



An analysis of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with external stakeholders

L van Dyk



orcid.org/0000-0002-3946-8298

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Supervisor: Prof LB Sutton

Co-supervisor: Prof L Bezuidenhout

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DECLARATION

I, Lize–Mari van Dyk, solemnly declare that this work is original and the result of my own labour. It has never, on any previous occasion, been presented in part or whole to any institution or board for the awarding of any degree.

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17 March 2026

SIGNATURE

DATE

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the problem of low stakeholder engagement on the social media platforms of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, a non-profit organisation representing local businesses and the broader Potchefstroom community. Despite utilising platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to build relationships with external stakeholders, the Chamber experiences limited engagement, as reflected in its relatively small follower base and low average post reach. To address this problem, the study investigates how the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce manages its social media communication and the extent to which theoretical principles of two-way symmetrical communication, social media engagement, and stakeholder relationship management are applied to foster engagement and strengthen stakeholder relationships.

The study employed a qualitative research approach comprising a literature study, semi-structured interviews with representatives from the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and Feisty Communications and Marketing (who manages the social media platforms for the Chamber), and a qualitative content analysis of one year of posts on the Chamber's Facebook and Instagram platforms.

The findings indicate that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and Feisty Communications and Marketing demonstrate a clear commitment to mutual respect, transparency and stakeholder involvement. While some principles of two-way symmetrical communication are evident in the strategic planning processes, their application on social media platforms remains limited and inconsistent. Although the organisation adopts a strategic approach to social media engagement, informed by demographic insights and platform-specific content, opportunities to foster deeper stakeholder relationships through interactive features and participatory content strategies are not fully utilised.

The qualitative content analysis further reveals that, although several theoretical guidelines are present across the Chamber's social media platforms, many are only partially implemented or absent. The Chamber primarily uses social media for event promotion and information dissemination, with most posts reflecting a one-way, broadcast-oriented communication style. While mutual respect and recognition are evident in certain posts, opportunities for dialogue, co-creation and shared decision-making remain underdeveloped. Additionally, irregular posting patterns and organisation-driven engagement limit sustained interaction with stakeholders. Practices such as usefulness and selective disclosure are evident, while interactivity and communality are present but inconsistent. Overall, the findings suggest that although the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce has established a foundation for stakeholder engagement

on social media, it has not yet fully leveraged these platforms to cultivate long-term, mutually beneficial relationships through two-way symmetrical communication and relationship-building strategies.

Key terms: engagement, external stakeholders, Facebook, Instagram, Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, relationship building, social media, social media engagement, stakeholder relationship management, two-way symmetrical communication.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Organisations should implement symmetrical communication through interaction, dialogue, reciprocal communication and swift response to incoming messages (Girsang & Kartikawangi, 2021:271) as such communication enables engagement, essential for building and maintaining relationships (Indeed, 2021). Businesses develop trust with their clients and learn about the needs and expectations of their stakeholders through symmetrical communication (Indeed, 2021). Organisations should build the best possible relationships with stakeholders in order to ensure the survival of the business (Van der Colff, 2003:258).

Communication on online platforms creates the ideal environment for implementing two-way symmetrical communication, specifically within the context of fostering engagement and building relationships (see Grunig & Hunt, 1984:22; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:60). Two-way symmetrical communication, as described by Grunig and Grunig (1992b) aligns well with Kotler and Keller's (2012:123) perspective on relationship building: for relationships to be lasting and trusting they should be built on mutual benefits for each participant. The key to relationship building in an online environment is communication.

Social media platforms allow organisations to build relationships directly with their external stakeholders through engagement (Cleary, 2021:295; Farhat *et al.* 2021:320). Social media platforms also equip its users (including the external stakeholders of an organisation) to actively engage with the organisation (e.g. via liking, commenting, sharing and creating posts) (Aydin *et al.* 2021:771; Cleary, 2021:295; Farhat *et al.* 2021:320). Social media engagement theory takes into account the role of technology in forming the basis of social interactions between users (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016:54; Wereda & Woźniak, 2019:2). As technology increases in popularity, it becomes more important to foster engagement on each digital platform (Farhat *et al.*, 2021:319). Engagement with stakeholders should be focused on creating long-term two-way symmetrical relationships (Farhat *et al.*, 2021:319). Social media provides users with the opportunity to create a unique experience where they can connect with organisations and engage in mutual interaction and co-creation (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016: 54). Two critical factors that need to be considered when researching social media engagement are “the experience derived from the social interactions and the experience derived from the technical features”, according to Di Gangi and Wasko (2016: 54). Social media tools and trends reflect the importance of engagement on social media platforms for successful communication (Farhat *et al.*, 2021:320).

According to Di Gangi and Wasko (2016:34), higher user engagement occurs when an organisation supports a user's needs by creating a positive user experience, which explains why it is important to ensure that the correct content type is used. The content type is also a factor that needs to be considered for social media engagement, as it can be a significant driver of engagement and relationship building (Aydin *et al.*, 2021:771). Another important factor in user engagement is the timing and frequency of posts as well as the interactivity of posts (Aydin *et al.* 2021:771).

According to (Cho *et al.*, 2014:566) low engagement carries consequences, including negative effects on relationships between external stakeholders and the organisation. This is because engagement is essential for building and maintaining relationships on social media platforms.

1.2 Context of the study

The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce is an organisation that aims to share knowledge and facilitate networking among organisations in Potchefstroom, promoting relationships between businesses and individuals to create economic prosperity for all in the area (Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, 2022). The organisation organises events that its members can attend to learn more about commercial themes and to promote their businesses by networking with each other and with leaders in their industry (Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, 2022). The Chamber of Commerce is a non-profit organisation with the primary objective of empowering its members, enabling each member and citizen to contribute to the community in their own way and to uplift Potchefstroom as a town (Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, 2022).

With the above mission and goals in mind, it is essential that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce builds and maintains relationships with its stakeholders to achieve its objectives. Such stakeholders could include, but are not limited to, its members, businesses in Potchefstroom, and the larger Potchefstroom community. The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce contracted Feisty Communication and Marketing to develop a communication strategy and to manage its social media platforms in order to engage with the external stakeholders on social media and build long-term relationships with them, with the end goal being to fulfil their mission and reach their goals. Feisty Communication and Marketing provides consultancy services on a monthly retainer, including the development of a communication strategy and the management of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms.

The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce uses social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram, to engage with its stakeholders in order to build and manage relationships between external stakeholders and the organisation. Using social media platforms appropriately could help

grow an online community, create engagement and build relationships. However, it seems that there is low engagement on the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media posts and platforms in general.

1.3 Problem statement

The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce is a non-profit organisation that represents local businesses and the community of Potchefstroom. The Chamber of Commerce uses various social media platforms (such as Facebook and Instagram) to build relationships with its external stakeholders to achieve its goals. However, low levels of engagement are evidenced by the small number of followers it has on Facebook and Instagram and the low average reach of each post. According to the two-way symmetrical communication model, low engagement negatively affects relationships because constant reciprocal engagement is crucial for building and maintaining a long-term, mutually beneficial relationship on social media platforms (Cho *et al.*, 2014:566).

To build and maintain relationships in an online environment, it is essential to manage communication in a way that fosters engagement. The application of two-way symmetrical communication and social media engagement theory could lead to long-term mutually beneficial relationships, which ultimately could facilitate the success and survival of an organisation (Cho *et al.*, 2014:566-567). Therefore, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms should be managed to encourage engagement and to foster successful relationships with its external stakeholders.

1.4 General research question

Based on the above problem statement, the following general research question is posed:

How does the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce manage communication on its social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders?

1.5 Specific research questions

1. According to the two-way symmetrical communication model, social media engagement theory and stakeholder relationship management theory, what guidelines have been established for communication management to foster engagement and relationships with external stakeholders on social media?
2. What is the management of Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's approach to managing communication on social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders?

3. What is the practitioners at Feisty Communication and Marketing's approach to managing communication on Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders?
4. How is content being managed on Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders?

1.6 Specific research aims

1. To consult existing literature to identify established guidelines that could be used for managing communication on social media in a way that fosters engagement and builds relationships with external stakeholders, with a focus on the two-way symmetrical communication model, social media engagement theory, and stakeholder relationship management theory.
2. To conduct semi-structured interviews to evaluate the management of Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's approach to managing communication on social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders.
3. To conduct semi-structured interviews to evaluate the practitioners at Feisty Communication and Marketing's approach to managing communication on Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders.
4. To conduct a qualitative content analysis to ascertain how content is being managed on Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders.

1.7 Guiding theoretical arguments

The theories that guide this research study and provide theoretical principles for the empirical data collection are the two-way symmetrical communication model, social media engagement theory, and stakeholder relationship management theory.

1.7.1 Two-way symmetrical communication

Two-way symmetrical communication was theorised as part of the Excellence study. The theory states that communication takes place in two directions, from top to bottom and bottom to top, in a horizontal manner (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Two-way symmetrical communication makes use of dialogue that facilitates relationship building and maintenance (Grunig, 2001:12) through mutual understanding (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:60, Wilcox *et al.*, 1998:50). According to Taylor *et al.*

(2001:264), establishing dialogue between an organisation and its stakeholders is important because relationships can be built between the organisation and their stakeholders (Grunig & White, 1992:18). Furthermore, transparent communication can be created through open and honest communication (Men & Bowen, 2017:26, Tourish & Robson, 2006:711).

Ideal two-way symmetrical communication exists when a balance is achieved between the organisation and its stakeholders' communication with one another (Van Rooyen, 2007:25). In this balanced two-way symmetrical communication, mutual influence is evident: stakeholders may revise their opinions as they become better informed about an issue, and this learning can, in turn, shape their views (Fill, 1999:399).

Long-term and mutually beneficial relationships are built between an organisation and its stakeholders, which is crucial to the survival of the organisation (Pressly, 2016:10), through two-way symmetrical communication, which is created through engagement. Thus, it is important for the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce to apply the principles of two-way symmetrical communication in their social media strategy.

1.7.2 Social media engagement theory

Social media is an ideal platform for facilitating engagement because it is easily accessible and mostly cost-free (Cho *et al.*, 2014:566-567). When social media posts have more engagement, they will appear more in other users' feeds, leading to a greater organic reach (Cho *et al.*, 2014:566-567). Through greater organic reach, more relationships can be built and maintained, which could lead to a bigger online community. The more frequently the user takes part in activities on social media, the more the social media platform becomes valuable to the organisation and to other users (Cho *et al.*, 2014:566-567). This builds relationships and creates an online community, which, being reciprocal in nature, leads to its value being co-created (Cho *et al.*, 2014:566-567). The value of social media lies in its ability to satisfy the needs and wants of users while ensuring that the audience is interactive and engaging (Cho *et al.*, 2014:566-567).

Social media engagement theory considers technology as the platform needed "to facilitate social interactions among users" (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016:55). Users connecting with organisations on social media constitutes user experience. Two factors that impact user experience are the technical features of a platform and social interactions (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016:55). The technical features are defined by Di Gangi and Wasko (2016:55) as "the perceived capabilities of the technology", and Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) define social interactions as "communication among users through social media". Organisations need to create a positive user experience because it leads to higher user engagement (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016:55; Prahalad

& Ramaswamy, 2004; Wixom & Todd, 2005). User engagement is defined as the state of mind that ensures a user's heightened involvement as a result of the personal benefit they experience through the engagement (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016:55; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Wixom & Todd, 2005). It is also important to note that the more frequently users engage in various activities on a platform, the more valuable the platform becomes to the organisation and the users, ensuring mutual value (Kankanhalli *et al.*, 2005:133; Li & Bernoff, 2012:184). This theory is applicable to how the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms are managed because its implementation influences the levels of user engagement and how successfully relationships with external stakeholders are built.

Aydin *et al.* (2021:774) developed a model for evaluating social-media engagement. The model first considers the creative format of posts, focusing on elements such as interactivity and vividness. It then examines the nature of the content, assessing whether the post is informative, entertaining, promotional and advertising or other. The next component addresses temporal factors, including the time of day at which posts are published and their frequency. Finally, the model incorporates contextual factors, such as the brand or industry in which the organisation operates and the specific social media platforms it employs. These aspects are important to reach engagement and subsequently build and manage relationships with external stakeholders via social media.

1.7.3 Stakeholder relationships management theory

According to Waters *et al.* (2009:102), relationships are "the foundation for social networking sites". Social networking sites are defined by Tredinnick (2006:232) as sites that are driven by user participation and user-generated content. Social media allows users to become involved with an organisation and interaction with stakeholders on social media platforms develops and maintains relationships with key stakeholders (Waters *et al.*, 2009:103). There are three main strategies for implementing strategic virtual communication (Waters *et al.*, 2009:103). The first strategy advocates for increasing the openness and transparency of organisations (Briones *et al.* 2010:38; Kelleher, 2006:443). The second strategy aims to ensure that the information disseminated on the platform is useful to the stakeholders, which fosters dialogical relationships (Briones *et al.* 2010:38; Taylor, Kent & White, 2001:265). The third strategy focuses on utilising interactivity in the role it plays in developing relationships in an online environment (Briones *et al.* 2010:38; Waters *et al.*, 2009:103). Hallahan (2008:49) identified five outcomes for measuring online relationships, namely commitment, control mutuality, communality, trust and satisfaction. Some of these outcomes can also be seen in Ledingham and Bruning's (1998) relationship management theory and in Hon and Grunig's (1999:4) paper: *Guidelines for Measuring*

Relationships in Public Relations. Managing communication on social media platforms is important for the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce because it serves as a way to connect with its external stakeholders and build online relationships.

1.8 Research methods

1.8.1 Qualitative research approach

This study follows a qualitative research approach. A qualitative research approach focuses on understanding the context of the study and the perceptions of the participants and stakeholders (Korstjens & Moser, 2017:271). This research approach is well-suited to understanding the participants' perceptions (Struwig & Stead, 2001:12) in the context of fostering engagement and building a relationship through social media, as is the case in this study. Qualitative research also focuses on contextualism (Struwig & Stead, 2001:12), which is applicable to this study because it can assist in determining the context-specific prerequisites in the formation of two-way symmetrical relationships on social media platforms that rely on engagement. The qualitative research approach ensures that in-depth information is collected from a smaller sample of participants (Vasileiou *et al.*, 2018:148), which enables a deeper understanding of how content should be managed in order to foster engagement and build relationships.

The research methods for this study consist of a literature study that, as previously stated, focuses on two-way symmetrical communication, social media engagement theory, and stakeholder relationship management theory, in the context of social media environments. The literature study acts as a point of departure for this study. Empirical methods that include semi-structured interviews and qualitative content analysis were also used to collect data for the study. The questions used in the semi-structured interviews are based on the literature, which also acted as a guideline when the content analysis was performed.

1.8.1.1 Literature study

Different databases, including EBSCOHost, Research Gate, Nexus, North-West University Ferdinand Postma catalogue (Boloka Institutional Repository), Emerald Online, Science Direct and Google Scholar, were consulted, and research was conducted to ensure sufficient information was available for this study. It also ensured that no studies of the same nature have been conducted in the past. The literature study covers strategies for engagement and cultivating strong relationships with external stakeholders in an online environment.

The research has determined that different studies have been conducted on the following topics: social media engagement theory, two-way symmetrical communication on social media platforms,

and stakeholder relationship management via social media platforms. Examples of previous studies that have been conducted in this field include an academic journal article by Di Gangi and Wasko (2016) that focuses on social media engagement theory and explores the influence of user engagement on social media. Another academic journal article on social media engagement theory is based on a study by Aydin *et al.* (2021), which researched how customers can be effectively engaged through the use of social media. Lipschultz (2015) published a book that explores how different social media platforms can be used for building relationships and Qualman (2013) published a book that explains how social media has transformed the way people conduct business. Hallahan's (2008) chapter on organisational–public relationships in cyberspace and Waters *et al.*'s (2009) academic journal article focus on relationship building through social media. Bernoussi's (2012) master's dissertation and Lein and Ungstad's (2011) master's thesis investigate the value that social media adds to stakeholder relationship management. Pressly's (2016) master's dissertation focuses on how relationships with university alumni can be built on social media. Girsang and Kartikawangi's (2021) academic journal article covers a company strategy that applies two-way symmetrical communication to build engagement through social media.

The above examples confirm that there is sufficient literature available to support this study. Furthermore, the literature search also confirms that other studies have yet to be conducted that specifically consider how social media can be used to foster engagement and build and maintain relationships through engagement in the context of a Chamber of Commerce and its external stakeholders. The findings of this research could also apply to similar non-profit organisations or associations that focus on businesses and uplifting the community.

1.8.1.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews consist of structured and unstructured questions (Struwig & Stead, 2001: 98). Semi-structured interviews have been used for this study because they ensure that predetermined questions are answered, while allowing for follow-up questions. Semi-structured interviews also allow the participants to express their concerns and voice their thoughts (Struwig & Stead, 2001:98). The advantage of a semi-structured interview is that multiple responses can be obtained from the set of questions (Struwig & Stead, 2001: 98). Semi-structured interviews also allow for gaining detailed responses to questions and gaining a comprehensive view of the participants' perceptions (Greef, 2011:351; Struwig & Stead, 2001:98).

A total of five semi-structured interviews were conducted. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with the chairman and the deputy chairman, who led the Board of Members of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, with the two directors from Feisty Communication and

Marketing agency, and the account manager of Feisty Communication and Marketing, who manages the Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms. These participants were sourced through purposive sampling, a technique where the sample is chosen with a specific purpose in mind (Maree & Pietersen, 2017:198), allowing the specific research questions and, ultimately, the general research question to be addressed. The semi-structured interviews were conducted online through Microsoft Teams because of the geographical distance between the researcher and the chosen participants. The interviews were recorded via this platform, with the consent of each interviewee. Each interview lasted about 40 minutes. The guidelines identified in the literature study were used as a guideline for the questions in the interview schedule. The interviews were transcribed and analysed through qualitative content analysis, based on the same guidelines identified in the literature study used to develop the interview schedule.

1.8.1.3 Qualitative content analysis

A qualitative content analysis, according to Struwig and Stead (2001:14), is "the gathering and analysing of textual content". For the purposes of this study, the focus is on posts gathered from Facebook and Instagram. The posts are analysed through a deductive content analysis, based on the literature study, which includes guidelines from the two-way symmetrical communication model, social media engagement theory and stakeholder relationship management theory on social media platforms. The qualitative content analysis, therefore, used the guidelines gathered from the literature study to determine how successful the content is in fostering two-way symmetrical communication, engagement and building relationships. The qualitative content analysis focused on the posts, the interactions, and the reactions to the posts on the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's Facebook and Instagram pages.

Please see Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of the methods used in this study.

1.9 Ethical considerations

An application was submitted to the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) to obtain ethical clearance for the study (ethics number: NWU-00998-24-A7) (see Annexure A). Permission was obtained from the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and Feisty Communication and Marketing for conducting the interviews, and voluntary informed consent (see Annexure B) was obtained before the interviews took place. The interviewees' names were not mentioned during the reporting of the findings. To protect the identity of each interviewee, pseudonyms were used when reporting the findings, for example, "participant 1" or "participant 2". However, total anonymity could not be achieved, as the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, as well as the CEOs of Feisty Communication and

Marketing, are identifiable. The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and Feisty Communication and Marketing also permitted the researcher to analyse the specific social media platforms, even though the content on these platforms is in the public domain and does not require permission to be analysed.

The data that was collected is stored in a secure, confidential folder on sync.com, where only the researcher has access to the data. It will be stored for five years after the completion of the study. The researcher transcribed the audio-recorded data, and these transcripts are stored in the same secure folder on sync.com. The findings of this research study will be sent to the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and Feisty Communication and Marketing via a link to the dissertation on the North-West University's Library website (Boloka Institutional Repository) when the study is concluded.

1.10 Limitations and significance of the study

One of the limitations of the study is its limited scope: a case study of one chamber of commerce in a specific area of South Africa. Other chambers in different locations were not included. Additionally, data collection is restricted to the management of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and Feisty Communication and Marketing's perspective.

However, the purpose of the study is not to generalise the findings, but rather to contribute to understanding the phenomenon of context-specific communication and to add to its meaning. The study was designed in such a way as to ensure that the research question could be answered, while maintaining a sufficient degree of relevance to similar organisations and industries. Therefore, the study's findings could be applied in other contexts to manage communication on social media platforms in a way that fosters engagement and builds relationships.

The study contributes to the approaches that chambers of commerce and/or communication practitioners follow in managing communication and engagement on social media platforms to build and maintain relationships with their external stakeholders.

1.11 Chapter layout

Chapter 1: Introduction and background

Chapter 1 acts as the introduction of this study, giving context regarding the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms. This chapter emphasises the importance of managing communication on social media platforms in a way that fosters engagement, leading to

the building and maintaining of relationships. It addresses both the problem statement and the research questions.

Chapter 2: Literature study

Chapter 2 explores the relevant literature, focusing on the guidelines identified in the two-way symmetrical communication model, social media engagement theory and stakeholder relationship management theory through the lens of social media.

Chapter 3: Research methods

Chapter 3 focuses on the research methods that were used to gain insight into how communication is used to foster engagement on social media platforms and to ensure that it can build and maintain relationships with external stakeholders.

Chapter 4: Findings of semi-structured interviews

Chapter 4 focuses on the findings of the semi-structured interviews regarding the perception of the identified participants at Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and Feisty Communication and Marketing about how communication on social media platforms is managed and to what extent it fosters engagement and builds relationships with external stakeholders.

Chapter 5: Findings of qualitative content analysis

In Chapter 5, the findings of the qualitative content analysis are discussed, which include insights gathered from the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce Facebook and Instagram posts.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and recommendations

In Chapter 6, conclusions are drawn to answer the general research question on how communication is managed on Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with external stakeholders.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE STUDY

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explained the context of the study and the research problem, from which the research questions and aims arise. It became clear in the previous chapter (see Section 1.3) that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media pages (Facebook and Instagram) have low engagement which in turn could impact relationship building on social media platforms with its external stakeholders.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce could foster engagement and build relationships with external stakeholders on their social media platforms by identifying guidelines from theory. This chapter provides background and a discussion of the following theories: the two-way symmetrical communication model (as part of the excellence study), social media engagement theory, and stakeholder relationship management theory. This chapter answers the first specific research question (see Section 1.5):

According to the two-way symmetrical communication model, social media engagement theory and stakeholder relationship management theory, what guidelines have been established for communication management to foster engagement and relationships with external stakeholders on social media?

2.2 Two-way symmetrical communication model

2.2.1 Background on the two-way symmetrical communication model

The excellence project was conducted with James Grunig as the project leader, along with the following researchers: Larissa Grunig, David Dozier, William Ehling, John White and Fred Repper (Grunig *et al.*, 2006:288). The excellence theory is a collection of integrated theories that was studied over 15 years in a study sponsored by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Research Foundation (Grunig & Grunig, 2008:327). In the excellence study, four models were researched, with the main focus being on the two-way symmetrical communication model. These models were developed in the 1970's and 1980's for explaining the value and importance of public relations to an organisation (Grunig & Grunig, 2008:327), and for helping it achieve its communication goals (Hon & Grunig, 1999:7). It was demonstrated that two-way symmetrical communication can help an organisation achieve its goals (Hon & Grunig, 1999:7). The four models studied in the excellence study are: the press agency model, the public information model, the two-way asymmetric model and the two-way symmetrical model.

The first three models will be discussed briefly as they are not the focus of the study, but they form a part of how the two-way symmetrical model developed.

The press agency model is seen as the earliest public relations model. The model follows a one-way approach to communication, where information is spread only in one direction (Grunig & Grunig, 1992b:287-288). The information is spread through a channel from the organisation to the public (Grunig & Grunig, 1992b:288). The main goal of this model is to create publicity for the organisation and to market the products or services of the organisation (Grunig & White, 1992:18). The communication approach in this model is propaganda, seeing that the information that is disseminated may not always be the truth (Grunig & Grunig, 1992b:288, Doorley & Garcia, 2015:99). The stakeholders are persuaded and manipulated through the use of this model (Doorley & Garcia, 2015:99). Minimal research is used because the public's perception is not valued (Fill, 1999:398).

The public information model is the second model. This model also makes use of one-way communication and is used by an organisation to spread information to their stakeholders (Grunig & Grunig, 1992b:288; Willacy, 2016:13). This model is implemented based on the reaction of the stakeholders to the press agency model. This model aims to spread accurate information and to promote the responsibility of the organisation toward their stakeholders (Grunig & Grunig, 1992a:288). Organisations that implement this model would hire journalists to publish articles that communicate the truth from the organisation's perspective (Dozier *et al.*, 1995:41). The aim of this model is to keep specific stakeholders informed regarding the activities of the organisation (Doorley & Garcia, 2015:99).

The two-way asymmetrical communication model uses scientific research to persuade the public and the organisation's stakeholders (Willacy, 2016:13; Grunig & Grunig, 1992b:288). The organisation manipulates its stakeholders through this model and uses it for the organisation's own benefit (Grunig & Grunig, 1992b:288). In the two-way asymmetrical model, the audience is chosen through research, but the conversation is intended to persuade the audience (Willacy, 2016:13). The organisation employs research in order to send a message that would influence the attitudes and behaviours of the stakeholders, which aims to ensure that the organisation gains a benefit (Grunig & Grunig, 1992b:288, Doorley & Garcia, 2015:99). This model can be seen as unethical because it focuses on winning the stakeholders over in the short term, but is not necessarily beneficial to them in the long term (Doorley & Garcia, 2015:99).

All three above-mentioned models have an ethical implication: they are either only one-way communication or, in the case of the two-way asymmetrical model, the communication is two-way but biased. These three models do not apply to this study because they promote propaganda

and/or manipulation and do not support true two-way symmetrical communication. Two-way symmetrical communication is relevant to this study because it ensures that both parties are participating in communication. Two-way symmetrical communication can be used to promote effective communication that is ethical and adaptive, which is essential for engagement and relationship-building.

2.2.2 The two-way symmetrical communication model

The two-way symmetrical communication model was created because of the criticisms the other models received. Some assumptions in the two-way symmetrical model are that the organisation is truthful towards the public and understands the viewpoints of its stakeholders (Grunig & Grunig, 1992b:289). This model uses research to ensure that all parties benefit from the solution (Doorley & Garcia, 2015:99; Grunig and Grunig, 1992b:289). The message used to communicate with stakeholders is formulated using research, feedback and understanding (Grunig & Grunig, 1992b:289; Willacy, 2016:14), but the organisation is also open to changing its perspective.

Overall, the aim of the two-way symmetrical communication model is:

1. to ensure mutual understanding (Wilcox *et al.*, 1998:50),
2. to build relationships through dialogue, feedback and research (Grunig & White, 1992:50),
3. to change the stakeholders' perspective while the organisation also remains open to changing its perspective (Grunig & Grunig, 1992b:289),
4. to send and receive information in a balanced manner (Grunig & Grunig, 1992b:288).

2.2.2.1 Defining two-way symmetrical communication

Grunig and Hunt (1984) defined two-way symmetrical communication as a model where organisations engage in a balanced and reciprocal exchange of information with their stakeholders. The model is designed to foster mutual understanding and build relationships through dialogue and feedback. Grunig and Kim (2021:283) recently redefined symmetrical communication to mean that a “person or organisation communicates with the understanding that the interaction could change either or both parties”. This means that both parties can be influenced by one another through communication.

Van Rooyen (2007:24) defined the two-way symmetrical model of equity in organisational culture to mean that each stakeholder “should be given equal opportunity and be respected as fellow human beings”. By these means, a relationship can be built that ensures mutual understanding and longevity. The organisation and its stakeholders should be open to each other's perspectives and be prepared to change their behaviours or ideas as they receive more information (Grunig &

White, 1992:39; Grunig, 2001:27). Ideal two-way symmetrical communication can be created by ensuring a balance in communication between the organisation and its stakeholders (Van Rooyen, 2007:25).

2.2.2.2 Guidelines of two-way symmetrical communication

According to Pressly (2016:41), long-term relationships need an open communication channel, which is where social media platforms come into play. Social media platforms allow both parties to communicate their needs in an open and honest discussion (Pressly, 2016:41). This is also helpful in building a basis for mutual commitment (Hon & Grunig, 1999:15). Long-term and mutually beneficial relationships can be built through two-way symmetrical communication that emphasises mutual understanding and dialogue between the organisation and its stakeholders on social media platforms (Pressly, 2016:10; Waters *et al.*, 2010:245).

The guidelines relevant to this study, identified from the two-way symmetrical communication model for communication management that fosters engagement and relationships with external stakeholders on social media are briefly discussed below.

2.2.2.2.1 Mutual understanding and respect

Mutual understanding is identified by Dozier *et al.* (1995:41) and Grunig and Grunig (1992a:289) as a core aspect of two-way symmetrical communication, characterised by shared meaning between organisations and their stakeholders. According to Laurie *et al.* (2024:47), the purpose of two-way symmetrical communication is to create mutual understanding, which leads to mutual benefits for both parties, as decisions are made after reaching consensus. This is because the parties listen to each other and are open to changing their views or compromising on their opinions. Two-way symmetrical communication focuses on ensuring a mutual understanding between the organisation and its stakeholders, which also highlights mutual respect between the parties (Wilcox *et al.*, 1998:50). Kleinman (2016:13) states that the two-way symmetrical model encourages respect through its “give-and-take” approach. Parties that participate in the conversation should respect each other (De Beer, 2022:24) in order to encourage mutual understanding.

2.2.2.2.2 Mutual influence

Each party is open to changing their attitudes or behaviours, meaning that the organisation or each stakeholder can change their opinion as they become more educated about a topic and the other’s views (Fill, 1999:399). True two-way symmetrical communication ensures that both the organisations and the stakeholders’ attitude or behaviours can be influenced and influence goes

both ways (Doorley & Garcia, 2015:99; Grunig & Grunig, 1992b:288, Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:62). Fill (1999:399) further identified that a characteristic of the model is that power is equally distributed, meaning that each stakeholder has the power to influence decisions and information.

2.2.2.2.3 Dialogue

According to Grunig and Hunt (1984:27-29) and De Wet (2022), communication takes place when both the stakeholders and the organisation have the opportunity to talk or reply to each other as equals. This facilitates the reciprocal exchange of ideas between the organisation and the stakeholders. Not only is information provided to the stakeholders, but the organisation also receives information from their stakeholders through feedback (Grunig & Grunig, 1992a:288). Wilcox *et al.* (1998:50) state that two-way symmetrical communication ensures that both parties form part of the dialogue. Using the two-way symmetrical model, relationships are built with stakeholders by use of research and dialogue (Grunig & White, 1992:51). There should be equal opportunity to reply (give feedback) and participate in dialogue (Fill, 1999:399). Feedback can be seen as the receiving of and response to the message (De Wet, 2022:42). Dialogue is present in this model, meaning that each stakeholder should have an equal opportunity to take part in the conversation (Fill, 1999:399) on the social media platform (Pressly, 2016:34), and there is participation and a balance in the communication process (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

2.2.2.2.4 Transparent communication

According to Kleinman (2016) the two-way symmetrical model uses an approach that ensures that communication is open and honest, which should lead to transparent communication. Open communication ensures that access is granted to the necessary information. This type of communication also encourages feedback and dialogue (discussed above). In open communication, it is ensured that there are no barriers that prevent the exchange of information between the organisation and its stakeholders (Men & Bowen, 2017:23). Honest communication requires that the organisation be truthful and direct, sharing both the challenges they face as well as positive information, this avoids providing misleading information to the stakeholders and builds trust and credibility on the part of the organisation (Tourish & Robson, 2006:711). Transparent communication is thus communication beyond mere truthfulness; it includes the deliberate act of ensuring that all relevant information is easily understood by and accessible to an organisation's stakeholders (Men & Bowen, 2017:26). This means that nothing is hidden and that stakeholders are aware of the decisions and changes that are made by organisations, though two-way symmetrical consultation (Men & Bowen, 2017:26).

Social media is the ideal platform for implementing two-way symmetrical communication, because it can facilitate conversation by sending and receiving information (dialogue) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:60). Diga and Kelleher (2009:440) point out that social media can be used as a form of two-way symmetrical communication, which allows the organisation to strengthen their relationship with their stakeholders (Taylor & Perry, 2005:209). Information should not only be communicated by the organisation, but the organisation should also be able to receive information and feedback (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Two-way symmetrical communication ensures long-term and mutually beneficial relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders, allowing the organisation to provide information to its stakeholders and have the opportunity to reply to one another (Pressly, 2016:34).

Theoretical statement 1: Two-way symmetrical communication

Two-way symmetrical communication on the social media platforms used by the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should ensure that all parties have the opportunity to send and receive information to be able to mutually influence each other. Such communication should be dialogical in nature and be characterised by transparent communication to ensure mutual understanding, respect and mutual influence that could build and maintain mutually beneficial long-term relationships.

2.3 Social media engagement theory

Social media engagement theory and two-way symmetrical communication makes it possible for one to understand how effective communication in organisations occurs, especially via digital platforms, such as social media. Hernández (2018:21) considers social media engagement theory as social interaction; the technology used is seen as the most important factor in understanding how user experience is formed on social media platforms.

Social interactions are defined by (Prahalad, 2004) as “the communication among users through social media”. Social media engagement theory investigates the role that technology as a platform plays in facilitating interaction between users (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016:55). Engagement is reflected on social media platforms through liking posts, commenting on posts or sharing posts (Aydin *et al.*, 2021:771). A low level of user interaction indicates that engagement is low (Aydin *et al.*, 2021:771). A personalised relationship is built between users through social interactions (Hernández, 2018:21).

Di Gangi and Wasko (2016) and Hernández (2018:22) identified four categories of content on social media, namely:

1. Personalisation: Content should be relevant and of interest to the user.
2. Social accessibility: The ability to have access to social resources, and the user having the opportunity to see that people they follow also participate by interacting with the content.
3. Perceived risk: The perception the user has of potential damage they may experience through using social media.
4. Transparency: The user's perception that they are trusted within the community.

These four categories shape the forms of social interaction that occur on social media platforms and provide insight into how different users perceive social media. They highlight the need for a balance between personalisation and connectivity, as well as the importance of stakeholders feeling safe and able to trust the organisation. Collectively, these categories contribute to relationship building on social media platforms.

User experience can be impacted by technology and its technical features (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016:55). A technical feature refers to the capabilities of technology, whereas social interaction refers to communication on social media platforms between users (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016:55). Di Gangi and Wasko (2016:55) define technical features as "the perceived capabilities of the technology". When the organisations meet the needs of the users through facilitating positive user experience, higher engagement occurs (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016:55). Another four categories that increase engagement are identified by Di Gangi and Wasko (2016:55) and Hernández (2018:22):

1. Completeness: Users should have access to interesting information and the information should be complete and comprehensive or provide the user with an option to retrieve the complete and relevant information.
2. Flexibility: Different ways of using the technical resources should be available. This helps to adapt to the diverse needs of users, including compatibility across different devices and interfaces.
3. Evolve ability: The application should be able to have new developments added that would improve the user experience.
4. Integration: How content is gained and used from various sources.

Social media platforms form part of modern technological applications and are most effective when the four categories outlined above are integrated. These categories are relevant to the

present study, as the analysis of social media platforms seeks to understand how they are used to build and maintain relationships. Together, the categories provide a technological foundation that supports sustained interaction and engagement on social media platforms.

Given the background of social media engagement, Aydin *et al.* (2021) developed a model to measure social media engagement on social media platforms. This model is discussed in the next section (see Section 2.3.1 below) and will be used as the guideline to measure social media engagement on the social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram) of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce.

2.3.1 Measurement of social media engagement

Aydin *et al.* (2021:774) developed the following model to measure social media engagement.

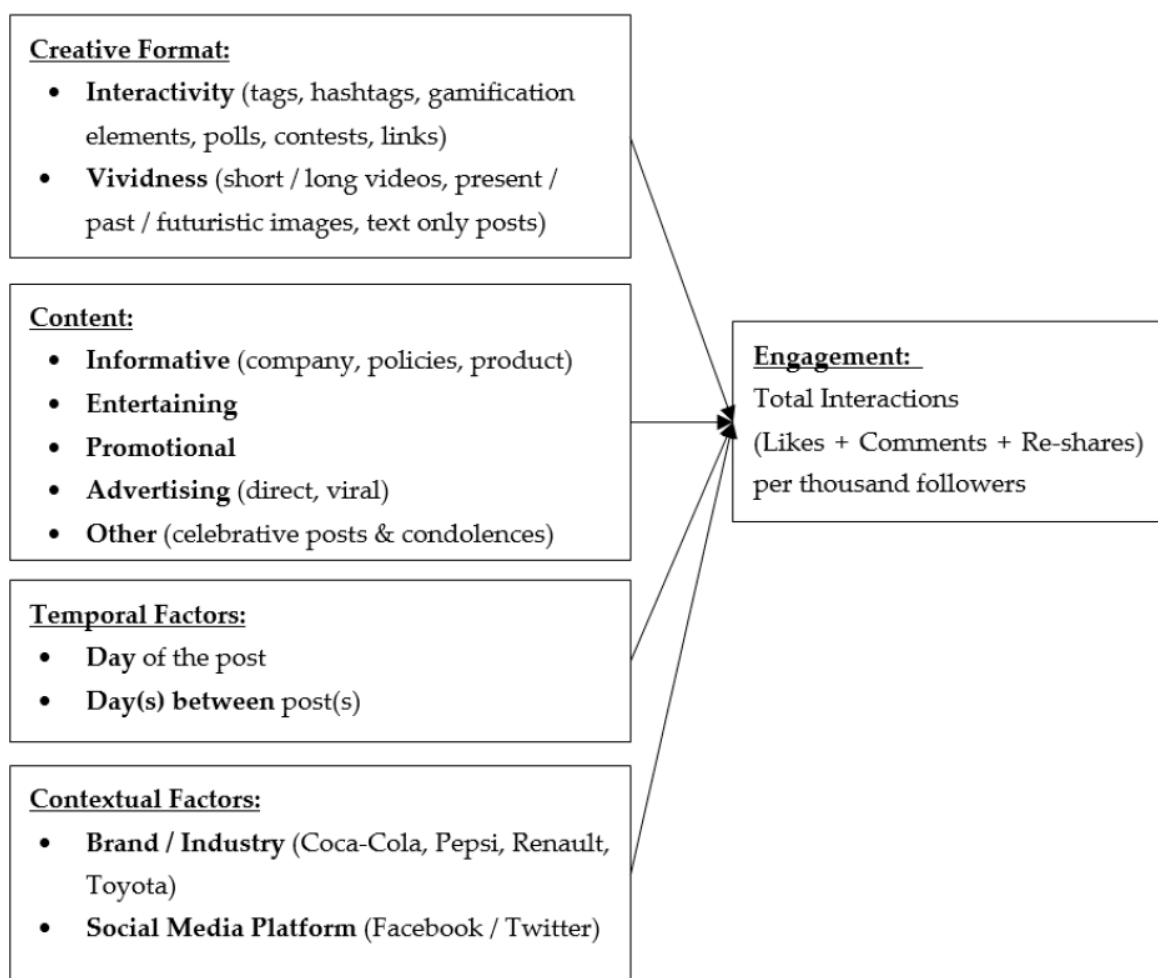


Figure 2.1: Research model for social media engagement, as conceptualised by Aydin *et al.* (2021:774)

The model presented in Figure 2.1 by Aydin *et al.* (2021:774) covers four factors that could influence users' engagement with social media posts. These factors are creative format, content, temporal factors and contextual factors. The model showcases different aspects that can influence engagement on social media platforms.

2.3.1.1 Creative format

The creative format draws the user's attention, and it can influence how users interact with the content (Aydin *et al.*, 2021:771). Interactive content draws users to engage with the content. Examples of such content include sweepstakes or questions, which can influence the users' involvement, engagement and interaction (Aydin *et al.*, 2021:772). Vividness acts as a way to spark the users' interest and can be used as a factor to evaluate their stimulation level (Aydin *et al.*, 2021:771).

2.3.1.1.1 Interactivity

Interactivity is defined by Liu and Shrum (2002:54) as "the degree to which two or more communication parties can act on each other, on the communication medium and on the messages and the degree to which such influences are synchronised". Studies conducted by Aydin (2020), Chiu (2021), De Vries *et al.* (2012), Gutiérrez-Cillán *et al.* (2017) and Pin *et al.*, (2015) found that interactivity influences the users' interaction, engagement and involvement. Interactivity can be built by having a call to action (e.g. a content provider asking users to like, comment, and share a post to see more like it) and can be measured through the amount of likes, shares and comments a post receives.

2.3.1.1.2 Vividness

The vividness of a post concerns the degree to which a message stimulates a viewer (Aydin *et al.*, 2021:771). This showcases the effects the creative format of a post can have on user engagement, because, like with all other types of digital communication, different formats can be used (Aydin *et al.*, 2021:771). For example, text only, images or photos, and/or animated photos or videos can be used in different formats. Lohtia *et al.* (2003:412) found that animations and videos are more vivid than photos and text-only posts, which ensures that more people are reached.

2.3.1.2 Content

The type of content (informative, entertaining or promotional) can be a significant driver of effective social media campaigns, and it can influence how users engage with content (Aydin *et al.*, 2021:771)

2.3.1.2.1 Informative

The content of an organisation's posts can be of value to its audience, as it provides them with information or teaches them about the organisation, its values and its products or services (Aydin *et al.*, 2021:772). This attracts the attention of the followers, creating engagement (Gavilanes *et al.*, 2018:8).

2.3.1.2.2 Entertaining

By providing entertaining content, interest can be generated from users, which in turn can improve attitudes towards an organisation, as argued in Hausman and Siekpe (2009) study on the context of websites. The same is true for social media pages (Aydin *et al.*, 2021:772).

2.3.1.2.3 Promotional and advertising

Promotional and advertising posts offer benefits to the user, giving information to the user regarding special discounts or exclusive campaigns (Men & Tsai, 2012:723; Utz, 2009:224). Pin *et al.* (2015) found in their study on the influence of Facebook brand-page posts on online engagement, that such posts significantly shape users' interactions with brand content on social media. However, Robinson *et al.* (2007) found in their study on the effectiveness of internet advertising that promotional incentives can harm social media post engagement. Thus, more research is needed to ascertain the entire effect of promotional content.

2.3.1.2.4 Other

Other content is content that does not fall in any other category as discussed above. This content isn't posted for being informative, entertaining or as promotion or advertising, but as celebrative posts or posts that are used for condolences (Aydin *et al.*, 2021:772).

2.3.1.3 Temporal factors

De Vries *et al.* (2012), Moro *et al.* (2016) and Villamediana *et al.* (2019) found that posting frequency and the timing of posts play an integral role in how well a post will perform and be received by users.

2.3.1.3.1 Day of the post

Studies by Antoniadis *et al.* (2019), Villamediana *et al.* (2019), and Schultz (2017) found that the timing of a post does not significantly influence how followers engage. However, in the light of social media platforms, like Meta, displaying the best times to post, based on the activity of a page or account's followers, this study follows its recommendations that the algorithm showcases the best time.

2.3.1.3.2 The frequency of posts

Posting too frequently can leave too little time for engagement, because posts would be in the most visible space of a social media feed for only a short period of time (Aydin *et al.*, 2021:773). This can also lead to followers getting irritated with a content creator (Iqbal Khan *et al.*, 2020:1030), leading to less engagement on posts. Posting infrequently may also influence the amount of interest in your posts, influencing engagement negatively (Aydin *et al.*, 2021:773).

2.3.1.4 Contextual factors

Contextual factors include the brand or industry of the organisation as well as the social media platforms that are used, which both can influence engagement on posts.

2.3.1.4.1 Brand/Industry

Studies by De Vries *et al.* (2012) and Pin *et al.* (2015) aimed to gain generalised insights on how social media posts perform, but failed to consider a brand's impact on engagement (De Vries *et al.*, 2012, Schultz, 2017). Felix *et al.* (2017) and Srivastava *et al.* (2018) found that brands influence the engagement rate on posts when promoting posts. It was found that the competitiveness of an industry can influence the effectiveness of social media and that the industries in which a brand operates can exercise an influence on its social media activities and influence engagement (Aydin *et al.*, 2021:773).

2.3.1.4.2 Social media platform

Voorveld *et al.* (2018) found that engagement can be context-specific and that different platforms provide different experiences to their users. Li *et al.* (2020b) found that the characteristics of a social media platform influence consumers' word-of-mouth sharing. The characteristics that influence consumers' word-of-mouth sharing have been identified as (Li *et al.*, 2020b):

- whether the existing word-of-mouth is positive or negative,
- the perceived anonymity of a social media platform,

- the perceived interpersonal closeness of friends on a social media platform,
- and the number of friends on a social media platform.

According to Voorveld *et al.* (2018) content can be perceived as entertaining, informative, promotional, advertising or other, and many factors can influence whether or not the content will perform well on the platform.

Theoretical statement 2: Social media engagement

Engagement on the social media platforms of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce could form an integral part of how relations are built with external stakeholders. For the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, it is important to understand how engagement on their social media posts can be influenced by the following:

1. The creative format of the post, including the interactivity and vividness of the post.
2. The type of content that is posted, such as informative, entertaining, promotional and advertising or other content.
3. Temporal factors, like the day of the post and the number of days between posts.
4. Contextual factors, including the brand or industry and social media platform that is used.

In the next section, the stakeholder relationship management theory is discussed in a social media context.

2.4 Stakeholder relationships management theory

Grunig and Huang (2000) and Grunig and Grunig (2008) developed strategies for relationship building between organisations and their stakeholders. Waters *et al.* (2009) subsequently adapted these strategies for the online environment, and the present study focuses exclusively on these online adaptations, which are relevant for the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce social media platforms.

Both stakeholder relationship management theory and social media engagement theory focus on how the organisation interacts with its stakeholders. Linking these two theories provides a clearer understanding of how communication via social media should be used for managing relationships with stakeholders. Social media can act as a way for stakeholders to become part of the organisation, as they can interact and build relationships with the organisation on social media

platforms (Waters *et al.*, 2010:45). Social media platforms can also be used as a management function (Waters *et al.*, 2009:103, Pressly, 2016:24). Furthermore, two-way symmetrical communication can be facilitated on social media platforms to build relationships (see Section 2.2.2.2) (Waters *et al.*, 2010:45). Next, the strategies and outcomes for stakeholder relationships relevant to social media platforms are discussed.

2.4.1 Relationship-building strategies

Waters *et al.* (2009:103) provide three main strategies for cultivating relationships through social media. These three strategies are (1) disclosure and openness, (2) usefulness and information dissemination, and (3) interactivity and involvement.

2.4.1.1 Disclosure (openness)

Disclosure, also known as openness, is one of the key indicators of relationship quality (Canary & Stafford, 1994:12; Grunig & Huang, 2000). Waters *et al.* (2009:103) found that the public, including stakeholders, needs organisations to be more open and transparent. Ensuring that an organisation is transparent and open in the online environment builds open and honest relationships (Kelleher, 2007:443). This can be achieved by having hyperlinks on social media platforms to more detailed media or using visual elements and captions that describe the organisation, for example (Pressly, 2016:36). This strategy would entail that the organisation be open and transparent on social media about their affiliations, sponsorships and content, ensuring that the organisation is seen in a more authentic light.

2.4.1.2 Usefulness and information dissemination

Usefulness and information dissemination refer to the value of the information provided and the ease with which it can be accessed (Waters *et al.*, 2009:103). Useful information facilitates dialogue (Kelleher, 2007:173). Ensuring that information is useful and available in multiple formats for easy access for an organisation's stakeholders adds value to online relationships (Pressly, 2016:36). Information should be both useful to stakeholders, meaning they can learn from it or use it, and should also be disseminated in such a way that it can be accessed easily (Briones *et al.* 2010:38; Taylor, Kent & White, 2001:265). This strategy would be implemented on social media platforms through prioritising information according to relevance and accessibility.

2.4.1.3 Interactivity and involvement

Interactivity and involvement refer to content that encourages stakeholder participation, prompting actions such as commenting, liking and sharing (Waters *et al.*, 2009:103). Interactivity, according

to Hallahan (2003:22), is one of the main factors in the process of building relationships on online platforms. Sundar *et al.* (2003) identified two types of interactivity: contingency and functional interactivity. Contingency interactivity has to do with how relationships build an online environment (Kelleher, 2007:173), whereas, functional interactivity focuses on the features that media present (Sundar *et al.*, 2003:33). By ensuring that the stakeholders are kept informed of events and how they can be involved in the organisation's projects, the organisation can involve its stakeholders (Pressly, 2016:36). Each platform possesses different features for promoting interactivity and involvement. This interactivity and involvement can be through personalised interaction, or users can create content in response to a post.

Theoretical statement 3: Strategies to cultivate social media relationships

To use social media effectively for relationship building, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should adopt strategies that include timely and transparent information disclosure, the provision of useful, accessible, and interactive content, and the active encouragement of stakeholder involvement.

2.4.2 Relationship outcomes

Stakeholder relationship management strategies and outcomes are interconnected and focus on how the stakeholder relationships are managed by the organisation. The argument is that if the relationship-building strategies are applied, certain relationship outcomes will be met. Hon and Grunig (1999) determined specific outcomes for a relationship to evaluate whether relationships are mutually beneficial, strategic, positive and long-term. These outcomes are trust, control mutuality, commitment and relationship satisfaction. According to Hallahan (2008:50-51) trust, control mutuality, communality, commitment and relationship satisfaction are outcomes relevant to the online environment, as applied in this study.

2.4.2.1 Trust

Ledingham and Bruning (1998:58) define trust in a relationship between an organisation and their stakeholders as the result of an organisation being true to their promises. According to Hallahan (2008:56-57), trust is difficult to achieve in an online environment and it is important that the organisation be truthful, consistent, and reliable in the information it shares on social media platforms. Trust between an organisation and its stakeholder groups can be described as the degree to which they are willing to communicate openly and honestly with each other (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Hon and Grunig (1999:19) identified three dimensions of trust, namely integrity,

reliability, and competence. *Integrity* refers to stakeholders' belief that the organisation will act fairly and justly (De Beer, 2022:33, Hon & Grunig, 1999). *Reliability* refers to stakeholders' belief that the organisation will do what it says it intends to do (De Beer, 2022:33, Hon & Grunig, 1999). De Beer (2022:33) states that "*competence* refers to the belief that the organisation has the ability to do what they have promised to do". Briones *et al.* (2010:38) state that trust can only exist when an organisation is viewed by their stakeholders as reliable, credible and consistent.

An organisation can increase trust through communicating openly with its stakeholders and keeping its stakeholders informed of events associated with the organisation. This will contribute to long-term relationships with stakeholders (Grunig & Huang, 2000, Hutton, 1999:210).

2.4.2.2 Control mutuality

Control mutuality focuses on the interactivity that takes place between an organisation and its stakeholders (Hallahan, 2008:53-54). Hon and Grunig (1999) describe control mutuality as both parties being content with the amount of control they have. The organisation and its stakeholders should work together and take each other's opinions into consideration with the aim of ensuring that both parties have control in the relationship (Barker & Slabbert, 2018; Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2011:246).

Despite the imbalance in control that exists between the organisation and its stakeholders, each party should have some sort of control over the other (Hon & Grunig, 1999:3). If there is no control mutuality in a relationship, the relationship will be neither stable nor positive (Hon & Grunig, 1999:19).

2.4.2.3 Communalities

Hallahan (2008:51) and Briones *et al.* (2011:38) define communalities as the extent to which organisations and stakeholders identify with one another's interests, values and beliefs. Hallahan (2008: 55) further argues that users who perceive themselves as part of a community also identify with others within that community. Identification, according to Hallahan (2008:55), occurs when individuals recognise that they play a role in the organisation as stakeholders or members. It may take the form of interest in, or involvement with, the organisation.

2.4.2.4 Commitment

According to Hallahan (2008:52), commitment is how an organisation is viewed by either the public or the organisation's stakeholders and how committed the organisation is to online engagement. Commitment to a relationship is the amount of faith the organisation and their

stakeholders place in each other and the belief they hold that the relationship is valuable and should continue to exist (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2011:246; Grunig & Huang, 2000). This mutual faith is determined by how deeply each party feels about the relationship and whether or not they believe that the relationship is worth the energy, time and effort they invest in it (Hon & Grunig, 1999:20).

Each party should be willing to commit to the other (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999:59) and there should be concrete action that displays the parties' commitment to each other in the relationship (De Wet, 2022:39). This action includes, according to Ledingham and Bruning (1998:165) time, energy and money spent on the relationship. The ideal situation is that the parties would repeatedly choose one another, which develops stronger relationships and loyalty (De Wet, 2022:39; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Sutton, 2014:37).

2.4.2.5 Relationship satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction is gained when the organisation and its stakeholders' expectations are not only met but also exceeded on social media platforms (Hallahan, 2008:57). Relationship satisfaction is described as a favourable feeling between the organisation and its stakeholders (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999:20). Relationship satisfaction as a measure considers whether the stakeholder's expectations and needs are met by the organisation. Relationship satisfaction is present in a relationship where there are more advantages than disadvantages (Hon & Grunig, 1999:3). This statement is corroborated by Holtzhausen and Fourie (2011:246), who state that when both parties gain an advantage from the relationship, the stakeholders feel that the organisation considers their input as important, which leads to strong long-term relationships.

2.4.2.6 Two types of relationships: exchange vs communal relationships

Hon and Grunig (1999) identified two types of relationships between organisations and their stakeholders, namely exchange relationships and communal relationships. The type of relationship forms part of the strategy for how relationships are built on social media platforms and influences the outcome of these relationships.

2.4.2.6.1 Exchange relationships

Exchange relationships imply, according to Hon and Grunig (1999:3), that one party is perceived as being beneficial to the other party, because of the tangible benefits previously experienced or those it hopes to experience in the future. This type of relationship is often sought after in the marketing domain and is seen as the core of marketing strategies (Hon & Grunig, 1999:20).

2.4.2.6.2 Communal relationship

In this type of relationship, both parties provide each other with benefits, because the welfare of each party is important to the other (Hon & Grunig, 1999:3). When a communal relationship is created, it is important to convince the organisation that the relationship is indeed important (Hon & Grunig, 1999:21; De Wet, 2022:40). This relationship also creates value for the community in the context of social responsibility (Hon & Grunig, 1999:21). In the domain of public relations, the stakeholders expect benefits from the organisation without any intention of providing benefits to the organisation in return (Hon & Grunig, 1999:21).

On social media platforms, this can be applied as the organisation showcases its contributions to the community while providing the community with opportunities to share valuable information about issues requiring the organisation's attention. Communal relationships are considered a more effective type of relationship, as both parties offer mutual benefits and contribute to creating value for the community.

This considers whether the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and its stakeholders have a relationship resembling a communal relationship, where the organisation provides the stakeholders with benefits without expecting anything in return, or whether their relationship more closely resembles an exchange relationship, where the organisation and their stakeholders provide each other with benefits.

Theoretical statement 4: The outcomes of stakeholder relationships

To manage stakeholder relationships effectively on social media platforms, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should strive to build trust by delivering on the promises, fulfilling its commitment to online engagement, promoting relational satisfaction, with mutual control and shared communality. Furthermore, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should strive to cultivate relationships that provide mutual benefits and value for both the Chamber and its stakeholders.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, three main theories of this study are discussed: the two-way symmetrical communication model, social media engagement theory and stakeholder relationship management theory. These theories act as guidelines for how communication should be

managed to foster engagement and build relationships with external stakeholders on social media.

The guidelines identified in these theories are used to answer specific research question 1:

According to the two-way symmetrical communication model, social media engagement theory, and stakeholder relationship management theory, what guidelines have been established for communication management to foster engagement and relationships with external stakeholders on social media?

The following table showcases the identified guidelines from literature and answers the above-mentioned research question.

Table 2.1: Guidelines identified in the literature

Guideline	Operational definition
Two-way symmetrical communication	
Mutual understanding and respect	On social media platforms, both parties should have mutual respect, listen to each other, and be open to changing their views in order to reach decisions through mutual agreement or consensus.
Mutual influence	Each party should have the opportunity to influence the other's views and perspectives via social media platforms.
Dialogue	Both parties should be equals in the communication process on social media platforms, ensuring an open and reciprocal exchange of ideas, information or opinions. Both parties should be open to receiving information and have the opportunity to reply, give feedback and respond.
Transparent communication	All relevant information should be accessible and clearly communicated on social media platforms. The communication between the parties should be open, honest, truthful and direct.

Social media engagement theory		
Creative format	Interactivity	Interactivity focuses on whether the post or platform facilitates two-way communication or engagement through the features that are available, including likes, comments, shares, tags, hashtags, gamification elements, polls, contests and links.
	Vividness	Vividness focuses on the degree to which a post or content stands out and whether the content is visually and emotionally engaging. Rich dynamic elements, such as high-quality content (images, videos or animation), are characteristic of a vivid post.
Types of content	Informative	Informative content informs or educates the users. The information provided is valuable, relevant, and accurate.
	Entertaining	Entertaining content amuses, engages or provides the users with enjoyment. The content can include humour, memes, storytelling, or games.
	Promotional and advertising	Promotional and advertising content promotes a product, service or event. The content attracts attention or generates interest that encourages action.
	Other	Other content is any content posted on social media platforms that doesn't fall into the above-mentioned types, such as celebratory posts and condolences.
Temporal factors	Day of post	The time of the day the post (content) is published and the specific calendar date. This information is used to track and analyse whether the timing of the content release was effective.
	Days between posts	The frequency of posts and the number of day(s) between each post.
Contextual factors	Brand/industry	The brand or industry in which the organisation posts their content can influence the engagement rate and the effectiveness of the social media communication.
	Social media platform	The social media platform where posts are published influences engagement. Whether the content is tailored to the given platform or application is also important, as different platforms generate different experiences.

Stakeholder relationship management theory		
Online relationship-cultivation strategies	Disclosure	The organisation should share information openly and transparently with their stakeholders on social media regarding what is happening within the organisation.
	Usefulness and information dissemination	Relevant information that stakeholders could use should be shared on social media platforms in a timely and systematic way.
	Interactivity and involvement	Stakeholders should be able to interact with the content and the organisation on social media platforms. Stakeholders should be involved on social media platforms through active participation in planning, decision-making and activities that will influence the stakeholders' interest in the organisation.
Relationship outcomes	Trust	The amount of confidence each party has in the other, based on integrity, competence and reliability to deliver on promises made on social media platforms.
	Control mutuality	How satisfied each party is with the amount of control each party perceives they have or experiences within the relationship on social media platforms.
	Communality	The sense of shared concern, interests and values between the organisation and its stakeholders and mutual benefit experienced.
	Commitment	The degree of dedication from each party including the amount of time, energy and money each party is willing to spend on social media platforms when engaging with each other.
	Relationship satisfaction	The extent to which each party is satisfied with the relationship they have on social media, meaning that their expectations, desires and needs are met by the other party.
	Exchange relationships vs communal relationships	In an exchange relationship, parties provide benefits to each other because of previous benefits experienced or the hope of benefits in the future. In a communal relationship, both parties provide each other with benefits, because the welfare of each party and their relationship are important to the other.

This chapter explored the theoretical foundations necessary for building relationships and fostering engagement on social media platforms. Drawing on the principles of relationship building from three theories, namely two-way symmetrical communication, social-media engagement theory and stakeholder relationship management theory, these guidelines provide the basis for developing communication strategies that effectively promote engagement. The next chapter (Chapter 3) discusses the research approach and methods employed to collect data for the empirical part of this study.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 highlights the necessity of external stakeholder engagement on the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media pages to build and maintain relationships in the online environment.

Chapter 2 identified guidelines from the two-way symmetrical communication model, social media engagement theory and stakeholder relationship management theory in the context of social media that should be followed by the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce when using these platforms to engage with external stakeholders and build relationships with them.

In this chapter, the research approach and empirical methods for data collection are discussed, based on the guidelines identified in the literature study.

3.2 Qualitative research approach

The qualitative research approach is followed to understand individuals in their social context (Moser & Korstjens, 2018:271-272). Teherani *et al.* (2015) define the qualitative research approach as a systematic inquiry regarding a social phenomenon, where the researcher is the main data collection instrument and examines why the events related to a given phenomenon occur, what exactly occurs and how it influences the participants. Cresswell (2007:37-39) and Struwig and Stead (2001:12-13) identify the following characteristics of the qualitative research approach:

- It emphasises the perspectives of participants and researchers, considers the context in which the research is conducted, outlines the methods employed, allows flexibility in methodological application and guides the use of theory.
- Data are typically collected at sites where participants experience the phenomena relevant to the study.
- Data collection methods include examining documents or posts, conducting interviews or focus group discussions and observing behaviour.
- Data are gathered in multiple forms.
- Phenomena are studied in a holistic and complex manner, recognising their interrelated and multifaceted nature.

Qualitative research emphasises the depth and context of the study, as well as the perspectives of participants, thereby providing rich insights into the issues under investigation, including social

media relationships. Based on research compiled from Du Plooy (2009), Fouché and Delpont (2011) and Struwig and Stead (2001), the advantages of qualitative research include:

- The ability to obtain information relevant to specific situations or problems.
- The opportunity to explore and discuss particular phenomena in depth.
- Flexibility to adapt the research approach to the participant or context.
- The potential for findings to be applied across different contexts and to inform practice in other organisations.

A qualitative research approach is holistic, meaning that the context of the participant is taken into account as part of the research process (Struwig & Stead, 2001:11). In this study, a qualitative approach enables the researcher to examine comprehensively and understand how social media can be used to engage with and build relationships between the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and its external stakeholders.

3.3 Research design

This research study is designed so that different methods are used to answer the research questions.

Table 3.1: Research design

Specific research question	Research method
1. According to the two-way symmetrical communication model, social media engagement theory and stakeholder relationship management theory, what guidelines have been established for communication management to foster engagement and relationships with external stakeholders on social media?	A literature study (already done – please see Chapter 2)
2. What is the management of Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's approach to managing communication on social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders?	Semi-structured interviews with participants at the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce

3. What are the practitioners at Feisty Communication and Marketing's approach to managing communication on Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders?	Semi-structured interviews with participants at Feisty Communication and Marketing
4. How is content being managed on Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders?	A qualitative content analysis of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's Facebook and Instagram pages

3.4 Theoretical statements and guidelines

In the table below, the theoretical statements and subsequent guidelines identified in the literature study are illustrated.

Table 3.2: Theoretical statements and guidelines

Theoretical statement	Guidelines
Theoretical statement 1: Two-way symmetrical communication Two-way symmetrical communication on the social media platforms used by the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should ensure that all parties have the opportunity to send and receive information to be able to mutually influence each other. Such communication should be dialogical in nature and be characterised by transparent communication to ensure mutual understanding, respect and mutual influence that could build and maintain mutually beneficial long-term relationships.	• Mutual understanding and respect • Mutual influence • Dialogue • Transparent communication

Theoretical statement 2: Social media engagement Engagement on the social media platforms of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce could form an integral part of how relations are built with external stakeholders. For the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, it is important to understand how engagement on their social media posts can be influenced by the following: 1. The creative format of the post, including the interactivity and vividness of the post. 2. The type of content that is posted, such as informative, entertaining, promotional and advertising or other content. 3. Temporal factors, like the day of the post and the number of days between posts. 4. Contextual factors, including the brand or industry and the social media platform that is used.	• Creative format - Interactivity - Vividness • Types of content - Informative - Entertaining - Promotional and advertising - Other • Temporal factors - Day of post - Days between posts • Contextual factors - Brand/industry - Social media platform
Theoretical statement 3: Strategies to cultivate social media relationships To use social media effectively for relationship building, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should adopt strategies that include timely and transparent information disclosure, the provision of useful, accessible, and interactive content, and the active encouragement of stakeholder involvement.	• Disclosure (Openness) • Usefulness and information dissemination • Interactivity and involvement

Theoretical statement 4: The outcomes of stakeholder relationships To manage stakeholder relationships effectively on social media platforms, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should strive to build trust by delivering on the promises, fulfilling its commitment to online engagement, promoting relational satisfaction, with mutual control and shared communality. Furthermore, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should strive to cultivate relationships that provide mutual benefits and value for both the Chamber and its stakeholders.	• Trust • Control mutuality • Commitment • Communality • Relationship satisfaction • Type of relationship: Communal vs. exchange relationships
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3.5 Research methods

3.5.1 Literature study

The literature study forms a theoretical base for the study, which provides guidelines for the empirical part of the research. As described in Chapter 1, the relevant databases were consulted to ensure that no studies of the same nature as this study have been conducted. The databases include EBSCOHost, Research Gate, Nexus, North-West University Ferdinand Postma catalogue (Boloka Institutional Repository), Emerald Online, Science Direct and Google Scholar. Please see Section 1.8.1.1 for more details about previous studies that used the same theoretical frameworks or that were conducted on similar topics. Please see Chapter 2 for the literature study, which included the two-way symmetrical model, social media engagement theory and stakeholder relationship management theory. Table 2.1 summarises the theoretical guidelines that were identified in Chapter 2 and provides an operational definition for each. Operational definitions ensure that clarity and precision are present in the study. It also ensures that the guideline is defined in the context of the study with an observable term, which serves as the theoretical underpinning that guides the rest of this study.

3.5.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews combine features of both in-depth and structured interview approaches, allowing for a balance between guided questions and open discussion (Struwig &

Stead, 2001:98; Du Plooy, 2009:198). Key characteristics of semi-structured interviews include the use of an interview schedule, the flexibility to explore topics in greater depth, prior preparation of questions, and the freedom for interviewees to express their views (Struwig & Stead, 2001). These interviews are known for providing interviewees with freedom and offering the interviewer flexibility (Du Plooy, 2001:117).

Semi-structured interviews encourage participants to be involved in the conversation, rather than purely question-and-answer interaction (Moser & Korstjens, 2018:13–14). They also allow the interviewer to pose follow-up questions between preset questions in the interview schedule to obtain deeper insights or clarify responses (Bryman, 2012:471). The interview schedule is typically organised around themes identified in the literature study (Du Plooy, 2009:177). This format enables participants to respond to predetermined questions while also allowing them to expand on their answers and share their perspectives, making semi-structured interviews particularly suitable for this study.

3.5.2.1 Choice of participants

The participants are chosen for this study according to the role they play in the content that is created, published and managed on the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's Facebook and Instagram pages. They were selected in order to gather information regarding their approach to managing communication on social media, fostering engagement and building relationships with the external stakeholders of the organisation. The data collected from the semi-structured interviews with the chosen participants address the second and third specific research questions:

2. What is the management of Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's approach to managing communication on social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders?

3. What is the practitioners at Feisty Communication and Marketing's approach to managing communication on Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders?

This study makes use of purposeful sampling (known-group sampling), as each participant was chosen specifically based on their relevance to this study (Du Plooy, 2009:123). Each of these participants was chosen because of the active role they play in the organisation's communication and relationship building on the social media platforms, and because they possess the relevant information that is necessary for answering the specific research questions of this study.

The following participants were chosen for the semi-structured interviews:

- The Chairman of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, because this person guides the overall strategy and goals of the organisation. This participant has strategic input in the management of the organisation's social media platforms and also needs to approve what is communicated on the platforms.
- The Deputy Chairman of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, because this person has a strategic influence on what the organisation posts on their social media platforms, to reach the organisation's goals.
- The two directors of Feisty Communication and Marketing were specifically chosen because they develop the social media strategy and/or approve the social media campaigns that are used for the organisation in a strategic communication capacity. Feisty Communication and Marketing is contracted by the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce as communication and marketing consultants for the social media function and is paid a monthly retainer to manage the social media pages.
- The account manager of Feisty Communication and Marketing, who works directly on the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms in a technical function, creates a content calendar, develops content and publishes posts according to the social media strategy.

They were purposively selected as a known-group sample, solely based on the position they occupy at the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce or at Feisty Communication and Marketing. No other inclusion or exclusion criteria were relevant for choosing the participants.

3.5.2.2 Interview schedules

The semi-structured interview schedule was developed based on the guidelines that were identified in the literature (see Table 2.1 and Table 3.2). The interview schedules for the participants from the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and Feisty Communication and Marketing are included as Annexure C.

3.5.2.3 The data collection and analysis process

The participants were invited to the semi-structured interviews via email. They were informed about the purpose of the study and their participation in the study prior to the interviews. The interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams calls in February 2025. Microsoft Teams

was used because of the geographical distance between the interviewer and the interviewees, which made in-person interviews impractical. Each interview lasted about 40 minutes.

Microsoft Teams is a convenient and accessible platform with video and audio capabilities, which also offers a recording feature. The disadvantages of Microsoft Teams for these interviews are that there can be technical issues, there can be distractions in remote environments, and a lack of personal interaction.

One of the challenges during the interviews was an unplanned emergency power outage that created a data outage, and one of the interviews was disrupted and continued via a WhatsApp call until the power supply was restored and the interview could proceed again on Microsoft Teams.

Each interview was recorded on Microsoft Teams with the permission of the participants and thereafter transcribed. The transcribed semi-structured interviews were analysed through qualitative content analysis against the theoretical guidelines and operational definition (see Table 2.1 and Table 3.2) as identified in the literature study.

The interview transcripts were analysed using qualitative content analysis, following the identified guidelines and operational definitions (see Table 2.1 and Table 3.2) as identified in the literature study. This approach involved systematically organising and categorising the transcript data to identify patterns and insights relevant to the research questions. Qualitative content analysis allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives while maintaining the contextual meaning of their responses.

3.5.3 Qualitative content analysis

Strydom and Bezuidenhout (2014:191) define qualitative content analysis as “the systematic analysis of social artefacts to provide an in-depth understanding” of the content in its specific context. Qualitative content analysis focuses on the experiences and perspectives of the participants (De Wet, 2022:43). By doing a qualitative content analysis, the researcher works in an interpretative paradigm, seeking to understand the social reality that is within the content (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014:191). Qualitative content analysis allows the researcher to test existing theories or develop new theories using the collected data (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014:191). In this study, each guideline from the literature study is used to analyse the social media posts and to evaluate whether the posts conform to the criteria from the literature for engagement and relationship-building.

Qualitative content analysis is the ideal option for this study because of its advantages, including cost-effectiveness (Adler & Clark, 2008:382) and that the analyses can be repeated if the researcher made a mistake (Adler & Clark, 2008:376). Qualitative content analysis also offers the researcher the opportunity for understanding the social reality in a scientific manner by using clear and measurable terms (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005:1).

The qualitative content analyses of Facebook and Instagram pages in this study were performed by following the steps set out by Mayring (2022:109-115):

1. Firstly, the research question needs to be formed (Mayring, 2022:109).
2. Secondly, the theoretical background of the study must be established (Mayring, 2022:115).
3. Thirdly, the study must be designed, which includes all the steps of analysis (Mayring, 2022:119).
4. In the fourth step, sampling is done, and all textual material is gathered (Mayring, 2022:125). This includes the collection of the digital content of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's Facebook and Instagram pages, which is done manually in this study.
5. In step five, adequate methods should be chosen and constructed according to Mayring (2022:137).
6. Step 6 according to Mayring (2022:166) is where the empirical research is conducted and the results are presented.
7. The second last step is to discuss the quality of the criteria according to (Mayring, 2022:137).
8. Lastly, there should be a reflection on the research implications found in the study (Mayring, 2022:183).

3.5.3.1 Sampling and analysis process

The dataset for the qualitative content analysis comprises a full year of content, covering the period from February 2024 to February 2025. This timeframe was chosen as it coincides with the appointment of the new management of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and the commencement of Feisty Communication and Marketing's oversight and management of the organisation's social media accounts. This period makes it possible to observe how the social media pages developed in response to the communication strategies implemented under the new management of the Chamber and the appointed consulting agency.

The data were collected manually by reviewing each post during the year individually. In total, 182 posts from Facebook and 91 posts from Instagram were included in the analysis. Facebook and Instagram were selected for evaluation as they are the primary social media platforms utilised by the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce.

The operational definitions formulated for the guidelines identified from two-way symmetrical communication, social media engagement theory and stakeholder relationship management theory informed the qualitative content analysis (see Table 2.1).

One of the challenges encountered during the analysis of the posts was the inability to determine the precise time of day at which each post was published on the social media platforms. In addition, Instagram and Facebook stories could not be examined, as they remain visible for only 24 hours and were therefore not accessible for analysis across the full study period.

3.6 Validity and trustworthiness of the study

To ensure that the study is valid, specifically a study that utilises a qualitative content analysis, it is important that the classification process is trustworthy (Weber, 1990:12). Data should be dependable, and the same findings should be yielded if the study is repeated by the researcher or any other researcher (Stemler, 2000:3).

3.6.1 Validity in qualitative studies

Internal validity and external validity are important in research studies. To ensure internal validity, the researcher should evaluate whether the findings from the study correspond to reality. To ensure that this is the case, the researcher should consider whether the study was conducted in the way it was planned (Merriam & Grenier, 2019:5). In this study, the supervisors reviewed and continuously provided feedback on the data analysis and findings to improve internal validity. To achieve external validity, the findings from the research study should also be applicable in other situations (Merriam & Grenier, 2019:5). It is therefore recommended that future studies use the same guidelines identified from the literature in this study and duplicate the research in other contexts.

3.6.2 Trustworthiness in qualitative studies

To ensure that the study is trustworthy, it is important to perform the semi-structured interviews in a consistent manner and that the data is truly measured against the identified guidelines. Trustworthiness also depends on the measuring instruments that should be consistent and should be used in other academic papers and by other researchers (Hon & Grunig, 1999). To ensure

trustworthiness in this study, the same guidelines from the literature study were used to develop the interview schedule, to analyse the transcripts and to use the guidelines as categories for the qualitative content analysis.

Furthermore, trustworthiness is achieved by following the correct procedures (Riffe *et al.*, 2005:160). By following the correct data collection procedures, important information that could impact the study is not omitted (Bengtsson, 2016:13). Ultimately, the study can be considered valid and trustworthy by ensuring the findings in the study are backed by the data that is collected through the study (De Wet, 2022:63). Therefore, direct quotes of the participants are integrated into the findings in Chapter 4 and screenshots of the social media posts are integrated into the findings in Chapter 5.

3.7 Ethical aspects

As indicated in Section 1.9, ethical approval for the study was granted by BaSSREC with the following ethics number: NWU-00998-24-A7. Please see Annexure A for the ethical approval letter. Prior to data collection, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and Feisty Communication and Marketing provided formal permission for the interviews and for the analysis of the social media platforms.

All interview participants voluntarily agreed to take part and provided written informed consent. Please see Annexure B for the Informed Consent form used in this study. The participants were selected based on their involvement in the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and familiarity with its social media communication activities. They were informed of the purpose of the study before the interviews and reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any stage. To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms (e.g., “participant 1”) were used in the reporting of the data. Full anonymity, however, could not be ensured for individuals in leadership roles, such as the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and the CEOs of Feisty Communication and Marketing. However, the pseudonyms were allocated at random in an effort to protect their identity in the findings of the study.

The interviews posed no foreseeable risks to participants. The questions avoided sensitive, confidential or legally sensitive information and did not expose participants to emotional, cultural, economic or physical harm. The interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams at a time and date convenient to the participants. The use of online interviews mitigated potential location-based risks, as participants were not required to be physically present and chose a convenient location themselves.

All data, including audio recordings and transcripts, is stored in a secure, password-protected folder on sync.com accessible only to the student and supervisors. These files will be retained for five years following completion of the study. Once the study is finalised, the findings will be made available to the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and Feisty Communication and Marketing via a link to the dissertation housed in the North-West University's Boloka Institutional Repository.

Throughout the research process, the study complied with the ethical standards and procedures prescribed by BaSSREC.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the qualitative research approach employed in the study and the chosen methods to collect data in order to answer the specific research questions. Semi-structured interviews and qualitative content analysis were selected as methods to collect data and reach contextual findings into the social media engagement and relationship-building practices of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce.

The following chapters present the findings derived from the two data collection methods. Chapter 4 discusses the findings of the semi-structured interviews, and Chapter 5 reports the findings obtained through the qualitative content analysis.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter 3, the research approach and methods used to answer the specific research questions were explained. This chapter aims to answer the second and third specific research questions through information collected in semi-structured interviews.

The specific research questions are:

2. What is the management of Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's approach to managing communication on social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders?

3. What is the practitioners at Feisty Communication and Marketing's approach to managing communication on Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders?

In this chapter, an overview of the theoretical guidelines identified in the literature is provided. The findings are then analysed and interpreted to ensure that both of the above-mentioned specific research questions are answered. The theoretical guidelines identified in Chapter 2 are used throughout to describe and evaluate how the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce utilises two-way symmetrical communication, social media engagement theory and stakeholder relationship management theory to foster engagement and build relationships through social media platforms.

It is important to note that the findings obtained from the data collected through semi-structured interviews with both the Chamber of Commerce and Feisty Communication and Marketing are combined in reporting the data, as it was evident that their perceptions and opinions align. There were no significant discrepancies in their views, and therefore, the researcher decided to report on the interviews holistically.

4.2 Two-way symmetrical communication

The first theoretical statement, based on the two-way symmetrical communication model, provides guidelines for how the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should communicate in a two-way symmetrical manner on its social media platforms.

Theoretical statement 1: Two-way symmetrical communication

Two-way symmetrical communication on the social media platforms used by the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should ensure that all parties have the opportunity to send and receive information to be able to mutually influence each other. Such communication should be dialogical in nature and be characterised by transparent communication to ensure mutual understanding, respect and mutual influence that could build and maintain mutually beneficial long-term relationships.

The following guidelines, identified in the two-way symmetrical communication theory, are relevant to this study, namely mutual understanding and respect, mutual influence, dialogue and transparent communication.

4.2.1 Mutual understanding and respect

According to Section 2.2.2.2.1 and Table 2.1, on social media platforms, both parties should have mutual respect, listen to each other, and be open to changing their views in order to reach decisions through mutual agreement or consensus.

According to the participants, it seems that the way communication takes place in the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce reflects mutual understanding and respect. For example, Participant 2 reported that the organisation is apolitical, which ensures that it does not participate in any political discussions and that they do not put one member above another. From this, it can be concluded that the organisation respects its stakeholders' political views and that its management does not use the organisation's social media platforms to promote their personal political views. This indicates that the members of the organisation's management respect each other's views and share a mutual understanding, while not forcing their views on one another.

Participant 2 also stated that Feisty monitors any negative comments to ensure that comments and conversations are neutral and can be seen in a positive light. Participant 2 further explained that programs are used to alert the communication agency (Feisty Communication and Marketing) of comments that may be negative. According to this participant, this procedure ensures that the agency can easily manage crises, when necessary, thereby preventing potentially negative situations from spiralling out of control. Taking this action shows that they respect each other. By monitoring the accounts on social media platforms, it is ensured that all comments are respectful and that there is mutual understanding.

Participant 3 stated that mutual respect and understanding are encouraged by tailoring content to the preferences of the stakeholders while actively seeking feedback, which demonstrates that the stakeholders' input is valued and respected. There is also direct engagement with stakeholders or members of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, which shows that management of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and Feisty Communications and Marketing adapt their communication strategies to ensure mutual understanding and to meet the specific stakeholders' needs (Participant 3).

Participant 1 also stated that open dialogue is encouraged to reach mutual understanding when aspects are unclear. This participant also mentioned that management values and respects member contributions. This is evident in the organisation's accessible leadership and the fact that the organisation's initiatives are community-focused. However, this does not clarify how it applies to the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms.

4.2.2 Mutual influence

Mutual influence in this study means that each party should have the opportunity to influence the other's views and perspectives via social media platforms (see Section 2.2.2.2 and Table 2.1).

Participant 2 mentioned that many business owners in Potchefstroom influence each other mutually because the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's goal is to create networks and to help organisations grow in the community. This participant further explained that with each event, there is an opportunity for members of the Chamber of Commerce to communicate with each other and influence one another and the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce. From this statement, it can be deduced that the Chamber of Commerce organises several events for its members to network and influence one another. Participant 5 also mentioned that the Chamber of Commerce has several community-based projects that directly influence the residents, businesses and economy of the town.

Similar to the above perceptions, the engagement between the stakeholders (members) and the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce can be seen as mutually influential and beneficial, according to Participant 2. Interviewees stated that the reason for this is that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce works to create and facilitate projects that make a difference in the community. According to Participant 2, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce provides a platform for businesses to grow and become part of the community, and it can be observed that businesses indeed grow as a result of these projects. The management of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce receives no salary, and, according to Participant 2, once this is understood by business owners or members of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, the

value of the Chamber becomes apparent. Participant 2 explained: “The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce works for progress in the town, and that is also where the businesses’ hearts lie, not only for their own growth as a business but also to network, to meet new people and to learn new things ... the focus is on a win-win approach.” This ensures that the engagement is mutually influential and consequently mutually beneficial because all parties that form part stand to gain from it.

Participant 1 mentioned that unity and teamwork are observed among the members of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce. Member participation in projects is valuable to the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and its members. Forming part of the organisation is also beneficial to its members. Thus, the engagement between the two parties can be seen as mutually beneficial (Participant 2). From this, it can be observed that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce intends to have mutually beneficial relationships, not only by being open to being influenced by their members but also by actively participating in projects.

There are, however, shortcomings in ensuring that it is clearly utilised on social media platforms. The above-mentioned events and projects are communicated on Facebook and Instagram. Participant 4 mentioned that the community of Potchefstroom and Chamber members are invited on Facebook and Instagram to be part of the events and projects. The outcomes of these events and projects are also shared afterwards on social media. However, from the interviews, it is unclear to what extent social media platforms are utilised during these events and projects to further stimulate mutual influence in the communication process in an online environment.

4.2.3 Dialogue

In the context of this study, both parties should be equals in the communication process on social media platforms, ensuring an open and reciprocal exchange of ideas, information or opinions. Both parties should be open to receiving information and have the opportunity to reply, give feedback and respond (see Table 2.1). Therefore, dialogue includes the opportunity for all parties to participate equally, giving all parties the chance to engage in two-way communication, the decision-making process and conversations (see Section 2.2.2.2.3).

Participant 1 stated that they primarily use social media pages for marketing and advertising purposes. Dialogue can be created through comments on the organisation’s posts and polls, or questions can be used on their social media platforms to obtain information. Usually, however, the organisation uses emails to communicate with their specific stakeholders. The above-mentioned is part of dialogue, seeing as posts can spark conversations on social media platforms. This fosters dialogue between members of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and

between members and management in comment sections, which can be classified as two-way symmetrical communication. Participant 2 also stated that if specific information is needed or if there is a decision that needs to be voted on quickly, information is collected through polls. This statement makes it clear that these practices can help improve dialogue because stakeholders are involved in the decision-making. Both Google Forms and external links that redirect to the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's website are also used (Participant 2). These types of polls are especially used with the organisation's annual meeting, where members need to vote for the prizes that are given out. One such prize is for the best ambassador organisation of the year (Participant 2). From these statements, it is clear that the organisation uses social media not only for dialogue in itself but also as a means to facilitate increased dialogue and provide stakeholders with a platform to voice their opinions, ideas or concerns.

The information sent to the communication agency, Feisty Communication and Marketing, regarding what should be posted on the social media platforms is gathered during the management meeting (Participant 1). Participant 1 states that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce employs a communication liaison between itself and Feisty Communication and Marketing: "That is how we ensure that they have all the information that is needed to be posted on the social media platforms ... they have knowledge then of all the upcoming projects that need to be advertised and communicated". Thus, it is clear that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce provides Feisty Communication and Marketing with information that it uses to create the communication that is disseminated to the external stakeholders on social media platforms. Participant 1 stated: "The social media pages are used to keep the stakeholders informed regarding projects that we are busy with." From this, it can be deduced that the social media pages are mostly used by the organisation to inform its external stakeholders, and the social media platforms are not used for true dialogue and two-way symmetrical communication.

According to Participant 1, feedback is gathered from the comments that are made on posts on social media platforms. However, external stakeholders are also encouraged to discuss any problems or objections directly with the organisation's chairperson or vice chairpersons.

Participant 1 also stated that they have a constitution and regulations that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce follow. Participant 1 explained that "the constitution does not specifically state the communication aspect", but any communication that is to be disseminated would be discussed in the management meeting to ensure that all members can provide input. This is done to ensure that no communication that is not supported by the management and members of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce is disseminated. From this, it can be deduced that the

Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce tries to operate according to its policy and procedures, but that certain aspects of communication are omitted therein.

These findings suggest that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce emphasises adhering to formal policies and procedures, but communication practices, particularly those related to social media, are not embedded within these organisational guidelines. This omission is noteworthy, as it indicates a structural gap that may hinder effective and responsive stakeholder communication. It would, therefore, be advisable for the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce to integrate social media communication and management into its constitution and regulations to ensure consistency and strategic alignment.

Furthermore, the feedback from participants implies that decision-making regarding social media content is often delayed until the next management meeting, which potentially slows the organisation's ability to engage in timely communication on these platforms. These delays could counter the organic and natural flow of dialogue and interaction, including prompt replies and feedback with external stakeholders. This lack of organic communication represents a concern and may negatively affect the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's ability to foster engagement and stakeholder relationships online.

Moreover, for dialogue to take place, the information that is conveyed should be easily accessible. Participant 3 states that many platforms are used to ensure that information is easily accessible. They include social media platforms, newsletters, e-mails, newspapers, online platforms, and WhatsApp Business (Participant 3). Participant 2 also mentioned that all the members of management are available to address any problems or questions that members or stakeholders may have. From the statements provided by the participants, it is clear that the management of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce is accessible to the members and that different channels are used to make information easily accessible for the members to find.

4.2.4 Transparent communication

In this study, transparent communication refers to all relevant information that should be accessible and clearly communicated on social media platforms. The communication between the parties should be open, honest, truthful and direct (see Table 2.1). Therefore, transparent communication includes the degree to which the organisation and its stakeholders are truthful and accurate in their communication and not deceitful or withholding important details (see Section 2.2.2.2.4).

Participant 2 highlighted the importance of open, honest and transparent communication during the interview and mentioned the following aspects: “The Chamber is apolitical and builds trust by disseminating information regularly ... It also undertakes projects where input is allowed from members of the public as to the proper use of its resources ... The organisation also acts as an intermediary between members, stakeholders, publics and the municipality, and in this capacity, it communicates with the municipality on behalf of the other parties...” Participant 2 further explained that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce is open to sending information and also to receiving information from the public, stakeholders, members and the municipality. The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce tries to maintain open communication channels directly to its management and also to the organisation as a whole.

Participant 1 stated: “The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce is there to help other organisations and people.” Each member of management has a role or portfolio assigned to them. As an example, Participant 2 mentioned that member businesses of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce can approach the financial team for advice on financial issues.

Participant 3 added that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, as an NGO, has a constitution that requires it to be transparent. This participant also gave an example of it transparent communication: “We use functions and projects to showcase where the money goes, and we also communicate to our stakeholders where the money goes.” With the annual general meeting, to which every member is invited, the financial statements are presented and made available for review by all members. With this, the organisation’s projects and functions are also explained, and members are allowed to ask for clarification on matters they do not understand. This ensures that communication is clear and the organisation is transparent. Interestingly, the transparency of financial aspects that was mentioned during the interviews is not publicly communicated to external stakeholders on social media. It is suggested that all aspects of the Chamber of Commerce are made available and accessible on social media, not withholding important details, as mentioned in the operational definition for transparent communication (see Table 2.1).

4.3 Social media engagement theory

Theoretical statement 2 relating to social media engagement indicates the guidelines from theory for the social media platforms of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce.

Theoretical statement 2: Social media engagement

Engagement on the social media platforms of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce could form an integral part of how relations are built with external stakeholders. For the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, it is important to understand how engagement on their social media posts can be influenced by the following:

1. The creative format of the post, including the interactivity and vividness of the post.
2. The type of content that is posted, such as informative, entertaining, promotional and advertising or other content.
3. Temporal factors, like the day of the post and the number of days between posts.
4. Contextual factors, including the brand or industry and social media platform that is used.

The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should cultivate engagement with stakeholders on its social media platforms by following the above-mentioned guidelines.

4.3.1 Creative format

The creative format of social media posts includes how interactive and vivid the post is. The participants' perceptions regarding the creative formats of the posts on the social media pages of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce are discussed next.

4.3.1.1 Interactivity

Interactivity focuses on whether the post or platform facilitates two-way communication or engagement through the features that are available, including likes, comments, shares, tags, hashtags, gamification elements, polls, contests and links (see Table 2.1). Furthermore, interactivity points to the reciprocity of all parties on the social media platform and the parties are seen as actively engaging and responding to each other on the social media platform (see 2.3.1.1.1).

During the interviews, participants explained that the Chamber plans a year in advance, which helps the organisation to determine exactly when each function, event or project will be held, and in that way provide the Feisty Communication and Marketing agency with adequate time to plan and prepare the social media posts ahead. Specific themes to focus on or questions to be asked are identified and used to promote feedback and interactivity on the social media platforms.

Participants also mentioned that SEO (search engine optimisation) is considered to ensure that the keywords that will yield the best results on social media are used. Another strategy that is used is that of posting images of events in an album on Facebook and allowing people to comment or tag their friends in the post (Participant 3). Photos or videos of members participating in projects are therefore used to encourage their friends and family to comment on the posts, which creates interactivity between the organisation's stakeholders on the social media platforms. Lastly, it was mentioned that questions are sometimes posed in posts to promote interactivity on the social media platforms (Participant 4).

4.3.1.2 Vividness

Vividness focuses on the degree to which a post or content stands out and whether the content is visually and emotionally engaging. Rich dynamic elements, such as high-quality content (images, videos or animation), are characteristic of a vivid post (see Table 2.1). As explained in Section 2.3.1.1.2, the vividness of a post is seen as the level of stimulation engaging the user through high-quality, captivating imagery or videos.

The participants explained that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce uses an agency, namely Feisty Communication and Marketing, to manage its social media platforms. This is beneficial because the agency has a graphic design team and a dedicated social media account manager for the Chamber's social media platforms (Participant 1). The content for the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce is planned according to a certain strategy and is aligned with its overarching goals (Participant 2). The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce has a corporate identity, which stipulates the global look and feel for its content, and this is incorporated in every design (Participant 3). Thus, the social media team provides the goals that must be achieved through a post, and the graphic design team ensures that the post is visually appealing and conforms to the prescribed look and feel (Participant 3). It is also important that each post displays the so-called golden thread, to ensure that the look and feel is correct (Participant 2).

Participant 3 also added that Feisty Communication and Marketing asks management of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce to appear in videos and photos to help generate conversation when friends, so that the contacts of management can see and comment on the posts. This facilitates community involvement. Video is mostly used as the medium and currently performs better than static posts. However, "there is a place for static posts as well" (Participant 3), for instance, to inform the public when the organisation's offices open or close. From the interviews, it can be deduced that the participants perceive the posts to be vivid in some ways, but the use of corporate colours of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce might limit vividness.

4.3.2 Content

In this section, the interviewees' perceptions of the type of content in social media posts are analysed, and whether the content is considered informative, entertaining, promotional and advertising or other.

4.3.2.1 Informative

Informative content informs or educates the users. The information provided is valuable, relevant, and accurate (see Table 2.1). Therefore, informative content can be seen as content that brings value to the audience by virtue of being factual and accurate (see Section 2.3.1.2.1).

According to Participant 1, posts on social media are used to inform community members of projects or functions that are taking place. Social media platforms are also used to inform the stakeholders and the Potchefstroom public about the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's values and what it does for the community (Participant 3).

From these statements, it can be deduced that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's content on social media platforms is used to inform its stakeholders, but that it is not the only method of communication it employs, as seen in Section 4.2.4, where many other communication channels are employed with the purpose of informing.

4.3.2.2 Entertaining

Entertaining content amuses, engages or provides the users with enjoyment. The content can include humour, memes, storytelling or games (see Table 2.1). This type of content piques the interest of users by engaging them with evoked emotion (see Section 2.3.1.2.2).

According to Participant 3, both stakeholders and management of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce are involved in the content, because "people are curious and love to see people that they know in social media posts". This encourages stakeholders to share the post because they know the person in the content, and it creates a conversation that facilitates two-way symmetrical communication (Participant 3). This also contributes to an authentic image for the organisation (Participant 3).

From these statements, it is evident that the posts of familiar people in town on the social media platforms are entertaining to stakeholders. Personal elements, including images of the Chamber's management and its stakeholders, are integrated into the posts. From this, it is apparent that familiar faces foster an emotional connection between the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce

and its stakeholders. This forms part of a strategy to make content more relatable and encourages stakeholders to interact, share and comment on the content, which they find entertaining. This creates discussions, which in turn increases the reach of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce on social media platforms. These entertaining factors also add to perceived authenticity, as people active within the organisation are featured on the social media platforms. From the participants' feedback during the interviews, it is not clear if and how they strategically integrate other entertaining tools, such as memes or games, in their social media posts.

4.3.2.3 Promotional and advertising

Promotional and advertising content promotes a product, service or event. The content attracts attention or generates interest that encourages action (see Table 2.1). Promotional content focuses on marketing and advertising the services that the organisation offers, with the intention of the content being to attract and generate interest and attention (see Section 2.3.1.2.3).

According to Participant 1, they try to ensure that the material that is posted on social media is professional and broadcasts “the right message”. Participant 1 believes that the expectations of their audience are met, as they have never received any complaints to date regarding the content on their social media platforms. Participant 2 mentioned that they always refer to the strategy and the goals of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce to ensure that promotional content still aligns with the overall goals of the organisation and the needs of the stakeholders. Participant 2 further explains that a marketing strategy, which stipulates a specific social media strategy, is employed. As part of a marketing strategy, promotional content is integrated on social media as well. Participant 2 also referred to the vision, mission, main goals and values of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce when posting promotional content.

From this, it can be deduced that, while the content is promotional in nature, the social media practitioners also aim that its message is appropriate and that it appears professional. The content is created to ensure that it conforms to professional standards and that its message is conveyed clearly. Participant 2 reiterated that promotional content is guided by the broader marketing strategy of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, as implemented by Feisty Communication and Marketing. This ensures that the post aligns with the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce’s vision and mission. It can further be deduced that the content is not only based on what the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce needs to promote, but also according to what their stakeholders’ needs are. This enhances the effectiveness of their promotional content.

4.3.2.4 Other

The operation definition for other are: Other content is any content posted on social media platforms that doesn't fall into the above-mentioned types, such as celebratory posts and condolences.: Celebrative posts and condolences. Participant 2 stated that the chairperson made a short video wherein they stated their heartfelt thankfulness for entrusting them with the responsibility and honour of being the chairperson of the organisation. Furthermore, participant 3 stated that they also use public holidays (like Christmas and New Year's) that are celebrated as part of their strategy on the social media platforms.

4.3.3 Temporal factors

Temporal factors include the time of day a post is made or the number of days between posts.

4.3.3.1 The time of day

The time of day refers to the specific time of the day the post (content) is published and the specific calendar date, which includes the day of the week. This information is used to track and analyse whether the timing of the content release was effective (see Table 2.1 and Section 2.3.1.3.1).

According to Participant 2, this can depend on the social media tool that they use, which provides the Feisty Communication and Marketing as an agency with statistics on when the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's followers are the most active on the social media pages. Based on that statistical data, the timing for posts is planned (Participant 2). Sometimes it happens that communication needs to be broadcast fast, and in such cases, this data is disregarded. In these cases, posts would then be shared with all the community groups to ensure the stakeholders are reached (Participant 2). The timing of publishing posts can also differ from platform to platform (Participant 2). The participants noted that Feisty Communication and Marketing creates a monthly content calendar to make sure planned posts are distributed evenly throughout the week and scheduled at times and on days when the social media audiences are most active.

From these answers during the interviews, it can be seen that the time of day is considered when time allows planning for the posts, but when a post is urgent, it is made as soon as it is ready, overriding the scheduling norms. Normally, the time of day when a post is made is strategically planned according to informed analytics that Feisty Communication and Marketing uses and according to the content calendar. The timing of the post is also platform-specific for each post, ensuring maximum reach for each post.

4.3.3.2 The number of days

The number of days is referred to as the frequency of posts and the number of day(s) between each post on the social media platforms (see Table 2.1 and Section 2.3.1.3.2).

According to Participant 2, statistics from the social media pages are used to determine the best days to post content to ensure that the maximum number of stakeholders are reached.

As with the previous section, it can be deduced that the social media analytics and statistics gained from the current Facebook and Instagram posts are used to plan when to post on the social media pages. The content calendar is created according to strategic gaps to maximise posts' visibility and ensure that communication remains consistent without being oversaturated.

4.3.4 Contextual factors

Contextual factors refer to the relevant brand or industry and the social media platform used, all of which can influence how a post performs.

4.3.4.1 Brand/Industry

The brand or industry in which the organisation posts their content can influence the engagement rate and the effectiveness of the social media communication (see Table 2.1 and Section 2.3.1.4.1).

The participants noted that the brand or industry is not a significant factor specific to the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, as it is the only one of its kind in the Potchefstroom area. Therefore, there is limited competition in the industry. However, other organisations and members of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce can compete for attention if they cover the same community issue or host and advertise similar projects or events. Nevertheless, Participant 2 stated that "it is more a case that we work together and promote each other, rather than taking away from each other".

From the participants' perceptions, it can be deduced that the different organisations in Potchefstroom work together, rather than detracting from each other's engagement. Instead, they try to promote each other and their shared mission or goal in the community.

4.3.4.2 Social media platform

Social media platforms enable users to create and interact with content. The social media platform where posts are published influences engagement. Whether the content is tailored to the given

platform or application is also important, as different platforms generate different experiences (see Table 2.1 and Section 2.3.1.4.2).

According to Participant 2, the stakeholders are the determining factor for which social media platforms are chosen. Demographics, such as age, are one of the factors that are considered when choosing a suitable social media platform. Secondly, it is then determined which platform is the best suited for the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce stakeholders and “who we want to reach with a specific post” (Participant 2).

Platforms have been identified based on the demographics of the Chamber’s stakeholders, including Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn (Participant 4). Participant 3 mentioned that the choice of the right social media platform depends on the type of organisation. This participant explained that some platforms are more associated with seriousness, whereas others are more associated with light-heartedness. According to Participant 2, LinkedIn is chosen because it is “a business-oriented platform”, which seems suitable for the Chamber of Commerce.

Another important factor that is taken into consideration is the social media platforms on which the Potchefstroom community and stakeholders are active, seeing that “they are generally the people we want to reach” (Participant 2).

After choosing the right platform, messages are tailored for each platform, except for times when the message has to be broadcast quickly. In such cases, the same post may be used on all platforms (Participant 2). Thus, Feisty Communication and Marketing’s standard stipulates that the same content is not broadcast on the same days on all platforms. Content is tailored for each platform because, for example, “while a static post could work on Facebook or Instagram, it would not work on TikTok, which is a video-based platform” (Participant 2). Thus, the social media strategy is adjusted for each platform, and different types of content are posted on each platform to ensure maximum results (Participant 3).

From the interviews, it is apparent that platforms are chosen according to certain determining factors, such as demographics or the general community that the Chamber wants to reach. Messages are also tailored to each platform. Lastly, the nature of the organisation influences which platform is prioritised, and therefore, Facebook, Instagram and the business-like LinkedIn are currently the social media platforms utilised for the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce.

4.4 Stakeholder relationship management

As stated in Chapter 2, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce needs to build healthy and long-term relationships with stakeholders through its social media platforms. The interviewees’

perceptions about online relationship-building strategies and outcomes of strong relationships are discussed in this section.

4.4.1 Relationship-building strategies

Theoretical statement 3 focuses on the strategies that should be employed to cultivate relationships on social media.

Theoretical statement 3: Strategies to cultivate social media relationships

To use social media effectively for relationship building, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should adopt strategies that include timely and transparent information disclosure, the provision of useful, accessible, and interactive content, and the active encouragement of stakeholder involvement.

From the stakeholder relationship management theory and the statement above, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should utilise disclosure (openness), usefulness and information dissemination, and interactivity and involvement as online relationship-building strategies.

4.4.1.1 Disclosure (openness)

The organisation should share information openly and transparently with their stakeholders on social media regarding what is happening within the organisation (see Table 2.1 and Section 2.4.1.1).

Participant 1 explained that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce maintains a weekly communication schedule with Feisty Communication and Marketing, as stipulated in their contractual agreement. Although the contract outlines the agency's core responsibilities for managing the social media platforms, additional information occasionally needs to be communicated at times on social media beyond the planned updates. It can be deduced that this structured weekly communication between the Chamber and Feisty Communication and Marketing provides a way for coordinating what information is shared on social media and when it is posted.

The existence of a formal communication strategy that was developed by Feisty Communication and Marketing for the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce further suggests that they recognise the importance of communicating openly with stakeholders and take the responsibility to

communicate information about the Chamber on social media seriously. However, the need for ad hoc communication outside of the weekly schedule indicates that not all organisational developments are disclosed through the existing processes. This may limit their ability to share timely and transparent information with stakeholders on social media.

4.4.1.2 Usefulness and information dissemination

Usefulness and information dissemination mean that relevant information that stakeholders could use should be shared on social media platforms in a timely and systematic way (see Table 2.1). It also refers to how easily accessible information is to stakeholders, whether their needs are fulfilled and whether the information provides value to the stakeholders (see Section 2.4.1.2).

According to Participant 2, most of the information that is broadcast on other communication channels is also posted and available on social media platforms. This ensures it is easily accessible to the stakeholders because they can use the platform of their choice. The social media handles (Facebook and Instagram pages) of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce are also included in all marketing material and are available on their website. Thus, Participant 2 believes that “anyone could easily find the organisation with all its information on the platform of their choice”. The website and the social media pages also include links to the other for easy access (Participant 2). Newsletters are used to provide stakeholders with information, and these online newsletters that are sent out also include social media links (Participant 3).

It can be concluded that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce’s strategy is to make information accessible on multiple channels, as mentioned above. These include the social media platforms, the website and newsletters, among others. The participants believe that having these choices helps stakeholders to engage with the information on their own terms and according to their digital habits across platforms.

4.4.1.3 Interactivity and involvement

Interactivity and involvement are identified in the literature as the degree to which each party actively participates or engages with the posts posted on the social media platforms of the organisation (see Section 2.4.1.3). Stakeholders should be able to interact with the content and the organisation on social media platforms. Stakeholders should be involved on social media platforms through active participation in planning, decision-making and activities that will influence the stakeholders’ interest in the organisation (see Table 2.1).

During the interviews, participants explained that Facebook, for example, allows users to schedule and share events. The events always include a link to allow people to access all the

information easily and indicate their interest in the event. The banner feature is used to promote an upcoming event. The video feature is used to garner attention and raise awareness of upcoming events and to showcase previous events. The story and post features are also used. These are important because, as Participant 2 stated, “some people scroll horizontally, and others scroll vertically”. This means that some people scroll on their feed by looking at stories (horizontally) and others prefer scrolling from top to bottom and engage with actual posts, whether it is words, images, videos or events (vertically). Furthermore, the schedule feature is used to schedule posts, videos and stories in advance. It is recognised that users scroll “horizontally or vertically” and stories or posts are used accordingly. It seems that the participants feel that they understand the stakeholders’ user behaviour on social media platforms and try to ensure that content reaches the stakeholders in the format they prefer and want to engage with.

From this explanation, it can be deduced that the event scheduling and the inclusion of direct links that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and Feisty Communication and Marketing want to ensure that stakeholders get involved in their events, have easy access to the necessary information regarding events and can register for them. This also refers to involvement on social media platforms. When watching events live or registering for events through social media, stakeholders are engaging with the Chamber of Commerce. It can further be deduced that the use of the banner feature and videos that promote events displays the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce’s commitment to having visually engaging content that captures the attention of its stakeholders.

4.4.2 Relationship outcomes

Theoretical statement 4 guides the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce on how to evaluate its relationships on social media.

Theoretical statement 4: The outcomes of stakeholder relationships

To manage stakeholder relationships effectively on social media platforms, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should strive to build trust by delivering on the promises, fulfilling its commitment to online engagement, promoting relational satisfaction, with mutual control and shared communality. Furthermore, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should strive to cultivate relationships that provide mutual benefits and value for both the Chamber and its stakeholders.

The outcomes of strong relationships are trust, control mutuality, communality, commitment, relationship satisfaction, and the type of relationship (exchange relationships vs communal relationships).

4.4.2.1 Trust

Trust is seen as the amount of confidence each party has in the other, based on integrity, competence and reliability to deliver on promises made on social media platforms (see Table 2.1 and Section 2.4.2.1).

During the interviews, Participant 1 argued that trust is built when the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce launches projects and creates networking opportunities for the stakeholders and members. This participant explained that one way the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce builds trust is by providing opportunities for the stakeholders to network and create a better economy in and around Potchefstroom, which is an important goal of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce. Thus, “working together to ensure economic growth builds trust” (Participant 1).

Participant 3 added that posts are consistent and reliable, which establishes stakeholders’ trust. This participant explained that each post undergoes several steps in its creation before it is posted to ensure that posts are consistent and reliable. “First, the content is sent to the head of social media in the agency [Feisty Communication and Marketing], from where it is sent to the graphic department for design according to the brand’s look and feel ... Then the post is sent back to the account manager, and finally it is sent to the clients for approval” (Participant 3).

From these explanations, it can be deduced that the participants believe that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce builds trust and credibility in person and on social media. The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce strengthens its economic ties by creating networking opportunities and positioning itself as a facilitator of economic growth, which they believe builds trust. Lastly, Feisty Communication and Marketing follows a process to create reliable content for social media platforms, which also contributes to credibility in the online environment.

4.4.2.2 Control mutuality

Control mutuality refers to how satisfied each party is with the amount of control each party perceives they have or experiences within the relationship on social media platforms (see Table 2.1), ensuring there is a balance between influencing each other without dominating each other (see Section 2.4.2.2).

Participant 2 noted that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce reshapes members' content, thereby incorporating stakeholders' perspectives into its social media presence. The reshaping of members' content demonstrates a willingness to allow stakeholders to influence the organisation's social media communication by giving more visibility to their pages.

Moreover, Participants 2 and Participant 3 explained that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce has the final say over what is published on its social media platforms, even though Feisty Communication and Marketing create the content for posting. All social media posts must be approved by a member of the Chamber's management before they are posted. It can be deduced that this practice suggests a limited form of balanced control within the relationship between the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and Feisty Communication and Marketing. The agency contributes to content creation and manages various aspects of the posting process, but the Chamber maintains final decision-making authority.

Overall, the above perceptions reflect some degree of control mutuality, as both the organisation and its stakeholders are able to contribute to, and have influence over, the social media communication process.

4.4.2.3 Communal

Section 2.4.2.3 identified communal as the sense of shared concern, interests and values between the organisation and its stakeholders and mutual benefit experienced (also see Table 2.1).

The participants felt that the stakeholders of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce show their interest in the organisation by becoming a member of the Chamber or by participating in an event or community project hosted by the organisation that aligns with their interests, values and beliefs.

Furthermore, Participant 4 indicated that the Chamber and its stakeholders share communal interests and the same values on social media as well, "because they like our posts" and they "attend our events". Therefore, there is alignment between the content the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce posts on social media and the content stakeholders engage with and eventually participate in. Participant 2 explained: "The posts on social media speak to what the members value ... economic growth ... collaboration ... local business."

It can be deduced that the participants believe that the stakeholders and the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce show interest in each other and have the same values and beliefs, otherwise they would not participate in the projects and events held by the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce.

4.4.2.4 Commitment

Commitment can be seen as the degree of dedication from each party, including the amount of time, energy and money each party is willing to spend on social media platforms when engaging with each other (see Table 2.1 and Section 2.4.2.4).

According to Participant 1 and Participant 2, the stakeholders show their commitment by becoming a paying member of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce. In turn, the organisation's commitment is observed by the projects that it drives. It can be deduced that stakeholders voluntarily commit to the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce by becoming paying members. The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce likewise commits to its members by initiating projects that benefit members and also the broader community of Potchefstroom.

Participant 2 further notes that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce is not driven by profit. The individuals in management roles are motivated and committed to the Chamber through a passion for Potchefstroom and by a desire for economic growth and improvement of the town. Therefore, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's commitment can be observed by the statements that no member of the management team receives a salary. The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and its members are united by their common goal of improving the economy and developing Potchefstroom. It is unclear from the interviews whether this goal is realised on the social media platforms of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce.

4.4.2.5 Relationship satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction refers to the extent to which each party is satisfied with the relationship they have on social media, meaning that their expectations, desires and needs are met by the other party (see Table 2.1). Ideally, each party should be content and fulfilled in the relationship (see Section 2.4.2.5).

Participant 4 mentioned that the projects launched by the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce are structured in such a way that participants and members of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce gain the greatest advantage from them.

The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce mostly relies on feedback from participants who take part in projects. The functions and projects allow members to provide feedback in person. Various online channels are also used to collect feedback, such as questionnaires on Google Forms, and members can use the social media platform's comment section to give feedback on projects (Participant 3). Participant 2 also mentioned an app that has been launched but remains in its testing phase, which is intended to make communication easier for the members.

The participants believe that members and other stakeholders experience relationship satisfaction with the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce because of the positive feedback they receive through the channels mentioned. It was also noted that people rarely say something negative on social media posts. They conclude that the positive comments and likes on posts indicate that stakeholders are satisfied and positive towards the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce.

4.4.2.6 Communal vs. exchange relationship

According to the literature, there are two types of relationships. In an exchange relationship, parties provide benefits to each other because of previous benefits experienced or the hope of benefits in the future. In a communal relationship, both parties provide each other with benefits, because the welfare of each party and their relationship are important to the other (see Table 2.1 and Section 2.4.2.6).

According to the participants, the relationship between the two parties is both an exchange and a communal relationship. It is an exchange relationship because the members of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce pay membership fees, and in exchange, the members are provided with networking and marketing opportunities. The participants noted that it is also a communal relationship, evident by Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's commitment to helping the Potchefstroom community and the town's economy, rather than acting for profit. Participant 1 noted that some of the projects of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce are specifically focused on the community, and most of the proceeds of these projects, for instance, will go toward other worthy projects or to community service, such as restoring roads.

Participant 2 also states the relationship more closely resembles a communal one, because both the members and the organisation receive benefits, despite neither the members nor the organisation having any expectation of receiving benefits in return. Participant 3 also added that "at the end of the day, it is to make Potch[efstroom] a better place as a whole, to make a cleaner Potch and to grow a love for Potch, and to uplift its people."

Participant 3 added that any business aims to benefit from a relationship. What the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce provides businesses are functions, projects, and a place to network, as well as advertisement space on their social media platforms and website.

It can therefore be deduced that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce has a dual relationship with its members, with both exchange and communal relationships being applicable. It is an exchange relationship because the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce is paid

membership fees by its members, in return for tangible benefits like networking opportunities and marketing exposure, in person and on social media platforms. The communal relationship is reflected in the mission of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, which aims to aid the community and support the town's development.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, the findings of the semi-structured interviews with participants of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and Feisty Communication and Marketing were presented and interpreted to address specific research question 2 and specific research question 3. The analysis in this chapter was guided by the theoretical guidelines as identified in Chapter 2.

The findings in this chapter reveal that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and Feisty Communications and Marketing have a clear commitment to mutual respect, transparency and stakeholder involvement, but the practical application of two-way symmetrical communication is limited on the social media platforms. Further, it is found that mutual influence and dialogue are present in the offline interactions and that parties have dialogue as part of the strategic planning, but it is not consistently facilitated on social media platforms.

The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and Feisty Communication and Marketing's approach to social media engagement is informed by strategic planning and using demographic insight while tailoring content specific to the platform. However, there are opportunities that remain unused to deepen the relationship with stakeholders through using more consistent interactive features available on social media platforms and having a participatory content strategy that makes use of real-time feedback mechanisms. The guidelines of the stakeholder relationship management theory are partially implemented and could be leveraged to cultivate long-term, mutually beneficial relationships on social media platforms.

In the next chapter, a qualitative content analysis of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's Facebook and Instagram pages will evaluate how the social media posts reflect the guidelines identified in the literature to foster engagement and relationships.

CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS OF QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 presented the first part of the empirical research by discussing the findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and the contracted agency, Feisty Communication and Marketing, which manages the Chamber's social media platforms.

Chapter 5 addresses the second part of the empirical research by presenting the findings obtained from the qualitative content analysis of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's Facebook and Instagram pages.

The findings obtained from the qualitative content analysis respond to the specific research question 4:

How is content being managed on the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders?

The analysis considers the content of posts on the two social media platforms, namely Facebook and Instagram. The content analysis spans from 25 February 2024 (when the new management of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce was elected and Feisty Communication and Marketing was appointed to manage its social media platforms) to 25 February 2025. As of November 2025, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's Facebook page had 4,200 followers, and its Instagram page had 1,448 followers.

For the purposes of the qualitative content analysis, only those guidelines identified in the literature that could be observed on the social media pages were analysed, and screenshots of examples are provided (see the figures in this chapter). Some theoretical guidelines could not be explicitly observed on social media platforms, as noted in the sections below.

The qualitative content analysis of the two social media platforms is guided by the same theoretical guidelines identified in Chapter 2 through the literature study and follows the same categories used in Chapter 4 for analysing the semi-structured interviews. Therefore, the overall theoretical statement for each theory will be presented again in this chapter as a general guide and reminder, but each operational definition will not be repeated. Please see Table 2.1 for the operational definitions of each identified guideline.

5.2 Two-way symmetrical communication

The first theoretical statement, informed by the two-way, symmetrical communication model, outlines how the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should normally engage and communicate with stakeholders on its social media platforms.

Theoretical statement 1: Two-way symmetrical communication

Two-way symmetrical communication on the social media platforms used by the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should ensure that all parties have the opportunity to send and receive information to be able to mutually influence each other. Such communication should be dialogical in nature and be characterised by transparent communication to ensure mutual understanding, respect and influence that could build and maintain mutually beneficial long-term relationships.

5.2.1 Mutual understanding and respect

In the analysed posts, it is not evident how mutual understanding and respect are expressed through the social media platforms. In one of the posts, which announces new board members, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce expresses appreciation for these contributors and acknowledges the roles these community members play by being part of the management of the Chamber. This could reflect respect for stakeholders' perspectives, values, and their right to participate in selecting individuals to serve in leadership positions for the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce.

The analysis of the social media posts on Facebook and Instagram indicates an emphasis on event promotion and peer-to-peer challenges. Although businesses encourage one another to participate in these initiatives, there is limited evidence that stakeholders exert influence on the Chamber's decisions or social media communication practices.

However, the posts demonstrate that respect and understanding are fostered by recognising stakeholders and including them in events. This respect is conveyed symbolically by inviting stakeholders to participate and by presenting awards that acknowledge their contributions.

5.2.2 Mutual influence

Within the one-year period analysed, there is little evidence of mutual influence between the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and its stakeholders on the social media platforms. More

specifically, the posts on Facebook and Instagram do not indicate that stakeholders influence the Chamber. What is evident, however, is peer-to-peer influence among businesses, particularly when one business challenges another to participate in events or projects hosted by the Chamber.

The social media posts do not actively invite stakeholders to contribute to shaping content or to participate in organisational decision-making. Consequently, limited mutual influence between the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and its external stakeholders is evident on Facebook and Instagram.

5.2.3 Dialogue

In the posts analysed, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce initiates dialogue by asking questions that invite responses from stakeholders. In the example below (see Figure 5.1), businesses in Potchefstroom are also encouraged to tag one another, which can stimulate further dialogue and interaction when the tagged organisation replies or expresses appreciation. For example, Tanglewood Nature Estate was tagged in one post and subsequently tagged another business, thereby extending the conversation and creating additional opportunities for dialogue among stakeholders.

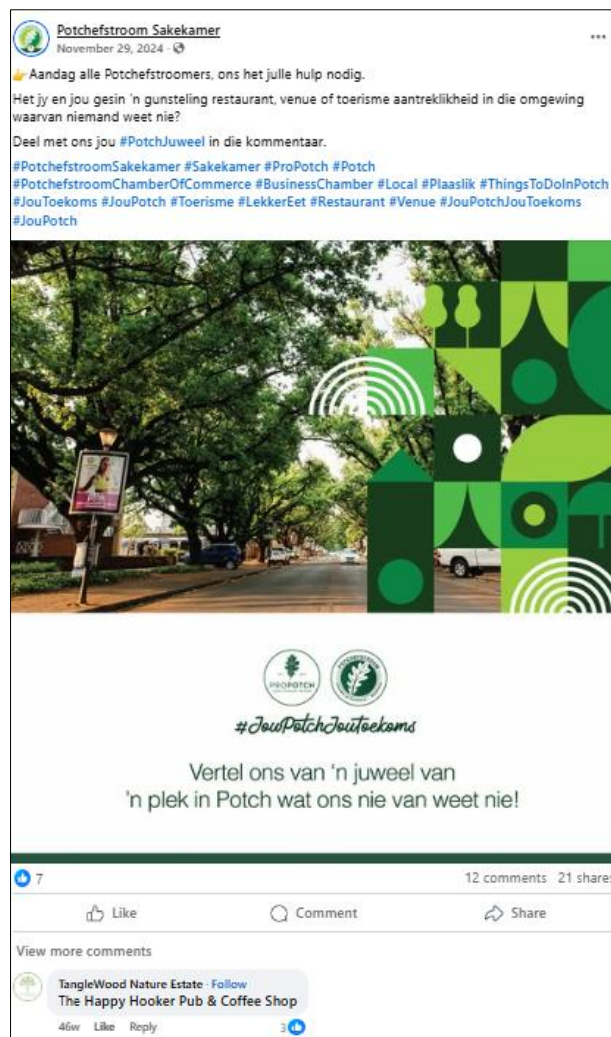


Figure 5.1: Screenshot of a Facebook post (Potch juweel)

The level of dialogue observed on the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's Facebook and Instagram pages appears minimal. Although a few posts generate some interaction, many receive no comments. This pattern suggests that the Chamber predominantly uses these platforms as one-way communication or broadcast tools rather than an online space for dialogue. This limits opportunities for co-creation and reduces the Chamber's potential to build relationships through dialogue and feedback on social media.

5.2.4 Transparent communication

Based on the analysis of the social media posts, it is not possible to determine if the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's communication is transparent. However, the findings indicate that the Chamber shares information about events and projects as they take place, and that announcements, such as the introduction of new management at the annual general meeting,

are also communicated on these platforms. The posts clearly communicate upcoming event details, opportunities for business participation, and recognition, suggesting some degree of transparency. Nevertheless, the transparency is mostly informational, focusing on what is happening rather than why decisions are made or how stakeholders can contribute to decision-making processes.

5.3 Social media engagement theory

The second theoretical statement, which focuses on social media engagement, outlines the guidelines for how the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should manage its social media platforms and engage with stakeholders on them.

Theoretical statement 2: Social media engagement

Engagement on the social media platforms of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce could form an integral part of how relations are built with external stakeholders. For the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, it is important to understand how engagement on its social media posts can be influenced by the following:

1. The creative format of the post, including the interactivity and vividness of the post;
2. The type of content that is posted, whether informative, entertaining, promotional and advertising, or other content;
3. Temporal factors, like the day of the post and the number of days between posts;
4. Contextual factors, including the brand or industry and the social media platform that is used.

5.3.1 Creative format

The creative format includes both the interactivity of a post and its vividness.

5.3.1.1 Interactive

The Instagram post with the most likes can be seen in Figure 5.2. It seems that Instagram followers liked the video content featuring an interview with the winner of a mountain bike challenge that was posted. It could also be that many people in Potchefstroom know the person who was interviewed and therefore liked the post.

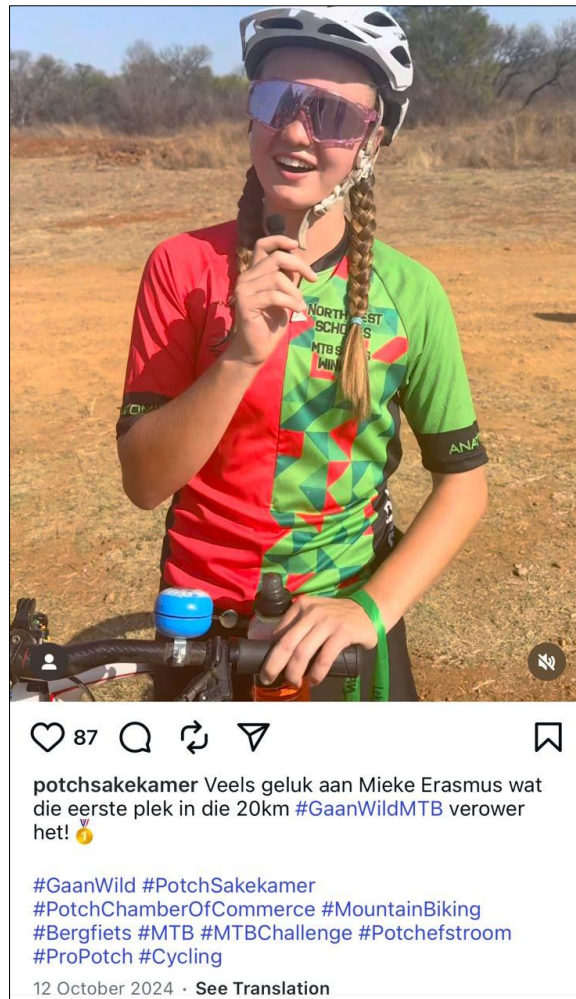


Figure 5.2: Screenshot of an Instagram post (GaanWild MTB)

Other Instagram posts that received many likes were those where businesses in town competed in an event. Staff members at these local businesses who took part in the “Skattejag” competition liked these posts. See examples in Figure 5.3 and Figure 5.4. In Figure 5.3, the venue for the competition was also tagged (Lekwena Wildlife Estate). It could be that the venue’s followers also liked the post. This is a strategy the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce could employ more in its posts to reach a wider audience in the Potchefstroom community and increase engagement on the social media pages through likes.



Figure 5.3: Screenshot of Instagram post (Winners)



Figure 5.4: Screenshot of Instagram post (Teams)

The Facebook post with the most shares was about the “Amazing Skattejag” event (see Figure 5.5). The post received only eight likes and two comments, one of which was made by the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce to tag their followers, but the post had 25 shares. One of the shares was made by the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce page itself when they shared the same post later, closer to the date of the event. Four of the shares were also made by the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce to other Facebook community groups relating to Potchefstroom. Another five shares were made by the account manager of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce (working for Feisty Communication and Marketing) to Potchefstroom community Facebook groups. Another two shares were made by one of the management members of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce. The rest of the shares cannot be analysed due to Facebook users’ privacy settings.

From the analysis, it can be deduced that 12 of the 25 shares were made by either the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce management or employees of the account working at Feisty Communication and Marketing. Even though the number of shares seems high, only about half of all shares were made by external stakeholders.



Figure 5.5: Screenshot of a Facebook post (Amazing Skattejag information)

Similarly, in the next example of a video post promoting the “Amazing Skattejag” event, the shares also seemed relatively high at 16. From the 16 shares, three were made by the account manager at Feisty Communication and Marketing, and seven were made from the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce page to other Potchefstroom community Facebook groups. Again, the organic shares from external stakeholders were only six, which is less than half the post’s total shares.

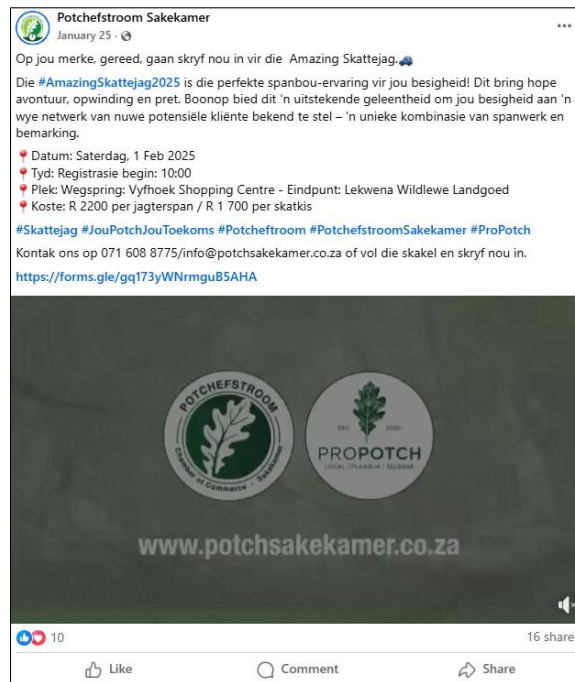


Figure 5.6: Screenshot of a Facebook post (Amazing Skattejag video)

A strategy that seems to work well for creating interaction through comments on Facebook can be seen in the example in Figure 5.7. The post asked people in Potchefstroom to mention their favourite restaurant, venue, or tourism spot in the comments. Even though 12 comments are not many, they are still more than on other posts. People shared their opinion on “a jewel of a business” in Potchefstroom and also tagged some businesses in the comments, which would lead to a further reach. It is recommended that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce create more posts for the community to answer questions in the comments. This could attract more interaction in the future.

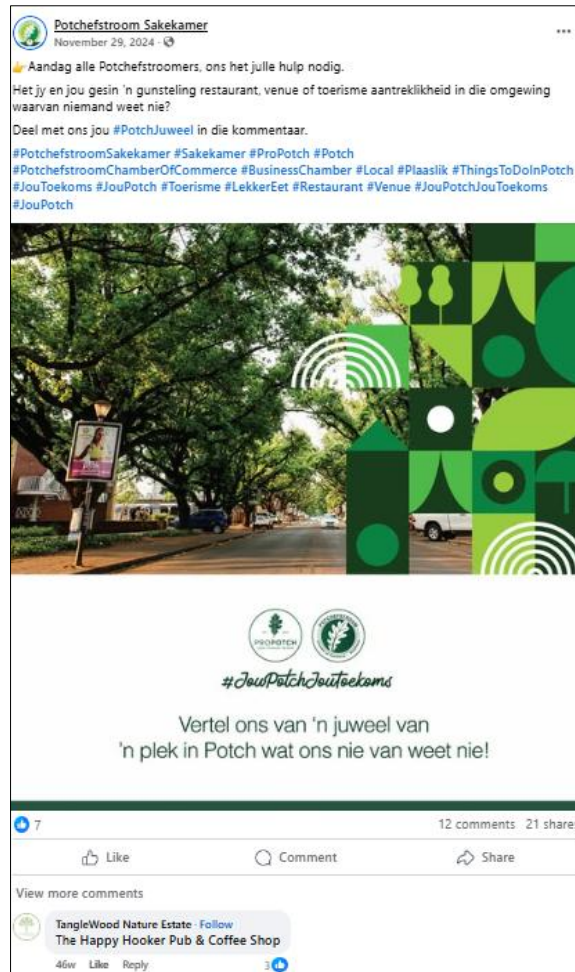


Figure 5.7: Screenshot of a Facebook post (Potch jewel)

5.3.1.2 Vividness

The posts on the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's Facebook and Instagram pages are limited to using corporate colours, but it seems that Feisty Communication and Marketing's graphic design team uses shapes and bold graphics in the images to make them eye-catching. Two examples are shown in Figures 5.8 and 5.9, where graphics are used to create a sense of movement. These striking visuals use bold graphics to capture attention and polished, dynamic layouts to stimulate social media users by conveying excitement and community spirit. It can be deduced that this level of vividness enhances the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's attractiveness on social media pages and makes the content visually captivating. The graphic design team at Feisty Communication and Marketing should continue to create content with vivid visuals.



Figure 5.8: Screenshot of a Facebook post (Merry Christmas)

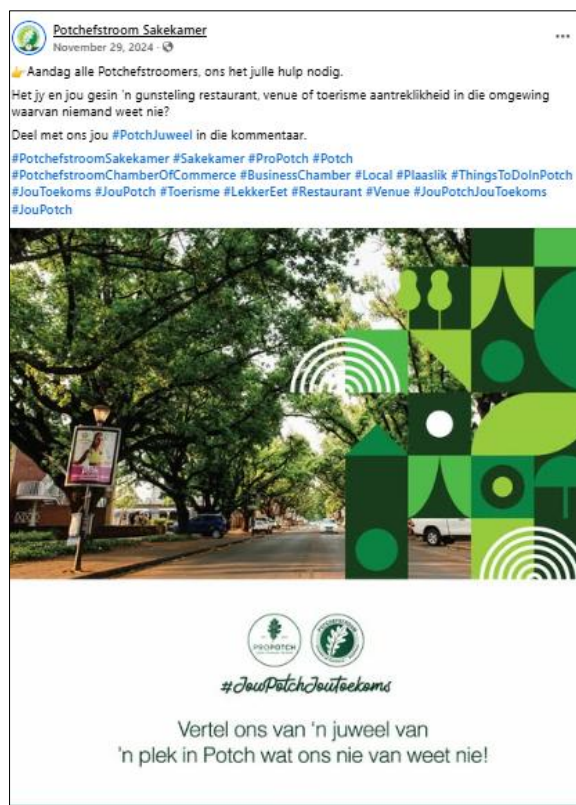


Figure 5.9: Screenshot of a Facebook post (Potch jewel)

5.3.2 Content

The type of content on social media pages should be informative, entertaining, promotional, advertising, or other types of content.

5.3.2.1 Informative

One example of an informative Instagram post is shown in Figure 5.10. In this post, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce informs its stakeholders how they can participate in a specific project to help community members in need (“Emmers vol hoop”). The post includes a step-by-step guide on how to participate in the project. Furthermore, the video with text also provides information about the project and how stakeholders can form part of the project by following the steps.

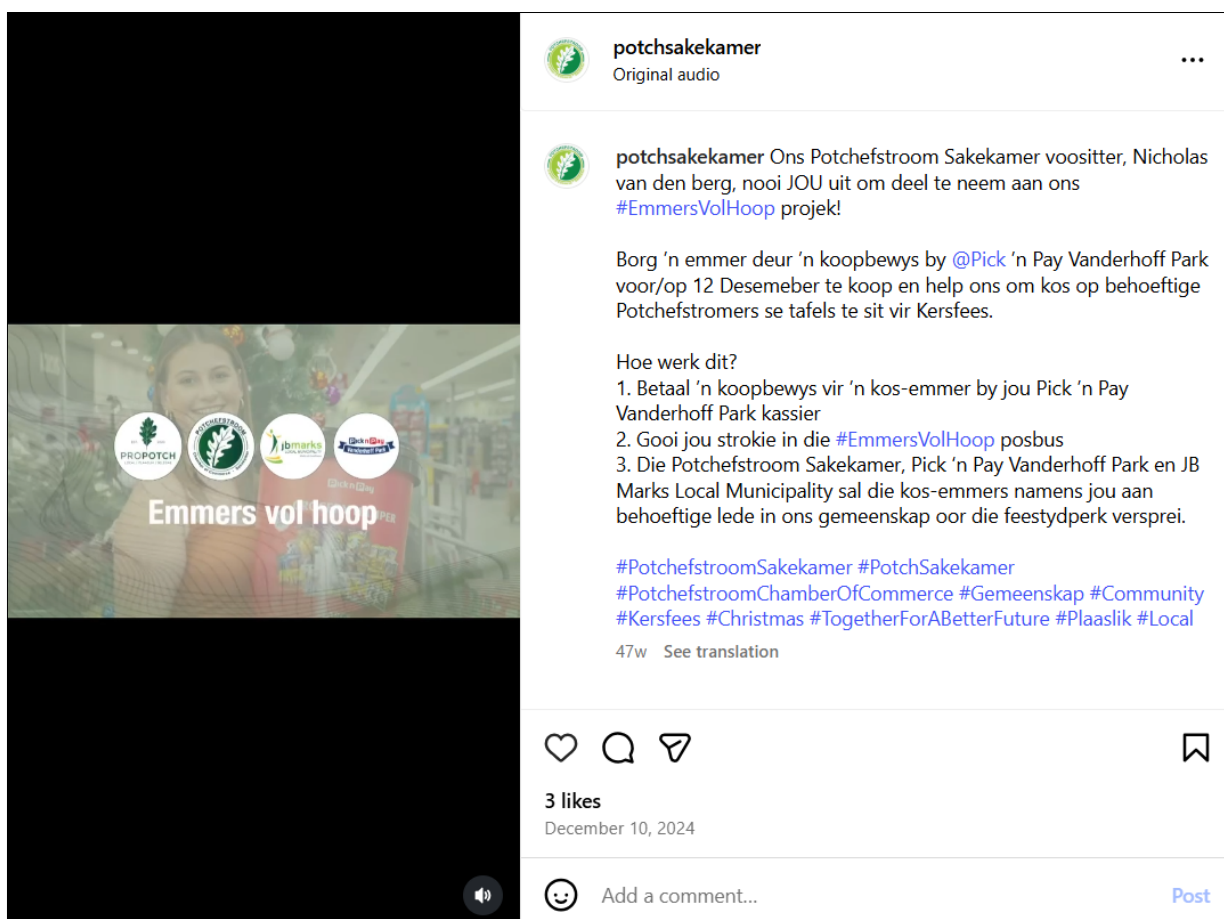


Figure 5.10: Screenshot of an Instagram post (“Emmers vol hoop”)

From the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's Facebook and Instagram posts, it can be concluded that most posts focus on informative content, such as announcing events, outlining event and project participation requirements, and sharing logistical details like dates, venues, and registration processes. The example in Figure 5.11 shows a purely informational post indicating that the office will be closed during the festive season. Many posts on the Facebook and Instagram pages contain factual and essential information with the sole purpose of providing stakeholders with information about the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce.



Figure 5.11: Screenshot of a Facebook post (Closed)

5.3.2.2 Entertaining

Across posts on both Facebook and Instagram, it is evident that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce creates entertaining, informative, and promotional content (see Section 5.3.2.1 and Section 5.3.2.3). Entertainment is evident in posts that provoke excitement about the events, for example, Figures 5.12 to 5.15, which are screenshots of Instagram Reels with a countdown to the “Gaan Wild” mountain biking and running event.



Figure 5.12: Screenshot of an Instagram post (4 days)



Figure 5.13: Screenshot of an Instagram post (3 days)



Figure 5.14: Screenshot of an Instagram post (2 days)

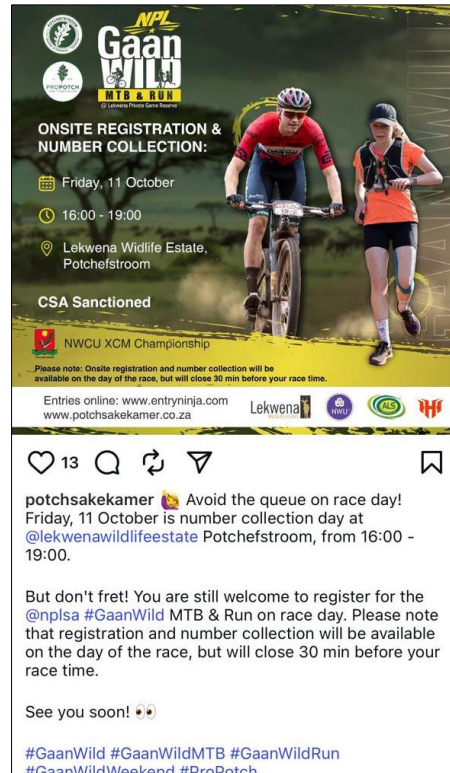


Figure 5.15: Screenshot of an Instagram post (on the day)

Another example of entertainment-related posts showcasing enjoyment, excitement, and participation as an adventurous community activity can be seen in Figure 5.16. This Instagram post features bike riders at the starting line and ready for the mountain bike race. The entertainment factor is most evident in posts made on the day of the activity.



Figure 5.16: Screenshot of an Instagram post (Mountain bikers)

5.3.2.3 Promotional and advertising

It is evident from the qualitative content analysis of the Facebook and Instagram pages that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce posts promotional content to market and advertise its services (projects and events). Figure 5.17, for example, announces the “Amazing Skattejag” event to attract and generate interest.



Figure 5.17: Screenshot of a Facebook post (Amazing Skattejag)

This image illustrates how the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce promotes an event on social media. On the same day, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce also created an event for the “Amazing Skattejag” on Facebook (see Figure 5.18). Another example of an event post, where stakeholders can indicate whether they are interested or going to the event, can be seen in Figure 19. Here, the event is a golf day.



Figure 5.18: Screenshot of a post on Facebook (Amazing Skattejag event)



Figure 5.19: Screenshot of a Facebook post (Golf Day event)

Posts are created to promote upcoming Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce events, and subsequent posts that capture what happens at these events are also created to showcase and further promote the events. These posts promote the events as opportunities for networking. These promotional posts could position the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce as a facilitator of opportunities in town and a builder of relationships in an offline environment.

5.3.2.4 Other

The qualitative content analysis of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's Facebook and Instagram pages reveals evidence of celebratory messaging, as shown in Figures 5.20 and 5.21. The posts highlight a national moment, such as Heritage Day, and reflect an inclusive celebration of South Africa's "rainbow nation." In addition, the organisation marks occasions like Easter, Christmas, and the New Year on Facebook and Instagram, demonstrating celebration in its social media posts.



Figure 5.20: Screenshot of an Instagram post (Heritage Day)



Figure 5.21: Screenshot of an Instagram post (New Year)

5.3.3 Temporal factors

Temporal factors include the day of the post and the number of days between posts on social media.

5.3.3.1 The time of day and the number of days

In total, 196 posts were published on Facebook and 127 were published on Instagram during the one year of the content analysis. Table 5.1 below first reflects the number of days between Facebook posts, and Table 5.2 thereafter illustrates the number of days between Instagram posts.

Table 5.1: The number of days between posts on Facebook

Months	Number of days between posts							
	Multiple posts per day	0 consecutive days	1 day	2 days	3 days	4 days	5 days	> 5 days
25-28 February 2024	2 days (4 posts)	4						
March 2024			1		1			1 (14 days) 1 (6 days)
April 2024		1			1			1 (18 days) 1 (11 days)
May 2024	1 day (5 posts) 1 day (2 posts)	1		1		1		1 (8 days) 1 (15 days) 1 (7 days)
June 2024		2		1	1			1 (6 days) 1 (7 days) 1 (9 days)
July 2024	1 day (4 posts) 1 day (6 posts) 1 day (2 posts)	2	1	1	2		1	1 (8 days) 1 (6 days)
August 2024	1 day (3 posts) 1 day (9 posts) 1 day (2 posts) 1 day (3 posts)	7	2	4	1		2	

September 2024	2 days (2 posts) 1 day (5 posts) 1 day (4 posts) 1 day (7 posts)	7		1	2			1 (10 days)
October 2024	2 days (2 posts) 1 day (4 posts) 1 day (11 posts) 2 days (7 posts)	6		1	1	1		1 (7 days) 1 (11 days)
November 2024	1 day (3 posts) 1 day (2 posts)	1						1 (30 days)
December 2024	3 days (2 posts)	2		1		3	2	
January 2025	1 day (2 posts)							1 (7 days) 2 (12 days)
1-25 February 2025	1 day (7 posts) 1 day (4 posts) 2 days (2 posts)	2		2	1	1	1	

Table 5.2: The number of days between posts on Instagram

Months	Number of days between posts							
	Multiple posts per day	0 consecutive days	1 day	2 days	3 days	4 days	5 days	> 5 days
25-28 February 2024	1 day (6 posts)	1		1				
March 2024					1			1 (16 days) 1 (9 days)
April 2024								1 (18 days) 1 (15 days)
May 2024	1 day (2 posts)	2				1		1 (8 days) 1 (16 days) 1 (7 days)
June 2024		1		1	1	1		2 (9 days)
July 2024	1 day (2 posts)	1		1	1	1	1	1 (8 days)
August 2024	1 day (8 posts)	3		2			2	1 (6 days) 1 (7 days)
September 2024	1 day (3 posts) 1 day (4 posts) 1 day (5 posts)	4			1			1 (6 days) 1 (11 days)
October 2024	1 day (2 posts) 1 day (12 posts) 1 day (7 posts)	5				1		1 (7 days) 1 (6 days)

November 2024		1						1 (14 days)
December 2024	2 days (2 posts)	1		1	1	1	2	1 (6 days)
January 2025								1 (7 days) 1 (24 days)
1-25 February 2025	1 day (9 posts)	1		1				1 (7 days) 1 (10 days) 1 (14 days)

Even though this is a qualitative content analysis of the social media pages of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, the numerical analysis in the tables on the previous pages provides an overview of a specific theoretical guideline, namely the number of days between posts. From the two tables (Tables 5.1 and 5.2), it can be deduced that the posts made on the Instagram and Facebook pages from 25 February 2024 to 25 February 2025 are very inconsistent, with sometimes even weeks going by without a post. This is probably the reason why engagement is low on these social media platforms for the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce. Social media users (followers) cannot get into a routine of engaging with the posts because they are not consistently and frequently posted. Consequently, the posts on these pages are not pushed or prioritised by the platform algorithms, as they do not consistently appear among the content followers engage with most.

It seems that posts on Facebook and Instagram increase on event days and the days immediately following them, often with multiple posts published within a short period (more than one post on the day after the event).

Unfortunately, one of the challenges encountered during the analysis of the posts was the researcher's inability to determine the exact time of day each post was published on the social media platforms. In addition, Instagram and Facebook stories could not be analysed retrospectively, as they remain visible for only 24 hours and were therefore not accessible for analysis across the full study period. Thus, no inferences can be drawn about the extent to which the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce makes use of this feature.

5.3.4 Contextual factors

This refers to the contextual factors that can influence the engagement rate, including the brand or industry of the organisation and the social media platforms.

5.3.4.1 Brand/Industry

The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce operates within the local business community as a representative body in a non-profit capacity. The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media engagement is shaped not only by its own posts but also by content shared by other organisations and stakeholders in Potchefstroom about the Chamber's projects and events. When the Chamber and local partners or businesses promote the same event (such as cleaning up the town), stakeholder attention may be divided, reducing engagement and the number of likes, shares and comments received on the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's posts. It is noted that an analysis of other organisations' social media pages was not part of the scope of this

study, and therefore, it could not be determined to what extent competing organisations in the same industry in Potchefstroom influence the Chamber's social media engagement. This is something future studies could examine.

5.3.4.2 Social media platform

The platforms analysed in this study are Facebook and Instagram. When analysing the same post for the same community project on the same day on the two social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram), it becomes clear that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce does not use exactly the same content for both platforms. The content differs to suit each platform's characteristics. The content of the cleanup event on the Instagram post (see Figure 5.22) differs from the post about the same event on the same day on Facebook (see Figure 5.23).

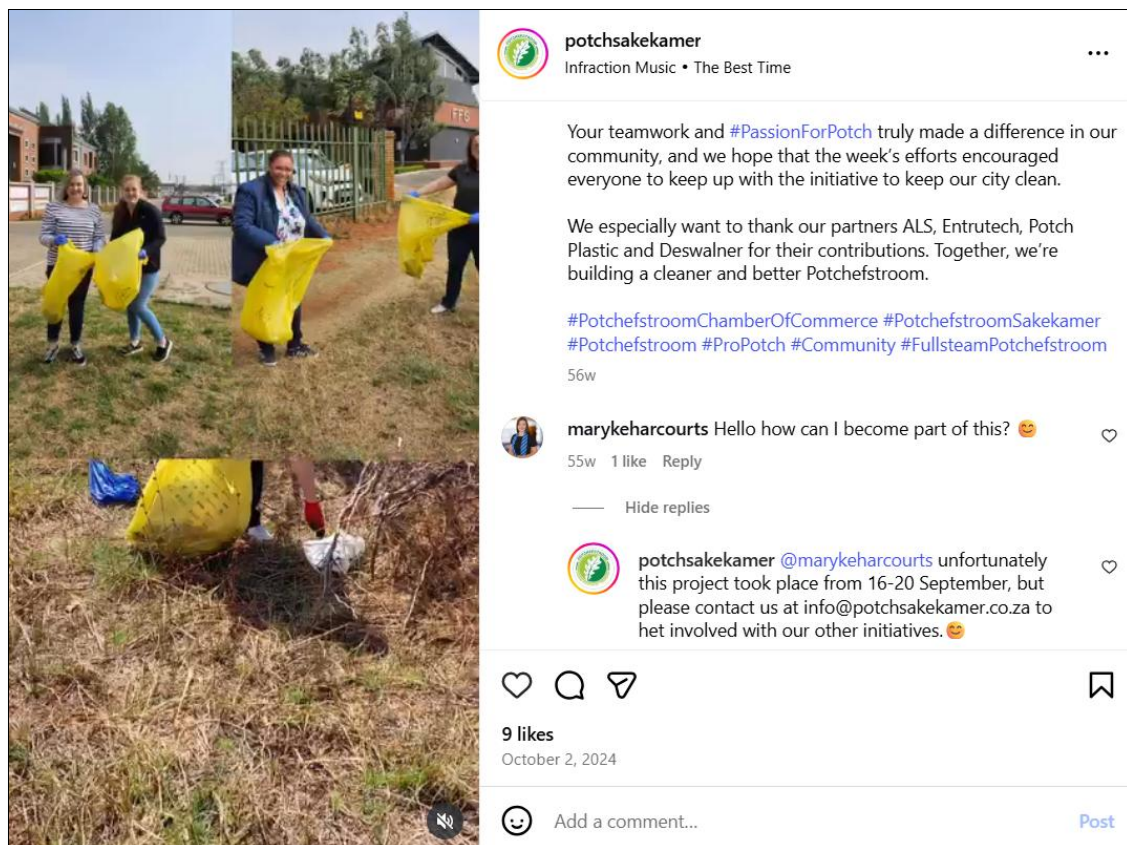


Figure 5.22: Screenshot of an Instagram post (clean-up)



Figure 5.23: Screenshot of a Facebook post (clean-up)

It is also noticeable that the posts in the above example (Figure 5.22 and Figure 5.23) slightly differ in the level of engagement on the two platforms. One stakeholder commented on the Instagram post to ask how they could get involved in the project, and the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce replied with information on how they can be part of upcoming projects.

No comment was made on the Facebook post. One would think that more stakeholders who see these types of clean-up posts in town would express their gratitude and appreciation by commenting and sharing.

5.4 Stakeholder relationship management theory

The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should build and maintain long-term relationships with its external stakeholders through its social media platforms.

5.4.1 Relationship-building strategies

The third theoretical statement argues that relationships should be built on social media by using the following relationship-building strategies in the online environment: disclosure (openness), usefulness and information dissemination, and interactivity and involvement.

Theoretical statement 3: Strategies to cultivate social media relationships

To use social media effectively for relationship building, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should adopt strategies that include timely and transparent information disclosure, the provision of useful, accessible, and interactive content, and the active encouragement of stakeholder involvement.

5.4.1.1 Disclosure (openness)

The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce primarily demonstrates disclosure through posts announcing milestones of the organisation and leadership updates, for example, the election and appointment of a new board during the annual general meeting. This is shown in Figure 5.24.



Figure 5.24: Screenshot of a Facebook post (new board elected)

Another example of transparent disclosure of information is shown in Figure 5.25, where the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce reported that a large sum of money, namely R120,000, was raised through a project and donated towards cleaning up a specific area in Potchefstroom.

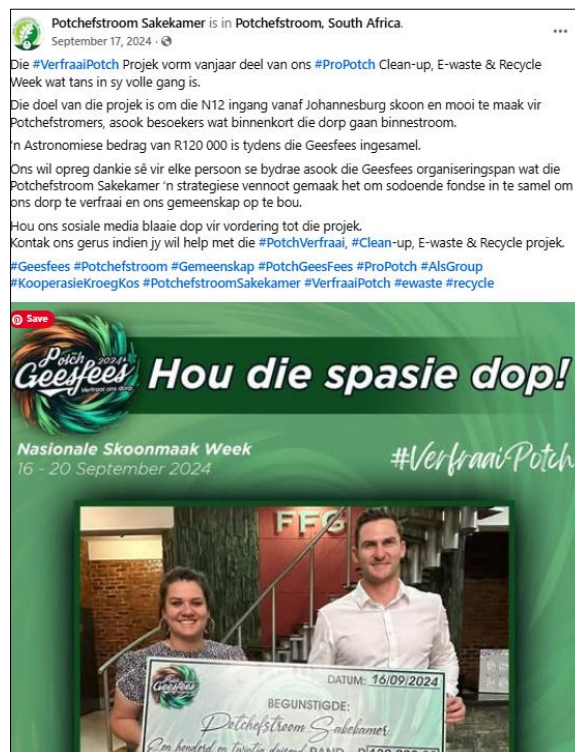


Figure 5.25: Screenshot of a Facebook post (funds raised)

When analysing the Instagram and Facebook pages, it is difficult to determine exactly what is disclosed in an open and transparent way about the organisation, because, other than the announcement of new management and the sum of money raised and donated, the transparency of ongoing operations and decision-making is limited on the social media platforms. This demonstrates selective disclosure on the social media pages and suggests that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce communicates sensitive or relevant information only at key events. It seems that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce does not consistently provide deeper insight into its internal processes or decision-making information on its social media platforms.

5.4.1.2 Usefulness and information dissemination

As discussed in Section 5.3.2.1 regarding informative content, many of the Facebook and Instagram posts can be seen as useful, as they provide timely information about upcoming events and projects initiated by the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce. Posts on social media platforms promote initiatives and networking events, such as community clean-ups, the “Amazing skattejag”, the golf day, the mountain bike and running event, to name a few already illustrated in the content analysis. These serve as a systematic channel of information dissemination, ensuring stakeholders are aware of activities that may align with their interests. This usefulness strengthens the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce’s role as an information hub for stakeholders, helping it position itself as a reliable source for updates and information within the business community of Potchefstroom.

5.4.1.3 Interactivity and involvement

As discussed in Section 5.3.1.1 on interactive content, there are various examples of engagement and interaction that occur through liking, commenting, and sharing social media posts on both Facebook and Instagram.

One salient example was the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce’s direct reply to an inquiry in the comments about how the community can get involved in community initiatives (see Figure 5.21). This post demonstrates the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce’s responsiveness and active involvement on its social media pages, which in turn could foster dialogue. This interactive exchange of communication through comments enhances stakeholder engagement, as it makes them feel included in the organisation’s initiatives and events. As noted earlier, more can be done to facilitate interactivity on social media, even though it seems that good stakeholder involvement exists in the physical world.

5.4.2 Relationship outcomes

It is important to evaluate the relationship between parties with the following outcomes, as stated in the fourth theoretical statement: trust, control mutuality, communality, commitment, relationship satisfaction, and the type of relationship (whether communal or exchange).

Theoretical statement 4: The outcomes of stakeholder relationships

To manage stakeholder relationships effectively on social media platforms, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should strive to build trust by delivering on its promises, fulfilling its commitment to online engagement, and promoting relational satisfaction, with mutual control and shared communality. Furthermore, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should strive to cultivate relationships that provide mutual benefits and value to both the Chamber and its stakeholders.

For the purpose of this qualitative content analysis, only the guidelines that can be observed on the Facebook and Instagram pages of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce could be analysed. When it comes to the outcomes of strong relationships, it is not possible to observe or draw conclusions based solely on what is posted on social media. It is argued that external stakeholders' perceptions are needed to evaluate whether the relationship between them and the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce is built and maintained on social media. Therefore, another empirical component would be needed, such as questionnaires, interviews, or focus groups. This aspect is beyond the scope of this study.

One outcome that could be qualitatively analysed to some extent on the social media pages is communality. Although the researcher acknowledges the other outcomes identified in the literature, only communality can be evaluated using social media posts.

5.4.2.1 Communality

It is evident to some extent that external stakeholders share a concern for the town and its residents with the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, based on the many social media posts showing how stakeholders participate in community projects. Some examples can be found in Figures 5.26 and 5.27, where businesses are shown on social media cleaning up the town in person. As seen in Figure 5.27, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce shared and reposted the album of an involved business (OppiKampus) on both their pages, which demonstrates that the organisation's members share a similar sentiment about this initiative.



Figure 5.26: Screenshot of a Facebook post (e-waste and recycle week)



Figure 5.27: Screenshot of a Facebook post (OppiKampus)

This creates a sense of collective purpose between the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and its stakeholders, which could further strengthen their bond on social media, as both parties work together to improve the community in which they live and work. It can also be deduced that these posts illustrate shared values between the Chamber and its stakeholders.

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the qualitative content analysis shows that many of the theoretical guidelines' recommendations are present across the two social media platforms and are evident in this chapter's discussion. However, several remain absent from the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media posts. The analysis of the Chamber's Facebook and Instagram activity from February 2024 to February 2025 indicates that, although the organisation uses social media to promote events and disseminate information, the platforms' potential as tools for stakeholder engagement and relationship building is not fully realised. The Chamber demonstrates mutual respect through announcements and recognition posts, but opportunities for dialogue and mutual influence remain limited. Most posts are broadcast-oriented (one-way communication), leaving little room for co-creation or shared decision-making, which are important factors in building long-term stakeholder relationships.

From the reviewed content, several insights emerge relating to the social media engagement theory. The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's content is vivid, informative, occasionally entertaining, and consistently promotional and advertising in nature. However, an irregular posting schedule undermines algorithmic visibility and makes it difficult to establish consistent engagement among followers. Although stakeholders sometimes interact with posts through likes, comments and shares, much of this engagement originates from the Chamber (and Feisty Communication and Marketing) itself, rather than from external stakeholders. This suggests that engagement is primarily organisation-driven rather than community-led.

With regard to stakeholder relationship management, it is evident that disclosure is selective, focusing on posts such as management appointments and funds raised, rather than on internal organisational processes. Usefulness is present, as the Chamber frequently shares accurate and timely event information. Some interactivity is visible, but it is sporadic, and responses are limited to specific inquiries in the comments. Communitas as a relationship outcome can be observed in posts about stakeholders' participation in community projects.

The next chapter will conclude the research findings by addressing each specific research question and then answering the general research question posed for this study.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The aim of the study was to explore how the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce manages communication on its social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders. Chapter 1 provided the background and context of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and its social media platforms. In Chapter 2, a literature review was conducted on the two-way symmetrical model, social media engagement theory, and stakeholder relationship management theory to identify guidelines applicable to the social media context and to guide the study's empirical data collection and analysis. In Chapter 3, the qualitative research approach and the methods used to collect data were explained, specifically semi-structured interviews and qualitative content analysis. Chapter 4 reported on the findings from the semi-structured interviews with the management of Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, as well as Feisty Communication and Marketing, which manages the social media platforms. In Chapter 5, the qualitative content analysis of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's Facebook and Instagram pages was conducted over a one-year period.

This chapter presents concluding discussions of the findings of Chapters 2, 4, and 5 to answer the three specific research questions. First, each specific research question is addressed and answered; thereafter, the general research question is answered, and last, the chapter concludes with an acknowledgement of the shortcomings of this study and recommendations for future research.

6.2 Research conclusions

In this section, the research aims are addressed by answering each research question. The researcher summarises the findings from the literature study, semi-structured interviews, and qualitative content analysis.

6.2.1 Answering specific research question 1

1. According to the two-way symmetrical communication model, social media engagement theory, and stakeholder relationship management theory, what guidelines have been established for communication management to foster engagement and relationships with external stakeholders on social media?

In Chapter 2, the guidelines applicable to the social media context (drawn from the two-way symmetrical communication model, social media engagement theory, and stakeholder relationship management theory) were identified and explained. Theoretical statements were formulated, based on the identified guidelines, to guide the study. A summary of the guidelines applicable to this study was presented in Table 2.1, with operational definitions to make the guidelines relevant to the study context. The operational definitions provide guidance on how the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should manage its communication on its social media pages to foster engagement and build relationships with external stakeholders.

Table 6.1 on the following page presents the theoretical statements, identified guidelines and operational definitions to answer the specific research question 1.

Table 6.1: Summary of theoretical guidelines

Theoretical statement	Guideline	Operational definition
Two-way symmetrical communication		
Theoretical statement 1: Two-way symmetrical communication Two-way symmetrical communication on the social media platforms used by the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should ensure that all parties have the opportunity to send and receive information, enabling mutual influence. Such communication should be dialogical in nature and characterised by transparency to ensure mutual understanding, respect, and mutual influence that could build and maintain mutually beneficial long-term relationships.	Mutual understanding and respect	On social media platforms, both parties should show mutual respect, listen to each other, and be open to changing their views to reach decisions through mutual agreement or consensus.
	Mutual influence	Each party should have the opportunity to influence the other's views and perspectives via social media platforms.
	Dialogue	Both parties should be equals in the communication process on social media platforms, ensuring an open and reciprocal exchange of ideas, information or opinions. Both parties should be open to receiving information and have the opportunity to reply, give feedback and respond.
	Transparent communication	All relevant information should be accessible and clearly communicated on social media platforms. The communication between the parties should be open, honest, truthful and direct.

Social media engagement theory			
Theoretical statement 2: Social media engagement Engagement on the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms could be integral to building relations with external stakeholders. For the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, it is important to understand how engagement on their social media posts can be influenced by the following: 1. The creative format of the post, including the interactivity and vividness of the post. 2. The type of content that is posted, such as informative, entertaining, promotional and advertising, or other content. 3. Temporal factors, like the day of the post and the number of days between posts. 4. Contextual factors, including the brand or industry and the social media platform that is used.	Creative format	Interactivity	Interactivity focuses on whether the post or platform facilitates two-way communication or engagement through the features that are available, including likes, comments, shares, tags, hashtags, gamification elements, polls, contests and links.
		Vividness	Vividness focuses on how well a post or piece of content stands out and on whether it is visually and emotionally engaging. Rich dynamic elements, such as high-quality content (images, videos, or animation), are characteristic of a vivid post.
	Types of content	Informative	Informative content informs or educates the users. The information provided is valuable, relevant, and accurate.
		Entertaining	Entertaining content amuses, engages or provides the users with enjoyment. The content can include humour, memes, storytelling, or games.
		Promotional and advertising	Promotional and advertising content promotes a product, service or event. The content attracts attention or generates interest, encouraging action.
		Other	Other content is any content posted on social media platforms that doesn't fall into the above-mentioned types, such as celebratory posts and condolences.
	Temporal factors	Day of post	The time of the day the post (content) is published and the specific calendar date. This information is used to track and analyse whether the timing of the content release was effective.

		Days between posts	The frequency of posts and the number of days between each post.
	Contextual factors	Brand/industry	The brand or industry in which the organisation posts their content can influence the engagement rate and the effectiveness of the social media communication.
		Social media platform	The social media platform where posts are published influences engagement. Whether the content is tailored to the given platform or application is also important, as different platforms generate different experiences.
Stakeholder relationship management theory			
Theoretical statement 3: Strategies to cultivate social media relationships To use social media effectively for relationship-building, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should adopt strategies that include timely and transparent information disclosure, the provision of useful, accessible, and interactive content, and the active encouragement of stakeholder involvement.	Online relationship-cultivation strategies	Disclosure	The organisation should share information openly and transparently with their stakeholders on social media regarding what is happening within the organisation.
		Usefulness and information dissemination	Relevant information that stakeholders could use should be shared on social media platforms in a timely, systematic manner.
		Interactivity and involvement	Stakeholders should be able to interact with the content and the organisation on social media platforms. Stakeholders should be involved on social media platforms through active participation in planning, decision-making and activities that will influence the stakeholders' interest in the organisation.

Theoretical statement 4: The outcomes of stakeholder relationships To manage stakeholder relationships effectively on social media platforms, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should strive to build trust by delivering on its promises, fulfilling its commitment to online engagement, and promoting relational satisfaction, with mutual control and shared communality. Furthermore, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should strive to cultivate relationships that provide mutual benefits and value for both the Chamber and its stakeholders.	Relationship outcomes	Trust	The amount of confidence each party has in the other, based on integrity, competence and reliability to deliver on promises made on social media platforms.
		Control mutuality	How satisfied each party is with the amount of control they each perceive they have within the relationship on social media platforms.
		Communality	The sense of shared concern, interests, and values between the organisation and its stakeholders and the mutual benefit they experience.
		Commitment	The degree of dedication from each party, including the amount of time, energy and money each party is willing to spend on social media platforms when engaging with each other.
		Relationship satisfaction	The extent to which each party is satisfied with the relationship they have on social media, meaning that their expectations, desires and needs are met by the other party.
		Exchange relationships vs communal relationships	In an exchange relationship, parties provide benefits to each other because of past benefits received or the hope of future benefits. In a communal relationship, both parties provide benefits to each other, because the welfare of each party and their relationship are important to the other.

6.2.2 Answering specific research questions 2 and 3

2. What is the management of Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's approach to managing communication on social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders?

3. What is the practitioners at Feisty Communication and Marketing's approach to managing communication on Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders?

Seeing that the perceptions and opinions obtained from semi-structured interviews with both the Chamber of Commerce and Feisty Communication and Marketing aligned, the two were combined in reporting the data. There were no significant discrepancies in their views; therefore, specific research questions 2 and 3 are reported on holistically.

6.2.2.1 Two-way symmetrical communication

6.2.2.1.1 Mutual understanding and respect

The management of Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and the practitioners of Feisty Communication and Marketing approach mutual understanding and respect as encompassing respect for each other's political views, with the organisation avoiding participation in political discussions and not using social media platforms to promote any personal political views of management. The comments on social media platforms are also monitored to ensure that conversations stay neutral and that if any negative comments are made, the agency can handle a crisis before the negative situation spirals out of control. This showcases that both management and the agency respect the Chamber's stakeholders and strive for mutual understanding. Furthermore, content is tailored to stakeholders' preferences, demonstrating the organisation's respect for and mutual understanding with stakeholders.

6.2.2.1.2 Mutual influence

According to the participants, the goal of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce is to create networks where business owners can, among other things, participate in events, influence one another, and create positive challenges on social media. The participants feel that stakeholders are invited to form part of events on the social media platforms. However, it is not clear how the organisation and the stakeholders mutually influence each other on these platforms.

6.2.2.1.3 Dialogue

According to the agency, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce mostly uses social media platforms for marketing and advertising and not as a primary dialogue tool. While dialogue can be created through comments on posts and polls on the social media pages, the primary focus is not to foster dialogue. That said, posts can spark a conversation on social media pages. Furthermore, these posts can facilitate dialogue and provide a platform where stakeholders can easily voice their ideas, opinions, or concerns.

Research indicates (see 4.2.3) that the social media pages are primarily used to inform stakeholders of events and projects. The participants indicated that feedback is gathered through social media posts, but stakeholders are encouraged to discuss any problems directly with the organisation's Chairperson or vice chairperson.

The research reported in section 4.2.3 indicates that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce adheres to its formal policies and procedures for communication and dialogue, but that these policies and procedures are not particularly related to the social media platforms. This approach creates a structural gap that can affect communication between the organisation and its stakeholders.

6.2.2.1.4 Transparent communication

The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce takes an open approach to communication, ensuring it is not only receptive to input from the public, stakeholders, members, and the municipality but also open to sending information through various channels to its stakeholders. The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce also has an established constitution that requires it to be transparent. Functions like the annual meeting are used to report on spending, and members are encouraged to ask questions if anything is unclear. However, financial records are not posted publicly on social media for the external stakeholders to view.

6.2.2.2 Social media engagement theory

6.2.2.2.1 Creative format

The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's approach to the creative format includes the interactivity and vividness of a post (see section 4.3.1). It has been determined that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce plans a year ahead to ensure the agency has adequate time to plan posts with specific themes in mind, used to promote feedback and interactivity. SEO is also used to ensure that posts perform best on social media. Event photos are also posted in

an album, which gives social media users the opportunity to tag and comment on photos; this can increase interactivity. It is noted that vivid imagery is used, although the agency is constrained by the company colours of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce. The content is also planned to align with the overarching goal while still forming part of the social media strategy.

6.2.2.2.2 Content

As identified in the literature review, there are different types of content (see section 2.3.1.2). This includes informative content, entertaining content, promotional and advertising content, and other content that doesn't fall in the previous categories. The research (see section 4.3.2) has determined that posts are used not only to inform the public about projects and functions hosted by the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, but also to communicate the organisation's values to stakeholders. Entertaining content is also used by featuring the Chamber's management and its stakeholders in videos, because the personal element increases the likelihood that people share the content, since they know the person in the video or photo. This forms part of the Chambers' strategy to make content more relatable and authentic. Other content referred to by participants, includes celebratory posts, such as those commemorating national vacation days (Christmas and New Year's Day) or the appointment of management of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, as well as condolence posts.

6.2.2.2.3 Temporal factors

Temporal factors are different time factors that can influence the performance of the post. It is clear from the research (see section 4.3.3.1) that the participants perceived the time of day a post is made to be influential in its performance. The agency uses statistics to ensure the post is optimised for good performance by posting it when their stakeholders are active on social media platforms, except when communication needs to be broadcast immediately. Regarding the number of days between each post, the participants from the agency indicated that statistics are used to determine the best day to post.

6.2.2.2.4 Contextual factors

Contextual factors focus on the brand or industry within which the organisation operates and the social media platform used. Research has determined (see section 4.3.4.1) that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce has a unique approach, based on its collaboration with other organisations, it can compete or help each other gain engagement on their social media posts. The participants from the agency also indicated that the stakeholders and their

demographics are the determining factors for choosing a social media platform. It has also been found that messages are tailored for each platform to optimise performance.

6.2.2.3 Stakeholder relationship management theory

6.2.2.3.1 Relationship-building strategies

In relationship-building strategies, the participants indicated that **disclosure (openness)** is considered of prime importance. The research has established that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce has a weekly communication schedule to share important information with the agency and ensure that stakeholders receive all communications. However, using this scheduled communication may limit timely communication to stakeholders. The research found that all important information shared on other communication channels is also posted on social media platforms to ensure stakeholders can easily access it. Participants from the agency indicated that the social media pages and the website are also cross-linked to make them easily accessible to the stakeholders. The participants also mentioned the relationship-building strategies of **interactivity and involvement** of each party in the research (see section 4.4.1.3). In this regard, it has been found that the social media platforms of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce are used to enable stakeholders to interact and share posts and events. The banner feature on Facebook is also used to promote events, and different features are used to accommodate each user, whether they tend to scroll vertically or horizontally. From the research, it is deduced that stakeholders have the opportunity to participate in the events and have easy access to all necessary information about them.

6.2.2.3.2 Relationship outcomes

Relationship outcomes identified in the literature are trust, control mutuality, communality, commitment, relationship satisfaction, and the type of relationship (exchange or communal). From the research (see section 4.4.2), it is deduced that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce builds trust on social media platforms through the projects and networking events it hosts, as these provide opportunities for stakeholders to network. It is also deduced from the participants' statements that posts are consistent and reliable. **Trust** is not only built on social media platforms, but the organisation also heavily relies on in-person projects and networking events to build trust. **Control mutuality** considers how satisfied each party is with the amount of control it has. It can be concluded from the research (see section 4.4.2.2) that there exists some degree of control mutuality as both the organisation and its stakeholders can contribute and influence the communication process on the social media platforms; however, all social media posts must be approved by a member of the management of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce. The

shared interests, concerns and values were identified as **communality** by the participants who indicated that stakeholders who attend events and like or share posts share the organisation's values and interests. Next, **commitment** is identified as one of the outcomes of the relationship, and it is clear from the research (see section 4.4.2.4) that the stakeholders and the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce show their commitment to each other by becoming members of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and management in turn shows its commitment by working for the Chamber pro bono. Relationship satisfaction is evident in the results of the research (see section 4.4.2.5), which indicate that members are satisfied by virtue of the positive feedback the organisation receives both in person and on online platforms. Last, it can be seen from the research in Section 4.4.2.6 that the relationship between the Chamber and its members can be classified as both a communal and an exchange relationship because the members pay for their membership and to participate in the projects, but the projects also exist to help the community without offering direct reward to the organisation.

6.2.3 Answering specific research question 4

4. How is content being managed on the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders?

6.2.3.1.1 Mutual understanding and respect

In the analysis of the social media posts on Facebook and Instagram (see section 5.2.1), there is no evidence of how mutual respect and understanding are expressed, but it can be seen that respect and understanding are fostered through recognising the stakeholders and including them in events.

6.2.3.1.2 Mutual influence

From the analysis of social media posts on Facebook and Instagram, it is clear that they don't actively invite stakeholders to contribute to content or participate in organisational decision-making. Therefore, there is limited evidence that mutual influence exists on the organisation's social media platforms.

6.2.3.1.3 Dialogue

The research concludes that minimal dialogue is observed on the social media pages (see section 5.2.3); though some posts receive interactions, many receive no comments. This pattern, also observed in the research, suggests that these platforms are used predominantly as one-way

communication or broadcasting tools, which limits opportunities for co-creation and prevents the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce from building relationships on these platforms through dialogue and feedback.

6.2.3.1.4 Transparent communication

It is not possible to determine from the analysis of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media posts whether the communication is transparent, but it is found that they share information regarding events and projects. Communication on social media platforms is mostly informational and concerns what is happening rather than why decisions are made or how stakeholders can contribute to decision-making processes.

6.2.3.2 Social media engagement theory

6.2.3.2.1 Creative format

The creative format includes interactivity and vividness. The research that has been conducted (see section 5.3.1.1) found that interactivity varies across posts. Posts which had good interactivity include one that showed the winner of a competition and another showing different businesses participating in an event, which had the highest number of shares. Upon further analysis, it was discovered that of the 25 shares, 15 were made either by the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce or the account manager working for the agency. It can be deduced from this that organic interactivity on the social media pages is limited. Vividness also plays a crucial role in capturing the audience's attention on social media pages. From the research conducted (see section 5.3.2.1), it can be seen that bold graphics are used to catch the user's eye, since the posts are limited by company colours.

6.2.3.2.2 Content

The types of content that are identified in the literature chapter are informative, entertaining, promotional and advertising, and other types of content. The research (see section 5.3.2.1) has found that most posts are made to inform stakeholders about events or projects that are hosted by the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce. Furthermore, content that is not only entertaining but also informative and promotional is used; these posts are designed to provoke excitement about events. It is evident from the research (see Section 5.3.2.3) that some posts on the social media pages are aimed at promoting and advertising the services (events and projects) that the organisation offers. The other types of content posted on the social media pages include posts celebrating national moments such as Heritage Day (see section 5.3.2.4), as well as other occasions like New Year's or Christmas.

6.2.3.2.3 Temporal factors

The temporal factors that could be considered in the research include the number of days between posts and the time of day when posts are made, but unfortunately, the time of day couldn't be determined, and the stories on the social media platforms couldn't be analysed as they are only available to view for 24 hours. The research has determined (see section 5.3.3.1) that posts on social media platforms are very inconsistent, with days and sometimes even weeks going by without a single post. However, post frequency increases on event days and on days following the event, with evidence of multiple posts per day.

6.2.3.2.4 Contextual factors

The contextual factors focus on the brand/industry the organisation operates in and the social media platforms it uses to post content. The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce operates within the community and serves as a representative body and a non-profit entity. The organisation's social media engagement isn't only shaped by its posts, but also by the content shared by other organisations and stakeholders in Potchefstroom about the Chamber's events and projects. This can serve to divide stakeholders' attention and reduce engagement. The social media platforms analysed were Facebook and Instagram (see section 5.3.4.2), and from these analyses, it is deduced that the content is tailored to each platform to suit its characteristics.

6.2.3.3 Stakeholder relationship management theory

6.2.3.3.1 Relationship-building strategies

Relationship-building strategies include disclosure (openness), usefulness, information dissemination, interactivity, and involvement. The research demonstrates that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce mostly displays disclosure through milestone posts and leadership updates. Evidence of transparency in ongoing operations and decision-making processes on social media platforms was limited. Most of the posts analysed on the social media pages are useful and contain information that positions the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce as a reliable information hub for its stakeholders and the business community of Potchefstroom. There is some interactivity and involvement from the organisation, as discussed in Section 6.2.2.2.3, but as noted, the organisation could do more to be more involved and interactive on its social media platforms.

6.2.3.3.2 Relationship outcomes

As stated in Section 5.4.2, only communality could be analysed through the qualitative research. To study the other aspects identified under relationship outcomes (trust, control mutuality, relationship satisfaction, and the type of relationship [communal or exchange]), additional studies, such as interviews, questionnaires, or focus groups, would be needed to determine the external stakeholders' perceptions. From the research on communality, it is evident that external stakeholders share a concern for the town, seeing as they participate in community events hosted or organised by the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce.

6.3 Answering the general research question

How does the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce manage communication on its social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders?

This study found that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce manages communication on social media platforms by drawing on some aspects of two-way symmetrical communication, social media engagement theory and stakeholder relationships management theory.

Although participants know what two-way symmetrical communication is, and how it can be practised on social media platforms, no specific evidence from the research shows that it is being utilised on the platforms. Nevertheless, it can be seen that management seeks to foster constructs such as respect, understanding and mutual influence by including the stakeholders in events. Minimal dialogue was observed in the research, and Feisty Communication and Marketing confirmed that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce primarily uses social media platforms for advertising and marketing and not as primary dialogue tools. Posts can spark conversation and are used for feedback, but stakeholders are encouraged to discuss problems directly with the Chamber's management, rather than on social media platforms. There are also established formal policies for social media platforms that can hinder dialogue on social media platforms. According to the participants, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce has an open approach to transparent communication, but this could not be determined through the analysis of the social media posts.

The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce approaches its social media engagement through planning the information it disseminates to stakeholders ahead of time in order to provide adequate time for Feisty Communication and Marketing to create the content. From the qualitative research conducted on the posts on social media, it is apparent that interactivity varies across

posts and that organic interactivity is limited. These posts are not truly vivid; intriguing graphics are used to capture the stakeholders' attention. It was found that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce uses social media platforms to inform the public and stakeholders of events, projects and functions and to communicate the values of the organisation. This finding is also reflected in the qualitative content analysis. According to the participants, they use statistics to choose the best day to post content. The qualitative content analysis shows that post timing is highly inconsistent, with long gaps between posts and a sudden increase in posts on the days around events. Social media engagement theory is concerned with contextual factors, and in this regard, participants report that collaboration with other organisations exists. This was also found to be true in the qualitative content analysis. The content is also adapted for each platform, as stated in the semi-structured interviews. From these findings, it is evident that the perceptions of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and Feisty Communication and Marketing do not always correlate with the actual posts on social media. The participants' perceptions do not align consistently with the evidence from the content analysis of the Facebook and Instagram pages.

Lastly, stakeholder relationship management theory focuses on relationship-building strategies and relationship outcomes. It was found that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce has weekly meetings with the agency (Feisty Communication and Marketing) to ensure the strategies of openness and disclosure. However, these strategies only manifested through milestone posts and leadership updates on social media platforms, and lack transparency into ongoing operations and decision-making processes. Furthermore, it was found that the participants felt that the posts they share on social media platforms are useful and that information can be easily disseminated, which is also evident in the qualitative content analyses. The participants stated that interactivity and involvement by stakeholders are achieved on social media platforms by giving stakeholders a chance to interact and share the posts. Nevertheless, there are opportunities to expand and use additional features to make social media platforms more interactive and increase stakeholder involvement. From the participants' perceptions, they believe that relationships that are based on trust, commitment, mutual control and relationship satisfaction are built with external stakeholders through the social media platforms. However, these outcomes were not explicitly evident in the qualitative content analysis of the Facebook and Instagram pages.

Therefore, the conclusion is made that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, together with the input, planning and content creation of Feisty Communication and Marketing, should purposively employ the guidelines of the two-way symmetrical communication model, social media engagement theory and strategies of the stakeholder relationship management theory to engage its external stakeholders on social media. Furthermore, this engagement should be utilised to build and maintain positive, long-term relationships with external stakeholders on social

media. In this regard, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should consider the recommendations below.

6.4 Suggestions for the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce to foster engagement and build relationships with stakeholders on social media

The following recommendations are based on the findings of this study for the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce to better foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders via Facebook and Instagram.

First, to foster engagement and build stronger relationships with external stakeholders, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce needs to adopt a more strategic (Noor Al-Deen & Hendricks, 2013), two-way symmetrical approach (Girsang, 2021) to manage communication on its social media platforms.

To strengthen its two-way, symmetrical communication on social media platforms, it needs to promote dialogue and mutual influence by moving beyond just one-off comments and polls and begin sustaining an ongoing conversation with stakeholders (Girsang, 2021). This requires it to maintain consistent responsiveness and incorporate feedback into its future content (Sahani, 2024). The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should also enhance its online transparency by extending the openness it demonstrates in offline meetings to its social media platforms by sharing organisational challenges, decisions, and financial updates to ensure authenticity and build trust between it and its stakeholders (Kesar, 2025). It should also continue to value and respect its stakeholders' diversity, but should make these qualities more visible on its social media accounts, using inclusive communication in online campaigns and recognising the varied stakeholder contributions in the online environment (Montgomery, 2018).

Furthermore, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should apply social media engagement theory more fully by diversifying its content formats to include interactive, vivid content such as live sessions, reels, and stories, as well as question-and-answer features that are available on social media platforms to stimulate engagement (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016). The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should, with Feisty Communications, work on consistently posting and optimising post timing (Coker *et al.*, 2018). This would establish a regular posting schedule informed by social media analytics, which would serve to strengthen the Chamber's social media pages and encourage routine interaction on the social media pages (Coker *et al.*, 2018). The Chamber, together with Feisty Communications, should also balance its content types to avoid monotony and appeal to the diverse interests of stakeholders. This can be achieved by having a good blend of informative, entertaining, and promotional posts (Malik, 2020). Finally, the Chamber

and Feisty communication should tailor their social media strategy specifically to each platform, rather than duplicating posts across channels (Li *et al.*, 2020a).

The Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce should strengthen its stakeholder relationship management by increasing disclosure and openness on its social media platforms. This can be accomplished by communicating its sponsorships, affiliations, and strategic decisions; this, in turn, will foster transparency and authenticity on social media platforms (Mzizi & Govender, 2024). They could also share and prioritise useful information by making content that is not only easily accessible but also directly valuable to their stakeholders. Examples of this might include business opportunities, resources, and community updates. Stakeholder relationship management might be enhanced further by encouraging stakeholders to be actively involved on the organisation's social media platforms (Namisango *et al.*, 2021). This would enable it to move beyond passive engagement (likes and shares) and allow for the co-creation of content, the contribution of ideas, and participation in strategies that shape communication on social media platforms (Namisango *et al.*, 2021).

By improving content management practices, the social media platforms of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce can shift from a broadcasting approach to a dialogical engagement approach that uses social media not only to promote events but also to facilitate and build relationships and create a space where stakeholders can influence organisational processes in an online environment (Kent & Taylor, 2021). It is also recommended that it develop a structured system that helps to enhance responsiveness. This would include timely responses to stakeholder comments and would foster inclusion and communality on social media platforms (Mzizi & Govender, 2024). Through leveraging analytics using data-driven insights, content strategies can be refined, and feedback loops can be created to visibly acknowledge stakeholder input on posts on social media platforms (Trilling, 2024).

Finally, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and Feisty Communications should focus on relationship outcomes, building trust with transparent communication and authenticity, which would strengthen commitment between the organisation and the stakeholders (Lee, 2025). It should also ensure relationship satisfaction by recognising stakeholders' contributions and providing content that meets their needs (Mohammad Hatamleh *et al.*, 2023). Communality should also be enhanced through online collaboration, which in turn would empower stakeholders to achieve control mutuality (Sisson, 2017).

6.5 Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research

A challenge experienced in this study, which could be seen as a limitation, is that the stories posted on the social media platforms could not be analysed because they were not available to the researcher at the time of analysis. Social media stories are only available for 24 hours and then expire. The researcher could also not determine the time of day posts were made, since only the post date is available on Facebook and Instagram, not the time they were published. Future researchers can expand on this study by taking daily screenshots of the stories and content posted on social media pages and also analysing them.

Furthermore, the study focused on a single organisation, namely the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, and therefore the findings cannot be generalised to other chambers in other towns or similar organisations in South Africa or globally. This may affect the broader applicability of insights regarding communication management to foster engagement and build relationships with external stakeholders on social media. It is, however, important to note that the qualitative nature of this study was not intended to produce generalisable findings, but rather to provide in-depth insights into how the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce engages and builds relationships with stakeholders on social media. Further studies could adopt a broader scope by including multiple chambers of commerce within the South African context, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of their engagement with and relationships to external stakeholders on social media.

The analysis was also limited to two social media platforms, namely Facebook and Instagram, seeing that these are the primary platforms used by the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce. Other platforms, such as LinkedIn, which the Chamber began using in 2025, could be included in future studies. Another limitation related to this is the temporal constraints: as social media evolves rapidly, the findings of this study reflect only a snapshot in time (one year).

This study focused on the perceptions of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce (which includes the contracted Feisty Communication and Marketing agency) and also provided an analysis of the social media pages. It did not include the external stakeholders' perspective. This lack of stakeholders' perspectives beyond what could be seen on social media pages constrained the study's broader insight into how stakeholders perceive engagement and relationships with the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce on social media. Future studies could include the external stakeholders' perceptions by incorporating quantitative methods, such as questionnaires, to evaluate their perceptions of communication as a means of engaging and building relationships with the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce on social media. Incorporating quantitative methods alongside the qualitative approach could also facilitate the generalisation of findings.

6.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce (and Feisty Communication and Marketing) could foster engagement and build stronger relationships on the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media pages by consistently applying the guidelines of two-way symmetrical communication, social media engagement theory and stakeholder relationship management theory, as identified in this study.

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ANNEXURE A: BASSREC ETHICS APPROVAL LETTERS



Private Bag X1290, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222

Fax: 018 299-4910

Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics
Committee (BaSSREC)

Faculty of Humanities Ethics Office for Research,
Training and Support

Tel: 018 285 2457

Email: Erhabor.Idemudia@nwu.ac.za

Senate Committee for Research Ethics

Tel: 016 103 4446

Email: Feziwe.Mseleni@nwu.ac.za

14 October 2024

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) on 14/10/2024, the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee hereby approves your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-SERC) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title: An analysis of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with external stakeholders.

Study Leader/Supervisor (Principal Investigator)/Researcher: Dr. L.B. Sutton and Dr. L. Bezuidenhout

Student/Research Team: L. van Dyk (30297389)

Ethics number:

N	W	U	-	0	0	9	9	8	-	2	4	-	A	7
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Institution Study Number Year Status

Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation

Application Type: Single Study

Commencement date: 14/10/2024

Risk:

Low risk

Expiry date: 14/10/2025

Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.

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

General conditions:

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

- The study leader/supervisor (principal investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the BaSSREC:
 - annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and

- without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.
- The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the BaSSREC, prior to implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-SCRE and BaSSREC reserves the right to:
 - request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;
 - to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process;
 - withdraw or postpone approval if:
 - any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;
 - it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the BaSSREC or that information has been false or misrepresented;
 - submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or
 - new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.
- BaSSREC can be contacted for further information or any report templates via BaSSREC-Admin@nwu.ac.za.

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

Yours sincerely



Prof. E. Idemudia

Chairperson NWU Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee



Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222

Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Basic and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC)

Faculty of Humanities Ethics Office for Research,

Training and Support

Tel: 018 285 2457

Email: Erhabor.Idemudia@nwu.ac.za

03 October 2025

APPROVAL FOR CONTINUATION OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

Ethics number: NWU-00998-24-A7

Study title: An analysis of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with external stakeholders.

Study leader/supervisor: Dr. L.B. Sutton

Student: L. Van Dyk

Application type: Single study

Risk level: Low

Dear Researcher

You are kindly informed that this application was reviewed for monitoring at the meeting of the North-West University Basic and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC), Faculty of Humanities, North-West University, held on 01/10/2025. Following the review of the application, it has been decided that the study is approved for continuation.

Suspension	
Continuation	X
Termination	

Approval date: 01/10/2025

Expiry date: 01/10/2026

If you have any questions or need further assistance, please contact BaSSREC.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Erhabor Idemudia', is written over a horizontal line.

Professor Erhabor Idemudia Chairperson: NWU-BaSSREC

ANNEXURE B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM



DATE: 14 October 2024

BaSSREC Authorisation

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'L. van Dyk', is written over a horizontal line.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM

Title of the research project	An analysis of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with external stakeholders
Ethics number	NWU-00998-24-A7
Principal investigator	Lizé-Mari van Dyk
Student number	30297389
Address	22 Voorsien st. Stampriet, Namibia
Email address	lvdyk@outlook.com
Contact number	+264813606314

You are being invited to take part in a research project that forms part of my masters study. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project. Please ask the researcher any questions about any part of this project that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research is about and how you could be involved. Also, your participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to decline to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part. Prior to publication of the study's results (or the point that publication is in process), you may also withdraw the data you generate.

This study has been approved by the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) of the Faculty of Humanities of the North-West University (NWU.....) and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the international Singapore Statement on Research Integrity (2010) and the ethical guidelines of the National

Health Research Ethics Council. It might be necessary for the research ethics committee members or relevant authorities to inspect the research records to make sure that we (the researchers) are conducting research in an ethical manner.

What is this research study all about?

- This study is an investigation of how relationships are built on social media platforms and will involve the use of semi-structured interviews and qualitative content analysis.
- The researcher has been trained to use the methods mentioned in the previous sentence.
- Approximately 4 participants will be included in the semi-structured interviews of this study.
- The objectives of this research are:
 - To determine the guidelines that have been established for communication management to foster engagement and relationships with external stakeholders on social media, by focusing on the two-way symmetrical communication model, social media engagement theory and stakeholder relationship management theory, through a literature study.
 - To determine the management of Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's approach to the management of communication on the social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders, through semi-structured interviews.
 - To determine the approach of Feisty Communication and Marketing regarding the management of communication on social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with its external stakeholders, through semi-structured interviews.
 - To determine how content is being managed on Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with external stakeholders, through qualitative content analysis.

Why have you been invited to participate?

- You have been invited to participate because you have the knowledge or because of your involvement in the organisation and the organisation's social media pages. You either form part of the management of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce or are the account manager (working for Feisty as a consultant for the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce) who manages the social media pages of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce.
- You will be excluded if:
 - You do not have internet access to participate in an online interview via Zoom or MS Teams.
 - You are younger than 18 years old.
 - If you cannot read or understand English.
 - If you do not hold a position at Feisty as an account manager for the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce or a management position at the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce.

What will your responsibilities be?

- You will be invited to participate in the noted study by *semi-structured interviews*.
- You will be expected to answer questions during a semi-structured interview about your perception of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media pages to build relationships and engagement with its stakeholders.

- You will have 7 days to indicate whether you would be willing to participate.
- You will be requested to sign this Informed Consent Statement before the commencement of the study.

Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

- You will not receive compensation or be reimbursed for taking part in the study, and you will probably not directly benefit as a participant in this study.
- The indirect benefit will probably be that the organisation (Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce) will gain insight into how social media can be used to build relationships and engagement between the organisation and its stakeholders, and could, furthermore, guide theory (contributing to knowledge generation)

Are there risks involved in your taking part in this research and how will these be managed?

The possible risks in this study, and how these will be managed, are summarised in the table below:

Possible risk and mitigating strategy
The interviews will be conducted via an online platform, such as Zoom or MS Teams (your preferred medium). The interview will be scheduled at a time and date convenient for you. You will therefore participate from a location convenient to you and a device convenient to you. Seeing that you chose the location from where you will digitally participate in the interview, there are no potential hazards or risks that could arise from the location. You can also make sure that there is no lack of privacy or discomfort during this time. There is no need to arrange for emergency care situations. There is no personal contact and no health risk involved.
You will be asked about your perception on matters related to the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media pages to build relationships and engagement with its stakeholders, and will not be asked sensitive questions. As such, the study offers little threat, and counsellors, psychologists, psychiatrists or social workers are not needed.
The semi-structured interviews will be an online conversation of about 40 to 60 minutes. You should not experience tiredness or discomfort during this time. If you do, you can take a 5-minute comfort break and then continue with the interview.

- *However, we do believe that the benefits to you and to science (as noted in the previous section) outweigh the risks we have listed. If you disagree, then please feel free not to participate in this study. We will respect your decision.*
- *Should we learn, in the course of the research, that someone is harming you, or that you are intending to harm someone, then we must tell someone who can help you/warn the person you are intending to harm.*

Who will have access to the data?

The following procedures will be observed in line with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA):

Principle	How will this be done?	When will this be done?
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Anonymity	Anonymity will be ensured by the principal investigator who will assign a fictitious code to you before the interview starts. Only this name will be used in the research process. For example, Participant A, Participant B, etc.	Before the interview commences and after the interview has been conducted.
Confidentiality	Confidentiality will include the use of pseudonyms for participants. It involves not disclosing any information gained from an interviewee deliberately or accidentally in ways that might identify an individual. It should be noted that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and Feisty Communication and Marketing (working as consultants on the social media pages) as organisations are identified in the study and reporting. The participants will, however, be kept anonymous.	After the fieldwork has been completed. During analysis and the write-up of findings. During the reporting of findings. During the publication of findings in the form of articles, books, conference proceedings, etc.
De-identification of data	All identifiable personal information will be de-identified to ensure that no information identifies any participants.	After the fieldwork has been completed. Before data analysis and the write-up of findings start.
Data storage	All data collected for the purpose of the research will be stored safely in electronic format for a period of five years after which it will be destroyed. The primary investigator will ensure data that both hard-(printed) if used, soft copy (electronic) are safely locked away and password-protected, respectively. Only approved people in my research team (namely my supervisor) will have access to my raw data where the need arises. At the analysis stage, as will be the case throughout, the use of coding will reinforce participants' non-identification, hence upholding the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity.	During the fieldwork. After the fieldwork has been completed During analysis and the write-up of findings. During the reporting of findings. During the publication of findings in the form of articles, books, conference proceedings, etc.
Privacy	<i>Privacy</i> will be ensured by not probing unnecessarily if you do not wish to discuss particular matters.	During the fieldwork. During follow-up fieldwork.
Transcription/coding of data	I will not use a <i>transcriber</i> for the purpose of the transcripts after the interview. I will not use a <i>statistician/coder</i> for the purpose of the transcripts after the interview.	The primary investigator will be responsible for transcribing the data. Therefore, no other person will have access to the data, except for the supervisor of the study. The primary investigator will be required to sign a NWU

		Confidentiality Agreement before the study commences.
Translation/interpreter services	I will not use a <i>translator/interpreter</i> for the purpose of the interviews/explaining the informed consent, etc.	N/A

Collection of only relevant personal information:

Collection of only relevant personal information	I, the principal investigator, will only collect personal biographical and opinion-related data about the topic I am studying.	For the purpose of this study the following biographical information will be collected: Occupation details such as how long in a position and working for/with the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce. For the purpose of this study the following opinion-related information will be collected, based on the following themes: Relationship management constructs such as trust, commitment, satisfaction and mutual control, as well as engagement via social media constructs such as Internal communication constructs, such as two-way communication, feedback, dialogue, participation, etc.
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What will happen to the data?

The data from this study will be reported in the following ways: the data from the semi-structured interviews will be transcribed by the primary investigator, and from the transcribed data the conclusions will be reported in a MA in Communication dissertation, to answer the research questions. In all of this reporting, you will not be personally identified. This means that the reporting will not include your name or details that will help others to know that you participated.

This is a once-off study, but the data may be re-used in the form of conference presentations and articles published in academic journals.

Will you be paid/compensated to take part in this study and are there any costs involved?

No, you will not be paid/compensated to take part in the study. As the semi-structured interviews will take place online, there will be no compensation for travel costs. There will thus be no costs involved.

How will you know about the findings?

- The general findings of the research will be shared with you by the primary investigator once the research findings have been published in the form of a MA in Communication dissertation on the NWU's Library website (after examination).

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

- You can contact the primary researcher, Lize-Mari van Dyk at +264813850925 and lvdyk@outlook.com if you have any further queries or encounter any problems. You may also contact the supervisor of the study, Dr Lucinda B Sutton at lucinda.sutton@nwu.ac.za
- You can contact the chair of the Basic Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Prof Erhabor Idemudia) at 018 389 2899 or Erhabor.Idemudia@nwu.ac.za if you have any concerns or complaints that have not been adequately addressed by the researcher.
- You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your own records.

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I _____ agree to take part in a research study entitled: "An analysis of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with external stakeholders"

I declare that:

- I provide *informed consent*.
 - Thus, I have read and understood this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
 - Thus, I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person obtaining consent, as well as the researcher (if this is a different person), and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I provide *voluntary consent*.
 - Thus, I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and I have not been pressurised to take part.
 - Thus, I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
 - Thus, I am aware of the fact that I may request that the researcher does not continue with said recording if I request it.
- I provide *specific consent*.
 - Thus, I understand that what I contribute (what I report/say/write/draw/produce visually) could be reproduced publicly and/or quoted, but without reference to my personal identity.
 - I provide *specific consent*. Thus, I consent to an audio and/or audio-visual recording of the semi-structured interview.

Signed at (place) _____ on (date) _____ 20 _____

Signature of participant

Signature of witness

- | | |
|--|--|
| • You may contact me again | ☐ Yes ☐ No |
| • I would like a summary of the findings of this research | ☐ Yes ☐ No |
| • I would like feedback on my functioning/wellbeing as reflected in the questionnaires I completed | ☐ Yes ☐ No |

The best way to reach me is:

Name & Surname: _____

Postal Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone Number: _____

Cell Phone Number: _____

In case the above details change, please contact the following person who knows me well and who does not live with me and who will help you to contact me:

Name & Surname: _____

Phone/ Cell Phone Number /Email: _____

Declaration by person obtaining consent (if not the researcher/primary investigator)

I (*name*) Lizé - Mari van Dyk declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (*place*) Stampriet, Hardap, Namibia on (*date*) 17 May 20 24



Signature of person obtaining consent

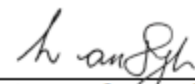
Signature of witness

Declaration by researcher/primary investigator

I Lizé-Mari van Dyk declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to the fullest extent to the plausible participants.
- I encouraged them to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that they adequately understand all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (*place*) Stampriet on (*date*) 17 May 2024



Signature of researcher

Signature of witness

ANNEXURE C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Interview schedule for the management of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce

Grand opening questions 1. Would you begin by telling me what the first things are that come to mind when you think of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms? 2. To what extent do you feel that stakeholders engage on the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's Facebook and Instagram platforms? Why or why not? 3. To what extent do you feel that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce builds relationships with stakeholders on its Facebook and Instagram platforms? Why or why not? 4. Who do you think are the most important stakeholders of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce (external stakeholders specifically)? 5. Please describe how the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media pages are managed.	
Theoretical guideline	Question
*Only ask the relevant questions if the participant has not already provided an answer through the above general opening questions. Use these questions as a guide for the semi-structured conversation.	
Two-way symmetrical communication	
Mutual respect and understanding	How do you, as management (the Board Members), foster mutual respect and understanding and ensure that it is present in communication on social media platforms with stakeholders? Can you give examples where mutual respect and understanding led to improved stakeholder relationships?
Mutual influence	How does Feisty see to it that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and its stakeholders influence each other?
Dialogue	What methods does the organisation use to create dialogue with stakeholders on social media platforms?

	How does the organisation encourage stakeholders to engage in two-way communication on social media platforms?
Dialogue: sending and receiving information	What processes are used by your organisation to facilitate effective two-way communication on social media platforms with your stakeholders? How do you collect information on what Feisty needs to post on the social media platforms? In what way is feedback gathered and addressed from stakeholders to ensure that their voices are heard?
Dialogue: equal opportunity to reply (give feedback) or participate	What systems are in place to ensure that all stakeholders have an equal opportunity to give feedback and to participate in the communication process?
Transparent communication	How do you ensure that open and transparent conversations are maintained with stakeholders via social media? What systems and policies are in place to help ensure that all communication with stakeholders is honest and trustworthy, especially with hard or difficult news shared on social media?
Social media engagement theory	

Creative format: interactive and vivid	To what extent do you believe stakeholders are interactive on the social media pages of the organisation? Please provide examples. How do you, as an organisation, ensure that the information shared on social media platforms is vivid and easy to engage with?
Content: informative, entertaining, promotional and advertising, other	What strategies are used by the organisation to ensure that the information shared on social media platforms is informative? What role does entertainment have in the organisation's social media communication? How does the organisation align promotional content with the needs and expectations of stakeholders on social media platforms? How do you determine which content is created and designed for the social media pages?
Temporal factors: Day of the post, day(s) between the post(s)	How does the organisation decide on the correct timing and frequency for communicating with Feisty regarding updates and announcements that need to be shared with the stakeholders?
Contextual factors: brand/ Industry and social media platforms	In what way does the organisation tailor their message for different brands and industries the organisation is associated with (specifically pertaining to Potchefstroom)? What considerations went into choosing the social media platforms?

	How do you determine the effectiveness of each platform?
Stakeholder relationship management theory	
Cultivation of social media relationships: Disclosure	What strategy is used for determining the amount of information that is shared with Feisty and the stakeholders?
Cultivation of social media relationships: Usefulness and Information dissemination	To what extent do you believe that the information shared on the social media pages is easily accessible to your stakeholders?
Cultivation of social media relationships: Interactivity and involvement	What features of the social media platforms do you (or Feisty) use to ensure that the content is interactive? How do you involve stakeholders on your social media pages?
Relationship outcomes: trust	How do you ensure that all your posts are consistent and reliable? What strategies are used to build trust with the stakeholders via social media?
Relationship outcomes: control mutuality	In what ways does the organisation balance control and influence in the relationship between the organisation and the stakeholders on social media platforms?
Relationship outcomes: communality	What values are important for the organisation? Do you think the stakeholders share the same values on social media?

Relationship outcomes: commitment	To what extent do you believe external stakeholders are committed to the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce, considering its social media pages?
Relationship outcome: relationship satisfaction	How do you (or Feisty) collect data regarding what your stakeholders' needs are? To what extent do you believe that the stakeholders' needs are met?
Relationship outcomes: Types of relationships (exchange vs. communal relationship)	In your opinion, would you say that you have more of an exchange or communal relationship with your stakeholders?
Is there anything you would like to add to the conversation?	

Interview schedule for Feisty Communication and Marketing

Grand opening questions 1. Would you begin by telling me what the first things are that come to mind when you think of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms? 2. To what extent do you feel that stakeholders engage on the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's Facebook and Instagram platforms? Why or why not? 3. To what extent do you feel that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce builds relationships with stakeholders on its Facebook and Instagram platforms? Why or why not? 4. Who do you think are the most important stakeholders of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce (external stakeholders specifically)? 5. Please describe how the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media pages are managed.	
Theoretical guideline	Question
*Only ask the relevant questions if the participant has not already provided an answer through the above general opening questions. Use these questions as a guide for the semi-structured conversation.	
Two-way symmetrical communication	
Mutual understanding and respect	How do you ensure mutual respect and understanding are present on social media platforms?
Mutual influence	How does Feisty see that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce and its stakeholders influence each other?
Dialogue	How do you ensure that dialogue is horizontal on the organisation's social media platforms? What do you see as a mutually beneficial relationship on social media platforms? How do you ensure that the relationship between the organisation and their publics is mutually beneficial?

	How do you work on the relationship to ensure that the relationship is long-term?
Dialogue: sending and receiving information	How do you collect information on the social media platforms?
Dialogue: equal opportunity for replying (give feedback) or participating	How do you give your audience the opportunity to reply or give feedback on the social media platforms, other than just in the comment section?
Dialogue: usefulness and information dissemination	How do you ensure that the information that you disseminate is easily accessible for the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's stakeholders?
Transparent communication	How do you ensure that the conversation is open and transparent on social media platforms?
Social media engagement theory	
Creative format: interactive and vivid	What methods are used to ensure that communication is interactive on social media platforms? How does Feisty ensure that the posts shared with the stakeholders of the organisation are vivid and engaging? What strategies are used to ensure that the posts are visual appealing to stakeholders?

Content: informative, entertaining, promotional and advertising, other	What strategies are used by Feisty to ensure that the information shared on the social media accounts of the organisation is informative? When communicating complex topics, how does Feisty balance the detailed information with clarity? What elements are integrated to ensure that posts are entertaining and engaging to stakeholders, while still ensuring professionalism? In what way does Feisty ensure that the promotional content still aligns with the needs and expectations of the organisation's stakeholders? How do you determine which content is created and designed for the social media pages?
Temporal factors: Day of the post and day(s) between the post(s)	How does Feisty decide on the correct timing and frequency for communicating updates and announcements that need to be shared with the stakeholders on social media platforms? What data or feedback is used by Feisty to determine when and how often content should be communicated with the stakeholders on social media platforms?

Contextual factors: brand/ Industry and social media platforms	What considerations go into selecting the appropriate social media platforms for the organisation to engage stakeholders? How are messages tailored for each platform to ensure that the correct audiences are targeted? What consideration went into choosing the social media platforms for the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce in order to ensure that its stakeholders are reached? How does Feisty adapt the strategy for different social media platforms?
Stakeholder relationship management theory	
Cultivation of social media relationships: disclosure	What strategy is used to determine the amount of information that is shared with the stakeholders?
Cultivation of social media relationships: usefulness and information dissemination	How do you ensure that the information that you put out is easily accessible to your stakeholders?
Cultivation of social media relationships: interactivity and involvement	What features of the social media platforms do you use to ensure that the content is interactive? To what extent do you think stakeholders are involved on the social media platforms?
Relationship outcomes: trust	How do you ensure that all your posts are consistent and reliable?
Relationship outcomes: control mutuality	What strategy does Feisty use for balancing control and influence in the relationship between the organisation and the stakeholders on social media platforms?

Relationship outcomes: communality	What values are important for the organisation on its social media platforms? To what extent do you think stakeholders share the same values when looking at the social media platforms?
Relationship outcomes: commitment	How do you ensure that the stakeholders see the organisation as committed?
Relationship outcomes: relationship satisfaction	How do you collect data regarding what the organisations' stakeholders' needs are? How do you ensure that the stakeholders' needs are met?
Relationship outcomes: Type of relationship (exchange vs. communal relationship)	Would you say that the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce has more of an exchange or communal relationship with its stakeholders?
Is there anything you would like to add to the conversation?	

ANNEXURE D: TURNITIN REPORT

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ORIGINALITY REPORT

16%	11%	12%	5%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

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ANNEXURE E: LANGUAGE EDITING CONFIRMATION



KRÜGER LANGUAGE PRACTITIONERS

Certificate of Proofreading

391 Walter Sisulu Street
Miederpark
Potchefstroom
2531
17/03/2026

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I, Mirrycke Krüger, hereby confirm that Krüger Language Practitioners have proofread:

An analysis of the Potchefstroom Chamber of Commerce's social media platforms to foster engagement and build relationships with external stakeholders

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mirrycke Krüger'.

Mirrycke Krüger
SATI member and PEG member
Certified and Qualified Language Practitioner
info@krugerlangprac.co.za

Disclaimer

During the proofreading process, the assigned language practitioner uses track changes and the comment tool to make corrections and suggestions. The client works through these track changes and rejects or accepts them. Thus, this document cannot be a direct representation of the language practitioner's work. Furthermore, Krüger Language Practitioners cannot guarantee that the client did not include new sections after receiving the proofread document.

Proofreading services exclude reference checking; it is exclusively concerned with the appearance of the references according to a specific style. Reference checking is a separate and costlier service. If major errors are found in the appearance of the references, such as using a mixture of APA and Harvard style references, consistently making the same mistakes, or incorrectly applying a reference style throughout the text, the client is instructed to revise them. The practice also cannot guarantee that the client understood or corrected these errors. Proofreading services excludes fixing references.

Furthermore, proofreading services are also distinct from editing services, which means that the content and overall composition of the text is solely addressed by the client (or a third-party service provider other than Krüger Language Practitioners). Proofreading is primarily concerned with syntax, grammar, punctuation, minor formatting errors, inconsistencies, and the appearance of references. Proofreading is synonymous with language editing.

If any doubt exists as to whether this certificate was indeed issued to the specific client named on this form, contact us to confirm whether he/she was our client.