

**ONLINE PUBLIC RELATIONS:
AN EXPLORATION INTO THE IMPACT OF INFORMATION
COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) ON CORPORATE
COMMUNICATION IN GAUTENG COMPANIES**

**BY
IRIS RINGANI**

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SUPERVISOR: DR J. I. DE JAGER

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To whom it may concern

This is to confirm that I, Ruth Angela Scheepers, edited Iris Ringani's thesis for language and style. The onus is, however, on the student to implement the changes that I suggested.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RA Scheepers', followed by a period. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

RA Scheepers
Department of English Studies
Unisa

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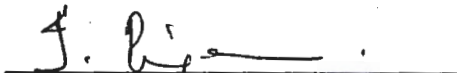
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DECLARATION

Herewith I declare that the thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the North West University hereby submitted has not previously been submitted by me for the degree at this or any other university, that this is my work in design and execution and that all material contained herein has been duly acknowledged.


IRIS RINGANI

ABSTRACT

The research problem identified focused on dispersed company audiences which result in the lack of immediate communication. Public relations activities which are undertaken through conventional media do not explicate organisational policies. Feedback is rendered impossible or delayed due to the non-availability of the same tools used by organisations. This thesis explores possibilities of how new technologies would address these problems, and opportunities of executing corporate communication functions.

Existing literature highlights various conventional media used in organisations for corporate communication. Though the conventional media serve organisational, employee and stakeholder needs, they do not offer solutions that will enhance communication or alleviate the above-stated concern. With the introduction of new technologies, literature shows that they have the potential to execute various corporate communication activities. New technologies offer organisations opportunities to excel in executing corporate communication activities and extend the communication tools with more efficiency.

The study hypothesis took the form of research questions. The questions that were tested focused on how public relations practitioners use the internet as a new medium to execute corporate communication. Further, research questions focused on how the intranet is used for internal communication. Research questions also looked at the functions of electronic mail for both internal and external publics.

The methodologies were content analysis and survey research. The former analyzed existing communication content from web sites, and the latter gathered data from the same sample pertaining to intranet and e-mail usage. Content analysis analyzed numerous units which were categorized as 'corporate

communication', investor information', 'virtual centre' and 'web surveys'.

Data was collected from 27 companies from these sectors: oil, mining, banking, newspapers and radio. Basic descriptive statistics as well as Chi-Square to test hypothesis were conducted. Other tests included Scott's *pi* and Holsti method for reliability testing.

The findings showed that Information Communication Technologies are changing the landscape of corporate communication for the better, thus supporting study objectives and answering almost all research questions. Though new theoretical models are proposed with regard to technologies, the findings support the two traditional theoretical models which underpin public relations activities. The significance of the findings calls for an integration of ICT strategies with traditional communication strategies. In order for organisations to be more efficient and competitive, conventional methods should be integrated with new methods introduced by technologies.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The concepts **technology**, **online**, **cyberspace**, and **information superhighway** are buzzwords which have become part of everyday vocabulary in the business world. What do these buzzwords mean and what are their implications? Pavlik (1996:136) describes the information superhighway as "the emerging digital data networks that are rapidly covering the globe and have implications not only for journalism but for all society and democracy itself". The term "cyberspace" was coined by science-fiction author William Gibson and refers to "the virtual space in which computer-mediated communication takes place" (Holtz, 1999:302).

Hope (1996:9), who regards the World Wide Web (www) as the fastest growing communication medium in the world, cites IBM internet spokesperson John Patrick's assertion that "not doing business on the net would be equivalent to not having a fax machine". The implications for Public Relations (PR) practise are that, with the technological advances of the internet and its applications, **managing communications is made easier and information is within easy reach.**

A new era of communications has entered business life. Companies realise the importance of such technologies and adapt them to embrace public relations. Given the fact that public relations executed through tools which include various publications, news releases and audio-visual means, the internet presents itself as a new medium through which to execute public relations activities. When browsing through company websites, certain corporate communication functions become evident. These include **media centres** which host news releases aimed particularly at journalists, **social responsibility projects** and **investor relations**.

Media relations have changed radically as journalists can continuously access organisational information from websites. For organisations with websites, printing and dispatching costs are drastically reduced. The unlimited space of websites means that press releases and other media-related information can be archived for future reference. Thus Information Communication Technologies (ICT) diminish human relations as journalists now rely on these technologies.

The **investor relations** landscape is changing as financial information appears regularly on websites which carry information pertaining to the financial performance, share information and other financial information of companies. Shareholders, business media and analysts are in the position to receive communication on share performance, share values and news on acquisitions or mergers. Websites can make transactions available online for the convenience of shareholders.

Companies experiencing **crises** use the internet to communicate these to their affected stakeholders. This provides the public with up-to-the-minute information and also reassures those who have been inconvenienced. New **corporate identities** are announced through this medium, informing stakeholders of decisions leading to such changes. **Social responsibility** projects are also explained and information provided on the policies which inform them. Prior to the advent of ICTs, stakeholders were hardly aware of all the projects companies were involved in, except those that were advertised through the mass media.

A further technological invention is the **intranet** which serves only the internal public. Public relations functions that are usually executed through conventional means can be carried out through this medium. These functions include hosting various publications, handling change management functions and helping employees across distances to collaborate on projects. As far as employees are concerned, intranets enhance communication with other departments or divisions

which were previously less accessible. Other work-related activities can also be conducted through the intranet.

Electronic mail adds to the technological applications which companies use as a medium intended for both internal and external publics. Company publications are attached through e-mail. This medium has changed the face of media relations as journalists use it to send media enquiries and to receive media releases. Employees also benefit by receiving company information speedily and cost effectively. Dialogue and vertical communication are enhanced by e-mail applications.

Glennie (1999:36) asserts that for PR practitioners to survive in this era, they must embrace and master the key concepts together with other applications of technology. The internet brings advantages to organisations as companies execute public relations activities faster and much cheaper than through traditional means.

1.1 Problem Statement

Multinational and local companies have widely dispersed target audiences or stakeholders. It becomes difficult, if not impossible, for these companies to reach all their stakeholders simultaneously. For these audiences, accessing corporate information becomes equally difficult. Communicating to widely dispersed stakeholders by means of conventional media has three obstacles: feedback, reach and immediacy.

Immediacy would be impossible for external audiences as the mass media reports events that have already taken place. Not all stakeholders and the general public can be reached individually. This research will explore the technological means of facilitating access to most stakeholders immediately and of allowing recipients to send feedback.

Traditionally, companies send press releases to the media. Such press releases contain information on company activities, new products, company results and so on (Jefkins, 1998). Certain audiences might not even be aware of this publicity. Although trade magazines target specialised audiences, they are said to lack immediacy as they have long closing dates (Newsom, 1996:187).

Television, with its high impact from combining sight, sound and motion, is still limited to restricted time segments to allow for a full coverage of news (Newsom, 1996). Radio, with its ability to transmit public relations activities through news bulletins, live studio or recorded interviews, has the disadvantage of sending brief messages. Listeners may switch to other stations and not hear the company news (Skinner & Von Essen, 1999:185). This research study intends to explore how technologies can deliver detailed company information in ways that surpass traditional media.

The same applies to internal audiences in organisations that may lack the necessary technologies. There are ways to communicate with these audiences through house journals, video conferencing and staff television. House journals are usually published on a monthly or quarterly basis, thus they report events at a later stage. Newsletters, another form of house journals, are commonly used to communicate company operations, job-related issues and events, but only literate employees can gain crucial company information (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1985).

The spoken word has immediate feedback and meaning is exchanged with a view to reaching mutual understanding (McCathrin, 1999:16). However, the spoken word does not present enough opportunities and is not feasible in large organisations or those with global offices (Rensburg, 1994). In this instance, the research intends to explore which technologies can deliver communication tools with immediacy to local and globally dispersed employees.

Certain public relations functions are only evident as news articles, corporate advertisements and sponsorship activities. Policies and reasons that underlie such activities are generally unknown. Using the conventional media makes it difficult to outline the rationale and management decisions behind such functions, owing to the cost of media space. Media organisations also adhere to their editorial policies. All articles that are received are edited before they are published. Journalists choose which stories to report, which facts, quotes and other story elements to include and which to exclude (Millison, 1999:2). This research seeks to determine whether technologies allow public relations activities to be explained in detail, in line with management decisions.

Two-way communication between organisations and their publics is not easy. If made possible at all, this takes time and the use of research platforms for management decision-making reaches a limited audience with a minimal return rate. Letters are sent and suggestion boxes are still used, but these still yield limited feedback. Sifting through notes deposited in suggestion boxes is time-consuming, and responses are limited as writers rarely receive individual feedback on letters sent to management. Management, on the other hand, cannot pay heed to every individual suggestion.

Organisations such as banks, government departments and insurance companies send letters to clients regarding important announcements and changes. They cannot guarantee that the addressee will receive the mail because post may not be delivered, or may be read much later. As a result, responses to new business processes may be hampered by a lack of client cooperation in the newly implemented business processes. This study seeks to identify means that promote dialogue between management and the publics in order to facilitate faster decision making and execution of organisational changes.

1.2 Formulation of Research Questions

Wimmer and Dominick (1983:193) assert that "research questions can be tested for statistical significance". The reason for testing research questions in this study is to indicate the degree of accuracy of the sample.

Research questions are commonly used in *exploratory research* which is the case in this study, because researchers cannot confirm what may be found.

Research questions can be stated as simple questions about either the relationship between two or more variables, or about components of a phenomenon.

1.2.1 Research Questions

- How do PR practitioners adopt ICT as a new medium that complements conventional media in terms of publicising newsletters, annual reports, news releases, company information (operations, structure etc.)?
- How do companies use the internet to scan their environment for mentions in discussion forums or "contact us " links?
- During times of crisis, to what extent is the internet used to inform stakeholders about how the crisis is being dealt with?
- How is the internet used to establish two-way communication with the relevant audiences?
- To what extent are corporate image, social responsibility and other PR programmes featured on the net?
- What role does the website play in changing media relations between practitioners and journalists?

The following research questions are included in a survey questionnaire. Their significance is not subject to a statistical test.

- How do companies use intranets for internal communication?
- How do employees across distances use the intranet to collaborate on projects?
- How do PR practitioners use the intranet to implement communication programmes aimed at employees?
- How does the intranet promote vertical communication between senior management and employees?
- To what extent do organisations use the intranet to post publicity functions?
- To what extent does e-mail complement other conventional modes of internal communication?
- What role does e-mail play in the company's media relations?

1.2.2 Significance of the findings

As reflected in the research questions, the researcher is attempting to identify aspects of corporate communication which are published in conventional modes through ICTs, and also how different ICTs host such information. The impact of this on the publics is that more users will be in the position to access corporate information. More information will be available when published in this way than when provided by conventional modes. For these publics, information will be within easy reach.

In establishing two-way communication, companies are in the position to engage in dialogue with various publics. Companies stand to gain from numerous views by incorporating them in their strategies. Questions pertaining to crisis management seek to establish how companies engage with affected audiences by providing them with information on how problems and crises are handled. Investigating two-way communication on the internet will involve looking for ways in which companies are interactive.

As intranets are internal company networks, the researcher seeks to discover how communication which is directed through conventional modes is diverted to such networks. Companies can use such tools to make collaboration with offices in distant locations easier. The researcher seeks to find how other communication programmes are communicated to employees through ICTs, which are not clearly defined through conventional means.

The dialogical capabilities of ICTs must be established. This could alter the manner in which companies communicate with their employees, thus changing the communication culture of these companies. With regard to e-mail, the researcher is looking for clues as to whether companies have fully embraced the tool or whether they use it hand in hand with other means. The means to assess whether e-mail has changed the landscape of media relations and what new possibilities and benefits it can bring, remains to be discovered in the data.

1.3 Rationale for the study

In the new millennium, business operates in an arena that is beginning to move beyond the constraints and limits of a text-based world. The new dynamics of communication are online, interactive and participatory. Naudé, Froneman and Atwood (2004:35-36) support this view by arguing that interactive messages can be responded to immediately using the same medium. In this sense, internet users have more control over media usage and its content. This study seeks to explore how the function of the printed word such as that carried by brochures, news releases and annual reports is extended to this new electronic medium.

The impact of the internet on public relations functions of organisations and how these specific functions are reflected must be established. This is because the internet is a new medium with capabilities that are not present within conventional media. Public relations functions include running corporate image and corporate identity programmes, social investment, research that includes

environmental scanning, crisis management, media relations and internal communication. In the past, conventional media was used exclusively to execute these functions. With the advent of new technologies, the internet has presented opportunities for communicating these functions to global audiences at a low cost. The internet allows larger audiences to be reached, thus providing sufficient information for sound decision making.

Media relations are traditionally restricted to media briefings, media releases, media kits (speeches, photographs, fact sheets, brochures, biographies) which are sent through the post or by fax. However, the internet stores volumes of background information and other required information which was traditionally supplied through media kits. Media conferences require the presence of journalists, irrespective of their location. New technologies, on the other hand, have invented *web casting* which can link journalists, investors, analysts and companies through online means in real time, at different locations.

Internal communication is executed through conventional means such as notice boards, memoranda and newsletters. However, the advent of the intranet as an internal communication tool presents opportunities which were not available from conventional media. Conventional modes of executing PR functions could be taken over by the intranet, given its ability to reach offices in various locations.

Using conventional modes implies sending mail to external publics and periodic newsletters to internal publics. Reproducing publications is costly and they take time to reach the public. By contrast, Information Communication Technologies – internet, intranet and e-mail – can play a crucial role in internal and external public relations practise. In the absence of an intranet, e-mail could be used as a medium to send information to internal publics, for example by sending newsletters as attachments. E-mail can also change conventional media relations which engage journalists and public relations practitioners in telephone conversations or which send information by fax.

1.4 Study Objectives

The study examines the following aspects of PR:

- To explore how public relations practitioners use the internet as a new **medium** for corporate communication.
- To discover the **functions** of corporate communication as reflected through this medium.
- To determine how the **intranet** is used for internal communication.
- To determine the functions of **electronic mail** in internal and external communication.

1.5 Theoretical perspectives guiding the study

This study is based on two models of public relations as propounded by Grunig and Hunt (1984): the public information model and the two-way symmetrical model. The public information model succeeded models which were propaganda-oriented, and came into existence because government agencies and corporations were attacked and criticised by journalists. The model is characterised by disclosing true organisational information to the media. Thus good relations between the media and the organisation generate favourable publicity in the long run.

This model is one-way as it depicts communication flow from the organisation through the media to the target publics, and not the other way round. Practitioners using this model follow a journalistic pattern of publishing information to large, unknown publics (Grunig, 1992).

Propositions of the public information model guide this study in areas of ICT publicising corporate information regarding company structure, company history and areas of operation. Company performance is demonstrated in the investor relations function by presenting financial statements delivered through quarterly

and annual reports. In media relations, news releases that were traditionally published as news articles are also posted and archived on the website. Other company publications appear on websites, the intranet and electronic mail. Public relations functions such as corporate image and social responsibility carry organisational information which informs the stakeholders of company activities. All these areas of corporate communication are one-directional as organisations present them to the audiences and not the other way round. Hence, Naudé et al. (2004) refer to these messages as “non-interactive”, with a fixed availability “because they are only available when the sender makes them available”.

The two-way symmetrical model accords equal value to the views of the organisation and its audiences. In this model, practitioners use research to provide feedback from the publics to management, thus closing the gap and making communication two-way. Negotiation by both parties is used in resolving disputes in order for both parties to benefit (Dozier, Grunig and Grunig, 1995:41). Practitioners serve as mediators between organisations and their public. As communication flows both to and from the publics, the model resembles a dialogue rather than a monologue (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

Elliot (1997, in Naudé, Froneman and Atwood, 2004) states that “online communication is the most symmetrical form of mass communication” when compared to traditional mass communication media. Thus, the researcher is of the opinion that the two-way symmetrical model guides the study in areas involving the interactive nature of technologies, where online research is conducted to solicit responses from users. In environmental scanning, comments and suggestions are invited and forums are in place which offer public opinion. In media relations, news conferences are held where journalists can participate with company executives in real-time interaction. In investor relations, company executives engage with the press, analysts and investors through webcasts.

By using the intranet, vertical communication with senior executives is made possible. As an information resource, the intranet promotes dialogue and collaboration with a view to increasing productivity. Electronic mail follows the dialogical stance as it creates an environment conducive to interaction prevailing between the organisation and the media. Given the above, the symmetrical nature of the internet and its related applications accord equal power to both the organisation and its public (Ryan, 2003:339, in Naudé et al., 2004:39).

1.6 Significance of the study

The significance of this study is that it aims to reveal the extent to which organisations use technologies to reach more stakeholders. This will be evidenced in the websites under study and whether links to geographic regions of other worldwide operations exist. The study also seeks to establish various methods of communicating company activities and executing PR activities through technologies. Websites assume a different format from traditional brochures and other printed material when publicising corporate information. Information headings appear on home pages and the user clicks on the selected topic. This opens a web page containing selected information and possibly further links (topics that are usually highlighted in blue) to topics presented on other pages.

Based on the symmetrical and public information models which underpin the study, the strategic and tactical nature of the internet and its applications will be revealed. This will be indicated by how organisations open lines of communication with their stakeholders (the media, investors, customers etc.) through research, discussion forums and comments. The internet uses different platforms in communicating with stakeholders. Data might reveal links which allow users to send comments, discussion forums which allow users to share opinions on certain issues, or even questionnaire surveys that users can complete and send to management at the click of a button.

Publications assume a new platform on internal websites when disseminated through e-mail and the intranet. Data might also reveal various issues of newsletters that are archived according to dates. Technologies allow users to make use of pull mechanisms by clicking on the required heading and accessing the relevant page, instead of scrolling through the entire page to find the required information.

Corporate communication functions which are not communicated to employees through traditional means assume a new role through these technologies. Data will reveal whether intranets and e-mail communicate corporate image and identity, social responsibility, crisis management, investor relations and media relations functions using other means unrelated to traditional methods. Thus new technologies have important implications for the public relations profession as PR centres on exchanging information.

1.7 Delimitations

This study is limited to ICTs - the internet, the intranet and electronic mail. It focuses on how companies use technologies to execute public relations or corporate communications. Specific functions of public relations that will be investigated include environmental scanning, investor relations, crisis management, corporate image/identity, corporate social responsibility and interactivity. Although media relations are discussed in the literature review chapter as an observed trend, they are not analysed in the content analysis. Media relations are not a function, but imply communication tools which disseminate information. Therefore they will not form part of the findings of content analysis, but will be included in the findings of the survey.

This study does not delve into the traditional means of executing the above-stated functions. Only an overview of conventional media is provided as a

background against which to compare what the new technologies have to offer. The study is limited to how the intranet is used for internal communication. Specific public relations functions on the intranet that are investigated include publications, corporate image, corporate social responsibility and crisis management. The study is also limited to electronic mail for both internal and external communication. In the case of internal communication, specific reference is made to public relations functions, namely, information dissemination and the dissemination of publications. In the case of external communication, media relations become the sole focus of electronic mail.

2. DEFINITION OF TERMS

- The internet is "the largest network of connected computers in the world all sharing and disseminating information across the globe" (Woo, 1997:17).
- The intranet is "any private network contained within an enterprise internet" (McDonogh, 1996).
- Online communication refers to "the communication that occurs between users at two or more computers connected over a local or wide area network" (Holtz, 1999).
- Impact would refer to the effect of information communication technologies in enhancing corporate communication (Holtz, 1999).
- Public relations is "the management through communication of perceptions and strategic relationships between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholders" (Skinner & Von Essen, 1999:4).
- Information superhighway refers to "the emerging digital data networks that are rapidly covering the globe and have important implications for all society and democracy itself" (Pavlik, 1996).
- Cyberspace refers to the virtual space in which computer-mediated communication takes place (Holtz, 1999:302).
- Electronic mail is defined as "correspondence in the form of messages transmitted between work stations over a network" (Straubhaar, 1998:373).

- Medium refers to “the physical means by which messages are transmitted between people in communication” (Steinberg, 1994:15).
- Communication is the “sending and receiving [of] messages from one person to another with a view to achieve mutual understanding” (Steinberg, 1994:12).
- Technology is merely a machine which becomes a medium as it employs a symbolic code, as it finds its place in a particular social setting” (Pavlik, 1996:13).
- Stakeholders are defined as a “group whose collective behaviour can directly affect the organization’s future, but which is not under the organization’s control” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).
- Public relations is “the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics” (Jefkins, 1994:7).
- A company is defined as “those private need-satisfying institutions of a market economy that accept risks in pursuit of profit by offering products and services on the market to the consumer (Cronjé, Hugo, Neuland & Van Reenen, 1994).

3. STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH

This study consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 is a general introduction explaining the background. The stated problem allows the researcher to highlight the shortcomings of conventional modes of communication in 21st century public relations. Research questions which will be tested as hypotheses in chapter 4 are outlined. The background to two theoretical perspectives which guide the study is provided.

Chapter 2 provides an in-depth discussion of the literature reviewed. First, it gives the background to conventional media, followed by an examination of the potential of the internet in conducting public relations functions *vis-à-vis* conventional media.

Chapter 3 focuses on research methodology. Data-gathering techniques are outlined and the analysis of the actual content of websites is performed. In this chapter, reliability of the measuring instrument is established from the results of a pilot study. The chapter analyses websites belonging to twenty-seven companies in Gauteng. These fall within five industries.

Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the findings from the content analysis and the questionnaire survey. Research questions are put to the test, and a hypothesis test against a *chi-square* test reveals how research questions support the data. Findings from the questionnaire survey are also discussed in this chapter with reference to frequency distribution tables.

Chapter 5 offers a discussion of research findings in order to determine the extent to which the study objectives have been met. The literature review is synthesised with the research findings.

Chapter 6 concludes the study by bringing all its elements into perspective. It provides a conclusion on whether the study objectives were accomplished. The limitations that prevented the study from reaching its full potential are mentioned and, finally, recommendations on ideal corporate websites are made.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines conventional media in order to illustrate the tools used in public relations and how they function. This is followed by an in-depth examination of the internet as a new medium of communication. This examination will include a discussion of the public relations functions and the potential the internet has to offer *vis-à-vis* conventional media.

A second application of ICTs, known as the intranet, intended for internal public, is also considered with a view to demonstrating its impact on PR. Since the intranet is used within organisations, its functions and communication benefits to internal publics are examined. Its strategic function as an additional medium for disseminating brochures, newsletters and memos will be investigated. E-mail as an ICT application is discussed to show how it can be used for PR purposes for both the internal and external publics. Most of the literature consulted is American and European. South African literature found in journals pertaining to ICT usage is limited. This is the reason the researcher has consulted web material and an interview as references.

2. A PLAN AND RATIONALE OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The following plan indicates the rationale for selecting the literature discussed in this chapter:

Literature on conventional media deals with controlled and uncontrolled media. Conventional media starts with the spoken word, the most basic form of communication, and proceeds to printed and electronic forms of communication.

Literature on spoken communication provides an analysis of why face-to-face communication is preferred in organisations and reveals studies which highlight its effectiveness.

This is followed by literature on speeches which emphasises their uniqueness as direct means of communication with the audiences. House journals, which include newsletters, magazines and news tabloids, are discussed. This literature highlights the objectives of these house journals and reveals how they disseminate crucial company information to employees.

Brochures assume a different form from house journals and serve a once-off purpose. Audiovisual means of communication provide a contrast to the paper-based media mentioned above. They serve different functions of corporate communication which are characterised by motion and sound. Literature on letters focuses on the individualised approach between the organisation and targeted individuals who form part of a certain public. Literature on bulletin boards indicates their easy and effortless reach to employees. Bulletins indicate speed in disseminating urgent information.

Literature on video-conferencing emphasises how this uses the electronic means to enable collaboration across vast distances. Exhibitions are PR tools that are used during special events. Annual reports provide information on the financial performance of an organisation.

In the case of uncontrolled media, magazines are geared to specific publics and assist organisations in targeting messages. Newspapers can target messages at specific publics as well as the general public. Television and radio literature show the various formats that are used to convey corporate information.

Literature selected on internet usage shows how South African users have grown in number over the years. On the subject of environmental scanning,

literature discusses how the two-way capabilities of the internet enable discussion forums, and how organisations manage their reputations through this medium. Literature on media relations focuses on how PR practitioners can use the internet as a controlled mass communication medium. It demonstrates the impact of the internet by extending traditional media relations and presents great opportunities that are not available when using traditional means.

Literature on investor relations reveals the enormous opportunities presented by the internet as it allows the user to use pull mechanisms to access the requested information. On the subject of crisis management, literature demonstrates case studies of how companies handle both meteor and predator crises, and guidelines on how companies should address such crises using online means.

Literature on corporate image is selected on the basis of demonstrating how the internet can contribute to the negative image of companies. This also shows how companies can use the internet to counter “attack sites” which may be created to damage their reputation. However, there are gaps in how the internet presents corporate image and identity programmes. Information on these was inferred from selected websites. Literature on corporate social responsibility has been chosen on the basis of the internet’s ability to explain management policy informing specific activities and in detailing those activities.

Literature on the functions of the intranet has been selected to outline the vertical capabilities which demonstrate a wide variety of organisational activities. It reveals its relationship-building capabilities between employees and executive management. No literature is available on the intranet’s use in corporate social investment activities. Instead, information is gleaned from the relevant websites. As an interdepartmental information resource, literature looks at opportunities brought by the intranet to access a wide range of information from databases of various departments, and how this contributes to employee effectiveness.

On the subject of newsgroups and collaboration, literature investigates the opportunities presented by increased productivity and as a means of two-way communication in managing projects. Literature on electronic newsletters has been selected because it shows how the intranet goes beyond traditional newsletters to publish a wide variety of news with a faster and wider distribution.

Much of the literature on crisis management reflects case studies related to the same issue. However, literature is lacking on strategies to handle crises. Change management information also cites case studies and lacks guidelines on how organisations should use the intranet to implement change management. Literature on corporate identity demonstrates the importance of intranets which inform and involve employees in the process of implementing new identities.

Return on investment indicates the bottom line impact that intranets have on companies. This is essential to the strategic management of communication. Literature on e-mail discusses the various functions of e-mail in the day-to-day operations of the organisation. Media relations demonstrate a breakthrough in traditional media relations and offer guidelines in composing effective media releases. E-mailed newsletters offer a detailed analysis of strategies and tactics used in implementing e-newsletters. Case studies also demonstrate how organisations use audience-specific newsletters to increase productivity.

3. AN OVERVIEW OF CONVENTIONAL MEDIA

(A) Controlled Media

Public relations practitioners use both controlled and uncontrolled media to communicate with the organisation's publics. They regard controlled media, which is primarily aimed at the internal publics, as media in which practitioners control the message, when the message should be communicated and to whom it should be directed. In this fashion the message is guaranteed to reach its

audience unaltered (Cutlip, Centre and Broom, 1994:249; Newsom, Turk and Kruckeberg, 1996; Rensburg, 1994). The following section covers forms of controlled media.

3.1 The spoken word / Interpersonal communication is the basic form of conventional media used in public relations. Interpersonal communication is a transactional process between two or more people in a face-to-face encounter. Verbal and nonverbal messages form part of the interpersonal encounter. Thus meaning is exchanged in order to reach mutual understanding (McCathrin, 1989:16).

Studies have indicated that interpersonal communication is preferred as employees increasingly request more timely information, relationship building and dialogue. In certain corporations, research has found that there is a need for interpersonal communication to assist employees in understanding strategy and in explaining ongoing changes taking place in the company (Watras, 1995).

A study cited by McCathrin (1989:14) revealed that employees are concerned about receiving information pertaining to company mergers, downsizing and information about where the company is heading and why certain decisions are taken.

Cutlip et al. (2007:52) state that the oldest form of face-to-face communication is the grapevine. Though it is neither a formal nor a controlled medium, the grapevine circulates harmful rumours such as layoffs and takeovers which can damage the organisation's reputation. Public relations practitioners keep their fingers on the pulse when they dispel such rumours by releasing the full facts of the matter.

Meetings provide opportunities for two-way communication. Examples of task-oriented meetings are work-group meetings, quality control circles and participative management sessions (Cutlip et al., 2007:52).

3.2 Speeches

Speeches are also regarded as publicity, whether they are covered by the media or not. In this case, the PR person researches the topic in order to write the speech. Speeches are often published as brochures and sent to special audiences. Such brochures extend the importance of speeches as publicity tools (Newsom, Turk & Kruckeberg, 2004:242). Furthermore, Cutlip et al. (1985:339) add that organisations may deliver speeches in response to a controversial issue. The main purpose is to inform and reassure concerned individuals about issues of mutual interest. These concerned individuals include employees, legislators, financial analysts, pressure groups, the media and opinion leaders (Cutlip, Center, Broom & Du Plessis, 2007: 50).

3.3 House Journals

According to Lubbe and Puth (1994, in Scriven, 2002: 8), managers in South African organisations have realised that employees are the most important public. Therefore internal communication is given priority, and the printed house journal remains the most effective communication channel. Internal communication has improved in response to changes in organisational environments. Such changes include organisational growth, a need for transparency between management and employees, the unstable environment and cultural diversity. In becoming effective and competitive, managers strive to provide information that is multidirectional, timely, and that bears specific information objectives (Sonnenberg, 1992, in Scriven, 2002: 4).

Scriven (2002:4) refers to Sparks (1997) who advises that printed house journals should be updated to meet the information needs of employees. In order to do this, regular surveys should be conducted to establish the house journal's readability, preferred articles and the perceived relevance of information to various employees.

The three types of house journals discussed here are as follows:

3.3.1 Newsletters

Newsletters are the most common form of internal publication. The aim of a newsletter is to communicate information about past, current and future events pertaining to the company (Rensburg, 1994:144). Newsletters communicate information that is essential to achieving organisational objectives. These include organisational plans, public relations programmes, company operations, job-related issues and events (Cutlip et al., 1985:334).

Cutlip et al. (1994:266) add that newsletters are relatively easy, fast and inexpensive to produce. This is the reason why most organisations rely on them to communicate news in a timely fashion. Cleaver (1998:2) cites a case of the Kodak company which announced a massive layoff of its employees. Even though other means of communication such as e-mail and the intranet were used, a follow up through a newsletter was important. Employees in this instance needed printed material for future reference. During such crisis situations, today's newsletters can be produced in a matter of hours using desktop publishing software and fast copiers.

Grates (2000:27) backs up company publications which are falsely perceived as becoming extinct due to the advent of ICTs. He highlights the fact that companies use a mix of communication media to keep in touch with employees, one of which is the employee publication. He cites BASF, the Germany-based chemical manufacturer, whose employees have limited access to the corporate intranet and rely on a newsletter to inform them of developments in the company locally and around the world. This characterises many organisations whose employees have no access to technological media as they may be working in a warehouse, in the plant, or on the road. Thus company newsletters serve as the ideal vehicle for reaching these diverse groups.

House journals are distributed to employees and sometimes to external stakeholders of an organisation. Some organisations have publications for specific external publics, such as the financial public. This is why organisations produce a number of publications designed to meet the information needs of particular employee and external groups (Smith, 1995).

A South African version of audience-specific newsletters is distributed by the government's Department of Land Affairs. The communication services held an Indaba during 1998 as part of the restructuring of the entire department. The outcome was the communication unit producing various audience-specific publications. Examples are the *Journal* which is a newsletter aimed at employees and is issued every two months, *The Anthill*, which is intended for the office of the Restitution Commission in two provinces, and *Diphetogo*, a quarterly newsletter of the transformation process in the Department of Land Affairs (www.aardvark.co.za, July 2002).

Cutlip et al. (2007:45) note that in South African organisations, multilingualism is a critical factor in sending messages that can be understood by everyone. They argue that fewer than 50% of the South African population is conversant in either English or Afrikaans. Since different language groups are represented in organisations, there is often no common language in which all employees are equally conversant.

3.3.2 Magazines

Magazines are similar to newsletters but are bound in magazine format. Magazines contain feature articles and pictures and may be published weekly, fortnightly, or monthly. Company magazines are used to inform employees and the public about the organisation, its people, and its products. What is reported at media conferences can be covered in magazines as feature articles (Rensburg, 1994:144; Skinner and Von Essen, 1999:256).

3.3.3 News tabloids

These resemble newspapers and contain news items, feature articles, photographs, columns featuring employee interests and activities. They may be published weekly, fortnightly, monthly or bi-monthly (Baines, Egan and Jefkins, 2004: 284; Rensburg, 1994; Skinner and Von Essen, 1999:256).

3.4 Brochures carry brief company information on the history of the company, the company structure and its operations. The brochure serves as a source of company information for its stakeholders, the media, prospective clients and other interested parties (Rensburg, 1994). Bivins (1995:86) adds that brochures can serve as stand-alone display rack literature, may be used as a component of a press kit or serve as a part of a larger media mix.

3.5 Audiovisual communication

Rensburg (1994:148) outlines audiovisual communication media used in organisations. Transparencies and overhead projectors, slides, corporate films and videotapes are used by public relations practitioners. Audiovisual communication is most effective

“in explaining an important corporate strategy, showing the company's profile to recruits, investors, clients, announcing additions or revisions to company benefit plans, educating employees about policies and procedures, training supervisors, managers and employees and presenting public relations strategies to top management and stockholders.” (Rensburg,1994:148).

Newsom et al. (1996:366) and Cutlip et al. (1994:276) regard films and videos as informational and publicity vehicles used by PR practitioners. Companies may produce sponsored films which are distributed free of charge. These are primarily intended for schools, community organisations, television stations, in-

house training or for PR purposes. *Feature fillers* are a one- to five-minute film clip on video cassette. These clips serve as fillers for feature programmes, talk shows or local sporting events. In order for fillers to be considered for broadcast, they must be newsworthy and timely, and contain only one mention of the sponsor.

Other uses of the video include covering press conferences, annual meetings and beaming important conferences via satellite to other venues. Outside the organisation, the uses of audiovisual technology are many as organisations take their stories to different types of public in a variety of shapes (Cole, 1981:58).

The telephone company Sprint/UTF uses the *SNN Vision* channel with an advanced video messaging, scheduling and graphics creation system to instantly distribute corporate news to more than 140 television sets in thirty-one locations. Television sets are placed in strategic, high-traffic locations for employees to watch. The *SNN Vision* channel provides employees with national and world news, business news, sports and weather information. Using this video system, information can be distributed quickly and at minimum cost (Smith 1995:35).

Absa Bank airs the Absa television channel which broadcasts every Wednesday for twenty minutes. Presenters from various business units are featured. It follows a question and answer format. The channel is also used to announce financial results to employees. First, results are sent to the JSE, followed by a newsflash sent to all staff members to announce a special broadcast by the Chief Executive. Press conferences are also held using this channel.¹

¹ Interview held with Samantha Perumal, Editor: E-Communication on 16 July 2009, at 11:00, ABSA Head Office, Cnr Anderson & Mooi streets, Johannesburg.

3.6 Letters

Individualised letters are increasingly being used as a traditional means to establish direct, fast communication with both the internal and external publics. Letters allow the Chief Executive to direct personalised messages to employees in a fast and economical manner. Letters and memos as daily correspondence are an important and informative means of communication. They support line communication by ensuring the accuracy of information (Cutlip, Center and Broom, 1994:267).

Letters add to the importance of line communication by indicating important matters in the organisation. Organisations send letters to members of various professions, opinion leaders, suppliers, legislators and media executives. With advanced computer technology, automated individualised addresses and salutations are possible (Cutlip et al., 2007:49).

3.7 Bulletin boards and posters have become electronic post notices and messages. Posters are often displayed on walls in work areas. They usually reflect themes that are related to safety, health, and productivity aspects (Rensburg, 1994:46). Cutlip et al. (1994:269) are of the view that this medium provides for brief urgent messages. These boards must be updated constantly.

Companies such as Eli Lilly in France use a VideoBulletin board of text and graphic information in a slide-show format. This is aimed mainly at reaching employees who work in the laboratory or production areas who may not have access to a personal computer (Gordon, 1998:4). Baskin and Aronoff (1988:279) mention that bulletin boards perform a follow-up role of information already given at meetings or in in-house publications. Bulletin boards can also be used to disseminate information about a company's performance, or to display press coverage of the organisation's activities (Cole, 1981:135).

3.8 Bulletins are short documents which may be printed on a company letterhead. The aim of the bulletin is to disseminate urgent information to company employees (Rensburg, 1994:144). Cole (1981:135) adds that bulletins are company requisites which announce developments which could not be delayed for publication in the company newsletter.

3.9 Video teleconferencing is a mode which enables collaboration over vast distances. Given that it is regarded as the most interactive communication medium, video can be viewed and documents shared simultaneously by people at different locations. Using video teleconferencing, senior executives located at head offices can communicate crucial company information such as downsizing, mergers, and other decisions to employees at various other locations (Croft, 1995). Coetzee (2001, in Saunderson and de Wet, 2005:108) describes videoconferencing as "the real-time and typically interactive transmission of images and sound (usually in digital format) between two or more sites".

Teleconferencing can be useful for holding national press conferences during crisis situations. Company executives are in a position to respond to questions from reporters who are remotely located (Croft, 1995; Cutlip et al., 1985:344).² Cutlip et al. (2007:56) add that General Motors (USA) has its manufacturing plants linked via satellite teleconferencing. This technology serves to facilitate the exchange of information pertaining to design, research and production.

A study by Saunderson and de Wet (2005), based on the Eastern Cape Technikon's Linkage Programme, revealed that videoconferencing facilitates organisational communication networks provided that such networks are well managed. Videoconferencing should form part of management strategy and be developed in line with the organisation's vision, mission and policy. Research findings also highlighted the following:

² "During the Tylenol poisoning crisis, Johnson & Johnson used teleconferencing to hold national press conferences in 30 cities to answer reporters' questions and to keep the media updated on developments" (Cutlip et al., 2007:56).

- More information was shared through videoconferencing;
- It is a better alternative to flying;
- It forges new relationships and contributes to effectiveness of workgroups.

3.10 Exhibitions

Exhibitions are but one of the tools for the public relations programme to reach target audiences during special events. Exhibitions are designed for various public relations purposes. They create and maintain a specific perception of the organisation. Exhibitions maintain contact with important audiences and highlight the organisation's business operations. They generate requests for more information and can serve as a platform to recruit personnel (Baskin and Aronoff, 1988:280; Rensburg, 1994:154).

Baines, Egan and Jefkins (2004:280) extend the PR functions of exhibitions further to press conferences. In this light, public relations tasks include organising the press and obtaining maximum media coverage of the official opening of the event. They prepare the press room, display news releases on tables, and exhibit photographs and captions on panels.

3.11 Annual Reports

The annual report is a company's yearly financial statement made by management. This report is a communication tool to reach all stakeholders. PR practitioners can produce three types of reports. The first is a stockholders' report which is produced by organisations that sell stock to the public. This includes a letter from the chairman, the auditor's report and financial statements. The second is the employee annual report which targets employees and serves to provide vital financial information about their organisation and also to recognise employees' contributions to the organisation's success. The third is a summary annual report which is the abbreviated form of the traditional report to

shareholders. Its purpose is to simplify the communication of financial data. The financial data are summarised, colourfully illustrated and discussed in narrative form (Rensburg, 1994:145).

3.12 Advantages and disadvantages of controlled media

Face-to-face encounters contribute to faster decision making, establish a relationship of trust, and contribute to increased productivity (Howard, 1996; Rensburg, 1994:149). Problems stemming from the use of this medium are that opportunities for interpersonal communication, be it one-on-one or person-to-group are few. In large organisations, particularly those with offices nationwide and globally, face-to-face encounters are not possible (Rensburg, 1994:149). Not all supervisors are comfortable or capable communicators (Tucker, Derelien and Rouner, 1997:237).

Speeches cover all the facts, unlike mass media which reports the news selectively. Speeches provide a direct and persuasive means of communication with a live audience. They personalise an organisation as they allow a two-way dialogue that can be informative for both top management and employees. (Cutlip et al., 1994). Speeches provide opportunities for dialogue between speakers and the audience. Organisations' views are placed on public record (Cutlip et al., 2007:54).

Speeches tend to focus on the narrow interests and achievements of executives. The writer can select impressive facts about the organisation in order to promote its business (Cutlip et al., 2007:50).

Newsletters have the advantage of being produced faster and at lower cost than magazines. They can deliver specific information to the targeted public. Newsletters as well as other company publications have a degree of permanence (Cutlip et al., 1985). Swift (in Cutlip et al., 2007) regards

newsletters as narrowcasting, owing to their ability to target specific messages to specified audiences.

The disadvantages of newsletters lie in their outdated content and limited visual appeal. Newsletters lack feedback as most readers do not bother to write to the editor, because of the time frame between sending and seeing the letter in print (Cutlip et al., 2007). Other disadvantages of newsletters lie in the fact that they are not timely and are costly compared to electronic communication (Gordon, 1998:4).

Magazines permit creativity in design and colour. They are able to examine and thoroughly interpret employee issues, coupled with liberal photographs and illustrations. Their shortcomings are that they are expensive to produce. The length should exceed twenty pages in order to avoid looking skimpy (Skinner & Von Essen, 1999).

News tabloids can communicate a broader spectrum of information than newsletters.

Brochures are used to stimulate interest, answer questions about organisations and provide sources for further information. Brochures are problematic in the sense that certain information may be outdated, which leads to additional costs being incurred by printing updates.

Audiovisuals may be more likely to stimulate human emotions than printed media. Overhead projector transparencies can be produced immediately, but these are not suitable for large audiences. In the case of slides, a change or error requires a new photograph. A dark room is required for optimum visibility. In the case of videotapes, technical expertise is necessary to produce a film but this takes some time and is expensive. There is also the question of standardisation and compatibility among VCRs (Rensburg, 1994:148).

Letters are economical, direct, and have an individualised approach. They supplement the employee publication which is slower and published only at certain periods (Cutlip et al., 2007:49).

Bulletin boards are fast and effective. They offer a timely medium through which to post recent and urgent messages. But bulletin boards may be overlooked without being read, and only the literate will pay attention to them.

Videoconferencing replaces face-to-face meetings, thereby decreasing travel expenses. Video images enhance the written and spoken word. The productivity of geographically dispersed work groups is enhanced (Czek, 1995, in Saunderson and de Wet, 2005:109). The disadvantage of video teleconferencing is that it relies on the availability of satellite technologies. Reception is also limited by the availability of satellite receiving stations and specialised meeting facilities (Cutlip et al., 1985).

Exhibitions tend to attract the masses indiscriminately, thus providing detailed educational information. One disadvantage is, however, that exhibitions are limited to one place, and thus cannot reach mass audiences.

Annual reports are regarded as the most useful and informative source of information, particularly in the investment community. Their content is informative and assists the current and prospective institutional investor in determining the investment value of a particular company (Hutchins, 1994:19-20). The problems lie in the cost of producing reports, which may be very high given the glossy and colourful features. Some shareholders who are not financial experts may also find it difficult to understand these reports. In the case of global companies, the contents must be translated into local languages (Newsom et al., 1996).

(B) Uncontrolled Media

Uncontrolled media are mass communication media which are used mainly by companies to reach the external publics. Mass media are uncontrolled in the sense that the placement of the public relations material depends on the editors of the media concerned. In the case of uncontrolled media, practitioners cannot make decisions on media content. The following are forms of uncontrolled media:

3.1 Magazines

Magazines offer effective channels of communication to specialised publics. Thus public relations articles on companies could best be featured in financial, trade and business magazines. Articles mostly cover consumer service features, product and financial features, all of which are effective tools for shareholder relations. Financial publicity may include mergers, dividend announcements, profit reports and information on new product lines (Baskin and Aronoff, 1988:208).

Cutlip, Center and Broom (1994:289) believe that opinion leaders read many magazines. Since articles on companies feature a more interpretative reporting of controversial or informative issues, they stand a better chance of being reread and discussed. Magazines are but one channel of communication which can be directed at specific audiences with specific interests – for example, *PR & Communications Africa*, for PR practitioners, *Byte* magazine for Information Technology specialists. Cutlip et al. (2007:70) advise that PR practitioners should first make an analysis of a magazine's readers, its editorial formula, its advertising content and its market. It is important to study the style of the magazine, its topics, trends and format in order to gear messages to the targeted magazine.

3.2 Newspapers

The press is another mass communication tool used in public relations. The newspaper is a powerful force in shaping public opinion (Rensburg, 1994:150). Newspapers are used primarily to reach different community publics due to fragmented audiences. Jefkins (1998) and Cutlip et al. (1994) note that public relations practitioners write press releases for placement in the press. PR stories may cover a new product, company results, company activities, company news or promotional campaigns.

3.3 Television

Television is valuable in transmitting public relations programmes. Practitioners may make use of news bulletins, discussion programmes, interviews and magazine programmes (Rensburg, 1994:152).

According to Baines et al. (2004:265), a video news release (VNR) is "a kit that consists of pictures that the television producer can combine to provide a visual report with a spoken newscast or commentary". VNRs are cost-effective for television stations when produced by organisations, as covering outdoor events can be expensive. They are used in three ways. First, a VNR can be used as live pictorial news material for news bulletins. Second, a VNR may be used for documentary and public affairs programmes, and lastly, these releases may be archived for future news or documentary programmes.

Curtis (in Gray, 1997:3) adds that companies can spend a lot of money on producing VNRs which may be broadcast during programmes that are watched by a limited audience. VNRs may be used in television programmes only if they add value to the story they are telling.

An anonymous author (in the *Marketing Journal*, London, 1998:2) has commented on the evaluation of television coverage which has been difficult to track. Tracking is made possible by electronically tagging video news releases

(VNR). Video news releases are encoded before distribution which allows the signal to be picked up by a television station each time they are broadcast. This information is fed back through a computer data link which enables consultants to inform their clients when and where the video was broadcast, and who the audiences were.

3.4 Radio

Radio may be used by public relations practitioners for news programmes, live studio or recorded interviews. Phone-ins and talk shows provide a forum for public debate. Radio is flexible because of its many formats. It is portable, with specialised stations for specialised audiences (Skinner and Von Essen, 1999:185). Baines et al. (2004) add that PR practitioners can reach particular audiences if the material is properly timed for certain programmes.

Further, radio is cost-effective and programmes are easy to produce in several languages (Skinner and Von Essen, 1999:185). PR practitioners usually send radio news releases over the telephone. Radio has a direct, personal touch because it uses the spoken word to convey messages. Company representatives can be interviewed on radio talk shows. A public debate can be made possible as call-ins are invited (Cutlip et al., 1994:290).

3.5 Advantages and disadvantages of uncontrolled media

Magazines can be geared to specific audiences, thus making the production of such a publication economical. But circulation is often duplicated owing to the presence of competitors reaching the same target audience. Magazines have late closing dates and thus messages lack immediacy (Newsom et al., 1996:187; Newsom, Turk, & Kruckeberg, 1999).

Newspapers are relatively affordable with a high degree of audience selectivity. The press can reach multiple audiences at no extra cost. The size and format of

columns is determined by the editors. Information is provided in greater depth than its electronic counterparts. The newspaper is portable and can be read anywhere (Baines et al., 2004:238).

Newspapers may also be characterised by inaccuracies and superficial coverage. Message life is very short (Newsom et al., 1996:188). Baines et al. (2004: 239) make specific reference to the fact that in the United Kingdom, the younger generation rarely buy newspapers. There has also been a decline in the number of daily newspapers and in circulation figures. Newspapers tend to be biased, choosing not to report stories or distorting them to take account of their particular viewpoint. Public relations press releases may suffer from exploitation because they will only be printed if editors consider them to be of interest and of value to their readers.

Television audiences are huge. This medium combines visuals, sound and motion. But because of its brief span and lack of repetition, audiences cannot refer back to the message. Television messages are limited to restricted time segments (Newsom et al., 1996).

Radio has the advantage of selectivity of geographical markets. Radio offers a wide range of publicity possibilities. There are disadvantages, however, as messages may be missed as listeners switch from one station to another. From the perspective of news, radio messages are brief. Radio also lacks a visual appeal (Skinner and Von Essen, 1999:185).

4. SUMMARY

Various types of conventional media demonstrate the wide variety of ways through which corporate information is disseminated. Modes such as speeches, face-to-face communication and video teleconferencing demonstrate that feedback is speedy. Printed publications have a degree of permanence which

does not exist in ICTs as messages may be deleted at any time. The downside of conventional modes is that they are time and space-bound. The internet offers unlimited space which allows detailed information to be posted on numerous web pages. No additional costs are incurred in updating the information.

Conventional media may be audience-specific, portable, and have an extended life. ICT reaches a non-specified audience. ICTs are not portable and the presence of information is indefinite. With the former, small audiences can be reached in specified areas while the web can be accessed globally and edited in accordance with the company's preferences. The web is continuous or "fluid", with no restricted time segments as is the case in radio and television.

Nemec (1999:30) cites findings from a study by Jupiter Communications which indicate that it is important to balance communication between conventional media and cyberspace outlets of websites. The study showed that both conventional media and online channels "need to have a symbiotic relationship that provides synergistic results". Thus practitioners should weigh the strategic importance of using either mode, or both at the same time, in order to maximise audience reach.

5. HOW COMMUNICATION PROFESSIONALS USE THE INTERNET AS A NEW MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION

Spataro (1998:2) regards net relations as “a new set of communication skills and services that capitalize on the global reach, instantaneous communications and functionality of the web to reach target audiences”. The internet offers enormous potential to public relations practitioners. Its potential is demonstrated in the sense that as a new medium of communication, companies present information about their products as well as their operations. Practitioners can deliver messages directly to the audience, bypassing the traditional media.

5.1 THE INTERNET DEFINED

The internet is defined by Fisher (1993:9) as “a giant network of computers located all over the world that communicate with each other”. Cronin (1996) defines the internet as “basically a system for exchanging and distributing information. It is a huge global network that allows computers of different kinds, located in different countries to communicate directly”. Woo (1997:17) describes the internet as “the largest network of connected computers in the world all sharing and disseminating information across the globe”.

Mersham (1999:188) describes the internet as “a single medium of communication that can transmit and receive all existing media forms between one organisation and another, between one individual and another, regardless of their geographic location”. Holtz (1999:37) defines it as “a network comprised of smaller computer networks. Each of the networks and each of the computers on those networks can retrieve information that is made available on any of the other networks and their computers.”

The definitions above emphasise the fact that information is shared between computers which are located all over the globe.

5.2 History of the Internet

The internet began in the late 1960s as a project by the Advanced Research Project Agency (ARPA) of the US Department of Defence. It was an experimental network intended to allow scientists receiving research grants from ARPA to communicate with each other (Fisher, 1993:13).

Later, computer researchers at Stanford University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology devised ways to standardise the software on different computers in order to facilitate the sharing of documents (Mersham, 1999:192).

The World Wide Web (www) was developed in 1989 as a technique to create web pages comprising text and graphics using telephone lines (Mersham, 1999). Tim Berners-Lee, the father of the World Wide Web, developed it as a new element of the internet while working as a researcher at the European Particle Physics laboratory in Switzerland. He introduced the web as a technique for sharing documents called web pages that are linked together over the internet (Holtz, 1999:6). Straubhaar (1998) puts it that "the web is in essence an architecture for sharing information". These individual pages can contain text, graphic images and links to voice and video if connected to speakers. In this study, the reviewed literature and the content analysis of companies to be researched will indicate how web pages present their content in text and graphics to communicate corporate information.

5.3 THE FUNCTIONS AND POTENTIAL OF ICTs IN PR AND THEIR STATE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

5.3.1 The internet as a new medium of communication

According to a 1999 internet user survey, an estimated one million South Africans are online (<http://www.southafrica.co.za/survey>). Since then, internet

usage has increased tremendously and global users were estimated at 707 million by January 2001 (Ashcroft and Hoey, 2001). Du Plessis (2004:112) refers to Goldstuck (2002) who notes that by 2002, 238 462 domain names had been registered by South African organisations. By domain name, this study means a company's website address, for example, www.sasol.co.za.

Another study by Arthur Goldstuck (in Roos and Jordaan, 2006) revealed that in 2001, an estimated 2.89 million South Africans had access to the internet. Internet users had increased from 3.1 million in 2002, to 3.28 million in 2003 and eventually to 3.6 million in 2005.

The web contributes to raising the profile of an organisation, thus increasing awareness of the organisation's operations. New initiatives can be promoted through the internet. Marken (1998:31) adds that public relations people can become publishers by sending a single message to millions of users around the globe.

Organisations are using the internet increasingly to communicate with each other and to obtain valuable information. The implications for PR are that the internet no longer serves only as a tool to communicate the value of the product and company, but creates instead value for customers and other stakeholders. The internet is used to identify customers' needs, to provide solutions and facilitate dialogue, thus building relationships with the organisation's stakeholders (Gronstedt, 1999:15). The rationale for this study is that internet users have more control over the internet's content as a result of its interactive capabilities.

A study by Dozier and Pavlik (1998:2) revealed that public relations is the leading form of web activity. It was found that 21% of all company websites researched posted public relations information, followed by 20% for advertising. Their findings also suggest that the internet is primarily a communication medium through which users seek information about an organisation.

An academic study by Hill and White (2000:31) on how practitioners perceive websites and how they fit into the corporate strategy, yielded interesting findings. First, the literature reviewed by the authors indicated that websites are becoming significant tools of communication as they serve to keep stakeholders up to date with organisational developments. Second, websites, among a host of other public relations functions, serve to gather information about publics, to provide information to the media and to enhance corporate identity.

5.3.2 Environmental Scanning

In scanning the environment, companies monitor the internet for anything that is mentioned about them in the same way that they monitor newspaper clippings, because an issue that could be critical to the organisation's reputation could be mentioned as a single message in cyberspace. Public discussion forums serve to gather people's opinions and these can assist in the reputation management function of affected organisations (<http://www.newsgate.net/online>, 1998).

The internet's hosting of forums and discussion groups provides platforms for two-way communication in discussing crucial company information. This is an added advantage that traditional media lacks. As the internet enables two-way communication, feedback can be received on products, and the company can monitor share performance and determine people's attitudes to management, for instance (Broderick, 1997:22).

Gofton (1999:23) believes that "malicious gossip and criticism can take hold like forest fire if they are not countered". Hence there is an imperative to monitor what is being said in web discussion forums. Howard (2001), in her interview with PR agency leaders, noted that CEOs are very concerned about the damage the internet can cause to a company's reputation as "it has the potential to be a tool of destruction". In such cases the internet can be destructive as rumours may be

fanned globally. In addition, the vast majority of PR people spend very little time monitoring such mentions on their websites. In contrast, American companies spend thousands of dollars on radio, television and print clipping services to analyse how their messages are being received and interpreted.

Research findings by Dozier and Pavlik (1998:3) indicate that organisations use the internet to monitor online dialogue which serves as an early warning device. Research literature also indicates that the web is the first controlled mass medium whose information content is not edited by gatekeepers. Some authors regard technology as essential in spotting trends, monitoring issues, and taking cognisance of changes among various publics in order to improve productivity.

Feedback mechanisms on the web allow publics to raise issues and concerns directly with the organisation. It is advised that specific individuals should be designated and trained to monitor websites (Marrelli, 1995:244, in Naudé et al., 2004:47). This environmental scanning function positions practitioners in the strategic role of "expert prescriber", as espoused by Broom (1982, in Hill and White, 2000:33).

This section relates to the investigation as it is described in the theoretical underpinnings of the two-way symmetrical model with a focus on interactivity.

Marken (1998:32) mentions that "a satisfied customer will tell ten or more. With the internet, if the same customers are dissatisfied, they can tell millions of people." As pressure groups and other activist groups find refuge on the web and as online forums and discussion groups gather momentum, these groups exchange both negative and positive information about companies, products and services. Public relations practitioners should take pains to monitor the internet for malicious information which could be costly to the company if ignored. The most cited examples of companies whose images have been tarnished online are Intel and McDonalds, both of which lost millions in revenue on lawsuits and

lost customers.

Gronstedt (1999:14) cites the example of Intel whose loss of reputation resulted in revenue losses. Intel's flawed Pentium chip exploded in over twenty newsgroups before the news reached the print media. The company paid \$475m on lawsuits for its negligence. Now Intel has staff which monitor discussions on the internet. The staff provide feedback on negative comments received on the internet and Intel informs employees about the problems raised. This serves to keep the employees in touch with public opinion and involves them in solving problems.

A disgruntled customer of BMW South Africa resorted to setting up a website and also received extensive print media coverage. Joe Rio reported the shabby treatment he received from BMW upon reporting damage to his vehicle. He experienced repeated delays and poor workmanship, and being double-charged on invoices compounded his problems (Sukhraj, 2003) (See Appendix A1).

Traditional press monitoring means scanning reams of newspapers. The internet offers news alerts and updates on any subject or any company's name. Checking the newsgroups also gives an indication of what is being said about an organisation (Abu Bakar, 2001).

Vericlip is a South African digital news-clipping service which scans and picks up requested information on websites on a daily basis. The Vericlip Agent then generates a report and e-mails it to the company with a brief extract of the articles, with hyperlinks to full articles. The clipping service sizes up the organisation's competition, how the organisation is presented on the web, and monitors and researches marketing trends. Compared to traditional news-clipping services which produce monthly reports, online clipping services

disseminate them via e-mail within the same day (Le Roux, 2002).

5.3.3 Media Relations

The trend that "the public-at-large tells the story" is indicative of the internet's powers to go beyond traditional means in order to influence the end-user (<http://www.newsgate.net/online>, 1998). Boutie (1996:37) notes that a new branch of media relations has emerged as practitioners establish dialogue with journalists and also with "news-making *Netizens* and get them to endorse, propagate and enrich messages of interest to their clients". These *Netizens* create information. This has transformed the top-down model of traditional journalism in that the flow of debates and opposing views is no longer controlled by the editor.

Today more and more people are switching from traditional media to reading their daily news on the internet. Media statistics indicate that in the United States there has been a thirteen percent decline in television viewing, an eight percent decline in weekly news magazines, and a five percent drop in newspaper audiences (Spataro, 1998:4). In addition, websites can be used to host press releases. The web trend has resulted in online journalists. A survey by the US-based Radio and Television News Directors Foundation and the news service Zatso indicated that "one in four US consumers go online to obtain news at least four days a week" (Manson, 2001:1). In 1996 three percent of US consumers accessed news online (Manson, 2001:1).

Online journalism has the advantages of immediacy and unlimited space over traditional print media. It is easier to update editions several times a day. Since web space is always available, detailed versions of old news releases, and even articles from published magazines can be loaded (Quint, 1998:4).

Potgieter (2002) offers a synopsis of how South African traditional publishing companies are going online. Primedia has an internet presence which aims to extend its relationships with consumers. For Ramsay Son & Parker, online publishing is another medium through which they communicate with their primary magazine readership with new and complementary stories which are not published in their print version.

M-Web employs a team of editors who monitor online discussions and write copy for the newsletter. Media authorities assert that the internet offers traditional media a way of enhancing their services by means of continual updates and instant delivery of breaking news. The information dissemination function is thus extended into unlimited space. Compared to traditional means of paper publishing, updates are faster and less costly (Potgieter, 2002:1).

Websites host thousands of versions of newspapers and magazines each month. However, there are still some shortcomings to this. Van Zyl (2000 A) is concerned about the hours spent in preparing media material. Input that is used by a financial weekly newspaper will last for a week or even more, whilst the same information, if sent to an internet publication, could last as little as a minute before it is wiped off when another story breaks.

This provides PR practitioners with a new audience and greater control over their message. Even more information can therefore be added because of unlimited space. As a result, global communications assume a new definition where messages can be communicated instantly. Business executives can conduct online interactive chat sessions with the press, thus bypassing media gatekeepers (Jarvis 2000:6; Spataro, 1998:4).

5.3.3.1 Media Centres

With the introduction of media centres, bypassing traditional media relations allows greater control of message consistency as publications no longer provide the intended angle or placement for a company, product or service (Jarvis, 2000:7).

Catacalos (1999:1) says that the media are increasingly turning to the internet for research and information about issues and companies they cover. The media have different needs than a consumer when visiting a site. Thus the author suggests that a "media room" or "media centre" be created within a website. Van Zyl (2000B:2) is of the opinion that "a well designed and fully functional press room can save the company money, provided the target markets have been conditioned to visit the site". She refers to some US companies which have cut the costs incurred in printing and sending media kits and brochures. As a result, there are fewer phone calls from the media as enquiries are diverted to the web. Furthermore, the cost of public relations is considerably reduced as their websites provide the most requested information on, *inter alia*, news releases, new product information and executive speeches.

Research findings by Hill and White (2000) reveal that the web can demonstrate its competitiveness. There is a perceived relationship between technology and being competitive which is associated with keeping abreast of the communication resources available to one's competitors. In media relations, the website provides additional information and easy access to the organisation. News releases that are sent out also go to the site unedited. The participants in the study believe that journalists could access company websites to research information for a story. However, it turns out that there is little media coverage generated by web information. This confirms the scepticism shown by journalists cited in Jarvis (2000), who regard web information as not sufficiently credible for their purposes.

Participants in this study were also concerned about the diminishing personal relations if journalists were to rely solely on their websites.

A South African online survey conducted by Van Zyl (2000c:1) on practitioners' views on "PR in Cyberspace" generated a negative attitude towards this medium. Most respondents view the internet as an impersonal medium which has to be used hand-in-hand with a telephone call in order to establish what journalists need, and to provide them with newsworthy stories. As more publications are becoming electronic, good interpersonal relationships with journalists would be crucial when practitioners discuss the company's request for coverage. Interpersonal relations are crucial as journalists have reservations about PR material,

The internet is viewed as an additional medium which still requires one-on-one interaction with journalists who will help PR people to tailor their messages to suit particular markets. Although it is regarded as useful, being quick and saving time and energy in recapturing news releases, the human element of communication suffers as a result (Van Zyl, 2000c:2).

Since the demise of PR photography, an innovation by a South African software developer, APPLE PLACE, has developed a server known as SpinPRO. This is designed to facilitate digital photography and press release delivery in a way that is acceptable and easy to e-mail. SpinPRO enables PR practitioners to attach a 24 Kbyte thumbnail of press photographs to their e-mail press releases. The journalists click on the URL added to the e-mail message, which takes them to a "pick-up zone" on the server. Here they can choose photographs from a selection related to the news release in a news-printable format (Van Zyl, 2000d). These photographs can then be downloaded via e-mail to a PC or forwarded to a sub-editor or production person in the chain. Each photograph comes with an embedded caption which cannot be separated from the image.

SpinPRO is a combination of a media and a PR tool. In PR, the system is used for sending, attaching and managing all types of press material and keeping records of what journalists have received. Journalists, on the other hand, use it as a repository of useful photos, press releases and other press documents (Van Zyl, 2000_D).

BMW South Africa hosts a library on its website containing digital video files of television commercials. The clips are in image format which can be downloaded on disk or viewed from their current location. These would be convenient and handy to broadcast journalists who could use them in news bulletins (www.bmw.co.za,2002); (See appendix A2).

SABMiller plc also posts a media centre with press releases and a fact sheet. The fact sheet carries information on the brewery's global status, markets, stock exchange listings and non-brewing interests. It also features tables detailing figures on the number of breweries, brewing capacity, main brands and turnover of its global operations. The photograph gallery hosts downloadable images of its breweries in various locations, executives and non-executive directors, staff, brands, customers and trucks (www.sab.co.za,2002).

This section has explained the rationale of the study which relates to the storing of volumes of background information on the internet. This section is also encompassed by the public information model which demonstrates that the internet archives news releases.

Nestlé's media relations site lists media releases as media statements. It also features media statements for both radio and television. A click on the "listen" button, allows the user to listen to topics on melanin on SAfm Radio. The

television view link allows the user to view the SABC2 Morning Live broadcast on 28 November 2008 on the same topic (<http://www.nestlé.co.za>,2009).

There is a new press release dissemination service in South Africa which ensures that press releases are targeted at the right media. The service brings together over 1000 newsrooms of predefined media including newspapers (local and foreign), news agencies, magazines, radio and television stations. Press releases can be disseminated by topic such as financial, political, science and motoring. By signing up with SAPressRelease, public relations companies stand to benefit. For example, company profiles of their clients will be available with the press release, allowing journalists to extract additional information with minimal effort, accessed through the concerned company's website (www.sapressrelease.com,2002).

It has been shown that for every 15 press releases sent, only one is published. This is because they are either not relevant to specific newsrooms or they do not reach the appropriate journalist in the newsroom. Thus, by signing up with SAPressRelease, profiles organisations according to relevant media criteria and press releases can be diverted only to the newsrooms dealing with issues related to the press release. This increases the chances of coverage in the media.

In turn, journalists who sign up with the service will receive the most recent news on companies, political parties and NGOs of their choice, according to their market interest. The service sends an "sms" transmission of breaking news headlines to subscribed journalists. This limits bulk press releases received daily as the industry and issues on which they wish to receive information are stipulated to SAPressRelease (sapressrelease.com,2002).

5.3.3.2 Press Kits

King (2000:1) offers an optimistic view on creating electronic press kits. With the

emergence of the internet as a communication medium, printed press kits are on the decrease. Creating electronic press kits has returns on the company's marketing investment. These may be in the form of money saved as electronic press kits can be provided simultaneously to many journalists. If changes are required, a single update can be made immediately without having to reprint the materials. This makes company information easily accessible to journalists working on tight deadlines.

King (2000:1) and Catacalos (1999:2) offer further guidelines on how to create an electronic press kit. The kit should consist of a list of press contacts, the latest press release, a company profile, biographies of the executives, along with digital photographs and logos. As the media wants to see continuity, the press room should host information about how the company began, its partners, investors and who the company serves. Making press kits interactive will also make them more interesting to journalists. They should therefore ideally include audio clips, video clips and downloadable speeches. The five Ws who, what, when, where, and why required in writing press releases remain crucial. The date indicates whether the news is current.

Berger (1997:21) adds that US companies such as Bell Atlantic Corporation and General Motors have introduced online news bureaus on their websites. These companies send out fewer press kits and receive fewer telephone enquiries than before owing to the diversion of such enquiries to the web. Thus, press materials can be updated quickly at less expense. This is preferable to reprinting publications if changes need to be effected.

5.3.3.3. Media Conferences

Librandi (2001) mentions virtual news conferences which could be hosted through the internet. This makes access easier for reporters who are located far away from the event. Companies could host news conferences in a password-protected chat room area. This ensures that competitors or unwanted visitors cannot access privileged discussions. Questions can be asked in a real-time format and answered just as they would be in person-to-person encounters. Similarly, those companies showcasing a new product or facility could create streaming video presentations of the product or facility.

As far as costs are concerned, Liebman (1998:4) reiterates the views of PR executives who believe that the costs of calling a press conference can run into six figures. Costs incurred include catering, hiring of the venue, press kits (which consist of a press release of the new product, biographies of the presenters, the new product, a product photograph), sending out media alerts and follow-up telephone calls. Even in pre-internet days, companies sought ways of reducing costs by holding audio-telephone press conferences, which reduced travelling costs of speakers and the press.

5.3.3.4 Return on Investment

Media relations sites contribute to slashing the high cost of PR by providing news releases, new product information, executive biographies, digitised photographs, contact names and numbers and executive speeches at one site. For instance, during 1997, Bell Atlantic cut its distribution of printed press kits by 50% by posting the digital version.

Automotive companies have made significant savings on photographs of new

models. During 1997, General Motors saved revenue by posting Chevrolet's press kit on its website. Automakers routinely distribute photograph-intensive press binders to 2000 or more journalists at an average cost of \$200 per piece. Cost savings in the processing of glossy photographs have been significant. Ford and Nissan have enjoyed similar benefits. Ford has had over 900 photograph downloads which in pre-internet days would have averaged \$25 per media request (Berger,1997).

5.3.3.5 Developing Media Relations Websites

Holtz (1999:119) and Berger (1997:3) outline some elements which should be present on websites if reporters are to be motivated to rely on them for accurate information:

- The home page of the media site should display breaking news, which would attract reporters, particularly during crisis periods. Photographs should preferably be linked to the relevant copy. Logos should be made available in cases of company mergers.
- The site should feature a list of media contacts with a name, telephone number, e-mail address and areas of responsibility. Breckenridge (2008:88) adds that some companies place their PR contact information on every page in prominent positions.
- A position statement on issues which may not be favoured by the government, environmentalists or other activist groups.
- An activity calendar announcing the company's forthcoming events. The calendar should include the time, date, location and nature of the company's involvement and the media contact.
- Speeches delivered by key executives should be archived online. It is also useful to provide audio and video clips of presentations to stockholders, analysts and even regulators.

- Company and executive background, also known as fact sheets, should include all the information that answers most telephone requests from the press. This includes company history, product lines and number of employees in different offices or plants. Executive biographies and photographs should also be included. Breakenridge (2008:88) adds that fact sheets give journalists "an idea of the history of the company and how it came together". This assists journalists in lending specific angles to their stories. It is advisable that such fact sheets include the company's mission/vision statements and its strategic direction. Financial information might be included with regard to sales for a specified time period, or growth projections for the future.
- Since reporters have different information needs, product/service information should include down-loadable product photographs, package art, manufacturing details and customer profiles. Press kits related to a particular product or service should be made available. Breakenridge (2008:89) adds that images which serve to enhance a story should be labelled with captions to describe the event or the individuals it features
- Links to alternative information sources such as other websites, mailing lists, and discussion groups which review the company can also be provided. This allows media to take advantage of information not published by the news bureau.
- Press kits should be made available for special events such as mergers or new product launches. They should include links to related press releases destined for different media. Photographs, logos and package shots can be archived under the "Corporate image" link.
- Some extra features of the media relations site include video, story ideas and the chief executive officer's web page which archives speeches, columns and news clippings.
- A list of newsroom participants is useful for those sites that require registration.
- Previous press releases should be stored in an archived database.

- The site should be protected by requesting user passwords. This is particularly crucial for long embargoed news, which could give journalists early access to impending company news.

Breakenridge (2008: 96) discusses three online newsroom leaders who are on the cutting edge of technology. These companies have newsrooms that provide information for today's journalists.

- Journalists can have password-protected personal folders to store information they have researched. As they find more information, they can add it to these folders which can be archived for future use³.
- Ford Motor Company has its newsroom divided into Corporate and Consumer sections. Each brand (Ford, Land Rover, Volvo etc.) has its own media centre, each with its brand news, photographs, facilities or assembly plants, videos and PR contacts. In the Executive Bio section, news releases, speeches or statements made by each individual executive are provided. A search feature exists which allows journalists to search for a particular media kit, car model or country of interest.

The facilities section on the site is arranged according to brand and region globally. There are links to fact sheets containing plant information, employment and production history in each facility. News releases have special built-in icons, which journalists can click on to add the announcement to their folders and to send the content to a wireless device.⁴

- America Online (AOL) can provide the media with video delivered digitally. Interactive areas include multimedia press packs a video and audio

³ Accenture is a global management consulting and technology services company. It is regarded as the # 1 leader of online newsrooms as it serves various needs of editors and has interactive abilities.

⁴ Ford Motor Company is a global automotive company with headquarters in Michigan. Ford is regarded as the #2 leader of online newsrooms as it goes beyond the five basic elements present in an ordinary newsroom.

library. Journalists can sign up for e-mail announcements and access archived newsletters.⁵

It is best to announce a website to the media by issuing a press release. The web address should be included on all press releases and other written material. Holtz (1999:136) advises on the steps that should be followed in order to ensure delivery of material that will benefit the reporters:

First, segment the media covering your organisation. Second, identify the kinds of information required by reporters working for different segments. Third, find out from reporters whether they would prefer receiving information by e-mail or through a website. Fourth, determine the nature of the information these reporters would like to receive through this medium.

The responses obtained from reporters will assist in prioritising the list of information categories. Fifth, those items that reporters want to pull should be on the media relations website. The information which the organisation wants to promote should be made available through a customisable subscription service.

It is apparent that most British journalists researching information online still prefer to receive press releases and photographs by mail. Other practitioners prefer to telephone journalists to find out whether the story would be of interest to them before forwarding a press release. Personal contact is of the utmost importance to these practitioners, but they do realise that websites are useful when faced with handling hundreds of press enquiries (Theaker, 1997).

5.3.4 Investor Relations

Investors and the financial community make up one of the company's most

⁵ AOL is a leading internet service provider in the United States. It is considered #3 leader of online newsrooms. It operates a Web network with 112 million visitors a month.

significant audiences. Boutie (1996) and Holtz (1999:139) mention that the internet is used to extend investor relations (IR) programmes to analysts, business media and investors who are scattered around the globe. The role of the investor relations site is to attract potential investors to buying stock. The web also serves the purpose of informing these stakeholders about the progress of the company. An IR website ensures that visitors receive accurate information, particularly during times of crisis. Investors will have the latitude to monitor and protect their interests, which in turn creates a favourable corporate image.

5.3.4.1 Annual Reports on the Web

According to Holtz (1999:140), the web holds the following advantages in relation to posting annual reports:

- Only one copy of the report is produced and this can be accessed by many people.
- There is no cost implication in web-based publishing beyond the storage space. This is in contrast to the cost of producing multiple printed copies.
- Potential investors may access the company's earnings which may bring opportunities for further investments.
- Highlights from the annual report could provide pathways to detailed information. This method presents an advantage over the printed report as more detailed information cannot be accommodated in one hard copy.

Online information makes it easier for members of the investment and financial communities to retrieve facts which may affect their stakes.

5.3.4.2 Other investor relations functions

Holtz (1999) mentions that for investor relations purposes, the internet can be used for the following:

Investor conferences and online road shows. These are presentations that are made to groups of analysts and investors in a large meeting environment. The web can make the stored presentation available to larger audiences after the show. The website can be used to communicate the news behind the news. In addition to traditional means of communicating valuable information, the internet can also be used to provide information such as mergers, acquisitions and so on. Included should be information on regulatory policies that could influence the company's share price. Lastly, the internet can be used to provide the figures. The internet can post the company's performance, history, stock charts and trend information.

In their investor relations sites, South African companies such as Liberty Group Limited and BoE feature financial results, a shareholder's diary, share prices, financial indices, dividends, the shareholder's annual report and major shareholders (www.boe.co.za; www.liberty.co.za, 2002) (See Appendix A3).

Exxaro, a mining company that has business interests in coal, mineral sands and industrial minerals, features a corporate home page that is more investor-inclined. The site goes beyond what was suggested by Holtz (1999) in the preceding paragraphs. It posts the latest annual report on the home page, results, investor presentations, news releases, shareholder leaflets and an audio web cast. The latest shareholder news is featured, as well as interim financial results and changes to the board of directors. "Key information" listed includes circulars to shareholders, listing particulars, financial archives and previous group results. "Shareholder information" includes share prices, indices and commodities and share performance graphs (<http://www.exxaro.co.za>; 2009).

5.3.4.3 Webcasting

Web casting is described by English (2002:3) as "the process of sending live audio or video data over the web". This has recently proved to be an effective

method of sending the right message to the right audience. Users are able to receive external live information, and this has the advantage of the audio and/or visual components of personable contact. Even when not viewed live, a streamed message captivates the user's interest as it creates a personalised image.

Other advantages of the web cast are that it can be attended in a non-linear manner. It accommodates interruptions and allows for pauses, rewinds and replays. It saves travel expenses (Breakenridge and DeLongry, 2003:137). But web casting technology is too expensive to be widely implemented. As far as journalists are concerned, it hinders their chances of escaping from the office environment and sharing in analysis with their colleagues (Breakenridge and DeLongry, 2003; English, 2002).

The financial sector was the first to adopt the application of web casts. As current information is accessed, such as share prices, profits and share performance, people can make more informed decisions. Web casting enables companies to reach their shareholders, analysts and other interested stakeholders. This enables CEOs to engage with their markets, analysts, investors and the press from corporate headquarters (English, 2002:3).

British American Tobacco web cast its 2001 third quarter financial results for 109 minutes. Over 200 viewers logged on from Europe, North and South America, Asia and the Far East. The company's tracking capabilities established that within the following month, over 600 people logged on to view the archived version (English, 2002:3).

The South African brewery web casts presentations and investor seminars. The presentations are archived and can be downloaded at a later stage in PDF format. Video interviews of its seminars held in European countries are also web cast (<http://www.sab.co.za/home2.asp>.2002).

Many in the investor relations community believe that audio-only web casts are sufficient for quarterly earnings reports. More importance is placed on charts and graphs presented on Power Point slides than on the presenter. On the other hand, a new product announcement might be handled best on a video web cast in which the product is displayed, and which captures the enthusiasm of the company's product managers and executives. Other uses of web casts include CEO announcements, keynote speeches and breaking company news (Breakenridge and DeLongry, 2003:128).

Exxaro, a mining company referred to above, contradicts the abovementioned view. In this instance, the company presents its year-end results on audio. The web cast page features the left-hand margin bearing the photographic image and the name of the chief executive officer making the announcement. Below is the audio web cast index listing the entire agenda. The middle of the page features a heading "Results for the 12 months ended 31 December 2008". When the user clicks on a topic in the index, the discussion is shown in the middle of the page. As in radio, the left-hand margin has buttons for play, pause, rewind and forward. The bottom of the page features buttons for running Power Point slides backwards or forwards, a link for sending e-mail comments and a button for printing slides (<http://www.exxaro.co.za>).

Breakenridge and DeLongry (2003) refer to Terri Walters, President and CEO of Moonfish Production, who advises PR professionals on factors to consider when planning a web cast. He asks the following questions:

- Who will log onto the internet to view the event?
- What is the proposed venue: is it the office environment or conference environment?
- Does audience participation take place in an interactive online conference?
- Is the engineering location of the web cast able to support the necessary bandwidth requirements?
- Are there firewall issues that would hinder access to the web cast?

- Is there a camcorder available to handle the direct video and audio feeds?

Breakenridge and DeLongry (2003:132) also refer to Lawson Softwares which held annual traditional press conferences to announce new products. These conferences did not meet their expectations in media attendance. Therefore, web casting a news conference and archiving video with electronic press kits accommodates editors and reporters whose schedules do not permit event attendance.

This section on investor relations relates to the rationale for the study. The public information model also provides for investor relations and presents the financial performance of the company.

5.3.5 Crisis Management

Avila and Sherwin (2001) offer the definition of crisis as propounded by the Institute for Crisis Management. They view a crisis as "a significant business disruption which stimulates extensive news media coverage. The resulting public scrutiny will affect the organisation's normal operations and could also have a political, legal, financial and governmental impact on its business." Any kind of crisis tests a company's strengths and exposes its weaknesses. How a company handles a crisis puts its reputation with its various constituencies at stake.

The role of the internet in a crisis

According to Holtz (1999:202), in pre-internet days the media broadcast and published news of company's crises. Individuals responded by writing letters to the editor, and in extreme cases organised action such as boycotts against those companies. The internet has accelerated the formation of activist groups within a relatively short space of time. With the availability of the tools of the World Wide Web, e-mail and discussion forums anybody can publish an opinion. There are

crises that were started on the net by newsgroups, and some that started elsewhere became the subject of discussion on the net.

There are two types of crises: *meteor* crises where something terrible and unanticipated occurs and companies can do little to plan for them, and *predator* crises, which erupt because an individual or institution has an ulterior motive. People turn to the World Wide Web and Usenet newsgroups for updated information about crises that suddenly befall organisations (Holtz, 1999:202).

Machlis (1998:2) writes that the internet rescued Swissair after the crash of one of its planes. By 7:00, within hours of flight 111's crash, Swissair had updated the company's home page. At 7:30, when the news first hit national television and radio, e-mail messages began pouring in from frantic relatives and were responded to within three minutes. The airline's special crisis care team handled the responses and, in the case of e-mails containing a telephone number, an airline official telephoned the family member or friend.

Once the passenger list was made public, it was posted on the Swissair website. In order to deal with the international requests from the media about the tragedy, reporters were told to access the news and public statements from the website. Swissair received over 6 000 messages of condolence through e-mail within the first week. Those e-mails which mentioned a specific passenger or crew members were sent to that person's survivors (Machlis, 1998).

The South African bank, Saambou, experienced bankruptcy during February 2002 and this led to its temporary closure. Clients were frantic as operations ceased temporarily but they were eventually able to withdraw a certain amount of their savings. Later they were advised to undertake their transactions with First National Bank. Saambou used its website to correct misconceptions among its shareholders, created by the media, that shareholders of Saambou Holdings would receive no payment for their shares.

Saambou's curator posted a letter on the website informing clients about First National Bank's acquisition of certain parts of Saambou. The message aimed to restore the confidence of clients by explaining the bank's choice in accepting FNB's offer. It mentioned the successes of FNB to reassure clients that their funds were in safe hands, and that as of 23 May 2002 they would be able to access their money easily from ATMs and branches. The message included call centre details of both Saambou and FNB for enquiries (Van der Walt and Louw, 2002);(Appendix A4).

Also posted on Saambou's website was a letter from FNB which served to welcome clients to their bank. It assured clients of the best service, and guaranteed to backdate rate increases which were due to clients during the curatorship period. The message also stated that in the coming months clients' accounts would be moved to FNB without any changes to their account or pin numbers (Van der Walt & Louw, 2002); (Appendix A5).

The abovementioned means were used in conjunction with other conventional media of communication such as newspaper reports, radio and television. With such technologies, companies can respond publicly to a broad audience at a reasonable cost during a crisis situation (Jarvis, 2000:7).

Another company that used a communication mix during its experience of crisis is eBucks.com, the provider of online banking services for First National Bank and RMB Private Bank. On 22 September 2003, its system went down and prevented internet banking transactions by its clients. Within the first few hours, a team met to assess the situation. This was followed by posting messages on the website and briefing call centres with a holding statement. Since eBucks.com was inundated with calls, the number of call centre staff was increased. A new call centre was also established at FNB to assist the bank's business customers. Customers received their first e-mail on the fourth day which provided solutions-based communication to isolated problems (Browne, 2004:14).

The crisis team held meetings daily to assess the situation, and branches nationwide were e-mailed with regular updates. A press statement was issued and a spokesperson was briefed to handle media enquiries. When business returned to normal, eBucks.com went the extra mile by refunding bank fees to all internet banking customers, and a message was sent to thank them for their patience (Browne, 2004:15).

Although Absa bank has not yet experienced a crisis, it has a plan ready should one strike. The bank has a data recovery centre, a backup of client databases and client contact lists. There is a crisis management team which performs simulation exercises. A spokesperson from the media team will prepare holding statements which will be sent to the media via e-mail and telephonically, to clients via sms and posted on the website, should a crisis occur (see Absa footnote).

According to Holtz (1999:205), there are specific ways to address both meteor and predator crises using online media:

Firstly, audiences should be informed of what the company is doing to attend to the issues that affect them. Links to messages issued to other audiences should be provided. For example, investors would prefer information on how their shares will be protected. Compassion or sympathy should be conveyed to victims and their families (if any) and the company should explain what it is doing to avert similar occurrences in the future. This will reflect a positive corporate image as the company will be seen to have the interest of its audiences at heart.

Secondly, present timely, accurate and up-to-date information. Offer information on the steps that the company will take, and when the situation should be resolved. It is crucial to update the web with the latest developments through posting news releases in chronological order.

Thirdly, keeping the media relations site updated can make it easier for reporters to access the information they need. This reduces the number of telephone calls which can inundate the communications unit. Official statements from key executives, transcripts of public interviews and press conferences should also be posted online.

Fourthly, news clippings relating to the crisis should be monitored in order to catch and correct misinformation as there may be forums and newsgroups in cyberspace that taint one's organisation. This allows companies to address rumours, claims, and misinformation that may be disseminated by various newsgroups.

Finally, maintain investor, employee, customer, governmental and community support. The internet should be used to solicit feedback from these stakeholders. Establish links to other relevant information on the web that supports the company's position.

Steps to be taken in integrating a crisis management plan:

The general crisis management plan should include the use of the internet. These are the key factors which the internet can execute which are not made possible or immediate through conventional modes of mass communication (Holtz,1999):

Monitoring. Public communication and media coverage can be monitored to assess public reaction to the message (Breakenridge and DeLoghry, 2003). When a crisis hits the company, websites should host a monitoring device to scan cyberspace for information relating to the crisis. What is uncovered could aid in planning the content of communications, identifying the source of the rumour, and assessing the degree of public reaction. Establish internal resources

to regularly scan the internet. Prepare reports for management gathered from the review with indications of the steps the company should take (Holtz, 1999).

Using your company website. A template should be in place on a web page bearing crisis-related information. Links should be established for a statement issued by the CEO, a media relations site, the government department's regulations on the product or company, and a Frequently Asked Questions page. This template should be easy to spot by journalists who seek information for reference. Also, links to the media relations site bearing the position statement from the CEO and media releases pertaining to the crisis could be of assistance (Holtz, 1999).

Breakenridge and DeLoghry (2003:166) advise that a crisis website be built in advance of a crisis and activated to educate various stakeholders about the steps the company is taking to respond to events. Building a crisis management strategy around the internet makes sense for these reasons:

The site will function in times of tragedy when telephone lines are inaccessible. It is a perfect place for posting a clear statement of the company's communication objectives for senior executives and other employees who must stay focused on the message in difficult times.

In addition to suggestions provided by Holtz (1999), Breakenridge and DeLoghry, (2003) suggest that a crisis site should include the following categories on a navigation bar:

- The CEO's message, updated daily.
- Press releases that make announcements on behalf of the company.
- News coverage from the press.
- An employee support section which gives information to all parties involved in a crisis.
- Emergency contact numbers and e-mail addresses for further information.

- Extra categories which provide room for additional information, depending on the nature of the crisis.

Breakenridge and DeLoghry (2003:176) urge practitioners to be proactive and to create "ghost templates" which will be activated and made accessible when crises occur. They offer some principles for designing and implementing "ghost templates". These include:

PR professionals should establish a relationship with the IT department to design a "ghost template".

The design of the crisis site should be predetermined and updated by the PR team in accordance with their crisis plan.

Using E-mail. Companies should provide e-mail addresses to enable the public to get in touch during the crisis. Auto-responses can be sent to those who ask questions that relate to prepared answers. E-mail submissions can provide useful information, allowing the company to assess crisis-related issues that are most important to the public.

In the case of conventional communication modes, members of the public can only be sent published feedback through controlled media. Telephone lines of the affected organisation may be overloaded with enquiries which may in effect not generate sufficient responses (Holtz, 1999).

Monitoring and using discussion groups. Companies should have monitoring devices in place to track what discussion groups are saying about a company. In order to curb employees imparting inaccurate information, there should be a policy allowing only designated representatives to make statements on behalf of the company. Online discussion groups prove to be fast and effective, and the absence of such groups may result in the establishment of rogue websites resulting in information spilling to the media (Holtz, 1999).

Literature on crisis management relates to one of the public relations functions mentioned in the rationale for the study. The rationale presumed that new technologies would communicate crisis information to global audiences at a low cost, and the discussion has demonstrated this.

5.3.6 Corporate Image

The internet increases the visibility of companies, which inevitably leads to a loss of control over corporate image. Traditionally, companies have tried to control how they are perceived by the outside world. While the internet enables companies to communicate directly with their stakeholders, outsiders, be they fans or rivals, can disseminate facts, rumours, even opinions, to the whole world. Companies are advised that, as they cannot control their image, they should turn their visibility to their advantage. One way of managing company image is to respond to people's complaints rather than to attempt to silence them. Acknowledging one's weaknesses and communicating measures taken to control the situation contributes positively to corporate image (Drucker, Dyson, Handy, Saffo and Senge, 1997:5).

According to a United States study on the impact of the internet on corporate reputation, CEOs acknowledge the impact of ICTs. The survey reveals, however, that less than half of the 600 CEOs and senior managers questioned have no strategy for managing internet communication of negative information about their companies. About 11% take it upon themselves to monitor the internet for negative publicity. This indicates that communication practitioners do not act as counsel to senior managers in developing strategies which would enhance their company's reputation among its various stakeholders (Hill and Knowlton Inc, 2000:1).

5.3.6.1 Counteracting negative information to maintain positive image

Activists develop critical or *attack sites* on the internet. Channels used include a listserv, which is an e-mail list that permits activists to send information to those listed. Internet activism is a powerful means of shaping public thinking. It can be executed through online traditional and non-traditional public relations means. The former uses tools which include web pages, discussion groups, list serves and blogs. The latter uses tool boycotts and the creation of attack websites. (Coombs and Holladay, 2007: 72-73).

Closely related to crisis management is how companies respond to crises in order to maintain a positive image. Kieler and Middleberg (1997:2) warn of the use of rogue websites which tarnish the company's image, reducing market shares and revenues and sending stock prices plummeting. Citing the McDonalds libel case in London which resulted from mentions of the company's unfair labour practices, among other accusations, the authors offer advice on what companies can do to overcome the turmoil caused by the existence of discussion groups. Instead of embarking on what turned out to be the longest libel case in history, McDonalds should have confronted online criticism by using online platforms to answer negative claims. An informational campaign could have been run online to provide the media and public with the company's position. The website should have carried a letter from the CEO expressing concern and the company's position.

Kieler and Middleberg (1997:3) also give an account of the successful handling of a rogue site by EPS, a mail order computer company. One disgruntled customer made impossible demands and when he demanded that his order be cancelled, he created an attack website against EPS. On discovering this, the company created a website before the rogue site attracted negative media attention. This site was dedicated to exposing disseminators of twisted facts on the web. EPS posted details about the incident, answering the customer's claims and creating links to his accusations to allow viewers to browse on the customer's site. By doing this, EPS provided the media and concerned

customers with facts, answered the claims and saved the company millions of dollars in sales.

Product boycotts by consumer advocacy groups have become a huge challenge to targeted companies. Environmental activists staged a sit-in at Shell's London offices. Although Shell tried to cut the telephone lines, one activist broadcast the protest live to the internet and e-mailed the press using a digital camera, a laptop computer and a mobile telephone. In pre-internet days, protest messages were confined to pamphlets and placards, but now the web can reach millions with information which is detrimental to the corporate image of the affected company (Reed,1999:1).

A South African rogue website mentioned earlier, which featured claims of BMW's poor service according to Joe Rios, elicited enormous responses which was also published. Other BMW customers echoed these complaints, citing similar incidents they had experienced. Had the company handled Rios' queries promptly, such a site would never have been set up. It seems that BMW had at the time no strategy for dealing with such websites, unlike EPS. The company responded only to media enquiries. Comments were invited on the accuracy of the site but no response at all were received. It can be deduced that BMW was ignorant when it came to protecting its image (www.bmwproblems.co.za, 2004); (see appendix A1).

These usernet or online discussion groups run various sites which discuss companies, including Shell, Nestlé and Colgate-Palmolive, in order to focus attention on their business practices. In turn, Shell has created its own online strategy for dealing with internet protests. A large part of its website is devoted to information on company ethics "to 'wrong-foot' its detractors". Similarly, Nike's and McDonalds' websites carry messages on environmental and labour practices. Disarming activists by issuing a pre-emptive counter message to possible criticisms places the company in a safer zone (Reed, 1999:3). Hence, Coombs and Holladay (2007:73) note: "consider how giants such as Intel, Shell

and Ford re-thought public relations after experiencing the power of online public relations first hand".

Kieler and Middleberg (1997:4-5) offer further guidelines for a strategic defence to counter rogue web attacks:

- Research current online crises and anticipate possible disasters likely to affect your company's consumers, investors and business.
- An internet attack ought not to be ignored, but should be given a prompt response.
- The company should establish a dialogue with the source and document exchanges.
- Give the source the company's position to clear up misunderstandings or inaccurate information and try to find common ground. Provide a response on the company website, as well as through traditional media.
- Create a media centre with facts, up-to-date information and links to third party sites that can offer credibility and verify the accuracy of your information.

5.3.6.2 *Corporate identity*

Adjami (2001:1) focuses on the strategic role played by the corporate identity design of a company. She asserts that an understanding of an organisation's core beliefs will lead to the design of a representation of those convictions which will reflect the company's position in the marketplace. In designing the identity, companies should be cognisant of the beliefs, motivations, and the culture and values of the organisation. The corporate identity should communicate these.

Sasol demonstrates this in its new corporate identity launched in 2001. At the time of the launch, with the *Reaching new frontiers* slogan, Sasol owned more than forty-nine chemical companies internationally, all operating independently of each other. Sasol decided to re-brand with a view to operating successfully in a

global context. The new identity, with a logo of a molecular symbol, suggests different units working together. This is explained thus: "the central sphere denotes stability while the six rotating 'business units' suggest a force greater than the sum of its parts - strength through synergy" (www.sasol.co.za, July 2002).



Adapted from (<http://www.sasol.co.za>, 2002)

Another South African company that used the internet to implement its new identity during 1997 is Caltex Oil. The company published detailed news and visuals about the new Caltex logo. It posted information on what the corporate colours and the new identity represent. Extensive research which ran over a period of three years resulted in changing the Caltex image to enable the company to attract new customers. Caltex's social responsibility function appeared on the net, which served to inform its audiences and also improve its image (<http://www.caltex.co.za>).

South African Breweries used its website to announce its merger with Miller Brewing Company on 9 July 2002. This merger resulted in the renaming of the company as SABMiller plc, the world's second largest brewer. However, the logo remains unchanged (www.sab.co.za, 2002); (See Appendix A6).

Conventional means and corporate advertising cannot inform the audiences in great detail about the management and operational decisions which led the business to change its identity. Conventional means such as corporate advertisements merely highlight the new logo so that it will be recognised by the

audiences in future. Limited space in the print media and the exorbitant cost of advertising make this necessary.

Literature on corporate image relates to one of the public relations functions mentioned in the rationale for the study. As the rationale presumed that new technologies should communicate corporate image information to global audiences at a low cost, this discussion has demonstrated the impact which the internet has had on the reputation of organisations. The literature focuses on managing the reputation of organisations, but no literature is available on executing corporate identity programmes. It is for this reason that the researcher used excerpts of corporate identity from websites.

5.3.7 Corporate Social Responsibility

Esrock and Leitchy (1998:2) are of the view that organisations can communicate their social responsibility efforts by using ICTs. In doing so, corporations participate in setting the agenda on public policy issues. The World Wide Web enables PR practitioners to disseminate information about their organisation's good corporate citizenship activities in a timely manner. By doing so, organisations use the image building approach which publicly trumpets their good deeds and reflects management's agenda.

With the traditional notions of agenda-setting, mass media are used to bring an organisation's issues to the public's attention. The web offers organisations a path to express their position on policy issues. Interactive features of the web allow organisations to use the public consultation approach in their social responsibility activities. The consultation model calls for systematic monitoring and identification of the interests of various publics. These interactive features enable communicators to interact directly with persons who are concerned about an organisation's public policy matters and social responsibilities, which could in

turn promote more understanding and collaboration on important policy issues (Esrock and Leitchy, 1998:2).

Holtz (1999) mentions that in community relations, the internet can help businesses target specific elements of the community relations audience. Given the capacity of search engines, companies can engage the community in direct two-way symmetrical communications. Companies can publish their community relations report on the web. Other sites cover the company's investment in civic affairs, education, arts and culture, the environment and health.

Holtz (1999:163) offers some ideas that companies might apply to the site:

- Subscriptions to community mailing lists. The web page could provide local residents with information on how to subscribe to an e-mailing list. The mailing list could be used to announce sponsorships.
- Companies can post information about grants and criteria for offering such grants.
- Promotion of joint projects. The web can be used to announce the company's involvement in joint projects with third parties. Appeals for contributions can also be publicised.
- Contributions to arts and culture. Companies can produce virtual galleries on behalf of museums to which a donation was made.
- Listings of contributions to political candidates.
- The internet presents new opportunities for communicating company activities in education. Companies can use approaches which include listing company employees who are able to share their expertise in a classroom or sponsor contests which would help unleash the talents of students. Even distance learning can be offered by expert employees.
- Companies can offer volunteer organisations a page or two to encourage them to build community forums. The bottom of the page should note that the site is provided as a community service.

- In the case of charitable organisations, an online community relations report should note the contributions given to such organisations. Information posted should include the reason these organisations are worthy of receiving donations (Holtz ,1999:163).

In South Africa, Liberty Group Limited, a global insurance company, has a home page featuring detailed social responsibility activities. The effort, known as the Liberty Foundation, focuses its major activities on empowering historically disadvantaged communities on a national scale. The foundation embarks on projects which include:

- Education - issuing newspaper supplements called *ReadRight* to improve literacy skills, and airing a television programme which delivers subjects such as biology, physics and English.
- Employment initiatives include the establishment of centres where women acquire sewing skills which could help them to become self-sufficient.
- The launch of the Liberty-One helicopter as a primary response vehicle for hospital emergencies (www.liberty.co.za, April 2002).

The South African Breweries Ltd has launched a "humanitarian" social responsibility site, called "talking alcohol.com", with a focus on the health and well-being of its consumers. The site encourages consumers to make informed choices about alcohol consumption. The home page has links to information on the following:

- "What is contained in a beer";
- Educating consumers about diseases caused by the abuse of alcohol, such as cirrhosis of the liver;
- Links to international news articles relating to international governments' adoption of laws pertaining to alcohol and other resolutions;
- Discussion forums in which consumers exchange health tips and experiences;

- A link to "Alcohol and your body" which explains the effects of alcohol on the body, the side effects and diseases it causes, such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, as well as the side effects of drinking during pregnancy (<http://www.sab.co.za>, accessed June 2009).

5.3.7.1 Research

Esrock and Leitchy (1998:1) conducted a study on Fortune 500 companies using content analysis to establish how these companies make use of the web to present themselves as good corporate citizens. The results indicate that social responsibility items range from 60% for community involvement to 52% for environmental education, and 43-48% for charity, health and diversity. Other items such as athletic sponsorships, economic development and disaster relief came to 44%.

A few companies (27%) have editorials and position papers that relate to public policy issues. Only 4% of sites collect information from publics on attitudes and opinions on policy issues. Fortune 500 companies use a variety of modes to communicate their social responsibility. These include news releases (52%), annual reports (30%), and a special home page for social responsibility materials (27%).

In pre-internet days the above social responsibility items were not articulated to mass audiences. Audiences were made aware of sponsorships of major events and sports mainly through corporate advertising. The internet has the capacity to cover details of the company's responsibilities, including the policies underlying the choice of such involvement. Modes which were previously used, such as the annual report and news releases, were not easily accessible to interested global audiences.

Literature on corporate social responsibility relates to the functions of public relations as discussed in the rationale for the study. It has been demonstrated that this function assumes a new role by engaging stakeholders in influencing management decisions by the communities affected. However, the literature does not reveal the various activities or means of communicating them via the internet.

5.3.8 Interactivity

Naudé et al. (2004:37) refer to Ha and James (1998:46), who define interactivity as “the extent to which the communicator and the audience respond to, or are willing to facilitate each other’s communication needs”. Naudé et al. (2004:33) regard it as the “most prominent feature of the internet”, which was not present in traditional mass media. Internet channels not only post information to the organisations’ audiences, but also carry feedback and comments (Holtz: 1999). Websites have the necessary devices to meet the needs of these audiences, thus making the site audience-oriented (Ha and James, 1998:464, in Naudé et al., 2004:41).

Specific functions of public relations cited above are illustrative of how the internet has extended these beyond the traditional means of radio, television, newspapers, newsletters, annual reports etc., thus making stakeholder relations truly interactive (Holtz, 1999).

Broderick (1997:21) reiterates the fact that there is a need for two-way communication. Sending out news releases via the net constitutes one-way communication, but the web should be developed to elicit feedback on products, on what customers think about the company and on management.

Ghose and Dou (1998: 30-34), in Naudé et al. (2004:43), highlight the functions of interactivity. “Customer support” as a function of interactivity assumes such

forms as software downloading, electronic-form inquiry, comments, feedback and online forums. The "marketing research" function applies such forms as site surveys and product surveys. The function of "search for more information" takes such forms as "key word search", "virtual reality" displays and dealer or branch locator. The "advertising or publicity" function includes newsgroups and online orders.

An anonymous author (In New Media choice..., *Marketing Journal*, 1998:2) cites Shell's updated website which was overhauled to be more interactive and appealing. This website, which boasts 250 000 visitors a month, hosts interactive forums where online debates take place on, *inter alia*, environmental issues with pressure groups and other individuals. Individuals can also e-mail their views, which are published unaltered on the site.

Although Breakenridge (2008:46;55) points out that data can be collected from bigger samples, she casts doubts on conducting internet research. She argues that samples are not demographically diverse. Data are compromised by the anonymity of participants. Thus, research findings differ from those obtained through other methods.

Literature on interactivity relates to the study as the rationale propounds that the new dynamics of online communication are interactive and participatory. Also, the two-way symmetrical model emphasises the dialogical, two-way nature of the internet which invites comments and suggestions from users.

5.4 Advantages of the internet

Ashcroft and Hoey (2001:2) list the advantages of the internet. There is speed of communication. It is interactive – thus allowing a two-way communication process. The internet provides a forum for group communication and interaction. Organisations can run a campaign and garner the support of shareholders, customers, employees and suppliers over the net (Pinkham, 1998:36). Through

this medium, customers, business partners, employees, the media and the financial community are attracted and informed (Nemec, 2000:30).

The advantages of the new medium over the old are that the user can move from one subject to another in any order, whereas with conventional publications, the editor dictates what is to be published and the order in which that information will be presented. Traditional journalism guides the reader through a linear narrative, whereas the online version allows readers to be participants, as they click to hyperlinked pages of related topics.

Newspaper editors keep track of the number of column inches available in each edition, whilst the web offers unlimited space. This permits online journalists to develop a story more fully and to publish source documents and background material (Brandon, 1996; Millison, 1999:2).

As far as the audience is concerned, the web is cost-effective in targeting special interest publications. News can be updated as it happens. Articles can be archived for future reference. Online journalism also hosts the multimedia elements of text, graphics, sound, motion video and animation (Millison, 1999:1).

5.5 Disadvantages of the internet

Although the internet is generally preferred, research indicates that some journalists are sceptical about accessing the web as they believe that the story is not credible anymore as it is old news (Holtz, 1999; Jarvis, 2000). They regard news releases as the only authentic mode for transmitting company news. Some journalists complain that they do not like to use much of the internet because it is costly, and downloading pictures takes too long (Theaker, 1997). A communication breakdown may develop between communicators and journalists as one party is virtualised and the other is traditional.

Implementing the internet is inevitably costly. Financing the infrastructure and maintaining this technology requires a substantial investment. Another flaw of the internet with regard to media relations is that it has become an impersonal medium (Jarvis, 2000:6; Laauwen, 2001).

St John (1996:32) points to the fact that electronic communications cannot be completely protected from outsiders accessing very sensitive items. Accessibility to computers and computer literacy is another factor which reduces internet usage. This medium lacks the extended life which characterises printed media owing to its regular updating. Feedback is not immediate and the absence of nonverbal messages makes this form of communication impersonal. The internet cannot target a specific audience, unlike newsletters which are aimed specifically at reaching the company's employees (Rensburg, 1994:151).

6. THE INTRANET AS AN INTERNAL COMMUNICATION TOOL

Various authors offer the following definitions of the intranet:

Holtz (1996:1) defines the intranet as "an employee communication network within the internet that is used exclusively by an organisation".

"An intranet is a private, secure space on the web which all members of your group can easily access and use to share documents, calendars, and event information" (intranet.com:2001:1).

R-Way Communications offers the view that "an intranet is merely a network of computers that can share data with each other using existing standardised WWW protocols" ([rway.com,2000:1](#)). The intranet is regarded as "a website designed to be accessed within a company". It is designed for information sharing between various departments and groups ([dtngroup.com,1999](#)). Woo (1997:17) sees the intranet "as an individual company's internal network of computers all sharing information in a standard format".

These definitions emphasise the fact that intranets, in essence, are private networks which are used within organisations for sharing information amongst employees.

6.1 The communication functions of the intranet

Knoch (1998:16) asserts that intranets carry internal company information straight to the employees' desktops and provide the users with access to company databases and archives. Intranets are secured from access by the outside world by means of firewalls. Firewalls are servers that screen access attempts by outsiders and other unauthorised personnel in order to protect confidential information. Information that is stored in different computers within a company can be linked through the intranet (Knoch,1998; scorched earth.com,2000).

Intranets send consistent, timely and targeted communication messages. Intranets use the format of radio news which aims at one person rather than the masses in print media. News items are brief and can include contact details of the relevant person in a relevant section (Scriven, 2002:6).

6.1.1 Vertical Communication

Intranets can be used to make announcements which notify everyone of the latest news or deadlines. In the ideal situation, announcements appear on the intranet home page with headlines appearing at the top of the list of postings. Urgent announcements should appear in red to draw the member's attention. The group calendar keeps members up-to-date by displaying events such as departmental meetings, deadlines, holidays, birthdays and special events.

The intranet usually posts the type of information which helps employees to effectively carry out their mission. This information includes product designs,

schedule changes, price lists, competitive information, client lists, event calendars, team member listings and responsibilities, problem status reports, customer complaints, company policies and company mission and vision. R-Way communications uses its intranet to distribute forms, documents and information to its personnel. Employees nationwide can retrieve time sheets, travel vouchers and other forms (r-way.com,2000:2). Absa Bank has an intranet for each business unit. It posts circulars, manuals, and policies which assist employees in performing their duties. Forms, events and e-newsletters are also posted (see Absa footnote, 2009).

A study conducted by Gronstedt (1999:14) with a view to establishing the intranet as a relationship-building tool, revealed that Hewlett-Packard (HP) uses the intranet as a vertical communications tool. HP's sales force receive the latest news on their computer screens as they indicated that they needed information to serve customers in a proactive manner. Thus, at HP, the intranet has improved vertical communication and closed the gap between frontline workers and company executives. Senior management keeps in touch with frontline workers who are closest to the customers, and as a result employees become proud and well-informed ambassadors of their organisation.

The impact on corporate communication brought about by the intranet lies in its ability to reach employees dispersed in various locations nation-wide and globally. Bulletins would be more costly to print and dispatch to global offices and would also increase the costs of faxes, telephones and couriers. The unlimited space of the intranet allows it to carry vast amounts of information such as status reports and policies, and this makes it convenient for employees to download forms. There is no single conventional platform that has the capacity to carry such information and ensure its timely dissemination.

Literature on vertical communication relates to the study as it forms part of the two-way symmetrical model. It supports this model by promoting dialogue and collaboration among employees.

6.1.2 Corporate Social Investment

Eskom, a South African power parastatal, embarks on environmental strategies as part of its social responsibility efforts. The company launched a campaign on World Environment Day in 2002 and now uses its intranet to keep its employees informed on its community responsibilities. The site publishes environmental information, legal issues, and policies and procedures surrounding environmental issues. The site offers links to group-specific environmental pages ([www.aardvark](http://www.aardvark.co.za) (B),2002).

The above-mentioned information relates to this study as it is stated in the theoretical models that this function assumes a new role through technologies which will be revealed in the data.

6.1.3 Interdepartmental Information Resource

The human resources department can use the intranet to give employees access to information on their benefits. They can browse internal job openings and submit applications from a human resource homepage (Sharples, 1997:3). The intranet can also be used to advance services such as posting holiday and career guides and training schedules. Companies that invest a lot of money in training can create interactive training programmes over the intranet. The accounting department might set up a site that contains corporate budget information (Sharples, 1997:4).

Wilson (2001:2) notes that a survey by the Hunter Group found that HR departments have joined the intranet bandwagon. Findings show that HR information mentioned above dominates these intranets. The benefits are that less time is spent providing employees with information on benefits and updating personal information telephonically. Now employees can themselves access information that was previously hidden in the databases of human resources.

Furthermore, the intranet can store the employee telephone directory. Employees' particulars can be searched by name, department or geographic location. An employee's name could have links to his profile, information about his department, and an e-mail link (Viedge, 1997).

Dekker (2002) believes that employees need instant access to corporate information, such as company reports. Accessing the requested information at the push of a button offers the following benefits:

- Increased productivity owing to reductions in time spent following routine requests for resources;
- Reduced frustration which is associated with completing forms;
- Lower costs associated with internal administration;
- Improvement in employee knowledge about the company;
- Greater access to company knowledge improves employee morale;
- Reduces loss of corporate information.

Ward (2001) explains some of the intranet's winning characteristics, and concludes that to make intranets successful:

- Users must be engaged by undertaking employee surveys including questions on satisfaction, most frequently used areas, and what they need and want.
- Measuring your intranet's effectiveness is most important in justifying its existence and budget. Measuring channels includes metrics or log analysis, online and offline surveys, focus groups, feedback e-mail, help desk calls,

usability testing and return on investment (ROI). Some companies have found that ROI has resulted in reduced operating costs and improved productivity. Metrics measure the yearly, monthly, weekly and even daily intranet and traffic usage. Log analysis software packages enable companies to measure lists, page views and unique visitors.

In the case of global organisations with workforces operating in different time zones, the intranet plays a vital role in making information available twenty-four hours a day. Decision makers, by accessing information about their organisations, can make informed decisions in real time (Dekker, 2002).

This section relates to the study objective that seeks to establish how the intranet is used for internal communication.

6.1.4 Newsgroups

Companies can set up forums where individuals discuss items of their choice electronically (Gronstedt, 1999:14). Sharples (1997:3) states that if a company has an intranet, newsgroups can be established to discuss projects across different facilities or offices. Broadcasting video presentations and other live events can be shared through chat rooms. Woo (1997:17) cites an instance of US West, a United States telephone company, which demonstrates the importance of newsgroups. Employees using the corporate intranet can voice their opinions on any subject, which leads to a culture of open communication. This enables executives to access what employees at ground level think and say. Thus the CEO can answer questions from any employee. Rumours can be prevented as accurate information is posted and can be accessed by everybody.

The value of internal newsgroups is demonstrated thus:

- Global companies use online employee forums as a means of sharing knowledge and solving problems (<http://www.holtz.com>, 2002).
- A form of activism has been made possible on the intranet by Aetna, a Connecticut-based health insurance giant. Its chairman was disturbed over media reports from politicians who constantly criticised its services. He invited employees through e-mail to sign a petition to be forwarded to senators and congressmen. Employees responded positively by sending the petition over the intranet to the chairperson. The petition highlighted the company's position on its multi-billion dollar spending on its members. The company called on politicians to adopt a "truth-in-campaigning" policy and to cease uninformed attacks on the industry, which is one of the state's largest employers. The intranet as an activist tool helped Aetna state its position and stance clearly to its detractors (<http://www.holtz2.com>, 2002).

Newsgroups relate to the study, as indicated in the rationale. The intranet presents opportunities which would not be possible through conventional means. This is an example of such an opportunity to outsmart traditional video conferencing.

6.1.5 Collaboration

As businesses expand physically and geographically, so the demand for intranets increases. The intranet enables two-way communication as a marketing department, for example, may brainstorm new ideas or generate suggestions for new product launches. SmithKline Beecham uses the intranet to aid its employees in accessing databases on distant computers for projects and scientific investigations and to update staff about business events. The company intranet presents opportunities for meetings which involve video, audio and file sharing, reducing much of the travel and expenditure associated with traditional meetings (Sharples, 1997:3).

Intranets at Ford help facilitate a global exchange of information which has enhanced productivity. The intranet links design centres on various continents and this helped engineers design the 1996 Ford Taurus (McGrath & Schneider, 2000:2).

Tabke (2000:2) discusses the benefits of having intranets. If employees save the results of their work for future reference, the intranet can contribute to company effectiveness. Project teams which are geographically dispersed can share electronic documents and this facilitates collaboration.

One way to encourage employees to visit the company intranet on a regular basis is to integrate business-related processes which will compel them to use the browser to get their jobs done. This will expose other displayed news and important content which may prompt them to navigate through it. Delta Airlines in Atlanta, USA, featured a component that contained information on seats available to employees. Other uses of Deltanet include checking updated weather forecasts and ordering uniforms directly from suppliers (<http://www.holtz.com> c,2002).

The intranet might serve a variety of purposes including facilitating working in groups, sharing information and conferencing. The company's CEO could also run a conference to address shareholders over the network (dtngroup.com,1999:1).

Some companies adopt the intranet with a view to improving team meetings. Instead of meetings being led by the chairperson, they are discussion-oriented. Members receive the news from the intranet before the meeting in order to share facts and talk to each other strategically (Mowatt,2002:4). This discussion relates to the study rationale as it reveals opportunities presented by the intranet that were not possible using conventional means.

6.1.6 Publicised Information

Ford Motor Company delivers its weekly newspaper to employees via the intranet in order to reach them punctually (Grates, 2000:30). Other corporations send audio and video feeds to employees around the world (Cortese, 1997).

Organisations should adopt a strategy which integrates internal content with external news. External news could be related to competitors' information. PR departments can post press coverage about the company, senior executives or new products for all employees to see. New product introductions can inform the marketing, sales and customer service people and improve business decision making (McCall and Almeida, 2001:59).

According to www.online-pr.com, 2001, intranets may be used for publishing employee newsletters, product/service information, newswire clippings etc. Intranets complement or substitute some conventional internal modes of employee communication. This medium allows faster communication and wider distribution than printed and electronic media. Intranet applications can host corporate bulletin boards on topics such as job listings and company news. However, McGoon (1992, in Scriven, 2002:7) argues that even if electronic newsletters are timely, the information society has led to information overload which results in employees reading more selectively.

Through the use of the intranet, employees can access the latest press releases, news and business weekly updates. Some companies include in their system corporate news, stock prices, new products and employee classified advertisements. US West, a telecommunications provider known for its myriad audience-specific publications, reaches its 50 000 employees across 14 states. Its internal website features a section of late-breaking news, over 40 internal publications, product catalogues, *The Big Picture* - a section covering the company's mission statements for its various divisions, company and national/international headlines of the day and *Lets' Talk*, an interactive forum for

employees to discuss issues. Most importantly, the intranet must be developed to improve the performance of employees who use the information to better serve the company and its customers (Miller, 1995:23-25).

ARVAL PHH Ltd uses its intranet to follow print stories in greater depth which complement the printed newsletter, mainly comprising pictures and personal news about employees (Mowatt, 2002:4). Scriven (2002:7) reminds us that electronic communication cannot substitute the printed house journal. She states that "the print house journal concerns human relationships in the organisation, an important aspect of internal communication which management cannot ignore".

This discussion relates to the study rationale as it reveals opportunities presented by the intranet that were not possible by using conventional means. This also supports the public information model as information flow to targeted publics is one-way.

6.1.7 Crisis Management

Ragan Communications (<http://www.2ragan.com>, 2001) published a case in which a US company, CCH Incorporated, used the intranet effectively to avert fear among its employees in the aftermath of the World Trade Center disaster. Employees in other offices around the country turned to the intranet to get information about the safety of their colleagues who were located a few blocks from the World Trade Center. The intranet also posted information on how the business had been temporarily disrupted.

At Baxter International, a medical supply company, the intranet also played a crucial role in the wake of the 11 September 2001 disaster. Baxter's site posted information related to travel updates for stranded employees, and alternative means of transporting products as airports were shut down. Feedback

applications were made available for questions and discussions among employees. Answers to frequently asked questions were also made available on the site (www.2ragan.com,2001).

Breakenridge (2008:177) advises that streaming videos can also be used for internal communications through the intranet. These are effective in crisis situations where the chief executive can reassure employees on how the company is handling the crisis.

This information relates to the study objective which seeks to establish how the intranet is used in the execution of PR activities.

6.1.8 Change Management

Schultz (1997:18) gives an account of the Westinghouse company which built its intranet during a period of downsizing. Westinghouse decided to separate its broadcasting and industrial businesses. During the period of transformation, the intranet provided stability and consistency by providing information on plans to split the company. Westinghouse executives regard the intranet as "a strategic asset in that it provides an archive of valuable information the company can draw and build upon".

The first thing the intranet team did at Westinghouse was to eradicate the departmental lines. There would be no Human Resources or Finance buttons on the website. The team categorised content into Corporate Information, Policies and Procedures, Corporate Services and Employee Services segments. If a Westinghouse team were to research a business opportunity in a country in which it had not yet worked, it would need to check on that country's environmental policies. Previously, that sort of information required the perusal of various documents in the possession of the environmental affairs department.

Now the team heads to the policies and procedures site and conducts an online search for information (Schultz, 1997:19).

Companies such as UnumProvident Corp, the disability insurance giant, used content management of huge documents during its mergers and acquisitions of other companies. All the information on customers' case histories, information on company products, services, policies and pricing was compiled on the company's intranet (Reimers, 2001:30).

This information is relevant to this study because change management, mergers and acquisitions are activities which require the intervention of public relations practitioners. Although these activities are executed by traditional means, the intranet has capabilities which facilitate access to information in the course of managing change, as indicated in the introduction to the study.

6.1.9 Corporate Identity

The intranet can be a means to establish an organisation's corporate identity and brand image across the globe. The intranet is a valuable tool for implementing new identities. Instead of having to courier brand manuals around the world, details of the design can be carried on the intranet and downloaded by employees. As companies react more quickly to market forces, their identities change and the website can enforce that instantly, giving the company a competitive edge (Smith, 1997:24).

Absa used the intranet extensively to introduce and promote its new logo amongst its staff in 1998/1999. This was at the time that Allied Bank, Volkskas Bank, United Bank and TrustBank merged. The intranet was also used to determine employees' disposition towards corporate business wear, and the corporate communication unit received a huge response from employees about their preferences (see Absa footnotes).

Brand information is as important a tool for employees as for customers. Using the intranet, companies are able to instantly disseminate crucial product information on image, presentation and promotion of particular brands to all their employees across the globe. Providing information about company developments on the intranet makes employees feel that they are part of the organisation (Smith,1997).

This information relates to the study as it is mentioned in the rationale that the intranet could take the place of conventional modes of executing PR functions.

6.10 Return on Investment (ROI)

McGrath and Schneider (2000:1) emphasise that intranet ROI should be linked to bottom line issues that concern senior management. These include the following: cost savings, increased productivity and gaining competitive advantage. As far as cost savings are concerned, the authors cite a study of a management consulting firm. The consultancy saved US\$390 000 over a three-year period by eliminating telephone calls, mail and faxes.

Intranets increase productivity because they allow faster and easier access and exchange of information. Intranets facilitate the global exchange of information, allowing organisations to be productive every hour of the day (McGrath & Schneider, 2000:1).

This information relates to the study as it shows how intranets add value to organisations and increase productivity.

6.11 Advantages of the intranet

The intranet benefits users by giving them access to information that is locked away inside the databases of various departments. Current information can be

produced quickly and cost-effectively and this obviates the need for telephone calls, printing and sending information by courier (Gronstedt, 1999).

Other benefits of the intranet are that it adds to the limited communication vehicles which, on their own, cannot cope with today's market environment. Information is instantly relayed. The intranet has publishing applications which are one-to-many communications through which teams and departments can set up pages to post information (Gronstedt, 1999).

As analysts estimate that 18% of corporate printed material becomes outdated within a month, manuals or handbooks can be stored on the intranet and easily updated without having to reprint new copies. The advantage of the intranet is that all kinds of documents such as internal telephone lists, procedure manuals, training materials and requisition forms can be converted to an electronic form on the web and updated at no cost (Cortese, 1997; McGrath and Scheider, 2000).

Once implemented, the web should improve productivity and save money, thus speeding up projects. Two-way and multidirectional communication is facilitated as anyone can engage in dialogue from anywhere. There is no cost involved in the publishing of the information, unlike when using layout designers and printers in the conventional media. One global pharmaceutical company used to spend US\$30 000 per month on mailing information to sales representatives, often outdated by the time it reached its destination. The development of the intranet cuts printing and mailing costs dramatically (Hammond and Thatcher, 1996).

McGrath and Schneider (2000) cite ways in which the intranet affects return on investment (ROI). The intranet contributes to productivity as information is rapidly and easily accessed on computer desktops. Increased productivity is measured in sales closed rather than minutes saved. This is demonstrated by a major pharmaceutical firm which launched an integrated internet / intranet and extranet programme to launch three new prescription drugs. Its internet website offers

information to customers. The intranet gives 2 500 mobile sales representatives access to a database of product information, government regulations, research tools and marketing materials to use when calling physicians. Sales managers will also be able to send sales reports over the intranet to headquarters. Physicians, as direct customers, can access the company's extranet which contains information on drug research, drug testing and medical journal articles.

The website (<http://www.dtnngroup.com>,1999:1) adds some of the advantages of the intranet which include reducing the administrative load. An intranet-enabled form substitutes filling in forms/requests on a hard copy which must be passed from department to department for approval. Information sharing between departments is instant and avoids having to track down the person to whom the report must be issued.

6.12 Disadvantages of the intranet

According to Hammond and Thatcher (1996:5), intranet transactions across the globe pose an economic problem because they eradicate boundaries. It is impossible for tax collectors to establish where goods, services and information have been developed and produced. In large organisations the intranet has limited users as only office staff are allowed access.

7. ELECTRONIC MAIL AS A PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOL

Straubhaar (1998:373) defines e-mail as "correspondence in the form of messages transmitted between work stations over a network". This facility allows users on different computers to compose and exchange messages. E-mail is a message that one individual sends to another individual or group of people. Together with the intranet, e-mail has become one of the most powerful internet-based tools used by public relations practitioners.

This facility transmits messages which are received almost instantly. Unlike the internet and intranets which post pre-programmed information, e-mail is composed by the user and destined for a particular individual or group of recipients. Both internal and external audiences can be reached via this medium.

7.1 The functions of e-mail as an internal and external medium of communication

7.1.1 Information Dissemination

Cutlip et al. (2007) note that e-mail is an instrument which organisations use to send messages instantly to a large group of employees. E-mail has, to a large extent, replaced the exchange of letters between employees and supervisors. The content of e-mail may include information about policy, task information, information acknowledging employee achievements and reprimands. Added benefits are that transferring large documents through e-mail reduces printing, paper and delivery costs. E-mail is said to have replaced some forms of interpersonal communication and provides opportunities for instant feedback.

Memoranda and other correspondence can be sent through e-mail within an organisation. The advantage of this is that if a memorandum is put out on the system, the sender can see whether the targeted people have received it on their computer, something which is not possible with ordinary written memoranda (Du Plessis, 1994).

Siqebengu (1997) outlines the benefits of e-mail in South African organisations, mentioning that company deals that used to be discussed in a series of meetings, including follow-up telephone calls, can be clinched by e-mail. He states further that e-mail can be used to introduce, follow-up on issues and generally communicate with employees regardless of their location. The author's

emphasis is on the efficiency and time-saving aspect of e-mail; the disadvantage is that person-to-person communication is diminishing.

E-mail discussions relate to this study as the objective seeks to establish its functions. The two-way symmetrical model underpins e-mail usage as it has dialogical capabilities.

7.1.2 E-mail and Media Relations

According to Van Zyl (2000b), journalists and organisations have found an easier, faster path to making requests and enquiries. E-mail is used for this purpose as it facilitates responses electronically, and information can be cut and pasted. This acts to the journalist's advantage as it saves time in the formulation of text. Dern (1997:1) is of the opinion that e-mail is a powerful, convenient way to provide information to the press, thus supplementing other conventional methods. E-mail not only offers PR practitioners better ways of getting information to the press, but also presents new ways for the press to access information.

Holtz (1999:116) cites a study by Middleberg and Associates which revealed that journalists use internet-based e-mail to correspond with sources after making initial contacts to establish the credibility of the source.

Dern (1997:1) and Breakenridge (2008) offer tips on how to use e-mail as a PR tool:

- E-mail messages should be sent single-spaced.
- The message should include a distinct subject line such as "RELEASE: Land Rover announces the launch of a new model".
- News releases should be in the body (not attachments), as they might contain a virus.
- Messages should include a return e-mail address.

- PR practitioners should not include e-mail addresses of journalists who have not asked or agreed to be in the mailing list. A message should be sent announcing the PR list and containing information on how to join. This information should be made available on the website.
- Messages should be personalised without including other e-mail addresses in the mailing list, which might be longer than the actual message.

Compton (1997:1) asserts that e-mail is used to disseminate fast-breaking corporate information, product news and service updates. However, he offers suggestions on how to avoid some mistakes in sending electronic releases.

Editors do not accept releases at face-value unless they are sure of the source's credibility. It is best to send an e-mail message to announce a release to be viewed on the company's website. Hence Breakenridge (2008,66) argues that editors prefer a telephone call followed by a detailed e-mail. Sending an e-mail without first calling an editor could lead to the e-mail being ignored or even deleted. PR practitioners should be familiar with topics which interest specific publications to avoid releases being sent to unintended newsrooms. It is recommended that practitioners use no more than 10 lines to emphasise benefits in cases of product publicity.

Holtz (1999:48) argues that traditional press releases differ from web-based ones in the following sense:

Headlines should include internal links to the key elements of the release. Extraneous information such as earnings reports should be kept out of the release. Instead, a link should be provided for reporters if they are interested. Such links will enable reporters to access areas such as analyst sites, related articles from online media, discussion groups and a company website. News releases should have added audio and video interactive features (Breakenridge, 2008). A separate link containing photographs or illustrations could also be

included. There should also be contact information with a hyperlink to the media relations staff contact's e mail address.

A South African online survey revealed that few respondents mention that e-mail is less intrusive than a telephone call, which journalists claimed to hate. But questions still remain on Van Zyl's (2000_A) concern about an American PRO who sends 120 media releases a week via e-mail: "how did he know if his e-mail was opened and read? How did he know he had structured or angled his media material correctly? "

E-mail has its disadvantages as well. As Van Zyl (2000_A) mentions, although journalists have found the mail the easiest and fastest path to requesting information, journalists and editors of internet publications can be very demanding. These journalists do not accept telephone responses to their enquiries and insist that an e-mail response be composed. Van Zyl (2000_A) indicates the element of time and the duration of exposure. A news article sent to a business weekly has a lifespan of a week. A news article sent to an internet publication could be deleted after an hour or a day if another story breaks.

E-mail does not always operate at the push of a button. When a company receives the request, PR personnel have to formulate input which must be approved by management before it is sent out to the media.

This discussion relates to this study as stated in the rationale. E-mail can change conventional media relations. The two-way symmetrical model also underpins e-mail usage with its interactive capabilities.

7.1.3 *E-mail enabled newsletters*

According to Miller (1995), companies publish online newsletters via e-mail. Usually these newsletters are no longer than three pages, containing briefs about

the latest company news. The cost of producing an online newsletter is minimal, and it offers immediate information and message control. Breakenridge (2008:20) adds that an e-newsletter does not limit the producer to a set number of pages as does the printed version.

As e-mail is the primary vehicle for business-to-business communication, it should also be the medium for sending business-to-business newsletters. It has been proved that using this mode for targeted campaigns has a 15% response rate (Miller, 1995).

Pridemore (2001:1) advises that before one launches an e-mail newsletter, the following should be considered:

- *Set objectives.* Clarify the goal of such a newsletter; it could be to generate sales, change or reinforce brand image, or to position the company as an industry expert. The business goal will affect the content of the newsletter.
- *Develop a calendar.* Planning editorial and promotional content in advance ensures a logical flow of information and a focus on objectives.
- Determine how *results* will be measured.

Breakenridge (2008) advises that the easiest way to create an e-newsletter is to design a template. This should be followed by sending an HTML cover e-mail to introduce the newsletter. This e-mail should have links to the PDF newsletter which allows the audience to click on links in order to access the required articles. Advantages of e-newsletters are that they are cost-effective as there is no printing charge, and photographic images are less expensive.

E-mail newsletters are ideal for brand reinforcement, product testing, promotional offers and customer surveys. E-mail can provide employees with a daily electronic newsletter featuring the organisation's morning news, its weekly calendar, management's memos and important announcements (Ward,

1994:33). Denton (2002:1) cites Atlas Venture, a capital firm which distributes articles of its media coverage in newsletter format. This newsletter is sent via e-mail to their clients' CEOs, individual investors and members of the Venture network. Since compiling the right information became a time-consuming process, a CI-Watch solution was installed to track down the relevant and targeted information which they use in compiling the corporate newsletter.

Smith (1995) mentions Sprint/UTF telephone company which has advanced its communication efforts to achieve true interdepartmental involvement through using e-mail for information delivery. This telephone company uses e-mail effectively to target specific internal publics. *SNN Today* is an electronic newsletter distributed three times a week via e-mail. *Quanda* is an electronic service whose aim is to facilitate communication between management and all employees. It uses a question and answer format that allows employees to pose questions directly to executives.

SNN Leadership Briefings is an electronic communication publication which publishes industry news, stock market information and related business news to executives during the first two hours of every business day. *SNN Leadership Letter* is an e-mail newsletter targeted to supervisors. The newsletter disseminates information on policies and procedures, management skills and other corporate news relevant to those who supervise others.

The *SNN Leadership* letter is an e-mail newsletter targeted exclusively at supervisors. The newsletter allows timely dissemination of information on policies and procedures, management skills or other corporate news of interest, primarily to those who supervise others. Industry news, stock market information and other related business news is compiled and distributed to executives via e-mail during the first two hours of every business day.

The US postal service is another example of how to take advantage of new technologies in revamping its internal communications. Initially, supervisors had to be trained in new communication tools. Now, an electronic newsletter for managers, called *Postal Link*, is sent to about 90 000 computer users and issued twice weekly. This newsletter is attached through e-mail and has a brief writing style. The newsletter contains feedback from readers who have indicated that they like getting the top line information (Myers, 1999:14).

Other features include customer service success stories, a major speech by the Postmaster General, legislation affecting the Postal Service and activities of competitors. Each issue publishes two or three letters to the editor. Surveys are also conducted through the newsletter. These are completed on the form and sent electronically. *Postal Link* has been followed by *Straight Talk* which is a two-page Microsoft Word document published on a weekly basis and attached to an e-mail message. This electronic newsletter was introduced as a response to supervisors' needs to be the primary communicators of business information to the employees they supervise (Myers, 1999).

Lee and Seward (2001:4), head of internal communication at Cable & Wireless, use e-mail as a push medium. Short messages are linked to more information on the intranet to enable users to judge the importance of the message. Cable & Wireless identifies e-mails as "*Fast News*", indicating that the news is time-sensitive or concerns very senior management items, "*Newsfile*", carries weekly news and key company operational information.

Absa Bank sends e-newsletters containing management-related information weekly, but only to senior executives. Other employees receive newsflashes every day in their mailboxes. The bank also has templates for various uses (see Absa footnote).

Literature on electronic newsletters is related to this study as indicated in the theoretical models: publications assume a new platform on e-mail.

7.1.4 Interactivity

Holtz (1999:42) cites some of the important uses of e-mail for one-on-one communication. This internet feature can be used by a PR practitioner to build relationships with news reporters. The practitioner can negotiate with a representative of an activist group on issues that are voiced on forums. E-mail messages can also be sent through distribution lists which are groups of people and their addresses. From the PR point of view, distribution lists can be used to conduct focus group research, share research findings with key publics or provide regular updates on particular issues to relevant publics.

Interactivity is relevant to this study as it underlies the theoretical models and the rationale for the study in supporting the participatory nature of technologies.

7.2 Advantages and disadvantages of e-mail

E-mail is acclaimed for its low cost, immediacy, traceability and convenience. It is a fast, easy-to-use, two-way channel which is convenient for contacting the press (Dern,1997; Foley, 2001). E-mail enables the sender to communicate with one or many recipients at the same time. Messages are transmitted over long distances almost instantly.

Lee and Seward (2001:5) believe that when e-mail is used by people within close physical proximity of each other it actually puts more distance between them. Laauwen (2001:23) adds that ICTs have, through the use of e-mails, changed the human side of communication to something non-verbal. Another disadvantage of e-mail is that information overload can reduce its effectiveness (Cutlip et al., 2007).

7.4 Summary

It is clear that the internet can host the same number of tools on one platform at a reduced cost as all the conventional media used for various information needs and targeted at specific audiences. An advantage of conventional modes is that they have a degree of permanence, while on the other hand press releases, speeches, and other publications can be archived for future reference on the internet. Annual reports on the web have a huge capacity and announce fluctuating share prices instantly. Web casting is an invention brought about by technologies which can extend the investor relations function, thus making it easier for global stakeholders and media to access information.

The web is an invaluable tool in managing crises. Timely and up-to-date information is posted, which could previously not be fully covered by conventional means. Corporate advertisements displaying position statements that carry limited information are also costly.

Certain South African companies offer e-mail links on their websites inviting complaints and suggestions. These companies do not acknowledge receipt or respond to such mails. This may contribute to a negative image of such companies. It has not been established whether discussion forums which could fan rumours or criticise such companies prevail in South Africa. Should they exist, then these companies are providing users with the ammunition they need to tackle them.

High-risk companies such as airlines, petroleum and chemical companies and those more likely to have pressure groups should host online discussion forums. These could be linked to areas on the site featuring company policy on certain aspects and legislation pertaining to particular issues.

Corporate social responsibility functions are widely featured on corporate websites and these contribute to a positive corporate image. The web offers an in-depth look at various contributions which would not be provided through conventional means.

Literature provided on the intranet should focus on a company's social responsibility projects. Since these topics are often featured on the internet, they could include links to the company's internet site. Also, the aspect of crisis management which focuses more on keeping in touch with external publics and the media, should keep employees abreast of every development, preventing them from simply having to read about their organisations in the media.

Information regarding intranet surveys is scarce. Intranets should be efficient in running surveys targeted at specific employees. Through focus group research, participants from distant locations could find the intranet convenient and cost effective for the company.

8. Conclusion

This chapter outlines various conventional modes of communication used by organisations. The outline serves as the background against which the impact of new media can be gauged. Furthermore, the chapter details how communication professionals use ICTs in executing PR functions. Certain functions and tools such as corporate social investments, annual reports and corporate image could not possibly be executed through conventional modes owing to the limited editorial space and high cost.

Literature consulted indicates how various functions of PR can be extended to the web. The web allows a wealth of strategies which could make the practice of PR faster and more effective, thus enhancing relationships with organisations' stakeholders.

The discussion on the intranet reveals the opportunities presented by the tool in managing internal communication. The intranet has the capacity to store company information in a centralised format for easy reach. Most importantly, this tool can be used to improve productivity and facilitate the flow of information. Companies save money as collaboration across vast distances is made possible. Its impact demonstrates its efficiency over traditional modes of paper-based procedures in executing communication activities.

E-mail is as useful as the internet and intranets in executing PR functions. Most crucial is its ability to extend the media relations' function in responding to media enquiries and sending press releases. It does not operate as an isolated tool as it can be linked to the company website bearing important information or media-relevant information such as press release archives, downloadable images and position statements. Another crucial aspect of e-mail is that it saves companies production and distribution costs when sending out publications, and makes it easier to reach audiences who are geographically dispersed.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss two data-gathering techniques, namely content analysis and the descriptive survey method. Content analysis will be used to conduct an analysis of the first two study objectives. As content analysis describes the existing content of media messages, these will be coded from various company websites.

The questionnaire survey will probe information on the intranet and electronic mail usage from the same sample. The researcher will use questionnaires because corporate intranets and e-mails cannot be accessed by outsiders. The questionnaire responses should reveal internal organisational uses of the intranet and e-mail and how organisations have embraced corporate communication functions. The responses will hopefully also reveal how e-mail has changed the face of media relations.

In conducting content analysis, web pages from the selected sample will be downloaded, followed by the prescribed steps in analysing content. A coding sheet (as reflected in Appendix B) outlines categories with applicable units of analysis which are check-marked. A quantification table indicates the frequency at which units of analysis reflect public relations content pertaining to a category on a website. A qualitative analysis will elaborate on the actual content of the units under study.

The last two stages of content analysis, “data analysis” and its “interpretation”, will form part of subsequent chapters.

Remark: Chapter 3 necessitates a detailed content analysis of the individual company websites. This analysis should reveal the existing website content of

each of the 27 companies which could be cross-referenced in the findings to be discussed Chapter 4.

2. AN OUTLINE OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

Kerlinger (1986, in Wimmer and Dominick, 1991:140) defines content analysis as “a method of studying and analysing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables”. Content analysis is a research approach which is frequently used in all areas of media.

According to Frey, Botan, Friedman and Kreps (1991), “content analysis is a research technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics in a text”. De Fleur and Dennis (1994:529) state that “content analysis is used to study any form of message and is mainly a tool of research that can reveal underlying patterns in the messages”.

According to Wimmer and Dominick (1991:159), content analysis is used for various purposes. These include:

- Describing the communication content. In this sense, content analysis identifies what exists in the media.
- Testing hypotheses of message characteristics. This aims to relate certain characteristics of the source of a message to characteristics of the messages that are produced.
- Comparing media content to the “real world”. This occurs when the portrayal of a phenomenon is compared against actuality. The aim is to find out whether there is a relationship between the real situation and the one portrayed.
- Assessing the image of particular groups in society. This focuses on exploring the media image of minorities or other notable groups. In most cases the content analysis assesses changes in media policy towards these groups.

- Establishing a starting point for studies of media effects. In this instance the dominant messages and themes are documented, followed by a separate study of the audience to see whether these messages have instilled similar attitudes among heavy media users.

Wigston (1997:165) expands the purposes of content analysis. It may be used to make inferences about the reason for the message and its effects: content analysis thus entails making inferences regarding the encoding of messages by the communicator. The technique describes and explains message characteristics. It is also used to make inferences regarding the effects of decoding of messages by the recipient.

Palmquist (1997) adds the following uses of content analysis which are adapted from Berelson (1952):

- To reveal international differences in communication content.
- To detect the existence of propaganda.
- To identify the intentions, focus or communication trends of an individual institution.
- To describe attitudinal and behavioural responses to communication.
- To determine the psychological or emotional state of persons or groups.

In this study, content analysis will be used to describe the communication content as reflected on web pages of selected companies. This content should reflect aspects of public relations such as corporate image, investor relations and social responsibility programmes. In the interpretation of the findings, communication trends in groups of companies will then be identified.

2.1 Advantages of content analysis

Krippendorff (in Frey et al., 1991) and Wigston (1997) identify the advantages of content analysis that make it a potentially more powerful technique than questionnaires or interviews in describing the nature of communication content.

Content analysis is an unobtrusive technique as it studies texts that already exist. Thus, researchers have no influence on the subject under study. Unlike interviews and questionnaires, which ask predetermined questions that limit respondents' responses, content analysis uses unstructured material which is categorised by observers. In contrast to questionnaires and interviews, content analysis is used to obtain and study the data as they appear in the context of communication. Content analysis can manage large volumes of data with the aid of computers for storage. Compared to other methods, it is cost-effective. Palmquist (1997) adds that content analysis can allow for both quantitative and qualitative operations.

In this study there will be no interference as the researcher observes already existing content of companies' websites. Corporate website content under study is unstructured and classified into categories that are stipulated by the researcher. As the website is the communication medium, specific aspects under study are within the context of communication. The quantification of frequencies of items under study is done using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and analysed according to research requirements. The qualitative method of analysis used indicates the information communicated and how it is posted on websites.

2.2 Limitations of content analysis

Wimmer and Dominick (1991:161) point out that researchers cannot rely on content analysis only to arrive at conclusions, thus additional studies are

required. The findings of a particular content analysis are limited by the particular categories and definitions used. A different set of categories can be used to study the same concept. Content analysis is also frequently time consuming because of the laborious task of examining large volumes of content.

Wigston (1997) adds that the method is limited to examining material that has been recorded in some retrievable format. Gathering information in other communication formats requires the researcher to use different types of research methods. The technique is also ineffective in testing causal relationships between variables. Palmquist (1997) adds that content analysis often disregards the context that produced the text, as well as the state of things after the text is produced. It can be difficult to automate or computerise content analysis.

For the purposes of this study, the researcher will focus only on stipulated categories. This makes it impossible to look into other aspects of communication as they appear on websites. In studying web content, the laborious element lies not in large volumes of web content, but in the time-consuming factor of technologies, with slow search engines when opening pages. If the original aim of content analysis is to look at texts that already exist, this cannot accommodate the communication context as argued by Palmquist (1997). Thus manual coding is done as computer coding would not consider implicit words in the coding process.

3. STEPS IN CONTENT ANALYSIS

The steps followed in content analysis are as follows:

- Formulating a research question

The ultimate goal of content analysis must be clearly spelled out to avoid aimless exercises that have little use for research (Wimmer and Dominick, 1991:161).

The research question helps the investigator to delimit exactly what is to be studied. The purpose of this step is also to determine the nature of the investigation and the procedures to be followed (Wigston, 1997:67). The first six questions listed in chapter 1 under hypothesis formulation cover this step.

- Defining the universe

This involves specifying the boundaries of the body of content to be considered in the study (Wimmer and Dominick, 1991). The universe serves to establish boundaries within which research is conducted. This entails selecting certain units for investigation from a larger population (Wigston, 1997:67).

In this case, the universe will be selected from the online Braby's Red Index business directory. Manufacturing and certain service industries will be excluded as they comprise a myriad categories of products and services. Certain large companies are not fully represented within Gauteng and this prevented the researcher from selecting these. In order to make the study manageable, the selected universe provides a comprehensive list from which to take the sample (<http://www.brabys.co.za>,2002).

Criteria

Fink (1995:27-29) refers to the use of eligibility criteria. This refers to the characteristics of the population which make it eligible for inclusion in the sample. The researcher will define criteria which all the members of a universe under study should meet. This will be followed by including those who meet the criteria and excluding those who do not.

Given that stratified random sampling is used in this study, the researcher will use the following criteria in identifying the population:

Target population: Mining companies, newspapers, radio stations, petroleum and banking industries.

Inclusion criteria: Business organisations within Gauteng;
Businesses with websites;
A comprehensive list of businesses from which to stratify and select a sample.

Exclusion criteria: Business organisations outside Gauteng Province;
Automotive companies, insurance, breweries and food industries; textile companies and others not falling within the spectrum of inclusion.

This study intends to consider business organisations in Gauteng Province which have websites during the period January 1 2003 to January 31 2004. This will include websites of the banking industry, which has a total universe of 14, mining houses (seven), petroleum industries (five), radio stations (eight) and newspapers (ten).

- Selecting a sample

Sampling refers to the selection by the researcher of a portion of the population for investigation. This may involve multistage sampling, simple random sampling, systematic sampling, stratified random sampling or other sampling techniques (Wigston, 1997:67-81; Wimmer and Dominick, 1991:162).

This study will use stratified random sampling which is described by Fink (1995:30) as "a sample in which the population is divided into subgroups or 'strata', and then a random sample is selected from each of these groups". According to Wimmer and Dominick (1991:71), this sampling technique is used when a researcher is interested in a particular characteristic or strata of the population. In this case, the researcher will identify a significant variable and

select subjects who reveal this trait. A sub-sample will then be chosen from this group.

Wimmer and Dominick (1991) mention that there are several reasons a researcher might prefer the stratified random technique:

- The technique assures that not only the overall population, but also key subgroups within the population under study will be represented. This may be the only way to examine subgroups.
- Stratified random sampling will generally have more statistical precision than simple random sampling. This will only be realised if the strata are homogenous. Wimmer and Dominick (1983: 65) describe homogeneity as referring to similar characteristics which are present in a sample.

Criteria for defining the mining industry sample

Target population: Mining industry;

Inclusion criteria: Gold mining, platinum, diamonds and iron ore;

Exclusion criteria: Stone mining, metallurgical industries, mining engineering companies, blasting and excavation companies, mining suppliers and mining marketing services.

In the case of the mining industry, the strata will comprise gold mining, platinum mining, diamonds and iron ore. Homogeneity in the mining industry sample is determined by the underground exploration of minerals which include gem stones, iron ore, coal, zinc, quarry products, diamonds, gold and platinum products. Their shafts are blasted with hydraulic drills in order to expose precious stones. Operations in the process from discovery to end product include mines, smelters and refineries.

Although all individual mines are listed, they belong to certain groups such as Anglovaal, Amplats and De Beers. Each group has its own website which lists the various operations. Gold mining has a population of four from which two will be selected, while one sample will be selected from the other groups.

Criteria for defining the newspaper industry sample

Target population: Newspaper industry;

Inclusion criteria: Daily newspapers, Sunday newspapers, business and black-owned newspapers;

Exclusion criteria: Magazines, newspaper publishers, news agencies, property finders, regional newspapers distributed free of charge, audience-specific newspapers.

In the newspaper industry, characteristics of interest to the researcher are represented in daily newspapers, Sunday newspapers, business newspapers and black-owned newspapers. Homogeneity in the newspaper sample is characterised by news and editorials on politics, entertainment, sports, world news, business reports, letters to the editor and classifieds.

Criteria for defining the petroleum industry sample

Target population: Petroleum industry;

Inclusion criteria: Companies headquartered in Britain, France, South Africa and the USA;

Exclusion criteria: Diesel companies, petroleum refineries, petroleum distributors.

In the petroleum industry, the criteria used in selecting the sample will be based on their different origins, that is, Britain, France, South Africa and the USA. Britain has a total population of two, of which one will be selected, and other countries have one each.

Homogeneity in the petroleum industry is determined by chemicals, solvents, oils, fuels, gas, lubricant suppliers, and the commercial, marine and aviation industries. Refineries, depots and retail sites characterise the distribution process of this industry.

Criteria for defining the banking industry sample

Target population: Banking industry;
Inclusion criteria: Consumer banks, development banks, merchant banks;
Exclusion criteria: Banking consultants and actuaries, brokers, financial services, foreign banks, asset managers, financial securities, development corporations, investment companies.

The strata to be selected from the banking industry will comprise consumer banks, development banks and merchant banks. Homogeneity in this industry is determined by banking products such as investments, unit trusts, financing, personal banking, foreign banking, business banking and corporate banking. Branches and various account types characterise this universe.

Criteria for defining the radio industry sample

Target population: Radio stations;
Inclusion criteria: Bilingual stations, talk radio stations, indigenous language stations, commercial stations;
Exclusion criteria: Community radio stations, foreign stations, production houses, audience-specific radio stations, radio advertising services.

The radio population strata consist of bilingual stations, a talk radio station, indigenous radio stations and commercial radio stations. Homogeneity in the radio universe is characterised by presenter profiles, news headlines, events,

programme line-ups, audio streams, promotions and demographic profile of listeners.

The size of the strata sample will be determined proportionally to the population. Proportionate sampling generally has a higher statistical efficiency (Emory and Cooper, 1995:222).

Population		Sample
Mining	7	5
Newspapers	10	6
Petroleum	5	4
Banking	14	7
Radio	8	5

The researcher will allow diversity among different industries so as to explore tendencies on web usage as determined by the type of industry.

3.1 Advantages of stratified random sampling

Wimmer and Dominick (1991:72) and White (1998:5) outline these advantages as follows:

The technique ensures that relevant variables are represented. Comparisons can be made to other populations. Selection is made from a homogeneous group. In this study, relevant variables are represented as indicated in the sample selected in accordance with the homogeneity of products and services. Comparisons will be made to show different communication patterns in relation to the categories under study. Sampling error is reduced.

If data of known precision are required from certain subdivisions of the population, then each stratum can be treated as a population. Stratification will

produce a gain in precision of the estimates of the whole population, because a heterogeneous population is split into fairly homogeneous strata. Heterogeneity refers to a population having unrelated characteristics. For example, in the finance industry heterogeneity lies in unrelated products such as asset management, investment companies, personal banking and brokers.

3.2 Disadvantages of stratified random sampling

Knowledge of the population prior to selection is required. The procedure can be time-consuming and costly. It may be difficult to find a sample if incidence (the frequency of desired subjects) is low. In this study, a case of low incidence was encountered: given the exploratory nature of the study and the focus on one geographic region, samples were chosen from the population. Variables that define strata may not be relevant. The technique is problematic if strata are not clearly defined.

Analysis can be quite complicated (White, 1998; Wimmer and Dominick, 1991:72). Bailey (1982:104) highlights the fact that stratifying a heterogeneous population into homogenous strata could lead to each stratum having a relatively small sample. He also adds that stratified random sampling can be disproportionate as higher proportions of the population may be sampled more in some strata and less in others.

- Selecting the unit of analysis

Wimmer and Dominick (1991:164) refer to the unit of analysis as “the smallest element of content analysis”. The unit of analysis is what is actually counted. Wigston (1997:157) asserts that the unit of analysis “is a measurable unit which provides the researcher with a standard method of analysing data”. The unit selected should always reflect the research question. Krippendorff (in Frey et al., 1993) identifies five units that researchers study in content analysis:

Physical units: These are texts that will be used, i.e. newspapers, books, television programmes.

Syntactical units: They consist of individual symbols (words) as in the case of counting the number of times a certain term appears in an article.

Referential units: Symbols are linked to particular referents, as when counting the number of positive or negative words used by a public figure.

Thematic units: When topics are contained within messages, for example, identifying sexist themes in the content of television shows.

Palmquist (1997) refers to this stage as “deciding upon the level of analysis”. The researcher must decide whether to code for a single word or for sets of words or phrases. For purposes of this study, thematic units to be analysed are as follows: share price, results, share performance, product /service information, operations, corporate image, corporate social responsibility, crisis communication, web feedback, discussion forums, suggestions, opinion polls, surveys and focus groups.

The themes listed above are posted on web pages and also form part of the functions of the corporate communication under investigation. An analysis of these themes will answer the research questions, and will reveal the impact of technologies, or lack thereof, on corporate communication.

- Constructing categories for analysis

Palmquist (1997) states that the researcher must decide how many different concepts will be coded. This involves developing a predefined set of concepts and categories. Determining a certain number of concepts or categories allows a researcher to examine specific aspects of a text. This study intends to use four

categories which should allow the researcher to focus on corporate communication functions and practices, excluding the tools used to execute such functions.

This is the category system used to classify media content. All category systems should be mutually exclusive, exhaustive and reliable. Wimmer and Dominick (1991:165) and Wigston (1997) explain that being mutually exclusive and exhaustive means that each unit of analysis should fit into only one category. "A category is a group of words with similar meanings or connotations" (Weber, 1990, in Stemler, 2001:3). Categories are the meaningful groups to which the units of analysis are allocated. In addition, the number of categories should be manageable; at most, there should not be more than ten.

This study uses *a priori* coding which, according to Stemler (2001:3), establishes categories prior to the analysis based upon some theory. The rationale for selecting the categories under study is the result of observation of the content of websites related to public relations activities. This will allow the researcher to establish suitable categories with appropriate units.

Category 1 = Corporate Communication (product/service information, operations, corporate image, corporate social responsibility, crisis management).

This category encompasses the most common public relations activities. Corporations tend to publicise information on their products or services in brochures. Corporate image programmes are traditionally announced through media articles, corporate advertisements and events. Corporate social responsibility traditionally takes the form of sponsorships of sports or other events. Usually crises are announced through news articles and news bulletins. The internet has extended these functions by hosting organisational information, announcing corporate identity programmes, listing various corporate

sponsorships and hosting and updating information on how the crisis is handled relevant to affected stakeholders.

Given that certain public relations activities, such as events management, issues management, public affairs and lobbying, are not posted on websites, units for their analysis will not be specified. However, those units not indicated appear as "other".

Category 2 = Investor Communication (share price, share performance, results).

Investor relations is a function of public relations. Investors are key stakeholders in public relations. Investor relations programmes manifest themselves in earnings results which are conventionally presented in the abovementioned units. Traditionally, annual reports post earnings results and share prices are announced in the media. The internet hosts reports on a quarterly basis. Other investor relations functions such as web casting results by the chairperson, acquisitions and mergers can be hosted on the web as they occur and updated on a daily basis.

Category 3 = Virtual Centre (suggestions, feedback, discussion forums).

Organisations attempt to keep in touch with what key stakeholders and the media say about them. Conventional means which companies use to scan their environments include analysing newspaper clippings and making suggestion boxes available. Using online means requires establishing a "virtual centre" which allows two-way communication between the organisation and its stakeholders. Stakeholders are able to contact organisations and this promotes dialogue and positive relations.

Category 4 = Web Surveys (opinion polls, surveys, focus groups).

As public relations is a research-based practice, public relations programmes, decision-making and managing emerging issues depend on research. The category "web surveys" thus examines the types of research used through online means. Research techniques listed are common to public relations practice with a focus on limited and designated samples. The internet has larger samples and is characterised by convenience, speed and low cost.

- Establish a quantification system

Palmquist (1997) refers to "coding for existence or coding for frequency of a concept". When coding for existence, a concept will be counted only once, irrespective of the number of times it appears. However, in coding for frequency, the number of times a concept appears in a text might be more indicative of its importance. In this study, coding for frequency will be adopted, allowing the application of measures of central tendency to be used during analysis.

Quantification is the attachment of numerical values to the data being analysed. Quantification in content analysis involves one or more levels of data measurement: nominal, interval, ratio or ordinal (Wimmer and Dominick, 1991:168).

In this study, a nominal level of measurement which allocates numerals to discrete variables is used to allocate numbers to media items appearing on web pages.

- Coding the content

This involves placing a unit of analysis in a category. It is a process of transforming raw data into a form suitable for analysis (Wigston, 1997:67-81; Wimmer and Dominick, 1991:168). In coding web content, categories will be indicated in the left-hand margin with corresponding units in the right-hand

margin. Units that are featured on selected web pages are check-marked and their frequencies (as per the number of hits on a site) quantified as indicated in the previous step. This is outlined in Appendix (B).

Furthermore, Palmquist (1997) adds that the researcher must decide on the level of generalisation. This means deciding whether concepts are to be coded exactly as they appear in the text, or whether they are coded as the same when expressed slightly differently. The researcher needs to determine whether two words mean radically different things or are similar enough to be coded as having the same implication.

In this study, words with the same implicit meaning will be coded in the same category. This would be particularly applicable in cases of the unit *product/service information* which appears on different websites as "about us", "company profile", the unit *operations* as "our business", "our business environment" and the unit *social responsibility* as "corporate social investment", "sustainable investment", "corporate responsibility" and "corporate care". Other information which, through inference, implies the same definition or has elements of the unit or category under investigation, will be coded together.

Establishing reliability in content analysis

Individuals who do the coding in content analysis are called coders. The number of coders is usually small and ranges from three to six. Coders should undergo training sessions in order to familiarise themselves with the meaning of units of analysis.

Inter-coder reliability refers to "the extent to which independent coders evaluate a characteristic of a message or artefact and reach the same conclusion". Inter-coder agreement is required in content analysis because it measures "the extent to which the different judges assign exactly the same rating to each object". Inter-

coder reliability is critical to content analysis because if not coded appropriately, the data could be invalid (Lombard, Snyder-Duch and Bracken, 2003). If coding results fail to achieve reliability, then it means the coders have deviated, the coding instructions were not clear, the category definitions and the units of analysis were not specified correctly, or a combination of these (Wimmer and Dominick, 1991).

Lombard et al. (2003:3) further distinguish between coding latent and manifest content. Manifest content is information that is on the surface, while in the case of latent content the coders must provide subjective interpretations based on their own mental schema. This research study intends to use both levels of coding by placing themes with implicit meanings under a specific category.

It is recommended by Wimmer and Dominick (1991) that to achieve acceptable levels of reliability:

- Category boundaries should be defined. Three coders, including the researcher, coded the content in the pilot study. Categories and units were clearly defined to other coders by explaining what type of content each entailed.

- Coders should be trained in using the instrument and the category system. A three-hour training session was held and coders were instructed on how to follow the categories outlined in the coding sheet guidelines. The coding sheet consists of categories and units of analysis. Instructions were given on how to access company websites, how to click on the relevant icon reflecting information in relation to the unit under study as well as further links to the same unit. Frequencies of these units were then to be totalled in the quantification table.

- A pilot study should be conducted. Select a sub-sample of the universe under consideration to be categorised by coders. Data from the pilot study is useful in detecting poorly-defined categories and identifying chronically dissenting coders.

A pilot study was conducted from a sub-sample of five companies, each representing a particular industry.

The Holsti method was used to calculate intercoder reliability using a formula for determining nominal data in terms of percentage agreement. Wimmer and Dominick (1991) refer to the formula thus:

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{2M}{N_1 + N_2}$$

Where M is the number of coding decisions on which coders agree, and N₁ and N₂ are the total number of coding decisions by the first and second coders.

Wimmer and Dominick (1991) assert that while this method is easy to calculate, it has shortcomings as it does not take into account the fact that some coder agreement occurs strictly by chance. This number is a function of the number of categories in the analysis. A two-category system should obtain 50% reliability simply by chance while a five-category system would obtain a 20% agreement by chance, which implies that more categories generate less chance of reliability.

Wimmer and Dominick (1991) and Lombard et al. (2003) note that as a rule of thumb, most published content analyses report a minimum reliability coefficient of about .90 when using Holsti's formula, and about .75 when using Scott's *pi* or Krippendorff's *alpha*. This is particularly evident in some exploratory studies (see Appendix A7).

INDUSTRY	Percentage of agreement
Petroleum	0.25%
Mine	0.25%
Newspaper	0.5%

Radio station	0.50%
Bank	0.25%

The overall inter-coder reliability coefficient for the first pilot study was .30.

Coding results indicate that reliability cannot be achieved for the following reasons:

1. Coder (C) was a chronic dissenter, as extremely high frequencies were recorded in certain categories. This occurred because subtitles with no links to web pages were also coded. The coder looked for certain units from a global website when there was a lack of relevant matter from a local site.
2. Coder (A) underrated a few categories, unaware that the relevant content appeared under icons with headings unrelated to the units under study.
3. Another factor contributing to the state of non-reliability was caused by the frequent updating of websites. Coders did not code web content at the same time, hence the existence of inconsistencies in the case of updated websites. This is one of the challenges identified by Wimmer and Dominick (2003:160): the internet is fluid in nature, with sites constantly changing. Thus, researchers should make sure that all coders view the same material. As some sites may offer both a text-only and a graphic version of the site, these different content features have implications for calculating inter-coder reliability.

Corrective measures based on the above included re-coding, and additional training of the dissenting coder. Coders also undertook to view the same material at the same time, given the constant updating of websites.

According to Lombard et al. (2003:4), a preferred approach would be to calculate and report two indices, taking into account the assumptions and weaknesses of each. With the second test, both Holsti and the Scott's *pi* indices were used.

Scott's *pi* index corrects for the number of categories used and also for the probable frequency of use. This decision was taken because four categories under study could not be catered for using the previous calculation.

The Scott's *pi* formula is as follows:

$$pi = \frac{\% \text{ observed agreement} - \% \text{ of expected agreement}}{1 - \% \text{ expected agreement}}$$

The results are as follows:

See Appendix A8

INDUSTRY	Percentage of agreement
Petroleum	100%
Mine	100%
Newspaper	0.75%
Radio station	100%
Bank	100%

The overall inter-coder reliability coefficient using Holsti's formula is .95. With Scott's *pi* the coefficient is .949.

- Analysing the data

Data will be analysed through descriptive statistics which include percentages, means and modes. Since content analysis data are usually nominal in form, this will call for the chi-square test (Wimmer and Dominick, 1991:169-171).

- Interpreting the results

The interpretation of the results should bring the meaning of the study to the surface and reject or confirm the hypotheses. Coding units into nominal categories yields qualitative data whereas counting the number of units in each category yields quantitative data. Knowing the types of categories informs the researcher about what is being communicated, while the number of units in each category indicates how often these types of messages are being communicated (Wigston, 1997; Wimmer and Dominick, 1991:171).

4. CONTENT ANALYSIS OF COMPANIES

4.1 BP SOUTHERN AFRICA (<http://www.bp.co.za>; accessed January 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	17
Investor information	14
Virtual centre	2
Web surveys	1

4.1.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. The site features consumer fuels, lubricants, gases, commercial products, marine, aviation and chemical products.

Social responsibility. The company mentions its social investment policy. Its projects include job creation, HIV/Aids programmes, Road Safety, environment and employee engagement programmes.

Operations. Various pages list the company's worldwide operations and those in different African states. BP also mentions its oil and gas businesses in Egypt and Algeria, and chemicals and abrasives in other African states.

No information on crisis communication and corporate image exists.

2. Investor information

Share performance, share price and results. The company's investor relations page hosts dividend information, financial performance, investor presentations, share price on the London Stock Exchange and the financial calendar. There is a link to register for the webcast of second quarter results, a link to view advertising videos of the US campaign, another link to purchase more shares and spreadsheets of financial information from the past five years.

Other. On its investor centre page the company posts notices of meetings and voting, shareholder statistics, mergers, acquisitions and dividends. There is a link to interactive tools for ordinary share investors. The chart enables the investor to calculate online the value of his/her shares and chart share price changes versus the UK stock. The investor centre has a feedback application asking for opinions regarding the page.

3. Virtual centre

The site features a "contact us" link for sending queries. The page has a form which requests the name of the writer, e-mail address, telephone number and a window for typing the query. The writer selects the country to which the query should be sent.

4. Web surveys

The survey is listed at the bottom of its media page and is aimed at journalists with a view to improving its service to them. Questions include journalists' main source of news about the company, how they rate the e-mail alert service and how they rate the presentation of press releases and speeches. A rating scale and space for writing additional comments are provided.

4.2 CALTEX SA (<http://www.caltex.co.za>; accessed January, 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	6
Investor information	0
Virtual centre	2
Web surveys	0

4.2.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. The website presents information on its products with further links to brands including specialist lubricants, greases and hydraulic oils.

Social responsibility. The site explains the company's responsibility projects which support education, community development, arts and culture, health, environmental management with a view to conservation and disaster relief. Initiatives to which the company is committed include rescue services, road safety, assistance for the handicapped and the homeless. There are photographs indicating different areas of the company's involvement. A separate page features information on an initiative with Volkswagen called Citiwise. The aim of this initiative is to empower students at seven tertiary institutions by providing driving lessons at a low cost.

Operations. The company hosts a page containing information on its new management structure in Central and Southern Africa, and a map illustrating the geographic regions of other operations. There is also a page listing its worldwide operations classified under different continents with a global map indicating business regions. Some of the countries listed provide links to their websites, while it is assumed that those without links have no websites.

No information on corporate image or crisis communication exists.

2. Investor information

No investor-related information is posted on the website.

3. Virtual centre

The site features a "contact us" link. The page contains a form which requests the writer's personal details, a window for writing a message and a wide selection of locations to which the information should be sent. The website also hosts a "Frequently Asked Questions" page on issues pertaining to the company's operations and management.

4. Web surveys. No surveys are hosted on the website.

4.3 SASOL (<http://www.sasol.co.za>; accessed August 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	20
Investor information	17
Virtual centre	11
Web surveys	0

4.3.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. The company website carries information on its major products, that is chemicals, fuels and oils. Each page is designed according to a format which allows the user to click on a box to select a particular group of chemical categories.

Corporate image. A brief explanation of the company's new corporate identity, implemented over a year ago, is presented. It explains how its new symbol reflects its unified and diverse global businesses.

Social responsibility. The policy underlying social investment is outlined. The company's focus areas include health issues, the environment, education, arts and culture and small business development.

Operations. Various pages cover each country's profile. For each operation, information on production facilities and a wide range of manufactured chemicals is provided.

Other. A business overview of the company's history, listings, workforce and corporate structure is outlined. This structure unfolds as the six key operating businesses.

No information on crisis communication exists.

2. Investor information

Share performance, share price and results. The company hosts the investor centre page which has links to press releases on investor news, financial performance, listings, shareholder information, annual report etc. The annual report presents the balance sheet, the chairman's and chief executive's statements and reviews.

Other. Within its annual report page, interviews about results and reports in the business media are provided. An audio presentation for analysts is also posted. There is a chart indicating operating profits and sales for local, export and foreign business.

3. Virtual centre

The site features an e-mail link to which the user can send queries and comments. There are spaces for entering contact details and the subject of the comment is selected. These range from careers, general, bursaries, and corporate publications. There is a page containing links to a number of divisions bearing contact details of heads of each unit. These units include careers, corporate social investment, brand management, safety, health and the environment.

4. Web surveys. No surveys are hosted on the website.

4.4 TOTAL SA (<http://www.total.co.za>; accessed September 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	43
Investor information	0
Virtual centre	2
Web surveys	0

4.4.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. The company hosts a page with links to automotive, agricultural, commercial and industrial products, and material safety data sheets. Further links to subcategories of products are available.

Corporate image. An announcement of a plan to merge with another oil giant is featured. This move offers both shareholders and employees the best business and financial prospects. The logos of both companies are displayed with the envisaged new name *Total Fina Elf* appearing at the bottom of the home page.

Social responsibility. The site hosts a page with links to its commitments including the environment, conservation and rescue operations. Clicking on the headings leads to numerous pages dealing with the company's commitment to projects including education, arts and culture. The company has supported the South African National Parks for over forty years in environmental conservation projects. In 2002, Total SA celebrated a 13-year partnership with the Department of Water Affairs in support of Arbor Week.

Operations. Total SA has fully-owned subsidiary companies in Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana.

Other. The site features information on the year of Total's establishment as the largest French investment in South Africa. Two other South African giants have a controlling interest of 57% of the shares in South Africa, while the rest are controlled by Total in France.

The site features an organogram of management, another of its shareholders and the company's percentage of shares in other oil industries such as a crude oil refinery, base oil refinery and bitumen.

No crisis-related information is featured on this site.

2. Investor information

No investor-related information is posted on the website.

3. Virtual centre

The site features a "contact us" link. This page provides an e-mail address and invites customers to send their opinions of the company and its services. A webmaster's e-mail invites comments on the design, layout and graphics of the site.

4. Web surveys. No surveys are hosted on the website.

4.5 DE BEERS (<http://www.debeersgroup.com>; accessed September 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	72
Investor information	11
Virtual centre	2
Web surveys	0

4.5.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. The website includes information on its products, history and achievements.

Social responsibility. A site on Sustainable Investment offers further links to its commitment to the environment, environmental projects, stakeholder relationships, community outreach such as charities, HIV/AIDS care centre and employee training.

Operations. The site offers links to its various global operations which indicate the location, date of establishment, number of employees and quantity of minerals excavated over the past three years.

There is no information on corporate image or crisis communication.

2. Investor information

The site carries no investor information on shares or annual reports showing financial results. Some investor-related information is published as media releases, publishing headlines pertaining to annual reviews and audited results.

3. Virtual centre

A "contact us" page with e-mail applications is made available, inviting ideas, questions and comments.

4. Web surveys No survey links are available on the site.

4.6 ANGLO PLATINUM (<http://www.angloplatinum.com>; accessed August 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	8
Investor information	4
Virtual centre	1
Web surveys	0

4.6.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. The website mentions the minerals that are mined.

Social responsibility. Summaries of diverse programmes with links to detailed information are posted. These include initiatives aimed at job creation, education, crime prevention, health and small business development.

Operations. Its operations host different subsidiaries indicating the ounces of platinum produced, achievements and innovations.

No information is reflected on either corporate image or crisis management.

2. Investor information

Each page presents market prices for its various minerals in US dollars as well as share prices. A separate page on share prices features the share code, bid, offer, share volume and time of release. An interactive share chart illustrating share performance is featured on another page. Links to related pages are provided for metal prices and rand/dollar exchange rates. Investors can also register online to receive alerts on share performance via their e-mail.

3. Virtual centre

Web feedback is sent to corporate communication where users select the kind of query they have and forward it through e-mail.

4. Web surveys. No surveys are hosted on the website.

4.7 GOLD FIELDS (<http://www.avmin.co.za> ; accessed October 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	10
Investor information	6
Virtual centre	4
Web surveys	0

4.7.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. The website includes information on its products, history and management.

Social responsibility. The site explains the mine's responsibility projects towards the staff which provide equal opportunities and training. Responsibilities towards the community focus on education, skills development and income generation opportunities.

Operations. The site lists headings with links to the various operations of gold, base metals and ferrous metals. It also provides information on the geographic regions of each operation.

No information is reflected on corporate image or crisis management.

2. Investor information

The site hosts Power Point presentations, downloadable speeches with photographic images of presenters of results, budget and investments. The analyst's report is posted on share performance. A link exists on every page to reports on share prices.

3. Virtual centre

The site features a "contact us" link. An e-mail application is available, inviting questions and suggestions pertaining to investor relations information. The user can also furnish his/her details online and request notification on earnings releases, annual interim reports and events. Other information can be e-mailed to media resources compilers.

4. Web surveys. No surveys are hosted on the website.

4.8 KUMBA RESOURCES (<http://www.iscor.co.za>; accessed December 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	8
Investor information	4
Virtual centre	1
Web surveys	0

4.8.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. The website hosts a page within the company profile which features various steel and ore products, strategy, markets and investors.

Social responsibility. The website offers summaries of diverse programmes with links to more information. These include initiatives aimed at safety, health, environmental and social investment.

Operations. The page hosts four South African steel operations presenting various products per operation (flat steel, long steel, iron ore, coal). Percentages of production for each category are also indicated.

No information is reflected on corporate image or crisis management.

2. Investor information

Investor information is presented within the annual and interim reports mentioned above. Kumba Resources has a link to the JSE Securities exchange website which hosts a share price chart and currency indicators. A PDF page hosts the audited group financial results. This page details group results for its various products, dividends, group income statements, cash flow and balance sheets.

3. Virtual centre

A contacts link exists which sends the user to the e-mail window to forward feedback.

4. Web surveys. No surveys are hosted on the website.

4.9 ANGLOVAAL GOLD (AVGOLD)(<http://www.avgold.co.za>; accessed January 2004)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	69
Investor information	46
Virtual centre	2
Web surveys	0

4.9.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. The site hosts information on gold, ferrous and base metals, each with its stock exchange listings in Johannesburg and Brussels.

Operations. Various pages host three operations in different provinces indicating the number of ounces produced. A map indicates the areas of operation. Information includes the number of tons produced each month. Several photographic images of the mines, drilling equipment, hydraulic drills and other earth-moving machinery are featured.

No information exists on corporate image, social responsibility or crisis management.

Other. Avgold is a major shareholder with a 42% shareholding, and others hold 12% and 19% of shares respectively.

2. Investor information

Investor information appears within annual and interim reports. Avgold has a page which hosts a share price chart and currency indicators. A PDF page hosts the audited group financial results. The page details group results for its various products, dividends, group income statement, cash flow, balance sheet, accounting policies, auditor's report and director's report. A web cast can also be viewed which announces quarterly results. If the user wishes to access a web cast specific software that is compatible with that used on the site is required.

Other. Press releases dating back four years cover investor relations news. These include unaudited results, foreign exchange and the opening of a new mining operation. News pertaining to important announcements, results and production is also posted. A shareholder's diary appears with dates for announcement of quarterly results and the annual general meeting.

Publications can be requested by completing a form online and selecting the quarterly report required. These financial reports date back four years. Users can also register for alerts to request information on shareholders, fund managers, analysts and media. A frequently-asked-questions page focuses on investor-related information.

3. Virtual centre

A page with investor relations contacts is posted. Telephone, fax details as well as e-mail addresses of the General Manager: Investor Relations and the Company Secretary are provided.

4. Web surveys. No surveys are hosted on the website.

4.10 BUSINESS DAY (<http://www.businessday.co.za>; accessed September 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	5
Investor information	1
Virtual centre	1
Web surveys	0

4.10.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. The newspaper has a page hosting other companies' product news. The newspaper offers a brief synopsis of readers' psychographic standing.

Corporate image. No information exists.

Social responsibility. No social investment projects are noted.

Operations. The newspaper's head office is in Johannesburg with correspondents in Pretoria, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and overseas.

Other. Editorial contact details are posted. A page devoted to advertisers indicating rates for the number of impressions, banners and buttons is featured. A subscription page hosting a form with options for different rates is posted for home delivery of the hard copy. Another page hosts announcements of the company's financial presentations, a link to the company's press releases, and another link to the web cast presentation or teleconference call.

2. Investor information

The site publishes investor information of other companies. It publishes figures for JSE all shares, gold mining, industry and currency values of rand/ US dollars. Market news pertaining to the rand, JSE, bonds, and gold is also posted.

3. Virtual centre

The site features a "click here to e-mail the editor" and a similar one for the webmaster.

4. Web surveys. No surveys are hosted by the website.

4.11 SOWETAN (<http://www.sowetan.co.za>; accessed September 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	8
Investor information	0
Virtual centre	1
Web surveys	0

4.11.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. The site features the history of the newspaper and its values during the country's political evolution.

Operations. No areas of operations are given.

Other. The newspaper features a page with editors' photographs documenting its historical development from 1932, when it was known as *Bantu World*, through its years as *The World* to its current brand. A page is also hosted within the promotional site which offers an analysis of readership profile. The profile includes daily sales figures, readership figures and readers' demographics. Reader psychographics are noted, including leisure and sports activities.

Social responsibility. Nation-Building projects are included on the same page as the readership profile. Projects include Community Builder projects, the Pick 'n Pay Parenting project and Transnet Massed Choir Festival. The promotional

company also offers a two-page account of the newspaper's Nation-Building activities.

No information on crisis communication or corporate image exists.

2. Investor information

No information is available.

3. Virtual centre. There is a "contact us" link which directs the user to an e-mail window.

4. Web surveys. No surveys are hosted on the website.

4.12 THE STAR (<http://www.iol.co.za>; accessed Oct 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	9
Investor information	0
Virtual centre	2
Web surveys	0

4.12.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. On its home page, the site features a paragraph on the purpose of the newspaper, a brief on its target market and a letter from the editor. Furthermore, two pages detail the demographic profile of its readers, providing percentages for race groups, gender, education, household income, languages and LSM measures. Circulation figures and cost price are also listed

under the icon “key facts” on the home page. There is a page which breaks down sales per province, indicating growth in percentages.

Corporate image. No information is available.

Social responsibility. No information is available.

Operations. The newspaper operates only from Johannesburg.

Other. One page features forms to subscribe online, and subscription rates for different time periods and days of the week are listed. Another page hosts advertising rates for the classified section, travel, entertainment and motoring section. Advertising tariffs are given for the various formats. Key personnel, including photographs of editors and reporters, are featured together with their e-mail contacts.

2. Investor information

No investor-related information is posted on the website.

3. Virtual centre

The site features a letters/opinion link. This page invites letters or opinions on anything published. Letters are sent through an e-mail-enabled format, providing a window for typing messages. A list of letters categorised under sport, politics and others, is provided with comments on published news. A forum containing reader's letters is provided, and responses to published letters and opinions are given.

4. Web surveys. No surveys are hosted on the website.

4.13 PRETORIA NEWS (<http://www.pretorianews.co.za>; accessed September 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	2
Investor information	12
Virtual centre	9
Web surveys	0

4.13.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. The "about us" page presents the mission of the newspaper. News articles that are published bear strong links to the politics, economy and the lifestyle of its readers in that region. Another page details the demographic profile of its readers, listing percentages for race groups, gender, education, household income, languages and LSM measures.

Social responsibility. No information is provided.

Operations. The newspaper operates from Pretoria and this forms part of the information given about the newspaper.

No corporate image or crisis communication information exists.

2. Investor information

Other. The newspaper is linked to the business report section which covers news on politics and the economy. There is news about companies, local and international markets, mining sector reports, a unit trusts page which provides a brief on various types of trusts, economic reports and finance reports. As far as corporate financials are concerned, a three page list of companies features information on these companies' share volumes and prices. A currency

converter page helps users to click on the country of choice and then on the "convert" button.

3. Virtual centre

There is a page which requires the user's details and bears a window for sending views on any subject. Another page presents excerpts from readers' letters, each with links to the full story. This affords readers the opportunity to air their views on any matter, particularly those arising from the media.

4. Web surveys. No surveys are conducted on the site.

4.14 THE SUNDAY TIMES (<http://www.sundaytimes.co.za>; accessed October 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	2
Investor information	0
Virtual centre	2
Web surveys	0

4.14.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. The site does not offer any information on the newspaper's products or any other company information.

Social responsibility. The newspaper sponsors the annual Literary Awards.

Operations. The newspaper features its national offices, bearing the names of reporters and editors. Links to overseas correspondents are also provided.

No corporate image or crisis communication information exists.

2. Investor information

No investor information is provided.

3. Virtual centre

The site features a page containing information on how to lodge a complaint relating to editorial content. The address, telephone details and e-mail of the press ombudsman are given. Contact details of the newspaper are provided for the forwarding of complaints.

4. Web surveys. No surveys are conducted on the site.

4.15 SUNDAY INDEPENDENT(<http://www.independent.co.za>; accessed August 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	5
Investor information	12
Virtual centre	3
Web surveys	0

4.15.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. The editor provides an overview of the target audience of the newspaper and the core issues it covers.

Operations. No location of operations is given but the reader can infer this from contact details of editorial staff which are listed with Johannesburg dialling codes.

Corporate image. A page lists the awards received by the newspaper, which include the CNN Journalism Award, sports reporting awards and various other journalism awards.

Other. Both the demographic and psychographic profiles of readers are listed. The circulation page features the sales breakdown in various provinces. The editor's and other key personnel profiles are provided with e-mail addresses. No social responsibility or crisis communication information exists.

2. Investor information

Other. The newspaper is linked to the business report section which covers news on politics and the economy. News about companies, local and international markets, mining sector reports, the unit trusts page, economic reports and finance reports are published. Corporate financials feature a three-page list of companies with information on their share values.

3. Virtual centre

Feedback is provided via e-mail. There is a window for typing a message to the editor in which readers may voice an opinion on any subject, from news coverage to opinions about the site. There is also a page for sending opinions and letters. These letters are published as part of a discussion forum with headings such as "views on what's making news", "sports", "politics" and other topics. There are also e-mail links to circulation personnel.

4. Web surveys No surveys are conducted on the site.

4.16 RADIO IKWEKWEZI (<http://www.hal.co.za> ;accessed October 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	3
Investor information	0
Virtual centre	0
Web surveys	0

4.16.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. The station posts information on its mission and vision and various formats.

Operations. The station lists areas covered by its network, with a map to highlight these regions.

No information is available on its corporate social investment, corporate image or crisis communication efforts.

Other. The station posts information on Radio Audience Measurement Systems research indicating listenership figures and demographics (gender, home languages, age, household income, province). Daily programmes and DJ information are outlined.

2. Investor information

No investor information appears on the web.

3. Virtual centre

No links to contact the station are available.

4. Web surveys. No surveys are hosted on the website.

4.17 JAKARANDA 94.2 (<http://www.jacarandafm.com>; accessed September 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	7
Investor information	0
Virtual centre	2
Web surveys	0

4.17.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. Includes information on its service, and a brief overview of audience demographics with listenership figures from Radio Measurement Systems surveys. The site also highlights its transmitters and the broadcast studio.

Social responsibility. The site hosts information on a musical event sponsored in association with Toyota. The station runs a number of quizzes such as a music quiz and celebrity quiz; DVDs are given away to winners. Homemakers' competitions are run and cash prizes are offered. The station also sponsors an annual cycling event known as the CANSA Lost City Classic. Messages are posted on the website reminding entrants to stay tuned for details regarding this event. The station has launched a Training and Education Fund which assists tertiary education students by awarding them bursaries and providing them with a year's training on completion of their studies. Community radio stations also stand to benefit from this fund.

No corporate image or crisis communication information is available.

Operations. The station hosts a page with a frequency map which illustrates the provinces reached by the signal. There is also a directional map indicating the location of the station.

Other. Images of employees, including newsroom personnel and brief information on their roles are provided. Every page hosts a box featuring the song which is playing and the name of the artist in the top left-hand corner. The website hosts an events icon with a link to a community calendar announcing sports events and fairs.

2. Investor information

No investor information is available.

3. Virtual centre

The site features a “talk to us” page which invites users to send their opinions. The user completes his/her personal details and types the information in the space provided. There is a frequently-asked-questions page dealing with queries from users of the station’s website.

4. Web surveys No surveys are hosted on the website.

4.18 YFM (<http://www.yfm.co.za>; accessed October 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	4
Investor information	0
Virtual centre	2
Web surveys	1

4.18.1. A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Operations. The station lists the provinces its signals reach, with the frequencies for each province and town.

Other. Picture galleries of the station's events, such as the 2nd Black Film Festival and Soul Train Party, are posted. A page exists with further links to information on DJs, the shows they host and their work experience.

No information on the station's service, corporate image, social investment or crisis communication is listed.

3. Investor information

No information is available.

3. Virtual centre

There is an e-mail link to the web editor only. There is a link on the announcement page which leads to a subsequent page and a form to request special tracks. The form is then sent through the "submit" button.

4. Web surveys A poll is posted with a "yes" or "no" enabled button, but the topic is not communication-related.

4.19 METRO FM (<http://www.metrofm.co.za>; accessed November 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	46
Investor information	0
Virtual centre	5
Web surveys	0

4.19.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate Communication

Products/Services. A paragraph provides the station's history, unique focus area, mission and vision. There is a brief overview of audience demographics and listenership figures. Graphs and charts point to the age, household income, race, gender and LSM groups of the station's audience. Psychographics are also indicated to reflect audience's lifestyle.

Operations. The radio station operates from Gauteng with signals reaching some parts of Africa and Europe through world space satellite, DSTV audio channel, and worldwide through the live audio stream from the station's website.

Corporate Image. The website boasts a page featuring its awards from recording companies. These awards focus on the station's successful promotion of certain artists.

Social Investment. The site hosts a page which announces the winners of CD hampers.

Other. The director's profile is given. The shareholding structure indicates four holding companies with their shareholding percentages. A page hosts the type of music played by the station. The weekly programme line-up is provided with broadcast times, the name of the show and the host. News briefs are given, titles of releases of local and international news, sport and business news. Clicking on the title leads to a full news article. Events including workshops, jazz festivals and stage shows are announced. Information covers the venue, date, time and admission fee.

Images of employees, including newsroom personnel, and a synopsis of their roles is hosted. Each page features the name of the song and the artist in the top

left-hand corner. The website carries an events icon with a link to the community calendar which announces sports events and fairs.

No information exists on crisis communication.

2. Investor information

No information is available.

3. Virtual centre

There are e-mail links to sports editors, sports journalists, morning and afternoon news editors and the African desk editor. A "letters page" shows excerpts from letters from listeners in South Africa and overseas. Letters can be e-mailed on site. A page for posting suggestions is available, inviting opinions and comments about the station, the website and any other issue. A "contact us" page lists the address, telephone numbers and e-mail address of the station.

4. Web surveys No web surveys are run by the radio station.

4.20 RADIO 702 (<http://www.702.com>; accessed December 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	7
Investor information	0
Virtual centre	1
Web surveys	0

4.20.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. This includes information on its services, a historical overview which outlines the station's areas of operation over the past two decades and its vision for the future. Its history is also featured in the galleries link, featuring presenters during functions which marked new developments for the station.

Social responsibility. The station engages in Drug Awareness road shows by visiting schools in Gauteng. The page hosts photographs featuring schools which were visited. The site also hosts information on its help line which offers counseling on various problems. The station provides information on the annual "Walk the Talk" events in partnership with FNB and announcements of musical concerts held in association with The Department of Arts and Culture.

Operations. The station operates in Johannesburg.

Other. Events taking place in Gauteng are announced on the community billboard. The weekly programme line-up with the names of presenters is provided. Each presenter has a photo-link on the home page to more information about the show. A page bearing photographs and presenters' profiles is available, and clicking on the image reflects information about the presenter. There is a page with snippets of the weather forecast which requires the user to click on the required city for an update. An audio stream allows one to listen to live broadcasts by clicking on an arrow to make the connection. Information is provided on the various versions of Windows required to connect to an audio stream and what to do when encountering technical problems.

2. Investor information

No investor information is available on the site.

3. Virtual centre

The site features a "contact us" link to presenters' e-mail addresses only.

4. Web surveys No surveys are hosted on the website.

4.21 DEVELOPMENT BANK OF SOUTHERN AFRICA (DBSA)

(<http://www.dbsa.org>; Accessed January 2004)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	12
Investor information	23
Virtual centre	3
Web surveys	0

4.21.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. The site features a page on the nature of the bank's business, which is the financing of infrastructural development. The names of the chairperson, the non-executive director and regional managers are provided as well as business contact details.

Social responsibility. The bank oversees the "Job Creation Fund", an amount of R60m was raised by three trade union federations (COSATU, NACTU, FEDUSA) for the fund. The fund targets literacy programmes, women, the rural poor, and the youth. The bank also uses media releases as a mode of communicating its responsibilities. Proposals to be considered for funding are invited from the

public. There is also a link to the "Concept Proposal" form and an e-mail link to allow one to submit the proposal.

Operations. The bank operates from Midrand.

No information on crisis communication or corporate image exists.

Other. The bank hosts a page that lists the projects in which it is involved, including the construction of toll roads, the Mpumalanga airport linked to a game park and the treatment of domestic waste water for industrial use in a KwaZulu-Natal town. Another page lists dated headlines and authors of documents which can be retrieved online free of charge. The home page has links to a page on the latest political events in development programmes and The World Summit on Sustainable Development. The bank supports the Summit by hosting some of its side events. A link to the Summit's programme and a programme of bus tours are available on site.

2. Investor information

Share performance, share price and results. Such information is hosted within the annual report page. There are headings with links to topics such as the director's report, operations overview and financial overview.

3. Virtual centre

The home page features an e-mail link for use when writing to the bank. E-mail contacts are provided for ordering publications.

4. Web surveys No surveys are hosted on the website.

4.22 RAND MERCHANT BANK (<http://www.rmb.co.za>; accessed January 2004)

Quantification system	
Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	5
Investor information	6
Virtual centre	2
Web surveys	0

4.22.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. The site features the bank's history, business activities and services including corporate finance, investment banking, mining, natural resources and profitability over the last two years.

Corporate image. The bank's winning eight awards in the past four years is indicative of a positive corporate image. The awards are for the first bank to introduce futures trading, the most innovative deals, best company to work for, a leading merger and acquisition player.

Social responsibility. The site hosts three pages of information on its social investment projects. The merchant bank spends 1% of its after-tax profit on a number of upliftment initiatives including education, crime prevention, environment and conservation, arts and culture and community care. Another page shows a pie chart indicating the fund's grants in percentages per sector from 2000 to 2001.

Operations. The bank has offices in South Africa, Ireland, Mauritius, Australia and the UK.

No information on crisis communication exists.

2. Investor information

Share performance, share price and results. Investor information is located within the banking partner's site. It links the user to pages pertaining to shareholder's diary, presentations, economic reviews and credit ratings. Financial results are also hosted, with graphs and tables indicating share price and share trades. The bottom of the page offers a link to the financial news headlines of the past five months.

3. Virtual centre

The site offers e-mail links to spokespersons in various divisions, while the financial results page is linked to human resources, investor relations, marketing and general.

4. Web surveys No surveys are hosted on the website.

4.23 BOE MERCHANT BANK (<http://www.myboe.com>; accessed September 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	20
Investor information	0
Virtual centre	1
Web surveys	0

4.23.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. The site features links to information on the products and services such as financial advisory services, private banking and property management.

Social responsibility. The bank's sponsorship focuses on cricket, show jumping and sports car rallies. Other initiatives include supporting organisations such as the Society for the Blind and the Organ Donor Foundation.

Operations. The bank is located in Johannesburg, the Western Cape, Southern and Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

No information on corporate image or crisis communication exists.

2. Investor information

No investor information is provided.

3. Virtual centre

The site offers a "contact us" link which requests the user's details. The user indicates in the appropriate block whether the comment should be submitted to personal stockbrokers, private clients or unit trusts. Comments are entered in the window provided and sent by clicking the submit button.

4. Web surveys. No surveys are hosted on the website.

4.24 FIRST NATIONAL BANK (<http://www.fnb.co.za>; Accessed December 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	8
Investor information	2
Virtual centre	3
Web surveys	0

4.24.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. The site provides the history of the bank since its establishment in 1838 and its development to its current state. A separate page hosts further links to products offered by the bank, such as personal banking, business banking, corporate banking, agricultural banking, internet and telephone banking.

Social responsibility. The bank uses news releases as a mode of communicating its "good corporate citizenship". The releases cover FNB and other donors' funding of poetry in Durban. Another news release states the bank's contribution to school music.

Operations. The bank's website lists neither its head office nor its branches nationwide.

No corporate image or crisis communication information exists.

2. Investor information

Share performance, share price and results. There is a page featuring the bank's unit trusts, selling and buying prices, the latest market indices and their values.

The share price across the bar, showing buying and selling price plus share volume, is reflected.

3. Virtual centre

The site features a "contact us" link on the investor relations page. There is a frequently-asked-questions page focusing on various topics pertaining to the selected topic. There is also a form accessed by clicking on the icon "forms" which requests the visitor's contact details, and a window for typing comments, complaints and requests for information or compliments.

4. Web surveys. No surveys are hosted on the website.

4.25 STANDARD BANK (<http://www.standard.co.za>; accessed October 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	51
Investor information	24
Virtual centre	35
Web surveys	1

4.25.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate communication

Products/ Services. The site features various links which cover a wide range of products offered. The categories "online" and "electronic services" include autopay, prepaid services and telephone banking. The "individual banking" category comprises private banking, investments and loans. Business and corporate banking comprise small and medium enterprises, institutional banking,

and agricultural services. International banking, offshore banking and African offices are represented.

Operations. A number of African countries are listed, including Botswana, Lesotho, Kenya and Nigeria, together with the addresses of corporate offices and contact details. International businesses are located in South America, Europe, Asia and North America. A page for locating local branches is provided. In searching, the user clicks on an alphabetical panel with the first letter of the branch name, or may type the name into the search box.

Social responsibility. The bank sponsors cricket, music and arts festivals.

Other. The site features online application forms for different services, including home loans, savings accounts, vehicle financing and credit cards.

No information on corporate image or crisis communication exists.

2. Investor Information

Share performance, share price and results. Share price, bid price and selling price scroll across the investor centre home page. Key financial, analytical and performance information include financial statements, balance sheets and income statements. Interim announcements are made comprising earnings, commentary on results and accounting policies.

3. Virtual centre

Various e-mail links are provided for enquiries and links to the bank's various products. Telephone details are also listed, including offshore operations and international e-mail links.

4. Web surveys

Other. Surveys are not run online, but the site features reports on various aspects researched such as local currency, economics research, emerging markets and forex rates.

4.26 NEDBANK (<http://www.nedbank.co.za>; accessed September 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	6
Investor information	0
Virtual centre	1
Web surveys	0

4.26.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate Communication

Products/ Services. The site outlines services which include savings accounts, assurance and lending.

Social responsibility. Five pages list the bank's social investment programmes. These include education, arts, health and charity.

Operations. A page presents addresses of regions in various provinces from which the bank operates. Contact details of regional and area managers are also made available.

Other. This bank posts information on its business partners. These are major companies with a global presence whose focus areas are also stipulated. Shareholder information is also listed, revealing a structure which includes consortia and other investment companies.

No information on corporate image or crisis communication exists.

2. Investor information

No information is provided.

3. Virtual centre

There is a box for searching for a particular branch. The user types in the branch name and then clicks "search". An e-mail address is provided for contacting the bank. It is not mentioned whether suggestions, comments or other matters are invited.

5. Web surveys No surveys are hosted on the website.

4.27 PEOPLES' BANK (<http://www.peoplesbank.co.za>; accessed September 2003)

Quantification system

Category	Number of links
Corporate communication	193
Investor information	0
Virtual centre	3
Web Surveys	0

4.27.1 A qualitative analysis

1. Corporate Communication

Products/ Services. Numerous links to products are provided. These are categorised under "individual banking" and indicate various banking accounts, financing, electronic banking and foreign exchange. Other categories are "private banking", "business banking" and "banking for the professional".

Social responsibility. Various pages exist focusing on the arts, environment and sports. Each page is linked to information on individual programmes, the philosophy guiding the programme, news and reviews, and frequently asked questions.

Operations. A searchable format in which the user selects the branch and clicks the button "search" is made available.

No information on corporate image or crisis communication exists.

2. Investor information

No information is provided.

3. Virtual centre

A page entitled "talk to us" is provided, which requests the user's personal details. Numerous banking topics are listed from which the user selects one and types the message in the space provided.

4. Web surveys

No opinion surveys are run online, but the results of opinion polls conducted elsewhere are reflected. Questions focus on various sponsorship trusts. Results show percentages received under "yes", "no" and "unsure" options.

5. DESCRIPTIVE SURVEY METHOD

The researcher also employed descriptive research as a second method of gathering data. Gay and Diehl (1992:14) define descriptive research as "research that involves collecting data in order to test hypotheses or answer questions

concerning the current status of the subject of the study". A descriptive study determines and reports the way things are. This method is commonly used to assess attitudes or opinions towards individuals, organisations, events or procedures. Data may be collected through a questionnaire survey, interviews or observations (Gay and Diehl, 1992:14).

5.1 Advantages of survey research

According to Wimmer and Dominick (1983:110), surveys can be used to investigate problems in realistic settings. In view of the amount of information gathered, the cost is reasonable. Researchers can select from mail, telephone or personal interviews, whichever is the most cost effective method in their particular circumstances. Large amounts of data can be collected with ease from diverse respondents. A large number of variables can be examined, be they demographic or psychographic, and data can be analysed using multivariate statistics. Existing data from archives, documents, and other material can be used as primary sources.

In this study, intranet and e-mail usage are examined within organisational contexts. Questionnaires will be e-mailed, thus reducing the cost of sending faxes and postage. Selected respondents represent diverse industries. In analysis, descriptive statistics will be used. Data is not collected from existing material; instead, a questionnaire will be developed to conduct the survey.

5.2 Disadvantages of survey research

According to Wimmer and Dominick (1983:110), independent variables cannot be manipulated as in laboratory experiments, thus causal relationships between independent and dependant variables cannot be established. The wording of questions and the placement of items within questionnaires may cause a bias in survey results. Also, survey research is dependent on sampling techniques. If the

sample is largely unrepresentative, the results will have little relevance to other situations. In addition, Gay and Diehl (1992:236) mention that self-report studies often have a poor response rate as many respondents do not return mailed questionnaires or attend scheduled interviews. Uncontrollable variables may interfere with the study if some significant event occurs halfway through interviewing session.

This study does not attempt to establish causal relations, hence it is characterised by descriptive hypotheses. The questionnaires were pre-tested to clarify bias. From a sample of twenty-seven, only eleven respondents returned questionnaires. This could lead to incorrect conclusions. For instance, in the case of web cast conferences, the conclusion may have been drawn that in the media industry, only a few respondents have access to some form of intranet. However, it is possible that non-respondents use the intranet and e-mail in more ways than those reported. Those who did not respond may also have engaged in virtual media conferences. Thus, it should not be inferred that the media industry in Gauteng does not engage in web cast conferences.

5.3 Data collection approach

Two different questionnaires will be used as instruments to gather data from the chosen sample. One will collect data from banks, the oil industry and the mining industry, and the other will be geared specifically to the media industry. This is because the nature of the latter's operations may differ from those of other companies. However, questions pertaining to the intranet remained unchanged. The questionnaires intended for the media industry attempt to gather answers about practices on which companies embark in the course of executing their media relations function.

Initially telephone calls were made to request e-mail addresses of respondents and to explain the nature of the research project. Questionnaires were sent through e-mail to selected respondents.

The questionnaire contained an introductory paragraph explaining its purpose. Numerous follow-up telephone calls to remind respondents were made within the first week of sending out the questionnaires. Subsequently, e-mails were sent as reminders when the researcher was unable to contact the respondents telephonically.

Questionnaires consisted of both close-ended and open-ended questions. In the close-ended questions, respondents were asked to select an answer from a list provided by the researcher. This ensured uniformity of responses, making the answers easily quantifiable during analysis. It is best to include an "other" option and to provide a blank space to accommodate important, unpredicted responses (Wimmer and Dominick, 1983:111-112).

Close-ended questions required respondents to indicate which areas or aspects pertaining to uses of the intranet and e-mail applied in their organisations. Open-ended questions allowed for responses that researchers might not have foreseen initially when constructing the questionnaire. The difficulty with open-ended questions is the amount of time it takes to collect and analyse the data owing to the variation in responses. Open-ended questions allow respondents to elaborate on their particular use of specified ICTs. In the final analysis, various responses which were related in meaning were grouped together and quantified as one response.

5.3.1 Rationale for the general questionnaire (See appendix F)

The aim of the questions is to assess:

- Whether organisations have intranets. The question aims to establish the intranet presence or assess reasons for its absence.

- Whether companies use the intranet for communication purposes. The question seeks to determine whether PR professionals have adopted this medium.
- Whether internal communication functions are executed through the intranet. The aim of the question is to establish how professionals exploit this medium in the course of executing their functions.
- Whether the functions of publicity are posted on the intranet. This question aims to establish whether public relations tools are converted to this medium.
- The frequency of intranet usage. This question seeks to establish whether the intranet has substituted or complemented conventional media.
- The advantages of using intranets compared to other modes of communication. The question intends to establish how companies benefit from this medium.
- Whether public relations functions are posted on the intranet. The question aims to establish whether the mainstream functions of PR are executed through the intranet.
- Which stakeholders can access the intranet. The question seeks to determine whether the intranet is widely adopted by the workforce and thus streamlines communication.
- How the intranet has enhanced communication with stakeholders. The question aims to establish if this mode performs better than other conventional modes.
- Whether organisations use e-mail for communication purposes. This question aims to find out if this internet application is adopted in executing communication functions.
- Which particular PR functions e-mail is used for. This question seeks to establish if this application is fully exploited to embrace certain functions.
- Whether media relations have changed or improved e-mail use. This question establishes any changes in liaising with journalists.
- The advantages of e-mail use. This question establishes the benefits of e-mail over conventional means.

- The pros and cons of the use of ICTs in general. This question seeks to establish the return on investment and/or problems brought about by technologies.

5.3.2 Rationale for the media questionnaire (See Appendix G)

The aim of the following rationale is to establish:

- Whether the media visit company websites to search of information. The question aims to establish whether media organisations consider the web in conjunction with other news gathering techniques, and to assess their reasons if they do not do so.
- Which information media organisations look for on company websites. This seeks to establish if there is specific information which is of interest to the media.
- Whether the media still acquire traditional or electronic kits. This question aims to assess whether media organisations are inclined to use ICTs or prefer traditional methods.
- The experience of a virtual media conference. This seeks to explore the processes in which journalists engage during web casting conferences.
- Whether organisations have intranets. The question aims to establish the intranet presence or assess reasons for its absence.
- The functions of publicity posted on the intranet. This question aims to establish whether public relations tools are converted to this medium.
- The advantages of using intranets over other modes. The question intends to establish how companies benefit from this medium.
- Public relations functions posted on the intranet. The question aims to establish whether the mainstream functions of PR are executed through the intranet.
- How the intranet has enhanced communication with stakeholders. The question aims to establish if this mode performs better than other conventional modes.

- Whether the media use e-mail for journalism or reporting purposes. This question seeks to establish whether this internet application is exploited in executing journalistic functions.
- The purposes for which e-mail is used. This question seeks to reveal journalistic tendencies when using this application.
- Whether journalism has changed or improved through e-mail usage. This question establishes any changes brought about when liaising with organisations.
- The advantages of gathering news through e-mail. This question establishes the benefits of e-mail over conventional means.
- Attitudes on pros and cons of the use of ICTs in general. This question seeks to establish the return on investment and/or problems brought about by technologies.

5.4 Method of data analysis

Data is analysed through descriptive statistics. One type of descriptive statistics is the measure of *central tendency* which determines the average score of a group of figures. This measurement enables the researcher to describe a set of data using a single number (Emory and Cooper, 1995:467).

In central tendency the mean score, which is the average of the calculated scores, is used. In order to determine the mean, data should be reflected on a frequency distribution table, as indicated in the appendices. Such a table reflects the manner in which the scores on a given construct occur for each category. In the case of each question, the distribution is reflected and the findings are discussed in the following chapter.

6. CONCLUSION

This chapter has used content analysis to analyse the websites of 27 companies. The frequencies of the units which appear on websites are listed in a quantification table. Qualitative analysis explains the information that is presented on company websites. This analysis will support the statistical analysis which is discussed in the following chapter. Survey research has also been used to gather data from companies which the researcher could not access from internal corporate websites.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will revisit the research problem and its setting, the rationale for conducting the study, the methodologies used and the statistical techniques applied in the data analysis. This is followed by an analysis of the findings of the content analysis inferred from the data matrices. Data is presented separately for each sector. Cross-comparisons between industries will be analysed in relation to the data in Appendix C.

Conclusions drawn from the content analysis and the survey findings for each industry will establish whether the data has offered solutions to the research problem. The extent to which research questions have been answered in each category of the content analysis is discussed. Bar graphs included in Appendix D indicate percentages obtained from the nominal aspect of the content analysis.

The statistical tests for research questions and *chi-square*, as reflected in Appendices E and F respectively, were performed to reveal the differences between observed values and expected values with a view to accepting or rejecting the . The discussion of the validity of the content analysis establishes the suitability of the measuring instrument. Survey findings are discussed with reference to frequency distribution tables, as illustrated in Appendix H.

1. REVISITING THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

Research problem

The research problem outlined in chapter 1 concerns companies that have audiences, publics or stakeholders that are widely dispersed. Communicating to

their audiences through conventional media poses obstacles, including feedback, reach and immediacy. Conventional media such as press releases and magazine coverage lack immediacy. Television and radio convey brief messages which are restricted to time segments. Feedback mechanisms are not available through the same modes.

Organisations use house journals and other printed publications to communicate with their employees. Once again, these lack immediacy as they are produced on a monthly or quarterly basis. Although meetings may be held regularly, they do not always provide adequate opportunities for feedback, and are not always feasible in large organisations, particularly those with global offices.

Certain public relations activities only become evident as completed corporate advertisements or sponsorship activities. This is because conventional media make it impossible to outline the rationale and management decisions motivating such activities. Two-way communication between organisations and their audiences is hampered by limited or absent feedback.

Rationale

Business has entered an era which operates beyond the constraints of a text-based world. The new dynamics of communication are online, interactive and participatory. The purpose of this study is to determine how the function of the printed word has been extended to the new electronic medium.

The internet is a new medium with capabilities that are not present in conventional media. It promises huge opportunities to communicate public relations functions to global audiences at a low cost. As such, its impact in executing public relations functions must be established.

The function of media relations, which is not analysed in content analysis, will be revisited under the heading "other observed communication tools". Media relations have entered a new landscape where the internet offers opportunities that were missing in traditional media relations. Media releases – current and archived – media kits and photographic images are all available on the internet. This study will demonstrate the impact of new technologies, particularly web casting and other media relations activities that go beyond conventional modes of practice.

The advent of the intranet as an internal communication tool presents opportunities which surpass those offered by conventional means. The functions of e-mail in both internal and external communication could play a crucial role in the future practise of public relations. E-mail is also set to play a crucial role in changing the face of media relations.

Delimitations

This study is limited to ICTs – the internet, the intranet and electronic mail. It focuses on how companies use technologies in executing public relations or corporate communications. Specific functions of public relations examined here are environmental scanning, investor relations, crisis management, corporate image/ identity, corporate social responsibility and interactivity. Though media relations are discussed in the literature review chapter as an observed trend, they are not covered in the content analysis. This topic will thus not form a part of the findings of the content analysis, but will be included in the findings of the survey.

This study does not delve into the traditional means of executing the above-mentioned functions. Only an overview of conventional media is provided as a background against which the new technologies will be compared. The study is limited to the way intranet is used for internal communication. Specific public

relations functions that are investigated include publications, corporate image, corporate social responsibility and crisis management. The study is also limited to electronic mail for both internal and external communication. In the case of internal communication, specific reference is made to public relations functions, namely, information dissemination and distribution of publications. In the case of external communication, media relations is the sole focus of electronic mail.

Methodology

Two research methodologies were used. The first method, content analysis, was used to analyse the current content of websites. Content analysis is a measurement instrument in itself, and follows this procedure: the researcher formulates a research question/s, defines the universe, selects the unit of analysis, constructs categories for analysis, establishes a quantification system, codes the content, which includes conducting a pilot study to establish reliability, analyses data and interprets the findings.

The second method used here was a survey questionnaire intended to probe information which could not be retrieved from company intranets or electronic mails. Two types of survey were prepared, one intended for the banking, petroleum and mining industries and the other for media organisations. The questions pertaining to intranet usage were the same in both questionnaires. In both questionnaires, closed and open-ended questions were featured, and there were also questions providing a list of items for selection by respondents. The same sample of twenty-seven companies whose websites were analysed completed the questionnaire survey.

2. CONTENT ANALYSIS FINDINGS

GROUP 1 THE OIL INDUSTRY

Table 4-1 Oil industry data matrix

The corporate communication category reflects a mean score of 21.50, is third highest in the entire sample. This mean score reflects the values obtained from all companies and divided by the number of companies. Corporate communication within the given sample comes third at a frequency of 12.4 %. Interestingly, oil companies have HIV and job creation programmes as part of their social responsibility. This reveals a response to the country's demand for jobs and the combating of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. On the other hand, oil companies reflect a lack of crisis management. Such companies may experience oil spills or plant explosions, as happened at Sasol in 2006. The internet should communicate such information to its customers, the distribution chain in this regard, as they are the first to be affected by such crises.

The standard deviation represents a dispersion of scores or the distance between the scores of individual companies and the mean score. The standard deviation of the oil industry is 13.55, indicating the lowest dispersion within the observed values in the five industries. Other industries present standard deviations of 18.79; 22.06; 22.67 and 77.52 respectively. Since this standard deviation is the lowest, it reveals greater consistency in terms of the units

analysed. Since the deviation is lower than the mean score, a negative relationship, though minimal, exists between them.

The *chi-square* statistic indicates the expected frequency at 95.5, which is comparatively higher than the observed frequency of 86. Since the sample frequency is below the expected frequency, an asymmetric distribution prevails. Observed values of other industries are 67; 81; 167 and 295. This is attributed to less product information and social responsibility content compared to the banking and mining counterparts.

The category of corporate communication is in line with the public information model (Grunig and Hunt, 1984). This is evident in the fact that these websites host product information pertaining to oils, lubricants etc., corporate image and social responsibility aspects. This indicates one-directional communication from these companies to various stakeholders.

The investor information category reflects a mean score of 7.75. The degree of dispersion is 1.52, which is the lowest within the observed values in the five industries. Other industries present dispersions of 2.20; 6.67; and 15.05 respectively, with the exclusion of the radio sector. This indicates greater consistency between the units analysed. A relatively high negative relationship exists as the standard deviation values are below the mean score.

The investor information category has 17.0% coverage, third highest in the categories analysed. The *chi-square* statistic indicates the expected frequency at 25.0 which is lower than the observed value of 31. Therefore a positive relationship prevails. Observed values of other industries are 0; 25; 55 and 71 respectively.

This is applicable to only two oil companies out of four hosting such information. It could be expected that oil companies would host investor-related information

as they have investors. Because oil companies are listed in local and international stock exchanges, hosting investor information is crucial. There should be daily communication on share performance. More important is the issue of information on acquisitions which would inform investors when making decisions on whether to sell or retain shares.

This category fits in with both models of communication (Grunig, 1992; Grunig and Hunt, 1984). The public information model is evident in the presentation of financial statements. The two-way symmetrical model is evident at BP Southern Africa where shareholders can calculate the share price against foreign stock, and where web casting is practised. The interactive nature of ICTs makes communication truly dialogical.

The virtual centre category reflects a mean score of 4.25 with the degree of dispersion at 4.43, the second highest within the observed values over all industries. Other industries present dispersions of 1.26; 1.71; 3.58 and 14.58. This indicates less consistency within the units analysed. Greater consistency is demonstrated in the oil industry as the standard deviation clusters around the mean score, thus showing a positive relationship.

The virtual centre category has a frequency of 16.5% which is the third highest within the sample. The expected count from a chi-square statistic is 14.1 which is lower than the observed value of 17. Thus a positive relationship prevails between observed and expected frequencies. Observed values of other industries are 10; 10; 18 and 48. The reason that this category presents a low value is the lack of discussion forums presented by newspapers and the banking group. Links to various divisions are also limited.

The virtual centre category follows the two-way symmetrical model owing to its purely dialogical nature (Grunig and Hunt, 1984). Reasons for this include the fact that internet users are accorded the opportunity to engage in dialogue with

these companies. Feedback and suggestions are sent through e-mail links provided on websites. It has not been established whether internet users receive feedback from companies as a result of their communication.

Web surveys reflect a mean score of 0.25 and there is no degree of dispersion recorded due to one count derived from BP Southern Africa. Although two other groups, banking and radio, engage in web surveys, the count is too low to yield dispersion scores. The web survey category comprises 33.3% which is derived from one hit from the sample. The percentage equals those of the radio and banking industries. The expected frequency from the chi-square statistic is 0.41 which is lower than the observed score of 1. This is the result of a very low cell value, making the relationship negative. Other industries present observed values of 0; 0; 1 and 1 respectively.

The low occurrence of web surveys may be attributable to companies not integrating the internet into their research strategy, or not taking research seriously. It was expected that web surveys would abound, in the same way as suggestions are invited. In the case of web surveys, a two-way symmetrical model is represented when companies solicit responses from users (Dozier, Grunig and Grunig, 1995; Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

In conclusion: The websites belonging to the four oil companies have proved otherwise in relation to the problem. Widely dispersed stakeholders can be reached simultaneously using the internet. This has made it possible for stakeholders to access corporate information, including the location of company operations, various products, corporate image programmes, and a wide range of social responsibility projects. In this regard, the internet outlines management policies that underlie these activities, something which would not have been possible using only traditional means of communication.

In the past, traditional media were the sole means used to announce company results to investors and other interested parties. Immediacy was not possible when announcing investor-related activities in business sections of the print media. In the case of the internet, investor relations have been expanded to provide dividend information, share prices as they fluctuate on a daily basis, current and archived annual reports and investor-related press releases. Immediacy and interactivity is also evident in BP Southern Africa, which registers investors and media for web casts, hosts an audio presentation by Sasol, offers share-value calculators against foreign stock and enables investors to purchase shares online.

The research problem highlights difficulties in two-way communication between organisations and their public. Internets provide "contact us" links with an e-mail window to enable visitors to send feedback and comments to companies. BP Southern Africa is exceptional as it also conducts web surveys.

Answering research questions

Oil Industry (Corporate Communication)

Research question: *How do PR practitioners adopt ICT as a new medium that complements conventional media in terms of publicising company information (operations, structure etc.)?*

In the corporate communication category, all four companies use ICTs to feature their products. These include consumer fuels, aviation and shipping products, lubricants, hydraulic oils etc. Company operations are also featured by all four companies. Operations are listed locally and worldwide together with the type of business engaged in that particular country. Caltex has links to the websites of different operations.

Under the unit "other", Total SA features its history and major companies with a 57% controlling interest of the shares in South Africa. An organogram of management, its shareholders and the percentage of the company's shares in other oil industries is also illustrated.

Statistics show a 12.4% frequency in communicating corporate communication. Presenting such product information to global customers gives them a better idea of locations of various businesses.

Research question: *To what extent are corporate image, social responsibility and other PR programmes featured on the net?*

Only two companies feature the corporate image function. Total France announces its merger with another oil giant, providing the envisaged new name *Total Fina Elf* and the logo. Sasol announces its new corporate identity, featuring its new molecular symbol. It explains how this symbol reflects its unified and diverse global businesses.

All four companies host social responsibility projects. These include environmental conservation, education, arts and culture, job creation, HIV/Aids programmes, and community development projects. Sasol also engages in small business development. As far as social responsibility is concerned, organisations seeking funding could form an idea of the causes these companies support and whether they are similar to their core operations. No other PR programmes are undertaken by these companies.

Research question: *During times of crisis, how is the internet used to inform stakeholders on how the crisis is being dealt with?*

This question remains unanswered as none of the companies feature crisis-related information. A frequency of 12.4% for this category is thus relatively low.

This means that key stakeholders would have to rely on conventional media for news in this regard.

Oil Industry (Investor Information)

Research question: How do PR practitioners adopt ICT as a new medium to complement conventional media in terms of publicising company information (operations, structure etc.)?

BP and Sasol feature information pertaining to share price, dividend information, presentations and financial performance.

Other matters within the investor information category on BP's website include notices of meetings for investors, mergers and acquisitions. Sasol posts press releases to analysts with investor news and an audio presentation of results. Interviews of audited results in the business media are also posted.

BP posts an interactive chart which enables shareholders to calculate the value of their shares, and to chart share price changes against foreign stock. Feedback regarding the page is invited. There is also a link provided for purchasing additional shares. BP shareholders can register for the web cast of quarterly results and view videos of advertising campaigns in the United States. Given this information, it is clear that BP has taken ICTs very seriously by bringing investor transactions to every shareholder's desktop.

A 17% frequency is relatively low. In this case there is reluctance on the part of Caltex and Total to host investor information. Because these companies have not taken advantage of ICTs, their shareholders are not updated on the latest developments, on changes taking place in stock markets or on other business processes. The view of this researcher is that shareholders will be forced to rely

on newspapers for the posting of share prices and the conventional annual report.

Oil Industry (Virtual Centre)

Research questions: *How do companies use the internet to scan their environment for mentions through discussion forums or "contact us" links?*

How is the internet used to establish two-way communication with the relevant audiences?

All four companies host "contact us" links which invite suggestions, feedback and queries. BP, Sasol and Caltex have a prescribed form requesting the writer's details and providing a space for typing a message, and a selector for the country to which the query should be sent. Sasol also provides e-mail links to heads of various divisions. Total provides a link to the webmaster where comments about the website can be sent.

Shareholders and customers are in the position to engage in dialogue with these companies. Symmetry is revealed here in that these companies are open to suggestions which could be integrated into corporate strategy. The frequency of 16.5% is relatively low. The researcher is of the opinion that companies should establish contact links for each division to enable shareholders and customers to direct information and queries to the correct recipients.

Oil Industry (Web Surveys)

Research question: *How is the internet used for purposes of establishing two-way communication with the relevant audiences?*

BP is the only company that conducts web surveys. The media page hosts a survey aimed at journalists, with a view to improving its service to this audience.

Comments are also invited. The fact that only one company from the sample hosts surveys suggests a lack of enthusiasm for the opportunities presented by ICTs. Priority is given to certain corporate communication functions at the expense of others.

GROUP 2 THE MINING INDUSTRY

Table 4-2 Mining industry data matrix

The category corporate communication reflects a mean score of 33.40, and a degree of dispersion of 22.06. Other industries indicate dispersions of 13.55; 18.79; 22.67 and 77.52 respectively. This suggests that there is less consistency among the units under study. A negative relationship prevails as the standard deviation is lower than the mean score. This category has the second highest coverage within the sample at 24%; even so, it remains far dispersed from the banking sector which stands at 42.4%.

Though common forms of social responsibility projects are presented by some companies, De Beers differs by its establishment of an HIV/AIDS care centre. This indicates a concern for the health and welfare of its workforce. HIV/AIDS affects huge numbers of mining personnel, hence establishing such centres may help to reduce the death rate among employees.

The expected count from the *chi-square* statistic is 175.4 which is higher than the observed value of 167. This demonstrates a positive relationship between observed and expected frequencies. Other industries present observed

frequencies of 67; 81; 86; and 295. This is attributed to a lower incidence of product information. Crisis management and corporate image information are not presented. The researcher observed that, from time to time, mining companies experience shaft collapses. The mass media is the sole medium used to announce developments in such crises. Crisis communication should take precedence when keeping the media informed. The families of those affected and shareholders should keep tabs on the suspension of mining activities and how this affects the share value.

The category of corporate communication fits in with the public information model as mines present information on various minerals, operations and social responsibility projects. This is a one-directional communication of corporate information to its public (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

The investor information category indicates a mean score of 14.20 and the highest degree of dispersion within the sample, at 15.05. This high standard deviation indicates a very low consistency within the units. Other industries have a dispersion rate of 2.20; 6.64; 13.55 respectively, with no investor category represented by the radio group. However, a positive relationship exists between the mean score as the standard deviation is higher and more closely dispersed from the mean score.

This category indicates the highest frequency at 39%. The expected count from the chi-square statistic is 45.9, lower than the observed value of 71. Though a negative relationship exists, a fairly normal distribution is evident as the observed value is far from zero. Other industries present observed values of 0; 25; 31; and 55. The highest frequency comes as a result of the emphasis placed on presenting share bids, share volume, individual mineral prices and the rand/dollar exchange rates. There are also numerous press releases and publications on investor news. Of particular interest is the fact that Gold Fields presents downloadable speeches from presentations. This makes communication ongoing

and in real time for interested analysts and business media. Like BP Southern Africa, Avgold also web casts its quarterly results.

Investor relations fit in with both theoretical approaches. The public information model is represented in the sense that mines present quarterly results; but interactivity created by registering for alerts on share performance, a web cast and online requests for publications represent the two-way symmetrical model (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

The virtual centre category indicates a mean score of 2.00 with the lowest degree of dispersion within the sample at 1.26. Other groups reflect dispersions of 1.71; 3.58; 4.43 and 14.58 respectively. This indicates a high level of consistency within the units analysed. There is a negligible negative relationship owing to the standard deviation value which is lower than the mean score.

This category has one of the lowest percentages at 9.7%. The expected frequency from a chi square calculation is 26.0, which is higher than the observed frequency of 10. An asymmetric distribution prevails due to a high expected frequency. Other industries have observed frequencies of 10; 17; 18 and 48.

This low frequency is attributable to the limited links requesting suggestions or feedback on general aspects. The focus of the mining company websites lies in requesting investor-related information. The researcher is of the opinion that mining companies are required to establish numerous links for each mineral. This practice corresponds to the two-way symmetrical model as stakeholders are in the position to make contact with these companies (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

Web surveys are not a feature of any of the mining websites and the value is .0%. Thus, no standard deviation analysis between the mines and other groups is provided. The expected count from the chi-square calculation is 0.75, which naturally exceeds the non-existing observed count. Other groups present

observed values of 0; 1; 1; and 1. In this case the result of a chi square statistic becomes invalid.

The researcher believes that mining companies should host such surveys in the same way as they invite suggestions. A variety of stakeholders, including the media, analysts, investors and customers, would definitely provide valuable information which would assist these companies in their decision making. As a result, neither of the theoretical frameworks can be applied here.

In conclusion: Websites of the five mining companies have presented solutions in relation to the problem. Their websites present corporate information to widely dispersed audiences. Corporate information includes company histories, management, areas of operations, stock exchange listings and various minerals. De Beers, Anglo Platinum and Avgold feature information which is conventionally provided on fact sheets sent to the media.

The internet has overcome the problem of reaching these audiences; for example, De Beers has links to other global websites. A wide range of social responsibility projects is indicated which, according to the research problem, were only evident as sponsorship advertising or as news articles. Projects that are committed to the environment, HIV/AIDS and those that provide equal opportunities for staff members, are not advertised in corporate advertising. Thus the internet provides detailed information on those projects and the management decisions behind them.

Investor relations abound on the websites of the mining group. This group has gone beyond simply announcing company results. Instead, information provided now includes current and archived audited results, share prices, share bids, reports by analysts, currency indicators and downloadable speeches by presenters. Immediacy and interactivity are also evident on the Anglo Platinum

and Avgold websites which feature an interactive share charts and alerts for registered shareholders.

Websites make two-way communication feasible as the mining sector can be contacted through e-mail applications.

Answering research questions

Mining Industry (Corporate Communication)

Research question: *How do PR practitioners adopt ICT as a new medium that complements conventional media in terms of company information (operations, structure etc)?*

All the mines provide information on their history, exploration activities and the minerals they mine. Almost all the mines engage in far-reaching social responsibility programmes which include safety, health and the environment, community upliftment projects and education. The mines provide information on their local and global operations, indicating minerals in each geographic region together with the quantity of minerals produced. There is, however, no information provided on corporate image or crisis communication on any of the mining websites.

Statistics show a 24% frequency of communicating company information. This suggests that insufficient corporate information is presented. The researcher has observed that as crises occur more frequently in mines, a crisis management plan and information on how crises are handled should be provided. Shareholders, analysts and the media would expect to be updated frequently in the event of a crisis. Mines do not show the same concern for such mishaps as they do for showcasing quarterly results.

Mining Industry (Investor Information)

Research question: How do PR practitioners adopt ICT as a new medium that complements conventional media in the publication of newsletters, annual reports, news releases and company information (operations, structure etc.)?

De Beers publishes investor-related information using media releases as a mode to indicate audited results. Anglo Platinum hosts pages for each mineral and its market price.

Kumba Resources hosts investor information within its annual report pages. There is a link to the JSE Securities Exchange site which hosts a share price chart and currency indicators. There is also a page hosting the audited group results for each of its products, dividends, balance sheet, cash flow statements and group income statements.

The highest frequency on investor information (39%) could be a result of the presence of information not provided by other companies. This includes share bids, share volume and individual mineral prices.

Research question: How is the internet used to establish two-way communication with the relevant audiences?

There is an interactive share chart indicating share performance. Rand/dollar exchange rates are also indicated. Gold Fields hosts downloadable speeches with photographic images of presenters on share performance, results and prices.

On the De Beers and Avgold websites, investors can register online to receive alerts on share performance, annual reports and earnings releases. Publications can be requested on the Avgold website by completing a form online and

indicating the particular quarterly report requested. Avgold also web casts its announcement of quarterly results. In addition, investor relations press releases are available on the site. These mines take the potential benefits of ICTs very seriously and have made their investor relations interactive. Relationships with investors become more positive and are strengthened because their information needs can be attended to at the click of a mouse.

Mining Industry (Virtual centre)

Research question: *How do companies use the internet to scan their environment for mentions through discussion forums or "contact us" links?*

De Beers, Anglo Platinum and Kumba Resources have "contact us" links inviting comments, questions and other feedback. Gold Fields differs from the former as it invites questions and suggestions pertaining to investor relations information. Avgold carries an e-mail link to investor relations managers.

At a 9.7% frequency, mines are one of the least active sectors when it comes to scanning their environment. According to the researcher, being seen as environmentally sensitive is crucial for these companies. Stakeholders expect a number of forums to be presented on websites, particularly for environmental activists. Frequently a disaster is explained in the mass media by a simple "no comment" from the affected company. Forums play a crucial role as companies can forward their comments to executive level where they are dealt with as external issues. The time has come for these companies to show a commitment to scanning their environment, particularly in this era of global warming and other effects of pollution.

Mining Industry (Web Surveys)

Research question: How is the internet used to establish two-way communication with the relevant audiences?

This question remains unanswered as no mine conducts surveys on the internet. The researcher has observed a lack of commitment from mining houses in this regard. Surely, if stakeholders such as the media, analysts and shareholders are enabled to make transactions online, surveys should be considered as a platform for posting responses to their needs and improvements in their service to these customers.

GROUP 3 THE NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY

Table 4-3 Newspaper industry data matrix

The category of corporate communication reflects a mean score of 13.50 with the second highest measure of dispersion in the sample at 22.67. Other groups present dispersions of 13.55; 18.79; 22.06; and 77.52. Thus there is less consistency between different groups within the units under study. A positive relationship exists between the standard deviation and the mean score as the former reflects higher values than the mean score.

This category revealed the second lowest coverage at 11.6%. The expected count from a chi-square calculation is 87.7 which is slightly higher than the observed value 81. A negative relationship is evident, even though the

distribution is within normal levels. This is the effect of the short distance between expected and observed values. Other groups have observed values of 67; 86; 167 and 295 respectively.

The low frequency in this category can probably be attributed to the fact that newspapers are products in their own right. They do not feature other newspaper subsidiaries which they may operate. Editorial and readership information takes precedence in this industry. Of interest is the fact that readers can subscribe online, and that advertisers are given rates online. Newspapers are committed minimally to social responsibility projects. Another interesting finding is that *Business Day* announces web casts or teleconference calls.

Most of the newspapers' activities fall within the spectrum of the public information model (Grunig and Hunt, 1984). This is clear from the publishing of the editorial, readership profiles, sales figures and circulation figures. Subscribing online and announcements for web casts by *Business Day* indicate the two-way symmetrical model as participants are able to participate in such activities.

The investor information category revealed a mean score of 4.17 and the second lowest degree of dispersion at 2.20. Other groups, excluding radio stations, presented dispersions of 1.52; 6.64 and 15.05 respectively. A fairly high level of consistency prevails within the units analysed from all industries. However, there is a negative relationship, as the standard deviation score is lower than the mean score.

The second lowest percentage is 13.7% as only three newspapers reflect investor-related information. The expected count from a chi-square calculation is 22.9, slightly less than the observed value of 25. A positive relationship exists together with a normal distribution, given the short distance between observed and expected values. Other industries have observed frequencies of 0; 31; 55 and 75 respectively.

Newspapers do not reflect great enthusiasm for ICTs. This can be inferred from their internal policies as certain newspapers do not publish financial information in their hard copy. They probably do not publish financial statements because they are not listed with the JSE. But they do belong to certain groups: the *Sowetan* is part of the Nail media companies, *Sunday Independent* and *The Star* are part of Independent News and Media (IOL), which have shareholding structures. Therefore it could be expected that the financial status of these companies would be revealed.

Only the public information model is revealed as newspapers publish financial information of other companies (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

The virtual centre category has a mean score of 3.00 with the third-lowest degree of dispersion within the sample at 3.58. Other groups present dispersions at 1.26; 1.71; 4.43 and 14.58 respectively. Consistency within the units under study from all groups is average, whilst a strong positive relationship exists between the mean score and the standard deviation.

The virtual centre category reflects the second highest coverage at 17.5%. The expected frequency from a chi-square calculation is 13.0, which is lower than the observed value of 18. Therefore, a positive relationship exists, reflected in the higher observed value. Other industries have observed values of 10; 10; 17 and 48 respectively.

This industry is unique in the sense that it abounds with forums, and letters from readers are sent through e-mail, making it truly virtual. *The Star* newspaper takes things a step further by segmenting forums according to various topics. The two-way model is evident as forums provide a platform for dialogue, but this will not be cemented unless letters written to editors are answered (Grunig and Grunig, 1992; Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

The web survey category indicates a zero frequency. Thus, no standard deviation analysis between newspapers and other groups can be conducted. The expected count from the chi-square calculation is .4 which naturally exceeds the non-existing observed count. Other industries have observed values of 0; 1; 1 and 1. In this case, the *chi square* result becomes invalid because it is the closest to zero.

The researcher argues that if newspapers show enthusiasm for readers' opinions, surveys should also be of the utmost importance as readers' opinions are crucial in making decisions.

In conclusion: The websites of the six newspapers have provided partial answers to the problems. Corporate information featured by newspapers focuses on editorial staff, readership profiles and circulation figures. Since newspapers focus on reporting news articles, their websites lack adequate corporate information. Public relations functions presented as news articles are scarce. Social responsibility projects are also limited to the *Sowetan's* and the *Sunday Times'* involvement in community building, massed choir festivals and literary awards.

Stakeholders receive very little, if any, investor-related information from these newspapers. However, websites do make two-way communication feasible as the newspaper sector invites letters from readers through e-mail applications and discussion forums.

Answering research questions

Newspaper industry (Corporate Communication)

Research question: *How do PR practitioners adopt ICT as a new medium that complements conventional media in publicising company information (operations, structure etc)?*

Newspapers feature information on their history, demographic profile of readers, circulation and sales figures. Certain newspapers feature operational areas with the names of reporters, editors and overseas correspondents.

The "other" unit indicates that *The Star*, *Sowetan* and *Business Day* feature editorial contact details together with e-mail addresses. Advertisers are offered online rates for different formats. The *Sowetan* has a link to another site which markets the newspaper. The site provides the demographic and psychographic profile of its readers together with daily sales figures.

This category is second-lowest at 11.6%, probably because newspapers do not feature other news products or services as part of their business operations. Editorial information pertaining to reporters and editors in specific areas makes up most of the published information. This would be sufficient to meet the information needs of readers of the online editorial, in that they would receive breaking news and updates almost immediately.

Research question: *To what extent are corporate image, social responsibility and other PR programmes featured on the net?*

Social responsibility projects by the *Sowetan* and *Sunday Times* focus on sponsoring literary awards, community building projects and the arts. There is a lack of emphasis on social responsibility. As newspapers are profit-making organisations, they are expected to contribute to society. The *Sunday Independent* reflects its corporate image in the listing of numerous "best journalism" awards.

Crisis communication is underscored as newspapers focus on publishing crises pertaining to other companies, such as the case of the *Mail & Guardian* being barred from reporting a political scandal, and its circulation being halted. In turn, the *Mail & Guardian* reported its own crisis as an article.

Newspaper industry (Investor information)

Research question: *How do PR practitioners adopt ICT as a new medium that complements conventional media in publicising news releases, annual reports, company information (operations, structure etc)?*

Business Day, Pretoria News and Sunday Independent feature other companies' investor news. The information includes JSE figures for shares, gold mining, industry and currency values. JSE bonds and gold prices are featured as news articles. *Business Day* hosts a page for its financial presentations and a link to the web cast or teleconference call presentation.

Newspapers serve as publicity vehicles for other companies, yet they recorded a frequency of only 13.7%, the second lowest in presenting financial results. Usually, financial news is published in weekly newspapers. However, shareholders would want to see how their shares have performed in order to decide whether to purchase more stock or to sell.

Newspaper industry (Virtual Centre)

Research questions: *How do companies use the internet to scan their environment for mentions through discussion forums or "contact us" links?*

How is the internet used to establish two-way communication with the relevant audiences?

Newspapers feature e-mail submissions to the editor and webmaster. The *Sunday Times* provides the contact details of the press ombudsman to allow its readers to lodge complaints relating to editorial content. It also features a page of information on how to lodge such a complaint. Complaints sent to the newspaper can also be forwarded online. Other contact details of the newspaper

are also provided. All newspapers provide online subscription forms for ordering hard copies.

Letters and opinions on anything published are invited via an e-mail enabled form. Letters containing comments on editorial content are published. There are discussion forums which feature published letters and readers' opinions.

Newspapers appear to be exploiting the virtual centre category quite successfully. Although newspapers have always published letters to editors in the hard copy, they are using ICTs to allow more than just these letters. Relations with newspapers are changing for the better as complaints can be voiced and hard copies can be ordered online. Dialogue is also established as a result of the availability of forums.

GROUP 4 RADIO STATIONS

Table 4-4 Radio industry data matrix

The corporate communication category reflects a mean score of 13.40 and the second-lowest degree of dispersion within the sample at 18.79. Other industries present dispersions at 13.55; 22.06; 22.67; and 77.52 respectively. There is a reasonable degree of consistency across all groups within the units under study. Thus, a positive relationship exists as the standard deviation is higher than the mean score.

This category had the lowest frequency of hits at 9.6%. The expected count from a chi-square calculation is 55.2, which is lower than the observed value of 67. An asymmetrical relationship exists, but the varying values show a relatively normal distribution. Other groups show observed values of 81; 86; 167 and 295.

Metro FM featured the highest number of links at 46 while other radio stations range between three and seven. These can be attributed to the presence of corporate image and social responsibility information. Metro FM and Radio 702 surpass other radio stations as their websites carry more information on upcoming events and presenter profiles, and they feature audio streams.

Radio stations are also services in their right. The researcher observed that they do not provide information on other broadcast services under the auspices of their respective stations. This industry is unique in the sense that it features information on radio formats, DJs, listenership figures and programmes. Listeners might expect more information on programming and news bulletins; in the same way that online newspapers publish news articles in their printed versions, radio stations should feature news bulletins which form part of their programmes. The industry also lags behind on social investment projects. Of interest is YFM's posting of the name of the track currently on air together with the artist's name. YFM and Radio 702 highlight community events, jazz festivals and other stage shows.

Information is disseminated in one direction, from the stations to listeners, thus making the public information model (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

The investor information category indicates a .0 count as no station features this function. Thus no standard deviation analysis between radio stations and other groups can be conducted. The expected count from the *chi-square* calculation is 14.4 which naturally exceeds the non-existing observed count thus making the

chi square result invalid. The other industries show observed frequencies of 25; 31; 55 and 71 respectively.

The researcher has observed that some radio stations are public companies managed by the SABC while others are private, belonging to certain media groups such as New Africa Investments and Thebe Investments. One would expect them to present their financial information in the same way as they publish printed versions of annual reports.

The virtual centre category indicates a mean score of 2.0 with the second lowest degree of dispersion within the sample at 1.71. Other groups reflect dispersions of 1.26; 3.58; 4.43 and 14.58. A fairly high level of consistency exists across the groups within the units analysed. Even if data are closely dispersed around the mean score, a negative relationship prevails because the score is below the mean value. This is the result of fewer links being available on the website.

The virtual centre category features the lowest frequencies at 9.7%, the same as in the mining industry. The expected count from a chi-square statistic is 8.2 which is lower than the observed value of 10. A positive relationship exists, but the distribution of values is normal. Other groups have observed frequencies of 10; 17; 18 and 48. The researcher observed that the lowest frequency is a result of some radio stations not offering applications allowing listeners to contact them. Only limited contact applications are made available online by some stations. Of particular interest is YFM, which has applications for requesting a song. Some radio stations allow two-way communication as listeners can e-mail letters to editors and respective DJs.

The Web surveys category indicates a mean score of 0.20 with no standard deviation as the raw data count is 1.0. Therefore no standard deviation analysis between radio stations and other groups can be conducted. This result is derived from YFM only. The web survey category reflects a 33.3% frequency. The

expected count from the chi-square calculation is 0.2 which is lower than the observed value 1.0. The smallest frequency closest to zero makes the chi square result invalid. Other industries have observed values of 0; 0; 1; and 1.

The researcher observed that the lack of online surveys suggests that radio stations do not conduct primary surveys as they rely on information given by All Media and Product Surveys (AMPS) databases. While radio stations make announcements on various events and invite requests online, they do not fully exploit this medium in conducting primary research into their audiences' opinions. The only survey done thus far would constitute two-way communication as explained by Grunig and Hunt (1984), where respondents are requested to select a desired response and send it through.

In conclusion: The websites of five radio stations have presented partial solutions in relation to the problem. Their websites present corporate information to widely dispersed audiences. Corporate information featured by radio stations focuses on listener profiles, presenter information, programme line up, and events., Websites belonging to radio stations do not resolve the problem of featuring public relations functions. Only Metro FM, Jakaranda 94.2 and Radio 702 feature social responsibility and corporate image aspects of public relations, but only to a limited extent. Projects centre on sponsoring musical events and competitions, education sponsorship by Jakaranda 94.2., and Radio 702's focus on drug awareness projects.

Metro FM and Radio 702 have overcome the problem of reach as listeners can tune in to live audio streams from their websites. This allows listeners to tune in to the station from anywhere in the world. However, the problem of reach remains unsolved, with the exception of Metro FM, because websites do not feature news bulletins as they happen. As a result, listeners are urged to tune in to a radio device to receive news.

Investor relations are lacking in the radio industry. The problem of immediacy has been solved by Metro FM which features news headlines and news briefs of the day.

Radio stations have overcome the problem of two-way communication, which is made feasible by listeners sending letters through e-mail applications to radio DJs and editors. Playing requested songs completes the loop by making communication dialogical.

Answering research questions

Radio stations (Corporate communication)

Research question: How do PR practitioners adopt ICT as a new medium that complements conventional media in publicising news releases, company information (operations, structure etc)?

Information on the history of radio stations, audience demographics and different formats is featured. Areas and provinces in which the stations operate are listed. Other featured items include events, research information, programme line-up, DJ information, the station's daily programmes and personnel. Three stations have audio streams for tuning in to live shows through the station's website.

Even though this category has the lowest frequency at 9.6%, its unique featuring of information is demonstrated. Relationships with listeners are improving owing to the availability of audio streams, they no longer rely on the radio for broadcasts. Listeners can refer to the website for an update on events taking place.

Research question: To what extent are corporate image, social responsibility and other PR programmes featured on the net?

Jakaranda 94.2, Metro FM and Radio 702 are socially responsible in areas of competitions, musical concert sponsorships, training and drug awareness projects.

Metro FM station reflects its corporate image by featuring awards it has received from recording companies.

The researcher observed that very few social responsibility projects are featured. As some stations are commercial in nature, with advertising as their main source of revenue, they are in a favourable position to engage in more social responsibility activities. Listeners rely on radio stations rather than on television for news and entertainment. They could in turn expect a certain level of philanthropy to be demonstrated by such stations. The researcher is of the opinion that the media industry should focus its social responsibility activities on sponsoring media and journalism education. In the radio industry, more focus should be placed on the promotion of radio DJs and upcoming artists.

The absence of corporate image information, with the exception of Metro FM, and crisis communication places radio stations bottom (9.6%) in presenting corporate communication.

Radio stations (Virtual centre)

Research question: How is the internet used to establish two-way communication with the relevant audiences?

Audiences tuning in to Jakaranda 94.2 and Metro FM stations can communicate with presenters or the editor via e-mail. One commercial station has a form to complete when requesting a specific song.

The 9.7% frequency indicates that radio stations are broadcast- rather than feedback-oriented. Fewer feedback applications are available. The researcher assumes that relations could be maintained at the same rate online as they are through phone-in programmes. Listeners expect to be heard through alternative means as talk shows are limited and provide little opportunity to be heard on air.

Research question: *How do companies use the internet to scan the environment for mentions through discussion forums or "contact us" links?*

Radio stations scan their environment by inviting listeners' opinions, suggestions and comments. This indicates that the radio stations analysed exploit ICTs fully as there are no programmes that are aired for the same purpose.

Radio stations (Web survey)

Research question: *How is the internet used to establish two-way communication with the relevant audiences?*

YFM hosts a poll with "yes" and "no" buttons, but the questions are not broadcast-related.

The researcher assumes that when a station conducts a poll, it indicates the delay on radio stations to exploit ICTs. Radio stations also rely on All Media and Product Surveys databases for information about their audiences. But if changes need to be made to programming, then surveys should be run online in order to target primary audiences.

GROUP 5 THE BANKING INDUSTRY

Table 4-5 Banking industry data matrix

The category corporate communication reflects a mean score of 42.14 and the highest degree of dispersion in the sample at 77.52. Other groups display dispersions of 13.55; 22.06; 22.67 and 18.79 respectively. This indicates the highest level of inconsistency within the units under study of other groups *vis'-a vis'* the banking group. Though a positive relationship is suggested as standard deviation values are higher than the mean score, data resemble the qualities of the mean score less as they are fatherly dispersed.

This category has the highest frequency at 42.4%. The expected frequency from a chi-square calculation is 282.2 which is less than the observed value of 295. A symmetrical relationship prevails with distribution at a normal level. Other groups have observed values of 67; 81; 86; and 167.

The highest frequency is a result of many links provided to various products. No information is reflected on crisis management. The researcher is of the opinion that although security is tight at banks, fraud does occur, including cash heists. Information on the above would surely alert clients to possible safety precautions and provide information on how banks deal with cash heists.

This category belongs within the public information model as banks host various product information and social responsibility aspects (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

The investor information category indicates a mean score of 7.86 with the second highest degree of dispersion at 6.64. Other groups reflect dispersions of 1.52, 2.20 and 15.05 respectively, with the exclusion of the radio group. Consistency within the units under study is at an average level between groups. A negative relationship exists as the standard deviation value is lower than the mean score but shows data uniformity by being closer to the mean score.

This category has the second highest frequency at 30.2%. The expected count from a chi-square calculation stands at 73.8 which exceeds the observed values of 55. In this case an asymmetric relationship prevails owing to lower sample frequencies. Other groups have observed values of 0; 25; 31; and 71 respectively. The banking industry could have been expected to reflect the highest frequency of investor information, but three, namely BOE Merchant Bank, Nedbank and People's Bank, do not feature any investor information. Since banks are listed on the stock exchange and have shareholding structures, they ought to feature investor information.

The public information model is evident in the presentation of financial statements to stakeholders (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

The virtual centre category has a mean score of 6.86 with the highest degree of dispersion at 14.58. Other groups reveal dispersions of 1.26; 1.71; 3.58; and 4.43 respectively. A high level of inconsistency exists between the banking group and the other groups. Although a positive relationship prevails between the mean score and the standard deviation, data resembles the qualities of the mean score to a lesser extent as the variance is fartherly dispersed.

This category has the highest frequency (46.6%) of hits within the sample. The expected count from a chi-square calculation is 41.8 which is less than the observed value of 48. A positive relationship exists with a normal distribution of scores. Other industries have observed values of 10; 10; 17; and 18 respectively.

The high frequency can be attributed to numerous contact links for all the bank's products, divisions and search applications to branches. Banks boast numerous branches, hence the high frequency.

This category reflects the two-way model as clients and other stakeholders can e-mail questions and suggestions, with certain banks requesting users' contact details (Grunig and Hunt, 1984). The Development Bank has a link allowing users to order publications online. Once again, it has not been established whether banks forward responses to users. Calculating loan payments online reflects two-way communication in its true sense (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

Web surveys indicate a mean score of 0.14 with no standard deviation as only Standard Bank engages in such activities. Therefore no standard deviation analysis between the banks and other groups can be conducted. The Web survey frequency is at 33.3%. The expected count from the chi-square calculation is 1.2 which is two points higher than the observed value 1. Thus a *chi square* frequency is invalid as it is closer to zero. Other industries have observed values of 0; 0; 1 and 1.

Banks do not fully exploit ICTs for research. Standard Bank does not do primary research as such, but merely publishes reports on research done elsewhere. In this case, the public information model is reflected in the presentation of research conducted elsewhere (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

In conclusion: Websites of seven banks have proven otherwise in relation to the problem. Widely dispersed stakeholders could be reached simultaneously using the internet. The internet has made it possible for stakeholders to access corporate information including the location of company operations, various products, corporate image programmes, and a wide range of social responsibility

projects. In this regard, the websites outline management policies that underlie these activities which would not be possible using traditional means only.

Immediacy was not found to be possible when announcing investor-related activities in the business section of the print media. With the internet, investor relations have been expanded to include presentations, financial news, share price and share volume. Interactivity and two-way communication is also evident in the "contact us" links provided to various branches and divisions.

Answering research questions

Banking Industry (Corporate Communication)

Research question: *How do PR practitioners adopt ICT as a new medium that complements conventional media in publicising newsletters, news releases, company information (operations, structure etc)?*

In most cases, banks host information pertaining to their history and products offered. Six banks list their operations in various cities, local and international. Other public relations functions featured by the Development Bank include projects on infrastructure development.

In the main, finance houses post their social responsibility projects which include education, the arts, community upliftment, the environment and conservation. First National Bank even employs news releases as a mode of communicating its contributions to various projects. Only BOE Merchant Bank provides corporate image information. This is reflected in several awards for, amongst others, being the first bank to introduce banking deals and futures trading.

In this case, with the highest frequency of 42.4%, it is evident that the banking industry has fully embraced ICTs. Current and prospective clients are in a better

position to make investment decisions as they are provided with comprehensive information.

Research question: *During times of crisis, how is the internet used to inform stakeholders about how the crisis is being dealt with?*

This question is not answered as no crisis-related information is provided. Banks have not exploited the value of ICTs in managing crisis. The researcher believes that fraud alerts should be posted as internet banking places clients at risk. Information that is reported in the mass media about cash heists and how these are dealt with should appear on websites.

Banking Industry (Investor Information)

Research question: *How do PR practitioners adopt ICT as a new medium that complements conventional media in publicising newsletters, news releases, company information (operations, structure etc)?*

Some of the banks feature information pertaining to share price, share performance and results. BoE Merchant Bank also provides press publications and news headlines relating to investor information. DBSA's investor information is situated within the annual report page.

The financial nature of the business of banks calls for the publication of financial statements. Although the second highest frequency (30%) was reported, this is owing to Nedbank, FNB and BOE's neglect of the ICTs, hence the mining group recording the highest. Today's stock markets are too fast paced for shareholders, analysts and business media to rely on mass media for their information. They must have recourse to the internet.

Banking Industry (Virtual centre)

Research questions: *How do companies use the internet to scan their environment for mentions through discussion forums or “contact us” links?*

Banks offer e-mail links inviting users' comments, opinion and complaints. Two-way communication is also established by certain banks by requesting users' contact details. One bank also features a frequently-asked-questions page which displays questions and answers on various topics. BOE Merchant Bank extends its media relations function by providing e-mail links to spokespersons in various divisions of the institution.

E-mail contacts are made available for making enquiries on banking products, offshore operations and requesting other financially related information and contacting the personnel responsible for those products. In the scope of this study, banks are unique in featuring calculators for loan payments.

A 46.6% frequency is indicative of the banking group's acceptance and full use of ICTs. Interactivity is fairly limited, evident only in loan calculations; however, websites offer many applications inviting information from users. Here banks strengthen their relations with their stakeholders by offering relevant opportunities to address comments, suggestions and complaints.

Banking Industry (Web surveys)

Research question: *How is the internet used to establish communication with the relevant audiences?*

Only Standard Bank reports research findings on economy-related matters. The researcher believes that the introduction of investment products, and constantly changing banking procedures, should prompt banks to run online surveys.

3. CROSS COMPARISONS REGARDING INTERNET USAGE BY GROUPS

Table 4-6 Scores of internet usage

Corporate communication

The petroleum group reflected the third-highest frequency in web-based corporate communication. Product information has the second highest representation within the petroleum group, while corporate image information is presented in greater detail than other industries. Its corporate social responsibility projects are similar to those of the mining and banking industries.

Within the mining group, emphasis is placed on various minerals and social responsibility programmes. The latter are more inclined to safety, health and the environment. The mining industry downplays crisis communication.

The newspaper industry does not reflect mainstream units such as products, corporate image, social responsibility projects on education, sports, the environment or community outreach to the same extent as other groups. Its corporate communication focuses on editorials, readership profiles, sales figures, and subscriptions. Most newspapers do not reflect social responsibility projects, and few focus on the arts or community building projects.

Corporate communication information reflected by radio stations includes formats, DJ information and audience listenership figures. Corporate social investment activities include competitions, quizzes and drug awareness programmes.

In the banking group, the highest frequencies are reflected by banking products offering numerous links. Corporate social responsibility projects focus mostly on the environment, education, community upliftment initiatives, sports and the arts.

Investor Communication

Investor information is available on only two petroleum company websites. This explains the substantial difference in frequencies in the petroleum, mining and banking industries. Information reflected includes share price, results and share performance, a web cast of quarterly results, an interactive chart of share values in various foreign currencies, an audio presentation of results and investor news provided in press releases. The content is more or less the same as that of the mining and banking industries, the only difference being that the site does not provide speeches or reports from board members.

The mining industry reflects the highest frequency within the sample of investor information for all its companies. Although most of the coverage is similar to that of other industries, emphasis is placed on share bids, volume, individual mineral prices and the rand/dollar exchange rates. Press releases and investor relations news is plentiful, and publications pertaining to investor information and downloadable speeches on quarterly results are reflected.

The newspaper industry reflects the second-lowest frequencies within the sample, as only three of them cover investor-related information. The information provided pertains to company news and business reports, reports from other sectors, local and international markets.

Radio stations do not feature investor communication.

The banking industry is the second-highest provider of investor relations information, after the mining industry, although three banks feature no investor

information at all. Similar information is provided by the mining and petroleum industries, including share prices, financial news and presentations. The exception is one of the banks which posts unit trust investments.

Virtual centre

The petroleum group covers suggestions and feedback, e-mail links to various company divisions such as corporate social investments, brand management, safety, health and the environment. Other industries invite similar feedback, but differ when it comes to inviting industry-specific information. Coverage in the mining group focuses on requesting investor-related information.

The newspaper industry differs from others as editors and the webmaster can be contacted through e-mail. Letters and opinions from readers are published. Discussion forums prevail as links to letters are provided and responses forwarded through the given application format. In the case of one Sunday newspaper, these forums are segmented according to topics such as politics, sports and news. This industry surpasses the mining group because of its various forums.

The radio industry has the lowest frequency together with the mining group. The focus of radio stations is on comments that are e-mailed to editors and presenters. Songs can also be requested online.

The banking group reflected the highest frequencies. Although, as in other groups, suggestions are invited, the banking industry offers e-mail links to various divisions, contact links to various products at local and international offices and search applications for all branches.

Web Surveys

The web survey reflected the lowest frequencies in the petroleum, banking and radio industries. The survey featured is directed at journalists, with questions aimed to improve the company's media relations. Surveys reflected by other groups are industry-specific.

No web surveys are featured on the websites of the mining and newspaper groups. Radio stations reflected a low frequency, derived as it was from one hit from the sample in a poll run by the commercial station.

The banking industry reflected a frequency equal to the radio and petroleum companies. One particular bank reports on research conducted into markets, local currencies and forex rates.

4. GENERALISING FROM SAMPLES TO POPULATIONS

In order to generalise and make claims about the population from which the sample was drawn, a test of statistical significance has been conducted. *Chi-square* (see Appendix F) provided the investigator with an indication of how confidently results could be generalised to a larger, unmeasured population (Connor-Linton, 1998:4).

Connor-Linton (1998:5) asserts that when frequencies are negative, the distribution cannot be normal if expected frequencies are close to zero. If the sample frequencies are below the expected frequencies, an asymmetric or non-normal distribution prevails. Smaller expected frequencies make the results of the chi-square less valid.

Table 4-7 Company coverage of web communication on a 5 x 4 table

The table above illustrates that six cells reflect a below-minimum value of 5 or below; this causes the minimum expected frequencies of the web surveys category of all industries, and the investor information of radio stations. It can be argued that no cell in a bivariate table can have an observed raw frequency of 0. The computed *chi-square* table shows three cells with 0 raw frequencies. Three other cells show frequencies of 1.

A statistically significant *chi-square* value at 57.736 is attained, and shows that the degree of confidence which the investigator holds in the relationship between the variables described can be generalised to a larger population.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that for all five industries, research findings in the case of the categories corporate communication, investor information and virtual centre can be generalised to the population. Given the fact that expected frequencies for the category web survey in all industries are close to zero, these results are invalid. The investigator therefore concludes that, with the exception of three other categories, web survey findings cannot be generalised to the population. In addition, the invalid results from the investor information category of the radio industry do not lead to the conclusion that radio stations in the population conduct their investor relations function online.

In testing research questions, a hypothesis test as shown in Appendix F is absolutely necessary. The statistical tests performed in *chi-square* and

hypothesis indicate that data supports the questions being tested. This means that the significance is not due to a sampling error, and results can be confidently generalised to the population. Thus, the variables under study, the "units of analysis", are supported by the data. This is confirmed by the *chi-square* value of 57.736 against the null hypothesis value (presented as research questions) of 21.026. As indicated in hypothesis testing (Appendix F), the degree of freedom (df) stands at 12, with a significance level of 0.5. The *chi-square* table which is adapted from Wimmer and Dominick, (1983:368) following the afore-mentioned appendix reveals a meeting point of (df) (12) and a probability or significance level of 0.5 which indicates the hypothesis value.

5. DESCRIPTION OF COMMUNICATION TOOLS OBSERVED ON WEBSITES

Websites of oil companies host current and archived press releases. In addition, one company hosts a news centre focusing on investor news. Annual reports which carry investor information are also posted. Only one company features an online newsletter. Two host downloadable speeches archived for up to six years. Journalists are able to download images and press kits consisting of a press release, a speech, a web cast, a downloadable brochure and interviews.

The mining industry also hosts press releases and archived releases. Annual reports, carrying investor relations information, are also featured on their websites. Three of the websites feature photograph galleries for journalists, executives, different mining sites and a fact sheet. One gold mine posts press releases with investor-related news. Other mining news items derived from other media sources are also featured.

The media industry does not feature newsletters, annual reports or press releases. Headlines, including breaking news, sports, politics, business reports

and company news are, however, featured. One Sunday newspaper hosts a picture gallery of images published by the newspaper. These images are in a searchable archive.

The banking sector hosts current and archived press releases. Some annual reports are hosted within the investor relations page. One consumer bank hosts newsletters and a magazine which addresses the needs of card holders. A merchant bank has a media resources page which provides a fact sheet, a contact list of spokespersons in various units, conference presentations, and deal advertisements that have appeared in the press at one time or another. Another merchant bank hosts the latest issue of a quarterly journal with headings of archived issues from the past four years.

6. CONCLUSION

The internet has made corporate information easily available to widely dispersed audiences. Findings prove that the internet has the capacity to host links to global websites, various company operations with fact sheets for each operation and detailed product information, far surpassing the capabilities of the traditional brochure. Management information changes constantly and developments can be immediately updated on the internet, something which was not possible when companies were limited to brochures. Brochures cannot reach such widely dispersed audiences and are limited to brief information.

As the research problem has indicated, certain PR activities are only evident as corporate advertisements and news releases in the traditional media. The findings of this study demonstrate that the internet details corporate social responsibility programmes that are not stated in traditional media. The internet also explains the management decisions behind social responsibility and corporate image programmes.

The findings have also revealed that the internet has expanded investor relations to a significant degree. All key aspects of audited results are presented on a quarterly basis and archived by date for future reference. Global and potential investors can easily access this information. Unlike audited results published in newspapers and the company annual report document, research findings show that internets use the "pull mechanism" which allows stakeholders to click on an icon and access the required information.

The element of currency also prevails in investor relations. This is the case particularly of share prices, share bids and currency indicators which present up-to-the-minute changes and fluctuations. Another element of interactivity is also evident in the findings: investors are able to calculate share value against foreign stock and purchase shares online. Investors, the media and analysts can register for webcasts which allow stakeholders to view live or archived streamed messages of financial presentations by company chairpersons. Thus, the internet has taken investor relations to a level which was not possible when using only newspapers and reports in financial magazines.

Research findings reveal that the internet can make communication virtual. Interactive features are evident as websites make "contact us" links available with a view to opening lines of communication. Websites belonging to newspapers in particular host discussion forums and abound with letters to the editor. Traditional print media do not have the capacity to publish such forums or letters to the same extent as the internet. Findings from radio stations reveal that websites host programme line ups, presenter profiles, news headlines and audio streams allowing listeners to tune into broadcasts. Radio stations cannot announce this type of information. Those radio stations with audio streams can reach global audiences, and those featuring news bulletins allow access to global audiences who cannot be reached by radio signal.

7. ESTABLISHING VALIDITY IN CONTENT ANALYSIS

Once content analysis has been used as a technique to report on existing web information, it should be established whether this instrument yields valid information which can be generalised to the study population.

Validity is defined as "the degree to which an instrument actually measures what it sets out to measure" (Wimmer and Dominick, 1983:156). According to Krippendorff (2003), in (<http://www.web-analysis.com>, 2004), content analysis is valid if the categories correspond to the conclusions, and the results can be generalised to a theory. Two types of validity apply to this study. The first, *face validity*, occurs when research results appear to follow logic and make sense on their own. The second type is *content validity*, which refers to all aspects that define specific categories that the technique claims to measure, and that are captured within the units.

In the case of face validity, no detailed explanation of research results that are supported by theories is necessary. In this study, research results make sense as they relate precisely to study objectives and answer the research questions. The data gathered correspond with the aim of the study, and support the literature reviewed.

Furthermore, Wimmer and Dominick (1983:157) and (<http://www.web-analysis.com>, 2004) mention that validity occurs if the categories are rigidly and satisfactorily defined and if the procedures of the analysis have been adequately conducted. The measuring instrument has proved to be valid because categories are mutually exclusive, and no data was discovered on websites that were outside the boundaries of the defined categories or that required the definition of new categories. This comprises *content validity*.

In addition, content analysis procedures have been followed satisfactorily as adequate sampling procedures were conducted. Units that are within the spectrum of categories were chosen, which established reliability of coding procedures and quantified web coverage that fully represents the units under study.

8. DESCRIPTIVE SURVEY METHODOLOGY FINDINGS

8.1 Introduction

This method is used to answer questions on how public relations practitioners use the intranet and electronic mail as a new media for internal and external communication. Data was collected through questionnaire surveys.

The survey enabled the researcher to probe the intranet and e-mail usage, which is not accessible to external users, of the same sample used in content analysis. Intranets and e-mail belonging to organisations are protected by firewalls and restricted to a specific company domain. Though two different questionnaires were employed, questions pertaining to intranet usage were the same in both.

Measures of central tendency were used to determine the mean scores and frequencies for closed questions. In order to determine values of the measures, data was first indicated on a frequency distribution table which reflects the manner in which the scores on a given construct appear in each category (Appendix H). Computation was done manually by focusing on one question at a time. Three industries, banking, mining and petroleum, were measured together as they answered the same questionnaire. Similarly, the radio group and newspapers were calculated together, thus revealing the meaning of percentiles within the given samples.

8.2 Criteria for coding open-ended responses

Since varying responses were made to open-ended questions, the researcher selected from a list of responses those items mentioned most often and coded these. According to Bailey (1982:349), open-ended survey questions do not require the use of computers for statistical analyses. Such data are subjectively analysed into typologies. Labels used to classify responses are deduced from typical responses given. Thus the researcher used labels to typify particular responses. The value which appears alongside the phrases indicates the number of responses to a particular question.

8.3 Oil industry findings

From a sample of four, only three companies (75%) responded, namely BP, Caltex and Sasol.

Q1 Whether oil industries have intranets

All three companies have intranets. Oil industries have the highest frequency (42.8%) of intranets within the sample.

Q2 Whether these intranets are used for public relations purposes

Companies do use intranets for public relations functions. This is reflected as a frequency of 42.8% which is the highest within the sample.

Q3 The internal communication functions served by the intranet

The oil industry has the highest usage (50%) of internal communication functions. Common denominators are corporate information and HR related information. Others include marketing, legal information and publications.

Q4 The publicity functions posted on the intranet

Dominant publicity functions posted are corporate news, publications (newsletters, brochures, annual report) and media releases. This industry has the second highest frequency of functions in publicity (30.9%).

Q5 The frequency of using the intranet *vis-à-vis* conventional media

This industry uses the intranet most often at 42.8%.

Q6 The advantages of using the intranet

Companies are of the view that information is communicated simultaneously to many people. Other responses are that it is more cost effective than print and there is rapid feedback. This industry has most advantages listed at 50%.

Q7 Public relations functions posted on the intranet

This industry has the highest percentage (46.6%) of coverage of PR functions. The company posts corporate image programmes, social responsibility, PR campaigns and corporate information. Other postings are research information and crisis management information.

Q8 Stakeholders having access to the intranet

Companies maintain that all office staff has access to the intranet. This translates to a frequency of 27.2% which is the second highest within the sample.

Q9 How communication with stakeholders is enhanced

Changes brought about are the second highest at 30.7%, as companies claim that everyone gets the same message, the intranet speeds up communication and is cost effective.

Q10 Whether organisations use e-mail for public relations purposes

The three oil companies use e-mail. This translates to a frequency of 42.8% which is the highest within the sample.

Q11 PR purposes of e-mail

The oil industry uses e-mail to a significant extent (55%), as it is used for various public relations functions including internal and external communication, corporate image and other PR campaigns.

Q12 How the media relations function has improved

The media relations function has improved to the second highest level of 33.3% as one company mentions that e-mail is fast and cost effective.

Q13 The advantages of using e-mail for business communication

Fewer advantages (26.6%) are noted as companies mention that stakeholders get the same message simultaneously. The tool is also cost-effective.

Q14 Other comments on ICTs

More disadvantages beset these companies (66.6% of the responses): e-mail lacks the ability to sort out problems, it contributes to information overload, the recipients are unknown, and there are fewer face-to-face encounters.

Answering research questions

Research question: How do companies use intranets for internal communication?

The oil industry disseminates corporate and human resources information through the intranet. Internal publications, marketing, legal and refining information are also disseminated for internal communication. The publicity functions which organisations post on the intranet include corporate news, media releases, annual reports, brochures and newsletters. One company also posts financial information.

Research question: How do employees across distances use the intranet to collaborate on projects?

This question remains unanswered as no information on employees' collaboration on projects is provided. The researcher is of the opinion that this indicates that ICTs are not fully exploited when engaging in projects on a continuous basis. This could mean that project managers travel frequently to common locations as the industry has operations in many locations.

Research question: To what extent do PR practitioners use the intranet to implement communication programmes aimed at employees?

Most of the public relations programmes indicated in the questionnaire are carried out through the intranet.

Research question: *In what form does the intranet promote vertical communication between senior management and employees?*

This question remains unanswered as no information is given on how the internal network links employees with senior management. The researcher observed that, given the fact that most, if not all, public relations functions are posted on the internal network, this may suggest the type of organisational culture of these companies. Perhaps there is not an open culture of communication allowing employees to communicate with senior management.

Research question: *To what extent does e-mail complement other conventional modes of internal communication?*

Oil companies use e-mail for the following PR purposes: disseminating corporate information, running corporate image programmes, corporate social responsibility programmes, PR campaigns, sending media releases, sending internal mail and other internal and external communication.

Research question: *What role does e-mail play in the company's media relations?*

Two companies claim that e-mail has brought no changes to their media relations functions, and one is of the view that it is a speedy means of communication.

8.4 Mining industry findings

From a sample of five, only two mines (40%) responded, that is De Beers and Gold Fields.

Q1

Both mines have intranets. Mines have the second-highest rate (28.5%) of companies with intranets.

Q2

Mines use the tool for public relations functions, reflecting the second-highest rate of 28.5% within the sample.

Q3

Mines indicate publicity tools which serve internal communication. These are newsletters, annual reports and brochures. Other communication content includes corporate news, local and international news and company press releases. The lowest rate (18.7%) of internal communication functions is served by the intranets in this industry.

Q4

The common denominators are corporate news, annual reports, brochures, newsletters and media releases. Only one mine publishes financial information. One other mine also makes a virtual library, vacancies and feedback forum available. This group has the highest coverage at 42.8%.

Q5

Both mines use the intranet frequently in executing communication programmes. This translates to 28.5%, which is the second highest within the sample.

Q6

Both mines mention that information can be easily accessed. This group has the lowest percentage of 21.4%.

Q7

Both mines post corporate image programmes, PR campaigns and corporate information. Other functions include research and corporate social responsibility. This group has the second-highest frequency (26.5%), the same as the banking group.

Q8

Both state that employees with access to desktops can access the net. Gold Fields makes the intranet available to its investors. This brings it to 27.7% which is the second-highest oil industry within the sample.

Q9

To a large extent, 38.4% of responses show that the intranet has enhanced communications because relations have improved among employees, given its interactive nature. The tool is also used for knowledge management.

Q10

Both companies use e-mail for public relations purposes, which reflects the second-highest rate (28.5%) within the sample.

Q11

These functions represent the second-highest rate within the sample (25%). Both maintain that they use e-mail to provide employees with information. Other

functions include sending media releases, announcing events and using it as a feedback mechanism between employees and senior management.

Q12

A minimum change of 11.1% has resulted as shown by Gold Fields, which uses e-mail to send out media releases.

Q13

Greater advantages, at a rate of 40%, are cited as both mines are of the view that employees can adapt to the fast pace of business. Relations have improved, e-mail replaces memos and notice boards, and stakeholders are reached simultaneously.

Q14

Similar to the former group, a 16.6% rate of negativity is reported: employees lack computer skills and receive irrelevant mail.

Answering research questions

Research questions: *How do companies use intranets for internal communication?*

Both mines use the intranet to execute internal communication functions, including the dissemination of publications (brochures, newsletters), media releases, financial indicators and corporate information. All publicity tools indicated in the questionnaire are disseminated through the intranet.

Research question: *How do employees across distances use the intranet to collaborate on projects?*

This question remains unanswered as there is no indication of how mines use the intranet to collaborate on projects. The researcher is of the view that ICTs are not taken seriously as mines mostly employ project managers.

Research question: *To what extent do PR practitioners use the intranet to implement communication programmes aimed at employees?*

Through the intranet, both mines execute all the stated functions of public relations except for crisis management. The researcher believes that employees who are directly affected by crises will rely on mass media and circulars.

Research question: *In what form does the intranet promote vertical communication between senior management and employees?*

De Beers has implemented discussion forums and feedback applications which promote open and constructive communication between staff and management.

Research question: *To what extent does e-mail complement other conventional modes of internal communication?*

Both mines use e-mail to announce events and activities and to disseminate company information and press releases already released to external media. It also acts as a feedback mechanism.

Research question: *What role does e-mail play on the company's media relations?*

The only role e-mail plays in external media relations is the sending out of media releases.

8.5 Newspaper industry findings

Only two of the six newspapers (33.3%) responded, the *Sowetan* and *The Star*.

Q1

Both newspapers visit company websites to research information. This translates to 50% of the given sample.

Q2

More information, at the rate of 61.1%, is researched by the newspaper industry from company websites than from other sources. The common denominators of information searched for are corporate news, media releases, annual reports, and product/service information. Other searched items include photographs, speeches and financial information.

Q3

Both papers 50% use traditional and online kits, with the *Sowetan* stating that when systems are down, hard copies come in handy.

Q4

Neither of the newspapers has had this experience.

Q5

Neither of the newspapers has an intranet.

Q6

Not applicable owing to the absence of the tool.

Q7

Not applicable owing to the absence of an intranet.

Q8

Not applicable owing to the absence of an intranet.

Q9

Not applicable owing to the absence of the tool.

Q10

Both papers use e-mail for journalism or reporting functions.

Q11

The second-highest, with a 42.8% rate of e-mail use, characterises newspapers. Both newspapers use e-mail to receive media releases. *The Star* also sends media enquiries through e-mail.

Q12

In the case of newspapers, the function has improved more than in the radio industry, at 55.5%. The common denominator is that e-mail is time-efficient. Other responses are "cost effectiveness", "detailed information is sent" and "can be used for referencing".

Q13

Newspapers have the second-highest rate of advantages (42.8%) in gathering news via e-mail. Both newspapers regard e-mail as time-saving in news gathering. It gives journalists the latitude to ask more questions.

Q14

Advantages are many at a 50% rate in the newspaper industry. There are positive views which include the fact that journalists do not re-type copy, but only edit it. There are fewer chances of misquoting and the written word is more credible.

Answering research questions

Research question: *How does the internet change media relations between PR practitioners and journalists?*

Both newspapers visit companies' websites in order to research information. The information sought from company web sites include corporate news, media releases, financial information, annual reports, product/service information, speeches and photographs. Electronic media kits are used to gather information for a story.

Research question: *To what extent does e-mail complement other conventional modes of internal communication?*

Newspapers find using e-mail advantageous for gathering news because it is accurate and many questions can be asked without any restrictions.

Research question: *What role does e-mail play on the company's media relations?*

Both newspapers use e-mail for journalism/ reporting purposes. They both use it to send out media enquiries and to receive media releases. Sowetan says its effectiveness lies in journalists only editing instead of composing the entire article. Chances of misquoting the source of information are reduced.

8.6 Radio industry findings

From a sample of five only two radio stations, 40% responded, which are Radio IKwekwezi and Radio 702.

Q1

Both stations visit company websites to research information.

Q2

Radio stations indicate that 38.8% of information is researched from websites. Both stations seek media releases and product/ service information. Other information sought includes corporate news and financial information. Annual reports and speeches are not researched.

Q3

Both stations use traditional and online media kits. Radio 702 uses traditional kits "if the company does not have an online presence or there isn't enough information available online". The other station relies on traditional kits only if systems are down.

Q4

Neither of the radio stations has attended a virtual media conference.

Q5

Only the Radio Ikwekwezi has an intranet.

Q6

The station posts corporate news and newsletters.

Q7

The indigenous station mentions that intranet usage is quicker and more cost-effective.

Q8

The station posts research, corporate image, social responsibility programmes, PR campaigns, crisis management and company information.

Q9

It serves as a reference tool.

Q10

Both stations use e-mail for journalism purposes.

Q11

Both stations use the tool to send media enquiries and to receive media releases.

Q12

Both stations indicate that e-mail is faster and less costly, reflecting the second highest rate in changing journalism (44.4%).

Q13

The radio industry carries more advantages at 57.1%. Both show that it is cost - effective. Other responses are that "one can communicate with everyone at once", and "it is an easier means of communication".

Q14

Both advantages and disadvantages of using technologies are reflected at 50%. In the case of Radio 702, the internet makes information more easily accessible. Radio Ikwewezi regards ICTs as the best source of information. There is also the disadvantage of companies not updating websites regularly.

Answering research questions

Research question: *What role does the company website play in changing media relations between PR practitioners and journalists?*

Radio stations visit company websites to research information. Information sought includes corporate news, media releases, financial information, product/service information and photographs. Both radio stations use online media kits.

Research question: *How do organisations use the intranet for publicity purposes?*

Radio Ikwewezi uses the intranet to post corporate news and newsletters.

Research question: *How do PR practitioners use the intranet to implement communication programmes aimed at employees?*

Corporate communication functions are comprehensively featured. These include corporate image programmes, corporate social responsibility programmes, crisis management and company information.

Research question: *How does the intranet promote vertical communication between senior management and employees?*

No information is provided on transactional communication between employees and management.

Research question: *What role does e-mail play on the company's media relations?*

Both radio stations use e-mail for journalistic and reporting purposes. E-mail is used mainly to send out media enquiries and to receive media releases.

Research question: *How does e-mail complement other conventional modes of internal communication?*

Both stations indicate that e-mail is an easier means of communication, it is cost-effective and allows the media to communicate with many people simultaneously.

8.7 Banking industry findings

Out of a sample of seven, only two banks (28.5%) responded, namely First National Bank (FNB) and Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA).

Q1

Both banks have intranets. These, like the mining industry, carry the second highest frequency (28.5%) of companies with intranets.

Q2

Both use the intranet for communication and public relations purposes. Banks, like the mining industry, have the second highest rate of public relations usage within the sample at 28.5%.

Q3

The banking industry has the second highest rate in internal communication functions, at 31.2% within the sample. Media information and corporate information are the common denominators. Other aspects include using the intranet to disseminate telephone numbers, branch lists, speeches and manuals.

Q4

The banking industry has the lowest publicity function within the sample (26.1%). Common functions of publicity posted on the intranet are corporate news, media releases, financial information and newsletters. Also mentioned are annual reports and brochures.

Q5

Banks use intranets at the second-highest frequency of 28.5%. Both banks use the intranet more than conventional media.

Q6

Banks reflect the second-highest frequency within the sample (28.5%). The common advantage they cite of using the intranet is that it offers immediacy. Other advantages are easy access to information and low cost.

Q7

Banks post the second-highest rate together with the mining industry, of public relations functions (26.6%). The functions are corporate image programmes and corporate information. Others include research, social responsibility, crisis information and PR campaigns.

Q8

Most internal stakeholders within the sample (45.4%) have access to the intranet. Corporate staff members and management of both banks have access to intranets. One bank has an intranet facility for each branch.

Q9

Communication is enhanced at the second highest rate in the banking industry as is the case of mines (30.7%). Both banks maintain that communication has been enhanced by easily accessing information they need. Other reasons are that many people can be reached simultaneously and paper is saved.

Q10

Banks reflect the second-highest usage of e-mail, together with the mining sector (28.5%). They use e-mail for executing public relations functions.

Q11

Banks have the lowest rate within the sample (20%) of e-mail usage pertaining to public relations functions. They use e-mail for external communication to send media invites, media releases and speeches.

Q12

The highest improvement is recorded by the banks (55.5%). Banks believe that e-mail speeds up communication. One bank mentions that various media can be targeted simultaneously. Reception of information is guaranteed and the tool is cost-efficient.

Q13

The second-highest advantages within the sample are noted by banks at 33.3%. Both banks indicate that e-mail offers immediacy. Further advantages are simultaneous targeting, cost-efficiency and time savings.

Q14

Within the sample, banks recorded disadvantages at a frequency of 16.6%, similar to the mining industry. This is much fewer than in the oil industry (66.6%). Disadvantages include technical problems hampering communication and computer viruses that destroy information.

Answering research questions

Research question: *How do companies use intranets for internal communication?*

The two banks use intranets to disseminate corporate information, media information, organisational policies, branch lists, telephone numbers, executive speeches and manuals. Publicity tools are also disseminated through the intranet.

Research question: *How do employees across distances use the intranet to collaborate on projects?*

No information is provided that indicates collaboration of any sort between distant branches.

Research question: *How do PR practitioners use the intranet to implement communication programmes aimed at employees?*

Core public relations functions are implemented mainly on the intranet, including crisis communication, communication campaigns and research.

Research question: *How does the intranet promote vertical communication between senior management and employees?*

Banks do not indicate how the intranet promotes vertical communication.

Research question: *How does e-mail complement other conventional modes of internal communication?*

There is no indication of how e-mail complements other modes of communication.

Research question: *What role does e-mail play in the company's media relations?*

Both banks use e-mail to send media invites, media releases and speeches. The function of media relations is changing as communication is quicker, various media can be targeted simultaneously and reception of information is guaranteed.

9. CONCLUSION

Intranets and e-mail have extended the functions of corporate communication to employees. Findings indicate that organisational policies and other manuals are posted on the intranet and sent through e-mail. Corporate communication functions such as corporate image and social responsibility projects are also posted on the intranet. Before the advent of these technologies, these functions were not aimed at employees but rather at external stakeholders because companies executed them through the mass media. Now, feedback mechanisms are available to employees and these have changed organisational culture by opening horizontal and vertical lines of communication.

Intranets and e-mail have added benefits for companies when compared to traditional modes. Findings show that intranets are cost-effective. These technologies have enhanced internal communication because one can reach many people simultaneously and the audience can receive the same message at the same time. Employees have easy access to information, the internet is a reference tool for seeking information, relations have improved and the intranet is used for knowledge management.

As the research problem concerned communicating to widely dispersed audiences, which posed obstacles of reach and immediacy, findings demonstrate that intranets and email have simultaneous reach. When companies use

traditional means, publications reach employees on a monthly or quarterly basis, thus reporting events after they have occurred. Findings show that companies now post publications on the intranet on a regular basis which is cost effective and offers immediacy.

Findings reveal that radio stations use e-mail to speed up contacts with external sources. E-mail replaces written communication through memos and notice boards, and assists employees in adapting to the fast pace of business and improved relations. Traditional memos and notice boards lack the speed which e-mail offers and employees may not read notices.

Findings show that e-mail improves journalistic functions for newspapers as it is time-efficient and cuts costs. More detailed information can be sent via this mode. Traditional modes of sending media releases impose restrictions in terms of the length of media releases.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the findings by establishing the extent to which study objectives have been met and given meaning in the study.

First, the two study objectives which were used in the content analysis will be integrated into the discussion. These are:

- To explore how public relations practitioners use the internet as a new medium for corporate communication.
- To discover the functions of corporate communication as reflected through this medium.

Second, the two study objectives which the questionnaires have attempted to answer will be investigated. These are:

- To establish how the intranet is used for internal communication.
- To establish the functions of electronic mail in internal and external communication.

The media industry will be discussed separately as a different questionnaire was completed by this industry, as was explained in chapter 3.

Third, the discussion will offer a collective interpretation of the findings, taking into consideration related information from the literature reviewed and from industry benchmarks. Observed communication tools which are discussed in the

literature review, but which were not subjected to study, will also be discussed. Finally, a synthesis of the impact of information communication technologies in relation to conventional modes will be established.

1. DISCUSSION OF CONTENT ANALYSIS FINDINGS

In answer to the question of how public relations practitioners use the internet as a new medium of communication, it is clear from the findings that the oil, mining and banking industries make significant use of the web. The oil industry exploits the internet by providing detailed information on a wide range of products. Local and global operations and facilities are posted, covering the businesses linked to each. These companies offer links to websites of companies in other global locations. The user can select the English version or the local language.

The mining industry also uses the internet as a new medium and posts mineral information ranging from diamonds, iron ore, platinum, metallurgical products, gold and other minerals, among others. Locations of each mining facility are provided and the specific minerals excavated are listed. Websites of mines in other locations also host photograph galleries of various operations in fact sheet format which indicate the location, the number of employees, production capacity as well as the history of the undertaking.

The banking industry presents information on all banking products offered as well as other business activities. Operations and branches are posted, and a searchable format for information on other branches is provided.

These findings are in line with assertions by Ashcroft and Hoey (2001) and Spataro (1998:2), who note that the internet increases awareness of an organisation's products and its operations. In Chapter 1, the significance of the study was predicted as revealing the extent to which technology can reach more stakeholders, and determining whether technology can link worldwide operations.

These research findings have proved that technologies do reach global audiences. Detailed information pertaining to products in global operations and other locations or in each facility abound on the internet.

Thus, this new medium extends the use of brochures and fact sheets by furnishing detailed corporate information. Findings show that the internet surpasses the traditional brochure which is a four- to six-page folded leaflet, which does not have the capacity to present volumes of company information in the same way that technologies can. Conventional brochures only offer a summarised account of the company structure and operations, while the internet has unlimited space to provide the same information in detail. Brochures do not have global reach, and only contain local company information. With regard to brochures, their web presence no longer resembles the folded leaflet format. Instead, information featured in brochures appears in various areas and can be accessed by using pull mechanisms to reach product or service information, company structure, or history and operations. Information can be easily updated without reprinting the material.

The media industry does not take full advantage of this new medium. Most of its coverage is devoted to audience demographics and circulation figures. Newspapers focus more on the details of reporters and correspondents, while radio stations mostly feature programme line-ups with DJ information. Not much service information is provided. More information could be devoted to company information such as the history and the type of service rendered, which would have the effect of positioning them more favourably than their competitors.

With reference to how the internet reflects the functions of corporate communication, a few companies do communicate their corporate image. Oil companies outline reasons for mergers with other companies which have led to a change in identity. A merchant bank's positive image is communicated through mentioning several awards received for its innovative banking practices.

Similarly, a Sunday newspaper and a commercial radio station reflect a positive image by listing awards they have received for journalism and for the promotion of upcoming artists.

These findings are in contrast to those of Drucker et al. (1997), who state that companies have lost control of their corporate image as rivals are able to use the same medium to disseminate rumours to the whole world. Announcing awards through the internet indicates control over their reputation, which reflects a positive image.

An industry benchmark in the literature which supports the findings has shown that the South African Breweries used its website to announce its merger with Miller Brewing Company on 9 July 2002. This merger resulted in the renaming of the company as SABMiller plc, the world's second largest brewer. However, the logo remains unchanged (www.sab.co.za, 2002).

The significance of the study sought to establish how technologies were used in executing PR activities. Findings indicate that companies use the internet to increase their visibility regarding changes taking place and in controlling their corporate image. Traditionally, these functions were evident only through corporate advertising and press releases. Detailed facts on policy and managerial decisions to change the image were thus limited by space and the cost of advertising.

Conventional means and corporate advertising cannot inform the audiences in great detail about management and operational decisions leading to changes in a business's identity. Conventional means such as corporate advertisements merely present the new logo, in order that audiences will recognise it in future. This is done because the print media offers only limited space and the costs of advertising are exorbitant.

The corporate social responsibility function is reflected by all industries, with the newspaper and radio industries showing least representation. Corporate social responsibility projects sponsored by the mining industry, banks, and oil industries include environmental conservation, education, arts and culture. These industries host home pages dedicated to this function as well as media releases publishing related information.

Radio stations place greater focus on competitions and music concerts. Such companies use the web to communicate their social responsibility efforts and to present themselves as good corporate citizens. The newspaper industry has limited responsibilities, which include community development projects and literary awards. In presenting their responsibilities on the internet, companies use an image-building approach which reflects their goodwill.

These findings correspond to what Esrock and Leitchy (1998) found in their study on social responsibility items featured on the websites of Fortune 500 companies. The items included the environment, education, charity, sports, health and community involvement. The findings also support Liberty Group Limited's use of the internet, as shown in the literature. The company has a home page featuring detailed social responsibility activities. The foundation embarks on projects which empower historically disadvantaged communities in areas of education, skills development and hospital emergency response (www.liberty.co.za, April 2002).

The significance of the study presumed that the social responsibility function would assume a new role through the use of technology. Findings reveal that the internet has the capacity to cover many details of the company's responsibilities, including the policies underlying the choice of such involvements. Websites of the researched companies contain numerous pages for each project. The modes which are traditionally used, that is, the annual report and news releases, would not be easily accessible to interested global audiences. The projects are

commonly highlighted by sponsoring major sporting events and through corporate advertising. Therefore, if companies used only traditional means, global audiences would not receive such information, which include projects such as education, arts and culture, humanitarian activities and social upliftment.

None of the industries communicate crisis-related information on the internet. The mass media are used to announce such occurrences, it is obvious that these companies do not have strategies in place to post crisis information on their websites. The importance of using these technologies has not yet been fully realised, because reporting a crisis in the mass media has serious implications for shareholders who are globally dispersed.

In contrast to the above findings, Breakenridge and DeLoghry (2003:166) advise that a crisis website be built in advance of a crisis and activated to educate various stakeholders on the steps the company is taking to respond to events. Building a crisis management strategy around the internet makes sense because the site will function in times of tragedy when telephone lines are inaccessible. It is a perfect place for posting a clear statement of the company's communication objectives for senior executives and other employees who must stay focused on the message in difficult times.

The investor relations function is reflected by four industries, with the exception of the radio group. Information that is most commonly presented is share prices, audited results and performance. The oil, mining and banking industries focus on investor information including dividends, share price, financial performance, audited results, annual reviews and interactive share charts. Two companies feature web casts of quarterly results and audio broadcasts of the teleconference of the chairman's and chief financial officer's interviews to shareholders.

The mining and banking industries also use media releases and annual reports to announce audited results and other investor information. The newspaper

industry's coverage of this function is confined to reporting financial news of other companies.

These findings correspond to the views of Boutie (1996) and Holtz (1999:139), who found that the internet is used to extend investor relations programmes to analysts, business media and investors who are scattered around the globe. Investor relations sites attract potential investors, and findings indicate this when companies post share prices with share purchasing applications on their sites. If the financial performance of companies is profitable and share value is high, this could attract prospective investors.

Furthermore, an industry benchmark set by Exxaro mining company supports the research findings. The company posts the latest annual report on the home page, including investor presentations, news releases, shareholder leaflets and an audio web cast. The latest shareholder news is featured, as well as interim financial results and changes to the board of directors. The findings on web casting reveal what English (2002:3) notes, that this enables companies to reach their shareholders, analysts and other interested stakeholders.

The significance of the study presumed that the investor relations function might assume a new role through these technologies. Findings show that the internet has expanded this role far beyond other corporate communication functions. Numerous pages of audited financial results are presented, far exceeding those of the conventional print annual report. The results are archived to allow the business media, shareholders and analysts access at a future date. Findings also reflect the interactive aspect of investors calculating share value against foreign stock, purchasing shares online and registering for web casts.

Web casts are particularly useful for reporters and investors in distant locations. The advantage of web casts against the traditional media conference and teleconferencing is that they can be archived and viewed long after the event has

occurred. Stored messages create a personalised image when accessed. Questions can be asked in real time, something which would have been impossible in pre-internet days.

In the virtual centre category, the oil, mining and banking industries invite comments, feedback and questions through e-mail enabled links. The newspaper industry features e-mail applications directed at editors and webmasters, e-mail enabled forms for sending letters and opinions, and discussion forums on various topics. Radio stations provide the e-mail contacts of presenters and editors, and a form to be completed by listeners when requesting a particular song.

These findings confirm Holtz's (1999) comment that internet channels carry feedback and comments to make stakeholder communication interactive. An anonymous author (1998) cites Shell's website as hosting online debates on environmental issues with pressure groups. The internet's hosting of forums and discussion groups provides a platform for two-way communication when discussing crucial company information. Interactivity is the "most prominent feature of the internet" and an added advantage that traditional media lacks (Broderick, 1997:22; Naude et al., 2004).

The significance of the study envisaged that the symmetrical nature of the internet would be revealed in organisations opening lines of communication with their stakeholders through research, discussion forums and comments. The researcher observed from the findings that discussion forums which serve to gather people's opinions are valuable in monitoring issues which could be critical to the company's reputation. Findings also show that newspapers present discussion forums and invite letters which allow dialogue with its audiences. Audio streams and news bulletins on radio stations reach global audiences. Since newspapers host forums on various topics, these could impact negatively on companies under discussion.

Traditionally, companies conduct environmental scanning research on the publics in order to remain sensitive to current issues. Formal scanning techniques, which are expensive, include public opinion research and communication audits. Informal techniques include receiving complaints from publics, analysing media clippings and checking reactions after special events. The formal techniques focus on predetermined questions. On the other hand, sending comments via the web is not restricted to specific topics as illustrated in the questionnaire survey, and an unlimited number of visitors can send feedback on a continuous basis. Thus this channel is cost-effective as no costs are incurred by questionnaires or field workers.

With regard to the web surveys category, findings show that these occur infrequently. In this sample only one oil company runs a survey aimed at journalists with a view to improving its site. Though research findings indicate a low incidence of surveys, this is in line with the views of Ghose and Dou (1998, (in Naude et al., 2004:43), who note that interactivity serves the "marketing research" function which applies such forms as site surveys and product surveys.

Once again, the problem statement of the study presumed that data might reveal links which would allow users to complete and send questionnaires to management at the click of a button. This finding indicates that research can be undertaken online with targeted audiences, thus making it easier and more cost-effective.

2. DISCUSSION OF SURVEY FINDINGS (Oil, Mining and Banking Industries)

Intranet

Communication and publicity functions

With regard to the study objective of how the intranet is used as an internal communication tool, the banking, oil and mining groups have intranets which are used for public relations. The communication and publicity functions served by this medium include disseminating corporate information, various publications, press releases, speeches, and business contact details for various divisions, feedback forums, financial information and vacancies. In the light of these findings, it can be stated with some confidence that these industries have fully adopted this technological medium in internal communication.

These findings correspond with the assertion by Knoch (1998:16) that intranets carry internal company information straight to the employees' desktops. As an interdepartmental information resource, the human resources department can use it to browse internal job listings (Sharples, 1997). In this regard, the oil industry posts human resources and marketing information. Viedge (1997) adds that the accounting department might post corporate budget information and employee telephone directories. Thus the intranet gives employees access to information on its various divisions dispersed across geographic locations.

The findings also support the views of Woo (1997:17) who cites US West, a United States telephone company, on newsgroups. Employees using the corporate intranet can voice their opinions on any subject, which leads to an open culture of communication. This allows the CEO to answer questions from any employee, thus preventing rumours by providing accurate information. This function is evident on De Beers' website, which hosts a feedback forum and describes its benefits thus:

The discussion forums and feedback tool have done a great deal regarding open and constructive communication between staff and management.

The findings on posting newsletters and press releases support the views of Grates (2000:30), who mentions that Ford Motor Company delivers its weekly newspaper to employees via the intranet. Employees can also access the latest press releases, news and business weekly updates on the intranet.

In chapter 1 it was envisaged that the study would reveal that other corporate communication functions which are not communicated to employees through traditional means might assume a new role through technologies. This can be seen in the fact that publications assume a new platform when disseminated through intranets. Findings show that the intranet has expanded corporate information which was traditionally communicated through newsletters. This is seen in intranets posting press releases which have traditionally been confined to the press. Speeches delivered by senior executives were once confined to special events which did not require the presence of all employees.

Intranets demonstrate impact because they are cost-effective *vis-à-vis* the printing of conventional publications and dispatching costs. Accessing a wealth of company information from various divisions in a company, and simultaneous reach, was not possible in pre-intranet days. The intranet has the capacity to establish two-way communication between employees and senior management, which changes traditional corporate culture.

The benefits of intranets

All three industries make significant use of the intranet, rather than using traditional modes. Findings also indicate that intranet benefits include immediacy, easy access, low cost, and simultaneous dissemination of information to many

people. The intranet enhances communication with employees by reaching many at once, and improved relationships through its interactive abilities. This was described as follows:

Everyone gets the same message at the same time.

Staff members have easy access to information.

Relationships with employees have improved.

Immediacy and cost.

Staff members have easy access to the tool and are able to access information any time they wish.

These sentiments are supported by Dekker (2002) who states that employees can instantly access corporate information. Lower costs characterise accessing information from intranets. For global organisations with workforces operating in different time zones, information is available twenty-four hours a day. Gronstedt (1999) also indicates that the intranet as a vertical communication tool improves relationships. This enables senior management to keep in touch and to be informed of the needs of frontline workers.

The impact of the intranet is shown by its capabilities of simultaneous reach and low cost. However, there are some disadvantages. Not all employees have access to an intranet. This was clear in the case of the mining sites, where most employees work underground or in refineries. The same applies to oil companies, where the majority of the workforce is stationed in plants or on the road, transporting fuel to depots. In banks, some of the workforce are stationed at customer services and some are computer illiterate. The effectiveness of intranets cannot therefore benefit all employees as some may still rely only on conventional modes of communication.

Specific corporate communication aspects

Research findings also reveal that only one oil company and one bank post crisis communication information on their intranets. This supports the literature on a medical supply company which used its intranet to alert its employees to alternative means of transporting products in the wake of the 11 September 2001 disaster. Intranet usage during crisis averts fear among employees and provides alternative ways of doing business (www.2ragan.com,2001).

Findings also reveal public relations functions posted on the intranet by all three industries as being corporate information and social responsibility programmes. The corporate social responsibility function is reflected by Eskom, which uses the intranet to keep employees informed about its World Environmental Day campaign as its community responsibility effort (Eskom, www.aardvark,2002).

Research findings show that corporate image programmes, PR campaigns and research are also posted by these industries. The oil industry includes corporate image and other PR campaigns which the mining and banking industries do not include in their intranets. This confirms the views of Smith (1997:24) who claims that intranets are valuable tools to implement new identities. An industry benchmark reveals that ABSA used the intranet extensively to introduce and promote its new logo in 1998/1999 amongst its staff. The intranet was also used to determine employees' disposition towards corporate business wear.

The significance of the study stated that data would reveal whether intranets communicate corporate image and identity, social responsibility and crisis management. Findings indicate the impact of intranets as they communicate corporate image/identity to employees. Traditionally, this aspect could not be communicated by newsletters. Hence, intranets have introduced a participative culture among employees in informing management decisions, and in order to collect data speedily with regard to conducting corporate image audits.

Social responsibility is traditionally directed at external publics. Now the intranet serves to inform employees about projects in which companies are engaged. Senior management also uses the intranet to engage employees in prioritising social responsibility projects. Though only two companies post crisis information, employees should take precedence in being informed when crisis strikes. In this regard, the intranet must provide information as employees work will be disrupted by any crisis.

Employee access to intranets

With regard to employees having access to intranets, all three groups reveal that all office staff have access and De Beers also makes this service available to investors. This finding suggests that companies have completely adopted this medium to disseminate internal company information.

E-Mail

With regard to the study objective of how electronic mail is used in internal and external communication, findings revealed that all three industries use e-mail for public relations. It is used to send media invitations, media releases, speeches, internal communication, and as a feedback mechanism for senior management.

For urgent employee communications and mostly to inform them on updates and new content published on the intranet. The e-mail helped by (unintentionally) acting as a feedback tool between employees and management via the PR department.

We use e-mail for media releases, important appointments, notices on art exhibitions, courses etc.

This finding corresponds with the assertion in the literature by Du Plessis (1994) that e-mail can be used for internal communication to send memos and other

information. Dern (1997) also states that "e-mail is a powerful, convenient way to provide information to the press". Cutlip et al. (2007) add that e-mail has, to a large extent, replaced the exchange of letters between employees and supervisors. It has replaced some forms of interpersonal communication and provides opportunities for instant feedback.

Thus, e-mail serves as a technological tool to send and receive information to both internal and external stakeholders. In all three industries, changes in media relations are evident. Such changes are reflected in sending media releases, speeches, making communication quicker, targeting various media simultaneously with guaranteed reception of information and cost-effectiveness. This is explained thus:

Simply a fast, easy and relatively inexpensive way of communicating.

One is able to send media releases to various media at the same time.

It's made the business of communication quicker and cheaper.

This response is related to Van Zyl's (2000) assertion that organisations have found an easier and faster path to request and disseminate information. Foley (2001) acclaims e-mail for its low cost and immediacy. The sender can communicate with many recipients at the same time.

The significance of the study presumed that data would reveal whether e-mail communicates the media relations aspect by using other means unrelated to traditional methods. Companies revealed the impact of technologies when they send media releases, speeches and media invites through via electronic mail.

How e-mail enhances business communication

With regard to how e-mail enhances business communication, all three industries emphasise that it makes communication quicker, it is cost-efficient and offers simultaneous targeting. The findings are explained thus:

One can communicate with many people at the same time.

With e-mail you can get a quick response to issues or matters that may be urgent.

This finding is related to Holtz's (1999) assertion that e-mail can be used for one-on-one communication. Relationships with reporters can be established or negotiated on issues raised through forums.

The significance of the study presumed that new technologies would have important implications as public relations focuses on exchanging information. As is the case with the intranet, findings revealed that e-mail targets audiences simultaneously and fast. Traditional means are unable to reach global audiences simultaneously, and bulletins which provide urgent company information are costly to print and distribute.

General comments pertaining to ICT usage are negative and include technical problems, irrelevant mail, computer viruses and a lack of computer skills. This was explained as follows:

People are inundated with irrelevant mail that wastes their time and that of the company.

People try to sort out problems using e-mail - it never works when there is no emotion involved.

There is a significant lack of computer skills amongst the previously disadvantaged communities.

These findings support the views of St John (1996) who points out that the lack of computer literacy and receiving irrelevant mail reduces internet usage and face-to-face encounters. Lee and Seward (2001) articulate this view when they state that e-mail puts more distance between people who are within close proximity at the workplace.

The researcher is of the opinion that receiving bulk and irrelevant mail takes more of the workers' time than was the case before the advent of this application. This may also lead to people deleting the most important information. Departments or sections in companies should have mailing lists with addresses of relevant recipients. As this is the information age, companies must see to it that all office staff are trained in computer usage.

2.1 Discussion of Media Industry findings

Internet

Findings indicate that radio stations and newspaper companies visit other company websites to research information. The media industry looks for financial information, media releases, corporate news, product/service information, speeches and photographs.

This finding is in line with the view of Catacalos (1999), that "the media are increasingly turning to the internet for research and information about the issues and companies they cover". Now journalists find a faster and more convenient path to retrieving detailed information. Since the media have different needs, it is suggested that a media centre be created within company websites. This is demonstrated by SABMiller plc which has a media centre hosting downloadable digital video files of television commercials, press releases, a photograph gallery and a fact sheet (<http://www.sab.co.za>,2002).

The significance of the study envisaged that technologies would open lines of communication with the media amongst other stakeholders. These findings imply that media relations have been transformed since the advent of the internet. Journalists can access a wealth of background information from company websites. Traditionally, this information was found in brochures, annual reports, newsletters and media kits on request. Now the media has access to detailed

corporate information posted on websites. This in turn is cost effective to companies because technology reduces printing and distribution costs. The impact of technology is demonstrated by the archived annual reports, speeches, media releases and fact sheets which journalists can reference and use as background information.

Although the internet is widely adopted, the media industry indicates some disadvantages of technology, as the industry still resorts to traditional media kits. This occurs when online information is not adequate and when online systems are under construction. The media industry indicated the situation thus:

As you know, with technology there are days when there are problems with systems, thus if you have a hard copy you can use that for reference etc. Yes, if the company does not have an online presence or there isn't enough information available online.

These findings point to the fact that technologies only complement conventional modes of communication and cannot replace them. Conventional modes can rescue a situation when there is a disruption in technological means.

Neither the radio stations nor the newspaper companies have participated in a virtual media conference. Possible reasons for this could be that industries whose news is covered by the media under study may not be aware of virtual news conferences, or they may not have web casting technologies in place.

Intranet

With regard to the study objective of how the intranet is used as an internal communication tool, only Radio Ikwewezi uses an intranet. The station publicises corporate news and newsletters on its intranet. This finding supports the assertions of Knoch (1998:16) that intranets carry internal company

information to employees' computers. Announcements notifying the users of the latest news can be made through the intranet (r-way.com,2000).

Radio Ikwewezi finds the intranet quicker and more cost-effective, compared to conventional modes of communication. This corresponds to the view that intranets are used to publish employee newsletters, product/service information, and allow faster communication than printed media, radio and television (www.online-pr.com,2001).

Findings also reveal that this radio station posts most corporate communication functions on its intranet, including PR campaigns and research information. This finding is in line with literature on Eskom publishing its social investment efforts on its intranet (Eskom,www.aardvark.com,2002) and other information such as crisis management, corporate image and general company information. Thus, intranet usage is fully exploited in disseminating corporate undertakings.

The significance of the study envisaged that publications would assume a new platform on the intranet, and data would reveal whether technologies communicate corporate communication functions. Findings reveal that corporate information and newsletters are posted on the intranet. The impact here is that publications are distributed more quickly and the cost of printing is reduced. Corporate communication functions are conventionally not communicated to employees, but the intranet makes these aspects available to employees.

The radio station reflects how its intranet enhances employee communication in this response:

It acts as a reference tool, hence makes life easier.

This is clear from the radio station's posting of corporate information which workers access in the course of executing their activities. This provides information at the push of a button and yields benefits to employees.

E-mail

With regard to electronic mail usage, findings show that all media companies use e-mail for journalism purposes, using it to send media enquiries and to receive media releases. This finding corresponds with Van Zyl's (2000) view that "journalists and organizations have found an easier, faster path for making requests and enquiries".

Findings also reveal that the media relations function is improving in the sense that e-mail offers a faster and more cost-effective means of communication. Detailed company information can be received through e-mail and future referencing is made possible. E-mail has the advantage of saving time and cost in gathering news. Journalists also have the latitude to ask questions.

It is the best thing since sliced bread. It also makes communication faster and less expensive.

It also cuts costs with regard to phone calls or delivery services.

E-mail is cost effective and also assists in terms of productivity, i.e. we spend less time on the phone and can send more detailed information via e-mail. It also helps in terms of reference and/or confirms that you have actioned a specific task.

These findings correspond with what Foley (2001) and Dern (1997) articulate that it is a fast, easy to use, two-way channel which is convenient for contacting the press.

The significance of the findings is that e-mail has taken the place of traditional postage and faxes in sending and receiving media releases. Traditionally, media releases were delivered to the newsroom and went through the relevant editor before being considered for printing; now detailed information can be sent by e-mail.

Research findings on ICT usage in journalism indicate that radio stations find the internet as the best source which offers easy access to information. This finding is articulated thus:

The internet is an invaluable tool in the media industry in terms of bringing the world closer and making it more accessible.

It is the best source of information.

Newspaper responses, on the other hand, regard the written word as more credible and appreciate that there is less duplication, only editing.

If it's not written it's not said.

It is very effective as journalists don't have to sit and re-type the whole press release, they just edit it. Also there are less chances of someone being misquoted if a press release is sent via e-mail.

This finding relates to the fact that when using e-mail, copy can be cut and pasted which saves the journalist time in formulating text (Van Zyl, 2000).

The significance here is that findings show that the internet brings the world closer and makes it more accessible; the obstacles of reach and immediacy are overcome by new technology. The media are able to access background information on the overseas facilities of a global company, for instance. E-mail increases productivity because it reduces reformulating text and allows journalists to alter information electronically. In the traditional modes of

communication, when a source is misquoted, journalists are usually alerted to this after the article has been published. An errata offering an apology is published after the damage has been done. Using e-mail media releases reduces such errors because copy is not re-typed.

3. DISCUSSION OF OBSERVED COMMUNICATION TOOLS

The literature review indicated that organisations host media centres which carry press releases.. This is prevalent on the websites of all companies researched, with the exception of the media industry. Oil companies, in particular, host downloadable speeches, press kits, web casts, and photographic images of company executives. This is in line with Catacalos (1999) who notes that the media have different needs when they visit company websites for research and other information. Photograph galleries post downloadable images and press kits which may be required by journalists, thus reducing telephone calls, the cost of printing and sending media kits and brochures.

Traditionally, press releases and media kits are sent via fax or mail. Now web technology has made it possible for journalists to access and speedily download required information. Three companies post company newsletters which are industry-specific. As noted in the literature, online publications can provide information about company performance, policies, products, and saving printing costs. The companies in this study do not seem to consider this seriously as only a few publications appear on the internet.

4. CONCLUSION

This chapter established the relationship between the research findings and the review of the literature. The literature and the industry benchmarks bear relevance to the research findings and this increases the chances of validity. The findings were discussed in relation to the study objectives and this proved

that all the objectives had been met. The findings from the survey questionnaire also support the information from the literature reviewed.

CHAPTER 6

MAIN FINDINGS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

This final chapter puts all the elements of the study into perspective. The chapter concludes on what has been accomplished in each section of the methodology. Factors which limited the researcher from gaining information in order to acquire optimal findings are stated. Following this, suggestions for future research are made. Finally, recommendations suggest the ideal method of executing public relations through online means, and envisaged areas for future research are mentioned.

1. MAIN FINDINGS

1.1 Content Analysis findings

The oil industry hosts moderate corporate communication information. This is attributed to a low incidence of product information and social responsibility projects on the website. Investor information is negligible because only two companies host such information, and a web cast of financial results is available. The virtual centre is characterised by only a few links. Only one web survey is conducted.

The banking industry hosts more corporate communication information. This is evident from the information on companies' operations, numerous products and social investment projects. Banks take the lead in investor relations as they are financially oriented. The virtual centre is adequately covered. Web surveys are not run on the internet, but one consumer bank publishes survey results acquired through other means.

The mining industry has the second highest coverage of corporate communication. Detailed information on various minerals and social investment programmes is featured. Elements of a press kit are available in the form of photographic images, media contacts, corporate profile, shares and assets. Mining companies are more interactive than other sector companies in their investor communication. Investor communication is exceptional, featuring presentations of quarterly results, speeches, currency indicators, share alerts, media releases, annual reports and web casts. The virtual centre is featured to a lesser extent, with feedback applications directed at investor relations.

The newspaper industry features mostly news headlines, circulation figures, readers' demographic profiles, reporters and editors. No investor relations information is featured except in those newspapers that publish financial information of other companies. The virtual centre category is moderately featured as e-mail contacts to editors are provided. There is also a discussion forum which publishes readers' opinions. No surveys are conducted.

Radio stations revealed the lowest coverage in corporate communication. The focus is more on audience demographics, radio formats, programme line-ups, competitions and musical concert sponsorships. Investor information is absent. This industry is virtual because it comprises audio streams and e-mail applications of presenters. Once again, no web surveys are featured.

1.2 Descriptive survey findings

Oil, mining and banking industries

Intranet

The oil, banking, and mining industries use intranets for public relations and publicity purposes that are listed in the questionnaire schedule. Findings also

indicate that intranet benefits include immediacy, easy access, low cost, and simultaneous dissemination of information to many. Findings show that all office staff in the three groups have access to the intranet and De Beers also extends this service to its investors.

E-Mail

All three industries – oil, mines and banks – use e-mail for internal and external communication and media relations. E-mail enhances business communication, making it quicker, more cost-efficient and providing simultaneous targeting. The negative side of e-mail includes irrelevant mail, computer viruses and a lack of computer skills.

The media industry

Internet

Findings indicate that radio stations and newspaper companies visit other company websites to research information. They research financial information, media releases, corporate news, product/service information, speeches and photographs. Though the internet is widely adopted, the media industry indicates a disadvantage to technology as the industry still resorts to traditional media kits. This occurs when online information is not adequate and when online systems are under construction.

Intranet

Findings reveal that only Radio Ikwewezi has an intranet, on which it presents corporate information and publications. The station finds the intranet quicker and more cost-effective than conventional modes; it enhances productivity by allowing employees access to information.

E-mail

Findings show that all media companies use e-mail for journalistic purposes: sending media enquiries and receiving media releases. The media relations function is improving in the sense that e-mail offers a faster and more cost-effective means of communication. Detailed company information can be received through e-mail and future referencing is made possible. Newspaper responses regard the written word as more credible and appreciate that there is less duplication, because journalists only edit the text.

2. LIMITATIONS

South African literature from scientific journals and textbooks pertaining to ICTs is scarce. The majority of references in this study are from US publications, followed by those from Britain. Information on how South African companies use the internet for various public relations functions is mostly inferred directly from websites. Other South African references are internet-based articles. There is also a lack of substantial literature pertaining to areas such as research and crisis management.

The return rate of questionnaires was forty percent. This makes it difficult to generalise on intranet and e-mail usage by companies. As a result, typical industry patterns could not be drawn conclusively from the study objectives relating to intranet and e-mail usage.

Categories defined in the methodology chapter limited the findings because of the existence of other PR-related information. A second coding sheet with different categories would be required to investigate other PR-related information observed on websites.

3. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The internet has great potential that remains almost untapped. The net seems to have several applications which outsmart the conventional tools of public relations. These are some of the opportunities which can be explored in future research:

- Information communication technologies have transformed media relations. As stated above, certain phenomena observed on websites could not be coded. It is suggested that media relations be researched to their fullest by focusing on the prevalence of press releases, press kits and other tools relevant to the media centre.
- As the information age has introduced new ways of sending and receiving information, focus should be directed to the dialogical capabilities. Interviews and/or focus group research would establish whether two-way communication exists between users and organisations.
- Future research could be expanded to investigate aspects of how the internet is used for change management and issues management.
- In addition, future research on intranets should use in-depth interviews in order to gain insight into how and why the tool is used for internal communication.
- The same research techniques could apply to researching electronic mail usage.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the literature reviewed, survey research and content analysis

findings, the following communication-related information is recommended for company websites:

- Corporate home pages should carry explicit links to “About Us” or “About the Company”, “Operations”, “Investor Relations” or “Investor Centre”, “Products”, “Media Centre” or “Press Centre”, “Social Investment” or “Community Outreach”, “Corporate Image/Identity”, and “Publications”. In this way, the user will be able to determine the exact location of the information required. This would reduce speculation or the overlooking of information which may be located within unrecognised icons.
- Information posted on the “About the Company” page should include company history, mission, values and profile. This would resemble a brochure and would be of value to journalists in providing “backgrounders”.
- The page on “Operations” should list not only the location of its operations, but also make mention of the year of establishment, number of employees, specific products dealt with and production figures of the past few years. This is in fact sheet format.
- The “Investor information” page should consist of annual reports, share price information, quarterly results, presentations, web casts and finance-related news releases. The researcher noticed that some companies host the latest annual report on their home pages. It is recommended that a news flash indicates “latest annual report”, which will lead the user to the investor information page. All archived reports should be dated and all information pertaining to specific financial periods should be stored in individual folders.
- The “products” home page should consist of links to various products manufactured, or services offered. This will allow companies to elaborate on

each one of them. Once again, information given could resemble a product fact sheet.

- The “media centre” site should include recent and archived press releases, speeches, an image gallery, media contacts, press kits consisting of a media release, photographic images, a web cast with a media player, a fact sheet, brochure and interview sound bytes for broadcasting.
- The “social investment” site should host headings of various projects with further links to detailed information. This information will be valuable to prospective foundations seeking assistance in furthering their cause.
- “Corporate image”, where applicable, should explain the corporate advertisement run in above-the-line media, mergers, acquisitions, and display the new logo and media releases on the issue at hand. This will enable users to gain information on the policies and decisions that lead to organisational changes.
- The “Publications” icon should be linked to newsletters, magazines, brochures and other publications. Each publication should specify its type and target audience. The user will then be in a better position to select the one that suits his or her needs.
- Websites should be interactive, in addition to providing e-mail contacts, by hosting “discussion forums” on various topics. Companies that are more prone to crises or those whose operations have an effect on the environment, should be open to opinions as this could be the starting point in managing external issues.
- “Surveys” which invite opinion and comments should be hosted. Web surveys are crucial in gathering information from external stakeholders for purposes of

developing strategy. They also contribute to the cost-effectiveness of conducting research and gathering information from global audiences.

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of Information Communication Technologies on corporate communication. Study objectives sought to determine how companies use the internet, intranets and electronic mail to execute corporate communication functions. Literature reviewed highlighted the importance, uses and suggested strategies in executing PR functions through technologies. Case studies were referred to in order to place the uses of technology in perspective.

Data was gathered through content analysis and survey questionnaires. Findings supported the study objectives and, on the whole, research questions were answered.

Thus, the study revealed the impact of ICTs on corporate communication.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A1



Please read the [user agreement](#) when entering this site.

Welcome to the BMW Dealer Problems website.

Last updated on the 23rd September 2003
(Added [parts prices issues](#) to invoicing section, and expanded 'quality' pages)

(20th June 2003 - Added [press coverage](#) and [reader feedback](#))

Keeping Consumers Informed

8 ISSUES TO BE AWARE OF!

Caveat Emptor (Let the buyer beware!)

Since knowledge is power, this website has been created to inform consumers of actual experiences with BMW dealers in South Africa. The more you know, the less likely you are to be surprised.

WebCounter **12919**

At the outset, let me explain that I was previously a big supporter of BMW and refused to drive anything else. I still believe that BMWs are excellent cars - they're generally built with outstanding quality, and as they leave the factory are usually trouble-free. When purchasing, you'll be greeted by several eager sales executives, and normally you'll be treated very professionally. You then pick up your shiny car from the showroom floor.

With respect to driving dynamics, all BMWs have exceptional handling and braking. Truly "a driver's car", as claimed by BMW's marketing campaigns. However, after purchasing the vehicle, you'll naturally have to return one day, either for servicing, warranties, or trade-ins. At this stage, you'll no longer be a prospective new customer – you'll be dealing with the after-sales departments.

Now welcome to my personal experiences with BMW over the past 24 months. I have learnt some lessons, some costly, others inconveniencing. If these experiences are unique to me, I must be really unfortunate. Since they may not be unique, then read carefully so that you'll be informed with the knowledge to ask the right questions - you'll know what to look out for. And then possibly, unlike me, you may not be so surprised by BMW's responses.

Following media reports on this website, I have received amazing feedback indicating that my experiences may not be unique after all. The last paragraphs on this page (media coverage and read feedback) make for really interesting reading.



My cars in 2001...

1. Buying used - Is the vehicle really undamaged ?

(click here for full details...)

You're buying it from an authorized BMW dealer – a one-year old vehicle previously owned by BMW SA. You get signed documentation from BMW SA, verifying that the car was never damaged.

Until you find the car has strange problems, try selling it and then find out that the reason for your problems is that the vehicle had actually been 'damaged' while owned by BMW SA! BMW signs the documents like that because they do not define 'never been damaged accidentally' the same way you do! Read about how this could happen to you, and learn what to look out for. (So, sir, about that trade-in value you were expecting...it is a damaged car...)

Lessons learnt : Even if you get signed BMW documentation that the vehicle was never accidentally damaged, even if BMW SA claims the "Dealer Network would not wilfully misrepresent", even if it is an "Approved" User Car, the car may still have been accidentally damaged while owned by BMW!

2. Repairs - when Invoices are higher than written 'Quotes'

(click here for full details...)

Just when you think you have a valid quote, you may get these responses when presented with a surprisingly different invoice :

"That quote we gave you was just for BMW labour, not the work we decided to outsource without your knowledge or permission."

"There was a price increase the day after you ordered the parts!"

"You asked for the wrong quote – you should have specified we had to 'remove' it as well before replacing it".

"You may have asked us for a written quote, but what we gave you was an estimate which isn't binding on us."

Lessons learnt : Ask for written quotations, not just estimates. After ordering, don't believe that BMW's parts prices have increased without checking with other dealers first. The dealer may then still claim that the quote was for the wrong work. And even then, you may still be liable for unquoted, unauthorized work that gets outsourced.

3. You took it to a BMW garage, but who's really working on your car?

(click here for full details...)

You may be dealing with a BMW dealership, you may be paying franchised dealer prices, but the work may be performed by someone else outside the BMW garage. Supposedly, it's approved by BMW.

Lessons learnt : Work may be outsourced without your knowledge or permission. Outsourced work may cost you more than 3 times the quoted amount. It may be difficult to prove liability for outsourced work, as dealerships sometimes don't accept diagnosis even by other *authorized* dealerships!

4. Check parts prices! And don't overlook those invoice items.

(click here for full details...)

a. Some dealers charge more than double the standard price on some parts. How is it done or possibly explained? Read the details here.

b. Mistakes do happen with parts listed in a workshop service invoice – you may inadvertently be charged twice for parts that cost thousands of Rands.

Good thing you picked it up, sir – we'll refund you immediately – in about a week.

Lessons learnt : Make sure your dealer charges standard prices. Although a reasonable premium is acceptable, some dealers are over 100% more expensive than others. And check your invoice items carefully – it could save you large amounts.

5. Fast Service

(click here for full details...)

BMW promises fast care at authorized dealers. I suppose it is relative, but I don't consider 60 days for a repair fast. Neither would I call it convenient having to return 3 times. Nor would I call waiting 45 minutes to collect my car fast, after being told the vehicle was ready for collection.

Lessons learnt : Be prepared for repairs which may take many weeks. Be prepared for long waits when picking up your car. Be prepared for repairs which may require you to return the vehicle up to 3 times.

6. "Quality" work? You decide.

(click here for full details...)

If problems are not correctly diagnosed, you may have to keep paying for parts replaced until the actual cause is found. Don't expect that a total engine replacement includes 'peripheral' work like reconnecting fuel and coolant hoses. Fuel lines leaking dangerously may be considered unrelated to the fact that the engine was just replaced (if you're lucky, fuel hoses will be reconnected as goodwill...)

If your oil pressure indicator lights up just after a R22,000 remanufactured engine has just been fitted, don't expect the BMW dealer to believe it is related.

If your engine is noisy after a R10,000 engine valve repair, although there was no noise before, remember that you *can* expect noises from a high-mileage engine!

Lessons learnt : Be prepared for repairs which may have to be rediagnosed and 're-repaired' at your expense. Be prepared for breakdowns which may happen the day you collect your car, or leave you stranded on the motorway after a specific repair. Be prepared for repairs which may require you to return the vehicle up to 3 times. Be prepared for breakdowns or other item failures which *coincidentally* happen the same day your car was at the dealership for what is considered an unrelated repair.

7. Warranty? If it worked before...

(click here for full details...)

There is a 24-month warranty on approved items fitted by a BMW dealer. Claiming under warranty may not be so easy, though, as there are obviously other factors to consider. Find out what they are before you may need to claim.

Lessons learnt : Servicing by the book may still leave you with expensive engine damage for your own expense. Read the applicability of warranties carefully.

8. Contact BMW SA - they're committed to Customer Service!

(click here for full details...)

The problems you reported 6 months ago, with many detailed fax pages ? Thanks for all the details, but we closed that log. We thought you had been contacted by someone, sometime, according to our system! Alternatively, "Thanks for reporting it. We'll call you tomorrow!". I waited more than 1 week, without response. The customer should be right, especially when the customer *is* right.

A substantial investment in a Customer Service department should serve a purpose. At the very least, customers should be listened to and taken seriously.

Lessons learnt : Reporting an incident to BMW's Customer Service Centre does not guarantee resolution (obviously subject to how much of a case you have). But can you at least expect the courtesy of a promised response? I waited for seven months...

Media coverage

(click here for details...)

- I was interviewed by John Robbie on Radio 702, on the morning drive-show on the 4th June 2003. BMW SA chose not to go on-air.
- In Die Beeld from the 12th June 2003, BMW SA are reported as claiming that their agents acted correctly. BMW SA seems to be missing the point that signing documents with an unashamed distortion of the truth is not considered fair business practice by a reasonable consumer. Rather than looking to the dealers or agents only, BMW SA should be reviewing their own internal handling of the issues raised.
- In the Sunday Times on the 15th June 2003, BMW SA are reported as claiming that some of my vehicles were of particularly high mileage. I hadn't thought that mileage was relevant to the issues I raised – or was it perhaps mentioned as justification for double-charging, or BMW SA not providing feedback as promised for over 7 months? With regards to the damaged 12-month old car I purchased, previously owned only by BMW SA's fleet, BMW SA reportedly explained that the damage had not been disclosed as it was considered cosmetic; firstly, it was not just cosmetic as the related problems frustrated me to the point where I had to sell the car, and secondly, damage below R15,000 does not entitle BMW SA to sign documents stating that a vehicle has never had *any* damage whatsoever.

- The Saturday Star ran a story on customer service on the 6th September 2003. BMW SA is quoted as refusing to comment on this website.

Reader Feedback

(click here for some email comments...)

The Sunday Times reported BMW SA's comments as "In the general course of business it is unfortunately not possible to please everyone and I am sad to say that Mr Rios is in this category." It's surprising that my insistence on getting the product or service that I've already paid for classifies me as 'not possible to please'. Many BMW customers and ex-customers have emailed with similar cases, showing that my experiences aren't unique after all. BMW SA should consider improving their customer service rather than being prepared to write off an increasing number of customers as impossible to please. This category of local customers may become significant should BMW one day not have the luxury of deriving the majority of profits from export volumes.



My cars in 2003...

What really disappoints me is that BMW's customer service has turned me away from what is otherwise an excellent product. Many other customers share my sentiments.

Please email all queries to bmw_problems@yahoo.com.

Names, dates and/or documentation are available to support all the above reports. BMW (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd was notified of this website's content in April 2003. Copies of website content detailing the above experiences were personally hand-delivered to the highest offices of BMW SA on the 22nd and 23rd April 2003. I notified BMW of the publication date, and further invited BMW to notify me should any of the website content "not be truthful or accurate".

No statements were contested. The response received from BMW Customer Services has been incorporated into the appropriate sections. As at the time of original publishing (16th May 2003), I had received no communication directly from any Director at BMW SA.

Please read the [user agreement](#) when entering this site.

Copyright © 2003

Adapted from www.bmwproblems.co.za.

APPENDIX A2 BMW SOUTH AFRICA



Adapted from www.bmw.co.za.



LIBERTY

Thursday,
16
September
2004

Home Investor Relations Webcast Results Presentation Print/Save Interims (PDF)

Interim Results

for the six months ended 30 June
2002

FEATURES

Commentary on
results

Financial
statements

Liberty Group has performed well in all aspects under its control during the six months ended 30 June 2002. The Group has grown new business in testing markets and substantial progress has been made in creating further value in the in-force insurance portfolio. This good operational performance could however not escape the investment market trends experienced throughout the world which have had the effect of reducing life fund earnings.

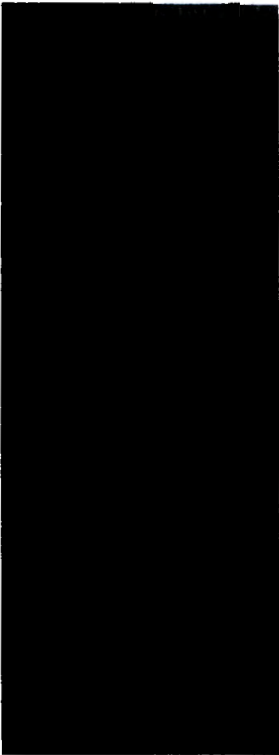
Life fund operating surplus

Headline earnings

New business production

Net insurance cash flow





<u>Embedded value and value of new business</u>
<u>Financial services activities</u>
<u>STANLIB</u>
<u>Investment performance</u>
<u>Liberty Healthcare</u>
<u>Capital and dividend policy</u>
<u>Dividend</u>
<u>Prospects</u>
<u>Related party transactions</u>

Adapted from www.liberty.co.za.

APPENDIX A4

MESSAGE FROM CURATOR

You will have heard that First National Bank's (FNB) offer to acquire certain parts of Saambou Bank has been accepted. This means that depositors will gain full access to their funds, without any loss of capital or interest.

Before accepting FNB's offer I considered many factors, not the least of which is the size and stability of the First Rand Group to which FNB belongs. It is one of the largest financial groups in the country with diverse interests; all of which give you confidence that your deposits are safe and that you will soon be able to access your money - including prepaid amounts for those customers who have an Availabond. You will be able to access your funds as normal, (i.e. via ATMs, Branches and Call Centres), from Thursday 23 May, 2002 and there should be no further inconvenience for you in this respect. The availability of your funds will be subject to the current terms and conditions.

FNB's management is well aware of how insecure you have been feeling since February. They are committed to ensuring that this is the thing of the past. Your sense of security is an extremely important consideration and they are determined to restore your confidence in the South African banking sector.

Enclosed with this letter is a letter from FNB, which gives you more information about what will happen from now on. FNB has undertaken to keep you completely informed about anything that will materially affect you or your banking issues.

While giving you this information I want to thank all Saambou customers for your patience as I have worked to resolve the bank's issues. I think you will be more than satisfied with the final outcome of my negotiations.

Here are Saambou's call centre details. They will be happy to answer any questions you may have. As an additional service to help you, FNB has introduced a special contact centre for Saambou customers who may have further enquiries regarding FNB's relationship with Saambou Bank.

Saambou Call Centre
Phone 0860 139 555
Open between: 07h00 - 18h00 Monday to Friday
07h00 - 16h00 Saturday

FNB Contact Centre
Phone 0800 202 842
Open between 07h00 -19h00 Monday to Saturday

Yours sincerely

JOHN LOUW
Curator: Saambou

Adapted from <http://www.saambou.co.za>.

APPENDIX A5 SAAMBOU (First National Bank)

FNB GUARANTEES YOUR DEPOSIT 100%

I wish to welcome you to the First National Bank family. Now that FNB is backing Saambou, rest assured your money is safe where it currently is, and we will apply the sound investment principles used throughout our organisation to ensure that your investments continue to grow. We encourage you to keep your account/s with Saambou Bank, where you can be confident that you will continue to enjoy extremely competitive rates. The rates on your products will in the majority of cases be matched to those of FNB, which are currently among the market leaders.

We are also aware that Money Market and Call Account customers did not enjoy the benefit of the March 2002 prime rate increase during the curatorship period. FNB and Saambou intend to backdate rate increases on these products where applicable. All you need to do to qualify for this additional interest payment is to keep your Money Market or Call Account exactly where it is, with at least a minimum balance, for a four month period. Over the next couple of months clients who choose to remain with us will be conveniently moved to FNB without any charges to their account or PIN numbers.

First National Bank is part of the First Rand Group, which has a market capitalisation of around R48 billion. As a bank we have our roots firmly planted in South African soil and can trace our origins back to 1838. We have a banking heritage of which we are very proud and on which you can definitely depend for stability and security.

I am confident that FNB can give you back the trust you may have lost in the South African Banking sector.

From 23 May 2002, I confirm that it is business as usual at Saambou and you will be able to access both your capital and interest. Previous client instructions to Saambou Bank with regard to the maturity and payment of interest will remain unchanged.

I want to assure you that should you choose to stay with either FNB or Saambou, and we hope you do, the staff will do everything they can to ensure that we deliver service and appropriate products to meet your financial needs.

Until further notice all existing Saambou ATMs, Call Centres and Branches will continue to serve you.

FNB has 640 branches and 1700 ATMs throughout South Africa and its Contact Centre has been voted South Africa's best, all of which will, in due course, make banking even more convenient for you. However, for now, it is business as usual at Saambou Bank. Please continue to visit your regular branch, use the ATMs or contact:

Saambou Call Centre 0860 139 555
07h00 to 18h00 from Monday to Friday
07h00 to 16h00 on Saturday
For additional assistance during this time, we have established a special
FNB Contact Centre 0800 202 842
07h00 to 19h00 from Monday to Saturday

Please call us if you have any queries.
Again, welcome to our FNB family, we are really looking forward to helping you.

Yours sincerely

PEET VAN DER WALT

Adapted from <http://www.saambou.co.za>.

APPENDIX A6

SAB MILLER

Our company investor centre media centre our brands accountability

2002 Reports Annual report 2002 (available in PDF format) Latest results Preliminary results Year ended 31 March 2002 Online version PDF version 305kb	Latest news Completion of the transaction between South African Breweries pic and Philip Morris regarding Miller Brewing Company and change of name to SABMiller plc , today announced that following the approval of its shareholders at the EGM on 1 July 2002 and the receipt of satisfactory regulatory Clearances, its transaction with Philip Morris Companies Inc, (Philip Morris) regarding Miller Brewing Company (Miller) has been completed Tuesday, 9 July 2002	Share price Sat Jul, 2716:45:40 UK LSE 464 -0.00% Sat Jul, 27 16:45 SA JSE 7450-0.00% Times shown are GMT +2.

Adapted from <http://www.sab.co.za>.

APPENDIX A7 First Inter-coder Reliability Test

Radio stations	Coder A	B	C
Corporate Communication	5	33	7
Investors Information	0	0	0
Virtual centre	2	2	1
Web surveys	0	2	0

Using Holsti = $3M / (N_1 + N_2 + N_3)$; where m = number of agreement and 3 = number of coders

$$\begin{aligned}
 &= 3 \cdot 2 / (4 + 4 + 4) \\
 &= 6 / 12 \\
 &= 1 / 2 \\
 &= 0.50
 \end{aligned}$$

Newspapers	Coder A	B	C
Corporate Communication	4	38	3
Investors Information	0	0	0
Virtual centre	1	5	1
Web surveys	0	0	0

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Reliability} &= 3 \cdot 2 / (4 + 4 + 4) \\
 &= 6 / 12 \\
 &= 1 / 2 \\
 &= .5
 \end{aligned}$$

Mines	Coder A	B	C
Corporate Communication	6	343	16
Investors Information	1	189	7
Virtual centre	2	5	1
Web surveys	0	0	0

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Reliability} &= 3 \cdot 1 / (4 + 4 + 4) \\
 &= 3 / 12 \\
 &= 1 / 4 \\
 &= .25
 \end{aligned}$$

Petroleum	Coder A	B	C
Corporate Communication	10	135	7
Investors Information	0	96	15
Virtual centre	1	11	1
Web surveys	0	0	0

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Reliability} &= 3 \cdot 1 / (4+4+4) \\
 &= 3/12 \\
 &= 1/4 \\
 &= .25
 \end{aligned}$$

Banks	Coder A	B	C
Corporate Communication	53	980	61
Investors Information	0	0	0
Virtual centre	1	8	1
Web surveys	8	2	10

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Reliability} &= 3 \cdot 1 / (4+4+4) \\
 &= 3/12 \\
 &= 1/4 \\
 &= .25
 \end{aligned}$$

The overall inter-coder reliability coefficient is:

$$\begin{aligned}
 &3(6) / (20+20+20) \\
 &= 18/60 \\
 &= .30 < 90 \%
 \end{aligned}$$

APPENDIX A8 Second Inter-coder Reliability Test

Radio	Coder A	B	C
Corporate Communication	7	7	7
Investors Information	0	0	0
Virtual centre	2	2	2
Web surveys	0	0	0

Reliability test

Using Holtsi = $3M / (N_1 + N_2 + N_3)$; where m = number of agreement and 3 = number of coders.

$$= 3 \times 4 / (4 + 4 + 4)$$

$$= 12 / 12$$

$$= 1$$

Newspapers	A	B	C
Corporate Communication	8	8	7
Investors Information	0	0	0
Virtual centre	1	1	1
Web surveys	0	0	0

$$\text{Reliability} = 3 \times 3 / (4 + 4 + 4)$$

$$= 9 / 12$$

$$= 0.75$$

Mines	A	B	C
Corporate Communication	72	72	72
Investors Information	11	11	11
Virtual centre	2	2	2
Web surveys	0	0	0

$$\text{Reliability} = 3 \times 4 / (4 + 4 + 4)$$

$$= 12 / 12$$

$$= 1$$

Petroleum	A	B	C
Corporate Communication	43	43	43
Investors Information	11	11	11
Virtual centre	2	2	2
Web surveys	0	0	0

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Reliability} &= 3 \times 4 / (4 + 4 + 4) \\ &= 12 / 12 \\ &= 1\end{aligned}$$

Banks	A	B	C
Corporate Communication	193	193	193
Investors Information	0	0	0
Virtual centre	3	3	3
Web surveys	3	3	3

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Reliability} &= 3 \times 4 / (4 + 4 + 4) \\ &= 12 / 12 \\ &= 1\end{aligned}$$

The overall inter-coder reliability coefficient is

$$\begin{aligned}&3(19) / (20 + 20 + 20) \\ &= 57 / 60 \\ &= .95\end{aligned}$$

Holsti's Coefficient of Reliability

Coder Pair

1,2	1
1,3	0.95
2,3	0.95

Average	0.967

Scott's Pi

Variable	Radio	Newspaper r	Mine	Petroleum	Bank	Average
Coder Pair						
1,2		1	1	1	1	1
1,3		1	0.619	1	1	1
2,3		1	0.619	1	1	1
Average		1	0.746	1	1	1

APPENDIX B

Coding Sheet

Company name:..... Business:.....

1. Corporate communication	101 Product/Service 102 Corporate Image 103 Crisis Management 104 Social Responsibility 105 Operations 106 Other
3. Investor Information	201 Share price 202 Results 203 Share performance
4. Virtual centre	301 Suggestions 302 Feedback 303 Discussion forums
5. Web surveys	401 Opinion polls 402 Surveys on corporate issues 403 Focus groups 404 Other

APPENDIX C DATA MATRICES

		GROUPS					Total
		Petroleum	Mine	Paper	Radio Stations	Bank	
Corporate communication	Count	86	167	81	67	295	696
	Expected Count	95.5	175.4	87.7	55.2	282.2	696.0
	Row %	12.4%	24.0%	11.6%	9.6%	42.4%	100.0%
	Column %	63.7%	67.3%	65.3%	85.9%	73.9%	70.7%
Investor information	Count	31	71	25	0	55	182
	Expected Count	25.0	45.9	22.9	14.4	73.8	182.0
	Row %	17.0%	39.0%	13.7%	.0%	30.2%	100.0%
	Column %	23.0%	28.6%	20.2%	.0%	13.8%	18.5%
Virtual centre	Count	17	10	18	10	48	103
	Expected Count	14.1	26.0	13.0	8.2	41.8	103.0
	Row %	16.5%	9.7%	17.5%	9.7%	46.6%	100.0%
	Column %	12.6%	4.0%	14.5%	12.8%	12.0%	10.5%
Web surveys	Count	1	0	0	1	1	3
	Expected Count	.4	.8	.4	.2	1.2	3.0
	Row %	33.3%	.0%	.0%	33.3%	33.3%	100.0%
	Column %	.7%	.0%	.0%	1.3%	.3%	.3%
Count		135	248	124	78	399	984
Expected Count		135.0	248.0	124.0	78.0	399.0	984.0
Row %		13.7%	25.2%	12.6%	7.9%	40.5%	100.0%
Column %		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	57.736(a)	12	.000
Likelihood Ratio	72.919	12	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.496	1	.221
N of Valid Cases	984		

a. Five cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .24.

Raw data for petroleum companies

Company	A	B	C	D
Corp Comm	17	6	20	43
Invest Info	14	0	17	0
V. Centre	2	2	11	2
W. Surveys	1	0	0	0

PETROLEUM

			GROUPS
			Petroleum
CATEGORY	Corporate communication	Count	86
		Column %	63.7%
	Investor information	Count	31
		Column %	23.0%
	Virtual centre	Count	17
		Column %	12.6%
	Web surveys	Count	1
		Column %	0.7%
Total		Count	135
		Column %	100.0%

		Petroleum		
		Count	Mean	Std Deviation
Corporate communication		86	21.50	13.55
Investor information		31	7.75	1.52
Virtual centre		17	4.25	4.43
Web surveys		1	0.25	.

Raw data for mining companies

Companies	A	B	C	D	E
Corp Comm	72	8	10	8	69
Invest. Info	11	4	6	4	46
V.Centre	2	1	4	1	2
W. Surveys	0	0	0	0	0

			Mines
CATEGORY	Corporate communication	Count	167
		Column %	67.3%
	Investor information	Count	71
		Column %	28.6%
	Virtual centre	Count	10
		Column %	4.0%
Total		Count	248
		Column %	100.0%

		Mines		
		Count	Mean	Std Deviation
Corporate communication		167	33.40	22.06
Investor information		71	14.20	15.05
Virtual centre		10	2.00	1.26

Raw data of the Newspaper Industry

Companies	Business Day	Sowetan	The Star	Pretoria News	Sunday Times	Sunday Independent
Corp Comm	5	8	9	2	2	5
Invest. Info	1	0	0	12	0	12
V. Centre	1	1	2	9	2	3
W.Survey	0	0	0	0	0	0

NEWSPAPERS

			GROUPS
			Newspapers
CATEGORY	Corporate communication	Count	81
		Column %	65.3%
	Investor information	Count	25
		Column %	20.2%
	Virtual centre	Count	18
		Column %	14.5%
Total		Count	124
		Column %	100.0%

		Newspapers		
		Count	Mean	Std Deviation
Corporate communication		81	13.50	22.67
Investor information		25	4.17	2.20
Virtual centre		18	3.00	3.58

Raw data of Radio stations

Companies	Ikwewezi	Jakaranda	YFM	Metro FM	Radio 702
Corp Comm	3	7	4	46	7
Invest. Info	0	0	0	0	0
V.Centre	0	2	2	5	1
W.Survey	0	0	1	0	0

RADIO STATIONS

			GROUPS
			Radio Stations
CATEGORY	Corporate communication	Count	67
		Column %	85.9%
	Virtual centre	Count	10
		Column %	12.8%
	Web surveys	Count	1
		Column %	1.3%
Total		Count	78
		Column %	100.0%

		Radio Station		
		Count	Mean	Std Deviation
Corporate communication		67	13.40	18.79
Virtual centre		10	2.00	1.71
Web surveys		1	0.20	.

Raw data of the Banking industry

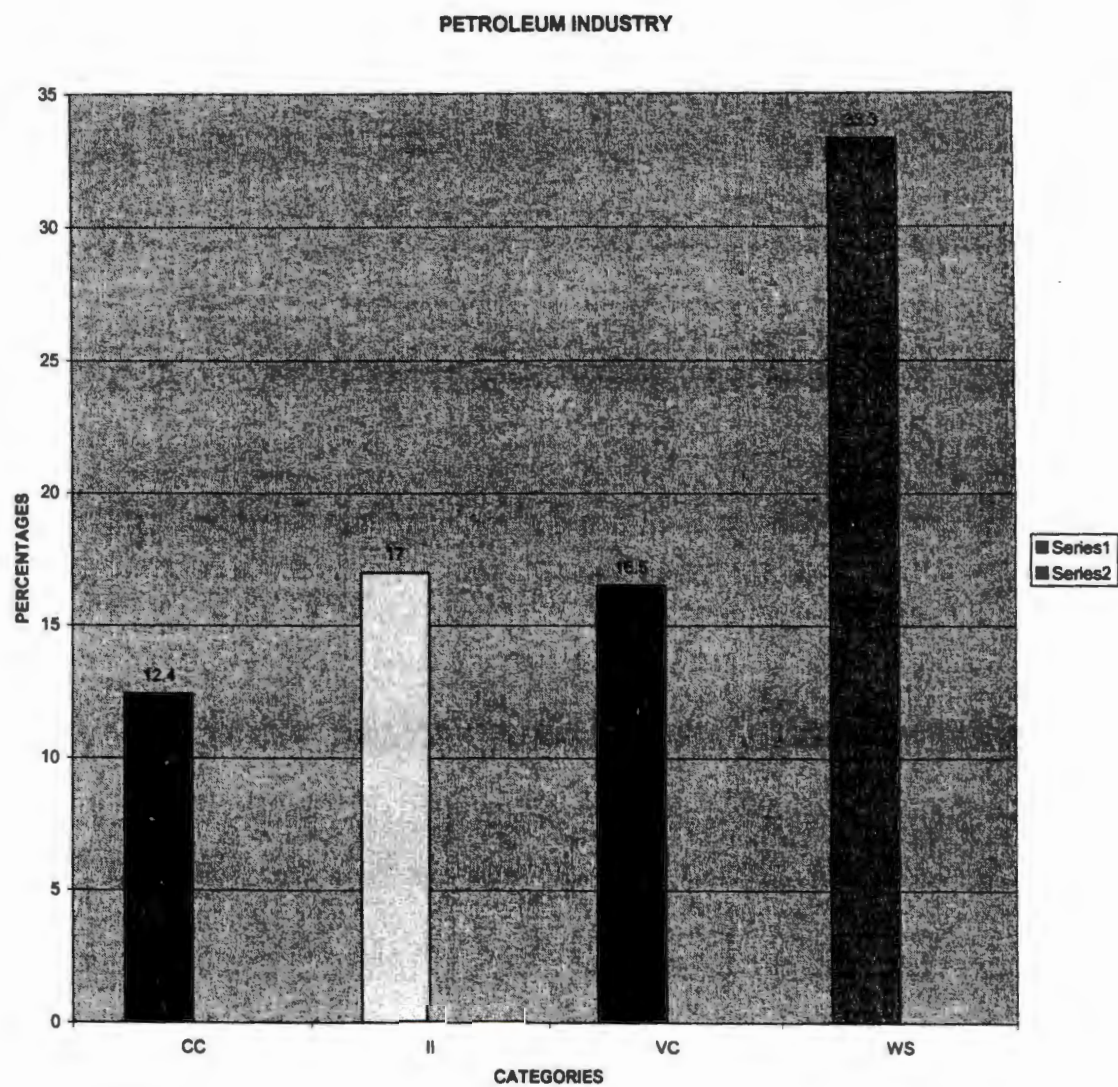
Companies	DBSA	Rand Merchant Bank	BoE Merchant Bank	FNB	Standard Bank	Nedbank	Peoples' Bank
Corp. Comm	12	5	20	8	51	6	193
Invest. Info	23	6	0	2	24	0	0
V.Centre	3	2	1	3	35	1	3
W.Surveys	0	0	0	0	1	0	0

BANKS

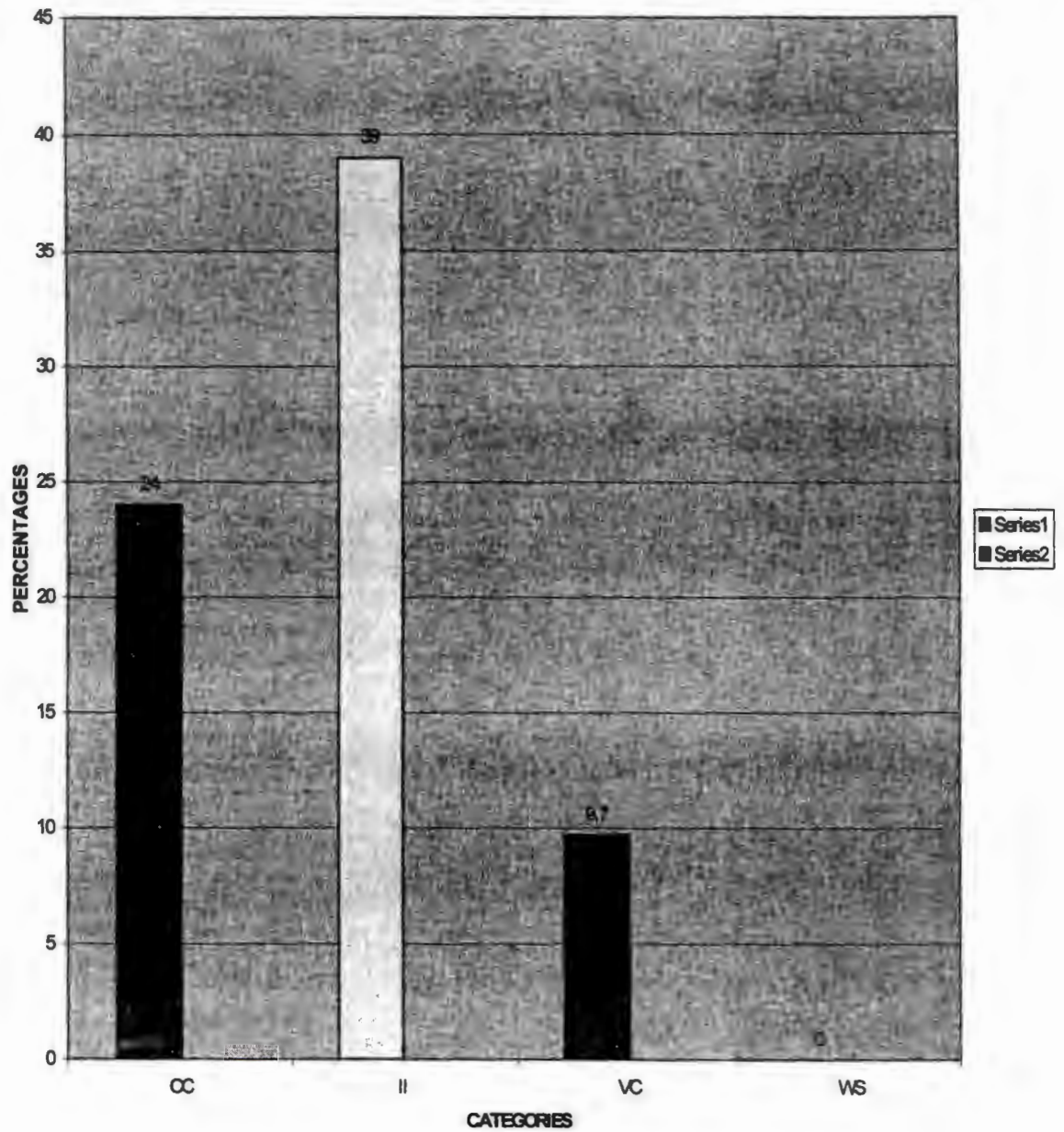
			GROUPS
			Bank
CATEGORY	Corporate communication	Count	295
		Column %	73.9%
	Investor information	Count	55
		Column %	13.8%
	Virtual centre	Count	48
		Column %	12.0%
	Web surveys	Count	1
		Column %	0.3%
Total		Count	399
		Column %	100.0%

		Banks		
		Count	Mean	Std Deviation
Corporate communication		295	42.14	77.52
Investor information		55	7.86	6.64
Virtual centre		48	6.86	14.58
Web surveys		1	0.14	.

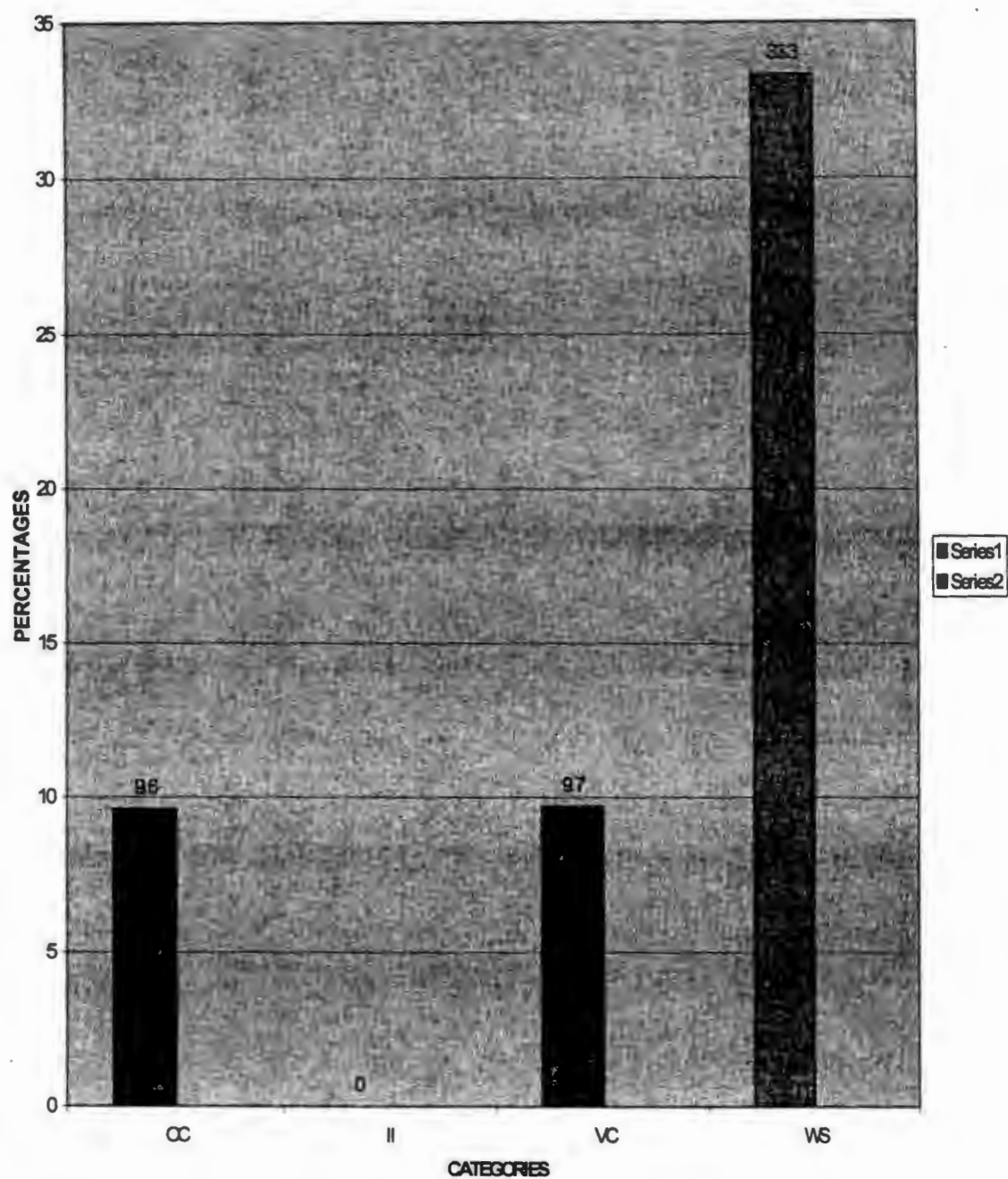
APPENDIX D BAR GRAPHS



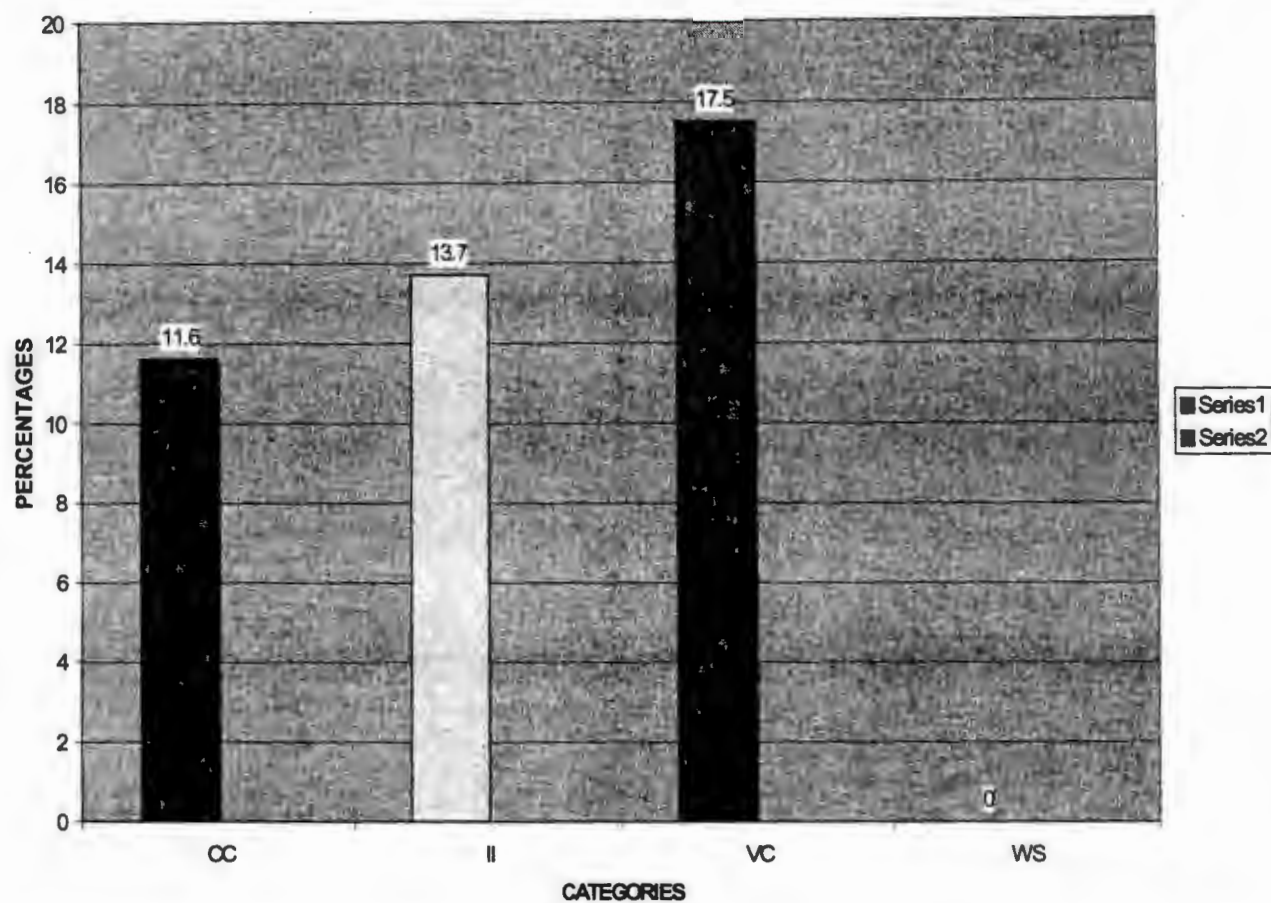
MINING INDUSTRY



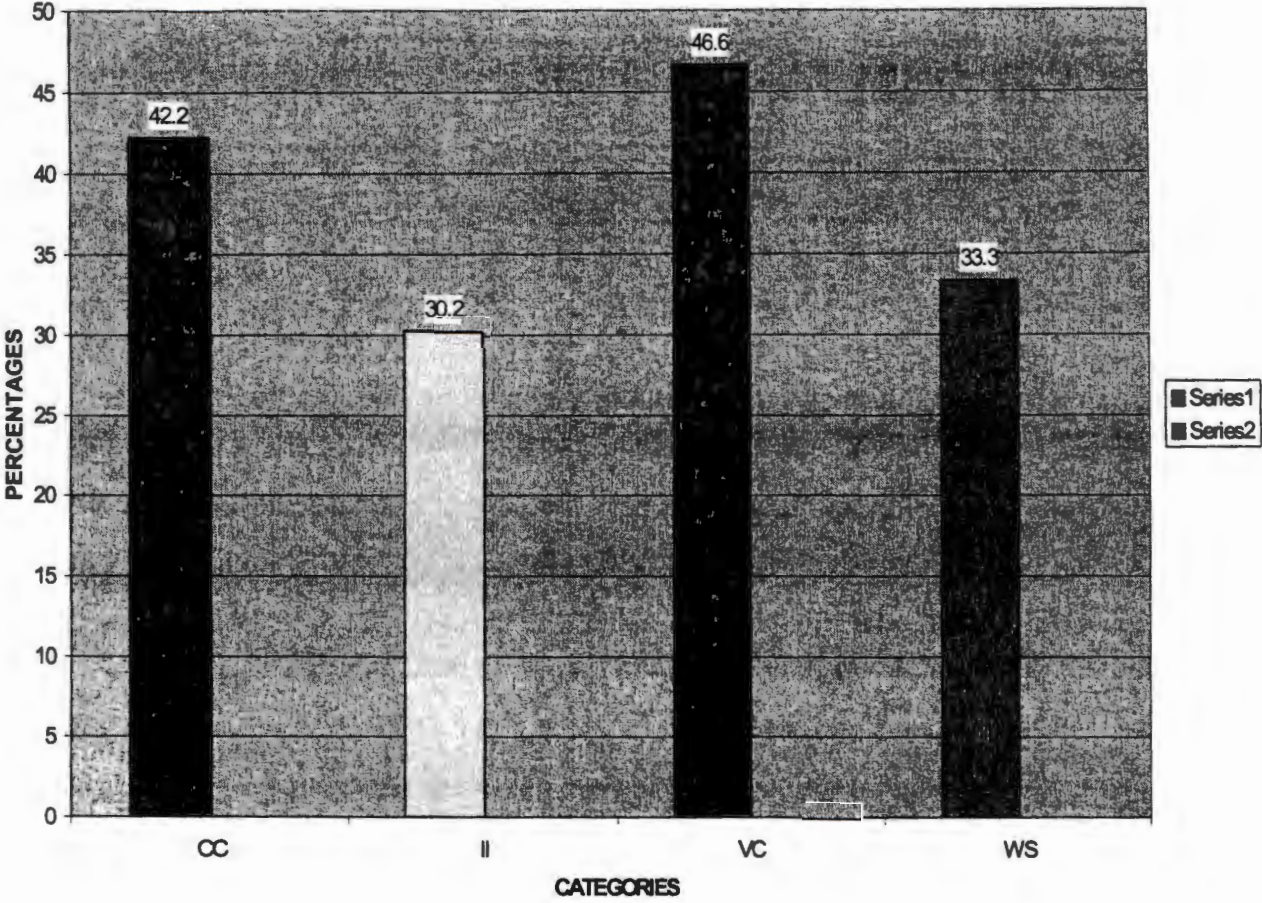
RADIO STATIONS



NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY



BANKING INDUSTRY



APPENDIX E HYPOTHESIS TEST

Steps in hypothesis testing:

Step 1: Identify null hypotheses (H_0)

Dillon et al. (1990) assert that the null hypothesis is typically a negative statement which must be proved wrong by the researcher.

H_0 : PR practitioners do not adopt the ICT as a new medium to complement conventional media.

H_0 : Companies do not use the internet for environmental scanning.

H_0 : There is no internet usage when companies experience crises.

H_0 : Companies do not use the internet to establish two-way communication with their audiences.

H_0 : Corporate image, social responsibility and other PR programmes are not featured on the net.

Step 2: Specify alternative hypotheses (H_A)

H_A : How do PR practitioners adopt the ICT as a new medium that complements conventional media?

H_A : How do companies use the internet to scan their environment for mentions on discussion forums or through "contact us" links?

H_A : During times of crisis, how is the internet used to inform stakeholders about the handling of the crisis?

H_A : How is the internet used to establish two-way communications with the relevant audiences?

H_A : To what extent are corporate image, social responsibility and other PR programmes featured on the net?

Step 3: Choose appropriate statistical test and calculate value

The main considerations in selecting appropriate statistical tests are:

- The nature of the data. There are two main groups of statistics, namely *parametric* and *non-parametric statistics*. Nominal data, which are used in this study fall, within the *non-parametric* group. Nominal data consist of numbers assigned to individuals, groups, or phenomena. These numbers are intended to identify categories. The content analysis technique has classified data into categories.
- The number of samples. This study used five samples taken from the petroleum, mineral, finance, newspaper and radio populations.
- Relationship of the samples. Samples are usually independent. This is the case as there are different elements in each population.

With due consideration to the above factors, the statistical test to be used to test hypotheses is Chi-Square χ^2 .

Step 4: Decide on the significance level

As stated earlier, the null hypothesis is accepted until proof to the contrary becomes evident. There is a possibility that the null hypothesis may be rejected even when it is true. This probability is termed the significance level and is denoted by the Greek letter alpha (α). This is referred to as Type I error. Type II error refers to the acceptance of a null hypothesis. Usually the significance level is chosen as 0.05 = 5% or denoted as $p < .05$. This means that there is only a 5% chance of drawing wrong conclusions and rejecting the hypothesis by mistake. The significance level should be made as small as possible in order to protect the null hypothesis and to guard against the investigator making false claims (Dillon et al., 1990; Easton & McColl, 2006).

Step 5: Determine the value of the tabulated test statistic

According to Easton and McColl (2006), a test statistic is a quantity calculated from the sample of data. Its value is used to decide whether or not the null hypothesis should be rejected in a hypothesis test. The calculated Chi-square statistic as derived from the statistic given below is 57.736.

Step 6: Determine the critical value of the test statistic

This is the value the test statistic would have to exceed in order for the null hypothesis to be rejected. In other words, the value of the test statistic obtained in a Chi-square calculation should exceed the calculated critical value to reject the null hypothesis (Dillon et al., 1990).

Wimmer and Dominick (1983:207) and Connor-Linton (2003) mention that after the Chi-square value is obtained, a chi-square table must be consulted. The table lists the critical values of chi-square. The column representing the probability level of .05 is matched to the row representing the degrees of freedom. In this study the degree of freedom obtained from a calculation equals 12. Then reference is made to the chi-square table for 12 appearing under the df row by matching the df value to the p value as determined in step 4. The table indicates a value of 21.026 which is the critical value.

Step 7: Compare the observed value with the critical value

If the observed value or chi-square value exceeds the critical value, then the null hypothesis is rejected. If not, the null hypothesis must be accepted as true.

We conclude by saying:

$$X^2 = 57.736$$

$$p < .05$$

$$\text{Critical value} = 21.026$$

Then we reject the H_0 in favour of H_A

CHI SQUARE TEST

Chi-square is a statistical test which determines whether some observed pattern of frequencies corresponds to an expected pattern. A chi-square tests the difference in some characteristic between different samples of websites that can be generalised to the population. This test is regarded as a rough estimate of confidence which accepts weaker, less accurate data. The test informs the investigator of the degree of confidence he or she can have in accepting or rejecting a hypothesis. The hypothesis tested with Chi-square serves to show whether or not two different samples are different enough in some characteristic that investigators can generalise to the populations from which the sample is drawn (Connor-Linton, 1998).

Runyon (1977) states that chi-square is used to test whether the actual observations differ reliably from what could be expected by chance. The test looks at the obtained values (O) which are the raw data arranged in the appropriate cells of a contingency table with the totals in the margins. The expected values (E) are those that would occur by or are due to chance.

The following are chi-square requirements:

1. The sample must be randomly drawn from the population. Stratified random sampling is used in this study.
2. Data must be reported in raw frequencies. Chi-square should only be used when data are in the form of raw frequency counts of items in two or more mutually exclusive categories. This study has data reported from four mutually exclusive categories. Computing percentages would standardise an already standardised measurement.
3. Measured variables must be independent. Any observation must fall into only one category in each variable. The data comes from the coverage of four different categories of corporate communication on the websites of the petroleum, mining, newspaper, banking and radio industries. Each subject is counted only once, as either a mining or banking industry etc. and as covering corporate communication, investor relations, virtual centre and web surveys.
4. Categories of independent and dependent variables must be mutually exclusive and exhaustive. No category should be influenced by another. In this study categories are completely exhaustive as their respective units bear no relation to each other.
5. Observed frequencies cannot be too small. Expected frequencies are derived from observed frequencies. If the raw observed frequencies in the bivariate table show low frequencies of 5 or below, the expected frequencies may also be too low for chi-square to be appropriately used. (Connor-Linton, 1998:4)

Out of twenty cells only three have a below minimum value.

Procedure in Chi-Square

Step 1. Arrange the obtained data in a contingency table.

Table 1.a Raw data

Company coverage of web communication on a 5 x4 table

Step 2. Add up the totals for each row and each column.

Table 1.b Observed frequencies with row and column totals

Chi-square operates by comparing the actual or observed frequencies in each cell in the table to the frequencies we would expect hypothetically to have occurred.

Step 3. Compute the expected frequencies (E)

Chi-square derives a representation of the null hypothesis as follows:

The expected frequency is the product of that cell obtained by multiplying each column total by each row total and dividing by the grand total.

Petroleum/Corp Comm: $(696 \times 135 / 984) = 95.4$
 Petroleum/ Invest. Info: $(182 \times 135 / 984) = 24.9$
 Petroleum /V.centre: $(103 \times 135 / 984) = 14.1$
 Petroleum / Web surv: $(3 \times 135 / 984) = 0.41$

Mining/ Corp comm: $(696 \times 248 / 984) = 175.4$
 Mining/ Invest: $(182 \times 248 / 984) = 45.8$
 Mining/V.centre: $(103 \times 248 / 984) = 25.9$
 Mining/ Web surv: $(3 \times 248 / 984) = 0.75$

Newspapers/Corp Comm: $(696 \times 124 / 984) = 87.7$
 Newspapers/Invest.info: $(182 \times 124 / 984) = 22.9$
 Newspapers/V.centre: $(103 \times 124 / 984) = 12.9$
 Newspapers/Web surv: $(3 \times 124 / 984) = 0.37$

Radio/Corp comm: $(696 \times 78 / 984) = 55.1$
 Radio/Invest info: $(182 \times 78 / 984) = 14$
 Radio/V.centre: $(103 \times 78 / 984) = 8.16$

Radio/ Web surv:	$(3 \times 78/984) = 0.23$
Banking/Corp comm.:	$(696 \times 399/984) = 282.2$
Banking/Invest info:	$(182 \times 399/984) = 73.7$
Banking/V.centre:	$(103 \times 399/984) = 41.7$
Banking/Web surv:	$(3 \times 399/984) = 1.2$

The researcher makes a comparison between the observed results and the results we would expect if the null hypothesis were true.

Step 4: For each cell subtract the expected value (E) from the observed value (O), square this figure, and divide by E . Sum the resulting numbers.

This is a step which measures how different our observed results are from the null hypothesis. This is a way of determining whether we can reject the null hypothesis, and if we reject it, with what degree of confidence we can generalise from our sample to the larger population.

$$X^2 = \sum (O - E)^2 / E$$

E	
Petroleum/Corp Comm:	$(86-95.4)^2 / 95.4 = 0.926$
Petroleum/ Invest. Info:	$(31-24.9)^2 / 24.9 = 1.494$
Petroleum /V.centre:	$(17-14.1)^2 / 14.1 = 0.596$
Petroleum / Web surv:	$(1-0.41)^2 / 0.41 = 0.849$
Mining/ Corp comm:	$(167-175.4)^2 / 175.4 = 0.402$
Mining/ Invest:	$(71-45.8)^2 / 45.8 = 13.86$
Mining/V.centre:	$(10-25.9)^2 / 25.9 = 9.761$
Mining/ Web surv:	$(0-0.75)^2 / 0.75 = 0.75$
Newspapers/Corp Comm:	$(81-87.7)^2 / 87.7 = 0.511$
Newspapers/Invest.info:	$(25-22.9)^2 / 22.9 = 0.192$
Newspapers/V.centre:	$(18-12.9)^2 / 12.9 = 2.016$
Newspapers/Web surv:	$(0-0.37)^2 / 0.37 = 0.37$
Radio/Corp comm:	$(67-55.1)^2 / 55.1 = 2.570$
Radio/Invest info:	$(0-14.4)^2 / 14.4 = 14.4$
Radio/V.centre:	$(10-8.16)^2 / 8.16 = 0.414$
Radio/ Web surv:	$(1-0.23)^2 / 0.23 = 2.577$
Banking/Corp comm.:	$(295-282.2)^2 / 282.2 = 0.580$
Banking/Invest info:	$(55-73.7)^2 / 73.7 = 4.744$
Banking/V.centre:	$(48-41.7)^2 / 41.7 = 0.951$
Banking/Web surv:	$(1-1.2)^2 / 1.2 = 0.033$

The sum of all products of this calculation in each cell is the total chi - square value for the table.

$$X^2 = 57.736$$

Step 5: Compute the degrees of freedom for the contingency table.

The researcher needs a yardstick against which to measure the chi-square value, to tell whether or not it is significant. We need to know how much larger than 0 (the absolute chi-square value of the null hypothesis) our tables' chi-square value must be before we can confidently reject the H_0 . The probability we seek depends on the degrees of freedom of the table from which our chi-square value is derived.

In computing the degree of freedom (df), the number of rows in the table minus one is multiplied by the

number of columns in the table minus one.

$$df = (r-1)(c-1)$$

$$df = (5-1)(4-1) = 12$$

Step 6: Find the significance of the Chi-square

$$df = 12$$

calculated value = 57.736

therefore critical value is 21.026

The researcher therefore rejects the null hypothesis as the calculated value is greater than the critical value

A MEDIA GENERAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear respondent

I am a doctoral student of Communication at North West University. Your company has been selected from Braby's online business directory as part of my study sample. The purpose of this study is to gather information on how organisations use Information Communication Technologies for corporate communication/public relations purposes.

Kindly complete the questionnaire below or forward it to the relevant person for completion. The research findings will be communicated to you on request. It would be preferred if the questionnaire could be returned by 31 October 2003.

I am a

Company Name..... Type of Business.....

Respondent's Position

1. Does your organisation have an intranet?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If no, why?

2. If yes, does your company use the intranet for public relations purposes?

Yes ☐ No ☐

3. If yes, indicate which internal communication functions they serve

4. Indicate the function/s of publicity which your organisation posts on the intranet?

☐ Media releases

☐ Annual reports

☐ Brochures

☐ Newsletters

☐ Other (specify)

5. How do you rate the frequency of your use of the intranet as compared to traditional media?

Very often ☐ Average ☐ Very minimal ☐

6. What are the advantages of using the intranet as compared to other modes?

7. Which functions of public relations does your organisation post on the intranet?

- ☐ Research
- ☐ Corporate identity/image programmes
- ☐ Corporate social responsibility
- ☐ PR campaigns
- ☐ Crisis management
- ☐ Company information
- ☐ Other (specify)

8. Which of your stakeholders have the most access to the intranet?

9. How has the intranet enhanced communication with the organisations' stakeholders?

10. Does your organisation use e-mail for public relations purposes?

Yes ☐ No ☐

11. If yes, for which communication/PR purposes do you use e-mail?

12. With specific reference to the function of media relations, how has the function changed and/or improved with the use of e-mail?

13. In your opinion what are the advantages of using e-mail for business communications?

14. Any other comments in relation to the advantages and disadvantages of using the internet, intranet, or e-mail for communication/PR purposes.

NWU
LIBRARY

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE MEDIA

Company Name:..... Type of Business: MEDIA

Respondent's Position

1. Does your organisation visit company web sites to research information?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If no, why?

2. If yes, which information do you seek? Mark appropriate block/s

- ☐ Corporate news
- ☐ Media releases
- ☐ Financial information
- ☐ Annual reports
- ☐ Product/service
- ☐ Speeches
- ☐ Photographs
- ☐ Other (specify)

3. With the internet presence do you still acquire traditional media kits or electronic ones from companies whose information you seek to publish?

4. If you have participated in a virtual media conference, give the information regarding the experience.

5. Does your organisation have the intranet?

Yes ☐ No ☐

6. If yes Indicate the function/s of publicity which your organisation posts on the intranet?

- ☐ Corporate news
- ☐ Financial information
- ☐ Annual reports
- ☐ Newsletters
- ☐ Other (specify)

7. What are the advantages of using the intranet as compared to other modes?

8. Which functions of corporate communication does your organisation post on the intranet?

- ☐ Research
- ☐ Corporate identity/image programmes
- ☐ Corporate social responsibility
- ☐ PR campaigns
- ☐ Crisis management
- ☐ Company information
- ☐ Other (specify)

9. How has the intranet enhanced communication with the organisations' stakeholders?

10. Does your organisation use e-mail for journalism/ reporting purposes?

Yes ☐ No ☐

11. If yes, for which purposes do you use e-mail?

☐ Sending enquiries

☐ Receiving media releases

☐ Other (specify)

12. How has your function changed and/or improved with the advent of e-mail?

13. What are the advantages of using e-mail for gathering news and information?

14. Any other comments in relation to using the internet, intranet, or e-mail for communication and journalism purposes.

APPENDIX H FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION TABLES

THE OIL INDUSTRY

Question 1	Frequency	Respondents
Does your organisation have an intranet?	1	BP
	1	Caltex
	1	Sasol
	0	Total
	n= 3	

Question 2	Frequency	
If yes, does your company use the intranet for communication/ public relations purposes?	1	BP
	1	Caltex
	1	Sasol
	n= 3	

Question 3	Frequency	
If yes, indicate which internal communication functions they serve.		Combined responses from the three companies
Corporate information	6	
Human resources	4	
Publications	1	
Marketing	1	
Refining	1	
Legal information	1	
Social issues	1	
Information sharing	1	
	n= 16	

Question 4	Frequency	
Indicate the functions of publicity which your organisation posts on the intranet.		Combined responses from the three companies
Corporate news	3	
Media releases	2	
Financial information	1	
Annual reports	2	
Brochures	2	
Newsletters	2	
Training & employment opportunities	1	
	n= 13	

Question 5	Frequency	
How do you rate the frequency of your intranet usage compared to traditional media?		
Very often	1	BP
Very often	1	Caltex
Very often	1	Sasol
	n= 3	

Question 6	Frequency	
What are the advantages of using the intranet as compared to other modes?		Combined responses from the three companies
Getting same information to everyone	1	
Communicate simultaneously to many people	2	
Fast and efficient	1	
Rapid feedback	1	
No distribution problems	1	
Cost effective than print	1	
	n= 7	

Question 7	Frequency	
Which functions of public relations does your organisation post on the intranet?		Combined responses from the three companies
Research	2	
Corporate image programmes	3	
Corporate social responsibility	3	
PR campaigns	2	
Crisis management	1	
Company information	3	
	n= 14	

Question 8	Frequency	
Which of your stakeholders have the most access to the intranet?		Combined responses from the two companies
Management to supervisory level	1	
All office staff	2	
	n= 3	

Question 9	Frequency	
How has the intranet enhanced communication with the organisation's stakeholders?		Combined responses from the two companies
Cost effective	1	
Speeds up communication	1	
Getting same message	2	
	n= 4	

Question 10	Frequency	
Does your organisation use e-mail for communication/public relations purposes?		
Yes	1	BP
Yes	1	Caltex
Yes	1	Sasol
	n= 3	

Question 11	Frequency	
If yes, for which communication/PR purposes do you use e-mail?		Combined responses from the three companies
Corporate information	4	
Corporate image programmes	1	
Corporate social responsibility	2	
PR campaigns	1	
Internal mail	1	
Internal /external communications	2	
	n= 11	

Question 12	Frequency	
With specific reference to the function of media relations, how has the function changed and/or improved with the use of e-mail?		Combined responses from the two companies
Fast and inexpensive	1	
No change	2	
	n= 3	

Question 13	Frequency	
What are the advantages of using e-mail for business communication?		Combined responses from the three companies
Cost effective	2	

Getting the same message at the same time	2	
	n= 4	

Question 14	Frequency	Combined responses from the three companies
Any other comments in relation to the advantages and disadvantages of using the internet, intranet, or e-mail for communication purposes.		
ICTs are office-bound	1	
It is not used to communicate or sort out problems with e-mail and intranet	2	
Information overload	1	
Keeping information up to date	1	
Maintains a consistent corporate image	1	
Recipients of messages unknown	1	
Less face-to-face communication	1	
	n= 8	

THE MINING INDUSTRY

Question 1	Frequency	Respondents
Does your organisation have an intranet?	1	De Beers
	0	Anglo Platinum
	1	Gold Fields
	0	Kumba Resources
	0	Avgold
	n= 2	

Question 2	Frequency	
If yes, does your company use the intranet for communication/ public relations purposes?	1	De Beers
	1	Gold Fields
	n=2	

Question 3	Frequency	
If yes, indicate which internal communication functions they serve.		Combined responses from the two companies
Publications	2	
Financial indicators	1	
Local and international news	1	
Corporate information	1	
Press releases	1	
	n= 6	

Question 4	Frequency	
Indicate the functions of publicity which your organisation posts on the intranet.		Combined responses from the two companies
Corporate news	2	
Media releases	2	
Financial information	1	
Annual reports	2	
Brochures	2	
Newsletters	2	
Other (virtual library, vacancies, classifieds, departmental and disciplines information, staff discussions, feedback forum)	7	
	n= 18	

Question 5	Frequency	
How do you rate the frequency of your intranet usage compared		
Very often	1	A
Very often	1	C
	n= 2	

Question 6	Frequency	
What are the advantages of using the intranet compared to other modes?		Combined responses from the two companies
Easy access	2	
Access to a wealth of company information	1	
	n= 3	

Question 7	Frequency	
Which functions of public relations does your organisation post on the intranet?		Combined responses from the two companies
Research	1	
Corporate image programmes	2	
Corporate social responsibility	1	
PR campaigns	2	
Crisis management	0	
Company information	2	
	n= 8	

Question 8	Frequency	
Which of your stakeholders have the most access to the intranet?		Combined responses from the two companies
Employees with access to desktops	2	
Investors	1	
	n= 3	

Question 9	Frequency	
How has the intranet enhanced communication with the organisation's stakeholders?		Combined responses from the two companies
Knowledge management	2	
Improved relations	2	
Access to information	1	
	n= 5	

Question 10	Frequency	
Does your organisation use e-mail for communication/PR purposes?		
Yes	1	De Beers
Yes	1	Gold Fields
	n= 2	

Question 11	Frequency	
If yes, for which communication/PR purposes do you use e-mail?		Combined responses from the two companies
Informing employees	2	
Send media releases,	1	
Feedback mechanism	1	
Events activities	1	
	n= 5	

Question 12	Frequency	
With specific reference to the media relations function, how has the function changed and/or improved with the use of e-mail?		De Beers
Circulating press releases	1	
	n= 1	

Question 13	Frequency	
What are the advantages of using e-mail for business communications?		Combined responses from the two companies
Receive a quicker response	1	
Replaces memos and notice boards	1	
Covers audiences simultaneously	1	
Adapting to the fast pace of business	2	
Improves relations	1	
	n= 6	

Question 14	Frequency	
Any other comments in relation to the advantages and disadvantages of using the internet, intranet, or e-mail for communication/PR purposes.		
Lack of computer skills	1	De Beers
Employees inundated with irrelevant e-mails	1	Gold Fields
	n= 2	

THE NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY

Question 1	Frequency	Respondents
Does your organisation visit company web sites to research information?		
Yes	1	The Star
	0	Pretoria News
Yes	1	Sowetan
	0	Business Day
	0	Sunday Times

	0	Sunday Independent
	n= 2	

Question 2	Frequency	
If Yes, which information do you seek?		Combined responses from two newspapers
Corporate news	2	
Media releases	2	
Financial information	1	
Annual reports	2	
Product /service	2	
Speeches	1	
Photographs	1	
	n= 11	

Question 3	Frequency	
With the internet presence, do you still acquire traditional media kits or electronic kits from companies whose information you seek to publish?		Combined responses from two newspapers
Traditional media kits	2	
Online kits	2	
	n= 4	

Question 4	Frequency	
If you have participated in a virtual media conference, give the information regarding the experience.		
None	0	The Star
None	0	Sowetan
	n= 0	

Question 5	Frequency	
Does your organisation have an intranet?		
No	0	The Star
No	0	Sowetan
	n= 0	

Question 6	Frequency	
If yes, indicate the functions of publicity which your organisation post on the intranet.		No responses
Not applicable	0	
	0	
	n= 0	

Question 7	Frequency	
What are the advantages of using the intranet as compared to other modes?		
Not applicable	0	
	n= 0	

Question 8	Frequency	
Which functions of corporate communication does your organisation post on the intranet?		
Not applicable	0	
	n=0	

Question 9	Frequency	
How has the intranet enhanced communication with the organisation's stakeholders?		

Not applicable	0	
	n= 0	

Question 10	Frequency	
Does your organisation use e-mail for journalism/reporting purposes?		
Yes	1	The Star
Yes	1	Sowetan
	n= 2	

Question 11	Frequency	
If yes, for which purposes do you use e-mail?		Combined responses from two newspapers
Requesting enquiries	1	
Receiving media releases	2	
	n= 3	

Question 12	Frequency	
How has your function changed and/or improved with the advent of E-mail?		Combined responses from two newspapers
Time efficiency	2	
Cost effective	1	
Sends detailed information	1	
Used for reference	1	
	n=5	

Question 13	Frequency	
What are the advantages of using E-mail for gathering news and information?		Combined responses from two newspapers
Time efficiency and accuracy	2	

Journalist can ask many questions	1	
	n= 3	

Question 14	Frequency	
Any other comments in relation to using the intranet, internet, or e-mail for communication and Journalism purposes.		Combined responses from two newspapers
Journalists do not retype, only edits copy	1	
Reduces misquoting	1	
Written word more acknowledged	1	
	n= 3	

THE RADIO INDUSTRY

Question 1	Frequency	Respondents
Does your organisation visit company web sites for researching information?		
Yes	1	Ikwekwezi
Yes	1	Radio 702
	0	YFM
	0	Metro FM
	0	Jakaranda 94.2
	n= 2	

Question 2	Frequency	
If yes, which information do you seek?		Responses from two radio stations
Corporate news	1	
Media releases	2	
Financial information	1	
Annual reports	0	

Product /service	2	
Speeches	0	
	n= 7	

Question 3	Frequency	
With the internet presence do you still acquire traditional media kits or electronic ones from companies whose information you seek to publish?		Responses from two radio stations
Traditional media kits	2	
Online kits	2	
	n= 4	

Question 4	Frequency	
If you have participated in a virtual media conference, give the information regarding the experience.		
None	0	Ikwekwezi
None	0	Radio 702
	n= 0	

Question 5	Frequency	
Does your organisation have an intranet?		
Yes	1	Ikwekwezi
No	0	Radio 702
	n= 1	

Question 6	Frequency	
If yes, indicate the functions of publicity which your organisation posts on the intranet.		

Corporate news	1	lkwekwezi
Newsletters	1	lkwekwezi
	n= 2	

Question 7	Frequency	
What are the advantages of using the intranet as compared to other modes?		
Quicker and cost-effective	1	lkwekwezi
	n= 1	

Question 8	Frequency	
Which functions of corporate communication does your organisation post on the intranet?		lkwekwezi
Research	1	
Corporate identity/image programmes	1	
Corporate social responsibility	1	
PR campaigns	1	
Crisis management	1	
Company information	1	
	n= 6	

Question 9	Frequency	
How has the intranet enhanced communication with the organisation's stakeholders?		lkwekwezi
Acts as reference tool	1	
	n= 1	

Question 10	Frequency	
Does your organisation use e-mail for journalism/reporting purposes?		
Yes	1	Ikwekwezi
Yes	1	Radio 702
	n= 2	

Question 11	Frequency	
If yes, for which purposes do you use e-mail?		Responses from two radio stations
Sending enquiries	2	
Receiving media releases	2	
	n= 4	

Question 12	Frequency	
How has your function changed and/or improved with the advent of E-mail?		Responses from two radio stations
Faster communication	2	
Cost effective	2	
	n= 4	

Question 13	Frequency	
What are the advantages of using E-mail for gathering news and information?		Responses from two radio stations
Cost effective	2	
Easier means of communication	1	
Communicate with everyone at once	1	
	n=4	

Question 14	Frequency	
Any other comments in relation to using the internet, intranet, or e-mail for communication and journalism purposes.		Responses from two radio stations
Easier to access information through the internet	1	
Best source of information	1	
Web sites not regularly updated	1	
	n= 3	

THE BANKING INDUSTRY

Question 1	Frequency	Respondents
Does your organisation have an intranet?		
	1	DBSA
	1	FNB
	0	Standard Bank
	0	Nedbank
	0	People's Bank
	0	Rand Merchant Bank
	0	BOE Merchant Bank
	n= 2	

Question 2	Frequency	
If yes, does your company use the intranet for communication/ PR purposes?		
	1	DBSA
	1	FNB
	n= 2	

Question 3	Frequency	
If yes, indicate which internal communication functions they serve.		Responses from both banks
Media Communication	2	
Policies	1	
Branch lists	1	
Telephone numbers	1	
Corporate information	3	
Speeches	1	
Manuals	1	
	n= 10	

Question 4	Frequency	
Indicate the functions of publicity which your organisation posts on the intranet.		Responses from both banks
Corporate news	2	
Media releases	2	
Financial information	2	
Annual reports	1	
Brochures	1	
Newsletters	2	
Other (Information impacting on the bank	1	
	n= 11	

Question 5	Frequency	
How do you rate the frequency of your use of the intranet as compared to traditional media?		
Very often	1	DBSA
Very often	1	FNB
	n= 2	

Question 6	Frequency	
What are the advantages of using the intranet compared to other modes?		Responses from both banks
Easy access	1	
Immediacy	2	
Cost	1	
	n= 4	

Question 7	Frequency	
Which functions of public relations does your organisation post on the intranet?		Responses from both banks
Research	1	
Corporate image programmes	2	
Corporate social responsibility	1	
PR campaigns	1	
Crisis management	1	
Company information	2	
	n= 8	

Question 8	Frequency	
Which of your stakeholders have the most access to the intranet?		Responses from both banks
Staff members	2	
Branches	1	
Management	2	
	n= 5	

Question 9	Frequency	
How has the intranet enhanced communication with the organisations' stakeholders?		Responses from both banks
Easy access	2	
Quicker to target many people	1	

Saves paper	1	
	n= 4	

Question 10	Frequency	
Does your organisation use e-mail for communication/ PR purposes?		
Yes	1	DBSA
Yes	1	FNB
	n= 2	

Question 11	Frequency	
If yes, for which communication/ PR purposes do you use e-mail?		Responses from both banks
Send media invites	2	
Send media releases, speeches, presentations	2	
	n= 4	

Question 12	Frequency	
With specific reference to the function of media relations, how has the function changed and/ or improved with the use of e-mail?		Responses from both banks
Communication is quicker	2	
Simultaneous targeting of multiple media	1	
Guaranteed reception of information	1	
Cost efficient	1	
	n= 5	

Question 13	Frequency	
What are the advantages of using E-mail for business communications?		Responses from both banks

Immediacy	2	
Simultaneous targeting	1	
Time saving	1	
Cost efficient	1	
	n= 5	

Question 14	Frequency	
Any other comments in relation to the advantages and disadvantages of using the internet, intranet, or e-mail for communication/PR purposes.		Responses from both banks
Technical problems hamper communication	1	
Destructive viruses	1	
	n= 2	