria. Oddly, given the organisations' predilection for *The silent treatment*, the businesses in turn gave considerable attention to responding to followers' posts about competitions, no doubt because an online competition is a marketing asset that first, attracts customers to the brand and "go viral" as followers share with friends, and second, provides invaluable data about customer demographics.

In this theme, the posts by the organisations were brisk, polite and factual, and designed to convey useful information briefly:

Vodafone: Hi London, thanks for entering the comp, all winners were chosen at random. Keep an eye out for more giveaways coming up on our Facebook Page shortly :) Thanks ^SF

Air New Zealand: Hi Edinburgh - are you using your mobile? As Facebook competition apps don't work on mobiles so you'll need to click on it from your computer. Thanks

ASB: Paris To be in to win an iPhone you'll need to submit your idea through the competition. Click on the link above.

Competitions may have gained attention from both parties because followers saw an opportunity to get something for nothing and the corporations found the questions straightforward to answer. For example, a response to an enquiry about the closing date of a competition requires only an easily-acquired fact, but answering a tirade against the company requires diplomacy and the skill to calm the customer without compromising the corporate image.

Another reason for the corporations' emphasis on competitions within Facebook may be that they are an easy driver of Likes. By this I mean that followers will often Like a Facebook Page in order to find out about the competitions on offer, and for the management of the organisations, Likes may be taken as a concrete measure of social media activity and therefore as an indicator of their marketing success. If, for example, Likes on Facebook were to grow from 10,000 to 20,000, companies may interpret the increase to mean that the popularity of the brand has received a major boost, rather than that a one-off competition has engendered activity on the Page. Competitions may therefore occur more frequently than would otherwise be the case simply to proliferate Likes.

We can't help you here: Facebook as a communication conduit

Corporations suggest that followers contact them in a different way, such as by dialling the main phone line or emailing them privately, rather than through the Facebook Page.

Keywords: contact, email, phone, dial, call, private, message.

The fifth biggest theme consisted of comments that pushed followers away from the Pages to other forms of communication. For example, a frequent response from the businesses was to redirect enquiries to their main phone lines or to a specific email address. The corporations frequently reminded followers that they could not “discuss account-specific information via our Facebook Page”, suggesting that although followers had no boundaries about what they were prepared to post, the corporations themselves did. A significant number of the corporations’ posts directed followers to another method of communication, usually the main phone line or an email address. These posts were almost identical regardless of where followers were being directed, and were strikingly similar across the different businesses:

ASB:

“Chicago It sounds like we need to talk! You can chat with us via our Virtual Branch on Facebook (M-F, 10am-6pm) or give us a call on 0800 803 804 to let us know how we can help. Thanks”

“Hi Sydney, please give our Kiwisaver team a call on 0800 272 738 - they'll be able to give you more info and help answer your questions. Thanks.”

Air New Zealand:

“Wellington - you can email - careers@airnz.co.nz for more information – thanks”

“Calcutta did you get it via a travel agent or online ? suggest you contact our contact centre to notify that you lost the ticket & that you need a replacement - 0800 737 000”

Vodafone (in these examples four workers identified by their initials as is company policy on social media for the company; SF, CK, ML and CB all write similar messages):

“Toronto, could you please email your contact details through to facebook@vodafone.com and we will be in touch. Thanks ^SF”

“Melbourne, if you could email your mobile number to facebook@vodafone.com, we will give you a call and sort you out. ^CK”

“Auckland & Christchurch - Could you please email your mobile numbers to facebook@vodafone.com? Thank you. ^ML”

“Hi Rome, can you send me your account details please facebook@vodafone.com I'll get someone to try sort this out for you if you like, my apoligies for the issues to date ^CB”

Malone and Fiske made this point:

it would be great if we customers could ask a question or register a complain with an employee who is known to us by name and face, directly from the company Facebook page. But Facebook permits only one voice—the administrator’s voice—for each page representing a company or brand. So we are left to talk to a Facebook monolith—which often isn’t the company or brand anyway, but rather a digital marketing agency hired to keep us away from their client. (2013, p. 112)

Vodafone's requirement that their workers identify themselves goes some way towards meeting Malone and Fiske's suggestion, but when followers replied to the organisation's posts, they addressed their message to Vodafone not to "ACB". Followers, then, are talking to a person called "Vodafone", because it is Vodafone who presents as the interested and engaging friend, not ACB.

Marketing

Comments from the corporations that relate to their promotions, sponsorships, marketing materials or general strategies.

Keywords: promotion, proud, sponsor, look out, exciting, new, discount, YouTube, television, advertisement, costumes, special, deal.

The sixth largest theme focused on marketing and contained promotional or sponsorship-related information. The marketing theme contained advertising and promotions for publicity stunts, events or sponsorship details. Cocheo (2009) claimed that customers prefer to be part of a community rather than be the recipients of marketing campaigns. The Pages integrated the two concepts, producing a hybridised communication that aimed to build a sense of community for followers while nevertheless promoting the brand.

Some marketing messages drove followers to visit other social media forums such as YouTube to watch advertising or promotional material. For example the following message to one of from Air New Zealand's followers sent a video of a plane being built: "Here is the All Black plane being built <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MxjK-w3w-Z4>". In

this post, the corporation seems to be engaging with the follower's personal interests, but in fact, the post is promotional. Other marketing messages pushed special deals or discounts:

"Aditi - please enter the promo code SAVE20 to get your discount and check the travel dates"

Montreal Great idea! If you are on Supa Prepay you can send a free text "BUY TXT2000" to 756 to purchase the recurring add-on for \$10 per month. If you aren't on Supa Prepay yet, you can text "SUPA" to 756 to switch. More info here <http://www.vodafone.co.nz/prepay/supa-prepay.jsp> ^ML

Some marketing messages built up anticipation for future products, like this post from Vodafone: "Hi Perth, we're working on our iPhone app at the moment - watch this space! We'll keep you posted with any updates. Thanks!" and others offered more information not on products, but on advertisements:

"Hi Brisbane, the advertisement is based on a true customer story, but unfortunately the visuals of the app were developed for use in the advertisement only."

Hi Jakarta, thanks for your post and checking out creating futures.co.nz we still have the rest of the ASB site with a fresh new look and you'll find this at the same place as usual www.asb.co.nz with all of our information about our products and services and access to Internet Banking. Our creating futures site has an exciting activation related to creating futures for children, check out <http://www.asb.co.nz/CreatingFutures/sheep/> and see what you think (if you click watch it might help to explain "mint sauce"

The human side of the corporate beast

Comments that exhibit a “human feel”, with tones of humour or friendliness and with an approach of kindness and attention towards an individual.

Keywords: ☺, like, friend ;), thanks, great.

The seventh largest theme was the “human” face that organisations occasionally showed when the business operative would joke and display some personality and friendliness toward the followers, straying from standard responses towards individuality. Often these responses consisted of a simple “thank you” for loyalty, assistance or feedback. The analysis of followers’ posts showed that followers personified the corporations and consistently communicated with them as their friends (and enemies) and confidants. As a general rule, unless the posts are the artfully designed messages on the main Pages, the corporations seldom reciprocated by showing emotion or a human connection in their responses to followers. *The human side* captures the quite small theme in which human feeling does appear, expressed as friendliness to, and appreciation of, followers.

This theme is something of an outlier in the data, but sometimes, the corporate employees broke the patterns of protocol and instead of sending standard posts, gave a more human touch to the conversation, perhaps joking or developing a sense of companionship. For instance, one Vodafone employee offers to assist Amsterdam and Bangkok to play an online game where they can win prizes:

“Amsterdam I am sitting with a couple of people at work would you like us to play with you? I promise we will give you any airtime if we win it :) ^TT”

“Oh no Bangkok would you like me to be your friend so we can play? I promise to give any airtime i win to you :)”

The Vodafone employee explicitly calls Bangkok as “friend” as distinct from “follower”. A “friend” is the term for a person who is connected to a Facebook Profile, and is a more intimate connection than “follower”. Businesses have “followers”, not “friends”, which makes the post to Bangkok remarkable, because it is an invitation into a closer relationship for the sake of a game. Barcelona won a camera, and the worker implies a power to speak for the whole company by saying that “we look forward to seeing the photos”, as though the corporation is a friend with whom Barcelona would share private images:

“Congratulations Barcelona, we look forward to seeing your photos.”

ASB posted, “If you've got a 140 character banking question, we've got an answer. Just drop us a tweet @ASBBank”, and becomes involved in friendly banter with Boston:

Boston: I have a question: is it "140 characters or less," or, "140 characters or fewer?" I also have the answer, but you probably knew that (-;

ASB: Boston Thanks for spotting our deliberate error! The real question is, can you ask us a question in exactly 140 characters?

Vodafone also creates intimacy with the use of “friend”: “Beijing, they will be available in June, no confirmed RRP yet. But stay tuned as we will be giving one away to a facebook friend soon! ^CK” and in a post about a job opportunity, writes with a marked degree of warmth designed to make the recipient feel singled out for particular approval and attention: “...and we would love you to apply. More details here https://careers.vodafone.co.nz/jobseeker/p=0&r=adatld9fi8cf&69s_j-m-r-stHkV7_68y_j-m-r-s_68j_j-m-r-s_5wp_j-m-r_5wk_j-m-r.”

Air New Zealand also engages in a friendly exchange, helping Berlin solve some practical problem:

Berlin: ARGH I give up, i cant figure it out...

Air New Zealand: Hi Berlin - it's a wee bit tricky isn't it! Which step are you having trouble with? Make sure you crease and fold everything. Once it's all been creased the actual fold just kind of fits into place...

Berlin: Haha, I just dont have the patience I think. Once I get to step 5 I lose it....

Air New Zealand: @Berlin - think of it as a challenge :)

Messages of appreciation were generally straightforward thanks to followers for their loyalty, feedback or support. These posts would have been quick to write, and would possibly have produced positive effect much greater than the effort it took to produce them, because they are personal acknowledgements of the followers. The shorter posts are so standardised that they fit Malinowski's (1923) concept of phatic communion, those everyday expressions that are almost meaningless in themselves, but are nevertheless important because they acknowledge the existence of the other party. For example, Air New Zealand posted, "Great to hear"; "Thanks so much ☺". Longer posts are more personal in that they show the writer is aware of the follower's specific contribution, and even use the recipient's name: "Cairo - thanks great to hear feedback on the flight :)"; "Thanks @Calgary - thank you for your support for 20 years :)". The posts of the other corporations were similar: Vodafone wrote, "Hi Cardiff, thanks for the feedback, great to hear it works well for you. ^CK" and ASB posted, "Hi Cleveland -

thanks for your suggestion. We agree, it's a great idea and we're investigating this concept already. Watch this space for future developments! Cheers."

"Smiley" emoticons were used more frequently in this theme than in other categories of corporate responses. Not only are emoticons a convenient tool for people faced with many messages to process, they also function as a non-verbal intensifier of meaning (Yum & Hara, 2006), and can therefore help to overcome the inability of computer-mediated communication (Kiesler, Siegel & McGuire, 1984) to convey social information through gestures, expressions, tone of voice and eye contact, all of which can be significant in establishing understanding. The criticism Kiesler, Siegel and McGuire made about computer-mediated communication in general was later levelled against social media in particular by Dubrovsky, Kiesler and Sethna (1991), who found that online exchanges provided "scant social information" (p. 119), and by Walther (2006) and Culnan and Marcus (1987).

Buote, Wood and Pratt (2009) argued that along with emoticons, the now commonplace use of informal language is a way of allowing less skilled writers to express themselves, and certainly, slang, "txt speak" and vernacular expressions combined to form a sort of "online argot". Perhaps the corporate posts speak in the voice of the online world, but perhaps also a link might be made to workers struggling to develop or define the corporate identity and align it with their own voice. One way or another, informal language was another way in which *The human side of the corporate beast* was shown to followers. The posts below capture examples of informal language:

"Hi Copenhagen **yup** all domestic flights in our network"

“Dallas, **hang in there**, we are working on our Smart plan TXT bundles and will have something for you over the coming months. ^CK”

“Denver **I definitely hear you on the smart plan allowance**, we have had lots of feedback our TXT bundles on smart plans are too low and we are listening and working on it :) Watch this space! ^TT”

On the whole, “humanised” posts were not usual. All three corporations tended to speak with almost interchangeable voices, largely devoid of identity or personality. Obviously, many workers make “the voice” of the Pages, but it is difficult to differentiate between them by reading their posts, as the following two messages from Vodafone show. The two writers, GW and CK wrote their posts at different times about the product Sure Signal.

Hi Detroit, unfortunately these coverage "weak spots" are something all network operators in NZ and around the world experience. Reasons vary from the topography of the land to the materials a building is made from. Sure Signal is a NZ first and a solution to help customers who live in these weak spots get 3G indoor mobile coverage. ^GW

Hi Florence, unfortunately these coverage "weak spots" are something all network operators in NZ and around the world experience. Sure Signal is a NZ first and a solution to help customers who live in these weak spots get 3G indoor mobile coverage. ^CK

Sorry seems to be the hardest word

The corporation apologises to an individual.

Keywords: sorry, but, apologies, apologise.

From time to time, the corporations admitted to being at fault and apologised in response to a complaint. Champoux et al. (2012) argued, “If a complaint ends up on a company’s Wall, the company is perceived to have directly caused the problem, fans want to hear companies take responsibility and admit that they messed up” (p. 28), but *Sorry seems to be the hardest word* is the second-to-smallest theme of the nine, and judging by the infrequent occurrence of apologies on the Pages, “sorry” does indeed appear to be hard for a corporation to say.

Sometimes the corporations said “sorry” so casually that it could have been replaced by a phrase like “That’s a shame”, and I did not count this somewhat perfunctory expression of regret as an apology. Corporations struggled to say, “We are sorry, this is our fault,” and rarely admitted fault, even when it seemed necessary and appropriate. When apologies were offered, they were often tempered with excuses and accusations:

Hi Dublin, sorry to hear that but to get these posts you'll need to have clicked on the "like" button on our Page a stage. If you no longer want to see our posts you'll need to either click "unlike" on our Page or click the remove option on our posts from your feed. We'll be sad to see you leave us.

The apology to Dublin above, for instance, makes it clear that the follower clicked the wrong button, so the corporation is not at fault. Florence receives an apology, a solution to the complaint, and a pointed reminder that the corporation is not responsible if the follower misses the advertising.

Hi Florence we're sorry you didn't get to hear about the competition. We did promote it extensively through the newsfeed a number of times as well as through advertising. We'll get your name manually added to the draw if you'd like?

Air New Zealand blames Geneva, and offers an investigation: “Geneva sorry to hear this - there is a cut off time to accept bags prior to a flight. Feel free to email us with your story so we can look into it for you- socialmedia @airnz.co.nz.” Kunz and Hackworth (2011) mentioned that the Facebook Page allowed Amazon customers to complain about a charging error in the systems, claiming, “These discussions allow consumers the opportunity to “vent” or be heard, and it allows the retailer to listen to customer concerns and to make changes where necessary” (p. 13). That may well be the case, but technological capacity is not the same as willingness to act. Consumers may vent (and do!) when purchases go awry, but this does not mean the retailers listen to the customer concerns and make changes when necessary.

Privacy

The corporation clarifies the meanings, responsibilities or implications of their privacy policies.

Keywords: respect, private, safe, secure, confidential, personal.

The smallest theme contained clarifications about the privacy or security stances of the corporation, and possibly would not have emerged in the coding had I not determined that ASB would be one of the corporations I researched. Vodafone and Air New Zealand barely featured in this theme: followers were more concerned about banking security than they were about products such as mobile phones.

ASB's Facebook security settings at the time possibly inflamed doubt and worry among followers. Though the settings have since changed, at the time of the research, ASB had a kind of "fan gate" in place that prevented followers from accessing the Apps for the Virtual Branch, Experience ASB or other parts of the bank's Facebook presence unless they agreed to give ASB access to their list of friends, their personal information such as birth date, their Likes and messages and also to allow ASB to post to their personal Profile, which gave the bank the ability to message all followers' Facebook friends. In general terms, fan gates block further progress into social media unless followers agree to certain terms, such as "liking" a specific Facebook Page in order to see anything on the Page or to receive free or discounted products. In the case of ASB, however, Facebook users were forced to explicitly agree to hand over their personal data in order to see the Facebook Page and its associated Apps.

Facebook followers freely self-disclosed, and few questioned the corporations' provisions for privacy and security, which tallies with research (Anderson, Charron & Cohen, 2005; Joinson, Reips, Buchanan & Paine Schofield, 2010; Metzger, 2006) that despite increasing publicity about diminished privacy online, people rarely change their behaviour to protect themselves.

Joinson et al. (2010) reported that users have strong concerns about security on websites, where users understand that they are interacting with businesses who may not be able to protect personal details if their security is attacked. The different attitude evident on social media sites may perhaps be accounted for by a sense among followers that even when they are dealing with the corporations, they are always “among friends”, because they are used to interacting with people they already know and with whom they already have a connection. Facebook imparts, often explicitly through their descriptions and advertisements, the idea that the Pages are the centre of a community, which may contribute to a sense that the Pages are a safe place to self-disclose. In this way, the corporations are taken as individuals, compatriots and friends in the conversation.

From time to time, a follower would question the corporation’s privacy and security practices both in a general sense and specifically about Facebook. Here ASB responds to a follower who has expressed concern about ASB’s online banking systems:

Havana You can be rest assured that everything’s safe with the mobile version of FastNet as it has the same security levels as our regular FastNet Classic. When you use the mobile version of FastNet you are required to enter your access code, password, and Netcode where applicable. Your mobile banking session will automatically time out after a certain period if there is no activity. Remember, your FastNet access code and password must be kept confidential at all times. Do not store these details in your phone (or anywhere else electronically or in written form). If you ever think your phone has been compromised, give us a call on 0800 FASTNET to have your password reset. Hope that helps to clarify. Thanks

Followers expressed apprehension about Facebook security itself. Helsinki, for instance, asked ASB why the bank needed complete

access to a follower's Profile before customers could use their online services.

Helsinki Hi, these are the standard permissions that most applications within Facebook will request. We only use the specific info that's required to make the application function. We use basic information like your profile name, profile picture, and who your friends are so we can personalise the experience on our application - you will see your picture and your Facebook username in the chat window when you are chatting with one of our Banking Specialists. We don't have access to information that you have set on your profile to be only seen by friends, or friends of friends. ASB respects all of our customers (and non-customers) privacy and we take this seriously (see our privacy policy: <https://www.asb.co.nz/story335.aspx>). Thanks.

Wang, Beatty and Foxx (2004) found that when businesses completed privacy disclosures, security disclosures, and seals of approval (none of which happened much on the social media sites I researched), consumers were more willing to offer their personal information and self-disclose, but by contrast, Chou, Teng and Lo (2009) maintain that there is no direct relationship between the disclosure of company identity information and self-disclosure by consumers, claiming instead that self-disclosure occurs because trust exists in the relationship. My results might be different from those of Wang, Beatty and Foxx (2004) because these scholars focused on disclosure of identity information (names, credit card details, birth dates and the like), whereas the followers of the three corporate Pages I studied disclosed what Chou, Teng and Lo (2009) categorise as *sensitive disclosures* (such as medical details, hopes and fears) and *general habits* (interests and hobbies).

Summary

In this chapter, I analysed the corporate replies to followers' posts, and showed that the most common response was *The silent treatment* or short, generic and indifferent to followers who are *all the same*, no matter the nature of the follower enquiry. It seems impossible to expect a one-to-one conversation to occur between the businesses and their followers, but follower behaviour, shaped by the friendly ambience of the main messages, indicates that followers seek a personal connection. The communication between corporations and individuals is significantly different in style and content and the expectations each party has of the other do not appear to be fulfilled in their conversations online.

Chapter Six: Reaching the people

My analysis of the year's worth of posts and responses on the Facebook Pages of the three corporations produced unexpected results. I had set out to discover the kinds of messages that were being written, and discovered as well that followers behaved far more emotionally than I had ever anticipated, despite my familiarity with the platform and knowledge as a sophisticated user. Followers connected with the corporations as though with a personal friend, and sometimes even with a personal enemy, and emotions ran high. It was not unusual to see both deep anger and forms of liking so intense as to amount to adoration. In the face of all the human connection offered by followers, however, the corporations seldom responded at all, and never with the sort of passion that should engender the depth of feeling that followers displayed. Overall, I found that not only was the followers' emotional display unexpected, but so also was the imbalance between corporate responses and follower engagement.

The results made me wish to understand what might have caused the style of followers' posts. It seemed to me that if the corporations' responses did not encourage the emotionally intense communication I observed, then some antecedent condition had to be present on the Pages to drive the behaviour. I could see that it was impossible to dismiss Facebook's origins as a social networking site for one-to-one communication: because Facebook has connected friends to friends since it began, the currency of the medium has been informality and a general style of post-the-way-you-speak, which may have permeated communication on the quite recently introduced business Pages,

especially since the set up of Facebook Pages and personal Profiles is remarkably similar. I could not accept, however, that the similarities between set ups entirely accounted for the expectations followers appeared to hold that corporations would respond as people.

The antecedent condition appeared in the “bank of the future” television advertisement for ASB. This advertisement shows the icons for various social media platforms dancing around the screen¹⁶, and it occurred to me that although the corporations were predominantly silent on the Pages, they actively used traditional sites of promotion to recruit followers to visit their Page, press the Like button and communicate with them. I decided that this observation went some way towards explaining followers’ communicative behaviour too: if corporations were pulling followers to the Pages by seeming to befriend them, then what the followers found when they arrived at the Pages probably influenced the way in which they “spoke”. Thus, the content of the Pages had to in some measure contribute to followers’ urge to connect with the corporations as though with a friend.

A cursory examination of the three Pages showed heavy emphasis on the personification of the corporations: ASB’s Virtual Branch featured a realistic “virtual teller” and Air New Zealand’s Page stars a “virtual fairy” who “likes pretty things” and distributed treats to followers. Vodafone perhaps went further than the other two corporations in creating the illusion of a personal relationship by encouraging users to “share everything”, as though followers were opening their diaries to close friends.

¹⁶ This particular advertisement is not available online but other recent ASB advertisements, with a similar style and approach can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/user/ASBbank>.

Closely reading the corporate Pages

I determined that I would carry out rhetorical analysis on the Pages using Cheney's (1983a) rhetorical analysis typology to see what linguistic elements the corporations used to produce such strong identification in followers, but I felt I needed to use a systematic method to familiarise myself with the selected texts, which were interwoven into the Pages in a complex relationship due to the very nature of the online environment. Teo-Dixon (2009) used Monin's (2004) method of "scriptive reading" to structure her approach to accessing the texts, and a similar approach seemed feasible and sound for this research. Accordingly, the critical rhetorical analysis I carried out is situated alongside a three-phase scriptive reading of the Pages.

Each of the three phases of scriptive reading accomplishes different understandings of a text. The first "dominant" phase produces quite a descriptive interpretation that results from a linear, top-to-bottom engagement with the text, and the context of and audience for the text are taken at face value. In the dominant reading the author's meaning is not questioned. The second phase is a "critical" reading, in which readers may use their own resources to find less obvious meanings: hidden connections between words and possible interpretations are sifted and examined. The third phase, the "reflexive" reading, questions the assumptions readers have based their interpretations and offers a place for drawing conclusions that are congruent with the critical reading of the second phase.

I am aware that a possible criticism of scriptive reading (Monin, 2004) is that it leans towards being overly subjective, but I see it as a structured way to "enter" the texts and move within them in a way that

Welcome to ASB Virtual Branch.

ASB

OPEN

Enter branch

Watch intro

Just like a regular branch, only right here on Facebook.

Which means you can now 'live chat' with us about anything from home loans to term deposits to smart ways of managing your money - from virtually anywhere. And all securely and privately too.

OPENING HOURS
 8am-8pm **Mon to Fri.**
 9am-5pm **Sat to Sun.**

Talk to us in real time
 Chat live and online with our banking specialists.

Safe and secure
 Everything we discuss in live chat is strictly confidential, and will not be posted on your Timeline.

Everyone's welcome
 Talk to us whether you're an ASB customer or not.

ASB Bank on Twitter | ASB Bank on YouTube

Log In to FastNet Classic

Figure 6.1: Screenshot of ASB Virtual Branch (<https://www.facebook.com/ASBBank>)

is consistent across all three, and I am encouraged by Fairclough (1989) who said, on the matter of subjective researchers, that nothing obviates the need for rational argument backed up by evidence that allows the evaluation and validation of interpretations.

I selected the texts for analysis because they all sit within Facebook itself¹⁷. The ASB Virtual Branch is a Facebook application that branches off the main corporate Page; the virtual fairy has her own Facebook Page that links to Air New Zealand's main Page, and the "Share Everything Day" video was uploaded to Vodafone's main Page. Promotion that is external to Facebook drives followers to the main Pages, where they receive messages about organisational presence and identity from the friendly corporations.

ASB

Phase one: Dominant reading

ASB's Virtual Branch purports to allow current customers to complete their banking needs through the Facebook application and to also enable potential customers to determine future banking requirements. The Virtual Branch tab resembles a website homepage, and its face and voice are young, female and friendly. The avatar welcomes followers and explains the workings of the Virtual branch, saying in a friendly voice, complete with an educated, but nevertheless identifiably New Zealand accent:

Hi and welcome to the ASB Virtual Branch. We're here to make banking easier so feel free to have a look around and to live chat with one of our banking specialists. They're very helpful. From home loans to term deposits

¹⁷ The diagrams in appendices i—iii explain the connections of the elements in the texts.

to anything else, we're here for you just like a regular branch. All chats are secure and confidential too.

And whether you're an ASB customer or not we're on hand to help. To get started just click the button here. And if you like what we've done, click on the like button and tell all your Facebook friends about the ASB Virtual Branch. Just like a regular branch, only right here on Facebook. Which means you can now 'live chat' with us about anything from home loans to term deposits to smart ways of managing your money - from virtually anywhere you fancy.

And all securely and privately too. Talk to us in real time

The avatar's "performance" is human-like: the background remains still, but she moves her head around, looking from side to side and even blinking occasionally. Her prepared spiel is warm, informal and friendly, written to sound like the sort of spontaneous "ad lib" welcome a real person would give. Sentences sometimes begin with "and", and she uses everyday, conversational expressions: "just like"; "anywhere you fancy". The welcome is informative and perhaps, just slightly directive: "talk to us in real time" and "chat live". The safety, confidentiality and security of the Virtual Branch are repeated for emphasis, because these are key concerns for followers: "all securely and privately"; "safe and secure"; and "strictly confidential".

When the general welcome has finished, followers choose to enter the Virtual Branch by pressing an "enter branch" button, where a large "Open" sign in the top left hand corner of the screen replicates "real life" experiences of visiting a bank or shop. The following text then appears on the screen along with photographs of (real) ASB bankers¹⁸.

Pick a banker. Any banker.

¹⁸ At the time of this research, there were 13 photographs to choose from.

We're all very friendly. And we'd like to help you create that future you're looking for. Just click on who's available and let's get chatting.

Chat live and online with our banking specialists.

Safe and secure

Everything we discuss in our live chat is strictly confidential, and will not be posted on your wall.

Opening Hours

8am - 8pm Monday to Friday. 9am - 5pm on Saturday to Sunday.

Security, confidentiality and the accessibility of friendly bankers are accentuated again.

Phase two: Critical reading

According to Karimov and Brengman (2011), corporations use human-seeming avatars in online commercial transactions to convey a vivid feeling to customers that they are engaging with a real employee, whose views and personality will then influence purchase decisions. It comes as no surprise, then, that ASB has deployed a life-like avatar to front the Virtual Branch, and it also should probably not surprise that the avatar is female. Avatars give organisations the chance to design a perfect employee, and in this case, ASB has chosen a front person who appears young enough to be attractive, but old enough to impart confidence; sufficiently lean to fit with current cultural concepts of attractiveness, but not so blatantly sexy as to draw public criticism and accusations of male chauvinism; sufficiently educated to make people feel that she deserves her "job", but local enough, with her New Zealand accent, to be approachable. Her design does not speak of

“otherness”, but of the reassurance of familiarity in both sound and look: she is, in fact, utterly non-threatening.

Her appearance, however, does not match the composition of New Zealand society in that she does not speak of the indigenous people of New Zealand, nor of any other minority ethnic group. What her presence as the receptionist of the Virtual Branch does do, however, is reinforce the enduring idea that the “female” role is to be pleasant and serve (Hall, 1993). In the conservative world of banking, where most senior managers are male (McDowell & Court, 1994), ASB might have been daring to have fronted the Virtual Branch with an avatar whose form presents as senior and male, but there is no courage at all in the decision to use a “woman”, merely the perpetuation of an outworn stereotype.

The virtual teller is certainly welcoming, but for all her seeming helpfulness, she actually imparts very few “hard facts”. The instructions are factual, and so too is the information about opening hours, but the rest of her speech is full of unsubstantiated claims. For instance, she offers nothing to back up her assertion that the Virtual Branch is secure: the confidence followers place in the bank through her depends on affect, not on argument. A similar situation pertains to followers’ choice of real-time tellers. Followers can use photographs to select the teller with whom to conduct their online interactions, when in fact, the way workers look should be irrelevant to objective conversations about online banking. The deployment of both the perky female virtual teller and photographs which are posed to make the real tellers seem both trustworthy and welcoming together suggests that the bank puts considerable store on an image of approachability.

At the time these data were gathered, ASB's Virtual Branch was the only example of a bank moving its entire existence into Facebook (Association for Data-driven Marketing and Advertising, n.d) (ADMA) and the initiative has been trumpeted on ASB's main Facebook Page as a "world first". ADMA (n.d), which is the largest marketing body in Australia, said this about the development:

ASB saw the Virtual Branch on Facebook as a way to listen to its customers and interact with them in a two-way dialog where they were already active. ...The company also wanted to increase the numbers of fans connected to its Facebook Page, the free public profile that allows companies to share their businesses and activities with Facebook users on an ongoing basis. It is important to ASB to build a solid online community with whom it could have a continuous conversation through the Facebook platform.

ADMA's comment is more promotional than analytical. It is true that Facebook is a place of two-way conversations for person-to-person, but there is little evidence that businesses achieve two-way communication with their customers, and no explicit reason is why "it is important to ASB to build a solid online community..." except the unspoken but underlying reason that all businesses can glean valuable demographic data from follower Profiles. The ASB Virtual Branch can be accessed only through the main ASB Page and followers must decide to click on the App to reach it, which they are pushed to do by the promotions on the main Page or in other media. The Virtual Branch, therefore, is less about conversations and more about the Likes that can be garnered by presenting a casual, friendly demeanour that entices followers in.

ASB used other media to heavily promote its Virtual Branch as efficient and convenient for customers (see Appendix ii for a detailed outline of the promotion involved) but in fact, visiting the Virtual Branch is more

complex than the advertising suggests. People must first have Internet access, then a Facebook account, then be technologically savvy enough to “add the App”. They must also agree to ASB accessing basic personal details information and then must follow through to another screen that states, “ASB would also like your permission to Post on your behalf” and agree that “This app may post on your behalf, including status updates, photographs and more”. It is true that followers are not compelled to accept the last agreement, but if they do not agree to let the App act for them, every visit to the Virtual Branch will incur the question, which many followers may find so irritating they will eventually capitulate and agree. It is not clear why a bank would wish to post on an individual’s Page or why it needs power over followers’ online identity, but more importantly, the bank does not clarify for followers the extent of the power agreeing gives. The request equivalent in the offline world is of asking a person for a list of contact details of friends and family each time they enter a bank building. In the offline world, this request would be considered bizarre and would not be countenanced, but in the online world, many followers seem to accept it quite uncritically, possibly because of the friendly, trustworthy image of itself the bank has painstakingly promoted.

The final message from the virtual teller asks followers to show their appreciation of the application by clicking the Like button and share the great news about the Branch with their Facebook friends. Here, the word “friend” is misleading: followers are not among friends, but rather, in a commercial relationship where the seemingly innocuous invitation “let’s be friends” masks a direct request to help get the Virtual Branch win more fans. If followers Like the Virtual Branch, the more successful ASB can claim it is, and the more they can use it to as a point of difference with competitors. Facebook not only counts

“friends” and Likes but also publicises the numbers, placing subtle pressure on the concept of friendship, because an uncritical view of the numbers might suggest that higher scores mean a person is better, more popular and more successful. Moreover, the request to Like the Page and tell their Facebook friends asks followers to work to advertise the bank for free. For the bank, this is a winning situation: the invitation to befriend the bank reinforces the carefully wrought friendliness of its image, and at the same time it profits from the unpaid promotional labour of their followers.

Phase three: Reflexive reading

I can see that behavioural norms are still being defined in the online world, and that the privacy may be evolving into a different concept there from the one that prevails in the offline world, but I find it impossible to see that any organisation has the right to tie a service like the Virtual Branch to the followers’ personal Profiles and to gain agreement to post on their behalf. The request to speak and send photographs or links in someone else’s name strikes me as arrogant, because it would not be acceptable anywhere else. I understand that the bank can point to followers’ consent, but I am not sure that in the prevailing atmosphere of friendliness and reassurance on the Page, followers have informed consent about what their agreement really means. I think this is objectionable, and it seems to me that the bank somewhat disingenuously relied on the fact that most followers are not sophisticated users to quickly obtain massive amounts of valuable information and contacts.

In connection with security, I also dislike the way the bank has substituted friendliness for information, because I feel it demeans



Figure 6.2: Air New Zealand Fairy (<https://www.facebook.com/airnzfairy>)

followers to be given warm words but no facts. Banks are sometimes targeted by hackers: if followers are considering placing their financial well-being in the hands of the bank, they deserve more than “customer relations”: they should be given solid details on which to base their decision. I see the bank’s attitude as, “Trust us, we’re nice and we know what we’re doing” and I think that consciously or unconsciously, the bank infantilises its customers, who are treated as though they could not cope with facts. I think that by being friendly, the bank intends to demonstrate that it values its customers, but instead, what it shows is that it values Likes.

Air New Zealand

Phase one: Dominant reading

Just as ASB presents its Page with a virtual receptionist, so too Air New Zealand has an avatar to front its Facebook presences. The Air New Zealand Fairy first appeared in 2009 in a Twitter feed and was such a successful creation that she subsequently became the “face” of both the corporation’s Facebook presence, and (more recently), of Pinterest and Instagram too. Followers who click the ‘About’ tab on the Air New Zealand Fairy Page receive their information from the Fairy:

About

Hello friends! I'm the Air NZ Fairy and I grant one Air NZ wish (big or small) every day to one lucky fan. Make your wish by clicking on my 'make a wish' button xx

Although the Air New Zealand Fairy is a character created for a marketing campaign¹⁹, her social media persona on Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest has a distinctly human feel because her Page is set up to resemble a personal Profile. The Page shows her 'biography', which contains a place and date of birth, and reveals a little of her 'job' with Air New Zealand, which is to surprise and delight fans, make people happy and chat with Facebook friends:

Biography

I was born in 2009 in the beautiful Fairyland and since then have been surprising and delighting my fans on Twitter by granting all kinds of wishes, like giving away Koru Lounge passes, flights, silver and gold status, airpoints, tees, lollies, and so much more. It's my favourite thing in the world - to make people happy. Now I'm here on Facebook to spread more of my love and grant more wishes!

Make sure you use my 'make a wish' application to make your wish - I can only grant wishes through this so please don't post your wish on my Page - but feel free to comment as I love chatting to my Facebook friends.

However, she drops out of her breathless girlishness in order to be strict about follower behaviour, and in an odd juxtaposition of moods, moves into 'nanny mode' when she warns of the consequences of repeat offending:

You can also find me on Twitter at www.Twitter.com/AirNZFairy

I love your comments, but please be respectful of others. My Page is a happy place for people to be surprised and delighted - I won't have any nonsense

¹⁹ The Fairy's job on Twitter was to distribute daily 'wishes' such as discounts, freebies and competition, and she has been one of their most successful marketing inventions, contributing to the corporation's success in winning the 2012 Excellence in Marketing award (StopPress, 2012) and the prize for 'Best Use in Emerging Media award from the New Zealand Marketing Association (Marketing Association, 2012).

on my Page and will delete profane, harassing, abusive, inappropriate and spam comments and block repeat offenders.

Air New Zealand has, with some effectiveness, positioned the Fairy as a celebrity. She is promoted in a range of media and in her “interview” on *The Examiner* website (www.examiner.com), answers to the questions appeared to come directly from her: “I was conceived in response to.... I have been sprinkling my fairy dust like mad ever since” (Laird, 2012, January 16). She also featured in a promotional spot on *Newstalk ZB*, one of the most popular radio stations in New Zealand (“Air New Zealand Fairy”, 2013, August 1).

Occasionally the Fairy pins images of her favourite things on the Facebook Page: rainbows; suitcases, balloons and buttons in bright, primary colours; coloured sprinkles for food; sparklers and glitter. She has her own Pinterest²⁰ account, and her “biography” on this forum reads, “The Air New Zealand Fairy waves her wand and grants one wish a day on Twitter - big or small. Wish her today @AirNZFairy. She loves pretty, sparkly things like...” Pictures of sweet food dominate: rainbow-coloured macarons, fairy bread, chocolate cake with chocolate dustings, rainbow coloured heart shaped sweets, rainbow cake, ice-cream with sprinkles, fairy floss, triple striped biscuits, heart-shaped shortbread and cupcakes, all of which are typical of the kinds of food treats at children’s birthday parties. Like the food, the language that she favours is also child-like: for instance, she describes a particular sweet as “the yummiest”; she describes something as “fun fun”, and sends followers “congrats”, and ends her messages with “yay xoxo”.

²⁰ Pinterest is a social medium where a person “pins” images they like to a virtual notice board and shares these with others. Pinterest users are predominantly female (Stellrecht, 2012).

The Fairy's appearance is pre-pubescent, but also strongly gendered and sexualised. Her eyes are large in proportion to her other facial features, and the fringe of her bob hairstyle hangs into her eyes, so that she looks at viewers from an angle, suggesting shyness and hesitation. Her arms and legs are so thin they impart an appearance of fragility, reinforcing the idea of a child in need of protection. The Fairy, however, describes herself as a woman, claiming after a supposed bout of the influenza virus "...I'm back to my normal slim, slender and womanly self..."

In contrast with the overall depiction of the Fairy as pre-pubescent, her many "outfits" fit her emerging curves closely and emphasise the promise of an idealised female shape. Indeed, the Fairy is presented as something of a clothes-horse. She has a range of new costumes for significant events and each new outfit is announced on the Page. She flirts with followers, asking, "Like my new look?" because after all, the Fairy "loves to get dressed up for any occasion". She has appeared in the uniform of the Air New Zealand cabin crew, in a Pohutakawa flower for Waitangi Day, in a gown inspired by *The Lord of the Rings* for the launch of *The Hobbit*, in an elf outfit for Christmas, with some mistletoe tucked flirtatiously behind her ear, in a dressing gown and sleeping mask for the new long-haul flights, and in a sundress and sunglasses for summer. Followers respond to the outfits enthusiastically, posting compliments as though to a real person: "Love the outfit", "Perfection", "Stunning", "Gorgeous", "Nice outfit", "Love the xmas look", "You look fabulous today", "Very pretty and feminine", "You look amazing", "Love it very You". Other comments, though positive, show that followers are aware that the Fairy is more—or less, perhaps—than an innocent child. Some remarks underline the clear

sexual element of her image: “Hubba hubba miss fairy”, “Kinda sexy too”, “You look real flash, so very beautiful”, “Hot mama miss fairy”.

Inasmuch as the Fairy’s sex is made clear from her appearance, her voice and lexical choices also conform to a particular construction of femininity. She addresses followers as “my lovelies”, and tells female fans, “I have a wee surprise for the girls” and offers to help “Get you out of the dog box with your hubby” or for a person to “see their gran and her amazing cooking! Don't fill up on inflight snacks!! Your wish is granted ;) xxx”. She finishes each message with a version of “xoxo fairy”.

Phase two: Critical reading

Toffoletti (2008) argues that the sexualisation of female appearance is often an attempt to feminise it. The representation of the Fairy is more complicated than that, for although her appearance hints at a sexually mature (or, at least, *maturing*) body, her behaviour is immature to the point of being childlike and she therefore induces the same discomfort in critical viewers as childrens’ beauty pageants (Cartwright, 2012). It is easy to deplore the sight of babies and toddlers competing in full make up and clothes that imitate popular notions of what is “sexy”, but audiences have the power of choice: they need not attend or view. Followers of the Air New Zealand Page, however, are compelled to endure the corporation’s constrained view of women as flirty and girly, needing admiration and reassurance for their “look” and seeking to win approval by giving out treats. The corporation’s defence against the observations I have made here is likely to be something along the lines of, “It’s all a bit of fun...it does no harm...followers love it!”, and could substantiate their opinion with the fact that the Page has garnered more

than 96,000 Likes. Ganesh (2003) has defined organisational narcissism as a projected image of the company as “desirable, proper and appropriate” (p. 664), even in the face of activities that are demonstrably questionable. A narcissistic organisation seeks to privilege its legitimacy over its accountability, and at a time when other forms of media are being called to account for the damage done by the representation of young, under-weight women as an ideal of beauty (Stice & Shaw, 1994), one of the uses of 96,000 hits on the Like button could be to substantiate an argument that no one is hurt by the company’s style of promotion.

Cunningham (1993) pointed out the anatomical absurdity of the Barbie doll, and with her small size, thick mane of blonde hair, oversized eyes, small nose and painted red lips, along with a body that hints at curves to come, the Fairy resembles Barbie. Children dress Barbie in new outfits just as Air New Zealand changes the Fairy’s look, and just as Barbie is remodelled each year from (say) a biker to a dentist, or ballerina to a movie star (Bell, 2004), so also does the Fairy transform from a flight attendant to a hiker to a runway model. The Fairy displays many of the personality traits attributed to Barbie: she is beautiful, ultra-feminine, sociable and fun to be with, smiling and happy (Bell, 2004). Children play with dolls in many ways (Caldera, Huston & O’Brien, 1989): they enact their observations of life, they transfer emotions onto the doll, but most of all, they enter a “pretend” world. The Page presents an inescapable element of ‘playing with dolls’, which calls into question the way Air New Zealand thinks its followers relate to the world. Certainly, followers seem to be positioned in relation to the company as children themselves, willingly suspending adult sensibilities in the hope of having a wish granted.

Behind the fun and femininity, the Fairy serves a commercial purpose: avatars engender more satisfaction, more trust in the company and a greater likelihood of purchase (Holzwarth, Janiszewski & Neumann, 2006). In addition, Holzwarth et al. (2006) found that shoppers who are only moderately involved with a purchase (as is the case with buying flights) respond better to attractive avatars. The use of an avatar that complies with one current cultural ideal of beauty, even if that ideal is arguably unacceptable and demeaning, is a calculated attempt to develop a personal relationship with customers who may see Air New Zealand as an extension of the appealing Fairy. The Fairy has a nascent career in Air New Zealand merchandising: for Christmas in 2012, Air New Zealand created a “holiday postcard” featuring the Fairy giving an animated wink—the first step towards creating a movie version of the Fairy—and in 2013, her image was printed on t-shirts which were used as prizes on the main Facebook Page. She would be easy to capture as a branded doll, and in fact, there are some significant ways in which the Fairy’s commercial career parallels Disney’s female characters.

I have already remarked on the Fairy’s similarity to Barbie dolls, and Disney and Mattel have collaborated on a number of products. She also resembles characters in Disney’s adaptations of fairy tales such as their Fairies of Pixie Hollow and their extensive line of princess stories populated by beautiful, hyper-feminine young women (Do Rozario, 2004; England, Descartes & Collier-Meek, 2011) whose physical and emotional dispositions have been modified to conform to the Disney ideal. Hurley (2005, p. 222) accounts for the power of Disney this way:

...The visual representation of fairy tale characters has been dominated by the Disney version of these tales. Such is the power of visual representation that children [and adults] tend to believe that Disney’s version of the fairy tale is the real story rather than the “classic” version to which they may or

may not have been exposed through school or home. Not only does the Disney version provide visual images for the fairy tale it is depicting, these images and the relative value of group membership associated with the images are then translated into beliefs children hold about status in particular group membership, in relation to notions of good, bad, pretty, and ugly as reflected in the films.

Thanks to Disney's success in popularising traditional story tales, society has a general understanding of what a princess should be like, and Air New Zealand may have decided too there were benefits in adapting what is now a common trope. In the world of Disney, the term Princess means more than royal daughter: it defines a general sense of a "good" female character, which sums up the Fairy, with her beauty, good nature and generosity.

Just as the media have given considerable attention to the putative connection between media images of women and eating disorders, so too has the "epidemic of obesity" been widely canvassed. One of the most disquieting things on the Air New Zealand Page, therefore, is the Fairy's predilection for the sort of sweet, sugary food that provides an abundance of calories and little nutritional value. It is, perhaps, part of the Fairy's notional charm that she likes pretty party food, but two things stand out here. First, although it is unlikely that followers will use the Fairy as a serious model for their behaviour, the visual prominence of food on the Page acts like an advertisement in that by reminding, it can create an appetite for a snack. Second, the type of food that is in evidence reinforces the Fairy's childlike and stereotypically feminine nature, harking back to the old childhood rhyme, "What are little girls made of? Sugar and spice and all things nice". Taken with her own comment about regaining her "slim, slender womanly self", the

message is clear about how to be seen as a desirable and good woman: eat the sweet stuff, but be slim as well.

Finally, it may be thought that the Fairy briefly slips out of character when she speaks so sternly about the behavioural standards she requires on her Page, but in fact, this departure from the usual tone of her communication further strengthens her stereotypical femininity. Kindness is shown as one of the key traits of princesses, and the Fairy's insistence that there should be "no funny business" is part of her construction as a "good" woman. It may even be that the combination of her provocative appearance ("Hot mama, miss Fairy"), careful matiness ("...help you get out of the dogbox with hubby") and firm rules makes the avatar even more appealing to followers: she shows a human mix of character traits.

Phase three: Reflexive reading

The Fairy is an example of breezy good humour on a public forum. It is possible to appreciate her Page for its sense of style and its awareness of matters of current interest to the nation (All Blacks games; Lord of the Rings premieres). It is possible to interact with the Fairy as though her speech, appearance and manners are simply, as they appear on a surface reading, expressions of well-meaning, and ultimately, harmless good fun. However, I also see a deeply objectionable aspect to the Page, because the Fairy's representation objectifies femininity and furthermore, equates beauty with moral worth in a woman.

I also find it curious and disturbing that Air New Zealand has, front of house, a construction that infantilises its audience: the Fairy may be sexualised, but her behaviour is far from adult. It makes me wonder



Figure 6.3: Screenshot of the Vodafone “Share Everything Day” video (<https://www.youtube.com/user/vodafoneNewzealand>)

whether the corporation sees the followers who approach the Page as children seeking gifts and wishes, while “grown ups” buy their tickets and keep the transaction on a business footing.

The Fairy makes me mindful that in the online world, anything is possible. In Second Life, players spend real money to buy virtual property; on the Air New Zealand Page, real people demonstrate a form of friendship with a Fairy. Every wave of her wand to grant a wish, however, reminds me that “fairyland” is in a commercial zone: the interests of the corporation are being met every time the Like button registers a hit. Even if the corporation has to give products away to acquire fans, the Fairy gets the Air New Zealand brand “out there”. Air New Zealand does well by doing good.

Vodafone

Phase one: Dominant reading

In 2011, Vodafone created a public relations campaign called “Share Everything Day”, which nominated a date (8 July) and encouraged followers to post any kind of message—written, pictorial, videos—through any medium enabled by Vodafone, such as emails, texts, PXT messages, Facebook and Twitter tweets. The “Share Everything Day” resulted in a promotional video, roughly three minutes long, that is humorous and “feel-good”. The video was uploaded to YouTube promoted on Twitter and the Vodafone website, and publicised in press releases, but it also sits within Facebook and followers can watch it directly from the Page. The “official” text that accompanies the video reads:

On July 8, Vodafone asked you to take part in the first ever "Share Everything Day". Share a random status update, upload photographs, videos or even TXTs message on our Vodafone Facebook Page. This video is what New Zealand looked like on July 8 through your eyes and ours.

The video aims for the widest possible audience, existing customers who want to feel positive about their telecommunications company of choice, and potential customers who might be pulled to the purchase decision by a company image that is fun and gives an impression of appreciation and engagement with its customers.

The tone of the video is set by a song by Dane Rumble entitled "Everything (Take me down)", which establishes an up-beat pace and lyrics about "being yourself" and "individual pride". As the video begins, the legend, "On July 8th, 2011" appears over a picture of the sun rising over a snow-covered mountain. Somewhat at odds with this rugged rural setting, in one corner of the screen a clock shows the seconds counting down to the end of the day. A sense of urgency is developed from this suggestion that although the video has just begun, time is running out in the fast pace of an online day where everyone is chatting to Vodafone, constantly "sharing everything".

The text becomes "You shared your day with Vodafone", and the background changes from rural to urban: a busy intersection on Queen Street in Auckland. People hasten about their business, the shot is in near darkness, like the previous mountainscape, intimating that the sun has not yet risen and the day is just beginning. Meanwhile, the clock in the corner runs on, the text changes to "With over 6,500 messages, picture and videos" and the background returns to a rural landscape with the sun shining. The text shifts to "Here is what you shared...", and

the song builds to a crescendo for the 'reveal' of what followers have shared:

"You told us what you were thinking."
"You showed us your kids."
"You showed us where you lived."
"You shared with us who you were supporting."
"What made you happy."
"What made you sad."
"You shared what you were eating."
"What you were wearing."

The clock continues to tick in the remains in the corner but the backdrop changes to video footage of a couple working on a house renovation, and the rolling text proclaims:

"You shared what you were doing."
"You shared some surprises."
"Your friends and family."
"You showed us your cats...lots of cats!"
"Auckland has its storm on."

During the passage through the day, the light changes to show daylight and changes again to give the feeling of dusk falling. Different scenery appears, and the "characters" in the video change as material from followers is incorporated onto the story of the day. As the video reaches its end stages, the background is divided into six squares behind the summary text:

"This is a snapshot of what New Zealand looked like."

The video has something of the quality of a fable, partly because it opens with "On July 8th, you shared everything," which is akin to

“Once upon a time,” the conventional gambit of fairy stories. This is not the only attribute of traditional story-telling, however: the structure of the narrative also evokes tales where ideas are piled on top of one another to build atmosphere and set the scene. Thus, the repetition of “You shared...”, whether stated explicitly or understood through context, leads to the climax, “This is a snapshot...”. As with all good stories, the language is simple, but the listener is kept engaged as a vicarious participant by the use of the second person plural pronouns. When Vodafone says “You shared your day...” listeners are likely to pay attention because people like to hear about themselves, and of course, there is always the chance in such a video that a follower might recognise a friend or neighbour.

Phase two: Critical reading

When Vodafone compiled its snapshot of New Zealand, the corporation made much of the fact that followers submitted more than 6,500 messages that showed “what New Zealand looked like” on 8 July 2011. On one level, the published video is evidence that the corporation kept faith with its followers, who contributed the raw material, but on another level, the video is the outcome of an exercise of power by Vodafone. The company did not make the raw data available, but retained the power of inclusion and exclusion, so that the resulting snapshot, which has overtones of the Domesday Book, relates a version of New Zealand approved by Vodafone. In this case, the power of the editing suite is true power: a story of New Zealand was told and offered for consumption with no other voice to counter the conclusions that might be drawn from the video. Although the video is presented as a truth, it is a persuasive text designed to promote Vodafone. For instance, the background of the opening screen consists

of a dozen squares in the exact red of Vodafone branding, and the Vodafone logo is subtly blended into the background throughout the video. The video, therefore, appears to promise followers that it tells their story, but it is an exercise in placing the corporation's branding in front of the nation in a way that disguises its primary purpose.

The running clock in the corner of the screen, present throughout the whole video, expounds on the tension about time in everyday modern life. Many people complain that their scarcest resource is time, and the speeding micro-seconds may emphasise their over-scheduled lives. In fact, there is scholarship that argues (Hope, 2006) that the technologies that provided the raw data for the making of the video are in a large part responsible for the prevailing sense in society that the present can be a burden because the technological capability that enables connection also imposes unceasing communication. The Vodafone video appears to celebrate the passing of clock time rather than dealing with real time (Tomlinson, 2007). As Virilio puts it, "With the sudden but subtle 'inflation of the present', of a present globalized by technologies, present time occupies centre stage not only of history (between past and future), but especially of the geography of the globe" (1997, p. 135).

The majority (Statistics New Zealand, n.d.) of New Zealanders now live predominantly urban lives, but many of the images in the video emphasise rural landscapes, giving the impression that New Zealand is still a nation where the bulk of the population can be found in the "heartland". The video's claims of revealing "What New Zealand looked like" seem rather more focused on a romantic portrayal of the country than on an accurate reflection of New Zealand as it is (Coyle & Fairweather, 2005; Tucker, 2011). The section entitled "You shared

what you were doing”, runs a background of a couple renovating a house, and this material seems to speak to the “number eight wire” mentality that is a feature of New Zealanders’ nostalgia for the way of life that is imagined to have existed before urbanisation. “Do it yourself” is part of the cultural capital of New Zealand: as Perkins and Thorns say:

...New Zealand’s suburban history have encouraged many homeowners to develop a special type of relationship with their houses, which has seen them continually renovating and changing the physical shape of house and garden – painting the roof or the house, putting up and staining fences, extending the living areas or building on rumpus rooms. (2001, p. 43–4)

The choice of ‘Do it yourself’ scenes, then, is likely to resonate with many New Zealanders, even if they personally could not or would not undertake home renovations themselves, and is further evidence that the video is an advertisement, not a real effort to capture the life of the nation. The material is universally agreeable, ignoring the existence of landfills, road accidents, political machinations, and a host of other dimensions that could equally show “What New Zealand looked like” on 8 July 2011.

Vodafone made much of the “more than 6,500 messages” posted by followers, building an impression that the corporation has many “friends” and that “everyone” shared “everything”. Some of this was perhaps self-aggrandisement, because it suggests that in the space of one short day, the company was inundated by messages from people eager to participate in “sharing everything”. Presumably the company did indeed receive 6,500 messages, but the number of messages does not necessarily equate to the 6,500 followers: comparatively few followers may have posted many messages each. The raw number, also, does not

allow for any assessment of the depth or breadth of the messages and their usefulness in making the video. In all, the raw number, even if accurate, can be used to mislead about the success or otherwise of the day, and the stress placed on it may be a reflection of how popularity is perceived online: quantity counts (Knight, 2012, July 12; Tong, Van Der Heide, Langwell & Walther, 2008).

Phase three: Reflexive reading

As I approached this video, I was conscious in a general way that it was an advertisement, but my primary reaction was to a fable in folklore. The audience is addressed in the same mode that marks oral tradition, when the scene is set with variations of “Once upon a time in a land far, far away...”. The style of opening is not inappropriate if the purpose of the video is to show “a day in the life...”, but it does mask Vodafone’s primary purpose, which is to promote itself to its audiences.

I remarked also that the title of the campaign, “Share Everything Day” could imply that sharing everything could become a regular occurrence, but although Vodafone posted plans for the day to be held annually, the event was never repeated. Vodafone has never explained why it did not continue with this form of promotion, but I surmise it may have been too labour intensive to edit, or perhaps followers did not submit that much useful and usable material. A further observation on the “share everything” concept is that Vodafone did not reciprocate. Followers shared the minutiae of their day, but Vodafone, in contrast, was silent about its contribution to “What New Zealand looked like”.

The format of the date in the video is also Americanised. New Zealand follows a British format, where the day is placed before the month;

America places the month before the day. This is a small point that shows the creeping dominance of American cultural forms (Donnelly, 1996). The format of the date may simply have been an error, but even if it was, the error was not noticed, showing that American forms have become so familiar that mistakes can be overlooked.

Summary

In their attempt to persuade the people, all three Pages infantilised the audience to some extent: ASB by the use of friendliness and attractiveness instead of solid facts and Vodafone by placing itself as the wise story-teller. Air New Zealand, however, was egregious in this regard: the Fairy's interactions with followers pay scant regard to her audience as intelligent, informed adult consumers (Barber, 2008; Nayak & Beckett, 2008).

The three corporations have, in their different ways, set out to construct themselves as friends of the followers. They express an interest in followers' lives—share everything—and flirt with them—what do you think of my outfit?—and in many other ways adopt a human face on the Pages in order to convince followers that they are fun, friendly and therefore a good place to do business. In social media, it seems possible to merge reality and illusion into an “integral reality” (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 1) in which the corporations, by behaving as a person and eliciting followers' responses to a person, can have a simultaneous existence as both business and person.

In this chapter, following Monin (2004), I have provided a close reading of the promotional material on the Pages of the three corporations in order to show the efforts of the companies to “reach the people”. In the next chapter, I will submit the text on the Pages to Cheney’s rhetorical identification typology to show the persuasive tactics employed to create identification with the companies.

Chapter Seven: Building identification—rhetorical tactics

Identification with an organisation occurs when people embody aspects of the organisation's image into their own self-concepts and in so doing, create a symbiotic relationship of mutual benefit (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Lee, 1971) in which the corporation wins customer loyalty and commitment and the individual gains enhanced self-esteem deriving from wise choices and sound associations. Obviously, organisations desire the advantages that follow from building a base of customers who identify with their ethos, and the Facebook Pages have been created in an effort to develop that identification. In this chapter, I will apply Cheney's (1983a) rhetorical identification typology to the three Pages to determine the linguistic and visual tactics that have been used to establish connections and to create identification with followers.

Cheney and Vibbert (1987) argue organisational communication is "designed to influence both internal and external publics, and therefore function[s] as multifaceted rhetorical acts" (p. 182). It is true that Cheney (1983a) developed his typology to examine the elements in organisational communication that assist in forming identification by internal stakeholders, but I believe the typology can readily be applied to my own research, because I see followers as being awkwardly positioned as both customers of the corporations and also internal stakeholders of the Pages. Followers who press Like and actively contribute posts both enable the existence of the Page by providing unpaid (Fuchs, 2014) content and also affirm its acceptability and instigate a cycle of popularity in which Likes lead to Likes. With these

actions, they become brand ambassadors whose advocacy of the organisation derives from strong identification that might well originate in the use of the persuasive strategies Cheney (1983a) identified.

Cheney's (1983a) rhetorical identification typology has its roots in Burke's (1969) theory of identification, in which the argument is advanced that overcoming stratification and division in society generates consubstantiality, which is a sense of "oneness" deriving from communication and cooperation. Burke (1969) suggested the identification desired by rhetors (who in this case are the three corporations) could be achieved if they could find and maintain a common ground with their target audiences. Rhetors' success in creating common ground is determined by the expression of values and goals that seem so desirable and advantageous that members will connect cognitively with the organisation and will use those values and goals to form at least part of their self-concept (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000; Brewer & Gardner, 2004; Chen & Xin Li, 2009; Dukerich, Golden, Shortell, 2002; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Hornsey, 2008; Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004; Scott, 2007; Spears, 2011; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel, 1978).

It is a premise of this research that becoming a follower of a corporate Page equates to belonging to any social group (such as a club, church or hobby group). By extension, therefore, the Pages of the three corporations are read by followers as social environments that offer the same opportunities as any other membership to make sense of society by analytically assessing the similarities and differences they share with other members (Albert et al., 2000; Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004; Parekh, 2009; Hornsey, 2008; Shinnar, 2008; Spears, 2011). The labour of self-

categorisation results in a sense of satisfaction in belonging to positively evaluated in-groups and to not belonging to negatively evaluated out-groups (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Brewer & Gardner, 2004; Chen & Xin Li, 2009; Scott, 2007; Shinnar, 2008; Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986). In the process of classifying themselves and others in the social environment of the Pages, followers internalise the characteristics that the corporations have selected for dissemination on their Pages, and so enter identification with the organisations. Hogg and Terry (2000) maintain that people who identify with an organisation form prototypes of ideal behaviour and characteristics for the organisation, and adopt the culture, behaviours and beliefs of what has become an in-group.

Organisational identity is usually considered to be the amalgamation of what the organisations consider to be their most important and stable characteristics (Albert & Whetten, 2004). These characteristics are communicated to stakeholders (Dukerich et al., 2002; Scott, 2007) in images, advertising, names, logos, jargon and mascots (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) which are calculated to prompt cognitive and behavioural connections (Albert & Whetten, 2004; Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994) between the individual and the organisation. Image makers within the corporations will be at pains to construct organisational identities that are as positive as possible (Dutton et al., 1994), and distribute the image through mass media such as Facebook in order to achieve success in the marketplace (Gioia, Schultz & Corley, 2000). Obviously, organisations are best served by acceptance of the identity they broadcast and by actions that fall in line with their preferred attitudes. Research on organisational identity has tended, therefore, to focus on the relationship between the “received” identity of the organisation and the assimilation of that identity into an individual’s

self-concept (Albert & Whetten, 2004; Alvesson & Empson, 2008; Humphreys & Brown, 2002) such that identification results. Dukerich et al. (2002) developed a theory of identification in which they argue that identification requires organisations to provide the antecedent conditions for the “self-continuity, self-distinctiveness, and self-enhancement” (p. 509) that allow individuals to self-define in a particular social environment.

Identification is not a stable construct. Bullis and Bach (1989) observed that strong socialisation can have a potent effect on increasing the salience of an organisation, but that salience may be quite temporary, and both Pratt (2000) and Scott, Corman and Cheney (1998) report that the intensity of identification changes as the salience of the organisation increases or declines. Furthermore, disidentification is possible. For instance, Dutton et al. (1994) found that organisations that fail to live up to their public images can cause members to experience “shame, disgrace and embarrassment” (p. 242) to the point that they may oppose the organisations’ actions and consciously disassociate themselves (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001, 2002; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). The goals and purposes of the organisation, therefore, are important in establishing identification, but may be less germane in maintaining it than the personal relationships that form through communication (Barker & Tompkins, 1994; Rousseau, 1998).

In summary, then, in the light of understandings drawn from the literature on identification, it seems likely that the effort that goes into the Pages is underpinned by the conscious desire of the three corporations to build sufficient commonality with followers that identification will occur (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton et al., 1994; Humphreys & Brown, 2002; Hall, Schneider & Nygen, 1970; Scott et

al., 1998) creating commitment to the organisations' goals, even if those goals are as simple and short term as "Press Like". I have already alluded to the difficult placement of followers in relation to the organisations: they are simultaneously "external" stakeholders because they are customers and "internal" stakeholders because they are actively involved in building the Pages, contributing to the constructed online life of the companies by contributing content and affirmations.

So far in this chapter, I have reviewed the literature on organisational identification in order to put a framework in place for the following examination of the three corporate Pages. The rest of this chapter is organised around the elements of Cheney's rhetorical identification typology, which consists of four strategies—the *common ground* technique, *identification through antithesis*, and the *transcendent 'we'* and *unifying symbols*. Not all the strategies are obvious in the Pages, of course, and some are heavily represented, while others, though present, have not been employed much. The investigation that follows concentrates on those strategies that have had a significant influence in shaping the conditions for followers to achieve identification.

Strategy one: Building common ground

An organisation wishing to create identification needs to lay out a space that is appealing enough to make followers want to enter it and interact according to the parameters set by organisational imperatives. In the case of Facebook Pages, "common ground" is an interesting concept, because it is at once both an organisational space, developed and controlled for organisational purposes, but at the same time, it is also made available for followers to post uncontrolled (though not

uncontrollable) comments and material. The Pages, therefore, offer an illusory freedom to followers: they can post what seems good to them, but the organisation can decisively remove any items that do not fit with their ambitions for the Page. The “tone” of the Page is therefore key to developing a sense for followers that the online space is a place where they will be accepted and understood, and to this end, the corporations have endeavoured to create online spaces that will draw followers to them and engage them when they are there. The strategy of building an attractive common ground depends on the use of six tactics to inspire a sense of unity and trust between the rhetor and the audience (Cheney, 1983a). The tactics comprise *expression of concern for individuals; recognition of individual contributions; espousal of shared values; advocacy of benefits and activities; praise by outsiders and testimonials* and their use marks an overt and deliberate attempt to positively influence the audience’s sense of identity in relation to the organisation.

Two key tactics that organisations can use to establish common ground are *expressions of concern* and *recognition of individual contributions*. These two tactics work on the same psychological premise: that people need to feel “seen” and appreciated. Both tactics, therefore, emphasise and valorise selected members, singling them out from what Cheney (1983a) called “the organization as a collection of people” (p. 150) to show that they are esteemed as individuals and are not merely part of a faceless mass.

Expressions of concern sounds as though it should deal primarily with members’ distress, and of course the tactic can be used to show a compassionate response to the difficulties that people experience, but in fact its wider purpose is to acknowledge individuals as “an integral

part of the organization" (DiSanza & Bullis, 1999, p. 351). Because of the hybrid status of followers as both internal and external to the organisation, the *expression of concern* tactic was used primarily to show the corporations helping out followers with problems. Vodafone, for example, presents its "Share Everything Day" as doing New Zealand a good turn because it will capture a day in the life of the nation. Claims to altruism are often long on assertion and short on substance, and with this particular attempt to integrate followers into the corporation, no rationale is offered to justify how a promotional corporate video, interspersed throughout with the company logo, helps the nation. A much more obvious example of an *expression of concern* that places the follower firmly within the Page, though not within the organisation, is the Air New Zealand Fairy's granting of wishes. When the Fairy responds to a touching story with a prize such as a trip to Sydney, the prize is for enduring a tough situation, but the acknowledgement means that the follower is heard. Followers will understand that a prize will likely happen only once, but the knowledge that they were heard is likely to sustain identification with the organisation for a long time.

All the corporations make particular lexical choices to build the sense in followers that they are seen individually, and chief amongst these is the use of first and second-person pronouns in messages. When Vodafone posts "We asked you to take part", it suggests the authentic voice of a one-to-one conversation. According to Stern (1991), the first person narrative approach "is commonly used to express personal values and attitudes, reveal intimate feelings, describe moods or mind-states, and/or simply muse aloud about life in general" (p. 10). Vodafone creates an artificial intimacy with the viewer by crafting the sense of a conversation to which, by definition, followers are

contributing. There are other word choices that generate a feeling for followers that they are taken as people not as a crowd. The Fairy's chatter and use of vernacular expressions, the ASB virtual teller's emphasis on offering help, Vodafone's interest in the minutiae of followers' days, are all suggestive of a conversation with a single person, rather than the generic distribution of information that the messages actually are. The language choices avoid all the usual markers of business communication and instead, aim to engender the sort of connection that occurs with people who are known to one another.

In building common ground, the tactic *recognition of individual contributions* emphasises to individuals that they belong to an in-group (Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel, 1982) and that they have behaved in accordance with the espoused values of the organisation. The underpinning reason for the tactic is to use praise to accentuate behaviour that is beneficial to the organisation and that might, through public commendation, be adopted more widely. The video that resulted from the Vodafone "Share Everything Day" recognises the contributions of those New Zealanders who posted their photos and stories, and the behaviour that is encouraged is participation in the corporation's brand. At the same time, the corporation self-promotes as a contributor to the national life of New Zealand, because through its offices, anyone can see a day in the life of the New Zealand. DiSanza and Bullis (1999) argue that recognising individual contributions often involves "recognizing or praising individuals by name" (p. 351) to increase their feelings of being valued and of belonging. Vodafone cannot name each contributor individually, but by using personal pronouns as it addresses its audience, aims to achieve the same result.

In recognising individual contributions, the ASB virtual teller singles out the quality of “helpfulness” in ASB staff:

Hi and welcome to the ASB Virtual Branch. We’re here to make banking easier so feel free to have a look around and to live chat with one of our banking specialists. **They’re very helpful.** From home loans to term deposits to anything else, **we’re here for you** just like a regular branch. All chats are secure and confidential too. And **whether you’re an ASB customer or not we’re on hand to help.** To get started just click the button here. And if you like what we’ve done, click on the like button and tell all your Facebook friends about the ASB Virtual Branch.

ASB does not here direct attention to the helpfulness of its tellers with the intention that followers will emulate them, but by recognising and emphasising the positive attribute, aims to build common ground with followers as outsiders, to bring them into the brand. Similarly, the Air New Zealand Fairy’s Page records her generosity and kindness, which are contributions to the organisation in the sense that they promote a positive image of the organisation in the minds of followers and are likely to create a sense of ‘wanting to belong’ to an in-group that consists of followers whose wishes are so worthy that they earn favour. For example, the Fairy posted this:

“Sharon S sent me this super cute wish... "I wish my friend Greg could have a San Francisco Giants ball cap. He met his wife there." Wish granted Sharon. A hat is magically heading Greg’s way! Xox”

This post reinforces desirable behaviour at the level of the giver and the level of the receiver: the wish was selfless, and the Fairy was generous. In fact, the Fairy’s activities set the corporation up as a good Samaritan, meeting the needs of people who need to visit their families overseas or have other difficulties. It is not only that the Fairy grants wishes to

ordinary citizens, it is that the granting of wishes is to those deemed worthy. In this way, gaining a prize from Air New Zealand is not based on the luck of the draw but on the neediness of the situation. As such, *Air New Zealand's recognition of individual contribution* is often grounded in a particular interpretation of *concern for the individual*. It may be a facile accusation to say that "playing at good Fairy" is an easy way for the corporation to establish common ground, but there is an element of truth in it. Even if people miss out on getting their wish granted *this time*, they are likely to maintain their connection with the Page in the hope that next time, theirs will be the hope that is answered. For Air New Zealand, it is a double win: the Fairy carries the image of a beneficent organisation out into the world, and the corporation is able to use photographs and testimonials from happy and thankful beneficiaries of their generosity.

Common ground can also be developed if organisations give the impression that the ideas they value are similar to those of their constituents (Cheney, 1983a). In the case of the three Pages, the values that are endorsed are undemandingly positive and show the corporations in an uncomplicated and positive light. Followers will become aware of the values of giving, friendliness, participating and helpfulness, all of which are unproblematic concepts for the corporations to promote. They are values that are also likely to be received uncritically by followers, not only because they are difficult for right-minded people to oppose, but also because they cost little to enact. Participation on the Page, for instance, can result in the expression of another value: giving, and giving engenders more participation. The virtuous cycle that is thereby set up affirms the organisations for followers because they believe that they too esteem

these qualities. The common ground created in shared values leads to identification.

The mode of expressing the shared values, through very accessible language and an egalitarian attitude, is itself a value espoused in wider New Zealand society (Grimshaw-Jones, 2011), and the choice of the “every day” approach is likely to attract followers rather than alienate them. New Zealand has figured in Hofstede’s (1984) research as a country with a low power distance, and the abundant use of current vernacular to level possible societal stratification is evidence of that cultural trait. Whether it is an accurate reading of New Zealand, however, is moot, but it is fair to say that New Zealanders like to think of themselves as classless, as is shown in many examples from popular culture (Grimshaw-Jones, 2011). On the one hand, the authoritarian voice the Fairy speaks in—“I won’t have any nonsense on my Page!”—perhaps strikes a jarring note in all this friendly bonhomie, but on the other hand, it may seem acceptable to followers because it reminds them of another New Zealand value, fairness. “Nonsense” appearing on the page would not be fair to other followers, and the fairy speaks out against it.

Organisations sometimes promote their own good works and the benefits that could ensue from them in order to attain identification from their audiences. *Advocacy of benefits and activities*, therefore, is one more tactic that rhetors can employ in the *common ground* strategy. All three corporations both explicitly and implicitly promote themselves to their followers through the benefits that will follow from their activities. Vodafone, for instance, asks people to share their day and hints that the corporation is performing a philanthropic act by collecting followers’ posts and compiling the video, ASB makes life

more convenient for followers by setting up the powerful Virtual Branch. The wishes granted by the Air New Zealand Fairy are perhaps the most obvious example of the benefits of an organisation's activities.

If organisations receive *praise by outsiders* they can disseminate it in messages that will either reinforce existing positive opinions or cause followers to align their attitudes with those of the admirers (Cheney, 1983a). In the cases of ASB and Air New Zealand, the *praise by outsiders* is enabled through the existence of the virtual representative to whom followers address their comments. I have argued elsewhere that followers exist in an awkward hybrid state between outsider and insider, because their contributions of content take them towards the status of insiders. However, no matter how they are defined, the praise they offer the organisations is treated as though it comes from outsiders.

Air New Zealand in particular makes use of the *praise from outsiders* tactic. The Fairy frequently posts messages on her Page to prove her popularity, and followers are sometimes so grateful for the granting of a wish that they send her gifts in return:

“Look at this amazing painting I was sent after granting a wish! Love it xox”
and:

Michael G is so lovely! I granted him a wish a few days ago to go on the Boeing 787 Dreamliner and today he buys a voucher for the Super Kool ice-cream van to bring me & grabaseat team ice-cream! So so sweet xxx

Furthermore, when corporation uses the Facebook facility to record followers as praise: when the Fairy reaches 10,000 followers, she is quick to publicise it: “Wow I've got over 10,000 fans! Time to grant a big wish...Robyn P. your wish for sparkly GOLD status is granted! Yay xx”

Vodafone likewise uses numbers as *praise by outsiders*, which in this case is claimed through the “over 6,500” messages and videos that were posted in the “Share Everything Day”. In fact, Vodafone did not receive 6,500 messages and videos of different, interesting content as the repeated use of the number suggests, but it did stimulate considerable attention and engagement from followers, and can reasonably be taken as an oblique form of praise.

The final tactic in the *common ground* strategy is *testimonials*, which originate with company insiders (Cheney, 1983a; DiSanza & Bullis, 1999) and are spontaneous expressions of positive feelings about the organisation. I have broadened the definition of *testimonials* to apply it to followers, who are, as I have already argued, hybrids of insider and outsider. Applications to the Fairy demonstrate the sort of testimonials on her Page: “ ‘I have a 7yr old son who'd love a model plane. **He just loves all his solo trips with Air NZ. He likes feeling important with his tag!** [emphasis added]’ SO CUTE! Wish Granted for Hamish H! xoxo”

Vodafone also received testimonials in the form of acknowledgements of participation in the video: followers were quick to respond, noting themselves in the video or complimenting Vodafone on the success of the video:

“the video glad 2 b a part of share everything day”

“spotted my nephew video”

“Nice work”

“51 secs...my boys after a good days work haha!”

"Awesome, nice job & I saw my pic I sent in coolness"

"Power To You' Vodafone. I didnt like that I did not win a phone but after seeing that, I don't care. That was totally awesome !! And my son is on there twice"

"Very clever and cool Thank you for sharing everyone and Vodafone for coming up with such a great idea May there be many more."

ASB also garnered testimonials for its Virtual Branch:

"I have used it a few times - excellent idea, well done!"

"Absolutely love this service. Very convenient - would love to see the hours extended though!"

The six elements in the *common ground* strategy are not evenly represented on the Pages, but consciously or unconsciously, the corporations have deployed rhetorical tactics to build their followers' identification. Hits on the Like button are likely to be taken within the organisations as evidence of that identification, but the truth of follower engagement is more complex than a number can show. Perhaps direct praise and testimonials are, in the end, the most useful indication of a customer's increasing sense of commonality with and commitment to an organisation, and those, oddly enough, have never been dependent on the existence of Facebook.

In this section, I have considered the way that *common ground* has been fostered with followers. In the next section, I will examine the way in which the corporations used a sense of "them against us" to instil identification in followers.

Strategy two: Identification through antithesis

Identification can be induced by encouraging people to unite against what is presented by the rhetor as a common enemy. The identification and elevation of a common enemy is often used as a motivation tool to unify a targeted group, constructing the members as an in-group with its own culture and purpose that are clearly distinguished from the inferior cultures and purposes of out-groups. *Identification through antithesis*, then, works by provoking “an explicit dissociation from one target [which] implies association with another” (Cheney, 1983a, p. 153). Of the four strategies in Cheney’s (1983a) rhetorical identification typology, this was the hardest to see, and probably quite properly so, because public corporations cannot be seen to turn one group against another without experiencing brutal back-lash in the media and from their peers in the business community. Predictably, therefore, there was no perceptible portrayal of common enemies, and if outsiders were perceived as problems, their risk factor was suggested implicitly rather than specified explicitly. However, since the purpose of all the identification strategies is “...achieving unity and collective acceptance of organizational values” (Cheney (1983a, p. 148), even when the presence of *antithesis* was subtle rather than overt (DiSanza & Bullis, 1999), it has been recorded.

If Cheney’s (1983a) words, “... an explicit dissociation from one target [which] implies association with another” (p. 153) are taken as the definitive explication of *identification through antithesis*, Vodafone’s video is interesting because it appears to flip the concept through a 180-degree turn. Here, I mean that the corporation could not build up an image of a common enemy from whom to dissociate, but it could exhibit the concept of an in-group with whom followers could associate, and achieve the same goal. Vodafone is a multinational

company operating in the highly competitive market for mobile technologies, but to gain market share in New Zealand, it might choose to downplay its international connections and emphasise its standing as a “Kiwi” company. By using the “Share Everything Day” to highlight its deep engagement in the life of *this* nation on *this* day, Vodafone perhaps achieves a certain desirable distance from its international origins. Perhaps also, in this case, the construction of an enemy is unnecessary, because by playing to New Zealanders’ sense of themselves, they have generated a sense of “this is us”, in which “us” implies the existence, somewhere of a “them”. Of course, the “them” that exists may never be an enemy, but an in-group is always likely to entertain doubts about any out-group.

Self-praise by a corporation does not set up an enemy, but it can separate the corporation from others in its category, so that members may feel themselves to belong to an in-group with practices and opportunities superior to those in out-groups. By touting its Virtual Branch as a world first, ASB accentuates its own qualities of forward-thinking and technological savvy, and by doing so, implicitly puts distance between itself and competitors who have not demonstrated a similar willingness to increase customer convenience. Again, as with Vodafone, this is not antithesis writ large, but is, rather, a subtle in-grouping of the bank and followers of the Page as technologically informed and competent users in a world where the out-group is composed of those people who are less able.

Like the other two corporations, Air New Zealand develops in-group identification in the positive rather than by explicitly fostering antithetical feelings in its audience, but like the other corporations, it draws a contrast between itself and other airlines that lack fairy-dust

and personality. By placing the gift-giving, fun-loving Fairy at the front of the organisation, Air New Zealand has crafted a market niche for itself as the airline with a heart for its fellow citizens. Air New Zealand's Fairy does not attack the competition, but she does block it out with her unrelenting feminine presence and her strong connections to New Zealand popular culture: she takes an interest in unique local events such as the World of Wearable Arts and the All Blacks' games.

The argument in this section does not follow Cheney (1983a) closely, because the Pages do not manifest strong antithesis towards a particular entity. Instead of creating common enemies to unite their in-groups, in fact, the corporations have created common friends: themselves. If the in-groups experience any antithesis, it appears to be directed, not towards any outsider, but rather towards other followers who show themselves unworthy of in-group membership by being "haters".

Marrakech: isnt it great how the haters waste space on this wall, which is all about a great opportunity for young people. There are many many worse airlines out there and I applaud air nz as our national carrier for creating a great opportunity like this

Here the corporations win, for the enemy emerges and is then defeated by forces from within the in-group. The positive organisational image promulgated by the Pages therefore generates its own common enemy and unites its in-group against expressions of disillusionment and disaffection.

Strategy three: The transcendent ‘we’

The use of the “*transcendent we*” (Cheney, 1983a, 154) attempts to unite disparate parties under the banner of the first person plural pronoun. Cheney (1983a) explains it like this: “The assumed ‘we’ and the corresponding ‘they’ are found in statements where a common bond amongst members of an organisation is taken for granted, but the nature of the relationship is not well defined” (p. 154). The relationship between and among parties is imprecisely drawn because a clear definition might lead to action based on recognition of their differences rather than on the similarities that might create bonds. The *transcendent we* is a subtle strategy. Audiences often do not notice the grouping that has occurred in the rhetoric, and accept their membership of a group whose existence serves imperatives other than personal choice.

The use of avatars by ASB and Air New Zealand recasts the form of the *transcendent we*. Cheney (1983) conceptualised the strategy as a literal use of the first person plural, but the avatars who speak for themselves as “I” are of course speaking for the organisations, and so it is, in fact, a “we” who addresses the audiences because the personality bestowed on the avatar becomes the functional persona of the organisation. Boyd and Waymer (2011) remarked that the organisations, though made up of many parts, can speak and act as a single “self”. Inasmuch as the organisations are simultaneously single and plural in their representation on the Pages, they also seek to join followers severally to the Pages through the Like facility and other, more specific actions. The Air New Zealand Fairy, for instance, asks “Be my Valentine? :) xoxo”, as though to yoke herself to a follower in a closer relationship, which, once formed, might well permit the corporation to speak with some authority for followers as “we”. The *transcendent we*, therefore, occurs

on multiple levels, and is more subtle, and possibly more powerful, for being sometimes masked in another grammatical form.

Vodafone's progress towards establishing a *transcendent we* is more obvious. The introduction to the video finishes by saying, "This video is what New Zealand looked like on July 8 through your eyes and ours", and although the participants—you and *your eyes*—are separated from the company—us and *ours*—the two parties are drawn together by the accomplishment of the video and the experience. Thus, it is "we" who made this artefact together, and it is "we" who have thereby captured New Zealand in a moment in time, and it is "our" view of what matters in a day, therefore, that passes into history. The "we" that emerges here is powerful indeed: the putative voice of the nation speaking as though with consensus from all participants. However, Vodafone, of course, possesses the power of the author to include and exclude material and so direct interpretation.

Most followers appear to accept quite uncritically that their posts, submissions and Likes give tacit approval to the prevailing ethos of the corporate Pages and that their personal voice, expressed in the different forms of their participation, is subsumed into the single voice of the organisations, who speak as the *transcendent we*. Cheney (1983a) spoke of relationships that are "taken for granted" (p. 154), and the dominance of the organisational voice appears to be one of those elements that are assumed.

Strategy four: Unifying symbols

Cheney (1983a) extended Burke's (1969) identification strategies by adding the new category *unifying symbols* to his typology. *Unifying symbols* are all the ways that companies distinguish themselves from others in the market place, and so comprises names, logos, trademarks, certain colours and packaging, all of which may be defended against copyright infringement because they contain and express key elements of the organisation's identity (Berger & Mitchell, 1989; Cheney, 1983a). Organisations tend towards ubiquity in their placement of their representative emblems, with the effect that those symbols become familiar and sometimes even revered markers on the social landscape. Part of the power of symbols to unify may be the familiarity thus created. For instance, an intending traveller may have no particular inclination towards one airline over another, but the pervasiveness of the Fairy's presence and her approachability as the company's face may draw the traveller in to the Page and create identification with the corporation. A sense of belonging, in other words, may develop from recognising the symbol and the ensuing comfort of the familiar (Cheney, 1983b).

All three corporations consistently use unifying symbols on their Pages. Vodafone referred to itself by name when it referred to the "Share Everything Day" video: "Vodafone asked you to take part", and furthermore, made considerable use of its logo and brand colours. Of course, there is a strong sense in which the video was only ever intended by the corporation to be the vehicle of its *unifying symbols*, but an outcome of the video is its transformation into a unifying symbol in its own right. Unifying symbols, in this case, begat unifying symbols. Followers expressed their identification with the company with words like these: "Very clever and cool Thank you for sharing everyone and

Vodafone for coming up with such a great idea May there be many more”.

ASB uses its corporate colours and style liberally on the Page of its Virtual Branch and even gives the impression of the same physical layout as in their regular branches. It is not surprising that banking specialists would be shown in ASB uniforms, but it does take the Virtual Branch a little more towards the realm of make-believe to offer couches in the corners and a queue to wait in. The simulation of a “real” branch²¹ bears out my earlier point about the power of familiarity to unite a group. Clearly, in the case of the bank, it is not just well-known logos, colours and uniforms that function as unifying symbols, it is also acquaintance with familiar rituals like waiting in line for service, as one follower comments on the Page, “LOVE YOUR WORK ASB”.

The Air New Zealand Fairy, both in name and activity, is a *unifying symbol* through whom the corporation wishes to achieve follower identification. The Fairy has charge of the company’s warm heart, and when she speaks with the company’s voice, she wears the Air New Zealand logo somewhere on her person, so that she remains the property of the organisations even though she has been set up as a complete personality in her own right. The Fairy, moreover, employs *unifying symbols* from other aspects of New Zealand life. If there is an important rugby game imminent, her costume will feature some suggestion of the All Blacks; *The Hobbit* inspired a gown that recalled aspects of Peter Jackson’s visualisation of Tolkien’s world.

In summary, companies employ more than just their corporate branding to induce identification. *Unifying symbols* can be drawn from

²¹ Here, I need to record my uncertainty about whether bricks-and-mortar can be considered more “real” than the reality of the Virtual Branch.

anywhere and absorbed into the company's image to bolster the logo and other branding elements. Air New Zealand's Fairy offers national events (rugby, World of Wearable Arts, major film productions) as part of her drive to unify users of the Page into a mass of dedicated followers; Vodafone used the country's recognisable natural beauty in the same way.

Summary

In this chapter, I applied Cheney's (1983a) rhetorical identification typology to the promotional elements of the Pages of Air New Zealand, Vodafone and ASB. My examination of the Pages has shown that consciously or unconsciously, the three corporations use all of the strategies in the typology both to maintain identification with their existing followers and also to establish identification with those members of the audience who could be potential followers. The blurred status of Page followers is a complicating factor in understanding the identification efforts of the companies: followers, as I have said before, are both insiders on the Pages while remaining outsiders to the company. In all instances, the corporations have become salient in-groups for followers by, first, shaping the rhetoric on the Pages along particular lines for their particular purposes, and second, by providing *unifying symbols* which attract followers and encourage them to contribute their own content to the Pages. All three corporations use the identification strategies in order to maximise the possibility that followers will see them as simply another "friend" on Facebook and thus will behave towards the corporations with the same level of trust they show in their other Facebook relationships. The benefits of this to the organisations are clear: not only can they acquire

cheap marketing intelligence directly from followers, but they can also tap into followers' networks. The simulation of friendship to achieve identification was most obvious in the *common ground* strategy in which the tactics of *concern for individuals*, *recognition of individual contributions*, *espousal of shared values* and *advocacy of benefits and activities* were heavily employed to appeal to individual's concerns.

The practices underpinning the new levels of intimacy between organisations and followers have grown from the origins of social media as a purely personal space for personal connections. By creating the conditions for identification and commitment, the corporations encourage their followers to make decisions that will ultimately favour the organisations and assist the consumer into developing a sense of belonging to a community. The images the corporations project on Facebook are attempts to construe the inhuman as human: the Pages successfully humanise entities that before Facebook, despite the best efforts of marketers to inculcate their promotional activity with "relationships" (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012), had been impersonal and faceless. Digital technology allows the corporations to approach their followers in a form of quite intimate human-hood, which embodies a change in methods of representing the *self* of the organisation.

Chapter Eight: Answering the research questions

Traditionally, communication between individuals (as social actors) and corporations (as communicative entities) is thought to be asynchronous, disjointed, and unidirectional. Such characteristics are, almost as a matter of course, held to be less relevant or, even, irrelevant, by the advent of the World Wide Web. Simply put, it is now commonplace to argue that it is possible to construct a synchronous, real-time and dialogic basis to communication between individuals and corporations. Making that possibility manifest, however, has been a difficult and often overly-complex task—the reality of these communication flows needs to be grounded in a real (or apparently real) connection between the two parties.

My research aimed to unpick and critically understand these communication flows, and I did so through a case study approach, focussing on three corporations' Facebook presence, and using a thematic analysis followed by a close reading and rhetorical analysis. The data generated clearly demonstrate that the three organisations on which I focussed (Air New Zealand, ASB and Vodafone) actively entice individuals to communicate with them via Facebook by promising a personal connection. This point cannot be overstated: each corporation clearly uses specific rhetorical devices to identify them (and their brand) as an individual actor that can be appealed to on a personal level. Here, the promise of friendship or, even, a relationship, operates on a more intense basis than could ever be delivered within the confines of a corporate Facebook Page (or, arguably, technologically mediated communication of any kind) and, the idea that a

commercially-driven enterprise is able to offer this communication and connection is tendentious at best. Crucially, however, my research also shows that many individual users “buy into” this communication (and follow the corporation’s Facebook Page), responding and engaging with the organisation in the same way as they would with their individual, personal connections. The identification practices of these individuals at times leads to them showing strong positive emotions (for instance love, adoration and, even, obsession) towards the brand. On other occasions (for instance when their expectations were not met) individuals exhibited disillusionment, disappointment or confusion. For the purposes of my research, the key insight here is that in either case (or at any point on the continuum between them) individual social actors chose to communicate with and behave towards commercial entities *as if they were also “people”*.

The purpose of this, my final, chapter is to bring all elements of the thesis together to present a coherent, united discussion about: (1) Facebook; (2) the role large New Zealand corporations can play within it; (3) and what this can mean for individuals who choose to communicate with those corporations. In doing this, I re-examine the literature review so I can place my research findings against the existing material (drawn from both social media critics and proponents). I also discuss ideas that provoked the initial stages of my research before moving onto the three research questions underpinning my thesis. The starting point for doing so is to interrogate the role and function of the corporation in contemporary society.

A new kind of corporation

My research uncovered proof of a new phenomenon in individual-to-business interaction: social media proponents have argued that social media offers a medium of communication where companies can be “friendly” and “conversational”, making “human” and genuine responses (Dimos, Groves & Powell, 2011) however, one of my basic findings was that this mode does not align with the expectations of the individuals who choose to communicate via corporate Facebook Pages. Here, it was immediately clear that, instead of conversation and friendliness, individuals reached out to organisations for love and belonging, to satisfy their needs for an authentically human connection. Importantly social media proponents such as Malone and Fiske (2013) argue that brands must act more human-like to be appeal to customers-as-people and demonstrate warmth and competence. They do not, however, claim that businesses should aim to appear as if they are people: “We are not delusional. We do not ‘think’ [corporations] are human” (Malone & Fiske, 2013, p. 101).

Despite the common sense approach suggested here, my data definitively show that on Facebook many individuals deliberately and, perhaps, knowingly, treat the organisations as people: they expected the organisation, not just to be “friendly” or “conversational”, *but to be human* in the nature and quality of the communication between them.

This finding was very unexpected. On its face, it seems counterintuitive that individuals (on Facebook or, in fact, in any environment) would see organisations as “other people”. Although there were peculiarities that could be used to characterise the emergent communication between people on Facebook and corporations-as-people, this did not accord with the expectations of such communication as described in

the literature: what was termed “friendly conversation” did not come close to indicating the extent to which people wanted more than a genuine personal *response*: they wanted a *human connection or relationship*. In other words, what had previously been established as a form of marketing communication (albeit with a more caring or human manner), has been replaced from the perspective of the individuals by a real, authentic, and dialogic communication. These people loved or hated the organisations, were disappointed or proud of them, they wrote friendly notes to them, wished them a happy Valentine’s Day or a Merry Christmas in exactly the same manner as they would do another human and with *the expectation of reciprocated human companionship*.

This implies that organisations can now be seen to be in a precarious “dammed if they do, damned if they don’t” situation. On the one hand, they are not human and, obviously, cannot *be* human. On the other, with commercial imperatives being paramount, if “the customer is always right”, and the customer wants a relationship, then commercially the organisations need to offer this relationship. Intriguingly, this explains why organisations created personal interactions only within certain contexts—the contexts where they would not be liable. It was notable that the three organisations I focussed on employed traditional communication methods for financial information. Perhaps this is because, when individuals are searching for a *relationship*, they do so within the same parameters as they would any other person—typically, serious information does not get communicated in a friendly manner in the offline world; this seems to have carried over into the Facebook Pages I studied.

Further, these findings suggest that the general level of “Facebook literacy” is relatively low: I would expect that, ordinarily, individuals ought to be able to differentiate between personal and business contacts within the social medium. The fact that this distinction is either blurred or non-existent suggests it would be extremely difficult to regress to a situation where individuals actively chose to relate to these organisations more formally. Here, the fact that recent moral panics over privacy issues, such as those raised by Edward Snowden (Pimental, 2013, June 17), have not resulted in changing behaviours in Facebook users, suggest that behavioural change is difficult to instigate in such a ubiquitous social medium, even when the risks are considered significant. And, of course, because of the nature of the communication in my research, the chances of people seeing significant risk in that communication are relatively low. This is supported by my previous discussion of the Facebook Privacy Policy. Few users read the Terms of the agreement when signing up to the forum, or paid attention to their own personal privacy settings determining which connections saw their details (Fuchs, 2012; Simmons, 2012; Young & Quan-Haase, 2013).

My data also showed that many individuals freely and voluntarily provided content to organisations, which again supports my view that they see the organisation as a friend (or, at least, a human with whom they had a connection). On this basis it made sense for them to reveal significant personal information, information which, of course, could often be potentially very valuable marketing insights. On yet other occasions, the three organisations I focussed on deliberately requested useful material, asking followers what they thought of their new advertising, logos or sales campaigns. Although I did not have the time or space to delve into this issue more systematically, it is clear that

academics, business analysts and Facebook itself have not sufficiently accounted for individuals' willingness to donate their time, effort and creative labour. In fact, such material as does exist in this area (see Bruns' 2008 discussion of produsage) centres on Facebook rather than the companies that use Facebook to connect with their users.

The new normal

Another underlying finding from my data is that corporations can and do interact online as friends with those individuals who see them in a "human" light. Individuals share their secrets, their jokes and their opinions with corporations in a manner that clearly represents a new development in the customer-to-business relationship. Accepted as a friend and acknowledged to have the moral capacity for value judgments, the "lucky" corporation is no longer limited to what was previously merely a legal term of "corporate personhood"²². Another example would be with the recent news coverage of Hobby Lobby in the United States whereby, as a corporation, Hobby Lobby were found to be permitted to espouse religious-based moral values in contrast to the implementation of health care covering contraception (Goodwyn, 2014, August 5). It could be argued that such developments and my findings demonstrate that the fiction of legal personhood may be replaceable with the reality of Facebooked friendship.

Here, the suggestion is that companies best able to cloak themselves as "humans" could function as all-powerful as friends which, of course,

²² The term "corporate personhood" refers to the American legal construct where a corporation is given some of the same rights as an individual person, for example, a corporation can enter into contracts, hold property, and sue or be sued (see Ripken's 2010 discussion on the complexities of the legal term and the contrasting normative frameworks for how corporations are viewed).

means they would be rarely questioned or critiqued in the same way as a customer-to-business relationship would suggest. Disguised as a friend or confidant, they could have the ability to establish deleterious or damaging practices because that questioning and/or critique was not manifest. Instead, the focus could move from the quality or use of a product or service to the pseudo-friendship being “sold”. If this were transferable to smaller businesses (and amenable to be taught within business schools), the “corporation-as-a-human-friend” typology might well become the new normal.

The space occupied by social media then would become self-perpetuating. Just as my research showed the ASB Virtual Branch was a sign of the bank moving its presence into the Facebook world for the purpose of Likes, soon airline tickets, mobile phones and a myriad of other products and services could all be purchased directly through a social medium. Here, what was first seen as a commercial advantage in service could quickly become mandatory—after all a Facebook-based interaction lowers a company’s costs, enabling them to have their “online call centre”, advertising vehicle, and point of sales all in one place. It is also possible that the end point would be where a customer is so tied into the cycle of competitive friendship that she has no real choice. Similarly, she may find herself with no voice to complain or demand accountability because her only space for such communication would be via the—publicly available—Facebook page. This is not to argue that the tools and techniques used here by corporations can only be used for commercial ends: the “friendship” cycle may also be, at least in theory, used by charitable organisations. Any organisation should be able to create a persona and, in so doing, attempt to form a friendship with the customer or individual. This possibility is might, however, only be an option for a short time: once

commercial organisations normalise the practice it may be too late for non-commercial and/or not-for-profit organisations to adopt the same strategy.

Similarly, although it may appear that the commercialised social networks I have focussed on have the *potential* to expand our social connections (by enabling individuals to connect with many different businesses) in reality the reverse is true. My research shows that the same narrowing of social connections that is occurring throughout social media (Aiello et al., 2012; Turkle, 2012) also occurs with respect to the commercial Pages I have studied. Facebook not only allows popularity to be self-perpetuating through filtering settings in the algorithms (Lafrance, 2014, August 21), but it also permits individuals to actively block anything not of interest. Individuals who do not wish to hear about a different business, community, interest or group that is not already established as “safe” or “valuable” can instead be ignored. Alternative or oppositional viewpoints can be disregarded and information that does not fit within a pre-existing consensus snubbed. Taken together, these factors mean one consequence of the communication I have studied is a flattening of difference, a lack of individuality, and, potentially, a robotic blandness.

In this regard it is vital to remember Facebook’s own corporate status. It will do little to restrain unbridled business power within its network because those businesses provide its profit (Lynley, 2014, January 30). Despite its relatively innocuous appearance, Facebook is a business-to-business corporation that sells individuals (and access to them) as its “product”. The furore surrounding Edward Snowden’s revelations (Ackerman, 2014, August 13), illustrates the value governments place on Facebook data. And such links between Facebook and arms of the

state are not limited to the United States of America: Snowden's exposition of the Five Eyes Intelligence alliance and Kim Dotcom's extradition (Cadwalladr, 2014, August 17) demonstrate the New Zealand government's actions. Overall, it appears that individuals have been willing to give Facebook access to their data (and indeed those data themselves) in return for free access to services, they have accepted large scale government surveillance within Facebook in return for increased safety from terrorism, and they have traded their personal details in return for a "friendship" with selected corporations.

This is the "new normal", where Mark Zuckerberg is correct—privacy is an outdated and outmoded concept (Kirkland, 2010). Given that the majority of New Zealanders participate in Facebook (Cadwalladr, 2014, August 17), the potential for abuse of Facebook-related data is significant. And such information matching will only spread further into previously sacrosanct areas of social, economic and political life. For example, should New Zealand institute electronic voting, Facebook data may be sufficient to authenticate an individual identity—and one could then not vote without it. Similar concerns exist for international travel. Increasingly, people access Facebook via their smartphones (Lafrance, 2014, August 21), which are all installed with GPS navigation settings, which can be used to monitor a person's travel patterns.

While this may seem a dystopian outcome, it is nevertheless patently true that large-scale citizen control becomes easier as use of Facebook becomes normalised. While my research focusses on New Zealand, it nonetheless could be applied anywhere the same conditions obtain. A truly dystopian perspective here would be to cite *Nineteen Eighty-four* (Orwell, 1949); however, unlike the novel there will be nowhere for

the main characters to run to: the online world tracks a person wherever they go at the time they are doing it. Similarly, lifestyles choices will become increasingly more standardised. Those who desire—and advocate for—an austere or, even, an off-grid, lifestyle will have fewer social, economic, and cultural spaces to inhabit. The overwhelming “logic” of Facebook-centric consumerism, funded by ever-increasing levels of personal and familial debt, will reinforce the new normal, where the ability to question those in power or to step back into an unmonitored or offline existence will be extremely limited, should it exist at all.

Orthodoxy thought in an Age of Outrage

The erosion of personal privacy that Zuckerberg correctly identified did not lead to the conclusion he constructed—where such developments meant the world would become a more open and accepting place (Kirkland, 2010). Rather, by contrast, I found that a singular view of what was “right” or “wrong” featured in three Facebook communities I studied. There was little if any considered and open debate (as might, say, befit a construction of these groups as part of a mediated public sphere); instead, they offered opportunities to “shout loudly” at or past other participants. Of course, I am far from the first researcher to notice this feature of online conversations, and my findings support previous research. Individuals loved or hated the corporation or its words and actions. There was no middle ground and no debate.

One way to expand and extend this point is by deploying the concept of the Age of Outrage (King, 2014, March 30) in which extremes of emotion become normalized. I believe we are increasingly seeing a

change in thought patterns and behaviours on a mass scale, where the contrasts between mania and depression that typify bipolar disorders on the individual scale (Phillips & Kupfer, 2013) play out across social groups. Facebook is clearly interested in manipulating user experiences. In a recent experiment it modified what individuals could see in their Newsfeeds, showing them solely positive or negative feeds. The aim was to investigate how this influenced personal emotions as identified by their corresponding posts (Kramer, Guillory & Hancock, 2014).

It is relatively safe to extrapolate that, as individuals spend more time within social networks, the habits they form there of instantaneous responses, little discussion or dialogue, and reactions of extreme emotion, will start to shape their offline conversations until those three characteristics become normal. More considered approaches to information gathering and sharing could well become problematic as individuals struggle to rationalize or spend long periods of time on a single topic. Similarly, relationships will become fractured. Friendships, romances, family connections or, indeed, the relationships people have with corporations, will be altered so they have less meaning, depth and insight. Empathy and fellow feeling will diminish and society as a whole could well become more narcissistic and less compassionate. This ties in with Social Exchange theory (Emerson, 1976) which holds that when the costs of a relationship outweigh the benefits, the relationship will be abandoned.

Balanced against these pessimistic views is the reaction to the emotional manipulation of users (Meyer, 2014, June 28) and anger about changes to mobile settings which allow Facebook to have more control over user data (Dewey, 2014, August 4). When Facebook

recently separated its Messenger service away from the main Facebook Newsfeed, which forced users who wanted to receive their personal messages to download a new app which required them to agree to more draconian Terms and Conditions (including Facebook to “call phone numbers without your intervention,” and “use the camera at any time without your permission”), there was a significant negative reaction from users. Unsurprisingly, Facebook termed this reaction “overblown” and “based on misinformation” (Albergotti, 2014, August 8). The concern is, however, that (a) these negative reactions are not uniform (there are users who happily accept the changes) and (b) as such changes increase the space available to resist is considerably reduced.

Responding to the research questions

I now turn to the task of responding to each of the four research questions outlined in chapter three. As noted in chapter three there are three questions that deal with specific aspects of the research project as reported in successive chapters. There is also a fourth, overarching research question that will, in this chapter, lead into the conclusions I will draw.

Research Question One: What is the nature of Facebook interactions between corporations and followers?

In chapters four and five I showed how the three corporations I focused on not only used social media actively (and developed their own extensive virtual communities); they also manifested this through the agency of Facebook. Examples here include building a strong online

brand presence, gaining large numbers of followers, and drawing attention to the numbers of people choosing to write comments on their Pages. Obviously, these examples also aided the businesses: they garnered useful information about their target market (or, at least, those willing to enter into dialogue via Facebook).

Each corporation deployed their social media strategically and subtly. They all hinted and sometimes quite strongly, at the possibility of real, personal relationships and human connection without ever actually specifying or delivering that relationship or connection. Of course, such observations are not, in themselves, new. As Champoux, Durgee and McGlynn put it:

Since overt product-pushing on Facebook is not quite in compliance with a “social” atmosphere, companies try to be as human as possible on their page. Fans look for entertainment, knowledge sharing and interesting conversations. Companies post topics not directly related to their businesses to engage fans, conduct informal market research and increase the visibility of their page (2012, p. 24),

I would add, however, that my research demonstrates the extent to which these logics can, and do, permeate corporations attitudes to social media/Facebook. Additionally, the degree to which the “ordinary user” is manipulated by these communications is, I would argue, downplayed in much contemporary research.

One very obvious example here is the way that “appearing-to-be-human” (by, for instance, having a company policy encourage feedback), is changed into “communicating-like-a-human-friend”. In all three examples in my study, the corporations explicitly or implicitly encouraged the users to treat them as friends: Vodafone via the promotional materials of the “Share Everything Day” video, ASB via the

ASB Virtual Branch and Air New Zealand via the Fairy. Nonetheless, while the corporations produced rhetorical discourses to suggest friendliness and a certain “kindness” to their actions, each also shows an underlying discourse of control. In short, the corporations retain control over their Pages and the comments made on them. For instance: the Air New Zealand Fairy tells her followers that she “won’t have any nonsense”; Vodafone selects what images and messages will make it onto their promotional video: and ASB instructs the users of the Virtual Branch on how to use their tool. On one level, the Page is constructed to appear as if it is a site of free, open, engaging communication where individuals can come to “chat” with organisations, where they can become “friends” and develop close bonds. On a more critical level, however, control and authority remain within the organisation’s purview: it decides what will be discussed, the terms under which it will be discussed, and, ultimately, what will be allowed to appear on the Page.

Research Question Two: What are the multiple realities discernible on the Facebook Pages of the three corporations?

Although I argued in chapter two that the notion of a public sphere is fatally flawed, that critique operates on a meta level. When analysing real spaces in the lived world in which public sphere ideals may be striven for, social media provide an environment that is no less suitable than more traditional locations. Obviously, the social media space features a number of serious issues (i.e. the digital divide, increasing commercialisation, and the question of where ultimate control lies) in the three instances I focussed on it nevertheless did enable individuals to freely come together and discuss matters they deemed worthy in a

largely equal manner. Therefore one key reality was that of a public space able to be used to communicate on matters of general interest.

Further, in terms of critical discussions between users and corporations, the social media space provided by Facebook did allow for some, limited questioning within what could be termed a public sphere framework. And, although all three corporations removed some negative comments, these tended to be the most damaging to their interests, and they all left other, less damaging comments on the Page. I did not find any evidence that Vodafone, ASB or Air New Zealand changed policy or practice as a result of any Facebook communication, the potential remains, as the example of Nestlé's use of palm oil showed (Champoux et al., 2012).

At the same time, however, it is also true to argue that another reality is equally present on the Facebook Pages. The current technological and social use of Facebook does not prioritise interaction between users. Of course, user opinion and/or action can lead to change when sufficient numbers share that viewpoint and direct it to the corporation. Despite appearances and claims to the contrary, however, this is a very limited "power". My research demonstrated that there is no relationship between individuals on the Page—every user communicates to or through the corporation. The consequence is that there can be no truly *informed* debate; rather, the Pages offer a significantly less formal and more emotional space, more a "lover's tiff", where the problems in a private relationship (between individual and the corporation) are being aired where others can hear them. The realities here are, therefore, mutually contradictory, with a surface appearance of communicative interaction belying a deeper, more unidirectional communication flow.

Research Question Three: How do corporations use their Facebook Pages to build follower identification?

In chapter seven I showed how individuals who interacted with corporations on the three Facebook Pages I studied constructed those corporations into human-like entities as best befitted the individuals' feelings or emotions at a given moment. My analysis showed that this could operate on a range of levels: as a teacher when it gave them interesting, new information; a lover, when it wished them Happy Valentine's Day; a friend when it asked them how their day was going; an enemy, when it delivered faulty goods or services; or a benefactor when they won prizes. Overall, I found that the most popular category was *Classroom question time* which, in my view, operated to allow followers a kind of phatic communion with the organisation. The next three most popular categories: *Love, or something like it*; *Hell hath no fury like a Facebook follower scorned* and *The lonely hearts club* all stress the human-like construction users were willing and able to apply to the corporations.

None of these points, however, gives any indication of the power balance between organisation and user. On one hand there is the question of how coercive or directive the organisation can be in targeting users. On the other, there is the question of how genuinely interested users are in establishing and maintaining this connection. I suspect that both these factors are occurring, with the exact balance between them being a matter of personal circumstance.

In terms of the big picture, however, it is crucial to realise that successive technological changes to Facebook appear to benefit the businesses who use it for commercial purposes. On the one hand, in

recent years the layout and accessibility of advertising have made it easier for businesses to have their own Page, build communities, and for these Pages to be viewed as similar in style to personal Profiles. On the other, the way Facebook has (re)defined “friendship” helped organisations in their quest for a closer relationship with their followers. Simply put, the word “friend” is used for any personal connections on Facebook: a parent, sibling, or work acquaintance are all labelled as “friends” despite the fact that each of these relationships is something quite different offline. Obviously, using the label “friend” in this way encouraged personal revelation:

Zuckerberg concedes that “the concept of a ‘friend’ is definitely getting overloaded”. He says that word was useful to “get people over a bunch of hurdles.” Most importantly it got them used to sharing a lot of information about themselves—after all, only friends would see it” (Kirkpatrick, 2010, p. 312).

The issue in terms of the research question, then, is that if by deploying the term “friend” to encompass a close relative, an acquaintance, an ex-partner or a classmate from childhood, then the term is also more than sufficient to encompass the relationship that individuals have with corporations via their Facebook Pages. The most concerning issue here is that, while it may appear that users have a significant amount of power in how they view a corporation, my research shows that this power is significantly less than they might typically imagine.

Research Question Four: In terms of business-to-follower communication, what is the nature of the “Facebook effect”?

This research was guided overall by a persistent curiosity about what was *really* happening on Facebook. The typical fervent reception that Facebook has received within the business community does not permit

any negativity, while at the same time, its detractors have painted a pervasively dystopian picture of the social changes that could possibly ensue from living a “Facebooked” life. Both standpoints have their truths, and both are largely theoretical. My interest was based in knowing the Facebook effect from examining the actual behaviour of corporations and followers. To this end, my data analysis unpacks and analyses what is really taking place on the Pages. The nature of the Facebook effect, then, encompasses the material previously presented in this chapter and what follows in this section.

At its most basic level the Facebook effect is a transactional one—users or followers communicate with businesses in communication flows that are synchronous, in real time, and dialogic. And, as the corporations would no doubt attest, this offers a “better” method of interacting with consumers or customers. What is interesting here, however, is that the lack of a single term to define those users / followers / consumers / customers strongly suggests that the true nature of those communication flows is not fully manifested. Here, I turn, again, to the peculiar nature of the corporation. Once legal personhood for the corporation was established in the late 1800s, businesses could enter into some—relatively limited—aspects of human lived experience (they could raise money, own property and so on). Corporations were not, however, envisaged to be actors in the social sphere.

My reading of the Facebook effect is that it works to “remedy” that issue. If, through the nature of the business-follower-business communication flows on Facebook, people begin to *act as if* the corporation is a social person, the nature of the personhood enjoyed by corporations has changed. Here, I am not arguing the Facebook effect is solely responsible for this change; rather, it plays a key role, not least

because Facebook is one of the most durable social networking sites. And when the corporation's aims (to "relate" to its customers) aligns with the user's aims (to receive an apparently meaningful response from a business) the result is a "virtuous circle" of mutual achievement. From my, more critical, perspective, though, this is a crucial point: the Facebook effect notes and defines a new state of being, one where the corporation no longer has mere legal personhood; it now has *social personhood* as well.

My research did not aim to tease out the next layer of meaning here. My findings do not identify the relative balance of power in this emerging relationship, nor do they deal with the production of the messages, be they emanating from the corporation or from users. I strongly suspect that each actor in this communication exchange would have very different explanations of the communication flow. I envisage corporations would stress the ease with which they could "authentically" communicate with their customers. I believe users would stress the "extra" influence they would be able to deploy by using friend-like behaviour to influence situations.

Implications for further research

Of course, there are other implications deriving my findings. At the most basic level, as Geertz (1973) suggests I would hope that another researcher would identify the same meanings and patterns in my data. Similarly, I would be very interested to know how many other corporations deploy similar communication strategies to those in my three case studies. I anticipate they would. For one thing, more and more corporations are engaging with social media:

The use of social media among Fortune 500 companies surged in 2012. According to a study conducted by the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, as many as 73 percent of these companies now have an official corporate account in Twitter, while 66 percent have a corporate Facebook page. (Okazaki and Taylor 2013, p. 56)

For another, it would likewise be interesting to see if, and how far, the “Facebook effect” (which I have located in the corporate sphere) might permeate other, non-commercial pages—an example here might be a not-for-profit such as Greenpeace. By this I mean that there need not be any specific relevance of the commercial underpinning of the organisations in my case studies, and future research could test that hypothesis. Likewise, future research could compare the Facebook effect with the effect(s) of other social media as and when they develop and become ubiquitous. Since “users tend to embrace new tools and adopt them as part of their communication repertoire” (Quan-Haase & Young 2010, p. 351), the extent of the relevance of the Facebook effect is unknowable at this stage.

Since my study is rooted in the organisational communication field it focusses on how organisations communicate with external stakeholders. As I note above, a study centred on the production of the corporate messages that produce one part of the Facebook effect would be very interesting. An ethnographic study based within such corporations would both help situate my research in a wider context and problematise the role of the individuals or teams responsible for these messages. Equally tracking the movement of the three case studies I examined onto other social media would be worthwhile. During the write-up of this research a social media presence for the Air New Zealand Fairy was introduced on Pinterest and Instagram, and

ASB placed additional emphasis on video responses through YouTube. It may be that corporations are expanding into these different social media because of the success of their presence in Facebook, or perhaps they see the other forums as offering greater promotional potential.

I contend there is also space for further research on the interactions between individuals and organisations on Facebook that is embedded in computer-mediated communication (CMC) theories. While I have referred throughout the research, albeit briefly, to various CMC concepts such as hypersonal and hypernegative communication and 'flaming', there are other computer-mediated communication models worthy of further investigation. For instance, the Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects, which is often used to explain group behaviour online, may or may not be applicable with the individuals, who as a group, follow an organisation on Facebook. What occurred on the Facebook Pages I analysed was certainly, at least by description only, online group behaviour, yet what my research showed was that individuals expressed a striking sincerity in their interactions on the Pages, in contrast to a 'crowd psychology' approach and developed a relationship with the organisation that tended to ignore the existence of other followers.

Conclusion

The word "share" now occupies an awkward place in society. Used so often in corporate marketing speak in the online world, it has now lost its meaning. Share once suggested equal contributions made by an individual or a group to each other, and therefore indicated a meaningful conversation, a dialogue. It was a term adopted early on in

online language with the invention of social networking, which reflected what was occurring in forums (such as the first Virtual Communities) as individuals did indeed share with each other. Nowadays it has become a marketing exhortation, a way of a corporation attempting to reinforce its legitimacy for being on social media. The businesses are ultimately there because “social media networks offer channels through which businesses can learn about their customers’ preferences and get insight into their goods or services acceptance in the field” (Kumar & Sundaram, 2012, p. 4). When corporations ask their customers to share, it is with this in mind, rather than any intention of “sharing back”. “Share” is somewhat of a misnomer. Yes, customers did “share” but not really the kinds of messages that count, and certainly not ‘everything’. They are mostly sharing about the weather, about their need for a coffee and about struggling through work on a Friday. This made up 37% of the submissions according to the Vodafone press release. This however shows neither depth nor breadth and is a kind of surface conversation. It seems a stretch to say they have “shared their day”.

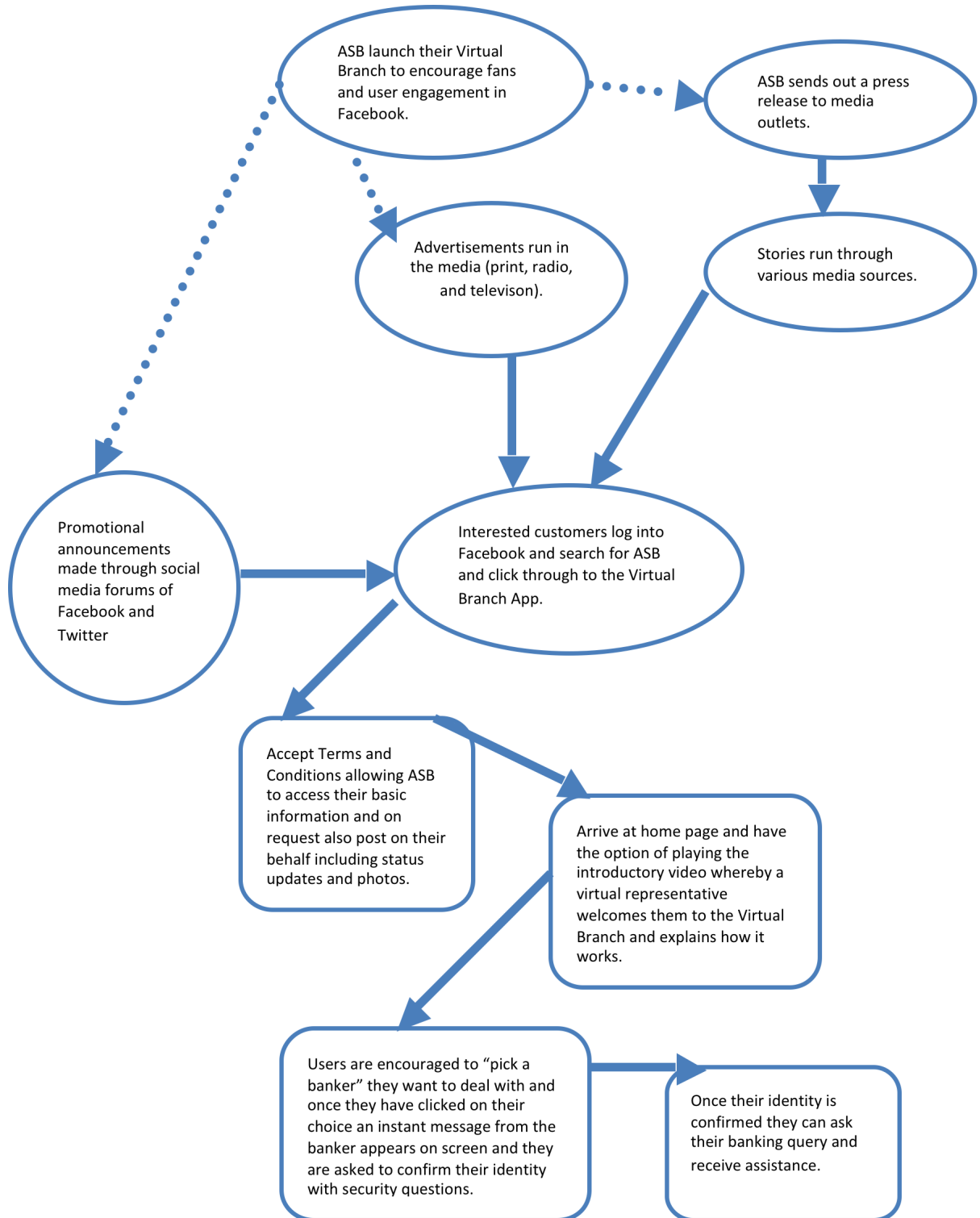
In this context, and despite the longstanding tradition of attaching some surface personal qualities to an organisation (Davies, Chun, Vinhas da Silva & Roper, 2004), my findings show a distinctive difference in the communication *from* users. There simply were no obvious differences in the language, the tone, the register, the phrasing, of how people are writing, responding or communicating via social media to the corporations as to other people in their social lives. And where they can, in *some* aspects of social media, corporations strive to become as human as possible. The distinction is lost on most users and their framing of the corporation as a social person pervades *all* the social media for that business.

Mark Zuckerberg is often held to believe that organisations should be authentic, more open and direct with customers, they should enter into dialogue with their customers, and people will naturally gravitate to favouring companies that show inspirational, human-like qualities:

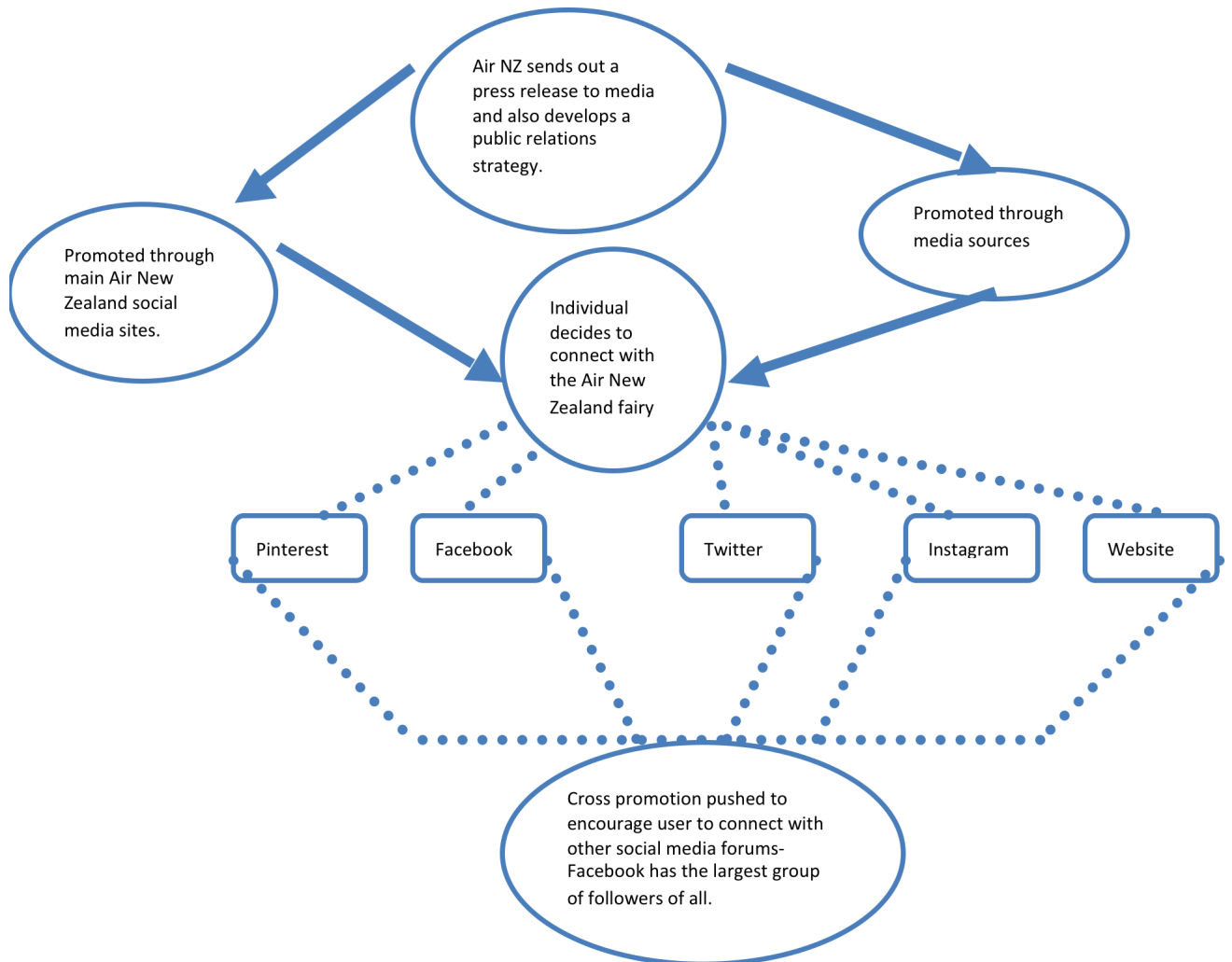
In addition to building better products, a more open world will also encourage businesses to engage with their customers directly and authentically...More than four million businesses have Pages on Facebook that they use to have a dialogue with their customers. We expect this trend to grow as well...These days I think more and more people want to use services from companies that believe in something beyond simply maximizing profits.
(quoted in Magid, 2012, January 2)

Zuckerberg's hopes here are clearly utopian and, as such, fit within one general frame of reference for understanding the World Wide Web. In the contemporary world, however, Facebook's influence on businesses no longer reflect Zuckerberg's vision. Now, the main priority for Facebook is to deliver a profit and as such, they must kow-tow to businesses, rather than enforce a new way of doing business. What Zuckerberg created for utopian ideals has had dystopian results.

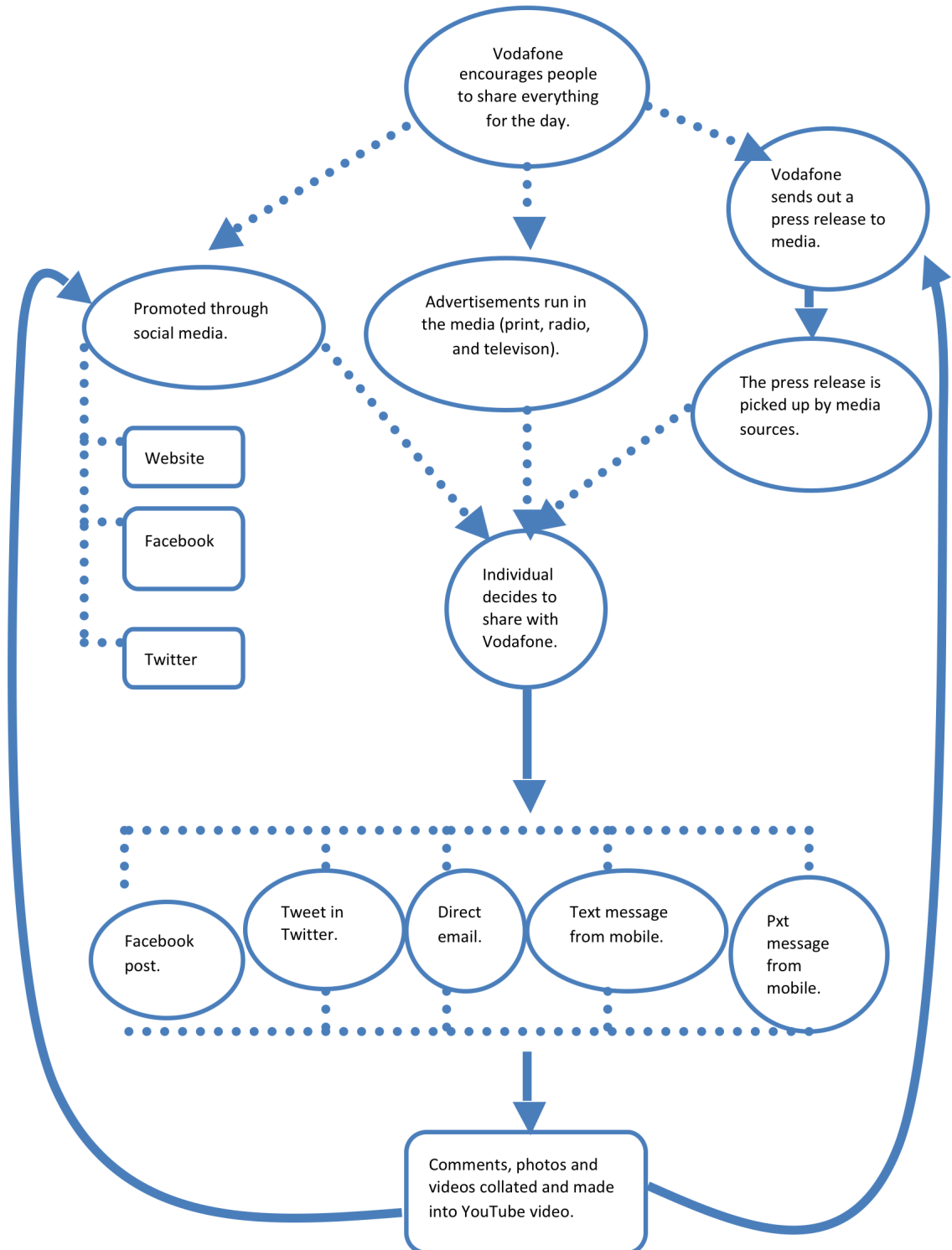
Appendix i: ASB Virtual Branch flowchart



Appendix ii: Air New Zealand Fairy flowchart



Appendix iii: Vodafone "Share Everything Day" flowchart



Glossary of online terms

Please note: Many of the terms listed below are already established in the English language, for instance to *share* or to *like*, but have taken on new meanings, colonised by the online environment. Such definitions as listed below assume the reader is already aware of the established meaning and only their online uses are defined.

Apps:

Originates from the word “applications” and refers to the option within Facebook of having additional elements added into the Facebook Page, such as a Virtual Branch or competition form which would otherwise not confine within the scope of the Page. Also see *tabs*. Apps can also exist in other social media forums.

Blog:

A reverse-chronological online journal. Blogs can document all manner of topics and range in length and quality. Web 2.0 technologies enabled non-professional users of the Internet to become bloggers and produce blogs in a simple format (Tredinnick, 2006).

Comment:

Within Facebook, this refers to a written reply by a Facebook user, made to a post on another user’s personal Profile or on a Page. Innovations to the Facebook set up have meant that as of 2013, comments could also be in the form of images (Espinosa, 2013, June 19), though predominantly comments remain in written form.

Emoticons:

Images, often suggesting an emotion (happiness, anger, sadness, love) produced through a mixture of letters, punctuation and numbers. For example an image of a smiling face, to indicate happiness, when writing online, is indicated by a colon followed by a parenthesis. Emoticons first appeared in 1982, and have continued to be used and developed due to limitations in online language, as they enable extra linguistic cues to the reader (Ruan, 2011).

Facebook:

A social networking tool accessed through www.facebook.com. Users fill in an online form with their personal details, which by Facebook rules and regulations must be an accurate representation of themselves, and are then granted a free account on the site that enables them to connect with others.

Friend/friending:

As noted by Angwin (2009) the word “friend” previously was solely a noun denoting a close acquaintance, however within social networking it has a much broader context. It denotes any person added into a social network by another. In this way a parent, a work colleague, or a former boyfriend may all be termed a “friend” on Facebook, though each carries a different

relationship in the offline world. Furthermore, people otherwise unknown to a Facebook user, may be a “friend” if both parties consent to the connection. *Friending* is the process of sending or accepting such a request.

Fan/Follower:

Used to describe individual users on Facebook who have pressed the Like button on a Facebook Page and receive regular updates from that Page. The Page may represent a business, a sports group, or fan club as well as a range of other options.

Group:

An additional option as an alternative to a Page, whereby Facebook users who already have a Profile are able to set up an online community on a topic of interest.

Instagram:

A social networking tool (owned by Facebook) with a focus on the sharing of images. Pictures are shared, usually taken from a mobile device and uploaded directly to the site, and ‘tagged’ with a word or selection of words that best describes the image. A hashtag often precedes each word. Instagram also enables filters to be placed on the image to improve the colouring of the photograph, or add a border (Ladhani, 2012).

Like:

Indicates a connection with or approval of someone or something particularly within the social networking site of Facebook. It is used as both a noun (referring to the existence of the Like button) and an adjective (to indicate agreement) within the forum or comments within the forum.

The Like button enables individuals who already have a Facebook Profile to receive updates in their Newsfeed from a particular Page once they press it. The Like button also exists at the bottom of all comments made either by a Facebook Profile or on a Page so that others who read it can indicate agreement, appreciation or simply express a form of phatic communion in response to what is written.

Meme:

A piece of online content that spreads virally through social media sites (see *viral*). Usually created by users for a humorous effect (though instances of politically motivated, or informative memes are available). It may be made up of text, images, video or mixed media, though most often it is a video or photograph that has a phrase written across it. Frequently these memes spawn user-created derivatives (Shifman, 2013).

Newsfeed:

The “home page” of a Facebook user’s Profile which users see first or most often. It shows a range of content from all Facebook connections and is categorised in reverse chronological order.

Post:

A comment, image or video that a person uploads to their Profile or to a Page so that it appears on other people’s Newsfeeds.

PXT:

A text message in picture format.

Share:

(adjective) Describes how people distribute content to others online via social media sites.

(noun) Within Facebook, there is a Share button under all posts, which enables users to distribute the content with anyone they are connected to—this is how content goes *viral* within this social networking site. Share buttons can also exist in other online forms.

Sharing is a significant part of the online, social environment and it has been reported in studies that around 59% of people share online content with others (Allsop, Bassett & Hoskins, 2007) however, critical theorists contend that the frequent use of *sharing* as an adjective hides the realities of production, distribution and consumption online (John, 2012).

Snapchat:

A mobile social medium whereby individual users send other individual users photographs taken on their mobile device. Once the receiver has opened the image to view it, the image self destructs within ten seconds. However, some users have found ways around the self-destruct aspect enabling them to make the images permanent if they wish (Gillette, 2013, February 7).

Tabs:

Within a Facebook Page, its creators can also add what are referred to as 'tabs'. These are sub-pages within the Page and allow different forms of content, such as competition forms, or a virtual branch, to still be a part of the Facebook presence. Also referred to as *Apps*.

Text Message:

A written, instant message sent on a mobile phone.

Timeline:

The Facebook format for a person's Profile which places an emphasis on requesting specific dates for all posts and sorting all content in a reverse chronological order. This change to Facebook occurred in 2007 as a technological improvement to the site.

Tweet:

A message sent specifically through the social media site of Twitter. Tweets are usually, but not always, textual and are limited to 140 characters or less (Zeichick, 2009). They often include a hyperlink to another online source providing more information on the topic. They also often include hashtags to label the content, in a similar manner to *Instagram*.

Twits/tweeters/ Twitterers:

Various terms used to describe a user/account holder of Twitter.

Twitter:

A social media site that functions as a micro-blogging platform. Users post tweets as frequently as they like, and choose other tweeters to follow (Zeichick, 2009). All tweets show in reverse chronological order.

Twitter feed:

Similar to the Facebook Newsfeed, individuals with a presence in Twitter have a Twitter feed which collates all content from others they 'follow' and presents it in reverse chronological order on their 'home page' of the site (Zeichick, 2009).

Viral:

A term often misused and misunderstood, viral refers to how widely a piece of content is distributed. The more people who have seen the content, the more 'viral' it is deemed to be. This is why the facility of sharing is so important online as it is the ease of sharing and the interest of the content that determines how often people pass it on to others. Content that goes viral may

spread quickly but it typically fades quickly as well (Broxton, Interian, Vaver, & Wattenhofer 2011).

Wall/ Wall post:

Prior to the move to a Timeline design within Facebook, users had a personal Wall instead where content was posted. The main difference between the two designs was that with the Timeline design there was an increased emphasis on timeliness of postings, and also greater capacity for images.

Wikipedia:

A collaborative online encyclopaedia, supported by a non-profit foundation which is free to users and exists over many languages. It has been found in many case studies to have a high degree of accuracy (Lamb & Johnson, 2013).

YouTube:

A video-sharing social media platform owned by Google (Fitzpatrick, 2010, May 31). Users can upload and watch videos on the site free of charge, though with limitations on the length of video enabled.

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