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### Andrews University's Thought Leadership Communication on LinkedIn: A Textual Analysis

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Andrews University  
Department of Visual Art, Communication & Design

Andrews University's Thought Leadership Communication on LinkedIn: A Textual Analysis

A Thesis  
Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by  
Nana Ama O. Akoto-Boateng

2021

**Abstract**

Thought leadership is fast becoming a powerful communication tool for most industries and sectors including higher education institutions (HEIs). This study employed textual analysis to determine how Andrews University's thought leadership on LinkedIn compares with four other top-ranking Adventist universities, namely Loma Linda University, Pacific Union College, Southern Adventist University and Walla Walla University. The text elements that were analyzed during the study were image posts and video posts on the respective LinkedIn pages of these institutions, spanning from January 2021 to June 2021. Among other findings, the results of the study revealed that Andrews University compares as the least ranked among the top-ranking Adventist universities with regards to its LinkedIn thought leadership communication.

*Keywords:* thought leadership, textual analysis, higher education institutions, LinkedIn, social information processing theory, social media, branding, post, dialogic communication, uncertainty reduction theory.

Andrews University's Thought Leadership Communication on LinkedIn: A Textual Analysis

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A thesis  
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Approval by the Committee:

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Desrene Vernon-Brebnor, Ph.D, Chair

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Heather Thompson-Day, Ph.D.

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Date approved

### **Acknowledgment**

It's been a long tough road, right from the emotional moments associated with leaving my family behind in Ghana, to when I first touched down in Berrien Springs on December 22, 2019. I can't believe two years have flown by so fast. I wasn't sure what to expect when I first landed on Andrews University campus. I remember meeting my academic advisor, Professor Desrene Vernon for the first time in her office. I was so nervous, but then my interaction with her turned out really great and it also made me feel really at ease. From day one, Professor Desrene has extended a consistent level of professionalism, care and attention towards me and I'm so grateful to have her as my academic advisor. Special thanks also to Dr. Heather Thompson-Day, a distinguished thought leader who added her great insights to complement the process and outcomes of this study. I'm also thankful to the leadership and my colleagues at AdventHealth who through their amazing work in thought leadership, have inspired me to consider this project.

### **Dedication**

The Almighty God has been faithful from day one. He has consistently provided for me and blessed me with the unique opportunity to pursue and successfully complete my master's degree at Andrews University. All honor and glory be unto His holy name! I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Victoria Ofori Mensah who has been a strong pillar in all aspects of my life including my career and educational journey. To my husband, Kwame Owusu Baah, thank you for your prayers and words of encouragement and for being my number one support system here in Berrien Springs. A special dedication also goes to Marvin Benjamin, my unborn child, who will be joining us next year by the grace and power of God.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Background

Joel Kurtzman is the most renowned scholar in thought leadership. In fact, the term “thought leadership” was invented by him in 1994 as a theme for a series of interviews he conducted as editor-in-chief of *Strategy + Business Magazine*, according to a 2012 *Forbes* article. Since then, management consultants have adopted this term which has been an important tool in public relations for more than 30 years (Young, 2013). Joel Kurtzman subsequently authored a book titled “Thought Leaders: Insights on the Future of Business” in 1997, in which he interviewed twelve of the world’s most remarkable business leaders and thinkers who share what it takes for companies to prosper in the next century (Kurtzman, 1997).

Kurtzman defined a thought leader as someone who had ideas that merited attention. Israel (2012) however felt this definition was weak and therefore came up with his own. He defined a thought leader as “someone who looks at the future and sets a course for it that others will follow (para. 7).” Thought leadership describes a firm’s “intellectual firepower” assembled and published in communications material designed to “transform the way we think” (McCrimmon, 2005).

HubSpot defines thought leadership as a tactic content marketers use to build credibility for themselves or leaders in their company. According to a recent article published on its website, the main goal of thought leadership is to become recognized as an expert and used as a go-to resource in your field. To become a thought leader therefore calls for a deliberate attempt to create and promote educational, helpful content and also become active in the industry community, particularly on social sites.

There are different types of thought leadership. A LinkedIn Marketing Blog article detailed three main types: industry thought leadership, organizational thought leadership and product thought leadership. Industry thought leadership looks at perspectives on news and trends within a particular industry whereas organizational thought leadership embodies the vision and ethos of a company. On the other hand, product thought leadership focuses on offering the best solution for a company's customers. The choice of the type of thought leadership or the best mix of types to pursue depends on the size of the company, the industry as well as the business objectives of the company.

Thought leadership content varies. They include but are not limited to public events, conferences, webinars, blogs, podcasts, guest posts, e-books, videos and social media content. Knowing the specific types of thought leadership content to pursue depends on the organization type and industry, as well as the media that seems most appropriate for the company's target audience. In other words, the type of thought leadership content a company chooses to distribute is a very vital part of a strategic thought leadership communications plan.

Various sectors and industries have keenly adopted the concept of thought leadership in their communications strategy. One of the major platforms that have advanced the course of thought leadership since its conception is the LinkedIn social media platform, the world's largest professional network on the internet with over 774 million members in more than 200 countries and territories worldwide. Launched in 2003, the platform has a mission of connecting the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful. LinkedIn is the oldest platform to be created in comparison to the other popular social media platforms such as Facebook (launched in 2004), Twitter (launched in 2006) and Instagram (launched in 2010).

One of the recent innovations that throws the spotlight on individuals driving the biggest LinkedIn conversations across various sectors is the annual LinkedIn Top Voices list, a collection of hundreds of experts driving today's professional conversation. The list entails as much as fourteen categories including data science, design, education, entrepreneurship, workplace equity as well as finance and economy. Other categories include frontline health care, frontline retail, careers, marketing, sales, sports, technology and worldwide influencers making waves on the LinkedIn conversation landscape. To compile this list, LinkedIn uses a scientific combination of qualitative and quantitative signals, such as engagements in the form of reactions, comments and shares, as well as posting cadence and follower growth.

For the year 2020, the frontline health care industry drove the most conversations on LinkedIn due to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. These conversations were mostly around advocating for the need to seek the right information in the midst of so much misinformation and speculations about what coronavirus is and what it's not. The ten thought leaders who were named in this space included health practitioners with varying levels of pedigree and specialization. First on the list was Dr. Daniel Goldstein, vice chairman of the department of cardiothoracic surgery at Montefiore Health System. His posts provided a deep context on medical studies and news reports such as the efficacy and safety of experimental drugs and the effectiveness of wearing masks. Other thought leaders in this list also generated a myriad of conversations around topics like personal frontline pandemic experiences, cultural diversity in medicine, lack of adequate personal protective equipment, mental health and many other sensational topics.

A deeper dive into the education category of the 2020 LinkedIn Top Voices revealed interesting dynamics of the individuals who were getting the most attention in this space. Out of

the top ten, more than half of them were from the United States, with others hailing from Britain, India and Vietnam. For the year under review, these thought leaders generally shared their opinions on the challenges the global pandemic was posing to education and subsequently recommended winning solutions for educators amid all the pandemic uncertainty.

A growing trend within the education space is the increasing patronage of podcasts, short videos and other new media communication tools. Stephanie Espy, founder and CEO of MathSP, topped the list with regular write ups on promoting female opportunities in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). Elizabeth Leiba, co-host of the EdUp Experience podcast, was also in the top ten. She delved into key insights on topics ranging from student support to new technology and diversity. Other topics that were discussed among the top ten in this space included remote learning techniques, skills gaps, job-search skills, expanding educational opportunities, virtual tours and school culture.

### **Statement of the Problem & Research Question**

Andrews University (AU) is the flagship institution of higher education for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The university positions itself as the heartbeat of Adventist education (Andrews University. (n.d.), para. 1). It has a mission to transform its students by educating them to Seek Knowledge and Affirm Faith in order to Change the World. Research has proven the enormous benefits of incorporating thought leadership into an organization's communication strategy. This study is therefore aimed at exploring the state of Andrews University's thought leadership on the LinkedIn social media platform.

The research question therefore is: How does Andrews University's thought leadership on LinkedIn compare with other top-ranking Adventist universities?

## **Significance of the Study**

Research has proven that thought leadership has become an important strategic communications tool through which firms in global markets can build trust in their expertise, create customer value, and set themselves apart from competitors (Economist, 2010; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2007; Kauffman and Howcroft, 2003).

The 2019 Edelman-LinkedIn B2B Thought Leadership Impact Study in which over 1,200 business decision-makers, content creators and salespeople in North America and Europe were surveyed, revealed that thought leadership content influences the majority of buyers and can help brands win, retain and even grow customer business. The survey found that 58% of respondents read one or more hours of thought leadership per week, which is eight percentage points higher than the previous year's survey. This implies that decision makers are reading more thought leadership (Edelman, 2018, Slide 7).

More than half of the respondents (55%) said they use thought leadership to vet organizations they may hire (Edelman, 2018, Slide 8). The survey also confirmed that thought leadership content can generate Request for Proposals (RFPs) as 45% of decision makers said they invited a producer of thought leadership content to bid on a project when they had not previously considered the organization (Edelman, 2018, Slide 10). Thought leadership has also been found to lead directly to sales. 58% of business decision makers said that thought leadership directly led to their awarding of business to an organization (Edelman, 2018, Slide 11).

Pricing power is also inherent in a good thought leadership strategy. 61% of C-suite executives in the study said they were more willing to pay a premium to companies that create thought leadership with a clear vision (Edelman, 2018, Slide 12). Lastly, there are a lot of growth

opportunities with existing customers as more than half (55%) of business decision makers said they had increased the business they do with an organization based on their thought leadership (Edelman, 2018, Slide 13). Similarly, 60% of decision makers said thought leadership convinced them to buy a product or service they were not previously considering (Edelman, 2018, Slide 13).

Despite the impact thought leadership has on driving demand, shaping perception and closing deals, the research demonstrated that many brands continue to underutilize thought leadership.

### **About Edelman**

Edelman is the world's largest public relations firm, founded in 1952 by Dan Edelman. It is a global communications firm that partners with businesses and organizations to evolve, promote and protect their brands and reputations. The multiple-award winning agency employs over 6,000 people in more than 60 offices around the world. Some of its awards include Cannes Lions Grand Prix awards for PR (2016) and the Entertainment Lions for Sport (2021); Cannes Lions Independent Agency of the Year for the Entertainment Track (2021); Advertising Age's 2019 A-List; the Holmes Report's 2018 Global Digital Agency of the Year; and, five times, Glassdoor's Best Places to Work. Some of the firm's several clients include Samsung, eBay, Unilever (Dove), IKEA, Hilton and AstraZeneca.

### **Researcher's Interest in the Problem**

My summer internship with AdventHealth in the year 2021 taught me many aspects of communication that are essential in establishing an organization's position in the marketplace. One of the key aspects I familiarized myself with during my internship was thought leadership.

AdventHealth has gained many benefits from deliberately cultivating its LinkedIn thought leadership strategy over the past few years. I was privileged to observe this in action. It is therefore my hope that by exploring the state of Andrews University's LinkedIn thought leadership, I will be able to make significant recommendations based on the findings of my study.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

**Thought leadership:** refers to a tactic content marketers use to build credibility for themselves or their leaders in a company or institution (Riserbato, n.d.).

**Thought leader:** refers to an individual or an organization that is recognized as an expert and used as a go-to resource in their field (Riserbato, n.d.).



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Studies on Adventist Universities**

Andrews University's positioning as the flagship institution of higher education for the Seventh-day Adventist church (SDA), provides the impetus for a critical study into the mission and tenets of Adventist higher education.

A 2014 CollegeImpact research report commissioned by the Association of Adventist Colleges and Universities titled "100+ Good Reasons to Attend an Adventist College or University", revealed that Adventist higher education offers measurable differences in spirituality, personal connections, campus participation and life preparation. Interestingly, 82 percent of graduates from Adventist colleges and universities told researchers that the investment they made in their education was worth it (Association of Adventist Colleges and Universities, 2014).

As part of the 100+ reasons given, graduates of Adventist colleges and universities said they were 8 times more likely to experience professors who helped them develop spiritually and/or develop spiritual values while in college than their Adventist peers from public universities. They also said they were 7 times more likely to experience professors who studied the Bible with them and/or increased their faith in the Bible while in college than their Adventist peers from public universities. Other reasons included experiencing professors who prayed with them, friends who attended worship services with them, developing a deeper personal relationship with Jesus, as well as experiencing mission service for a semester or more while in school. Many of the reasons pointed to strengthening their relationship with Christ, cultivating strong ethical values as well as having the ability to embark on mission trips with friends who

are like-minded with regards to their spiritual life. From the research, spirituality seems to be a major driving force behind why students choose to enroll at Adventist universities.

Currently, there is limited research to prove the reasons why students choose one Adventist school over the other. However, it can be deduced from the above-mentioned research report that students generally choose Adventist schools for very similar reasons. However, there are key differentiators that are likely to have influenced students' choice of one Adventist institution over the other. Particularly for Andrews University, the institution has indicated its key differentiators in a 2020 Enrollment and Rankings Report found on its website (Andrews Agenda, 2020).

Under the Rankings category, Andrews University continues to be the only Seventh-day Adventist university recognized as a national university for its distinguished research and range of bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees (para. 2). The 2021 U.S. News Best Colleges rankings also reveals that Andrews University is one of only a few national universities that ranks in both the Top Ten lists for ethnic diversity (#2) and most international students (#7) (para. 3).

There are currently twelve (12) Adventist universities spread across different states in the U.S. They include Walla Walla University (Washington), Pacific Union College (California), Loma Linda University (California), La Sierra University (California) and Union College (Nebraska). Others include Andrews University (Michigan), Washington Adventist University (Maryland), Kettering College (Ohio), Southern Adventist University (Tennessee), Oakwood University (Alabama), Southwestern Adventist University (Texas) and AdventHealth University

(Florida). The figure below is an overview of the regional mapping of the twelve (12) Adventist universities located in the United States.

**Figure 1: Adventist Universities in the US**



*Source: adventistcolleges.org*

According to a 2021 uniRank University Ranking, Andrews University currently ranks number 2 out of a total of 56 Adventist universities that were ranked among the “Top Adventist Universities in the world.” Loma Linda University is in first place, with Southern Adventist University ranking third. Others in the top 10 (in ranking order) are Pacific Union College, Walla Walla University, Southwestern Adventist University, La Sierra University, Oakwood University, Universidad Peruana Union (Peru) and AdventHealth University.

To enhance stakeholder perceptions of Andrews University as the flagship SDA institution of higher education, it is imperative that its thought leadership strategies visibly reflect

this leadership position accordingly. To determine this, the researcher will conduct an in-depth textual analysis of the thought leadership content strategies adopted by some of the top-ranking Adventist universities on their social media pages. The researcher will then make recommendations based on the findings.

### **Theoretical Support**

As earlier noted, thought leadership has been proven to be a product of trust between the sender of the message and their target audience. In this chapter, we will delve into a number of theories such as interpersonal theories of computer-mediated communication, which consists of the social information processing theory and hyperpersonal model. Also relevant to establishing a theoretical framework for this study is the dialogic communication theory and the uncertainty reduction theory. These theories have provided a theoretical framework within which thought leadership has been planned, practiced and evaluated worldwide over the years.

### **Interpersonal Theories of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)**

There are a few theories that guide how computer-mediated communication is organized. Since thought leadership is curated within the online media landscape, a deeper understanding of CMC theories will be essential to establishing a theoretical framework for this exploratory study. Prominent among them are the social information processing theory and the hyperpersonal model which highlight the power of online communication relationships.

### **Social Information Processing Theory (SIPT)**

Social information processing theory (SIPT) argues that people used text-based CMC in ways that make up for the absence of nonverbal cues, enabling communicators to develop impressions and interpersonal affection as strongly as they could offline (Walther 1992). SIPT

believes that social cues can be transmitted over written communication. As relationship building becomes more and more critical in public relations practices, insights from SIPT will be highly helpful in examining how organizations engage with their stakeholders over online and social media.

### **The Role of Social Information Processing Theory in Brand Management and Customer Engagement**

Perera, Nayak & Nguyen (2020) indicated the increasing importance of brand management in today's global marketplace. Since the brand is one of a company's most valuable intangible assets, a brand functions as a powerful differentiator for the business and as a decision-making tool for customers (Okten et al., 2019). Branding efforts are no longer limited to "consumer products", as organizations in various service industries continue to utilize branding strategies to build stronger brands (Ottman, 2017). In this regard, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are not exceptions. HEIs have also begun to realize the need to develop sustainable brand strategies in an effort to develop meaningfully differentiated brands to communicate their strengths (Endo et al., 2019). Since the higher education market has become highly competitive, domestically as well as internationally, HEIs are looking to counteract the new market forces primarily by differentiating themselves in the global arena (Lomer et al., 2018).

Perera, Nayak & Nguyen (2020) also believe that the emergence of customer-based brand equity (CBBE) has forced HEIs to place a greater emphasis on improving their marketing strategies through social media to survive in the modern digital era. In fact, the rising popularity of social media has offered a platform for students to meet and share their experience and enthusiasm regarding their preferred HEIs (Chugh and Ruhi, 2018). Social brand engagement

opens up many new opportunities for prospective students to extract HEIs' information from existing and potential students through different social networking sites (Liu et al., 2018). The importance of increasing students' social brand engagement and sense of belonging to their institution, faculty, or department is critical to student retention (Conduit et al., 2016).

Based on the Social Information Processing Theory (SIPT), Perera, Nayak & Nguyen (2020) revealed that students' social brand engagement on social media induce students to rely on the expertise, and trustworthiness of the HEI brands. Social Information Processing Theory (SIPT) suggested that individuals find alternative ways to gather information about the brands (Jahng and Hong, 2017), and make a judgment based on the information received. Bhaduri and Ha-Brookshire (2017) purport that customers could make judgments about the brands by referring to the information shared on social media to create a unique value about the brand in their minds. Students' engagement with social media therefore helps them to gather information about HEI brands.

### **Hyperpersonal Model**

According to Walther 1996, the Hyperpersonal model stipulates that under certain conditions, CMC relationships can exceed face-to-face relationships in relational closeness. The model believes that when people send messages in CMC, they have greater control over what they communicate to others, in the sense that senders can construct their messages to portray themselves in preferential ways, emphasizing desirable characteristics and communicating in a manner that invites preferential reactions. As such, these transmitted cues tend to work in favor of the senders as receivers of the message may idealize the sender. Feedback is consequently

understood in a way in which an individual's impression of a communication partner shapes their behavior toward that partner.

### **Dialogic Communication Theory**

Relationship building has become a key component in the practice of organizations' public relations. As a matter of fact, research on organization-public relationships shows that organizations that engage stakeholders and communicate with them regularly build better relationships than those that do not (Ledingham and Bruning 2000). The mutual exchanges that occur between organizations and stakeholders are known as dialogic communication (Wilcox and Cameron 2009). Although organizations now have a far wider range of dialogic, digital communications tools at their disposal (Shin, Pang and Kim 2015), there is still considerable disagreement about the utility of these platforms for meaningful dialogue and their value in maintaining relationships (Tong and Walther 2011). Research has also found that despite their awareness of the importance of online communication in cultivating relationships and a positive organizational image, many organizations are not exploiting the full potential of the new media (Shin, Pang and Kim 2015). The key question therefore remains, pertaining to the type of strategies organizations can adopt to engage in effective conversations with their audiences online.

Dialogic communication also encompasses an organization's efforts to engage in an open, honest and ethical relationship with its publics (Bortree and Seltzer 2009). This provides organizations the opportunity to hear from the public and adapt to the public's needs (Hong, Yang and Rim 2010). An organization's use of dialogic communication has been proven to build relationships with their publics in the same quality as that of an individual's dialogues in

interpersonal relationships. This is because both processes entail interactions that involve trust and aim to develop satisfactory relationships (Taylor, Kent and White 2001). The interactivity of online media can facilitate the quality of organization-public conversations and generate positive outcomes such as increased trust, enhanced product knowledge, and increased profits (Sundar, Xu and Dou 2012).

Dialogic communication plays an important role in developing and enhancing an organization's brand image. Research has revealed that organizations often tend to rely on one-way communication to control what messages are disseminated, and therefore do not truly interact with stakeholders online (Lovejoy, Waters, and Saxton 2012; Shin, Pang, and Kim 2015). In conclusion, it is imperative that organizations learn to talk with their stakeholders instead of talking at them as they co-construct their organizational image (Vernuccio 2014).

### **Uncertainty Reduction Theory**

Rod McKuen, one of America's most popular poets, is credited with saying; "Strangers are just friends waiting to happen (Williamson 2017, para. 15)." In simple terms, this quote implies that everyone or every organization we have ever interacted with in our lifetime, were once strangers to us. This concept is the fundamental rationale for the enormous significance placed on the Uncertainty Reduction Theory, a prominent communication theory propounded by Charles Berger (Griffin, Ledbetter & Sparks 2020). Uncertainty reduction theory has to do with getting an increased knowledge of what kind of person another is, which provides an improved forecast of how a future interaction will turn out. Based on this, the theory focuses on using human communication to gain knowledge and create understanding. Simply said, the more we know about an individual or an organization, the more our uncertainty about them is reduced.



Because thought leadership aims to project an individual's or organization's knowledge and expertise in a particular field, it is undoubtedly proven to be one of the most potent communication vehicles for reducing uncertainty about an individual or an organization. This correlation is directly linked to the findings of the 2019 Edelman-LinkedIn B2B Thought Leadership Impact Study in which almost 60% of business decision makers said that thought leadership directly led to their awarding of business to an organization.

A 2010 article published by Josh Sternberg titled "Mixing Theory with Business", reiterated the fact that today's companies need to constantly communicate to their audiences in the wake of the current technological/information age where every consumer expects to be engaged. In fact, the concept of a broadcast-based communications platform, as we all know, has been upended and companies are learning that they need to speak with, and "not at" their key constituencies. The article also revealed that companies are leveraging the social sphere to engage in the first entry stage of Uncertainty Reduction Theory. They (companies) follow people on Twitter and ask them to join their Facebook page or be a part of their LinkedIn group. The more companies communicate with customers, the more the customer feels at ease with that brand and is more inclined to have brand affinity for that company. This observation is particularly evident in crisis communications where communicating with an organization's audiences is vital.

### **Stages of Organization-Stakeholder Relationship**

Paying critical attention to relationship development models can greatly enhance an organization's online dialogic communication. Guerrero, Anderson and Afifi (2014) propelled three stages of organization-stakeholder relationship as follows: initiating/experimenting,

intensification and integrating/bonding. Each stage is related to both the SIPT and the hyperpersonal model.

In the Initiating/Experimenting stage of a conversation, communicators introduce who they are, and define the need for and the topic of the conversation. Usually at this stage, communicators desire to create favorable first impressions that can help them to achieve the relational goals like affection, credibility, trust or persuasion with their conversation partner. At the same time, the goal of the communication is to reduce uncertainties in the relationship by accumulating information about their conversation partner. In the Intensifying stage of relationship development, there is a deeper exchange of ideas. Guerrero, Anderson and Afifi (2014) identified intensifying as one person getting to know the other better. According to Walther (1993), evidence shows that more affectionate relationships develop when there is more communication between the parties involved. For instance, repeated interactions over time allow individuals to develop more interpersonal impressions. At Stage 3 which is referred to as Integrating or Bonding, a sort of closeness is said to be achieved. In this case, relational partners are willing to disclose more of themselves and have developed a “relational identity” (Guerrero, Anderson and Afifi (2014). In an integrated or bonded relationship, individuals expect future interactions with the same conversation partner, and this anticipated future interaction is important in building closer relationships according to SIPT and the hyperpersonal model.

## **Summary**

This chapter has provided adequate theoretical context on the nature and expectations of thought leadership. The literature review highlighted Andrews University's position as a highly ranked Adventist institution of higher education. Significantly high on the list of theories was the

social information processing theory, an interpersonal CMC theory which plays a crucial role in how brands including HEIs have differentiated themselves to promote their brands on social media. The review of the uncertainty reduction theory and the dialogic communication theory also revealed key insights such as the importance of relationship building in promoting meaningful dialogue between organizations and their stakeholders. I will draw on key insights from this literature review as a basis for the analysis and recommendations I will make.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to determine the state of Andrews University's thought leadership in comparison to other top-ranking Adventist universities. This chapter will highlight the methodology of the research which consists of the following three sections: Selection, Collection and Analysis.

#### **Selection**

The study method will entail a textual analysis which will enable the researcher to analyze "text" within the sample and determine how recommendations from the findings will be framed. Textual analysis is all about language, what it represents and how we use it to make sense of our lives. Language is a basic element of our human interactions, and it is through language that the meanings of our social realities are constructed (Brennen 2018, pg. 203).

A key aspect of the textual analysis method is understanding the concept of a "text." Texts are things that we use to make meaning. Examples include books, films, newspapers, photographs, magazines, websites, video blogs, games, television programs, podcasts, advertisements and popular music. Texts are thought to provide traces of a socially constructed reality, which may be understood by considering the words, concepts, ideas, themes and issues that reside in texts as they are considered within a particular cultural context (Brennen 2018, pg. 204).

Andrews University positions its brand as the flagship institution for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The researcher has therefore determined it appropriate to select the population of the study based on similar religious affiliation. Four other universities will be selected as a comparison benchmark for Andrews University. To ensure a fair process of shortlisting, the

researcher will rely on the list of top-ranking Adventist universities according to the 2021uniRank ranking system. The population of the study will therefore be Loma Linda University, Andrews University, Southern Adventist University, Pacific Union College and Walla Walla University.

With regards to their year of establishment, the five universities have all been in existence for more than 100 years. Out of the five, Andrews University (AU) was the earliest university to be established in 1874, followed by Pacific Union College (PUC) in 1882. Southern Adventist University (SAU) and Walla Walla University (WWU) were both established in 1892, followed lastly by Loma Linda University (LLU) in 1905. There are also noticeable similarities in their mission. Loma Linda University is on a mission to continue the teaching and healing ministry of Jesus Christ, whereas Southern Adventist University's mission is as follows: Grounded in Jesus Christ and dedicated to the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we equip students to embrace biblical truth, embody academic and professional excellence, and pursue spirit-filled lives of service. Andrews University shares a similar mission as follows: Andrews University, a distinctive Seventh-day Adventist institution, transforms its students by educating them to Seek Knowledge and Affirm Faith in order to Change the World. Pacific Union College is a Seventh-day Adventist learning community with a mission of offering an excellent Christ-centered education that prepares its students for productive lives of useful human service and uncompromising personal integrity. Walla Walla University's mission is to act as a community of faith and discovery committed to excellence in thought, generosity in service, beauty in expression and faith in God.

LLU and AU bear similarities in terms of the number of currently enrolled students for the 2020/2021 academic year. AU leads with a total of 4,767 students, which is 253 students

more than LLU which is currently at 4,514. SAU is next with a total of 2,719 students. WWU has 1,737 students and PUC has the least number of students totalling 966 for the same period. On an international diversity score, AU leads once more with its students hailing from a total of 181 countries around the world. Seventy-nine (79) countries are represented in LLU's students whereas only 38 countries are represented in SAU's students. At least 21 countries are represented on the WWU campus whereas PUC has only 11 countries represented.

AU currently offers the most undergraduate programs numbering 94 in total, followed by SAU with 75 undergraduate programs. WWU and PUC have 39 and 23 undergraduate programs respectively, with LLU having the least number of undergraduate programs totalling 20. However, LLU tops the three with 96 graduate programs. AU currently offers 67 graduate programs whereas SAU stands at 10 graduate programs. WWU has only 5 graduate programs on offer and PUC has no graduate programs.

### **Collection**

The researcher will be conducting a textual analysis involving the five above-mentioned institutions: Loma Linda University, Andrews University, Southern Adventist University, Pacific Union College and Walla Walla University. These institutions all currently have LinkedIn pages. To determine how the research question will be answered, it is imperative for the researcher to critically analyze the text found on the LinkedIn social media pages of all five universities. These pages are publicly accessible on the LinkedIn web platform ([www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)).

The text the researcher will collect will be LinkedIn posts consisting of images and videos. With regards to the preferred time frame, the researcher has determined that selecting time periods within 2021 will provide a fair overview of the different types of thought leadership content that were shared by the selected universities. This reasoning is stemming from the fact

that the year 2020 marked peak periods of the COVID-19 pandemic which centered majority of social media conversations on COVID-19. LinkedIn posts that will be selected for analysis will be dated within a six-month period beginning from January 1, 2021 and ending on June 30, 2021.

The researcher will record and categorize LinkedIn posts according to the various types such as images and videos. For each of the categories, the following elements of text will be collected about each LinkedIn post: the content type, period and estimated date of publication, post theme, post description, reactions, comments and a corresponding web link to the respective LinkedIn post. Out of this compilation, the data will be subsequently analyzed.

### **Analysis**

At the data analysis stage, the researcher will seek to analyze only LinkedIn posts with information that can be described as thought leadership content. Drawing from the definition of thought leadership and based largely on the researcher's perception, if the main goal of the post content was to enable the institution to become recognized as an expert and to get patronized as a go-to resource in a particular field, then the researcher will affirm that thought leadership has been achieved. LinkedIn posts of all five institutions will be compared to determine the institution with the most viable thought leadership content.

The theoretical framework that will guide the researcher's data analysis will be social information processing theory, dialogic communication theory and uncertainty reduction theory. As part of the results sharing process, the researcher will articulate the application of the social information processing theory in the content that will be analyzed. The thematic direction of the posts made by the five institutions will be analyzed to confirm if they form part of brand strategies aimed at developing meaningfully differentiated brands to communicate their strengths

in the global arena. Additionally, the researcher will indicate whether HEIs are placing a greater emphasis on improving their marketing strategies through social media to survive in the modern digital era.

The application of the uncertainty reduction theory will be tested in the analysis to ascertain whether LinkedIn posts helped to increase knowledge and create understanding, thereby reducing uncertainty. The analysis will also consider the evidence of dialogic communication. As Wilcox and Cameron (2009) defines dialogic communication as the mutual exchanges that occur between organizations and stakeholders, the number of reactions in the form of comments and reactions will be assessed for each LinkedIn post in order to ascertain if dialogic communication truly occurred.

The researcher intends to complete the data collection process in 5 days, perform data analysis in another 5 days and subsequently make recommendations based on the findings within another 5-day period.



## Chapter 4: Results

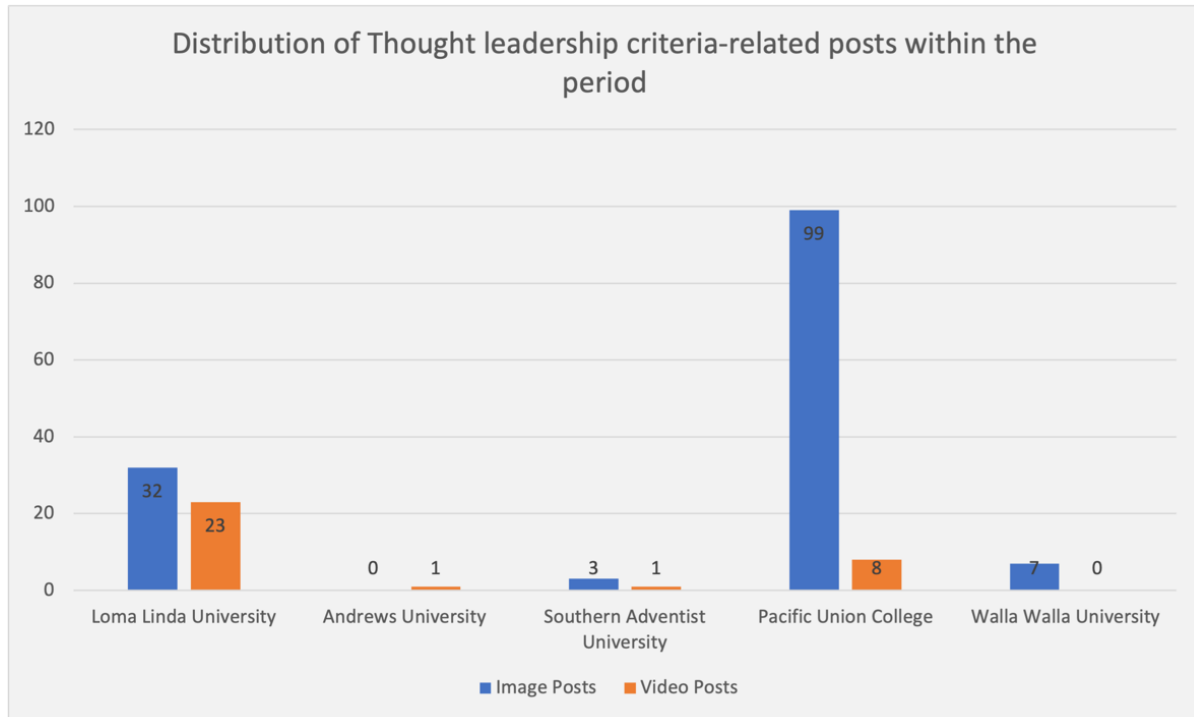
### Distribution of LinkedIn Image and Video Posts

For the period of January to June 2021, the researcher recorded a collective total of 164 image posts and 38 video posts on the LinkedIn pages of Loma Linda University (LLU), Andrews University (AU), Southern Adventist University (SAU), Pacific Union College (PUC) and Walla Walla University (WWU).

As earlier defined, a thought leader refers to an individual or an organization that is recognized as an expert and used as a go-to resource in their field (Riserbato, n.d.). Therefore, in line with the purpose of this textual analysis, the researcher further used the purposive sampling technique to select only LinkedIn posts whose meaning met the criteria of thought leadership. Other LinkedIn posts that were not related to thought leadership were therefore jettisoned.

A majority of the LinkedIn posts under the period of review qualified as thought leadership content. Overall, 141 out of the collective 164 LinkedIn image posts and 33 out of the collective 38 LinkedIn video posts met the thought leadership criteria. For Loma Linda University (LLU), 32 out of its 36 image posts and 23 out of its 24 video posts within the period, were classified as thought leadership content. Andrews University's only video post for the given period, qualified as thought leadership content. This criterion was also evident in 3 out of 4 image posts and the one video post made by Southern Adventist University. Out of Pacific Union College's 110 image posts, 99 met the thought leadership criteria, as well as 8 out of its 11 video posts. For Walla Walla University, 7 out of 14 image posts met the thought leadership criteria. The figure below shows the graphical distribution of image and video posts among the five universities from January 2021 to June 2021.

**Figure 2: Distribution of Thought Leadership-Related LinkedIn Image and Video Posts of the Five Universities from January to June 2021**



### Nature of LinkedIn Image and Video Posts

Posts that are made on the LinkedIn website are usually preceded by a caption which gives brief details about the post. The researcher observed that the messaging tone used in the caption of the LinkedIn image and video posts, was positive and friendly. The general aim of the LinkedIn posts was seen as conveying a powerful meaning about the institution in an effort to build a strong brand image among audiences. The researcher also observed that the nature and themes derived from the various LinkedIn posts provide strong evidence of the application of social information processing theory. The LinkedIn posts gave a lot of information about these HEI brands, which hopefully added to their efforts to increase brand recognition among their various audiences. Findings from this research also support the assumption that audiences who

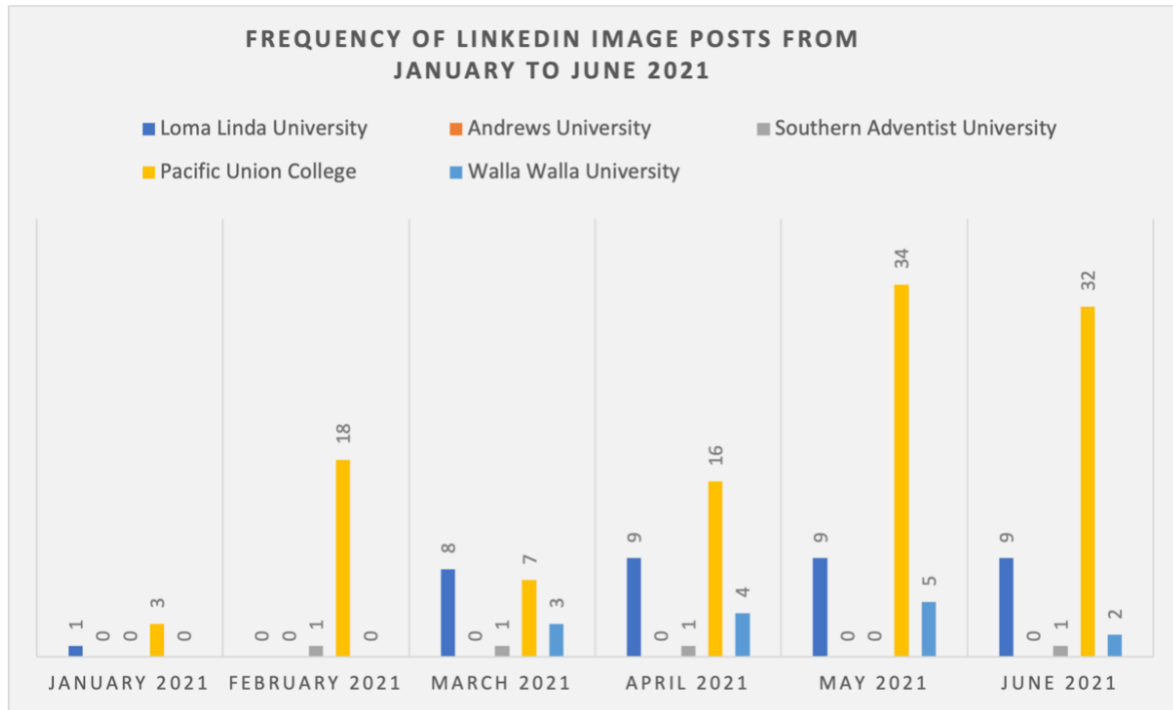
have consistently followed the LinkedIn pages of these institutions are most likely to have reduced uncertainty about the institutions as more information is shared via posts.

### **Frequency of LinkedIn Image Posts**

Figure 3 shows the frequency of image posts made on LinkedIn by the five universities. Andrews University did not have any image posts made within the period of January to June 2021. In January 2021, Pacific Union College (PUC) made three (3) image posts followed by Loma Linda University (LLU) with one (1) image post. The others did not make any LinkedIn image posts for the month of January 2021. In February 2021, PUC led with 18 image posts, SAU made one (1) image post and the remaining universities did not make any image posts. In March 2021, LLU shared 8 image posts, PUC shared 7 image posts, followed by WWU and SAU with 3 image posts and 1 image post respectively. PUC had the most number of image posts for April 2021 totalling 16, followed by LLU with 9. WWU had 4 and SAU had 1 image post. In May 2021, the researcher recorded a total of 34 image posts for PUC, 9 for LLU and 5 for WWU. PUC led in June 2021 with 32 image posts, followed by LLU with 9, WWU with 2 and SAU with 1 image post.

LLU made its higher number of 9 image posts each in the months of April, May and June 2021. PUC on the other hand, made its most image posts of 34 in the month of May 2021, followed closely by 32 image posts in June 2021. WWU recorded 5 image posts in May 2021, its highest within the period.

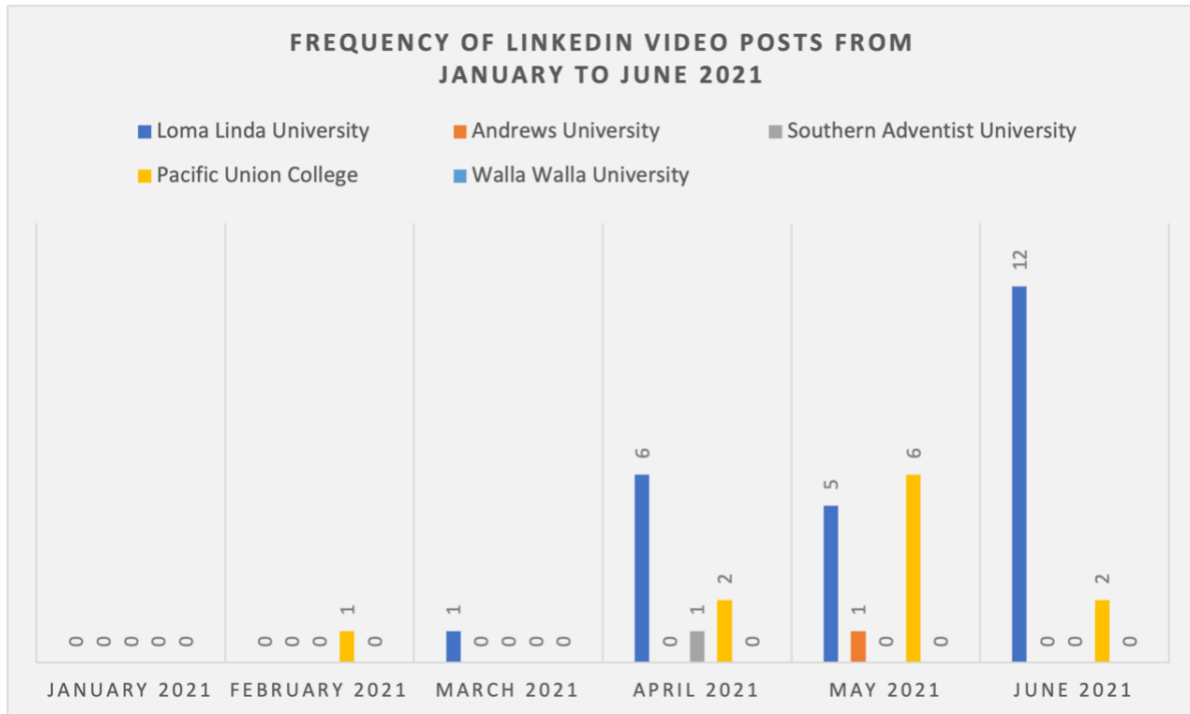
**Figure 3: Frequency of LinkedIn Image Posts of the Five Universities from January to June 2021**



### Frequency of LinkedIn Video Posts

Generally, the institutions made much fewer video posts compared to image posts within the period. LLU made 12 video posts in June 2021, the most number of video posts in a given month. The next highest number was 6 video posts which was recorded for LLU in the month of April 2021 and PUC in the month of May 2021. LLU made 5 video posts in the month of May 2021 whereas PUC made 2 video posts each for April and June 2021. LLU made 1 video post in March 2021 as well as SAU in April 2021 and PUC in February 2021. AU's only LinkedIn post which was a video was made in May 2021.

**Figure 4: Frequency of LinkedIn Video Posts of the Five Universities from January to June 2021**



### Frequency Limitations

The researcher made a few observations with regards to the monthly and weekly frequency of LinkedIn posts. First, LinkedIn only provides an estimated period within which a post is made. Immediately below the name of the university where the profile picture appears, LinkedIn indicates the estimated period of publication with descriptive phases such as “3 months ago” or “1 day ago”. The researcher therefore had to make a retrospective determination of the estimated month of publication for each LinkedIn post. The second observation the researcher made was that, LinkedIn did not provide information of the particular day, date or time a post was made. This made it impossible for the researcher to determine the weekly frequency of all LinkedIn posts.

### **Emerging Themes of LinkedIn Posts**

For each of the LinkedIn image and video posts, the researcher identified a theme which enabled her to decide whether a particular post met the thought leadership criteria or otherwise. Each LinkedIn post has been categorized under its appropriate theme.

Overall, twenty-one (21) themes emerged from the LinkedIn image and video posts of the various institutions. These themes qualify as thought leadership content because they helped in projecting institutional expertise and also promotes these institutions as preferred institutions for higher education. The themes include national or recognized events, people expertise, COVID-19 interventions, scholarships, mental health as well as nutrition and health tips. Others include spirituality, history, student stories, alumni stories, patient stories, men's health, campus/student life, program promotion, career promotion, community care, student projects, brand promotion, grant promotion, diversity, and infrastructure.

The themes have been further described in the table below:

**Table 1: Emerging Themes of the LinkedIn posts of the Five Universities from January to June 2021**

No.	Emerging Themes	Description
Theme 1	National/ Recognized Events	Refers to LinkedIn posts about nationally observed holidays and special events that receive mass attention
Theme 2	People Expertise	Refers to LinkedIn posts about new appointments, activities and achievements of the institution's leadership, faculty and staff
Theme 3	COVID-19 Interventions	Refers to LinkedIn posts about the institution's role in COVID-19 management
Theme 4	Scholarships	Refers to LinkedIn posts about scholarships for students
Theme 5	Mental Health	Refers to LinkedIn posts about mental health awareness and interventions
Theme 6	Nutrition & Health Tips	Refers to LinkedIn posts about healthy nutritional choices and general diet advice
Theme 7	Spirituality	Refers to LinkedIn posts about the Sabbath and the Christian faith
Theme 8	History	Refers to LinkedIn posts about the history of the institution
Theme 9	Student Stories	Refers to LinkedIn posts about the personal stories and achievements of students who are currently attending the institution
Theme 10	Alumni Stories	Refers to LinkedIn posts about the personal stories and achievements of the institution's alumni
Theme 11	Patient Stories	Refers to LinkedIn posts about patient stories (applicable to Loma Linda University Health)**
Theme 12	Men's Health	Refers to LinkedIn posts about helpful health tips for men
Theme 13	Campus / Student Life	Refers to LinkedIn posts about general community living, side attractions and recreational places to hang out
Theme 14	Program promotion	Refers to LinkedIn posts that promote the academic programs on offer
Theme 15	Career Promotion	Refers to LinkedIn posts that call attention to a student's career development
Theme 16	Community Care	Refers to LinkedIn posts that demonstrate the institution's role in caring for its community
Theme 17	Student Projects	Refers to LinkedIn posts that highlight the academic projects of current students such as thesis presentations
Theme 18	Brand Promotion	Refers to LinkedIn posts that projects what the institution stands for or is passionate about as a brand
Theme 19	Grant Promotion	Refers to LinkedIn posts that showcase the institution's available grants
Theme 20	Diversity, Inclusion & Social Justice	Refers to LinkedIn posts that showcase the institution's available grants
Theme 21	Infrastructure	Refers to LinkedIn posts that project new facilities being outdoored by the institution

### **Distribution of Emerging Themes of LinkedIn Posts**

Loma Linda University (LLU) covered 13 out of the 21 themes that emerged in the data. This was the highest number of themes attributed to one institution within the given period. Pacific Union College (PUC) covered 12 out of the 21 themes and Walla Walla University (WWU) and Andrews University (AU) covered 5 themes and 1 theme respectively.

The researcher made some key observations with regards to how emerging themes were distributed among the five universities. For instance, LLU was the only university among the five that focused on themes such as COVID-19 interventions, scholarships, mental health, nutrition, patient stories, and men's health. On the other hand, PUC was the only university among the five that focused on themes such as alumni stories, career promotion, student projects, grant promotion and brand promotion. WWU was the only university among the five that focused on the theme of diversity, equity, inclusion and social justice. There was no one theme that was covered by all five universities. The "student stories" theme was the only theme that was covered by 4 out of 5 universities within the given period.

The table below gives more highlights on the distribution of both LinkedIn image and video posts of the five universities within the given period:



**Table 2: Distribution of Emerging Themes of the LinkedIn posts of the Five Universities from January to June 2021**

Distribution of Emerging Themes of LinkedIn Image & Video Posts						
No.	Identified Themes	Loma Linda University (n)	Andrews University (n)	Southern Adventist University (n)	Pacific Union College (n)	Walla Walla University (n)
Theme 1	National/ Recognized Events	7	N/A	N/A	2	2
Theme 2	People Expertise	9	N/A	2	7	N/A
Theme 3	COVID-19 Interventions	11	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Theme 4	Scholarships	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Theme 5	Mental Health	7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Theme 6	Nutrition & Health Tips	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Theme 7	Spirituality	3	N/A	N/A	21	N/A
Theme 8	History	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Theme 9	Student Stories	1	N/A	1	4	2
Theme 10	Alumni Stories	N/A	N/A	N/A	41	N/A
Theme 11	Patient Stories	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Theme 12	Men's Health	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Theme 13	Campus / Student Life	N/A	N/A	1	3	N/A
Theme 14	Program promotion	1	1	N/A	16	N/A
Theme 15	Career Promotion	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	N/A
Theme 16	Community Care	N/A	N/A	N/A	4	1
Theme 17	Student Projects	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	N/A
Theme 18	Brand Promotion	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	N/A
Theme 19	Grant Promotion	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	N/A
Theme 20	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Social Justice	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1
Theme 21	Infrastructure	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	1
Total number of posts		(55)	(1)	(4)	(107)	(7)

NB: “n” refers to the number of posts of the institution that relate to the emerging theme.

**Distribution of Reactions and Comments on LinkedIn Posts**

Audience on social media normally press reaction buttons to show their liking or support for a post. On LinkedIn, these reactions take one of the following six forms; “Like”, “Celebrate”, “Support”, “Love”, “Insightful” and “Curious”. Audiences also have the option to leave comments under a LinkedIn post that they view. For video posts, LinkedIn typically displays the number of video views in addition to reactions and comments.

The highest number of reactions Loma Linda University (LLU) received on its LinkedIn image posts was 293 reactions. The number of comments per an LLU image post were comparatively lower, with the highest number on a post being 12 comments. With regards to LLU's video posts, the highest records were 1,315 views, 100 reactions and 4 comments. AU's only video post within the period recorded 1,225 views, 25 reactions and no comments. PUC's highest number of reactions and comments on its image posts were 95 reactions and 20 comments respectively. The highest number of views on PUC's video posts was 1,393. The institution's highest number of reactions and comments were 77 reactions and 2 comments respectively. SAU had a record high of 162 reactions and 9 comments on its image posts. It's only video post within the given period topped the charts with as many as 3,549 views, 266 reactions and 32 comments. WWU had 102 reactions as its highest number of reactions on an image post, with 5 comments accounting for its highest number of comments. WWU did not have any video posts within the given period.

Comparing the five institutions, the highest number of comments ever received on a LinkedIn image or video post was 32 comments, which was evident on SAU's only video post within the given period. The next highest was PUC (20), followed by LLU (12), and WWU (5). In comparison to the generally higher number of video views and reactions across the various LinkedIn posts, the researcher generally observed that there wasn't a lot of dialogic communication occurring on the various LinkedIn posts.

Based on the wholistic findings of this study, it is evident that Andrews University's thought leadership communication on LinkedIn was non-existent for the given period. Pacific Union College had the most thought leadership content and therefore ranks highly among the top five over the given period of study.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations**

The findings of the study brought attention to four significant outcomes: (1) Andrews University compares as the least ranked among the top-ranking Adventist universities with regards to its LinkedIn thought leadership communication; (2) there wasn't a lot of dialogic communication at play among the various LinkedIn posts; (3) emerging themes were different for each of the institutions and no single emerging theme was observed across the LinkedIn posts of all five universities; (4) Video posts received higher number of views than reactions and comments ever received on any single image post.

All five Adventist universities currently have an impressive following on their LinkedIn pages which presents enormous thought leadership opportunities for these institutions. Loma Linda University leads with 37,413 followers and 22,477 alumni who follow its LinkedIn page (as at October 24, 2021). Andrews University ranks second with 22,848 followers and 18,733 alumni (as at October 24, 2021). Pacific Union College has 12,782 followers and 15,143 alumni indicated on its LinkedIn page (as at October 24, 2021), whereas there are 12,618 followers and 10,379 alumni on Southern Adventist University's LinkedIn page (as at October 24, 2021). Walla Walla University has the least, with 11,425 followers and 10,404 alumni (as at October 24, 2021).

In light of recommendations, Andrews University will need a deliberate thought leadership communication plan. The plan must be developed from recommendations on LinkedIn's best practices as well as key observations made on the LinkedIn pages of other Adventist universities.

With regards to the frequency of posting on LinkedIn, although the researcher was only able to ascertain the monthly frequency, LeBlanc (2018) shared that it really didn't matter how often an individual or organization posts on its LinkedIn if the content isn't valuable. The general advice however is that the more often a post on valuable content is made, the better. According to the article, the content needs to stand out in the LinkedIn news feed and add value in order to be noticed by an audience. Posted images must be compelling and topics must be relevant and interesting. Instead of focusing on the volume of posts, the article recommends that there should be a focus on the audience and what they find interesting and helpful. Some recommendations for posting quality content with consistency include but are not limited to creating a content calendar and delegating content creation to a dedicated team.

Still on recommendations for posting frequency as well as best days and times to post, Marmer (n.d.) analyzed HubSpot customer data which included 15,000 posts on LinkedIn company pages. This research revealed useful information regarding the recommended frequency of posting on LinkedIn, as well as even the best days and time to post on LinkedIn. The article advises against publishing posts more than 5 times per week as there has been proven research that doing so causes the return on investment to drop substantially. The author further explained that because LinkedIn generally does not want users' feeds to be overwhelmed by posts by the same organization, the platform counteracts the efforts of too much posting frequency. Instead, the suggestion is to share between two and five posts per week on LinkedIn in order to get the maximum value from the platform on the time spent creating the content.

Marmer (n.d.) also shared that LinkedIn posts that are published Mondays, Saturdays and Sundays don't perform as well as post published Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. This was attributed to the fact that audiences are too busy working to check their LinkedIn feeds

on Mondays, and also do not want to think about the “work” platform over the weekend. The article further advised that Tuesdays and Wednesdays were especially good days to publish on LinkedIn. The article also suggested that scheduling LinkedIn posts to go out during business hours was more ideal than posting after 5pm. This was based on the research that the median number of clicks showed a drop off with posts that were published late in the evening.

With regards to recommendations on LinkedIn comments, Bliss (2019) advises both individuals and organizations to consider actively commenting on other LinkedIn posts instead of looking for more audience to leave comments on owned LinkedIn posts. The author explained that “when you comment on a post, not only is the original creator notified that you commented, but LinkedIn takes your comment and inserts it into the feed of your network. It shares with your contacts your comment. Even if you are commenting on someone completely disconnected from your other contacts, LinkedIn will still share your comment and their posts in the feed of your network (para. 7).” The implications include the opportunity of placing the organization, its ideas and its insights in front of a much wider audience that extends far beyond the limits of its own network. Further recommendations from the author on how to give quality comments include crafting comments like a mini-post which adds insights and expands the conversation, tagging the original creator in the comment and avoiding direct pitching or selling of services in this manner.

According to Miller (2017), video is a huge part of the LinkedIn content experience as it's been proven to capture audiences' attention and increase engagement. The article refers to a research from the Financial Times which showed that video is an important strategy for engaging C-suite decision makers and senior influencers, and that LinkedIn was fast becoming one of this group's most trusted sources of video content. When it comes to the ideal number of video views

on LinkedIn, Espirian (2018) recommends that any number over a thousand views is appreciable. The article further noted that video view counts are not displayed until the video has been viewed more than 500 times.

With regards to post themes, the researcher observed that the choice of themes to adopt was mainly based on the key highlights of the particular institution's mission. Considering that Andrews University positions itself as a flagship institution of higher Adventist education, spirituality is one of the key themes the institution can adopt in its thought leadership communication plan. In addition to common themes such as program promotion, career promotion, community care and many others, some other themes that will be highly relevant to Andrews University's mission and direction include but are not limited to student mission trips, alumni stories, seminary students' projects, and international diversity.

The benefits of rolling out an intentional thought leadership communication plan on LinkedIn cannot be overstated. Smith and Watkins (2020) revealed that the platform is the leader among professional social networks, and approximately a quarter of LinkedIn users are millennials who are the fastest-growing user demographic on LinkedIn. This translates into over 80 million millennial profiles on the site. The authors also stated that the growth of LinkedIn with younger and more diverse audiences continues to expand which is demonstrated by the fact that almost half of the users log in to the website daily. Currently with 22,848 followers and 18,733 alumni present on Andrews University's LinkedIn page, the institution will be able to tap into the myriad of thought leadership opportunities that exist, particularly as it pertains to getting the attention and support of a large base of alumni as well as current students, potential students and the general public who follow its LinkedIn page.

## **Summary**

In summary, the purpose of this study was to analyze Andrews University's thought leadership communication on LinkedIn. A research question was therefore formulated as follows: "How does Andrews University's thought leadership on LinkedIn compare with other top-ranking Adventist universities?" Based on the findings of the study, Andrews University needs a deliberate thought leadership communication plan. Following LinkedIn's best practices, the plan must include the recommended timing cadence and frequency of posts, comments strategy, video strategy and a structured classification of appropriate post themes.

## **Maximizing the Use of LinkedIn**

The LinkedIn platform has several resources for higher education marketers such as the executive playbook for university leaders (The Higher Ed Executive's Guide to LinkedIn. (n.d.). The playbook was created to help higher education top leaders to use their voice on LinkedIn to connect more deeply with the people who matter, to stay current as a leader in the higher education industry and to compete more effectively with regards to prospective students, alumni, faculty and peers. Recommendations include building and empowering an institution's academic community through frequent content publication, offering an authentic human face to the school, intentionally ensuring that the profiles of the institution's leaders including faculty are not only up to date but impressively active. For instance, by highlighting the achievements of the institution, as well as its faculty or staff, it can attract prospective students as well as prospective faculty to be affiliated with the institution. By utilizing the Alumni sub-page available on an institution's LinkedIn profile, the institution can activate its students and alumni as effective brand ambassadors in a bid to attract more prospective students.

### **Further Research**

The researcher recommends additional research to be conducted with a focus on assessing and comparing Andrews University's thought leadership communication on other social media platforms.



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