



The utilization of WhatsApp by North West University's Student RAG Community Service in the management of relationships with internal stakeholders

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ABSTRACT

Limited research currently exists on the use of WhatsApp as an internal two-way symmetrical communication platform that can be used to manage relationships between organisations and internal stakeholders. In order to determine how WhatsApp can be used to manage relationships between internal stakeholders, the NWU's student welfare organisation (SRCS) was used as a case study. Students usually serve on the NWU's student-driven community service project, SRCS, for a year only, thus indicating a lack of sufficient relationship management within the structure. This causes the structure to become unstable and unsustainable. The SRCS should thus manage their relationships with internal stakeholders in order to ensure that the structure remains stable and sustainable. Data was gathered through theoretical exploration, observation and content analysis, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. It was concluded that WhatsApp can be used by the SRCS to manage the relationships with their internal stakeholders through the various features and capabilities of WhatsApp, combined with the four relationship management strategies (disclosure, usefulness of information, interactivity and involvement, and dialogue). The use of the relationship management strategies should also lead to the relationship outcomes (trust, control mutuality, commitment, relationship satisfaction), ensuring that the relationship is being successfully managed, which then leads to the sustainability and stability of the SRCS. These results demonstrate that it is the interactive and participatory characteristics of WhatsApp that allow two-way symmetrical communication to take place without much effort. The focus should thus be placed on communicating *strategically* on WhatsApp.

Key terms: Internal communication, North-West University, Qualitative research, Relationship management, Social media, Student RAG Community Service, Two-way symmetrical communication, WhatsApp

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Internal stakeholders are individuals or groups that participate in the operations and management of an organisation (Surbhi, 2015). These groups or individuals include employees, owners and managers of the organisation. Internal stakeholders are often considered one of the most important strategic stakeholders of organisations (Grunig *et al.*, 2002).

The financial and social success of any organisation has always been connected to the effective link between the efforts of both management and internal stakeholders (Steyn *et al.*, 2011:131). Such a link that fosters engagement and participation of internal stakeholders are pivotal to organisational success as they generate many benefits, such as increased productivity, decreased attrition, stronger relationships, connectedness and accountability (Jiang & Men, 2017; Roberts, 2002). This link should be created through internal communication as a catalyst for organisations to reach their goals and objectives, as it enables them to effectively develop organisational structure and culture (Grunig *et al.*, 2002).

Internal communication can be defined as the full series of strategies used by people in an organisation to communicate with each other (Steyn *et al.*, 2011:132). Such communication should make use of internal two-way symmetrical communication that encourages frequent, honest, open, two-way communication between the organisation and its internal stakeholders (Steyn *et al.*, 2011:132; Morsing & Schultz, 2006:326). In today's digital era, internal communication often takes place on social media. According to Neill (2015), more organisations are using social media to communicate internally because of the preferences of the younger generation who grew up in the Web 2.0 era.

The Web 2.0 era refers to an abundance of websites that emphasise user-generated content, ease of use and participatory culture (Blank & Reisdorf, 2012:537). In the Web 2.0 era organisations have realised the power of social media, specifically WhatsApp in recent years, to facilitate two-way symmetrical communication (Abitbol & Lee, 2017:796). The term "social media" is difficult to define. Several definitions of social media have been offered, both within communication and public relations contexts (Lundmark *et al.*, 2016:3; Wakefield & Wakefield, 2016:140; Meikle, 2016; Hunsinger & Senft, 2014; Effing *et al.*, 2011; Kent, 2010), but the lack of a common definition can result in multiple connotations of a concept, making it difficult to create shared understanding to guide research (Carr & Hayes, 2015:5), especially where WhatsApp is concerned.

With this in mind, Kapoor *et al.* (2017:536) propose the following definition for social media: “Social media is made up of various user-driven platforms that facilitate dispersal of compelling content, dialogue creation, and communication to a broader audience. It is essentially a digital space created by the people and for the people and provides an environment that is conducive for interactions and networking to occur at different levels (for instance, personal, professional, business, marketing, political, and societal).”

Social media is thus a set of internet-based applications that are aimed at the promotion of creating and exchanging user-generated content, while establishing new links between the content creators (Luo & Zhang, 2013). WhatsApp is an internet-based application that allows users to send and receive messages, as well as share status updates, images and videos. WhatsApp also connects audiences in a particular way by allowing them to create their own content, communicate and interact directly with each other (Fourie, 2017:40). WhatsApp can thus be regarded as a form of social media, because it is a communication platform supported by technology.

The definition proposed by Kapoor *et al.* (2017:536) will be used throughout this study, as the primary objective of the study is to determine how WhatsApp can be used to manage relationships, something that inherently requires interaction, networking, dialogue and feedback. Over the years, WhatsApp has evolved to information sharing and allows for relationship management practises by allowing previously passive stakeholders the opportunity to become their own creators and senders of information (Cho *et al.*, 2017:54).

WhatsApp also allows internal stakeholders to express their opinions about an organisation and its practises easily (Cho *et al.*, 2017:53). The relevance of internet-based applications such as WhatsApp has increased to such an extent that online actions are now a fundamental part of every organisation’s internal communication strategy (Castelló & Ros, 2012).

Internal communication, and more specifically internal social media, has a range of definitions as well (Ewing *et al.*, 2019). Internal social media can be defined as social networking platforms that a company operates that has restricted access to employees, creating opportunities for employees to connect with each other as well as management (Buettner, 2015). There are two types of social media that can be used in the workplace (Wang & Kobsa, 2009): external social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn, whose original purpose is not work-related, and internal social media platforms, such as Google tools, Microsoft Office suite or cloud services, whose original purpose is productivity and work-based. Weber and Shi (2016) then went on to classify internal social media into two categories. Either the organisation using a third-party designed social media, such as WhatsApp, or their own proprietary social media, a social media

platform that the organisation designed and built themselves specifically for internal communications.

This study thus conceptualises internal social media to include platforms such as WhatsApp, based on the description of WhatsApp in that it allows for users to connect in an internal space.

Keeping the abovementioned factors in mind, this study will focus on internal communications within a university context, specifically the North-West University's Potchefstroom Campus Student RAG (Raise and Give) Community Service. The Student RAG Community Service organisation will be used to illustrate how a platform such as WhatsApp can be utilised in an organisational environment that uses WhatsApp as a primary form of communication. It is thus important to firstly understand this unique structure and the way it functions.

1.2 THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Student RAG Community Service, hereafter referred to as SRCS, is the North-West University Potchefstroom Campus' (henceforth NWU) registered welfare organisation. The SRCS is the largest student-driven organisation in the country and one of the largest of its kind in the world (SRCS, 2019). The SRCS has two components, namely RAG and community service. RAG is the fundraising component of the SRCS, dedicated to ensuring that all the projects run by the SRCS is funded. The second component is the community service component, where students are actively involved in community service.

The SRCS runs 87 projects in the Potchefstroom area, with an estimated 2 500 students who are involved as volunteers (SRCS, 2019). Every week, approximately 4 000 people in the community are reached through several events launched by the volunteers. There is a strong component of engagement and participation and a drive towards the socio-economic development of individuals, groups and ultimately the community as a whole (SRCS, 2019).

As the SRCS is a student-driven organisation, it is dependent on students for its continued survival. Moreover, the SRCS is dependent on the students who form part of the organisation and devote their time to running the organisation. For the purposes of this study, the SRCS will be seen as an organisation on its own, separate from the NWU, with students actively involved in the structure being the internal stakeholders of the SRCS.

By looking closer at the complex structure of the SRCS, the researcher has compiled a basic organogram (see figure 1.1) in order to illustrate the structure.

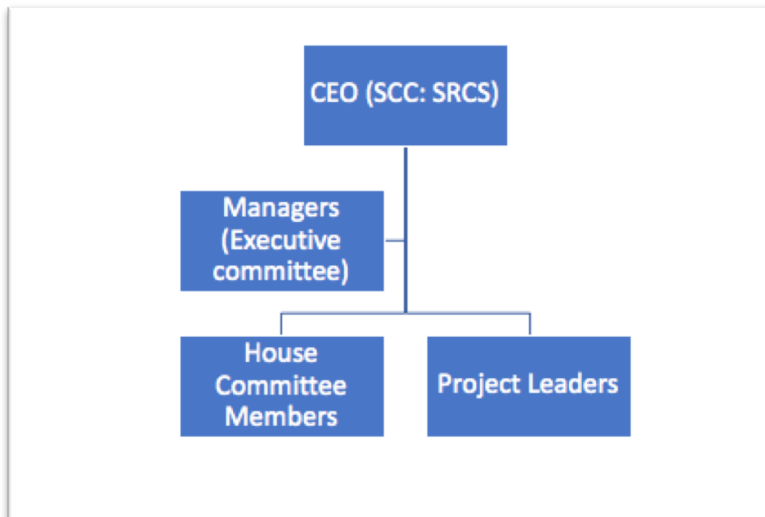


Figure 1.1: The SRCS structure. Source: Researcher

At the top of the structure is the Student Campus Council (SCC) member for SRCS. They are essentially the director of the organisation. Below the SCC member is the Executive Committee (EC), consisting of 13 members with their specific portfolios and responsibilities. These EC members are essentially the managers of the organisation. Beneath the EC members are the House Committee (HC) members. Each of these HC members runs one of the SRCS projects, essentially making them the internal stakeholders of the SRCS.

What is extremely important to note about the SRCS structure is that it constantly changes. New students are elected into the positions of SCC, EC and HC members annually. The individuals within the structure are constantly changing, bringing new ideas and projects with them, but often making the structure itself unstable. Some students leave the structure because they have completed their studies, however, many students who continue with their studies leave the structure as well. Those students who continue with their studies should preferably remain in the structure for a longer period of time. If the SRCS management manages good relationships with their internal stakeholders, they are likely to stay in the structure for longer, ensuring that the structure is sustainable and stable. The sustainability and stability of the structure are crucial to the survival of the SRCS.

In order to achieve sustainability and stability within the structure, the SRCS must be able to reach and communicate with their internal stakeholders. In order to communicate with internal stakeholders in the Web 2.0 era, it is necessary for organisations to set up dedicated spaces on social media, such as WhatsApp groups, with the goal of sharing information with their internal stakeholders (Abitbol & Lee, 2017). The SRCS already makes use of multiple WhatsApp groups to reach the 2500 students involved in their projects, meaning that WhatsApp is their primary form of communication. These WhatsApp groups provide the SRCS with the opportunity to engage

with internal stakeholders to gather feedback and to connect with them for meaningful discussion about the SRCS. Quality internal communication can be seen as two-way symmetrical communication and is thus vital for managing relationships between managers and internal stakeholders, thereby engaging the internal stakeholders in the organisation's priorities (Jiang & Men, 2017).

Engagement of internal stakeholders, through two-way symmetrical communication, is crucial for relationship management which, in turn, is crucial for the survival of the SRCS as an organisation. Internal social media, such as WhatsApp, can be used as a channel to facilitate engagement (Cho *et al.*, 2017:54).

1.3 THEORETICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE

This study takes place within the context of internal communications, which highlights the importance of internal stakeholders to organisations and how organisations such as the SRCS must communicate with internal stakeholders in order to manage relationships to achieve stability and sustainability. This argument will serve as the main motivation of why the study solely focuses on students who are actively involved in the SRCS structure, as they are essentially the internal stakeholders of the SRCS.

According to stakeholder relationship management theory, organisations need to manage relationships with stakeholders that are mutually beneficial to reap the benefits of strong relationships and to maximise the organisation's impact (Jahansoozi, 2007:398). In order for the SRCS to manage the relationships with their internal stakeholders and balance the needs of both the organisation and the stakeholders, there must be strategic two-way symmetrical communication (Heath, 2006:100). Strategic two-way symmetrical communication implies that stakeholders are involved, engaged and make suggestions on organisational matters (Morsing & Schultz, 2006:326). Strategic two-way symmetrical communication is also taken as the central theoretical departure of this study, with the focus on how social media can be used as a two-way symmetrical communication method in order to manage relationships.

Strong relationships can thus be regarded as an outcome of strategic two-way symmetrical communication, seeing that the implementation of two-way symmetrical communication can lead to long-term and mutually beneficial relationships between the organisation and its internal stakeholders (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:160). Hon and Grunig's (1999) relationship management theory and the outcomes of good relationships will be used as a framework for managing relationships, with the six relationship management strategies serving as guidelines for managing stakeholder relationships.

Organisations who communicate effectively with internal stakeholders develop better relationships with their stakeholders. Social media, specifically WhatsApp, has been recognised as an indispensable platform for communication (Bhanot, 2012:49), especially for two-way symmetrical communication. This argument is central to the study, as it serves as justification for the academic study of WhatsApp and how it can be used to communicate to internal stakeholders and manage relationships.

Social media, and by extension WhatsApp, provides a variety of ways for stakeholders to become involved in organisations (Khan, 2017:237; Waters *et al.*, 2009:103). Through interactions with internal stakeholders on WhatsApp, organisations can manage relationships with important publics. Waters *et al.* (2009:103) have developed guidelines for cultivating relationships on social media, specifically Facebook, however these guidelines were adapted to apply to WhatsApp. These guidelines will be used following stakeholder relationship management theory as well as two-way symmetrical communication methods.

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Long-term relationships within organisations should be managed through internal two-way symmetrical communication. Students usually serve on the NWU's student-driven community service project, SRCS, for a year only, thus indicating a lack of sufficient relationship management within the structure. This causes the structure to become unstable and unsustainable. This could be addressed through communication between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders that should include strategic two-way symmetrical communication, which are pivotal to relationship management. These relationships should be managed through WhatsApp, a platform already widely used by the SRCS as their primary form in communicating with their internal stakeholders, to improve the likelihood of their internal stakeholders taking part in the structure for longer than a year, ensuring the sustainability and stability of the structure.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.5.1 General research question

How can WhatsApp be used by the SRCS to manage the relationships with their internal stakeholders?

1.5.2 Specific research questions

- 1.5.2.1 *Which constructs of two-way symmetrical communication can be utilised by the SRCS to manage the relationships between them and their internal stakeholders?*
- 1.5.2.2 *To what relationship management outcomes should the use of two-way symmetrical communication between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders lead?*
- 1.5.2.3 *To what extent does WhatsApp as a platform allow for the utilisation of the two-way symmetrical communication model in managing the relationships between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders?*
- 1.5.2.4 *What are the internal stakeholders of the SRCS's perceptions of the use of WhatsApp as a way to manage the relationships between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders?*
- 1.5.2.5 *What are the SRCS management's perceptions of the use of WhatsApp as a way to manage the relationships between them and their internal stakeholders?*

1.6 RESEARCH AIMS

1.6.1 General research aim

To determine how WhatsApp can be used by the SRCS in order to manage the relationships with their internal stakeholders.

1.6.2 Specific research aims

- 1.6.2.1 *To determine, through theoretical exploration, which constructs of two-way symmetrical communication can be utilised to manage the relationships between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders.*
- 1.6.2.2 *To determine, through theoretical exploration, to which relationship management outcomes the use of two-way symmetrical communication should lead.*
- 1.6.2.3 *To determine, by means of a social media content analysis and observation, to what extent WhatsApp as a platform allows for the utilisation of the two-way symmetrical*

communication model in managing the relationship between SRCS and their internal stakeholders.

1.6.2.4 To determine the internal stakeholders of the SRCS's perceptions of the use of WhatsApp as a way to improve the relationships between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders, by means of focus groups.

1.6.2.5 To determine the SRCS management's perceptions of the use of WhatsApp as a way to manage the relationships between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders is, by means of semi-structured interviews.

1.7 RESEARCH APPROACH

1.7.1 Qualitative approach

This study will follow a qualitative research approach. The qualitative approach to research is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behaviour (Kothari, 2004). Qualitative research is usually purposive (Cochran & Patton, 2002), meaning that participants are selected because they will generate useful data for the study. In this instance, the internal stakeholders of the SRCS were identified as SRCS HC members. This group was selected in order to gain useful data for the study as this group works closely with the SRCS management. Qualitative research will further be used because it offers a deeper insight into issues such as the relationships between internal stakeholders and the SRCS, and their perceptions of and engagement with the SRCS.

Qualitative research is based on methods of data generation that are both flexible and sensitive to the social context in which data is produced, rather than rigidly structured. Qualitative research aims to produce holistic and contextual understandings on the basis of rich and detailed data (Mason, 2002:3). It is therefore highly valuable and important that qualitative research should be: systematically and rigorously conducted, accountable for its quality and claims, strategically conducted yet flexible and contextual, and able to produce explanations or arguments rather than claiming to offer mere descriptions (Mason, 2002:8). In the context of this study, using a flexible and contextual method of research should allow the researcher to gain deeper insight into the perceptions of the internal stakeholders of the SRCS. The flexibility should allow the researcher to explore different concepts and ensure that detailed data is collected.

The following assumptions can therefore be made about qualitative research (Du Plooy, 2009:35) and should be considered when researching the SRCS:

- reality is subjective;

- insights into communication, as part of the social world, can be derived from the participants' perspective;
- the research process is essentially based on inductive reasoning, which is used to understand patterns in observation;
- research questions can guide the types of observations to be made; and
- observations can be analysed thematically and holistically within contexts of relationships (Du Plooy, 2009:35).

These assumptions are important for the researcher to keep in mind because qualitative research will be used in this study in order to answer questions about the “what”, “how” or “why” of the phenomena, instead of the “how many” or “how much”, which are answered by quantitative methods. Qualitative research will be used in order to reveal the meaning that informs the action, producing descriptive data that must be interpreted using systematic methods of coding, transcribing and analysis of trends and themes (Crossman, 2018).

1.8 RESEARCH METHODS

1.8.1 Literature study

The literature study focused on how the SRCS should use WhatsApp to manage relationships with their internal stakeholders through two-way symmetrical communication. The theories that were discussed in the study include the stakeholder theory, the two-way symmetrical communication model, relationship management theories as well as stakeholder information, response and involvement initiative strategies and internal communication methods.

Searches have been done on Google Scholar, the NWU Potchefstroom Campus Ferdinand Postma Library database, the National ETD portal, EBSCOhost, Nexus and Science Direct in order to gather sources. There is already existing research on social media, the importance of relationships with stakeholders and two-way symmetrical communication (Ewing *et al.*, 2019; Byuna & Oh, 2018; Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018; Uzunoğlu *et al.*, 2017; Abitbol & Lee, 2017; Cho *et al.*, 2017; Harris, 2007). These studies are used as main resources to support this study. No significant research has been done on using WhatsApp as an internal two-way symmetrical communication method to engage with the students of the NWU Potchefstroom Campus about SRCS initiatives. However, MA and PhD studies have been done on managing relationships through social media (Pressly, 2016; Steenkamp, 2015; McCorkindale *et al.*, 2013). These studies are used as a departure point for this study.

1.8.2 Content analysis

Content analysis is a research technique used to make valid inferences by interpreting and coding textual material. By systematically evaluating texts (such as statistics), qualitative data can be converted into quantitative data (Duriau *et al.*, 2007). A content analysis has been done on the WhatsApp groups that the SCC: SRCS use in order to communicate with their internal stakeholders.

WhatsApp has become a vital part of today's social life. WhatsApp allows organisations to engage with their internal stakeholders (Lai & To, 2015:138). The rapidly increasing amount of information and stakeholder perceptions of an organisation has a considerable effect on the relationships with said organisation. The interactive nature of WhatsApp gives the researcher the opportunity to explore how the SRCS and their internal stakeholders appropriate these applications and how WhatsApp shapes the relationships between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders (Parker *et al.*, 2011).

Used as a research method, content analysis has several advantages. It provides profound insight into a situation that is not limited by existing viewpoints or methodologies, thus allowing new theories on the topic to be discovered (Lai & To, 2015:140).

Traditionally, content analysis involves the following steps (Lai & To, 2015:140): (1) selecting a topic, (2) deciding on the sample, (3) defining concepts or units to be counted, (4) constructing categories, (5) creating coding forms, (6) training coders, (7) collecting data, (8) determining inter-coder reliability, (9) analysing data, and (10) reporting results. Traditional content analysis involves human subjective interpretation. Thus, the classification procedure should be reliable to ensure consistency among different coders and the same coders over time (Lai & To, 2015:140).

The content analysis has been done on the SRCS's WhatsApp usage and posts from the start of the new SCC term in August 2019 to the middle of the term in March 2020. The researcher was added to the WhatsApp group of the SRCS' internal stakeholders, namely the HC members. The researcher did not post any messages on the groups, but simply observed the communication taking place between the SRCS and the internal stakeholders.

However, this raised certain ethical questions, such as participants who cannot give informed consent and whose privacy may be violated. In order to ensure that the study remains ethical, no personal information, such as the names and numbers of internal stakeholders and the SRCS management, has been shared or used in the study in order to maintain privacy. The researcher did not influence the environment in any way by making comments on the group. Obtaining consent could heavily influence the way in which the SRCS and their internal stakeholders

communicate with each other and could lead to the true nature of the communication not being studied, which leads to false results for this study.

1.8.3 Focus groups

Focus groups are defined as a group discussion organised to explore a specific set of issues, such as the views and experiences of certain groups (Kitzinger, 1994:103). The purpose of focus groups is to collect rich and detailed data. Focus groups generally consist of a one-time meeting of groups who have a common experience (Carey and Asbury, 2016), such as with the SRCS.

Focus groups are best suited to environments or groups in which the participants are knowledgeable, willing and capable of communicating. Focus groups are planned to capitalise on the interaction among participants. This approach, like most qualitative methods, is useful for exploring new topics (Carey and Asbury, 2016), such as the use of WhatsApp as an internal communication social media.

There are many advantages to using focus groups as a research method. Focus groups provide insights into attitudes and beliefs that underlie behaviour by providing context and perspective that allows for a better understanding of the experience (Carey and Asbury, 2016). This method allows for complex issues to be explored by providing richer data. This study aims to determine the internal stakeholders of the SRCS's perceptions of the use of WhatsApp. As the internal stakeholders of the SRCS all have specialised knowledge regarding the SRCS and the way in which it functions, focus groups were the ideal research method in order to determine how and why WhatsApp is being used.

The aim of the focus groups was thus to gather the internal stakeholders' perceptions of the communication between them and the SRCS. The researcher conducted four focus groups with HC members. The number of focus groups can be adjusted if the information gathered in the focus groups becomes repetitive. HC members are members who have been elected by their residences to run projects launched by the SRCS. There are 28 members in total, 14 male and 14 female. The focus group participants were drawn from these 28 HC members. The researcher contacted the possible participants individually via email. The researcher explained the essence of the study and asked for willing participants. No personal information of the participants was shared.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak that started in South Africa in late March, the researcher conducted focus groups and interviews via Zoom. If and when allowed by law, the researcher also conducted focus groups and interviews in person at the NWU Potchefstroom Student Campus Council Offices. For both the interviews and the focus groups, social distancing of 1.5

metres was maintained at all times and there was no physical contact. The researcher and participants wore masks and hand sanitiser was used before and after the interviews and focus groups.

1.8.4 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perceptions of a particular idea, programme or situation (Boyce & Neale, 2006). The semi-structured interview was used to provide context to the data obtained from the content analysis and the focus groups, offering a more holistic picture of what happened and why. The primary advantage of semi-structured interviews is that they provide detailed information (Boyce & Neale, 2006) and context.

Du Plooy (2009:198) explains that partially or semi-structured interviews allow a researcher to interact with a participant on a standardised set of questions and/or a list of topics, while also allowing them to easily deviate from preconceived themes as and when participants elaborate on replies or introduce new themes or responses. This insider perspective gained from the semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to understand the SRCS management's perceptions of communicating internally with their internal stakeholders.

The SRCS has 12 EC members and one Chairperson. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Chairperson (participant A) and the Vice-chairperson (participant B), both of whom are responsible for communication. The chairperson plays a more executive role, often giving instructions on the communication that needs to be sent out, while the vice-chairperson has a more technical role, creating and disseminating the communication. As internal actors, these particular individuals elicited insider information on how the theoretical constructions of two-way symmetrical communication, internal communication and social media are implemented, experienced and practised by the SRCS. The interview with the Chairperson will lead to a more in-depth understanding of how the SRCS functions within the NWU and what his/her intent is surrounding their communication.

The data analysis of the semi-structured interview followed the steps set out by Creswell and Poth (2010:172):

- The data was organised by transcribing the interview and typing the field notes;
- The interview was read through in order to understand all the information provided and first-stage coding will commence;
- The coding process allowed for the identification of themes and determined which answer matches which construct; and

- Finally, the data was interpreted against the study's theoretical framework.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study was approved (see annexure A) by the Arts Research Ethics Committee of the NWU (NWU-01021-20-A7). A number of ethical considerations apply to this study, as the proposed study must adhere to the NWU's official ethical clearance policy and procedures. After securing permission from the SRCS Chairperson to conduct the study, all participants in the semi-structured interviews gave informed and written consent to participate in the study. As all participants of the semi-structured interview can be identified by their functional positions on the EC, their anonymity cannot be guaranteed. However, all data was treated with the utmost sensitivity. The participants in the content analysis gave written consent to use their conversations on the group after the time period of analysis passed. Messages sent by participants who did not want to be included were omitted from the study.

From the start, all participants of the focus groups were fully informed of the purpose of the project and the research that is being conducted. They were informed of the nature of the study, the role of the participants, the identity of the researcher, the objectives of the research and how the findings will be used. They were also informed that participation is not compulsory, and that no one will be coerced, forced or bribed in order to participate. All participants were informed that their identities will be kept confidential and that they will be free to withdraw from the research anytime during the process.

The ethical considerations of conducting a content analysis on the SRCS' WhatsApp groups has already been touched on above (1.8.2) but will be reiterated. In order to ensure that the content analysis remains ethical, no personal information, such as the names and numbers of internal stakeholders and the SRCS management, were shared or used in the study in order to maintain privacy. The researcher did not influence the environment in any way by making comments on the group. Obtaining consent before the fact could have heavily influenced the way in which the SRCS and their internal stakeholders communicate with each other and could have led to the true nature of the communication not being studied, which could have led to false results for this study. Thus, permission to use the content analysis was obtained after the fact.

The anonymity of the participants in the focus groups was guaranteed, as their identity was not important to the research. The data collected from the focus groups and semi-structured interviews is only available to the researcher and study supervisor. Interview and focus groups recordings, transcripts and coding information is kept secure and only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the data, transcriptions, audio and field notes.

Another ethical concern was the researcher's own involvement in student life activities at the NWU. While not in any way directly involved with the SRCS, the researcher is well-known within student structures. This had both advantages and disadvantages. A disadvantage being that because the researcher is known, participants were uncomfortable speaking to the researcher. However, the opposite also applied, meaning that participants were more comfortable with the researcher because the researcher is known. To ensure that participants were comfortable, the researcher stated explicitly that the data recorded will only be used for the research purposes of this study and will not be shared with the SRCS or any other student life participant.

1.10 LIMITATIONS

This study is only being done on students of the NWU Potchefstroom Campus who are part of the SRCS structure. That limits the study to one campus of the NWU only and the findings may not apply to the other campuses. The findings of the study can also not apply to similar student-run organisations on the NWU Potchefstroom Campus, as the study is solely focused on the SRCS.

1.11 CONTRIBUTIONS

This study's contribution is strongly positioned in the field of internal communication and two-way symmetrical communication. At this time, the researcher couldn't find any studies that have been done on the use of WhatsApp as an internal communication platform for two-way symmetrical communication, meaning that this study will contribute to literature on how WhatsApp as a social media can be used to manage relationships with internal stakeholders of an organisation. This will be accomplished by providing literature on how to utilise WhatsApp and practically applying it to the SRCS in order to develop a conceptual framework for the utilisation of WhatsApp as an internal communication platform.

1.12 PROVISIONAL CHAPTER LAYOUT

Chapter 1: Introduction, context and background

This chapter focused on the introduction, context and background of the study. This chapter also determined the problem statement, research questions and research aims.

Chapter 2: Literature study

The literature study will aim to examine the existing literature in order to determine the constructs and concepts that will be used in this study.

Chapter 3: Discussion of research methods

The various research methods used, namely qualitative content analysis, focus groups and semi-structured interviews will be discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Discussion of results

The results of the various research methods will be discussed in this chapter in order to answer the research questions.

Chapter 5: Conclusions of research

In this chapter the conclusions of the research will be drawn, and the research questions will be answered.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Students usually serve on the NWU's student-driven community service project, SRCS, for a year only, thus indicating a lack of sufficient relationship management within the structure. This causes the structure to become unstable and unsustainable. Communication between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders should include strategic two-way symmetrical communication, which is pivotal to relationship management. With the main problem statement now contextualised (1.4), this chapter will focus on strategic internal two-way symmetrical communication and how it can be used to manage relationships with internal stakeholders. There will also be an in-depth look at how WhatsApp can be used to manage relationships through two-way symmetrical communication between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders. This chapter will aim to answer the first and second specific research questions of this study (see 1.5.2.1 and 15.2.1).

The first specific research question (**Which constructs of two-way symmetrical communication can be utilised by the SRCS to manage the relationships between them and their internal stakeholders?**) will be answered through the discussion on relationship management strategies, the dialogic loop and relationship management through social media (2.5). The second specific research question (**To which relationship management outcomes should the use of two-way symmetrical communication between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders lead?**) will be answered through the discussion on the relationship management outcomes (2.6).

In order to understand the relationship between management and employees, and how two-way symmetrical communication could be utilised, it is necessary to first understand the concept of internal communication. This chapter will discuss the relevant facets of internal communication and how it can be applied to organisations strategically in order to manage relationships with employees to ensure that the SRCS remains sustainable and stable.

Stakeholder relationship management theory will also be discussed, as well as relationship outcomes and strategies as the guideline for managing such relationships. It is also imperative that the outcomes and strategies of relationships are applied to WhatsApp, as the SRCS should manage relationships that lead to a certain outcome, which is why the study will specifically focus on the guidelines for cultivating relationships through two-way symmetrical communication on social media. Social media theory will be discussed in order to explain the features and uses of WhatsApp and how those features and uses can be applied to theory. Due to the literature on the

use of WhatsApp being very limited, this chapter will draw from social media theory in order to broaden the literature on WhatsApp.

The theoretical constructs of two-way symmetrical communication will be identified and evaluated as to how it could contribute to managing relationships with internal stakeholders through WhatsApp. Through strong relationships with internal stakeholders, these stakeholders become more engaged in an organisation (Reyneke, 2013:22). Engaged internal stakeholders is one of the benefits of internal communication, and this chapter will demonstrate how WhatsApp can be used as a two-way symmetrical communication channel to improve engagement.

This chapter will also aim to integrate all of the abovementioned theories and constructs in order to create a strategic conceptual framework that can be used as guideline by the SRCS to manage relationships with their internal stakeholders, with the outcome being that those internal stakeholders remain committed to the organisation for a longer period of time.

2.2 UNDERSTANDING INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Internal communication can be seen as one of the facets of organisational communication (Van Riel, 1995) and it is therefore necessary to firstly explain organisational communication in order to establish context. Organisational communication can be described as the process through which information is exchanged between two or more parties in order to bring about change in an organisation (Burger, 2018:28). The case with the SRCS is not necessarily that changes are made in the organisation, but that the management of the organisation changes yearly. Organisational communication, in this case, should not be seen as purely information exchange, but also as a procuring loop of the exchange of knowledge and skills (Burger, 2018:28).

This loop of information, knowledge and skills not only takes place between an organisation and its external stakeholders, but also between an organisation and its internal stakeholders. This is especially important for the SRCS, as the transfer of knowledge and skills ensures that when management changes, the new management will have the same knowledge and skills to ensure sustainability and stability. The communication that takes place in an organisation between the organisation and its internal stakeholders is thus known as internal communication.

Internal communication happens within organisations constantly and includes formal as well as informal communication (Welch & Jackson 2007:178). It is important to be aware that there are many alternative terms and keywords associated with internal communication, such as internal relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), employee communication (Argenti, 1996), employee relations (Quirke, 2000) and staff communication (Stone, 1995). This study makes use of the term internal communication and defines it as two-way symmetrical communication (see 2.4) between the

organisation's management and internal stakeholders (Dolphin, 2005:174). Internal communication could assist the internal stakeholders in understanding how the organisation functions and including internal stakeholders in the decisions being made by management (Burger, 2018:29).

It is essential for management to keep their internal stakeholders informed about decisions in the organisation and to encourage them to support the organisational strategy (Bull and Brown, 2012:136). It is therefore important for the SRCS management to keep their internal stakeholders informed about how the organisation functions, as this encourages internal stakeholders to support the organisation and to be actively involved in the organisation and the decision-making process. Strategic two-way symmetrical communication with internal stakeholders is thus very important to ensure that those internal stakeholders buy into the organisation, which can lead to various positive outcomes as discussed below.

Management's communication with their internal stakeholders can lead to various positive outcomes for the organisation. Communication with internal stakeholders can motivate them to provide better service to customers (Lowenstein, 2006) and enhance their skills and knowledge about the organisation, which turns them into organisational advocates (Gronstedt, 2000). Internal communication also enhances productivity and profitability, and informal communication with internal stakeholders leads to a greater level of trust and engagement in the organisation (Mishra *et al.*, 2014:184). However, if internal stakeholders are not well-informed and information hasn't been shared with them, it may lead to a variety of problems for organisations.

A variety of problems can be caused by ineffective internal communication, such as misunderstandings, lack of consensus, differences in opinion and disagreements (Voinea *et al.*, 2015:172). Misinformed internal stakeholders can lead to a decline in not only their productivity, but also their welfare, health, morale, efficiency and willingness to stay within the organisation (Ajala, 2012:142). Ineffective communication can further lead to management structures or functions that cannot be operationalised, which leads to organisational goals not being met (Burger, 2018:30).

As is the case with the SRCS, if internal stakeholders have not received enough communication about how the structure functions, what is expected of them, or they do not have a good relationship with management, the structure may end up failing when the time comes for management to change. Communication failures are always present, but can be minimised by implementing more effective ways of communication (Voinea *et al.*, 2015:173). When communicating internally, it is thus important for the SRCS management to keep certain goals in mind. By setting goals for internal communication, thereby ensuring that strategic internal

communication is taking pace, the SRCS management can communicate to their internal stakeholders more effectively which, in turn, can lead to more positive outcomes while eliminating problems caused by ineffective communication.

Strategic internal communication between management and internal stakeholders is also vital for strengthening relationships between the two parties, with stronger relationships leading to higher levels of satisfaction, citizenship, behaviour and performance for managers and internal stakeholders alike (Den Hartog *et al.*, 2012:1638). In the context of this study, internal communication implies two-way symmetrical communication between the SRCS management and the students who run the various projects (see figure 1.1), thus, the internal stakeholders. Internal stakeholders are an important part of any organisation, which is why it is important to communicate effectively with those internal stakeholders. This study will therefore focus on strategic two-way symmetrical internal communication that reflects the SRCS's ability to manage relationships with internal stakeholders (student members of the SRCS) through stakeholder relationship management on an internal social media such as WhatsApp, in order to ensure the sustainability and stability of the structure.

2.3 SOCIAL MEDIA WITHIN INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Today's workplace is becoming more technologically advanced, especially since first-generation employees who have grown up in the digital era are entering the workplace (Ewing *et al.*, 2019:1). The growing incorporation of social media in organisations leads to the reshaping of internal communications in order to improve corporate relationships and foster employee engagement (Ewing *et al.*, 2019:1). According to Neill (2015), more organisations are using social media because of the changing preferences of the younger generation, which makes social media an ideal platform for students to use in their communications.

The younger generation, or Millennials and Generation Z (terms used to define the generations that are most comfortable using digital technology and social media), prefer mobile devices and want to receive information when and where it's convenient for them (Neill, 2015:2). Organisations must cater to the preferences of their employees, especially with their internal communication. Internal communication has already been defined (2.2) and not only serves the purpose of sharing information with internal stakeholders, but also facilitates engagement with them in order to achieve organisational goals such as increased reputation, engagement and enhanced relationships (Mishra *et al.*, 2014:184). The new preferences of internal stakeholders and the rise of social media has given organisations the opportunity to make use of their own internal social media in order to foster engagement and manage relationships with their internal stakeholders.

There is a wide range of literature that defines internal social media (Ewing *et al.*, 2019). Internal social media can be seen as a social networking platform that an organisation uses that has restricted access to employees, thus creating opportunities for connecting employees (Buettner, 2015:1820). Social media platforms can also be defined as web-based services that allow internal stakeholders to construct public or semi-public profiles within a bound system, view a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and browse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007:211). The type of social media used in the workplace is known as enterprise social networks (Wang & Kobsa, 2009).

These enterprise social networks can be categorised into two forms: either the organisation using a third-party designed social media or an organisation's own proprietary social media (Weber & Shi, 2016:2). These social media platforms can range from Facebook and LinkedIn to the organisation's own intranet or WhatsApp groups. Internal social media platforms should offer internal stakeholders the possibility to set up a personal profile and communicate with other internal stakeholders (Haddud *et al.*, 2016:4). In addition to the aforesaid, internal social media platforms should also allow internal stakeholders to do the following (Leonardi *et al.*, 2013:15):

- Communicate messages to specific internal stakeholders or send a broadcast to all internal stakeholders;
- Explicitly indicate or implicitly reveal particular internal stakeholder as communication partners;
- Post, edit and sort text and files linked to themselves or others;
- View the messages, connections, text and files communicated, posted, edited and sorted by anyone else in the organisation at any time of their choosing.

These aspects of internal social media should be taken into account when using WhatsApp as an internal social media platform. This will be discussed further later in the chapter.

When using any form of internal social media, organisations should not only take its features into account, but also the challenges involved. There are a variety of challenges linked to internal social media, such as security and privacy risks for organisations and their internal stakeholders. It is also argued that concerns about privacy, as well as perceived usefulness and ease of use, can negatively impact the intentions to use internal social media. (Andriole, 2010., Buettner 2015., Ewing *et al.*, 2019).

However, recent research into internal social media suggests that organisations can also benefit in many ways when they use internal social media platforms (Ewing *et al.*, 2019). Internal social media can facilitate dialogue across a multitude of departments, which creates two-way symmetrical communication in the organisation. Internal social media can also facilitate strategic

interactions between management and internal stakeholders, meaning that it can strengthen ties between these two parties which, in turn, strengthens their relationships (Ewing *et al.*, 2019., Robertson & Kee, 2017., Huang *et al.*, 2015). It is thus imperative for internal communication to be two-way symmetrical to facilitate dialogue and to manage relationships.

2.3.1 WhatsApp as an internal communication medium

As established (1.1), the term “social media” is difficult to define. Several definitions of social media have been offered, both within communication and public relations contexts (Lundmark *et al.*, 2016:3; Wakefield & Wakefield, 2016:140; Meikle, 2016; Hunsinger & Senft, 2014; Effing *et al.*, 2011; Kent, 2010), but the lack of a common definition can result in multiple connotations of a concept, making it difficult to create shared understanding to guide research (Carr & Hayes, 2015:5), especially where WhatsApp is concerned. However, it is important to note that a single definition for the constantly changing landscape of social media can be constricting, even possibly limiting research into newer platforms.

With this in mind, Kapoor *et al.* (2017:536) propose the following definition for social media: “Social media is made up of various user-driven platforms that facilitate dispersal of compelling content, dialogue creation, and communication to a broader audience. It is essentially a digital space created by the people and for the people and provides an environment that is conducive for interactions and networking to occur at different levels (for instance, personal, professional, business, marketing, political, and societal).”

The definition provided by Kapoor *et al.* (2017:536) can be applied to WhatsApp. WhatsApp is one of the largest social platforms in the world, with over 1 billion people using the platform (WhatsApp, 2019). WhatsApp was founded by Jan Koum and Brian Acton and was originally intended to be an alternative to SMS. The company was bought by Facebook in 2014, but continues to operate as a separate application. WhatsApp is largely user-driven, with a strong focus on creating dialogue through the chat interactions. WhatsApp is a digital space where networking and interaction can take place on multiple levels, and it is often used for both business and personal communication (Dove, 2020).

While WhatsApp is easy to use, there are many issues associated with WhatsApp usage (Atalla *et al.*, 2020:57). WhatsApp has been known to have some privacy issues, such as allowing users to see when messages are delivered and read, and the last time of access. However, users have the option of privacy settings. Another concern would be the number of incoming messages. These messages may become overwhelming, causing users to lose information or switch their

phones to silent, which may hinder effective communication. The platform also requires an internet connection and a smartphone, which may be difficult in certain locations (Davis, 2017).

Apart from these issues, WhatsApp's main characteristic that is relevant to two-way symmetrical communication (see 2.4) is that the "audience" (in this case the internal stakeholders of the SRCS) plays an active role in spreading content by sharing, commenting or liking posts made by the organisation. WhatsApp actively involves audiences, such as the internal stakeholders, in co-creating content, empowering them and making them an integral part of the success of any organisation (Fuchs, 2017:66). The involvement of internal stakeholders in co-creation on WhatsApp ties in with two-way symmetrical communication and can be considered one of the most important characteristics of managing relationships.

Co-creation is an essential part of today's participatory culture. It has already been established that the younger generation (2.3) prefers to use platforms that allow them to interact and engage with organisations. This is essentially participatory culture. Participatory culture is a culture in which stakeholders are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content for organisations, which is also known as user-generated content (Jenkins *et al.*, 2006:331). Participatory culture can thus be seen as an important aspect of two-way symmetrical communication online. Two-way symmetrical communication online should include the opportunity for internal stakeholders to contribute to the organisation's goals (Kim *et al.*, 2013:198), and when stakeholders are invited to participate in content creation they essentially contribute to organisational goals and become more involved in the organisation. WhatsApp has introduced a myriad of features over the years that make the application easier to use, and that offers opportunities for user-generated content and participation. WhatsApp allows users:

- To send direct messages to any contact, through end-to-end encryption that makes the messages secure
- To participate in group video and voice calls
- Group chats with up to 256 people, with added features such as:
 - Mentioning a specific person in a message that makes it easier to catch up on messages
 - Description of groups
 - Search feature to find anyone in the group
- Set a WhatsApp status (similar to the Instagram Story feature)
- Set privacy settings for statuses and messages
- The ability to delete and resend messages (similar to Gmail's retract feature)

- Send offline messages
- Share photos and documents (such as PDF, Word, PowerPoint, Excel, etc.)
- The ability to quote messages for clearer replies on specific messages
- Auto-sorted links, documents and media
- Starred messages, allowing users to save messages and access them later
- Custom notifications for certain groups or people

WhatsApp can thus be used by the SRCS to communicate messages to their specific internal stakeholders or send a broadcast to all internal stakeholders via the group chat function, making it an ideal internal communication platform and the ideal platform to further engagement and participation. Through WhatsApp's "mentioning" ability, it can be explicitly stated which internal stakeholders are communication partners by mentioning them directly, or directly posting messages for the entire group of internal stakeholders to read. However, the number of messages sent could prompt internal stakeholders to silence their phones or information could get lost.

WhatsApp also allows both the SRCS and internal stakeholders to post, edit and sort text and files linked to themselves or others; and view the messages, connections, text and files communicated, posted, edited and sorted by anyone else in the organisation on the app at any time of their choosing. This may lead to some security concerns; however, WhatsApp does allow users to review their security settings.

Essentially, WhatsApp with its user-generated content encourages the internal stakeholders of the SRCS to articulate their opinions and concerns, share alternative views and foster a culture of learning, participation and collaboration (Men & Bowen, 2017), which is critical to empowering internal stakeholders and engendering engagement. WhatsApp can therefore be used to engage internal stakeholders, with management benefitting from its two-way, conversational and communal features (Ewing *et al.*, 2019).

The interactive and participatory characteristics of WhatsApp can allow internal stakeholders to easily engage with organisations in a more direct and mutual manner, revealing certain internal stakeholders as communication partners (Leonardi *et al.*, 2013:15). Theoretically, WhatsApp could be an ideal platform for the SRCS to use in order to create a culture of engagement according to the principles of two-way symmetrical communication.

2.4 INTERNAL TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL COMMUNICATION

The two-way symmetrical model of communication as described by Grunig's excellence theory is focused primarily on making sure that the decisions made by organisations are mutually beneficial between itself and its stakeholders (Kim *et al.*, 2013:198). The goal of the two-way symmetrical model of communications in internal communication is one that embraces negotiation between the organisation and its internal stakeholders, and one that promotes mutual understanding. The overall goal of creating mutual understanding through internal two-way symmetrical communication can be much more satisfactory for internal stakeholders. Mutual understanding is created when organisations and internal stakeholders not only exchange information, but ideas and opportunities to contribute to the organisation's goals (Kim *et al.*, 2013:198). WhatsApp can be considered an ideal platform to use in order to create mutual understanding, as both the organisation and their internal stakeholders can exchange information, ideas and opportunities on WhatsApp.

However, if an internal stakeholder is controlled or feels inferior to an organisation, they will not develop trust, and they are likely to withdraw from the relationship completely (Kim *et al.*, 2013:198). It is therefore imperative that organisations create a sense of open communication with their internal stakeholders by providing them with useful information. Useful information can be provided through WhatsApp, ensuring that all internal stakeholders receive the correct information through the group chat function. Providing internal stakeholders with useful information builds trust and commitment through the two-way symmetrical model (Kim *et al.*, 2013:198). Organisations should also try to shape and maintain long-term, mutually beneficial relationships by being transparent and by communicating equally and ethically (Grunig *et al.*, 2001:14;) on platforms such as WhatsApp.

Both the organisation and the internal stakeholders must also be willing to forfeit some form of power to each other or, for that matter, share the power of the relationship. Both must also be willing to transform according to the feedback or responses received from the other party (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:10; Grunig & White, 1992:39), which would lead to the communication between both parties being reciprocated.

Through two-way symmetrical communication, organisations can better understand the needs, expectations and concerns of their internal stakeholders in order to engage with and ensure better relationship with internal stakeholders. Engaged internal stakeholders is often a key goal of internal communication (Jiang & Men, 2017:225). WhatsApp can aid in the engagement of internal stakeholders, considering that internal stakeholders can create and post their own content on WhatsApp, as well as engage with content posted by the organisation.

Saks (2006:600) defined engaged internal stakeholders as the reflection of the extent to which a person is present in an organisational role. This suggests that internal stakeholders who are more engaged are more likely to contribute to the organisation, more likely to remain with the organisation and help the organisation to perform effectively (Mishra *et al.*, 2014:190). Efforts to engage with internal stakeholders are crucial at the start of their tenure. This means that it is necessary for internal communication with internal stakeholders to take place immediately by orienting them to the organisation, developing their professional skills, asking for feedback, and taking the time to listen to their concerns (Mishra *et al.*, 2014:190), essentially engaging them in the organisation through WhatsApp and two-way symmetrical communication.

In order for internal stakeholders to be engaged in an organisation, internal communication between the organisation and its internal stakeholders should be balanced, horizontal and two-way symmetrical (Kloppers, 2017:59) in order to achieve engagement. Organisations and internal stakeholders must be viewed as equal partners in the conversation. Two-way symmetrical communication is ideal for internal communication because it provides an opportunity for both formal and informal interaction between internal stakeholders and management (Argenti, 1998), which can easily take place on WhatsApp. Effective internal communication is therefore inherently two-way symmetrical communication, where both internal stakeholders and managers listen to one another (Wright, 1995), with the outcome being a better relationship between both parties.

However, the two-way symmetrical communication approach has been criticised for being mission-orientated, persuasive and manipulative and absent of the complexity needed in order to engage with multiple viewpoints (Hejjas *et al.*, 2018:322). Deeper insight into two-way symmetrical communication must be gained to create opportunities for engagement and communication, especially within the organisation and on WhatsApp. Dialogue is key in two-way symmetrical communication to ensure a deeper understanding.

Kent and Taylor (1998) emphasized the importance of dialogic communication in building relationships through the internet. Dialogue includes ongoing communication and assumes organisations are tied to their internal stakeholders, requiring collaboration, support, interaction and commitment that is less process-oriented (as the two-way symmetrical communication model prescribes) and more relational (Kent, 2017:4), meaning that there is a deeper connection between the organisation and its internal stakeholders. Moreover, dialogue requires mutual understanding between an organisation and their internal stakeholders (Kent, 2017:4), which ensures lasting relationships.

Dialogue thus places the communitive emphasis on the needs of internal stakeholders and ensuring genuine, lasting relationships with them (Kent, 2017:2). Relationships are organic and

require effective interpersonal communication to be realised, but genuine relationships are ultimately about trust and time (Kent, 2017:3). Dialogue thus assumes that organisations should be socially responsible and work to make the organisational environment a better place, thus, the purpose of dialogue is to manage relationships (Kent, 2017:3-4).

In order for dialogue within two-way symmetrical communication to be effective, certain features need to be present (Theunissen & Noordin, 2012:5), such as the inclusion of as many internal stakeholders as possible, engaging with internal stakeholders as if they were human beings, focusing on listening and speaking, and creating environments that allow internal stakeholders to speak and be heard by the organisation (Heath, 2006:100). The dialogic principles, created by Kent and Taylor (1998), can give guidance on how to engage with internal stakeholders in a dialogic manner, ensuring that two-way symmetrical communication takes place. Though the social media platforms have expanded since Kent and Taylor's original study, the basic principles of building relationships through dialogue on the internet still have value (Briones, 2011:38).

The dialogic principles can also be practical guidelines for an organisation on how to use WhatsApp as an interactive platform to create a participatory culture in order to engage with stakeholders. The principles that are relevant to two-way symmetrical communication on WhatsApp will be discussed briefly below, and more in-depth later (see 2.5).

2.4.1 Dialogic loop

In order for there to be dialogue, there must first be relevant posts and information on the organisation's activities. The dialogic loop then gives opportunities for feedback from internal stakeholders and an organisation's response to the internal stakeholders' questions, concerns and problems (Kim *et al.*, 2014), which creates mutual understanding between the organisation and internal stakeholders (see 2.3).

2.4.2 Usefulness of information

The usefulness of the information refers to the satisfaction of the internal stakeholders' information needs. This principle claims that information should be delivered via various multimedia formats (e.g. text, photos, audio and video) to help internal stakeholders understand the information given by the organisation (Kim *et al.*, 2014) so that they can take part in informed discussions about the organisation's activities.

2.4.3 The generation of return visits

The last principle emphasises that platforms should contain features that are useful and attractive for frequent repeat visitors (Kim *et al.*, 2014), such as new content, videos, photos and events.

The content must also be structured in such a way that internal stakeholders want to engage with the organisation, and the organisation must then respond to internal stakeholders.

Two-way symmetrical communication and, more importantly, dialogue is a process, not an outcome, and the SRCS should be willing to participate in this process (Theunissen & Noordin, 2012:6). Engagement on WhatsApp between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders should thus be directed according to the principles of two-way symmetrical communication and dialogue in order to manage relationships.

As previously mentioned (see 2.4), it is vital for internal stakeholders to be engaged in an organisation in order to manage the relationships between the organisation and internal stakeholders. Engagement is thus crucial to managing relationships, just as managing relationships is crucial to engagement. The one cannot take place without the other. The use of internal two-way symmetrical communication is thus important for the SRCS when managing relationships with their internal stakeholders. It is important for the SRCS to promote mutual understanding and open communication with their internal stakeholders. Internal stakeholders should contribute to the organisation's goals by being engaged in the organisation through dialogue and taking part in the decision-making process. This leads to trust and commitment being built between internal stakeholders and the organisation, which leads to strong relationships. These dialogic principles (Kent & Taylor, 1998) are thus valuable to the SRCS and will be used when discussing how to manage relationships on social media.

2.5 RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT THROUGH TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL COMMUNICATION

Communication is a critical factor that influences relationships between organisations and internal stakeholders (Mishra *et al.*, 2014:189). Relationships with internal stakeholders can be viewed as a set of expectations between the stakeholders and the organisation based on their behaviour and interaction (Thomlison, 2000:178). Relationships with internal stakeholders should be adjusted and maintained constantly in order to satisfy the expectations of both the stakeholders and the organisation (Ströh, 2005:111). In order to understand, and therefore satisfy, the expectations of internal stakeholders, there should be an interactive relationship between the organisation and internal stakeholders where both parties communicate with each other efficiently (Bruning, 2002:40) through two-way symmetrical communication.

Efficient stakeholder relationship management is an essential requirement for any successful organisation (Rajhans, 2018:48). Strong relationships with internal stakeholders can increase job satisfaction, which leads to internal stakeholders being more likely to continuously support the

organisation (Reyneke, 2013:29). Such relationships, developed and managed through two-way symmetrical internal communication, could thus contribute positively to the success of the organisation (see 2.2). Applying the principles of internal two-way symmetrical communication can serve as an ideal way to manage internal stakeholder relationships on multiple levels (Rajhans, 2018:48). Ideally, the SRCS and their internal stakeholders specifically need a strong and interactive relationship in order to understand each other better. The SRCS must therefore manage strategic relationships with their internal stakeholders and can do so with the help of Hon and Grunig's (1999) relationship management strategies.

Hon and Grunig's (1999) relationship management strategies provide strategic guidelines on how to manage relationships with stakeholders in a public setting. As social media can be considered a public setting due to its nature, these strategies can be implemented on social media platforms such as WhatsApp. Hon and Grunig's (1999) strategies will be combined to Waters *et al.*'s guidelines in order to apply the strategies to the virtual world. Hon and Grunig (1999) presented nine strategies, however, only six will be discussed as the latter three strategies deal with conflict resolution rather than relationship management:

- Access
- Positivity
- Openness and disclosure
- Assurance of authenticity
- Networking
- Sharing of tasks

For the purpose of this study, these six strategies will be linked to Waters *et al.*'s (2009:103) guidelines on how to manage relationships in the virtual world, as well as Kent and Taylor's (1998) dialogic principles (2.4). Fuchs (2014:5) argues that online communication is an effective platform to manage relationships through greater interaction. Managing these relationships can be done especially through social media, and especially through internal social media (Waters *et al.*, 2009:102). The guidelines mentioned above can now be taken and applied to the virtual world and can be used to facilitate two-way symmetrical communication. Waters *et al.* (2009:103) highlight three main strategies to cultivate relationships through social media, namely disclosure, usefulness of information, and interactivity and involvement. These strategies will be discussed further below, and will be interlinked with Hon and Grunig's (1999) strategies for managing relationships in order to strategically manage relationships on social media, while Kent and Taylor (1998) highlight strategies to ensure two-way symmetrical communication.

2.5.1 Disclosure

Disclosure means that the organisation is open, by making information available to internal stakeholders on social media through posts, detailed descriptions about the organisation and providing visual aspects, such as posters or videos, on social media for users to establish a connection (Pressly, 2016:36).

This links to the *access* strategy, as access is achieved (Hon & Grunig, 1999:15) when an organisation makes information freely available to internal stakeholders to show their commitment. Social media access therefore implies that internal stakeholders have access to the platform used, and that the use of the platform is preferred. Both parties must also be able to make enquiries or report a complaint when necessary (Pressly, 2016:32). Internal stakeholders should have the ability to access posts, comment on them or share them. Information should also be made available or updated constantly (Kerpen, 2011). If internal stakeholders have sufficient access to information, it is more likely that they would trust the organisation, which leads to improved relationships.

The *positivity* strategy is also closely linked to access. Positivity refers to the actions of the various participants that make both sides feel more comfortable with the relationship (Pressly, 2016:33). When both sides feel more comfortable in the relationship, it leads to trust, which then leads to information being easily spread between the parties. Hon and Grunig (1999:15) add that positivity is linked to access, seeing that the flow of information can only be achieved when parties are positively inclined towards each other. This means that when internal stakeholders are presented with relevant information by the organisation, they will be more likely to accept and interact with the information by asking questions and posting comments.

This effectively means that the SRCS should create an environment where all the necessary information can be found, with the information then being used to facilitate dialogue with their internal stakeholders in order to ensure a strong relationship with them.

2.5.2 Usefulness of information

Usefulness of information stresses that the social media used, and the messages posted on social media platforms, should be *useful* to internal stakeholders (Waters *et al.*, 2009:103). Focusing on the type of information that is distributed, using multimedia in posts comprising images, video and audio, using the message board or something similar to engage on discussions (Pressly, 2016:36), make information more understandable. The media and information should also be relevant enough to disseminate and share between internal stakeholders in order to ensure strong relationships.

The usefulness of the information also refers to the satisfaction of the internal stakeholders' information needs (Waters *et al.*, 2009:103). This principle claims that information should be delivered via various multimedia formats to help internal stakeholders understand the information provided by the organisation. Internal stakeholders should also be provided with enough information about the organisation, such as using an About Us section to ensure that the internal stakeholders understand the organisation.

Openness is often linked to *usefulness of information*. Both participants must engage openly and honestly with each other by sharing *useful* information in order to improve relationships. Being honest and open when posting or replying is another important way in which organisations can disclose *useful* information. The *openness* strategy creates opportunities for the parties within the relationship to discover each other's needs and motives on social media through posts, images, videos and audio, which will indicate their common purpose and thus lead to mutual trust (Pressly, 2016:33). This strategy should also create the opportunity for internal stakeholders to create their own posts.

Assurances of authenticity is also closely linked to *openness*. Hon and Grunig (1999:15) state that when one of the participants in the relationship is committed to the relationship, they will show commitment and dedication through open communicative behaviour (Williams & Brunner, 2010:2), such as asking questions or voicing concerns. This strategy focuses on the legitimisation of parties and their concerns (Hon & Grunig, 1999:15), in short, acknowledging the other party and what is important to them (Pressly, 2016:33) by responding to questions and concerns.

Providing internal stakeholders with useful information also builds trust through the two-way symmetrical model and ensures that internal stakeholders receive information that is relevant to them (2.3). If any information is unclear, there should be open communication and dialogue to address the uncertainties and the organisation should respond to questions and concerns.

By responding to questions or concerns, organisations show that they are authentic (Pressly, 2016:44). Internal stakeholders should view the organisation as "human", and the organisation should work to present itself as such. When the organisation creates content with a personal tone, respond to questions and interacts on posts in a personal manner, the stakeholders will view the organisation as *authentic* and real (Pressly, 2016:44).

It is also important to create a space where internal stakeholders can engage with each other and not just with the organisation (Kerpen, 2011). This will ensure that internal stakeholders feel comfortable in this digital environment, which will lead to a better relationship with the SRCS.

In order to engage openly and honestly with their internal stakeholders, the SRCS should be facilitating communication with their internal stakeholders through the use of posts, images and videos, and ensuring that the information they share is useful to the internal stakeholders.

2.5.3 Interactivity and involvement

Interactivity and involvement includes asking for and providing a calendar of events, sharing event ideas and providing other important information relevant to internal stakeholders (Pressly, 2016:36). It is important for internal stakeholders to be involved and active in an organisation, as this can lead to multiple benefits (2.2).

Networking can thus be seen as an important strategy for interactivity and involvement. Networking is considered as the organisation and its stakeholders working together as a unit to achieve greater heights (Hon & Grunig, 1999). With the organisation and their internal stakeholders working together, they can ensure better relationships, which would lead to more involvement which, in turn, leads to sustainability and stability.

In order to work together, organisations and internal stakeholders should share tasks. To *share tasks*, gives organisations and internal stakeholders the opportunity to help each other attain a common goal in the relationship (Williams & Brunner, 2010:2; Hon & Grunig 1999:15). Mutual decisions need to be approached as the sharing of tasks, where the responsibility of these decisions are divided between the parties (Stafford & Cannery, 1991:12). Internal stakeholders should also be given the opportunity to share their opinions on events happening within the organisation and be part of the decision-making process.

In order to ensure interactivity, platforms should also contain features that are useful and attractive for *frequent repeat visitors* (2.4.3), such as new content, videos, and photos. The content must also be structured in such a way that internal stakeholders want to interact with the organisation, and the organisation must then respond to internal stakeholders. However, it is important for organisations not to overwhelm their internal stakeholders with messages, which would cause the internal stakeholders to silence their phones, which would lead to missed information (also see 2.3). Internal stakeholders should be encouraged to engage with the organisation and voice their concerns and dissatisfaction. The communication between organisations and internal stakeholders should thus be reciprocated to ensure that internal stakeholders keep interacting with the organisation (2.5.4). WhatsApp should thus contain features that make the use of the app attractive for frequent visitors.

It is therefore important for the SRCS to engage with their internal stakeholders strategically on social media. The sharing of tasks and gaining feedback from internal stakeholders should lead

to both management and employees working together and becoming more engaged and invested in the SRCS. The social media platforms used should also contain features that ensure internal stakeholders become repeat visitors which, in turn, ensures that dialogue is taking place on the platform constantly.

2.5.4 Dialogue

Now that relevant posts have been made, information about the organisation's activities have been made available and internal stakeholders are involved and interactive, dialogue can take place. The dialogic loop (2.4.1) then gives opportunities for feedback from internal stakeholders and an organisation's response to the internal stakeholders' questions, concerns and problems, which creates mutual understanding between the organisation and internal stakeholders (2.3). WhatsApp has various features that can aid in the dialogue between stakeholders and organisations, such as (see 2.3.1):

- message posting;
- commenting on messages posted by management;
- receiving direct responses to those comments, either in the group or through personal messages; or
- sharing documents and information through the group.

By using WhatsApp to create a dialogic loop, two-way communication between organisations and internal stakeholders can be ensured. The use of WhatsApp could lead to internal stakeholders becoming involved in the organisation and the decision-making process of the organisation, which can lead to more commitment to the organisation and a stronger relationship between the organisation and their internal stakeholders.

By using the relationship management strategies combined with the dialogic principles, the SRCS can ensure strong relationships between management and internal stakeholders. When a strong relationship exists between these parties, it is assumed that the communication process is two-way and both parties involved are sending and receiving information equally. This exchange can benefit both parties and ensures that engagement takes place between organisations and internal stakeholders.

Strong relationships between management and internal stakeholders can be crucial for internal stakeholder engagement (Welch & Jackson, 2007:77). When an internal stakeholder feels engaged in an organisation, they are most likely to think favourably of the organisation, sharing their views on the organisation and becoming an advocate for the organisation (Mishra *et al.*,

2014:189). Engaged employees are thus an outcome of good internal communication and relationship management practises.

Based on the discussion of WhatsApp as an internal communication platform, internal two-way symmetrical communication as the normative manner to communicate on WhatsApp and how, by applying certain relationship management strategies, relationships could be managed on WhatsApp, the following theoretical argument can be formulated to identify the principles of two-way symmetrical communication that could be utilised on WhatsApp to manage relationships:

Theoretical argument 1: Managing relationships on WhatsApp through internal two-way symmetrical communication

The SRCS should apply two-way symmetrical communication through WhatsApp as an internal social media platform to manage relationships with internal stakeholders. This can be done by using disclosure, usefulness of information, interactivity and involvement, and dialogue as the guiding principles of two-way symmetrical communication.

If the SRCS were to apply the abovementioned strategies, they should be able to achieve strong relationships with their internal stakeholders. The success of the relationship between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders should thus be determined by measuring the outcomes of the relationship. It is imperative that the strategies used above should lead to outcomes of good relationships. It is thus important to keep the relationship management outcomes in mind when managing relationships, as they ultimately give guidelines on how to manage effective relationships, which will ensure that the SRCS remain sustainable and stable.

2.6 RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT OUTCOMES

Relationships between organisations and their internal stakeholders should be adjusted and maintained constantly to deliver successful interaction that satisfies the expectations of both parties (Ströh, 2005:111). In order to manage the relationship through two-way symmetrical communication, it is important to know what the outcomes of such relationships should be. Hon and Grunig (1999) determined the following outcomes by which relationships can be evaluated:

- Trust
- Control mutuality
- Commitment
- Relationship satisfaction

Each of these outcomes will be discussed in more detail below.

2.6.1 Trust

Trust can be seen as the result when an organisation does what it promised to do (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:58). One of the key outcomes of relationships is trust (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:58). Internal communication has been shown to improve trust between internal stakeholders and management, making trust a critical aspect of the organisation-internal stakeholder relationship (Gavin & Meyer, 2005:874).

The organisation, as well as the internal stakeholders, must commit to what has been promised (Pressly, 2016:29). When commitments are honoured, trust will form between the two parties. Hon and Grunig (1999:19) add that trust can also be found in the level of self-confidence between the parties in the relationship, and to what extent they are willing to reveal themselves to each other. Trust can also be formed between organisations and internal stakeholders when internal stakeholders' opinions are taken into account when making decisions, which can only happen through two-way symmetrical communication.

Trust can be characterised by the following three traits (Hon & Grunig, 1999:19) applied to the SRCS:

- Integrity: The internal stakeholders' view that the SRCS is trustworthy and vice versa.
- Dependability: Determined by whether the internal stakeholders or the SRCS do what is promised.
- Competence: The capability of the SRCS or the internal stakeholders to deliver on their promises.

If these characteristics are present within a relationship, it can be said that trust exists between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders.

2.6.2 Control mutuality

Control mutuality is the agreement by the parties involved in the relationship on the relationship goals and behaviours (Stafford & Cannary, 1991:5). These efforts are aimed at achieving interdependence and stability in the relationship, whether it is a symmetrical or asymmetrical balance (Waters, 2011:460). Such a balance will determine to what extent parties can influence one another or are willing to take the risk of being open and vulnerable (Pressly, 2016:31). If both the SRCS and their internal stakeholders are willing to open themselves to the risks involved in reaching a common goal, they will attain interdependence and stability.

Therefore, from the perspective of relationship management, it is important that an organisation must strive towards shared power with its internal stakeholders (Pressly, 2016:31). Power can be

shared through allowing internal stakeholders to be part of decision-making, which is a crucial component of two-way symmetrical communication. The SRCS should be open with their internal stakeholders and allow themselves a certain degree of vulnerability in order to achieve interdependence and stability with their internal stakeholders.

2.6.3 Commitment

Commitment within relationship management describes the extent to which one party in the relationship believes that the relationship has a certain value and, hence the motivation to manage the relationship and keep it strong (Hon & Grunig, 1999:20). In order to show commitment, both the organisation and their internal stakeholders must be willing to invest time, effort, energy and money into the relationship (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:165). The SRCS and their internal stakeholders must be mutually interested and willing to commit to each other.

It is thus important for both the SRCS and their internal stakeholders to believe that the relationship between them has value in order for them to continue managing it. Commitment can be built through open and honest dialogue, an important aspect of two-way symmetrical communication.

2.6.4 Relationship satisfaction

Hon and Grunig (1999:14) explain that satisfaction in the context of an organisation-stakeholder relationship, can be seen as the level of positivity one participant feels towards the other, and believes that the feeling is mutual. Stafford and Canary (1991:5) concur by pointing out that equal satisfaction or rewards can reduce the chances of risks in a relationship. When one party believes that the relationship is maintained, it will lead to satisfaction and effective interaction (Waters, 2011:460).

It is essential for the SRCS to take note of the relationship management outcomes in order for them to manage relationships with their stakeholders through two-way symmetrical communication. These outcomes should be kept in mind when looking at the relationship management strategies, as the outcomes give guidance on how the strategies should be implemented. The relationship management strategies should therefore lead to the relationship outcomes.

Theoretical argument 2: Relationship management outcomes

The relationships managed through internal two-way symmetrical communication on social media should lead to relationship outcomes such as trust, control mutuality, commitment and relationship satisfaction.

In conclusion, managing relationships with internal stakeholders can be achieved through strategic internal two-way symmetrical communication. It is essential for the SRCS to engage student members in two-way discussions and decision-making. In order to manage relationships between an organisation and their internal stakeholders, two-way symmetrical communication must take place. The abovementioned relationship management strategies, relationship outcomes and the dialogic loop can therefore be used as a framework for managing relationships between organisations and their internal stakeholders through two-way symmetrical communication in order to ensure that the SRCS remains sustainable and stable.

2.7 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AS GUIDELINE FOR INTERNAL TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL COMMUNICATION THROUGH WHATSAPP TO MANAGE RELATIONSHIPS

From the discussions about internal communication, stakeholder relationship management, two-way symmetrical communication and social media, it is clear that organisations should follow certain strategies to communicate with their internal stakeholders in order to manage relationships. We can thus conclude that organisations can make use of strategic internal communication through a social media platform such as WhatsApp in order to manage relationships using two-way symmetrical communication. The various strategies used can therefore be summed up in the following conceptual framework:

2.7.1 Phase 1: Creating a participatory environment

In order for there to be effective internal communication between an organisation and their internal stakeholders, the organisation first needs to create an environment in which their stakeholders feel safe to communicate. This type of environment is essential for all organisations, as it can create mutual understanding between the organisation and internal stakeholders. Internal stakeholders want to understand what happens in an organisation, which is why the organisation should **disclose information** (2.5.1). Understanding what happens in an organisation and supporting the organisation because of that understanding, is an essential outcome of internal communication.

However, organisations must now go one step further by not only providing information for understanding, but also allowing internal stakeholders to **participate in the decisions** (2.5.1) made by the organisation. The environment created by the organisation should be inherently two-way, allowing for **dialogue** (2.5.4) between the organisation and internal stakeholders. That is why social media is such an ideal platform to use in creating a participatory environment. By providing their internal stakeholders with **access** (2.5.1) to a social media platform on which they can communicate with the organisation, the organisation ensures that they are not only sharing information but also facilitating participation.

The social media platform used should allow the organisation to communicate messages to specific internal stakeholders or to broadcast messages to all internal stakeholders. This should create an interactive relationship between all participants and create an environment where information can easily be found and reacted on. **Co-creation** (2.4.1) is crucial in this participatory environment on social media. Internal stakeholders should be invited to participate in the creation and circulation of content on the social media platform. The organisation should also be creating relevant posts and giving internal stakeholders the opportunity to give feedback on those posts. If organisations make use of the abovementioned strategies, it should lead to **trust** (2.6.1) being built between the parties.

To summarise, organisations should create an environment:

- Where internal stakeholders can understand what is happening in the organisation;
- Where internal stakeholders can participate in the decisions made by the organisation;
- By providing access to a social media platform on which the internal stakeholders can communicate with the organisation;
- On a social media platform that allows the organisation to communicate messages to specific internal stakeholders or all internal stakeholders; and
- Where internal stakeholders are invited to participate in the co-creation and circulation of content in order to build trust.

After the participatory environment has been created, organisations must now ensure that communication is indeed being facilitated in that environment by moving on to phase two.

2.7.2 Phase 2: Facilitating communication

Now that an environment for internal communication has been created on a social media platform, the organisation must continue to facilitate communication between them and internal stakeholders. Organisations should now focus on the **usefulness of information** (2.5.2) they send and should focus on sending it in various ways using multimedia such as images, video and

audio. Organisations should not only share information, but also **facilitate engagement** (2.5.2) between internal stakeholders.

Interaction between the organisation and internal stakeholders enhances the productivity of internal stakeholders and strengthens their relationship with the organisation. The social media platform used to create the environment should also allow the organisation and their internal stakeholders to post and edit files, images, videos and audio. Communication needs to take place on this platform consistently. Both parties need to **engage openly and honestly** (2.5.2) with each other in order for the organisation to understand and acknowledge the concerns of the internal stakeholders and for the internal stakeholders to perceive the organisation as **honest and transparent** (2.5.2). If open communication takes place between the organisation and their internal stakeholders, it can lead to **control mutuality** (2.6.2) between parties which, in turn, leads to stronger relationships.

Thus, in order to facilitate communication:

- Various mediums such as images, video and audio should be used to communicate;
- Communication should take place consistently;
- Organisations should be honest and transparent; and
- Internal stakeholders need to share their views and concerns to establish control mutuality.

In order for communication to take place consistently, users would require data and a constant internet connection. If users are without data or an internet connection, they might miss messages and crucial information. It might then be beneficial for organisations to have clear communication times (such as only sending messages at certain times of the day) to ensure that their internal stakeholders are aware of when information is being posted. As soon as communication becomes a consistent between the organisation and their internal stakeholders, they can move on to phase three.

2.7.3 Phase 3: Engaging internal stakeholders

As the organisation continues to facilitate communication between them and their internal stakeholders, it is important to also **engage employees** (2.5.3) through their communication. Organisations and internal stakeholders should work together to achieve their goals. **Tasks should be shared** (2.5.3) between internal stakeholders and they should be given responsibility in order to involve them in the organisation. Engagement should take place where the organisation asks for feedback from internal stakeholders, improves on the feedback gained and

then reports back to the internal stakeholders. This ensures that the communication between both parties are **reciprocated** (2.5.4) and that engagement takes place.

Engaged internal stakeholders can be seen as a key goal of internal communications. Engaged stakeholders are more likely to remain in an organisation for longer and help the organisation to perform effectively. The social media platform being used for this communication should thus be useful and attractive for internal stakeholders and should lead to them **becoming frequent visitors to the platform** (2.5.3). New content should be posted regularly and structured in such a way that internal stakeholders want to interact with the content and become engaged in the organisation, which can lead to **commitment** (2.6.3) and **relationship satisfaction** (2.6.4). However, caution must be applied to ensure that frequent posts do not overwhelm users, as overwhelmed users may ignore messages and miss important information.

In order for internal stakeholders to be engaged in the organisation, the organisation should:

- Share tasks and responsibilities with internal stakeholders to ensure commitment;
- Use a social media platform that encourages return visits and interaction;
- Post new content with which the internal stakeholders can engage; and
- Create relevant posts on which the internal stakeholders can give feedback to ensure relationship satisfaction.

As previously mentioned (2.3.1), WhatsApp has a myriad of features suited to the needs of internal communication and the model proposed above. WhatsApp can be used to communicate to specific internal stakeholders or to broadcast messages. There are functions that allow users to post images, video, audio and documents, as well as a way to sort the documents sent. However, WhatsApp also has many drawbacks as mentioned in 2.3.1. One of the main concerns is that constant messages can overwhelm users and cause information to go unacknowledged. Users would also constantly require data and an internet connection.

With these issues in mind, and considering the knowledge that the SRCS already uses WhatsApp as their main communication platform, it is important to examine how WhatsApp can be used as an internal communication platform. Essentially, WhatsApp with its user-generated content could encourage the internal stakeholders of the SRCS to articulate their opinions and concerns, share alternative views and foster a culture of learning, participation and collaboration (Men & Bowen, 2017), which is why it is critical to create an environment where two-way symmetrical communication can take place towards the management of relationships.

2.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter explored internal communication and stakeholder relationship management and how the SRCS can use both to manage relationships with their internal stakeholders. This chapter also explored two-way symmetrical communication and how it can be applied to WhatsApp and its different features, as well as how literature suggests that organisations should manage relationships with stakeholders by using social media.

To answer the first specific research question (1.5.2.1), **the constructs of two-way symmetrical communication that can be utilised by the SRCS to manage the relationships between them and their internal stakeholders include disclosure, usefulness of information, interactivity and involvement, and dialogue.** Internal communication on social media should be two-way symmetrical and dialogic in nature to ensure that organisations meet the needs of internal stakeholders. The relationship management strategies were combined with strategies on how to manage relationships on social media platforms, and with the dialogic principles to ensure that communication is two-way (2.5). The combination of these strategies and principles thus lead to the constructs of two-way communication as mentioned above.

To answer the second specific research question (1.5.2.2), **the relationship management outcomes to which the use of two-way symmetrical communication between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders should lead are trust, control mutuality, commitment and relationship satisfaction.** It is important to keep the relationship management outcomes in mind when communicating with internal stakeholders, as these outcomes ensure that relationships are satisfactory to both parties which, in turn, ensures that internal stakeholders remain committed to an organisation. If these relationship outcomes are present, the SRCS can ensure the stability and sustainability of their structure.

Through the theoretical exploration of the abovementioned specific research questions, a conceptual framework can be created as guideline on how WhatsApp can be used to communicate internally with internal stakeholders in order to manage strong relationships. This conceptual framework combined the relationship management strategies, two-way symmetrical communication principles, the dialogic principles and the relationship management outcomes in order to establish strategic phases that the SRCS can follow to manage relationships with internal stakeholders through internal communication. WhatsApp should thus be used in combination with the relationship management strategies, two-way symmetrical communication principles and the dialogic principles to manage the relationship between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders.

In the following chapter (Chapter 3), the research approach and methods will be discussed. These will be used to test the theoretical knowledge discussed in this chapter and will ensure the reliability and validity of the study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 and 2 provided a background, context and theoretical framework to the study, while Chapter 3 will outline the research methodology of this study. This chapter will focus on the research methods employed, namely the literature review, qualitative content analysis, observation, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The aim of the research is to generate data that should answer the research questions posed in Chapter 1 (see 1.5.2).

This chapter will give guidance to the research and the data collected from the various research methods will be reported on and interpreted in Chapter 5.

The research methods will be subsequently discussed and explained.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

There are two research methods that can be used to undertake this study, namely quantitative and qualitative. This study made use of qualitative research methods in order to answer the research question, because the qualitative approach examines experiences and perceptions in detail. By using the qualitative approach, the researcher was able to evaluate the perceptions and experiences of the SRCS' internal stakeholders in order to answer the research questions of this study.

3.2.1 Qualitative research method

Qualitative research has been given many different labels, such as interpretive research, critical research, naturalism, ethnography and constructivism (Du Plooy, 2009:30). In broad terms, qualitative research is an approach designed to examine people's experiences in detail, by using a specific set of research methods such as semi-structured interviews, observation and content analysis (Hennink *et al.*, 2011:9).

Qualitative research is grounded on a philosophical position that is broadly "interpretivist" in the sense that it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted (Mason, 2002:3). Different versions of qualitative research might approach these elements in different ways, for example, focusing on social meanings, interpretations, practices, constructions, or data generation on social media. Qualitative research is based on methods of data generation that are both flexible and sensitive to the social context in which data is produced, rather than rigidly structured.

The purpose of a qualitative method is to understand and portray the behaviour, themes, trends, needs, perception or attitudes of people – for example those using social media (Presley, 2016:51). A qualitative research method would thus be advantageous to this study.

Qualitative research can also be of value for this study because it involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. Qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural setting, attempting to interpret the phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:4). Through qualitative research, a wide variety of dimensions in social media can be explored, such as the use of WhatsApp.

Throughout the qualitative research the researcher mainly followed a deductive approach. The theories discussed in chapter 2, mainly relationship management theory, internal communication and two-way symmetrical communication on social media, was used deductively as the point of departure to explore pre-existing themes and constructs. The researcher then collected the data using semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The pre-existing themes and constructs were explored deductively from the point of view of the persons being studied (Suter, 2012:347).

Qualitative research aims to produce rounded and contextual understandings on the basis of rich and detailed data (Mason, 2002:3). It is therefore highly valuable and important that qualitative research should be: systematically and rigorously conducted, accountable for its quality and claims, strategically conducted yet flexible and contextual, able to produce explanations or arguments rather than claiming to offer mere descriptions (Mason, 2002:8).

When studying new media, such as WhatsApp, a qualitative research method can be followed because it is a developing and novel research field (Naudé, 2001: 95). Qualitative research has been used in this study in order to answer questions about the “what”, “how” or “why” of the phenomena, instead of the “how many” or “how much”, which are answered by quantitative methods. Qualitative research was used in this study in order to reveal the meaning that informs the action, producing descriptive data that must be interpreted using systematic methods of coding, transcribing and analysis of trends and themes (Crossman, 2018).

However, the scope of qualitative research is limited, and its findings are not always generalisable. Researchers have to act with caution with these methods to ensure that they themselves do not influence the data in ways that significantly change it, and that they do not bring undue personal bias to their interpretation of the findings (Crossman, 2018). It is essential to identify bias and personal values at the start of the study, as stating the researcher’s contribution can support the research in a positive manner (Creswell & Poth, 2010:182).

The researcher has experience in managing several successful social media accounts, including various WhatsApp groups, over the course of six years. The researcher is not directly involved with SRCS but is involved in the general student life of the NWU and has served on many committees previously. Due to this previous experience, the researcher brings certain biases and knowledge to the research, however, every effort was made to ensure objectivity.

3.2.2 Qualitative research design

A research design is a plan, structure and strategy of investigation conceived in order to obtain answers to the research question (Kerlinger, 1986). In the first chapter, the specific research questions were formed, and the research aims were determined in order to ensure that each research question is answered with a view to answering the general research question.

In the second chapter, the literature study addressed the first research question by determining the theoretical background for the study. The second research question was answered by conducting a qualitative content analysis on the WhatsApp groups of the SRCS. The third research question was answered by conducting semi-structured interviews, and the fourth research question was answered by conducting focus groups. Each research question was answered by making use of a qualitative research method and can be explained as follows:

Table 3:1: Research questions and research methods

Research question	Research method
Which constructs of two-way symmetrical communication can be utilised by the SRCS to manage the relationships between them and their internal stakeholders?	The literature study (Chapter 2).
To which relationship management outcomes should the use of two-way symmetrical communication to manage relationships lead?	The literature study (Chapter 2).
To what extent does WhatsApp as a platform allow for the utilisation of the two-way symmetrical communication model in managing the relationships between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders?	Qualitative content analysis and observation done on the WhatsApp groups of the SRCS HC members (Chapter 4).
What are the internal stakeholders of the SRCS's perceptions of the use of WhatsApp as a way to manage the relationships between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders?	Analysis of the focus groups conducted with the internal stakeholders of the SRCS, namely the HC members (Chapter 4).
What are the SRCS management's perceptions of the use of WhatsApp as a way to manage the relationships between them and their internal stakeholders?	Analysis of the information gathered from the semi-structured interview with the management of SRCS (Chapter 4).

3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As previously mentioned, this study makes use of five different data collection methods. These methods are: a literature study, observation and content analysis, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups.

The specific research questions for this study flowed from the general research question. The specific research questions was used to generate information and data in order to answer the general research question. The first specific research question was answered by the literature study, and constructs and operational definitions were identified throughout the literature study in order to aid with the answering of the rest of the specific research questions.

3.3.1 Sampling and populations

Sampling involves a rigorous procedure where units of analysis from a target or accessible population is selected (Du Plooy, 2009:108). The population used for the content analysis includes all posts made by the SRCS on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group from 1 August 2019 to 31 March 2020. This WhatsApp group includes all EC members of the SRCS (management) and all HC members of the SRCS (internal stakeholders). As this WhatsApp group is the main communication platform between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders, it was the ideal group to include in the research. Social media conversations and interactions often take place over a long period of time with no clear end-point (Parker *et al.*, 2011), thus time frames are crucial. The specific time frame was used as new management and new internal stakeholders start their terms in August, and August 2019 to March 2020 is considered as the busiest time in the student calendar, with most events happening between those dates.

As explained in Chapter 1 (1.2), the internal stakeholders of the SRCS are the 28 different HC members, and without them the SRCS cannot function. It is thus imperative for the SRCS to manage their relationship with the HC members to ensure that those internal stakeholders remain in the structure, ensuring the structure's survival. The population used for the focus groups consisted of the 28 HC members, and the researcher conducted four focus groups with them. The HC members were selected based on convenient sampling. Convenient sampling is based on non-random sampling, meaning that the participants were chosen because it was convenient, and they were easily accessible (Sedgwick, 2013:1). The HC members used for this study were selected through convenient sampling, as most of them were easily accessible and it was convenient for the researcher to use the SRCS HC members.

All 28 HC members were contacted via email and asked to participate in the study. Those who participated were then randomly assigned to a focus group. Each focus group had three to five participants and were conducted via Zoom (see 3.3.4).

The population used for the semi-structured interview included the chairperson of the SRCS and the vice-chairperson of the SRCS. The interviews with both these participants are imperative, as it is the chairperson and the vice-chairperson who decide what to post on WhatsApp and when, and the vice-chairperson makes decisions about the communication sent to internal stakeholders. The chairperson also gives the vice-chairperson guidelines and sets the precedent for the relationship between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders. The chairperson takes on a more executive role, giving instructions on what to post, and the vice-chairperson has a more technical role as they create, send and manage the posts.

Table 3:2: Semi-structured interview sampling

Semi-structured interview sampling	
Chairperson of SRCS	Participant A
Vice-chairperson of SRCS	Participant B

3.3.2 Literature study

Literature studies help to make the researcher and the reader aware of previous and recent research on a specific subject (Du Plooy, 2009:58). In this instance, previous and recent research enabled the researcher to expand on research that has already been done and to apply it to new forms of social media.

Leonardi *et al.* (2013) set up criteria for internal social media platforms and Buettner (2015) expanded the research into internal social media further. A variety of studies have also discussed stakeholder relationship management (Reyneke, 2013; Ströh, 2005; Bruning, 2002). Hon and Grunig’s (1999) strategies for managing relationships were combined with Waters *et al.*’s (2009) strategies for managing relationships online, and the dialogic principles formed by Kent & Taylor (1998). This lead to the first theoretical argument. The second theoretical argument was based on Hon and Grunig’s (1999) relationship outcomes.

3.3.2.1 Theoretical argument 1

Managing relationships on WhatsApp through internal two-way symmetrical communication

The SRCS should apply two-way symmetrical communication through WhatsApp as an internal social media platform to manage relationships with internal stakeholders. This can be done by using disclosure, usefulness of information, interactivity and involvement, and dialogue as the guiding principles of two-way symmetrical communication.

From these theoretical points of departure, the researcher was able to form the concepts and constructs to be used in this study (table 3.3):

Table 3:3: Concepts, constructs and operational definitions taken from chapter 2

Concept	Construct	Sub-construct	Operational definitions
Managing relationships through two-way symmetrical communication on social media	Disclosure		Internal stakeholders need to have access to information in order to ensure a positive relationship. Disclosure can thus take place: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On a social media platform • Through posts on the platform • By making use of visual aspects such as multimedia.
		Access	Internal stakeholders should have access to the communication platform. Contact information of the SRCS and internal stakeholders is freely available. Internal stakeholders have full access to posts, comments and can share on social media. Internal stakeholders prefer the use of the social media platform. Information is being shared or information is being updated constantly. Access leads to trust, which improves relationships between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders.
		Positivity	Internal stakeholders can give input that makes the relationship more enjoyable.

			<p>Information is easily spread between the SRCS and internal stakeholders.</p> <p>Internal stakeholders should be comfortable with sharing information and asking questions.</p>
Usefulness of information			<p>Messages posted on social media should be useful to internal stakeholders. Participants must engage openly, and information must be authentic in order to ensure strong relationships. This can be achieved by:</p> <p>Information being useful enough to share between different groups of internal stakeholders.</p> <p>WhatsApp allowing for documents to be shared on the group.</p> <p>Contact information and an “About Us” section being supplied on WhatsApp to ensure that internal stakeholders understand the purpose of the group.</p> <p>Information being delivered via various media formats on WhatsApp, such as text, photo, video and audio, to ensure that the information is easier to understand.</p> <p>Open communication taking place on WhatsApp through the group to ensure that there are no uncertainties about information.</p>
		Openness	<p>Internal stakeholders and the SRCS engage openly and honestly with each other.</p> <p>Internal stakeholders are fully able to comment on posts shared by the SRCS.</p> <p>Internal stakeholders also have the ability to create posts on WhatsApp.</p>
		Assurances of authenticity	<p>Prompting internal stakeholders to share questions or concerns with the SRCS on WhatsApp and then responding to those concerns.</p> <p>Content is created with a personal tone to show that the SRCS is authentic.</p>
Interactivity and involvement			<p>Includes asking for and providing a calendar of events, sharing event ideas, networking opportunities, sharing tasks and providing other important information relevant to internal stakeholders.</p>

			<p>Internal stakeholders should be involved and active in the SRCS.</p> <p>New content should be posted on WhatsApp frequently.</p> <p>WhatsApp features allow for information to be sorted and easily found, making it easy to interact with information.</p>
		Networking	<p>Encouraging internal stakeholders to work together and to share their ideas with each other on social media.</p> <p>Encouraging internal stakeholders to work with the SRCS and give their inputs.</p>
		Sharing tasks	<p>Encourage internal stakeholders to share their opinions on events and be part of the decision-making process on social media.</p> <p>Internal stakeholders should engage with the SRCS on WhatsApp.</p> <p>Internal stakeholders should also have the ability to create posts on WhatsApp to engage with the SRCS.</p>
	Dialogue		<p>The dialogic loop should create mutual understanding through WhatsApp by providing continuous posts and information on the SRCS' activities.</p> <p>The organisation gives feedback to questions and concerns from internal stakeholders on WhatsApp.</p> <p>Internal stakeholders receive direct responses from the SRCS on WhatsApp.</p> <p>The SRCS then makes changes based on the feedback they've received from their internal stakeholders.</p> <p>WhatsApp allows internal stakeholders to comment on messages posted.</p>

3.3.2.2 Theoretical argument 2

Relationship management outcomes

The relationships managed through internal two-way symmetrical communication on social media should lead to relationship outcomes such as trust, control mutuality, commitment and relationship satisfaction.

The table below (3.4) indicates the concepts, constructs and operational definitions included in the second theoretical argument:

Table 3:4: Concepts, constructs and operational definitions determined in chapter 2

Concept	Construct	Operational definitions
Relationship management outcomes	Trust	Trust has been built when the following takes place: The organisation honours its commitments to their internal stakeholders. Internal stakeholders' opinions are taken into account. Internal stakeholders view the SRCS as trustworthy. The SRCS management is seen as competent.
	Control mutuality	Control mutuality is achieved by: Involving internal stakeholders in decision-making and setting relationship goals. The organisation being open with internal stakeholders. The organisation displaying a degree of vulnerability.
	Commitment	Commitment has been achieved when: The relationship has a certain value. Time, effort, energy and money is being put into the relationship. Internal stakeholders are interested in remaining in the organisation.
	Relationship satisfaction	Relationship satisfaction is achieved by: The organisation and internal stakeholders feeling positive towards each other. Both parties feeling like the relationship is being maintained.

The concepts and constructs that form part of theoretical argument 1 was used to gather data about the utilisation of two-way symmetrical communication on WhatsApp through content analysis and perceptions of internal stakeholders through the focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The concepts and constructs that form part of theoretical argument 2 was also used

to gather data from the semi-structured interviews and the focus groups on the perceptions of the relationship outcomes between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders. As discussed in Chapter 2, the integration of these methods is vital, since relationships cannot be managed without two-way symmetrical communication, and two-way symmetrical communication is needed to manage relationships. The discussion of the results (Chapter 4) was thus structured according to the research method and the rest of chapter 3 explained the research methods that were utilised to evaluate the constructs.

3.3.2.3 *Validity and reliability*

Validity determines whether the research truly measures what it was intended to measure, and how truthful the results are (Golafshani, 2003). In this case, the constructs of two-way symmetrical communication and how they are applied to managing relationships through WhatsApp. The following methods were utilised to ensure the validity of the study:

- The concepts and constructs should be a true reflection of the researched phenomenon (Du Plooy, 2009:124);
- The construct's reliability is established by indicating how the operational definitions link to the theoretical model (Du Plooy, 2009:126).

This was done in the current study by a comprehensive literature review in Chapter 2. The literature review provided the theoretical framework for the principles of two-way symmetrical communication from which the concepts and constructs were drawn.

Reliability depends on the process that was followed, as well as the interpretation of the results of the qualitative study (Du Plooy, 2009:121). Reliability is the extent to which results are consistent over time and the extent to which results can be duplicated under a similar methodology (Golafshani, 2003). In order for results to be duplicated (Babbie & Mouton, 2012), there must be a detailed explanation of the research process.

This detailed explanation must include the research (literature review), the collection (semi-structured interviews and observation) and analysis (content analysis) of information as well as the interpretation of the results, based on literature.

In the current study, Chapter 2 presents the literature review, which identified how WhatsApp can be used to manage relationships between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders according to the two-way symmetrical communication model.

3.3.3 Qualitative content analysis

Social media, and specifically WhatsApp, has become a vital part of today's social life. Social media affects the beliefs, attitudes and values of people, as well as their intentions and behaviours (Lai & To, 2015:138). WhatsApp also allows organisations such as the SRCS to communicate with their internal stakeholders. The interactive nature of WhatsApp gave the researcher the opportunity to explore how the SRCS and their internal stakeholders appropriate the application and how communication on WhatsApp shapes the relationships between the parties.

The dominant research method for studying social media has been quantitative content analysis (Parker *et al.*, 2011). While this is useful research, the dialogue by people using social media presents an opportunity for qualitative analysis. Such dialogue provides richer insights into people's viewpoints, feelings, attitudes and intentions (Parker *et al.*, 2011). Research using qualitative content analysis focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the contextual meaning of the text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

This content analysis was done on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group of the SRCS. The analysis looked at posts made between August 2019, when the management of the SRCS changed, and March 2020, the end of the busiest months for SRCS. The content analysis provided insight into how the SRCS manages their communication with internal stakeholders and how the communication is utilised to manage relationships with internal stakeholders. The framework for the quantitative content analysis (Parker *et al.*, 2011) of this study is as follows:

i. Defining the unit of analysis

An important aspect of qualitative content analysis is the unit of analysis, which can include structure, meaning, interaction, participation and social behaviour (Parker *et al.*, 2011). This study aimed to look at the communication between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders by observing the social interactions which take place on WhatsApp, as outlined by the construct's operational definition.

ii. Selecting the content

Qualitative content analysis involves the purposive selection of content (Parker *et al.*, 2011). The purposive selection of the content will be driven by the research objective; thus, this study will be looking at WhatsApp posts made by the SRCS on the HC members' WhatsApp group over six months. All posts made were documented by the researcher and coding (below) was used to determine to what extent the two-way symmetrical communication model is utilised to manage the relationships between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders through WhatsApp.

iii. Analysing the content

The process of content analysis includes open coding, creating categories and abstraction (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007). The codes used for analysis were developed using concepts from the literature study, ensuring that the data collected by the analysis is useful, valid, and reliable. Table 3.5 indicates the concept and constructs used, as well as the coding used to analyse the WhatsApp posts.

Table 3:5: Content analysis coding

Concept	Construct	Content analysis
Managing relationships through two-way symmetrical communication on social media	Disclosure	Information about the SRCS is shared through the WhatsApp group. Hyperlinks are posted on the WhatsApp group. The SRCS management's contact information is available on the WhatsApp group. Documents are shared by the SRCS. All internal stakeholders have access to the platform.
	Usefulness of information	Photos, videos and audio files are posted on WhatsApp. The About Us section of the WhatsApp group is filled in. The SRCS management makes honest and transparent posts on the group. The information posted is used for informed discussions on the group.
	Interactivity and involvement	New posts are being made regularly, causing internal stakeholders to check the group regularly. Internal stakeholders have access to all of the posts. Internal stakeholders can comment on posts. Internal stakeholders can create their own posts. It is easy for internal stakeholders to find information previously posted.
	Dialogue	Internal stakeholders have the opportunity to voice their concerns. Internal stakeholders receive direct responses to their posts from the SRCS.

		<p>Internal stakeholders can voice their opinions about decisions being made by the SRCS.</p> <p>Internal stakeholders receive feedback on their questions and concerns from the SCRS.</p>
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iv. Interpretation of the content

The interpretation of the content will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

3.3.3.1 Validity and reliability

Within qualitative research, a top priority is to ensure validity and reliability which, in turn, ensures that the concepts indicated are truly those being measured (Le Roux, 2011:171). By relating a measuring instrument to an overall theoretic framework, it ensures that the measurements are logically related to the concepts in the framework (Du Plooy, 2009:136).

The constructs that were identified for this study can therefore be considered valid as they relate to the overall theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 2. The concepts identified in Chapter 2 are used to guide the content analysis (Table 3.5).

It is important to keep the limitations of qualitative content analysis in mind, such as fatigue of the researcher, emotional or health problems, or environmental conditions (Du Plooy, 2009:132). In order to overcome these limitations, researchers should refrain from applying selective observation, where only patterns that match the research question are observed and other facts ignored (Le Roux, 2011:171).

3.3.4 Focus groups

Focus groups originated in market research in the 1950's and is essentially an organised discussion among a selected group of individuals with the aim of gathering information about their views on certain topics (Gray, 2014). The purpose of focus groups is to generate interactions and discussions within a group in order to shed a light on any topic or issue. Focus groups can allow researchers to explore the feelings, beliefs, attitudes or experiences of certain participants in a way that is not usually accessible through other methods of research (Gray, 2014).

Focus groups can cause a "chain effect", meaning that when participants listen to other participants' memories or experiences, it can trigger ideas or memories that would not have been triggered during, for example, an interview (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Focus groups are an excellent

way to help clarify similarities and differences between the opinions and values held by participants (Freeman, 2006:492).

According to Kitzinger (1994:107), focus groups can:

- Facilitate the collection of data on group perceptions;
- Encourage greater communication between participants;
- Encourage open conversations about sensitive subjects that might be left less developed through a one-on-one interview;
- Use conflict between participants to clarify why they believe what they do;
- Explore turning points in arguments when people change their minds and document how facts and stories operate in practice; and
- Encourage participation from people who do not want to be interviewed on their own.

As focus groups allow for complex issues to be explored by providing richer data, it is ideal for use in this study. This study aimed to determine the internal stakeholders of the SRCS's perceptions of the use of WhatsApp. As the internal stakeholders of the SRCS all have specialised knowledge regarding the SRCS and the way in which it functions, focus groups were the ideal research method in order to determine how and why WhatsApp is being used. Focus groups encouraged open conversations about the use of WhatsApp and was used to collect valuable data from participants.

However, focus groups are not just about open discussion. Focus groups should have a focus, hence they must have an agenda and seek answers to a specific problem (Gray, 2014). Stewart *et al.* (2007) has suggested the following steps in designing and moderating a focus group that was followed by the researcher:

i. Identify a problem/formulate a research question

This step has already been completed in Chapter 1. The research question that was answered by the data collected from focus groups is (1.5.2.4): **What are the internal stakeholders of the SRCS's perceptions of the use of WhatsApp as a way to manage the relationships between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders?**

ii. Identify sampling frame/recruit participants

This step has also been completed in Chapter 1, and in this chapter (3.3.1). The researcher conducted four focus groups with HC members. The researcher contacted the possible

participants via email (due to the COVID-19 outbreak) and asked for their participation in online focus groups.

iii. Identify moderator and others

A moderator is the person responsible for facilitating a focus group. The researcher acted as a moderator for all the focus groups. The researcher was able to record all online focus groups, making the transcription of those focus groups much easier since the researcher could review the entire discussion visually, and negates the need for a second moderator.

The researcher kept the following in mind when conducting the focus groups, in order to ensure that the focus groups were successful (Gray, 2014):

- Make a good first impression and establish the tone by making eye contact, smiling, etc.;
- Be clear about the intentions and expectations;
- Introduce self and welcome the participants;
- State clearly what the focus group is about and establish ground rules;
- Explain what the data will be used for;
- Create a comfortable atmosphere for participants;
- Ensure that the temperature is at the right level, seats are comfortable, lighting is acceptable;
- Be your natural self – avoid being overformal;
- Use clear language;
- Request personal stories;
- Be comfortable with silences; and
- Bring to the fore patterns (consistencies and inconsistencies) to prompt deeper discussion.

iv. Generate pilot and interview questions

The discussion questions will be generated by using the concepts and constructs identified in Chapter 2, and are indicated in Table 3.6:

Table 3:6: Moderator's guide

Concept	(Sub)Construct	Questions
Managing relationships through two-way symmetrical communication on social media	Disclosure	What is your experience with using WhatsApp as a platform to communicate with the SRCS management? What information does the SRCS usually share on WhatsApp?
	Access	How accessible is WhatsApp to you? Which other social media platforms would you prefer?
	Positivity	Do you find it easy to make suggestions or give input on the group? Are you comfortable with sharing information on the group?
	Usefulness and information dissemination	Do you perceive the information shared by the SRCS as useful? What do you do with the information shared by the SRCS? What kind of media does the SRCS use?
	Openness and disclosure	Do you feel comfortable engaging with the SRCS management on the group? Have you shared any concerns on the group?
	Assurances of authenticity	Are your concerns being acknowledged on the group? Have you engaged with other internal stakeholders on the group?
	Interactivity and involvement	Do you feel involved with the SRCS when using the WhatsApp group? Have you shared any ideas on the group?
	Networking	Do you share your ideas on the group? Have you engaged with the EC on the group?
	Sharing tasks	Are your inputs being asked for big events?
	Dialogue	Do you receive any feedback regarding questions or concerns on the group? Are improvements being made after you've received feedback?
Relationship management outcomes	Trust	Do you perceive the SRCS as trustworthy? Do you feel that your opinions are taken into account when the SRCS makes a decision?
	Control mutuality	Is the SRCS open with you on the group? Are you comfortable with engaging with EC members on the group?
	Commitment	Do you believe that the SRCS puts enough time/effort into communicating with you on the group? Would you continue being a part of the SRCS in the next term?
	Relationship satisfaction	Are you satisfied with your relationship with the SRCS? Do you feel like the relationship between you and the SRCS is maintained on the group?

v. Conducting the focus group process

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 in South Africa at the end of March, the researcher has had to adapt the methods of conducting focus groups. The researcher thus made use of online focus groups.

There are many options for conducting online focus groups (Stewart & Williams, 2005:402). Online focus groups can either be synchronous, meaning that they take place in real time over video chat, or asynchronous, meaning that they take place over a longer period of time through text. Asynchronous forms of communication, such as email or chatrooms, allow for lengthier and more considered responses. Synchronous forms of communication can be chaotic and fast-moving, much like an actual face-to-face conversation (Stewart & Williams, 2005:403).

Synchronous forms of communication were used for the focus groups. Firstly, the researcher reached out to all 28 of the HC members through email with a formal letter asking the participants if they would take part in the study. Most participants replied through email and WhatsApp to give their permission. The researcher then followed up through WhatsApp to set the date, time and Zoom link for the focus group. Password protected Zoom rooms were used to ensure privacy and security.

At the start of each Zoom session the researcher explained the study and reiterated that participation could be withdrawn at any time and that the participants' answers would be complete anonymous and not shared with anyone other than the researcher's supervisor. Each participant was given a number for transcription purposes and took notes during the session. The researcher also clearly indicated when the Zoom meetings were being recorded, when the recording started and when it stopped. The researcher attempted to ensure that all participants were comfortable and included. On average the focus groups lasted about 45mins. Some focus groups faced challenges, such as cameras or microphones not working, and one focus group had to be moved to a different time due to loadshedding.

A total of four focus groups were conducted with the SRCS HC members. After the focus group finished the recording was transcribed and saved on the researcher's external hard drive as backup.

Table 3:7: Focus Group Process

Focus Group	Date	Duration	Location
1	9 July 2020	14:00 – 14:45	Zoom
2	16 July 2020	14:00 – 14:35	Zoom
3	21 July 2020	14:00 – 14:40	Zoom

4	3 August 2020	14:00 – 14:45	Zoom
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vi. Record the data

In order to retrieve valuable data, the researcher made use of synchronous online focus groups through Zoom. Zoom allows for recording of conversations, which made transcribing easier and ensured that no information was missed. The researcher's presence in the online focus group also ensured that an open and interactive discussion is created to obtain the data needed (Stewart & Williams, 2005:405).

vii. Analyse and interpret the data

The data gathered through the focus groups was analysed and interpreted through the various concepts and constructs taken from theory (Chapter 2) and operationalised in Chapter 3. The results were analysed by using the four relationship management strategies (see 2.5 and 3.3.2) and the relationship management outcomes (see 2.6 and 3.3.2). This step was completed in Chapter 4.

3.3.4.1 Validity and reliability

The validity and reliability of the focus groups were ensured through a standardised set of questions (as seen in Table 3.6). The following methods were also employed by the researcher to ensure the validity and reliability of the data (Gray, 2014):

- Observing group interactions and emotional responses;
- Observing turning points where views might change;
- Making a voice/video recording of the focus group;
- Recording notes and quotes;
- Capture the conversation word-for-word as closely as possible;
- Using coding and seating charts to identify speakers;
- Provide reassurances of confidentiality if necessary; and
- Ensure that the focus group takes place in a safe, neutral space.

These steps were used during the focus groups in order to ensure that the data is reliable and valid.

3.3.5 Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interview is a prominent data collection strategy used in qualitative research (Bryman *et al.*, 2014:215). A semi-structured interview is a qualitative method of research that combines a set of open-ended questions with the opportunity for the interviewer to explore particular themes and responses further (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The interviewer has more control over the topics of the interview than in an unstructured interview, but there is no fixed range of responses as there is in a structured interview (Ayres, 2008:810).

A semi-structured interview represents characteristics of both a structured questionnaire and an in-depth interview, however, the objective (Du Plooy, 2009:198) of the in-depth part of the semi-structured interview is to understand how respondents perceive certain themes and topics. The characteristics of a semi-structured interview can thus be listed as follows (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006):

- the interviewer and respondent engage in a formal, in-depth interview;
- the interviewer develops an “interview guide”, which is a list of topics and questions that need to be discussed during the interview; and
- the interviewer follows the guide but is able to deviate from the questions and follow the conversation as it takes place.

The interview schedule for a semi-structured interview contains standardised questions or topics, however, the interviewer is free to deviate and ask follow-up questions (Du Plooy, 2009:198). This type of interview allows the interviewer latitude to move in unanticipated directions and to interact with the respondent. Semi-structured interviews are typically used when the interviewer will not get more than one chance to interview the respondent. This approach allows the interviewer to dive deep into the perceptions and understandings of the respondent (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in this study because questions can be prepared ahead of time, allowing the interviewer to appear prepared and competent during the interview (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews also provide reliable, comparable qualitative data, which will be used to answer the research question. Semi-structured interviews use many kinds of open-ended questions, some may ask for relatively concrete information, while others may ask for more narrative information (Ayres, 2008:810). The development of rich, relevant data therefore lies in the interviewer’s ability to understand, interpret and respond to the verbal and non-verbal information provided by the respondent.

In order to ensure a successful semi-structured interview, the researcher made use of the elements of a successful interview, as proposed by Bryman *et al.* (2014:228), which ensures success through:

- recording, with permission from the respondent, the interview;
- ensuring a setting where the respondent is at ease;
- taking field notes and making observations during the interview; and
- using an understandable language.

Semi-structured interviews were held with the chairperson and the vice-chairperson of the SRCS. As internal actors, these particular individuals will elicit insider information on how the theoretical constructions of two-way symmetrical communication, internal communication and social media is implemented, experienced and practised by the SRCS. Table 3.8 explains the semi-structured interview schedule according to the questions that were asked to evaluate the different concepts and constructs as identified in Chapter 2:

Table 3:8: Semi-structured interview schedule

Concept	(Sub)Constructs	Questions
	General questions	What is your experience with using WhatsApp as a platform to communicate and manage relationships with internal stakeholders?
Managing relationships through two-way symmetrical communication on social media	Disclosure	Are there any guidelines that you use when posting on WhatsApp? What content do you usually post on the group? Who decides what to post on the group?
	Access	How do you make sure that all your internal stakeholders have access to the information posted on WhatsApp?
	Positivity	How do you make sure that your internal stakeholders have a positive attitude towards you on WhatsApp?
	Usefulness of information	How do you make sure that your information is useful to internal stakeholders? What kind of media do you post on the group? Do you believe that the media mentioned helps internal stakeholders to understand the information shared?
	Openness and disclosure	How do you make sure that you are open with what you communicate on WhatsApp?
	Assurances of authenticity	How do you ensure authenticity?
	Interactivity and involvement	How do you make sure that your content on WhatsApp is interactive? How do you ensure that internal stakeholders check the group regularly? Do internal stakeholders voice their concerns on the group?

		Do you make changes in the organisation based on the comments from internal stakeholders?
	Networking	How do you network with internal stakeholders? Do you give internal stakeholders an opportunity to network with you?
	Sharing tasks	Do you share any tasks with internal stakeholders on WhatsApp? Do you ask internal stakeholders to share their stories on WhatsApp?
	Dialogue	How do you ensure that communication is two-way? Do you encourage internal stakeholders to discuss things on the group? Are internal stakeholders encouraged to make comments on posts? How do you respond to comments on the group?
Relationship management outcomes	Trust	How do you know that you have a good relationship with internal stakeholders? How do you know that your internal stakeholders trust you? Do you keep the promises that you make to internal stakeholders? Do you take the opinions of internal stakeholders into account when making decisions?
	Control mutuality	Do you think that your internal stakeholders' opinions are valid? Do your internal stakeholders have influence over decisions made by the SRCS? Would you say that you are open with internal stakeholders?
	Commitment	How much time and effort are being put into relationships with internal stakeholders? How much money is being put into relationships with internal stakeholders? Would you say that your internal stakeholders are committed to you?
	Relationship satisfaction	Would you say that your internal stakeholders are satisfied with your relationship? How are your internal stakeholders benefitting from the relationship? How do you benefit from the relationship? Do you believe that your internal stakeholders will want to continue working for the SRCS?

3.3.5.1 Semi-structured interview process

The researcher began by emailing both the chairperson and vice-chairperson of the SRCS with a formal letter in order to attain their participation. After the initial emails were sent, follow ups were made through WhatsApp. The researcher also used WhatsApp to set the date and time of the interviews.

The interview with the Chairperson was held on 9 July 2020 at 13:00 in the Student Campus Council offices at the North-West University Potchefstroom Campus. The interview lasted about

an hour and the researcher used the Voice Note app to record the session. Notes were also taken during the session. The researcher started the session by asking for permission to record, then stating the purpose of the study and assuring the chairperson that participation is not mandatory. After the session concluded the researcher transcribed the interview and saved a backup to an external hard drive.

The interview with the vice-chairperson took place over email, as the vice-chairperson was not on campus at the time and did not have a sufficient connection for Zoom. Several emails were sent between 3 – 21 September to ensure that the meaning of the answers were understood. The researcher also indicated in the emails that participation was not mandatory. Afterwards the researcher transcribed the emails and saved a backup to an external hard drive.

3.3.5.2 Validity and reliability

Gray (2014:388) explains that for a semi-structured interview, validity can be assured by focusing on the research objectives when designing and planning the questions.

In the present study, this was done by designing the interview schedule (Table 3.7) according to the constructs identified in Chapter 2. Gray (2014:388) also provides the following ways to ensure validity and reliability:

- Use interview techniques to build trust and rapport, which gives interviewees the opportunity to express themselves.
- Give interviewees the chance to expand on or illustrate their responses.
- Ensure a sufficient length of time for conducting the interview so that subjects can be addressed in-depth.
- Compile the interviews schedule that contains questions thematically drawn from the literature.

Validity can also be ensured by recording the interviews and then transcribing the interviews fully. Reliability can be ensured by standardising the interview schedule (as seen in Table 3.8) and by treating all the interviewees the same (Gray, 2014:389).

3.4 CHALLENGES

The researcher faced various challenges during this study. The biggest challenge faced was the outbreak of COVID-19 in South Africa. The country went into lockdown on 27 March 2020, meaning that all students on the NWU Potchefstroom Campus returned to their respective homes. This meant that the researcher could not conduct face-to-face interviews or focus groups and had to switch to electronic means.

The national lockdown also meant that the researcher had to leave campus, meaning that the researcher had limited access to internet connectivity and resources needed to continue the study.

3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical behaviour in research is vital (Wellman *et al.*, 2012:181). Issues regarding plagiarism and honesty are universal, but additional problems can arise when the research involves human beings and social sciences (Wellman *et al.*, 2012:181).

In this research, the researcher endeavoured to ensure no harm to the NWU or the organisation participating in the study. Interview and focus group recordings, transcripts and coding information will be kept secure and the researcher ensured that the participants are not identifiable by the content analysis. Only the researcher and supervisor have access to the data, transcriptions, audio and field notes.

Participants in the semi-structured interviews and focus groups were fully informed of the purpose of the project and the research that is being conducted from the beginning. They were informed of the nature of the study, the role of participants, the identity of the researchers, the objectives of the research and how the findings will be used. They were also informed that participation is not compulsory, and that no one will be coerced, forced or bribed in order to participate. All participants were informed that their identities will be confidential and that they will be free to withdraw from the research anytime during the process. The researcher has obtained the written permission of the SRCS chairperson to be able to use the SRCS for this study.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak in South Africa, the focus groups and one of the semi-structured interviews had to take place online. Recordings of the focus groups and semi-structured interviews were made; however, these recordings will not be made public and will only be used for the researcher to transcribe the focus groups and semi-structured interviews.

Permission from the participants in the content analysis was only obtained after the fact, as the researcher did not want knowledge of the study to influence the way participants communicated with each other (see 1.8.2 and 1.9). The researcher sent emails to all HC members, explaining the study to them and asking for their consent to use the data gathered from the WhatsApp group. Messages from participants who indicated that they did not want their data used, were not included in the study.

3.6 CONCLUSION

Various research methods were employed during this study: a literature study, qualitative contents analysis, semi-structured interviews and focus groups, to gather data to answer the specific and general research questions.

The aim was to gain insight into the SRCS' strategy to manage relationships with their stakeholders through two-way symmetrical communication on WhatsApp. The measurement instruments and methods were developed based on the constructs and concepts identified in literature (Chapter 2).

The abovementioned methods were incorporated into the study, and inferences drawn from the findings to determine how the SRCS was using WhatsApp to manage relationships, and if they were successful in managing relationships from the perspective of their internal stakeholders.

Chapter 4 will explain the findings of the qualitative content analysis, the semi-structured interviews and the focus groups. A conclusion will be drawn from the data in Chapter 5 by answering the specific and general research questions.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter (Chapter 3) discussed the research methodology used to answer the researcher questions posed in Chapter 1 (see 1.5).

This chapter aims to answer those questions by analysing the data gathered from the content analysis and observation, the focus groups and the semi-structured interviews. The analysis on the data gathered will be done according to the concepts and constructs identified in the theoretical framework in Chapter 2.

4.2 THEORETICAL ARGUMENT 1: MANAGING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH INTERNAL TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL COMMUNICATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Managing relationships on WhatsApp through internal two-way symmetrical communication

The SRCS should apply two-way symmetrical communication through WhatsApp as an internal social media platform to manage relationships with internal stakeholders. This can be done by using disclosure, usefulness of information, interactivity and involvement, and dialogue as the guiding principles of two-way symmetrical communication.

The first theoretical argument identified the following constructs of two-way symmetrical communication: disclosure, usefulness of information, interactivity and involvement, and dialogue. These constructs were then operationalised in order to provide a theoretical basis for the data gathered to be analysed. The operational definitions were discussed in Chapter 3 (3.3.2.1). In order to evaluate the first theoretical argument, focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and observation and content analysis will be used. The observation and content analysis will specifically look at WhatsApp's capabilities as a platform to manage relationships through two-way symmetrical communication, while the focus groups and semi-structured interviews will determine whether both the SRCS and their internal stakeholders perceive a relationship being built on WhatsApp through two-way symmetrical communication.

4.2.1 Disclosure

As previously established (2.5.1), *disclosure* means that the SRCS is open by making information available to internal stakeholders on a social media platform that is easily accessible. When both parties become more comfortable with sharing information on the social media platform, more

information could be exchanged by posing and answering questions that may strengthen the relationship. The construct of *disclosure* will be discussed in the following section, based on the data gathered from the various research methods.

4.2.1.1 Observation and content analysis

The focus groups and the semi-structured interviews both investigated the perceptions of the participants, whereas the content analysis and observation will investigate the actual content posted on the group, and the features of WhatsApp that makes two-way symmetrical communication possible.

WhatsApp is the social media platform used to facilitate communication between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders. As can be seen from figure 4.1, all HC members have been placed on a WhatsApp group with the SRCS EC (management). Internal stakeholders thus have access to the information posted on the group, because they are part of the group. Internal stakeholders have full access to all posts made, as well as all the media posted on the group. As can be seen from figure 4.2, the contact information of all participants in the group can be found under Participants. There is also an option to search the Participants if a specific number or person is needed.

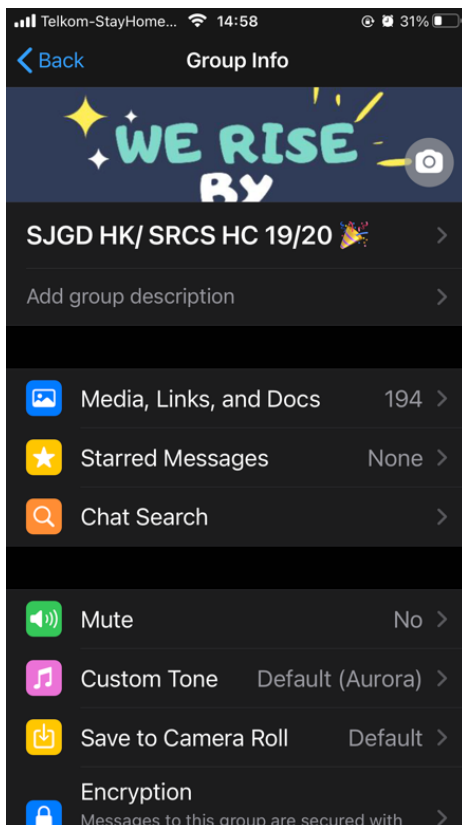


Figure 4.1: The SRCS/HC WhatsApp group

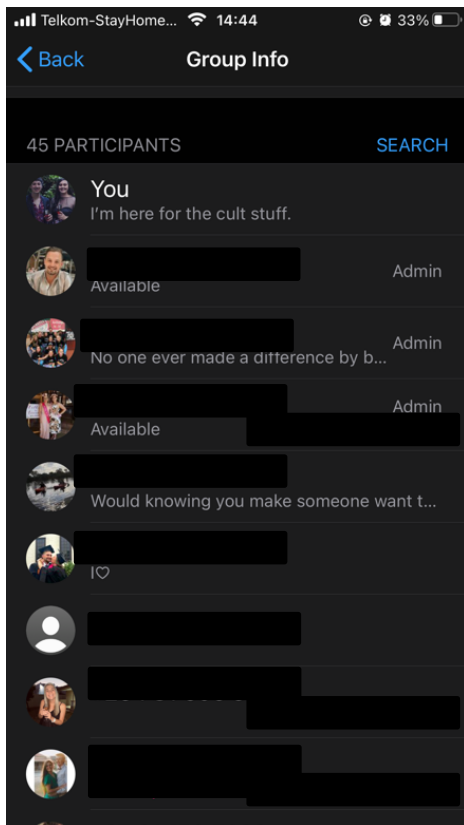


Figure 4.2: The contact information of all participants on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group



Figure 4.3: A question is asked by an HC member regarding a document that cannot be opened, and an EC member offers help

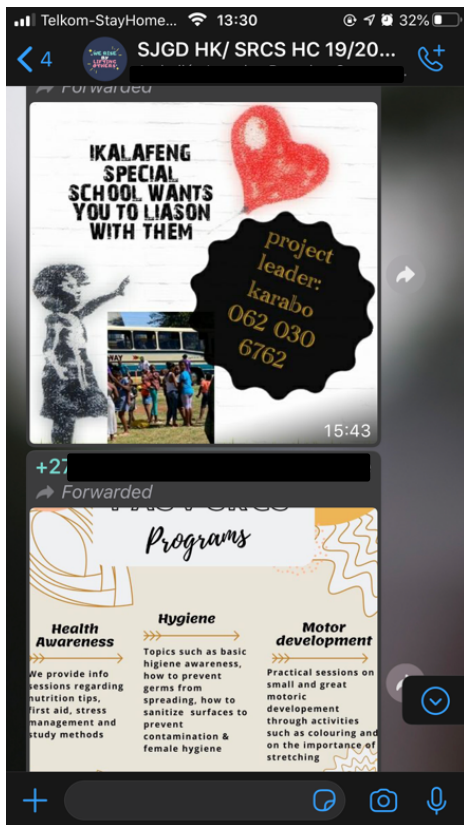


Figure 4.4: Media (posters) posted on the group advertising SRCS programmes

It can also be seen that in practice, internal stakeholders do ask questions and make comments on the group (figure 4.3), however, this is an exception to the rule. As determined by the focus groups (4.2.1.2), internal stakeholders are not necessarily comfortable with asking questions on the group because the general consensus is that the purpose of the group is for information only. The SRCS also shares information through various media formats (figure 4.4), thereby disclosing information that internal stakeholders require.

4.2.1.2 Focus groups

The participants agreed that *disclosure* takes place on WhatsApp, as WhatsApp is the primary social media platform used by the SRCS to disseminate information. The SRCS makes information available on WhatsApp by sending messages with updates. The internal stakeholders have access to the information shared by the SRCS due to the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group to which they belong. The SRCS usually sends information about big events, such as Canned Food Day or Barefoot Day, along with meeting times and dates, and important NWU posters. “The information they send us are things like when our meetings are, or when we have big events like Canned Food Day” (P10). The SRCS also makes use of several media formats within WhatsApp to disclose information, such as voice notes, posters, documents and pictures. “We get posters for advertising (P1)... we get voice notes, posters, documents and links” (P6).

The *access* strategy, which links to *disclosure*, is achieved when an organisation gives internal stakeholders the ability to *access* the platform where information is being provided (see 2.5.1). According to all participants, WhatsApp encapsulates the *access* strategy very well, as WhatsApp is an easily accessible application that most of the internal stakeholders already use. “It’s very convenient because everyone uses WhatsApp. It’s not like they have to download the app first, they already have it” (P6).

The general consensus was that “there’s no other platform that can give us information fast and efficiently” (P12), meaning that WhatsApp is both easy to use and easy to *access* for the participants. Internal stakeholders have full *access* to posts and comments. It appears that WhatsApp is preferred over other means of communicating, such as email, because it’s easier to *access*. “I think WhatsApp is an easier platform to use than say, sending emails. I don’t think you can even compare them” (P1). All participants also stated that information is sent on the group constantly, keeping them informed of everything that is happening. Participants also have access to the contact information of the EC members on the group, as WhatsApp allows them to see the numbers of all group members.

This means that internal stakeholders have full access to anything posted on WhatsApp. The access that internal stakeholders have to information, has made them view the SRCS in a positive way, thereby strengthening their relationship.

The *positivity* strategy is also linked to *access* and *disclosure*. When both the SRCS and their internal stakeholders feel comfortable with sharing information on the social media platform, it may lead to more information being spread through posing and answering questions that could strengthen the relationship (see 2.5.1). Because of WhatsApp’s accessibility, the participants generally feel *positive* towards the information shared on WhatsApp and towards the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group as well. The outcomes of the discussion of this strategy has, however, offered contradictory evidence in some cases. Some participants indicated that they do not usually make comments or ask questions on the SRCS/HC group. “We don’t usually post on the (SRCS/HC) group” (P11). In order for information to be understood and spread easily, internal stakeholders must feel comfortable with asking questions on the WhatsApp group. This is indicative of internal stakeholders not being comfortable enough with the environment. This can lead to the assumption that each WhatsApp group has a specific purpose, and that the purpose of the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group is to share information, and not necessarily to ask questions or make comments.

4.2.1.3 *Semi-structured interviews*

Both the chairperson and vice-chairperson of the SRCS confirmed that *disclosure* takes place on WhatsApp, as WhatsApp is the main social media platform used to communicate with internal stakeholders (Participant B, 2020). The SRCS makes information available to their internal stakeholders through posts on WhatsApp. The chairperson confirmed that they have about 12 SRCS WhatsApp groups, which includes the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group used for this study, as well as the smaller guardian groups. The SRCS usually sends information about big events and portfolio happenings to their internal stakeholders via the SRCS/HC group (Participant A, 2020).

The SRCS also makes use of many visual aspects, such as videos, photos and posters. Participant A (2020) also added that the use of multimedia makes the information easier to take in and disseminate which, in turn, leads to a more positive relationship between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders. Participant B (2020) also stated that they sometimes post photos of events on the group, but that it does not happen often.

With regard to the *access* strategy, Participant A (2020) indicated that internal stakeholders are provided access to the communication platform through the WhatsApp groups to which they belong. "We have to post in English and Afrikaans, and make sure that there are no spelling mistakes and that messages are professional" (Participant B, 2020). The SRCS also posted a document containing the contact information of the EC members, as well as other internal stakeholders, on the SRCS/HC group. Internal stakeholders are thus provided full access to posts and comments, and information is shared on the group constantly.

The *positivity* strategy states that information should be easily spread, and this could be done through internal stakeholders asking questions about the information shared. The SRCS frequently posts information on the SRCS/HC group, and then request the internal stakeholders to ask them questions or reply to the message in private. This links to the data gathered from participants in the focus groups, stating that they do not ask questions on the group. Participant B (2020) stated that they give HC members the opportunity to ask questions after messages are posted, and that they have a strict rule against posting negative or offensive content.

The SRCS has a professional group, which is the SRCS/HC group, and then smaller informal groups where questions can be asked. This once again correlates with the previous statement made that each WhatsApp group has a specific purpose, and that the overall use of WhatsApp is what inclines internal stakeholders positively towards the SRCS.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the SRCS *discloses* important information to their internal stakeholders through various media formats on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group. Internal stakeholders have full *access* to the information shared through the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group. Internal stakeholders prefer the use of WhatsApp above all other platforms because it is easy to use and provides *access* to documents and important information. Because of WhatsApp's accessibility, internal stakeholders feel *positive* towards the group and the information shared there. Through *disclosure, access and positivity*, internal stakeholders receive important information vital to the work that they should carry out which, in turn, leads them to think favourably of the SRCS, which leads to better relationships between the parties and ensures that the structure remains sustainable and stable.

4.2.2 Usefulness of information

Where *disclosure* referred to the *access* that the internal stakeholders have to information through the social media platform, *usefulness* stresses that the information posted should be *useful* to internal stakeholders. Useful information could be obtained if internal stakeholders are open and honest about their needs and concerns and these needs and concerns are being acknowledged by the SRCS. Through this process, the SRCS could ensure stronger relationships with their internal stakeholders (see 2.5.2). The data gathered for this construct will be discussed below.

4.2.2.1 Content analysis and observation

This content analysis and observation will look at the feasibility of sending useful information on WhatsApp. *Useful information* should be delivered through various multimedia formats to make the information *easier to understand*. If information may be unclear, there should be *open communication* to address the uncertainties (see 2.5.2).

To ensure that the purpose of the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group is clear, the SRCS should fill in the "About Us" section of the group. Ensuring that the purpose of the group is clear, could address any uncertainties that internal stakeholders might have. As can be seen in figure 4.5, WhatsApp allows the creators of a group to fill in the group description (essentially and "About Us" section). The SRCS' group description is currently empty, although the purpose of the group is still clear to all participants on the group as discovered through the focus groups (4.2.2.2) and the semi-structured interviews (4.2.2.3).

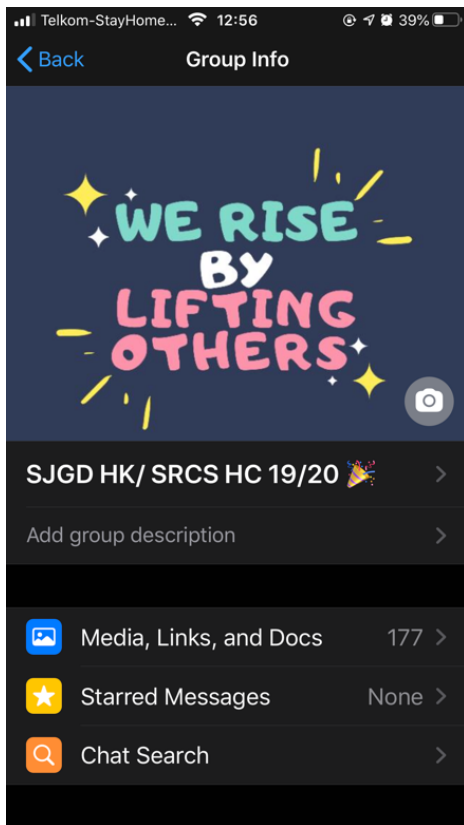


Figure 4.5: SRCS/HC WhatsApp group description and the media folder

The SRCS also makes use of a variety of media and document formats, and WhatsApp caters to all formats. PDFs (figure 4.6), Google documents (figure 4.7), posters (figure 4.8) and videos (figure 4.9) can all be seen posted on the group. This makes WhatsApp an easy platform to use to send multimedia to ensure that internal stakeholders understand the message. As the participants in the focus groups stated, they receive many messages on a daily basis (4.2.2.2). The use of media, such as videos and posters, makes the messages easier to understand. Participants in the semi-structured interviews (4.2.1.3) also stated that they find that the use of media makes information easier to understand. WhatsApp also has a feature that places all media files in one folder, as shown in figure 4.5, underneath Media, Links and Docs. This feature also makes information easier to find and can ensure that information does not get lost on the group.



Figure 4.6: A PDF document sent on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group

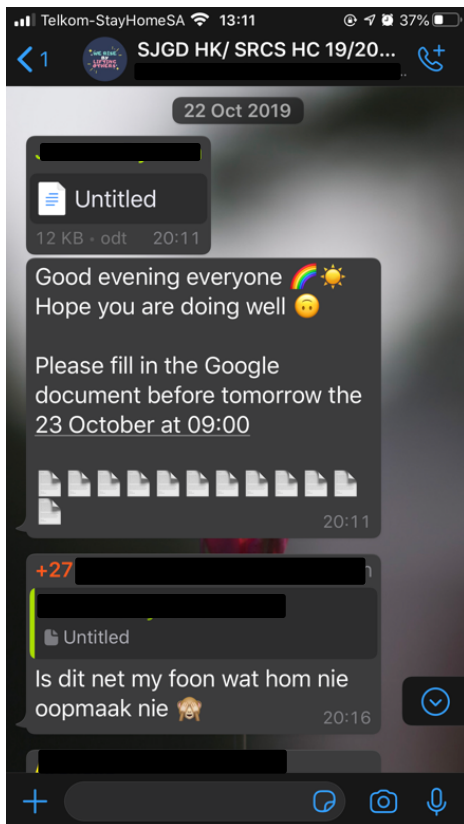


Figure 4.7: A Google document sent on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group

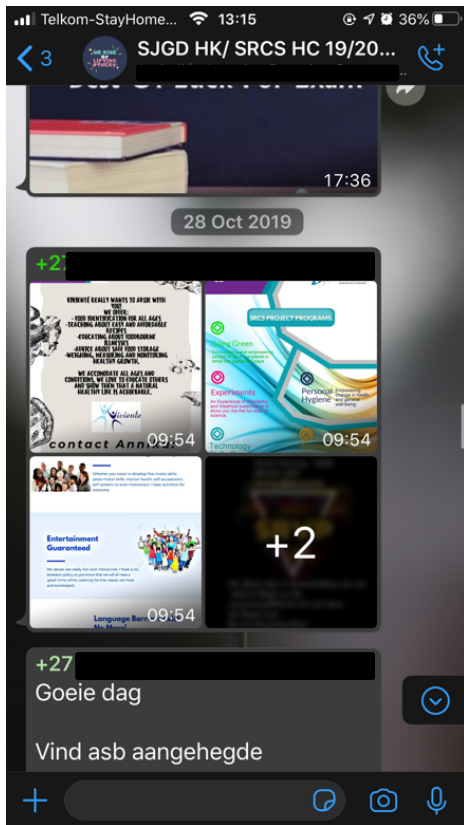


Figure 4.8: Posters sent on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group

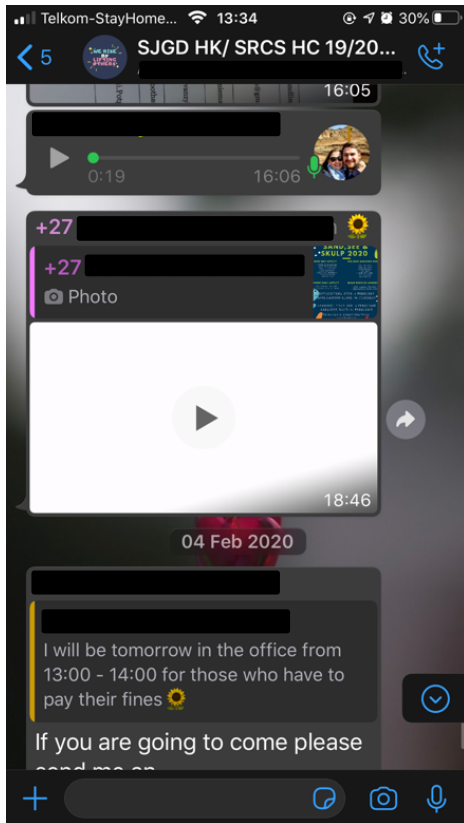


Figure 4.9: A video about one of the SRCS events sent on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group

It is also important for open communication to take place on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group, especially if internal stakeholders do not understand the information. The SRCS is very clear on the group about when they are available for internal stakeholders to see them (figure 4.10) and open communication takes place when the SRCS gives important information (figure 4.12). However, the SRCS requests their internal stakeholders to send them private messages (figure 4.11) if they have any questions or do not understand the information. At first, this might not look like open communication, but it links to the previous observation that the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group is for information only, and that two-way communication takes place on the other SRCS groups (4.2.1.3).



Figure 4.10: An SRCS manager indicates when they will be available for HC members to collect dresses (for a project)



Figure 4.11: A request for internal stakeholders to send the SRCS a private message if they have any inquiries about their points

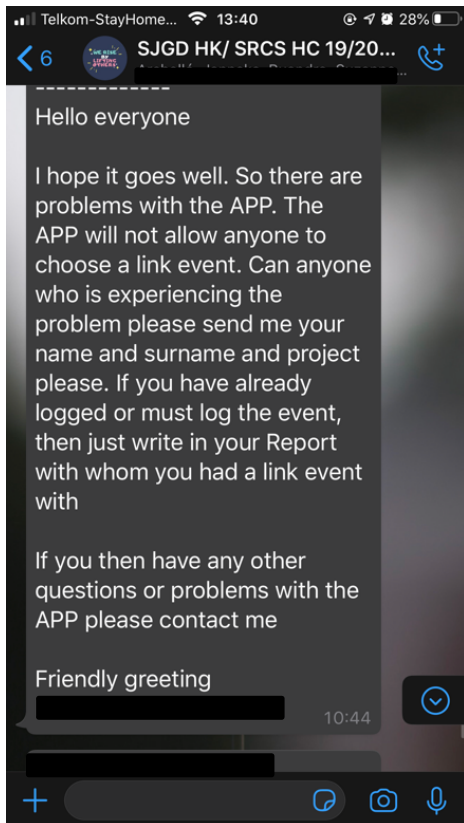


Figure 4.12: Open communication about issues with the SRCS app

WhatsApp can thus be seen as a good platform to use to ensure that internal stakeholders receive *useful information* in a multitude of media formats. WhatsApp can also facilitate *open communication* should internal stakeholders not understand the information posted on the group. The information sent by the SRCS and received by internal stakeholders can thus be perceived as useful. It is also important to note that internal stakeholders do not wish to be overwhelmed by information, as this decreases the usefulness of the information.

4.2.2.2 Focus groups

With regard to the *usefulness of information*, the internal stakeholders perceive the information that they receive on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group as useful to them. The useful information will then be shared with other internal stakeholders, such as the teams and committees of the internal stakeholders. “We communicate with our committee members about events and when those events take place” (P1). The information shared by the SRCS is thus useful to the internal stakeholders and is relevant enough to share with other internal stakeholders.

It has also come to light that the participants do not want to receive too much information at any given stage, as this overwhelms them and makes the information less useful. The participants are part of multiple groups and receive a multitude of messages daily. “...we get like 50 messages a day” (P3). The sheer quantity of messages received daily makes sifting through and taking in information difficult.

The discussion on *disclosure* (4.2.1) has already indicated that the SRCS makes use of various multimedia formats to disseminate information. However, the use of multimedia should also be *useful* to internal stakeholders by making the information shared on the SRCS/HC group easier to understand. Although one participant stated that they were not in favour of voice notes, the majority find that the use of multimedia makes information easier to process. “Media makes it easier to quickly check the information on the group (P3)... They always give us the information that we need” (P11).

While the information posted on the group is generally perceived as *useful*, participants in the fourth focus group felt that the EC members should prepare their communication better. The EC members sometimes send multiple messages with different dates or times for one event. “When they give information through, they should also think it through before sending” (P11). The participants want the SRCS to be sure of the information that they are sending, instead of sending multiple messages with multiple changes in information. This can cause some communication gaps, as messages could get lost in the stream of messages that internal stakeholders receive

daily. This also impacts the *usefulness* of the information, as the wrong information might get sent, which impacts the trustworthiness of the SRCS and the relationship.

WhatsApp is preferred above email and eFundi (the NWU's intranet) when it comes to accessing important documents sent by the SRCS. eFundi is the formal communication channel of the NWU, where all students and lecturers are uploaded. The site is mainly used for academic purposes, but organisations such as the SRCS often have their own pages. The participants stated that they prefer WhatsApp because the document downloads directly to their phones, meaning that they do not need to make use of a laptop. "We are really busy, so we don't want to waste time going to emails or eFundi. You'd have to make use of a laptop, which is usually at the residence, and by the time you get there you've forgotten about it. It's nice to have it on WhatsApp because you can access it immediately" (P7).

The *openness* strategy linked to *usefulness of information* (see 2.5.2). Internal stakeholders and EC members discover each other's needs and concerns on social media through the posts made on WhatsApp. It is also important for internal stakeholders and EC members to be open and honest with each other. Although the internal stakeholders perceive the EC as being open – "I think it's easy to communicate with them" (P9) –, they do not usually engage with the EC on the group, especially when it comes to sharing their concerns with the EC. "I think doing it personally is a better approach. No one wants to feel attacked on a group" (P2).

Internal stakeholders do have the ability to create posts on the SRCS/HC group, however, they prefer not to (4.2.1.2). This also correlates with the purpose of the group, which is to spread information. Discussions usually take place on different WhatsApp groups with the purpose of engaging in discussion. These separate groups make it easier for internal stakeholders to engage openly and honestly with each other, and the effect of the separate groups could be investigated further.

Acknowledging the internal stakeholders' questions and concerns, is an important aspect of the *assurances of authenticity* strategy. When big events are hosted, some participants will ask questions on the group and receive answers on the group. "I think I've asked a question on the group once or twice because I think there might be other people who want to ask the same question" (P11). The EC would also prompt for questions or concerns on WhatsApp in order to ensure that all internal stakeholders understand the information. "They (EC) would ask if we have any questions or concerns about a specific date or project, and then we can ask them (P9)... if it's something that affects everyone I'd ask on the group" (P5). There is open communicative behaviour from the SRCS towards their internal stakeholders on WhatsApp, even though communication does not always take place on the SRCS/HC group. Internal stakeholders are

thus asked to share their questions and concerns, and those questions and concerns are acknowledged, but the SRCS should take it a step further by also addressing the questions and concerns and making adjustments based on those questions and concerns.

In order to *assure authenticity*, the SRCS should also create content with a more personal tone. As previously established, the content, or messages, received by internal stakeholders on the SRCS/HC group is for information purposes only. “Everyone on the group has a minimalist mindset. It’s a group for the necessary information and not to be spammed” (P2). This means that the messages sent do not have a personal tone to them. However, in order to *assure authenticity*, the SRCS does host a lot of events where the EC and the HC members get to know each other. One participant noted that these events make it easier to communicate on WhatsApp, because he has gotten to know the EC on a more personal level.

4.2.2.3 *Semi-structured interview*

The SRCS should also ensure that the messages they post on social media is *useful* to internal stakeholders. The SRCS has indicated that they make their messages as useful as possible in order to ensure that the messages are relevant to spread. Participant A (2020) stated that they do not have one EC member who regulates what gets posted on the group, but that every EC member posts his/her relevant information on the group. Participant B (2020) correlates this by stating that “any EC member can send information about his/her event, and then most other posts are made by the chairperson or vice-chairperson.” This might cause discrepancies in the communication being sent, and the SRCS should consider streamlining the communication. The SRCS would also often post updates about the general happenings in the portfolio, such as when they are having issues with the app, which indicates that honest and transparent communication is being sent to internal stakeholders.

Internal stakeholders and EC members discover each other’s needs and concerns through *openness* on social media. The SRCS tries to ensure that both parties are *open* with each other through multiple channels (Participant B, 2020). Internal stakeholders are, however, not encouraged to engage with each other on the SRCS/HC group, mainly because the purpose of the group is to spread information. The SRCS has created smaller groups where internal stakeholders can create posts and make comments on posts shared by the organisation. While this may create more administrative work, these smaller groups are also more interactive than the larger SRCS/HC group. The SRCS will respond to questions asked on the SRCS/HC group, but prefer that those questions are asked in private or on the smaller groups, to ensure that important information does not get lost.

It is of importance that the SRCS gives their internal stakeholders *assurances of authenticity*. The SRCS should be asking internal stakeholders to share questions or concerns with management on WhatsApp. The SRCS does ask this of their internal stakeholders, but not usually on WhatsApp. Participant B (2020) also explained that they have a complaint channel, as well as anonymous evaluations of the EC, which makes the EC aware of their mistakes. Although this does not necessarily take place on WhatsApp, it still ensures that the SRCS are acknowledging their internal stakeholders and that they are willing to make changes based on the opinions and concerns of internal stakeholders.

Participant A (2020) also indicated that the SRCS tries to manage relationships with their internal stakeholders on a personal level, rather than just posting personal content on WhatsApp. In order to ensure that the SRCS is seen as *authentic*, they can incorporate more messages with a personal tone to them on WhatsApp.

In conclusion, the media used by the SRCS makes the information easier to understand and easier to disseminate. Useful information thus ensures that the SRCS is seen as *trustworthy*, which is an important outcome of a good relationship. The *openness* of the SRCS also contributes to their relationship with their internal stakeholders, as internal stakeholders are more comfortable with management when they perceive management as open. The SRCS also makes use of a mixed medium of personal and WhatsApp interactions to *assure authenticity* and ensure good relationships with their internal stakeholders to ensure that the structure remains sustainable and stable.

4.2.3 Interactivity and involvement

It is important for internal stakeholders to feel involved in the SRCS. The SRCS should provide their internal stakeholders with ways in which to become involved in the organisation, by encouraging engagement on social media through the sharing of ideas, opinions and tasks of events in order to ensure strong relationships (see 2.5.3).

4.2.3.1 Content analysis and observation

Interactivity and involvement emphasises that platforms should contain features that are useful and attractive for return visitors, such as *new information* and *finding and sorting of information*. The content should be structured in such a way that internal stakeholders want to *engage* with the organisation, and the organisation should *respond* to internal stakeholders (2.5.3).

It is important for the SRCS to post new content on the group, thereby ensuring that internal stakeholder *return* to the platform. New content should thus be posted on WhatsApp frequently

to ensure that internal stakeholders visit the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group often. A total of 94 messages were posted on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group in October, and 86 messages were posted by the SRCS in January. This indicates that there is no shortage of new content to be posted on the group. However, information can easily get lost in the sea of messages, which is why it is important to structure information in such a way that it is easy to find.

WhatsApp does allow for information to be easily found and sorted. WhatsApp automatically sorts links (figure 4.13), media (figure 4.14) and documents (figure 4.15), which makes it easier to find those links, media and documents that were sent on the group. WhatsApp also allows for participants to search the chat (as seen in figure 4.5). These features ensure that internal stakeholders can easily return to previous messages and find the information that they require.

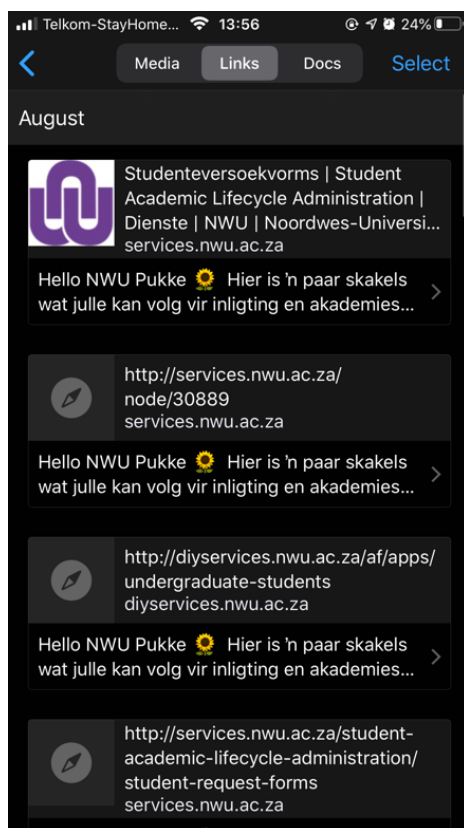


Figure 4.13: Links are auto sorted by date posted

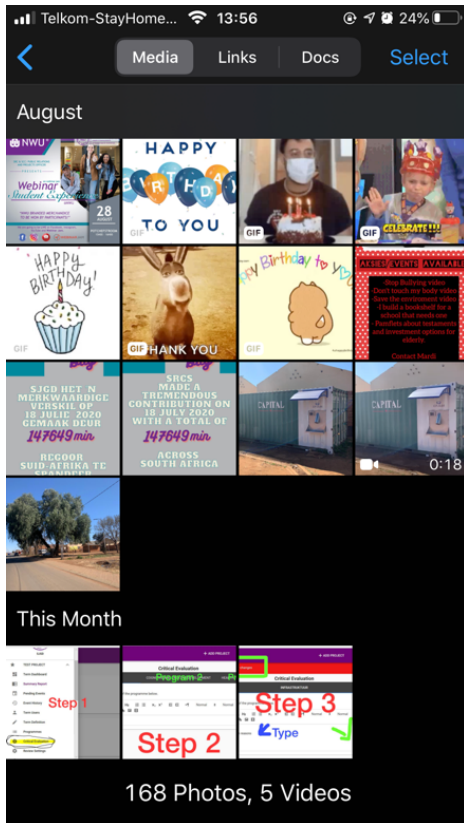


Figure 4.14: Media is also auto sorted by date posted

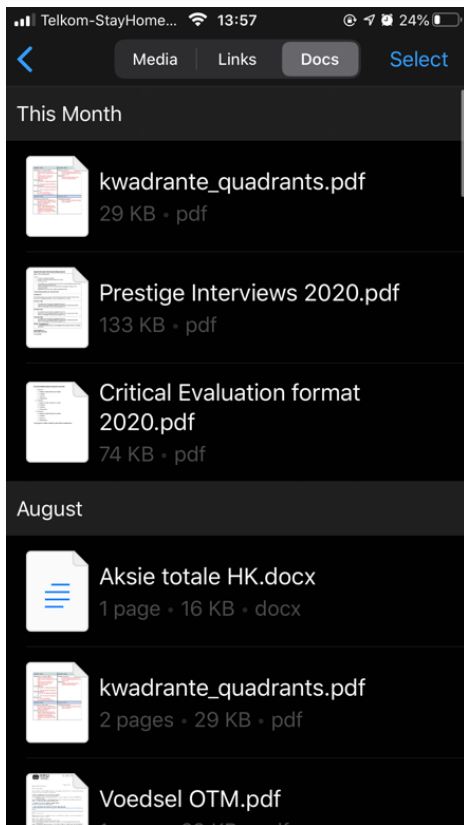


Figure 4.15: Documents are auto sorted by date posted

Internal stakeholders should also be able to *interact* with the SRCS and the SRCS should respond on WhatsApp. As previously mentioned, the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group's purpose is mainly for information. This means that engagement between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders should take place on different groups. It was discovered during the focus groups (4.2.3.2) and the semi-structured interviews (4.2.3.3) that interactions take place on guardian and coordinator WhatsApp groups or on private chats.

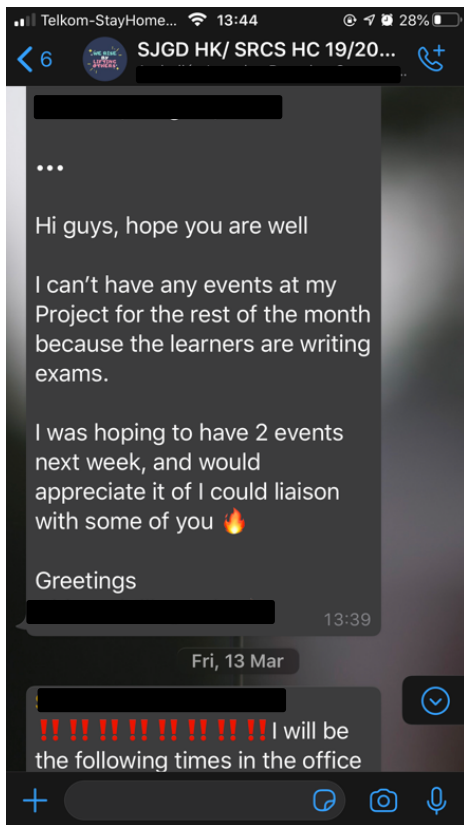


Figure 4.16: A message from an internal stakeholder, reaching out to other internal stakeholders about projects

Internal stakeholders are also able to create messages on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group in order to engage with the SRCS. As can be seen from figure 4.16, internal stakeholders do have the ability to create messages on the SRCS/HC group. However, as discussed during the data analysis of the focus groups (4.2.3.2), internal stakeholders do not prefer engaging on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group. Internal stakeholders prefer interacting and creating messages on the guardian and coordinator groups. As the creation of messages still takes place on WhatsApp, it can be determined that WhatsApp is a good platform to use when facilitating involvement and interactivity.

4.2.3.2 Focus groups

The internal stakeholders are *involved and active* in the SRCS through their own projects, and they are required by the SRCS to host events at these projects. Internal stakeholders can plan their events according to their own calendars, but the SRCS does give their internal stakeholders a calendar of events for the large events hosted. This also means that the SRCS should be *interactive* by sharing event ideas with the internal stakeholders and giving internal stakeholders the opportunity to share their ideas as well. Once again, this does not happen on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group. “I’ve never shared ideas on the group. I don’t think anyone does that. I only share it on my residence group (P7)... it’s not always relevant to share these things” (P3). The

participants would rather share ideas or ask for ideas within their own committee or residence groups.

However, ideas are still being shared between the EC and their internal stakeholders. Each internal stakeholder has a coordinator, usually the EC member who is responsible for one of the pillars of the SRCS. Each pillar has their own WhatsApp group as well where engagement takes place and where ideas are shared. “It’s mostly the coordinators that send us ideas (P11)... our coordinator would usually send us event ideas (P6)”. Sharing ideas on these groups involve the internal stakeholders with the SRCS and ensures better relationships between them, ensuring that the internal stakeholders remain active in the SRCS. “I’m a lot closer to my coordinator. If I have a question or I need ideas for an event, I would ask her” (P6).

The exchange of ideas between the coordinators and the HC members leads to them working well together and correlates with the *networking* strategy (2.5.3). Although networking does not necessarily take place on the SRCS/HC group, internal stakeholders do network with each other and the EC on WhatsApp. “It’s easy to just WhatsApp someone and ask for an event” (P14). Both the EC and the internal stakeholders prefer that conversations and networking take place on different WhatsApp groups than the SRCS/HC one.

“If you have conversations on a group that’s meant for information, information would actually disappear, and people would get confused (P5)... if you want to talk to someone you do it personally” (P7). *Networking* between the EC and the internal stakeholders thus takes place on WhatsApp, but not on the SRCS/HC group. However, when it comes to encouraging internal stakeholders to *interact* with each other, the SRCS/HC group is not the correct environment to do so. Internal stakeholders are instead encouraged to work together by hosting liaison events. This means that the SRCS does create a space for internal stakeholders to *interact* with each other, however, that space is not the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group.

In order to work together, the SRCS and the internal stakeholders should *share tasks*. To *share tasks*, gives the SRCS and internal stakeholders the opportunity to help each other attain a common goal in the relationship (2.5.3). The SRCS can achieve this by asking the internal stakeholders to share their opinions on events and to be part of the decision-making process. Most participants indicated that they are not often asked to share their opinions on events. “...with big events or issues, it would be good for them to ask our opinions (P9)... but I think there should be a limit. It’s a big portfolio so if they have to ask everyone for their opinions on everything nothing would get done. They should know when to involve us and when to solve a problem on their own” (P11).

However, the participants in focus group two felt that they could share their opinions with their guardians, and the guardians would then make suggestions to the SRCS. Each HC member is assigned a guardian at the start of their term. The guardians are EC members who specifically look after their assigned HC members to ensure that the HC members are comfortable and that their concerns are addressed. The SRCS should thus involve their internal stakeholders in decisions more by asking them to share their opinions on events.

4.2.3.3 *Semi-structured interviews*

Interactivity and involvement includes the SRCS providing a calendar of events, sharing event ideas, networking opportunities, sharing tasks and providing other important information relevant to internal stakeholders, which then leads to stronger relationships. The SRCS shares their annual calendar with their internal stakeholders to ensure that internal stakeholders are aware of the dates for big events. The SRCS also requires their internal stakeholders to host their own events, which keeps them *involved* in the SRCS. The SRCS also ensures that they are *interactive* with their stakeholders by providing event ideas in order to ensure that the events take place.

These ideas are usually shared through the SRCS' five coordinator groups, and through these smaller groups the SRCS can manage relationships with their internal stakeholders. Internal stakeholders are also encouraged to *network* with each other. Participant A (2020) stated that it is very important for SRCS members to have a good relationship with each other, because they often work closely together. The SRCS provides many networking opportunities outside of WhatsApp, and these opportunities are usually preferred above networking on WhatsApp by internal stakeholders, as stated by the focus group participants.

It has been previously stated that the SRCS does ask for feedback from their internal stakeholders, usually a feedback session would be held after a meeting (see 4.2.2.3). Participant B (2020) stated that the SRCS often hosts monthly feedback sessions with the HC members through the guardians and coordinators. However, it is not prevalent that the SRCS asks for inputs or *shares tasks* before big events take place. The SRCS should thus focus on including their internal stakeholders in the decision-making process before big events take place.

WhatsApp is thus an attractive platform to use in order to ensure *interactivity and involvement* from internal stakeholders. WhatsApp's various features, such as auto sorting links, media and documents, the chat search function, and the reply privately function, make it possible for internal stakeholders to return to the platform and engage with the SRCS on the platform. However, internal stakeholders do not often *share ideas* on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group. The sharing of ideas usually takes place on different WhatsApp groups. This reinforces the idea that WhatsApp

groups have different purposes, yet still functions as part of one network. *Networking* between internal stakeholders and the SRCS management also takes place on different groups, private chats or in person. Internal stakeholders are, however, not sufficiently involved in the *decision-making process*. That could lead to the internal stakeholders feeling left out, which could, in turn, lead to their relationship with the SRCS management deteriorating and the structure becoming unsustainable and unstable.

4.2.4 Dialogue

After new, relevant posts have been made containing information about the SRCS' activities, and internal stakeholders are involved and interactive, dialogue can take place (2.5.4). It is thus essential for the SRCS to take their interactions with their stakeholders further by not only acknowledging their questions and concerns, but also giving them feedback and making changes based on those questions and concerns.

4.2.4.1 Observation and content analysis

It has already been established (2.5.4) that in order for there to be dialogue, there must be continuous posts and information on the organisation's activities as seen in 4.2.1.1. The dialogic loop should now create mutual understanding through WhatsApp by providing continuous posts and information on the SRCS' activities. As can be seen in figure 4.17 and 4.18 below, the SRCS posts new information regarding their activities on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group constantly. This indicates that WhatsApp is a platform that allows for continuous message posting, and that the SRCS is providing their internal stakeholders with information. This correlates with the perceptions of the internal stakeholders, as they stated that the SRCS provides them with information on important events and deadlines in the portfolio (4.2.1.2).

However, it does not appear as if mutual understanding is being created through these messages on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group. Mutual understanding is created when organisations and internal stakeholders not only exchange information, but also ideas and opportunities to contribute to the organisation's goals (2.5.4). The SRCS mainly shares information and opportunities (as seen in figure 4.19), but the internal stakeholders do not share information or opportunities on this specific group. It was discovered through the focus groups and semi-structured interviews that the purpose of the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group is to share information, not engage in two-way symmetrical communication (4.2.1.2).

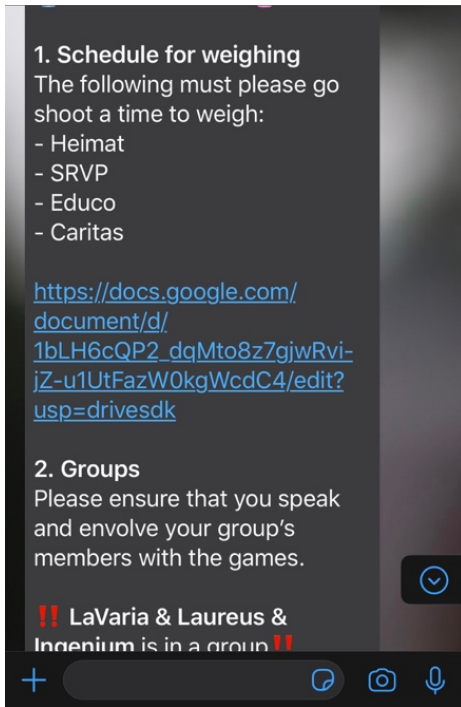


Figure 4.17: The SRCS gives information regarding one of their big events (Barefoot Day)



Figure 4.18: The SRCS shares information regarding one of their projects and opportunities to make use of the project

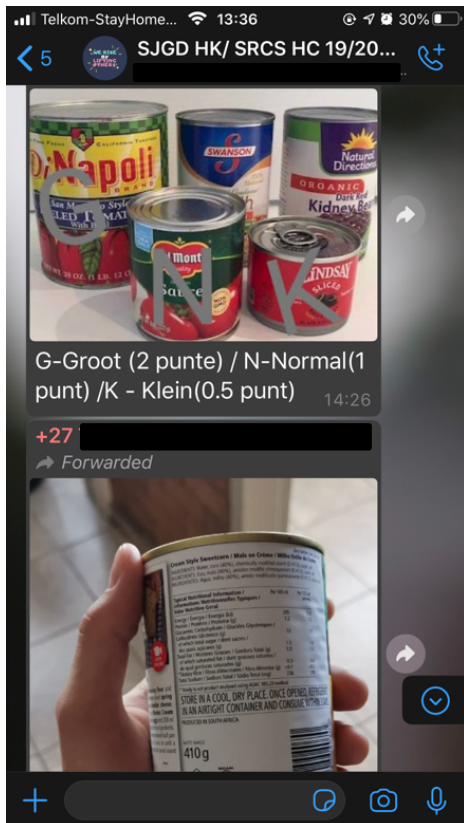


Figure 4.19: The SRCS shares information regarding one of their big events (Canned Food Day)

In order to complete the dialogic loop, however, WhatsApp should allow internal stakeholders to comment on messages posted in order to provide feedback. WhatsApp has a feature that only allows administrators of groups to post messages, however, this is not being used for the SRCS/HC group. Any member of the group can post a comment or question on the group. This means that WhatsApp does allow for parties to give feedback, as anyone can send a message at any time, however, it has been discovered that this is not always the case (4.2.1.2).

The SRCS should thus provide feedback to their internal stakeholders on WhatsApp. As previously discovered by the focus groups (4.2.2.2), internal stakeholders do not often make comments or ask questions on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group. WhatsApp does, however, make it easy for internal stakeholders to ask questions or make comments on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group should they choose to. A few instances where questions were asked was identified (figure 4.20 and 4.21), but these instances did not occur often. Internal stakeholders are thus receiving direct feedback from the SRCS (figure 4.20), but it should be added that feedback is not often given on the SRCS/HC group.

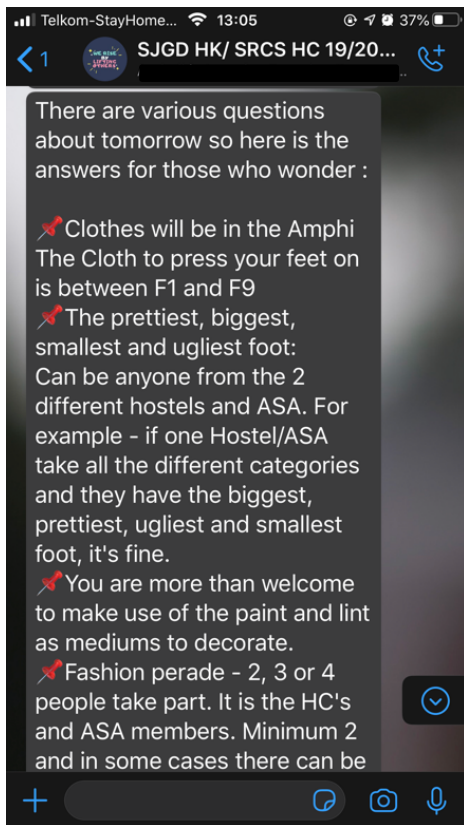


Figure 4.20: Questions regarding a big SRCS event (Barefoot Day) being answered by an EC member



Figure 4.21: An HC member asking which hashtags should be used, and an EC member replying with the correct hashtags to use

The SRCS often requests their internal stakeholders to reply to messages posted on the group in private. This is made easy on WhatsApp through the “reply privately” function (figure 4.22). This function allows any HC member to directly reply to a message in private and away from the group (figure 4.23). This correlates with the purpose of the SRCS/HC group (4.2.3.2) being for information only, and that conversations, questions or comments should be made in private or on some of the SRCS’ other groups.

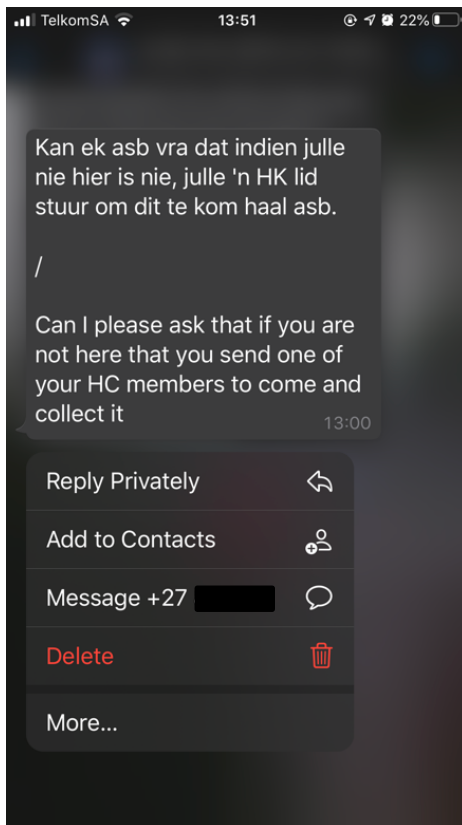


Figure 4.22: An example of the “reply privately” feature

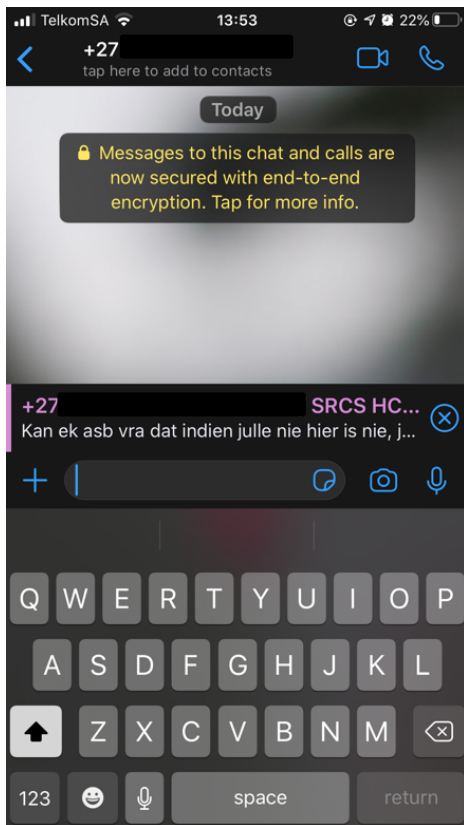


Figure 4.23: An example of a private chat and a private reply to a message posted on the SRCS/HC group

In this context, WhatsApp can be seen as an ideal platform to create a *dialogic loop* for internal two-way communication between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders, due to the ability to provide *feedback* on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group. It is clear, however, that feedback is not always provided on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group, and that the purpose of the group is to spread information only. This might cause a lapse in mutual understanding between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders. The focus groups and semi-structured interviews do lead to the conclusion that mutual understanding is created on WhatsApp, but not specifically on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group (4.2.4.2). It can be concluded that WhatsApp as a platform aids in achieving *mutual understanding* through the various features illustrated above, but that mutual understanding is created on groups other than the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group.

It is also important to note that information is being sent on WhatsApp *continuously*, meaning that internal stakeholders are always up to date with new information, and can thus ask informed questions and raise concerns. This leads to *dialogue*, and more importantly, the need for feedback and two-way symmetrical communication within the entire network of SRCS WhatsApp groups and not just on one group.

4.2.4.2 Focus groups

As previously determined in 4.2.1.2, internal stakeholders do ask questions about information posted on the SRCS/HC group on other WhatsApp groups. “We do have a lot of smaller groups where we ask questions” (P11). Each HC member is also assigned a guardian, as previously mentioned (4.2.2.2). HC members often go to their guardians with their questions and concerns and the guardians would take those questions or concerns to the rest of the EC.

While this indicates that internal stakeholders are not comfortable with making comments or asking questions on the SRCS/HC group, they are still comfortable with asking SRCS questions on other WhatsApp groups or talking directly to their guardian on WhatsApp. “Sometimes we create separate groups to talk about ideas and have discussions” (P14). Internal stakeholders can thus share input that would strengthen the relationship through the separate WhatsApp groups that they create and with their guardians. The conclusion can thus essentially be drawn that each WhatsApp group has a specific purpose, and that the overall use of WhatsApp is what inclines internal stakeholders positively towards the SRCS, not just the use of one group.

The guardian system works well in this instance as participants would much rather WhatsApp their guardian directly if they have a concern or a question about the information posted, than ask it on the group. However, there are exceptions in certain cases. “...sometimes someone will ask a general question on the group and it will be answered on the group” (P6). This usually occurs when big events take place, and internal stakeholders ask questions that can influence the whole group, or the whole group needs to know the answer to those questions. Participants are thus able to comment on information or posts shared by the SRCS, but often refrain from doing so if they do not feel that it is something that would be *useful* to the entire group.

4.2.4.3 Semi-structured interviews

It is crucial for the SRCS to create mutual understanding through dialogue with their internal stakeholders. Participant A (2020) indicated that they usually host feedback sessions with HC members after big events. “They’d rate large events and then the EC can see where they made mistakes and what we can do better next time.” It is thus imperative that the SRCS not only acknowledges the concerns of internal stakeholders, but that those concerns are addressed, and changes are made based on those concerns. However, this process does not take place on WhatsApp. HC members receive a feedback form to fill in during an SRCS meeting. Participant A (2020) stated that he prefers in-person meetings. “We usually ask for their opinions and take it into account. We’ve done it on WhatsApp once, but to do it in a meeting eliminates confusion so

I prefer that.” Even though this interaction does not take place on WhatsApp, it still creates dialogue between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders.

Participant B (2020) also previously indicated (4.2.2.3) that the SRCS has a complaint channel and that HC members can submit anonymous complaints. These complaints are then addressed in a meeting with the EC, thereby ensuring that the complaints are addressed and that the necessary changes are made based on the complaint. It is, however, not clear if the internal stakeholders receive feedback again after the changes have been made. The SRCS should thus focus on maintaining continuous dialogue with their internal stakeholders.

Overall, it can be concluded that WhatsApp can be viewed as a platform that is ideally suited for two-way symmetrical communication, and that all the necessary features are present to ensure that internal stakeholders remain engaged on the platform. WhatsApp can be used to create dialogic loops for internal two-way symmetrical communication because of the ability to provide feedback on the platform. Continuous information is also posted on WhatsApp, meaning that internal stakeholders can raise questions or concerns and engage in dialogue through a network of WhatsApp groups. WhatsApp can be an easy platform to use for larger organisations, since WhatsApp allows for instant and easy communication between parties. However, WhatsApp might not be ideal for storing and sending formal documentation. Although WhatsApp has the ability to send documents, documents cannot be edited or permanently stored in WhatsApp. Even though WhatsApp’s auto sorting feature is attractive, documents still need to be accessed through other applications.

Internal stakeholders do however, receive understandable information through WhatsApp’s media functions, and the auto sorting of links, media and documents makes them easy to find. WhatsApp also allows for open communication to take place between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders to ensure that all information posted is understood. This makes WhatsApp an attractive platform to use to ensure that internal stakeholders are engaged in dialogue, that they understand the information posted, and that they return to the app. Internal two-way symmetrical communication on social media between the SRCS managers and internal stakeholders could assist in managing relationships through disclosure, usefulness and information dissemination, and interactivity and involvement. By using the relationship management strategies, the SRCS has built a strong relationship between management and internal stakeholders. The participants all reacted positively towards the communication and interactions they were receiving from the SRCS on WhatsApp. It can be concluded that a strong relationship exists between the SRCS management and their internal stakeholders, as the communication process is two-way and both parties involved are sending and receiving information equally. This exchange can benefit both

parties and ensures that engagement takes place between organisations and internal stakeholders.

4.3 THEORETICAL ARGUMENT 2: RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT OUTCOMES

Theoretical argument 2: Relationship management outcomes

The relationships built through internal two-way symmetrical communication on social media could be managed by using relationship outcomes such as trust, control mutuality, commitment and relationship satisfaction.

The relationship between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders should be adjusted and maintained constantly to deliver successful interaction that satisfies the expectations of both parties. By using the relationship outcomes: trust, control mutuality, commitment and relationship satisfaction, (see 2.5) it can be determined how the internal stakeholders of the SRCS perceive their relationship. The data, gathered by means of focus groups and semi-structured interviews for this theoretical argument, will be discussed below. Observation and content analysis was not used for this theoretical argument, as the focus of this argument is more on the perceptions of participants than the actual capabilities of WhatsApp as a platform to cultivate specific relationship outcomes.

4.3.1 Trust

When commitments are honoured, trust will form between the two parties. The SRCS, as well as their internal stakeholders, must commit to what has been promised (see 2.6.1).

4.3.1.1 Focus groups

The EC appears very willing to assist the internal stakeholders and manage relationships with them. All participants indicated that they will communicate specifically with their guardians if they have a question or concern. “I feel like I can bother her, and she has to help me because she’s my guardian” (P4). As indicated previously, this exchange does not take place on the SRCS/HC group, but rather through personal WhatsApp messages. Internal stakeholder’s opinions are therefore taken into account by the EC through the guardian system, which leads to *trust* between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders.

This can also indicate that the parties are willing to reveal more of themselves to each other, as the participants are willing to talk to the EC in more private spaces and they are comfortable enough to send a personal message or visit the EC in person. “Usually if I have a problem, I would just go to the office and tell them. They would immediately try to help me solve the problem” (P6).

This also indicates a high level of *trust*, as participants feel comfortable enough to reveal themselves to the SRCS.

The EC was mainly seen as competent by the participants in focus group one. "...many of the EC members were Project Leaders with us last term" (P1 & P3). Because of the previous relationships these participants have, and because of the experience the EC members already have from previous terms, the EC members are seen as competent, and therefore trustworthy.

Participants in focus group two felt that the SRCS was honouring their commitments to them. "I can't think of an instance where they didn't (honour their commitments), so I'd say so" (P7). However, participants in focus group four felt that the SRCS does not always honour their commitments. "Once I asked them a question and they couldn't answer me. They should know what is going on" (P14). The general consensus is that the EC does honour their commitments, but that the trust and confidence in the EC decline when they are unable to answer questions or address concerns, which is an important part of their function as managers.

4.3.1.2 Semi-structured interview

Participant A (2020) indicated that the SRCS honours their commitments to their internal stakeholders through sending goal statements. Participant B (2020) also stated that they try to set realistic goals and that they "don't make promises we know we cannot keep." These goal statements help internal stakeholders to hold the SRCS accountable and ensure that the SRCS honours their commitments. This builds trust between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders.

Participant A (2020) also stated that "we build trust between us and the HC members through the guardian system and through the events we host." The EC also ensures that they do not keep important information from HC members, and that they do their best to be honest and open (Participant B, 2020). This ensures that the internal stakeholders view the SRCS as trustworthy, and also ensures that internal stakeholders' opinions are taken into account. As previously mentioned (4.3.1.1), internal stakeholders can communicate with their guardians and prefer to do so in some cases. This makes it easy for internal stakeholders to have their opinions taken into account.

The SRCS EC tries to ensure competency through a training camp and regular check-ins with the chairperson (Participant A, 2020). The EC reports to the chairperson and the vice-chairpersons regularly to ensure that they are meeting their goals and keeping their promises (Participant B, 2020). As mentioned above (4.3.1.1), trust and confidence in the EC tends to decline if they cannot help the HC members. It is thus crucial for EC members to be competent, as their competence leads to trust from their internal stakeholders.

4.3.2 Control mutuality

Control mutuality is the agreement by the parties involved in the relationship on the relationship goals. From the perspective of relationship management, it is important for the SRCS to strive towards shared power with their internal stakeholders (see 2.6.2). This can be achieved by allowing internal stakeholders to be part of the decision-making process and involving internal stakeholders in setting relationship goals by being open and honest. The SRCS should also be open with their internal stakeholders and allow themselves a certain degree of vulnerability in order to achieve interdependence and stability with their internal stakeholders (2.6.2).

4.3.2.1 Focus groups

Participants in the fourth focus group felt like the EC was not always open and honest with them. "...I don't think they're open about everything. We don't know everything that goes on behind the scenes and I think we should have that knowledge as well" (P12). Participants in the second focus group also felt that they were not involved in the decision-making process enough. "I won't say that they ask (for inputs) every month, but there were a few meetings where they asked if anyone had ideas, or if they could have done something better" (P7). The SRCS should thus be more open with their internal stakeholders in order to ensure that power is shared between the parties.

However, participants in the other three groups felt that the EC is open and included them in the decision-making process and made adjustments according to their concerns. "I've shared some portfolio concerns and they helped me with those (P10)... I have no problems with going to them and telling them what I think is wrong or how I feel" (P11).

The SRCS also displays a certain degree of vulnerability through the guardian system. As previously mentioned, internal stakeholders are very comfortable with talking to their guardians and prefer to take any issues to their guardians. "It's nice having a guardian. It's more personal than just having a large group of people, which can be intimidating" (P4). With The SRCS being perceived as open and vulnerable, internal stakeholders share power with the SRCS and can influence certain decisions made by the SRCS.

4.3.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

As previously stated, it is important for the SRCS to involve their internal stakeholders in the decision-making process. Few participants from the focus groups felt that they were not involved in decision-making enough. Participant A (2020) stated that the SRCS involves their internal stakeholders by asking their opinions on big events, but reiterates that the SRCS has the final decision in all matters. Internal stakeholders are usually asked to give their opinions during

meetings, and not on WhatsApp. The SRCS prefers to ask their opinions in person, as it eliminates confusion and their opinions can be taken into account immediately.

The SRCS is also open with their internal stakeholders. Participant A admitted that “the SRCS is a big group, so there is some miscommunication”. The SRCS tries to address those issues by being open with their internal stakeholders and by eliminating miscommunication through meetings. Participant B (2020) also added that they try to be open with their internal stakeholders through the guardian system. The guardian system is also used to display a certain vulnerability. The SRCS hosts many events, such as family days and social events, to ensure that the internal stakeholders and the SRCS committee members bond and that they are comfortable and vulnerable with each other (Participant B, 2020). However, they do not tend to show vulnerability on WhatsApp, but by hosting in-person events, they can ensure that better communication takes place on WhatsApp.

4.3.3 Commitment

Commitment within relationship management describes the extent to which one party in the relationship believes that the relationship has a certain value and, hence the motivation to manage the relationship and keep it strong (2.6.3). Commitment should be the essential outcome of the relationship between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders, mainly because of the constantly changing leadership.

4.3.3.1 Focus groups

All participants readily agreed that they would want to continue participating in the SRCS, with some even indicating that they would want to be involved even after they’ve left the university. A few participants expressed interests in serving on other committees, but they would not necessarily want to be HC members again. “The SRCS has changed my life and I would love to be part of it again. I wouldn’t mind being on the EC or the committee” (P12). This indicates that the internal stakeholders’ relationship with the SRCS has a certain value to them, and that they remain committed to the organisation.

It is interesting to note that most participants felt as if WhatsApp did not play a profound role in their commitment to the SRCS. “I feel committed, but I don’t think it’s because of social media (WhatsApp). It’s because of the difference that we’re making. WhatsApp adds to that, but it isn’t the biggest reason (P12)... it was being part of the community and doing things that made me feel part of the SRCS” (P1). Most participants also agreed that the SRCS does put enough time and effort into their communication on WhatsApp – “...they do everything they can to help us and

get the information to us as quickly and efficiently as possible” (P6) – although this does not necessarily add to the relationship.

4.3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

From the interviews with Participant A and Participant B (2020), it becomes clear that the SRCS puts a lot of time, money and effort into their relationships with the internal stakeholders. Both the guardians and the coordinators are encouraged by the SRCS to check up on their internal stakeholders, and Participant B (2020) stated that they host monthly feedback sessions with internal stakeholders to ensure that they are performing their duties and to check in on their projects. This indicates that the relationship between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders has value for the SRCS as well, and not only for the internal stakeholders.

Participant A (2020) believes that the internal stakeholders are committed to the SRCS. Most of the current SRCS managers held previous HC member or Project Leader positions. This essentially means that experienced and competent internal stakeholders remain in the organisation, ensuring that the SRCS remained stable throughout the years.

4.3.4 Relationship satisfaction

Satisfaction in the context of an organisation-stakeholder relationship, can be seen as the level of positivity one participant feels towards the other, and believes that the feeling is mutual (2.6.4). When one party believes that the relationship is maintained, it will lead to satisfaction and effective interaction.

4.3.4.1 Focus groups

Overall, participants were satisfied with their relationship with the SRCS. Participants are fond of the guardian and coordinator systems, which makes the EC more accessible to them and makes them more comfortable in the relationship. “I think it’s a good thing they gave everyone a guardian and coordinator, because it makes you so much more comfortable to talk to them” (P7). This system invokes a positive feeling towards the SRCS, as the internal stakeholders are comfortable in the relationship.

As previously mentioned, few participants have worked with the EC members on previous structures before. This also adds to their relationship satisfaction because they are simply maintaining previous relationships and not attempting to build new ones. “I know a lot of them from before they were EC, so they’re very friendly and easy to talk to” (P9).

Most participants also agreed that their relationships with the SRCS and other HC members are not solely being maintained on WhatsApp. “The SRCS has a lot of events where you get to know each other. You have to go to those events to really take part, and then the communication on WhatsApp will be better.” Interpersonal relationships between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders are more important and involve more effort than simply communicating through WhatsApp. This indicates that relationships can be maintained on WhatsApp, but that the foundation of the relationship is built through personal interactions. “I think your relationships on WhatsApp start with personal relationships. If you’re not comfortable with someone you won’t send them a WhatsApp” (P3).

However, some participants also found WhatsApp to be a good starting point for relationships, but would then continue to manage the relationship in person. “If someone I don’t know sends me a WhatsApp, asking if we could co-host an event, I would then talk to them in person because the introduction happened on WhatsApp” (P5). Both the internal stakeholders and the SRCS are maintaining their relationships with each other, which leads to both parties feeling positively towards each other.

4.3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

The SRCS indicated that they generally felt positive towards their internal stakeholders, even though they faced a few challenges throughout the term (Participant B, 2020). The SRCS agrees with what the internal stakeholders highlighted in the focus groups: their relationships are not solely built on WhatsApp and they depend on face-to-face interactions with each other to maintain their relationships.

As mentioned in 4.3.4.1, the SRCS hosts many events to manage relationships with their internal stakeholders. Participant A (2020) said that the SRCS is a very rewarding and inspiring portfolio to be a part of, which means that internal stakeholders get satisfaction from their relationship with the SRCS in more than one way. The SRCS provides their internal stakeholders with practical life skills and offers them a chance to create change in communities who need it.

It can thus be concluded that there is a high level of trust between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders, mainly because of the guardian and coordinator system. However, the SRCS should ensure that all their managers are competent to assist internal stakeholders to avoid internal stakeholders losing trust in the SRCS. The SRCS is generally perceived as honest and open by their internal stakeholders, but they should consider involving their internal stakeholders in decision-making more and should work to ensure that no miscommunication takes place.

The SRCS also has high levels of commitment. All internal stakeholders indicated that they would like to be part of the SRCS again, and the current SRCS management all come from previous groups of internal stakeholders. Both the SRCS and their internal stakeholders are satisfied with their relationships, even though those relationships are not built exclusively on WhatsApp but are maintained on WhatsApp to some degree.

4.4 CONCLUSION

Chapter 4 processed the findings of the focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and observation and content analysis in order to answer the specific research questions. This was done by providing the data gathered from the research methods and presenting the data according to the theoretical arguments made in Chapter 2.

The first and second specific research question has already been answered in Chapter 2. The third specific research question (1.5.2.3) (**To what extent does WhatsApp as a platform allow for the utilisation of the two-way symmetrical communication model in managing the relationships between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders?**) can be answered by the following:

WhatsApp as a platform is also ideally suited to the needs of the SRCS and can facilitate two-way symmetrical communication between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders. The features of WhatsApp make the platform inherently two-way and internal communication can take place on WhatsApp. WhatsApp is an attractive platform to use to ensure that internal stakeholders are engaged in dialogue, that they understand the information posted, and that they return to the application.

The fourth specific research question (1.5.2.4) (**What are the internal stakeholders of the SRCS's perceptions of the use of WhatsApp as a way to manage the relationships between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders?**) can be answered through the following:

Internal two-way symmetrical communication on social media between the SRCS managers and internal stakeholders assists in managing relationships through disclosure, usefulness and information dissemination, and interactivity and involvement. By using the relationship management strategies, internal stakeholders believe that the SRCS has built a strong relationship between management and them. The internal stakeholders perceive the communication and interactions that they were receiving from the SRCS on WhatsApp positively, but it is interesting to note that the participants prefer to manage relationships in person, with WhatsApp acting as an additional platform on which to maintain relationships. WhatsApp is not seen as a primary way of managing relationships.

The fifth specific research question (1.5.2.5) **(What are the SRCS management's perceptions of the use of WhatsApp as a way to manage the relationships between them and their internal stakeholders?)** can thus be answered:

The SRCS management perceives their internal stakeholders as very committed to the SRCS. The SRCS makes use of various events to manage relationships with their internal stakeholders, and WhatsApp is mainly used for communicating information and ensuring that there are no uncertainties among internal stakeholders. Both the SRCS and their internal stakeholders are satisfied with their relationships, even though those relationships are not built exclusively on WhatsApp. The SRCS management does believe that the relationships with their internal stakeholders are maintained on WhatsApp to some degree, but that the combination of WhatsApp and personal interaction is what leads to strong relationships.

The following chapter (Chapter 5) will focus on answering the specific research questions posed in Chapter 1 in depth, in order to answer the general research question (see 1.5.1).

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The focus of the current study was to apply certain research methods (Chapter 3) to determine how WhatsApp is being used by the SRCS to manage the relationships with their internal stakeholders. As the management of the SRCS changes every year, it is important for them to manage relationships with their internal stakeholders in order to ensure the sustainability and stability of the structure. The research looked at various aspects of two-way symmetrical communication, internal social media and stakeholder relationship theory in order to answer the general and specific research questions.

Chapter 1 provided an outline for the progress of the study. This included: the background and context, the research methods and the research questions and objectives. Chapter 2 followed by focusing on the theoretical conceptualisation of the study. Thereafter, Chapter 3 discussed the research methods applied to gather data in order to answer the research questions. This discussion was followed by Chapter 4, in which the data gathered through the research methods of focus groups, semi-structured interviews and content analysis and observation was reported on.

Chapter 5 will give a summary of the results from the focus groups, semi-structured interviews and content analysis and observation. This will be done in order to answer the specific research questions which, in turn, will answer the general research question. This chapter will also evaluate the conceptual framework created in Chapter 2 based on the results to propose a conceptual framework that could serve as a guideline for the SRCS in their internal communication through WhatsApp. The limitation of this study will be discussed, and recommendations made on how these limitations could be addressed in further research.

5.1.1 The context of the study

As determined in Chapter 1 (1.2), Student RAG Community Service (SRCS) is the North-West University Potchefstroom Campus' (NWU) registered welfare organisation. The SRCS is essentially run by a committee of students elected into the positions each year. The Student Campus Council (SCC) member for the SRCS essentially functions as the CEO of the organisation. The SCC member then appoints EC members who function as managers of the organisation. HC members are then appointed to run various projects, and they are the internal stakeholders of the SRCS.

As both the management and the internal stakeholders of the SRCS change each year, due to new EC and HC members being elected annually, two-way symmetrical communication is crucial in order to build relationships and to ensure the sustainability and stability of the structure (1.4). From within this context, the specific research questions will be answered.

5.2 SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

The first specific research question (1.5.2.1) is as follows: **Which constructs of two-way symmetrical communication can be utilised by the SRCS to manage the relationships with their internal stakeholders?** This research question was answered by examining the theories discussed in Chapter 2.

As previously stated (1.3), this study takes place within the context of internal communications, which highlights the importance of internal stakeholders to organisations. Stakeholder relationship theory also explored the importance of strong relationships between organisations and internal stakeholders. It was determined that in order to manage relationships, there should be two-way symmetrical communication between organisations and internal stakeholders. Organisations who thus communicate effectively with their internal stakeholders develop better relationships with them.

As discussed in Chapter 2 (2.2), strategic internal communication between organisations and their internal stakeholders is vital for strengthening relationships between the two parties. Specifically, with the SRCS, if internal stakeholders have not been given enough communication about how the structure works and what is expected of them, or if internal stakeholders do not have a good relationship with the EC, the structure may become unsustainable and unstable. This study therefore focused on two-way symmetrical communication that reflects the SRCS's ability to manage relationships with their internal stakeholders through stakeholder relationship management on an internal social media such as WhatsApp, in order to ensure the sustainability and stability of the organisation.

However, this study first had to define social media to ensure that WhatsApp could be seen as an internal social media in this context. The definition used, was proposed by Kapoor *et al.* (2017:536) and is explored in 2.3.1. WhatsApp can thus be used to manage the relationships between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders through its various features (also see 2.3.1). However, the most important feature is that the internal stakeholders of the SRCS can play an active role in spreading and creating content on WhatsApp.

WhatsApp actively involves both the internal stakeholders and management in co-creating content, empowering both parties and making them integral to the success of the SRCS. Such

involvement of internal stakeholders in co-creation on WhatsApp ties in with two-way symmetrical communication and can be considered an important characteristic for relationship management (2.3.1).

WhatsApp can thus be used by the SRCS to engage with their internal stakeholders via the group chat function. Through WhatsApp's "mentioning" ability, it can be explicitly stated which internal stakeholders are being communicated to. WhatsApp also allows for both the SRCS and the internal stakeholders to post, edit or sort messages and media linked to themselves or others (2.3.1). Essentially, the interactive and participatory characteristics of WhatsApp can allow internal stakeholders to easily engage with the SRCS. WhatsApp allows internal stakeholders to share their opinions, questions or concerns, and actively participate in the SRCS, which can lead to stronger relationships between both parties. WhatsApp can therefore be used to engage internal stakeholders through two-way symmetrical communication, which should lead to the sustainability and stability of the SRCS.

The most important aspects of two-way symmetrical communication are dialogue and mutual understanding (2.4). The goal of creating mutual understanding through two-way symmetrical communication is to ensure that information is not only being exchanged, but that internal stakeholders can also share ideas and have opportunities to contribute to the SRCS' goals. WhatsApp can be considered an ideal platform to use in order to create mutual understanding, as both the SRCS and the internal stakeholders can exchange ideas and opportunities on the platform.

The second aspect, dialogue, creates the opportunity for mutual understanding to be taken one step further by allowing internal stakeholders to form a deeper connection with the SRCS through ongoing communication, collaboration, support and interaction. Dialogue places the emphasis on the needs of the internal stakeholders and ensuring genuine, lasting relationships with internal stakeholders to ensure the sustainability and stability of the SRCS. Dialogue thus requires that there should be mutual understanding first, and then builds on mutual understanding to create and maintain lasting relationships in order to ensure the sustainability and stability of the SRCS.

Kent and Taylor (1998) give guidance here on how to engage with internal stakeholders in a dialogic manner in order to create mutual understanding and dialogue on a social media platform (such as WhatsApp). The principles were identified as (2.4):

- A dialogic loop
- Usefulness of information
- The generation of return visits.

These principles were then combined with Hon and Grunig's (1999) relationship management strategies. The strategies proposed are:

- Access
- Positivity
- Openness and disclosure
- Assurances of authenticity
- Networking
- Sharing of tasks.

The strategies by Hon and Grunig (1999) interlink with Waters *et al*'s (2009) strategies on how to create relationships on social media. The strategies proposed by Waters *et al* (2009) are:

- Disclosure
- Usefulness of information
- Interactivity and involvement.

By integrating these strategies and principles, the following theoretical argument was formulated:

The SRCS should apply two-way symmetrical communication through WhatsApp as an internal social media platform to manage relationships with internal stakeholders. This can be done by using disclosure, usefulness of information, interactivity and involvement, and dialogue as the guiding principles of two-way symmetrical communication.

Based on this theoretical argument, the constructs that will be utilised to carry out the research in Chapter 3 and 4, as well as answer the specific research questions, were defined as follows:

5.2.1 Disclosure

Internal stakeholders need to have *access* to information in order to ensure *positive* relationships. Disclosure can thus take place on a social media platform, through posts on the platform and by making use of visual aspects such as multimedia (3.3.2.1).

5.2.2 Usefulness of information

Messages posted on social media should be useful to internal stakeholders. Participants must engage *openly*, and information must be *authentic* in order to ensure strong relationships (3.3.2.1).

5.2.3 Interactivity and involvement

Interactivity and involvement includes providing a calendar of events, sharing event ideas, *networking*, *sharing tasks* and providing other important information relevant to stakeholders (3.3.2.1).

5.2.4 Dialogue

The dialogic loop should create *mutual understanding* through WhatsApp by providing continuous posts and information on the SRCS' activities, and by providing *feedback* (3.3.2.1).

The answer to the first specific research question can thus be summarised as follows: WhatsApp can be used to manage the relationships between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders through two-way symmetrical communication that includes disclosure, usefulness of information, interactivity and involvement, and dialogue.

5.3 SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

The second specific research question (1.5.2.2) is as follows: **To which relationship management outcomes should the use of two-way symmetrical communication between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders lead?** This research question was answered by examining the theories discussed in Chapter 2.

If the SRCS manages their relationship with internal stakeholders through two-way symmetrical communication, those relationships should lead to certain positive outcomes to ensure long-term relationships. Hon and Grunig (1999) (see 2.6) identified the following relationship management outcomes that should guide the relationship between an organisation and their stakeholders:

- Trust
- Control mutuality
- Commitment
- Relationship satisfaction.

These relationship management outcomes were used to form the second theoretical argument:

The relationships managed through two-way symmetrical communication on social media should lead to relationship outcomes such as trust, control mutuality, commitment and relationship satisfaction.

This theoretical argument was then used to determine the concepts and constructs needed to carry out the research in Chapter 3 and 4, as well as answer the specific research questions. The constructs were defined as follows:

5.3.1 Trust

Trust has been built when: an organisation honours its commitments to internal stakeholders; when internal stakeholders' opinions are taken into account; when internal stakeholders view the SRCS as trustworthy; and when the SRCS management is seen as competent (3.3.2.2).

5.3.2 Control mutuality

Control mutuality is achieved by: involving internal stakeholders in decision-making and setting relationship goals; the organisation being open with internal stakeholders; and the organisation displaying a degree of vulnerability (3.3.2.2).

5.3.3 Commitment

Commitment to the SRCS takes place when: the relationship between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders has value; time, effort, energy and money is being put into the relationship; and internal stakeholders are interested in remaining in the organisation (3.3.2.2).

5.3.4 Relationship satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction is achieved when: the SRCS and their internal stakeholders feel positive towards each other, and both parties feel as if the relationship is being maintained (3.3.2.2).

Thus, to answer the research question **to which relationship management outcomes should the use of two-way symmetrical communication between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders lead?** The use of two-way symmetrical communication to manage relationships should lead to trust, control mutuality, commitment and relationship satisfaction.

5.4 SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTION THREE

The third specific research question (1.5.2.3) is as follows: **To what extent does WhatsApp as a platform allow for the utilisation of the two-way symmetrical communication model in managing the relationships between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders.** This research question was answered through observation and content analysis in order to discover WhatsApp's capabilities as a platform. The constructs of theoretical statement 1 were utilised as the guidelines for the observation and content analysis.

WhatsApp is the social media platform used to facilitate communication between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders (4.2.1.1). All HC members (internal stakeholders) have been placed on a WhatsApp group with the entire EC (management) of the SRCS where information is being *disclosed*. Such *disclosure* entails that both parties have *access* to information shared. WhatsApp also has a feature that allows participants to fill in the "About us" section of a group. While the SRCS' section is empty, the purpose of the group still remains clear to all participants. This "About us" feature can thus be a useful tool in ensuring that participants in a group know the purpose of the group.

WhatsApp also allows for internal stakeholders to ask questions or raise concerns on the group (as seen in figure 4.3), which means that although internal stakeholders do not prefer asking questions on the group, WhatsApp still offers them the opportunity to do so. Internal stakeholders thus have the ability to give their inputs, which can lead to them perceiving the SRCS in a *positive* manner. This makes WhatsApp an ideal platform for *two-way symmetrical communication*, as the ability to send messages back and forth exists on the group.

WhatsApp has the capability of sending and receiving various media formats, including documents and PDF files. This makes WhatsApp a preferred platform by both internal stakeholders and the SRCS, as there is no need to make use of additional applications such as eFundi or email (4.2.2.2). As previously uncovered by the focus groups and semi-structured interviews, the use of media also makes information *useful*, and easy to understand and disseminate (4.2.2.3). This could help facilitate *open* communication, as participants are more likely to pay attention and ask questions based on the media files sent. In addition to the ability to send and receive various media files, WhatsApp will also automatically sort those media files (as seen in figure 4.14), making it easy for participants to locate files as and when they need them.

WhatsApp can thus be seen as a good platform to ensure that stakeholders have *access* to *useful* information. As previously stated (4.2.2.1), internal stakeholders who have access to useful information will perceive the SRCS as being open and trustworthy, thereby ensuring a good

relationship between the parties. However, WhatsApp should also have the ability to ensure that internal stakeholders are able to *network and share tasks* with the SRCS. WhatsApp provides this opportunity through the multiple chat features and WhatsApp groups. As previously mentioned, this might create more administration for SRCS. However, the participants indicated that they often find the multiple groups useful and better for communicating directly with EC members.

It is also important for the SRCS to post new information on WhatsApp to ensure that internal stakeholders *regularly return* to the group. WhatsApp allows for multiple new messages to be sent daily, however, this can become problematic due to WhatsApp's chronological timeline. Important messages can get lost in a constant stream of messages, meaning that information could easily be lost. It appears as if WhatsApp encourages the use of media in this instance, as media, links and documents are automatically stored and sorted by WhatsApp (as seen in figure 4.13-4.15). This feature ensures that internal stakeholders can *return* to messages whenever the need arises.

Internal stakeholders also have the ability to create messages on WhatsApp in order to *interact* with the SRCS. However, in order to create *dialogue*, the SRCS should provide feedback on those messages. As any member of the group can send a message or feedback at any time, WhatsApp is an ideal platform that can be used to create dialogue. WhatsApp also has a "reply privately" feature (as seen in figure 4.22), which allows for internal stakeholders and the SRCS to create dialogue in a private chat, away from the group. This feature can be of use for the SRCS, as the purpose of the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group is to send information. Through the "reply privately" feature, internal stakeholders can then ask direct, private questions to the person who sent the message, without disrupting the flow of information on the group.

Overall, it can be concluded that WhatsApp has the features and capability to ensure *two-way symmetrical communication* and *dialogue* can take place on the app, which leads to the management of relationships. Specific research question three can thus be answered as follows: WhatsApp as a platform allows for the utilisation of the two-way symmetrical communication model in managing relationships between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders through various features, such as the ability to send media, documents, create dialogue, ask questions and give feedback which, in turn, ensures that internal stakeholders are informed and involved in the SRCS which leads to the structure remaining sustainable and stable.

5.5 SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTION FOUR

The fourth specific research question (1.5.2.4) is as follows: **What are the internal stakeholders of the SRCS's perceptions of the use of WhatsApp as a way to manage the relationships between the SRCS and the internal stakeholders?** This research question was answered through focus groups with the HC members (internal stakeholders) of the SRCS by using the constructs of two-way symmetrical communication as indicated in theoretical statement 1 (*disclosure, usefulness of information, interactivity and involvement, and dialogue*) and the relationship management outcomes as specified in theoretical statement 2 (*trust, control mutuality, commitment and relationship satisfaction*) .

5.5.1 Managing relationships on WhatsApp through internal two-way symmetrical communication

The focus groups (4.2.1.2) determined that the SRCS *discloses* important information on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group. Internal stakeholders consider WhatsApp to be an easily *accessible* platform, and the use of WhatsApp is preferred by all internal stakeholders. Because of WhatsApp's accessibility, the internal stakeholders generally feel *positive* towards the information shared on WhatsApp. Although it appeared at first as if internal stakeholders were not comfortable with asking questions or posting comments on the group, something integral to *mutual understanding, dialogue* and *relationship management*, it was revealed that they perceived the purpose of the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group to share information only.

The internal stakeholders agreed that the information shared on the group is generally *useful* (4.2.2.2). Internal stakeholders also agreed that they do not want to receive too much information at any given time. The quantity of messages received by internal stakeholders, not only on the SRCS/HC group but on WhatsApp in general, makes it difficult to sift through information and makes it easy for information to disappear. Internal stakeholders perceive the use of different media (such as posters and videos) as a way to streamline the information they're receiving, and the use of media makes the information easier to assimilate. Some internal stakeholders are of the opinion that the SRCS should prepare their communication better before sending it. Messages with the wrong information are often posted on the group, and the information would only be updated after the information has been disseminated. This causes communication gaps, and information becomes less useful and less trusted by internal stakeholders. This can lead to the SRCS becoming unsustainable and instable.

Through the focus groups, the participants indicated that although they do not feel comfortable with asking questions on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group, they often have multiple other SRCS

WhatsApp groups where they can ask questions or raise concerns. Most internal stakeholders also feel that the best way of sharing their concerns with the EC is through a personal conversation, either on WhatsApp or face to face, rather than sharing it on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group. This correlates with the statement that each WhatsApp group has a specific purpose. There are a few exceptions to the rule, however, as internal stakeholders have asked questions on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group before, should they feel that the question could solicit *useful information* for all participants on the group.

It is therefore important for internal stakeholders to be *interactive and involved* in the SRCS (4.2.3.2). Participants indicated that they do not *share their ideas* on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group, but that they are instead encouraged to share their ideas with their coordinators and guardians on a separate WhatsApp group. Each HC member has a coordinator and guardian. These coordinators and guardians are members of the EC, and they are assigned an HC member to essentially take care of during the term. The internal stakeholders are very in favour of their coordinators and guardians and would often speak directly to them on WhatsApp or in person, instead of addressing something on the group.

The participants also agree with the purpose of the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group, and that it is not a matter of feeling uncomfortable on the group, but that they rather preferred raising their questions or concerns on smaller WhatsApp groups or with their coordinators and guardians. There is thus space for internal stakeholders to engage with the SRCS and with each other, just not on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group.

However, internal stakeholders feel as if the SRCS is not involving them in the *decision-making process* enough (4.2.4.2). Internal stakeholders would raise questions or concerns with their coordinators and guardians, but would often not be consulted on the decisions made by the SRCS. Some internal stakeholders have indicated that the *SRCS made changes* based on their suggestions, but most of the internal stakeholders would like to be involved in the decision-making more. Internal stakeholders would also engage in *dialogue* with the SRCS, but once again this does not take place on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group. Internal stakeholders are able to comment on posts made on the SRCS/HC group, but once again prefer to do it in a private WhatsApp message or face to face.

This indicates that internal stakeholders are comfortable with the SRCS, and that communication on WhatsApp mostly takes place through *two-way symmetrical communication*, but that it does not serve as the main communication medium to manage relationships.

Internal stakeholders have indicated that they prefer their relationship with the SRCS to be managed in person through face-to-face interactions at the various events that the SRCS hosts, or through personal WhatsApp messages with their guardians and coordinators. Those personal relationships do lead to better communication on WhatsApp, and also make it easier for internal stakeholders to communicate with the SRCS in private. WhatsApp does play a big role in two-way symmetrical communication, and relationships can be managed through two-way symmetrical communication on WhatsApp to ensure the sustainability and stability of the structure. However, the relationship between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders is managed mainly through personal interactions, with WhatsApp acting as an excellent additional way to manage the relationships and ensuring effective communication, sustainability and stability.

5.5.2 Relationship management outcomes

In terms of the relationship outcomes, internal stakeholders perceive the SRCS as very *trustworthy* (4.3.1.1). This is mainly because of the personal relationships between the internal stakeholders and their guardians. The internal stakeholders are comfortable with sharing their questions or concerns with their guardians on WhatsApp, indicating that there is a high level of trust between the EC and the HC members. Internal stakeholders also perceive the EC as being competent in their responsibilities, which builds trust. However, trust in the EC declines when they are unable to answer questions or address internal stakeholders' concerns on WhatsApp. Two-way symmetrical communication is thus crucial to building trust, as internal stakeholders often ask questions on WhatsApp, and the SRCS needs to engage in dialogue, answer questions and give feedback to internal stakeholders.

Internal stakeholders had mixed reactions to *control mutuality* (4.3.2.1). Some internal stakeholders felt very involved in the decision-making process, which is essential to two-way symmetrical communication and dialogue, where others felt like they were not involved at all. It is important to note that the interactions between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders that should lead to control mutuality does not take place on WhatsApp. Internal stakeholders are often involved through in-person meetings and are encouraged to provide feedback in monthly in-person sessions with the SRCS. It is, however, positive to note that internal stakeholders displayed *high levels of commitment* to the SRCS (4.3.3.1). This is crucial, especially to the sustainability and the stability of the structure. All internal stakeholders indicated that they would continue being part of the SRCS. It is interesting to note that most internal stakeholders felt like it was a combination of personal relationships, communication on WhatsApp, and the work that they do for SRCS that led to their commitment.

Internal stakeholders are also *satisfied with their relationship* with the SRCS (4.3.4.1) and are once again in favour of the guardian system. Internal stakeholders felt like their relationships with the SRCS are being managed on WhatsApp, but that the personal, face-to-face interactions with the SRCS mean more to the relationship than communication on WhatsApp. The SRCS hosts many functions with the intention of managing relationships with their internal stakeholders.

WhatsApp can be seen as a good platform to ensure that the relationship management outcomes are being met, as miscommunication on WhatsApp has a negative impact on the relationship between the SRCS and internal stakeholders. However, face-to-face interactions and personal two-way symmetrical communication on WhatsApp are preferred over group interactions. WhatsApp is thus an excellent additional platform for the SRCS to use in order to ensure that there is a strong relationship between them and their internal stakeholders.

To answer the fourth specific research question (1.5.2.4) then: **What are the internal stakeholders of the SRCS's perceptions of the use of WhatsApp as a way to manage the relationships between the SRCS and the internal stakeholders?** Internal stakeholders perceive WhatsApp as an easily accessible platform that facilitates two-way symmetrical communication. WhatsApp is positively perceived as a two-way symmetrical communication platform, however, internal stakeholders prefer that their relationship with the SRCS is managed mainly through face-to-face interactions or personal WhatsApp messages with their guardians. WhatsApp can thus be an excellent additional platform on which to manage the relationship, but only when used in conjunction with face-to-face and personal WhatsApp interactions. The combination of two-way symmetrical communication on WhatsApp and face-to-face interactions thus lead to trust, control mutuality, relationship satisfaction, and more importantly, commitment between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders, which in turn leads to the sustainability and stability of the structure.

5.6 SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTION FIVE

The fifth specific research question (1.5.2.5) is as follows: **What are the SRCS management's perceptions of the use of WhatsApp as a way to manage the relationships between them and their internal stakeholders?** This research question was answered through semi-structured interviews with the chairperson and vice-chairperson (management) of the SRCS by using two-way symmetrical communication constructs from theoretical statement 1 (*disclosure, usefulness of information, interactivity and involvement, and dialogue*) and relationship management outcomes from theoretical statement 2 (*trust, control mutuality, commitment and relationship satisfaction*) as determined in Chapter 2 and operationalised in Chapter 3.

5.6.1 Managing relationships on WhatsApp through internal two-way symmetrical communication

The management of the SRCS confirmed that *disclosure* takes place on WhatsApp, as WhatsApp is the main social media platform used by the SRCS to communicate with their internal stakeholders (4.2.1.3). Management perceives WhatsApp as an easy platform to use, as WhatsApp allows them to make use of visual and audio media to disseminate information. Management found that the use of media makes *information easier to understand*, thereby making the information *useful* to internal stakeholders, as discovered through the focus groups (5.5.1). Internal stakeholders are also provided with full *access* to posts, and information is shared on WhatsApp constantly. It is interesting to note that while the internal stakeholders felt as if they were not encouraged to post on the SRCS/HC WhatsApp group (5.5.1), management stated that they do encourage internal stakeholders to ask questions after messages have been posted (4.2.1.3).

As all members of the SRCS management have *access* to the group as well, all members are permitted to make posts on the group. While this may lead to *open communication* from the SRCS management, it can also lead to communication gaps, as there is no one person who regulates what gets posted on the group (4.2.2.3). The SRCS management also felt that their internal stakeholders were receiving enough encouragement from them to ask questions and raise their concerns, however, the internal stakeholders indicated through the focus groups that they prefer asking questions and raising concerns through their guardians or in-person meetings (5.5.1). It should be noted that a majority of the time these interactions either take place in person, through the smaller WhatsApp groups created by the SRCS for the specific purpose of asking questions and raising concerns, or in personal WhatsApp messages with guardians. The SRCS management therefore believes that the focus should be on maintaining relationships with internal stakeholders through personal interactions, rather than just posting content on WhatsApp, which correlates with the perceptions of the internal stakeholders (5.5.1).

When it comes to in *interactivity and involvement* (4.2.3.3), the SRCS makes sure to host various *networking* opportunities for their internal stakeholders. The SRCS management believes that it is important for networking to take place in person through face-to-face interactions at events, and that feedback is also given in person. The SRCS prefers the monthly meetings that they host with internal stakeholders to *share tasks* with internal stakeholders and to get *feedback* from internal stakeholders.

Although *dialogue* does take place on the smaller WhatsApp groups, the SRCS still prefers it to take place in person (4.2.4.3), as their internal stakeholders prefer the same (5.5.1). The SRCS

management creates *mutual understanding* and *dialogue* by asking internal stakeholders to rate the events hosted and give suggestions to improve them. This discussion takes place during a formal SRCS meeting, and not on WhatsApp. However, it remains unknown whether the feedback gained from internal stakeholders is used to make changes in the SRCS. An essential element of dialogue is feedback, and the SRCS should provide their internal stakeholders with feedback and make changes based on the feedback. Some participants in the focus groups (4.2.4.2) felt that changes were being made, but the majority agreed that the SRCS does not involve them enough or give enough feedback.

The SRCS uses face-to face-interactions, personal WhatsApp messages and the smaller WhatsApp groups to manage the relationships with their internal stakeholders. This combination of communication methods thus leads to the sustainability and stability of the SRCS. However, the larger SRCS/HC WhatsApp group is viewed as a way to disseminate information only. However, WhatsApp's interactive capabilities still make it possible for two-way symmetrical communication to take place on that group. They thus perceive WhatsApp as an excellent additional platform to use in conjunction with face-to-face interactions to manage relationships.

5.6.2 Relationship management outcomes

The SRCS management perceives that they build *trust* with their internal stakeholders through goal statements and ensuring that the internal stakeholders can hold them accountable to their goal statements. The SRCS management also perceives the guardian system (4.3.1.2) as a crucial way to build trust between them and their internal stakeholders. As indicated by the focus groups, internal stakeholders also view the guardian system as important, and they trust their guardians (5.5.2). The SRCS strives to be *open and honest* with their internal stakeholders and strives to ensure that all management members have sufficient training to execute their roles. It is imperative to the SRCS that their internal stakeholders trust management to give them guidance and to fulfil their responsibilities.

The SRCS management believes that it is important to include their internal stakeholders in the *decision-making process* (4.3.2.2), however, management admits that miscommunication takes place occasionally. The SRCS tries to fix miscommunication through the guardian system, and through hosting a variety of in-person events in order to ensure that their internal stakeholders feel part of the process. Some internal stakeholders did point out that the SRCS should plan communication more thoroughly before sending it (4.2.2.2). The SRCS also believes that they put a lot of time, effort and money into their relationships with internal stakeholders (4.3.3.2). The relationship between management and internal stakeholders thus has value to management, and

by placing value on the relationship, the SRCS can ensure that their internal stakeholders remain committed to the organisation and satisfied with the relationship (4.3.4.2).

It is also important to note that both the chairperson and vice-chairperson stated that there are not many guidelines that they use when posting on WhatsApp (4.2.1.2). The main guidelines used by the SRCS only ensures that messages are posted in both English and Afrikaans, and that messages should be professional. It was also stated that any EC member can post information and messages on WhatsApp, and that there is no specific EC member appointed for communication purposes. This indicates that the SRCS does not plan their communication to the internal stakeholders on WhatsApp *strategically*, which can lead to miscommunication and can have a negative impact on their relationships.

It can thus be concluded that the **SRCS management's perceptions of the use of WhatsApp as a way to manage the relationships between them and their internal stakeholders** are that WhatsApp is an excellent platform to use in order to disseminate information and to facilitate dialogue through personal messages or the smaller groups. However, the SRCS management prefers to manage relationships with internal stakeholders through in-person events hosted throughout the year, which leads to the sustainability and stability of the structure. The SRCS management believes that the use of WhatsApp contributes to the relationship between them and their internal stakeholders to some degree, because miscommunication on WhatsApp leads to the deterioration of the relationship, but that the relationship is managed mainly through personal interactions, with WhatsApp being an additional communication platform that is still essential for two-way symmetrical communication.

5.7 ANSWERING THE GENERAL RESEARCH QUESTION

With the five specific research questions now answered, the general research question (1.5.1) can be answered. **How can WhatsApp be used by the SRCS to manage the relationships with internal stakeholders?**

By answering the specific research questions above, it can be concluded that internal two-way symmetrical communication between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders could take place on WhatsApp, as WhatsApp has a multitude of features built into the app that supports two-way symmetrical communication. The focus groups and the semi-structured interviews agreed that WhatsApp is a good platform to use for two-way symmetrical communication and that internal two-way symmetrical communication assists in managing relationships between internal stakeholders and the SRCS. **WhatsApp can thus be used by the SRCS to manage the relationships with their internal stakeholders through** the various features and capabilities of

WhatsApp, combined with the four relationship management strategies (disclosure, usefulness of information, interactivity and involvement, and dialogue) to ensure that relationships are managed on WhatsApp through internal two-way symmetrical communication. The use of the relationship management strategies should also lead to the relationship outcomes (trust, control mutuality, commitment and relationship satisfaction), ensuring that the relationship is being successfully managed, which then leads to the sustainability and stability of the SRCS.

It can also be concluded that both the SRCS and their internal stakeholders are perceived as committed and trustworthy by the other party. However, the SRCS and the internal stakeholders believe that personal interactions aid in managing relationships more than what WhatsApp does. It is thus imperative that WhatsApp be used in a *strategic* way to manage relationships through two-way symmetrical communication. Although the SRCS does succeed to manage relationships through internal two-way symmetrical communication on WhatsApp in some ways, it is evident that more *strategic* planning should be done to ensure that the SRCS remains sustainable and stable.

It can also be concluded further that WhatsApp's inherent two-way symmetrical nature is what currently ensures that relationships are being managed between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders. As the SRCS prefers more personal methods of relationship management (5.4.2), it becomes evident that the SRCS is not applying methods of relationship management through WhatsApp *strategically*. It is the interactive and participatory characteristics of WhatsApp that allow two-way symmetrical communication to take place without much effort from the SRCS. The focus should thus be placed on communicating on WhatsApp strategically.

5.8 EVALUATION OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

It is imperative that internal communication between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders is not only two-way symmetrical, but also *strategic* in order to manage relationships. Various strategies have been used throughout this study in order to determine the most effective way of managing relationships through two-way symmetrical communication to ensure positive relationship outcomes, and those strategies have been summed up in a conceptual framework (2.7). The conceptual framework created will now be evaluated according to the results to propose a conceptual framework that could be used as guideline to manage relationships strategically through two-way symmetrical communication on *WhatsApp*.

5.8.1 Phase 1: Creating a participatory environment

In order for there to be effective internal two-way symmetrical communication between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders, the SRCS first needs to create an environment in which their

internal stakeholders feel safe to communicate (2.7.1). WhatsApp can be considered an environment where internal stakeholders feel safe to communicate, and WhatsApp allows the SRCS to create multiple groups with their internal stakeholders in order to give them a safe place to communicate (5.6 and 5.7), not only with the SRCS but also with each other, thereby creating mutual understanding between the parties.

WhatsApp also allows the SRCS to share information with their internal stakeholders, and internal stakeholders can comment on and ask questions about the information being shared. This makes the environment inherently two-way, allowing for **dialogue** to take place between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders (2.7.1). This should create an interactive relationship between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders and create an environment where information is easily found and shared, and an environment where **trust** can be built.

To summarise, WhatsApp can be the ideal environment to:

- Ensure that internal stakeholders can understand what is happening in the SRCS;
- Ensure that internal stakeholders participate in decisions made by the SRCS;
- Provide access to the SRCS in order for internal stakeholders to communicate with them;
- Provide internal stakeholders with the means to send group messages or personal messages to the SRCS; and
- Ensure that internal stakeholders take part in creating dialogue with the SRCS, which ultimately leads to trust between internal stakeholders and the SRCS.

5.8.2 Phase 2: Facilitating communication

Now that an environment for strategic internal communication has been created on WhatsApp, the SRCS must continue to facilitate communication between them and their internal stakeholders (2.7.2). The SRCS should now focus on the type of information being sent and ensuring that engagement takes place between internal stakeholders. WhatsApp allows for new information to be posted by both parties constantly, ensuring that there is a steady flow of information.

WhatsApp also allows both the SRCS and internal stakeholders to post various media files, documents, photos and videos (5.4), which makes **information easier to understand and disseminate**. This ensures that internal stakeholders are informed about what is happening in the SRCS and allows them to ask questions and interact with the SRCS. Communication between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders should be **open and honest**, ensuring that both parties understand each other and perceive each other as honest and transparent (2.7.2). Through open and honest communication, the SRCS can ensure that there is control mutuality with internal

stakeholders. WhatsApp's group and "reply privately" features can ensure that open communication takes place between the SRCS and internal stakeholders.

Thus, in order to facilitate communication on WhatsApp:

- Various mediums such as images, videos and documents should be used to communicate with the SRCS;
- New or updated information should be posted constantly;
- The SRCS should be honest and transparent through the messages they send; and
- Internal stakeholders should have the ability and opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns to establish **control mutuality**.

5.8.3 Phase 3: Engaging internal stakeholders

As the SRCS continues to facilitate engagement between them and their internal stakeholders, it is also important to ensure that internal stakeholders are engaged (2.7.3). This means that the SRCS and their internal stakeholders should work together to achieve their goals. The SRCS should **share tasks** with their internal stakeholders on WhatsApp and involve them in dialogue with the express purpose of using internal stakeholders' **feedback** to better the organisation. This will ensure that communication between both parties are reciprocated and that engagement takes place.

It is also important for the SRCS to ensure that internal stakeholders return to WhatsApp, in order to ensure that there is a continuous loop of information and dialogue. WhatsApp has various features (such as the auto sorted links, media and documents seen in 5.4) that could ensure that internal stakeholders use the app frequently. **Engagement** is crucial since engaged internal stakeholders are more likely to remain in the organisation for longer, which is essential to the SRCS as they are dependent on internal stakeholders to ensure the sustainability and stability of the organisation. By ensuring that their internal stakeholders are **committed** and **satisfied** with their relationship, the SRCS can remain sustainable and stable.

Thus, in order for internal stakeholders to be engaged, the SRCS should:

- Share tasks and responsibilities on WhatsApp to ensure commitment;
- Make use of WhatsApp's sorting features to ensure that internal stakeholders return to the app;
- Post new content with which the internal stakeholders can engage; and

- Give internal stakeholders feedback on WhatsApp and engage in dialogue on WhatsApp to ensure relationship satisfaction.

Now that all three phases have taken place, we can essentially concluded that phase 2 and phase 3 should happen in a constant loop. As discussed earlier (4.2.4) there should constantly be new (5.8.3) or updated (5.8.2) information posted on WhatsApp to ensure that dialogue can take place. The following figure (5.1) illustrates the process of the three phases as set out above.

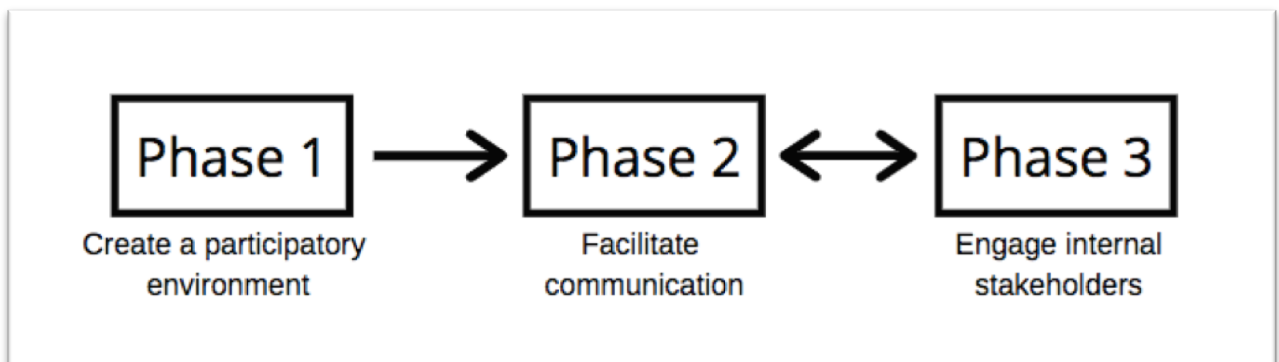


Figure 5.1: Three phase conceptual framework of communicating on WhatsApp. Source: Researcher

In conclusion, WhatsApp allows internal stakeholders of the SRCS to share their opinions, questions and concerns, which fosters a culture of learning, participation and collaboration. This ultimately leads to internal stakeholders becoming engaged in the SRCS, which ensures that a good relationship is built between the SRCS and their internal stakeholders and that the SRCS remains sustainable and stable. This conceptual framework can also be used to answer the general research question and can be used to manage relationships between organisations and their internal stakeholders through strategic internal two-way symmetrical communication.

5.9 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to further the field of social media and relationship management, with a specific focus on WhatsApp. However, certain limitations should be considered. The first limitation to be considered is that the field of social media is ever-changing. This study reflects a certain time period only, and as social media is rapidly changing and evolving, some findings may not reflect the current reality.

The second limitation is the lack of resources and information with regard to WhatsApp. The researcher could not identify any studies in South Africa that specifically pertain to WhatsApp or

the use of WhatsApp, which made academic sources limited. Further studies could be conducted on the nature and influence of WhatsApp.

The third limitation is that this study was only conducted on one WhatsApp group used by a large organisation. As the study found that organisations use a network of WhatsApp groups, and not only a single group, this limits the study to a narrow focus. Results gathered from an entire network of groups may differ. This study was also limited to only one campus of the North-West University, meaning that results could differ on other campuses and at other universities. It can be recommended to study different WhatsApp groups across different universities, or even study the different usages of WhatsApp across different universities in South Africa and internationally.

Fourthly, the conceptual framework created by this study was also tested on one WhatsApp group, and the results may differ when looking at other groups or even a network of groups. It is thus recommended that entire networks of WhatsApp groups be studied, or that different WhatsApp groups could be studied in order to further the knowledge base of the field. It can also be recommended to study the use of WhatsApp and WhatsApp groups in different countries, as social media usage is not universal. As this study clearly showed that internal stakeholders prefer interpersonal communication and relationship management over virtual, it would be interesting to compare interpersonal communication to communication on WhatsApp for further study.

5.10 FINAL CONCLUSION

This chapter draws conclusions on the specific research questions posed in Chapter 1 in order to answer the general research question (1.5.1). The research questions were answered through theoretical exploration (Chapter 2), the research methods (Chapter 3), and the research conducted (Chapter 4).

This study therefore concludes that WhatsApp can be used as a platform to build relationships through internal two-way symmetrical communication. It was also concluded that WhatsApp is inherently a two-way platform, but that specific strategies should be used in order to ensure that relationships are being managed on the platform. It is imperative for organisations who rely on their internal stakeholders for their stability and survival to communicate with those internal stakeholders strategically in a way that reaches them optimally.

As the SRCS depends on their internal stakeholders for survival, and those internal stakeholders change yearly, it is imperative that the SRCS manages their relationships with internal stakeholders to ensure stability and sustainability. By managing relationships through WhatsApp, within the context of internal social media with their internal stakeholders, the SRCS management

can improve the likelihood of their internal stakeholders taking part in the structure for longer than a year, ensuring the sustainability and stability of the structure (1.4).

WhatsApp can thus be considered an ideal additional platform for strategic internal two-way symmetrical communication that manages relationships. WhatsApp can be used in conjunction with various other communication strategies and platforms. The conceptual framework created in this study can serve as a guide to using WhatsApp to communicate with internal stakeholders and can expand research into the field of social media and WhatsApp. Future research can thus make use of the conceptual framework and build on it to improve the research of social media platforms in an ever-changing landscape.

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ANNEXURES



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12 June 2020

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the **Arts Research Ethics Committee (AREC)** on 12/06/2020, the Arts Research Ethics Committee hereby approves your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (NWU-RERC) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title: The utilization of WhatsApp by North West University's Student RAG Community Service in the management of relationships with their internal stakeholders															
Study Leader/Supervisor (Principal Investigator)/Researcher: Dr L Bezuidenhout															
Student: B. Visagie															
Ethics number:	N	W	U	-	0	1	0	2	1	-	2	0	-	A	7
	Institution		Study Number								Year			Status	
	Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation														
Application Type: Single Study	Risk Category: Low														
Commencement date: 12/06/2020	Expiry date: 12/06/2021														
Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.															

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):

- Translation of the informed consent document to the languages applicable to the study participants should be submitted to the AREC (if applicable).
- Any research at governmental or private institutions, permission must still be obtained from relevant authorities and provided to the AREC. Ethics approval is required BEFORE approval can be obtained from these authorities.

General conditions:

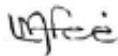
While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:

- *The study leader/supervisor (principle investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the AREC:*
 - *annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and*
 - *without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.*
- *The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the AREC, prior to implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.*
- *Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit.*
- *The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started.*
- *In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-RERC and AREC reserves the right to:*

- request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;
- to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process;
- withdraw or postpone approval if:
 - any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;
 - it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the AREC or that information has been false or misrepresented;
 - submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or
 - new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.
- AREC can be contacted for further information or any report templates via 13128388@nwu.ac.za or 018 285 2301.

The AREC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your study. Please do not hesitate to contact the AREC or the NWU-RERC for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely



Prof L.M. Fourie
Acting Chairperson NWU Arts Research Ethics Committee

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