

**Strategic stakeholder relationship management in
a professional organisation: An exploratory enquiry
into SACOMM**

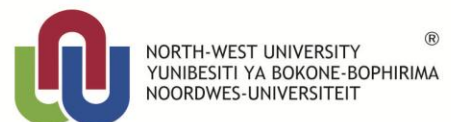
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Master of Arts in Communication Studies at the Potchefstroom
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It all starts here TM



Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my late parents Martha N'wa-Phiyosi and James Majika
Khoza.

My late brother John, your smile keeps me going.

In my heart you rest with love,
Beautiful memories remain,
Words are few but my love for you is Immeasurable.

It is with gratitude and love that I am building on the foundation you gave me,
I thank the Most High God through you.

Today, tomorrow and forever I will cherish you.

Mom and Dad, Rest In Peace...

My Philosophies

“The choices you make today will impact your life definitely”, S Khoza

“Believe you can and you’re halfway there”, Theodore Roosevelt

And

“The strongest principle of growth lies in human choice”, George Eliot

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I thank the Most High God for His Love and Grace, passion He granted me to complete this study.

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Claude Vosloo, who would I be without you? Thanks.

Dyondzo a yi lumi!!!

ABSTRACT

The South African Communication Association (SACOMM) is a Southern African professional organisation for academics in communication, journalism, media studies, marketing communication and related fields. SACOMM's broad objective is to encourage discussion and co-operation between tertiary education institutions that offer Communication Studies. SACOMM hosts an annual conference that provides an opportunity for their members and non-members to have discussions and cultivate a community of scholars. The conference is the most important channel of communication between SACOMM and their members or prospective members.

SACOMM faces various challenges, such as (i) a lack of growth in member numbers and disengaged members, (ii) a lack of contingency in management and the management of stakeholder relationships with members, and (iii) a lack of understanding for the role the annual conference can play in relationship building with members and prospective members. There is also (iv) the challenge that academics have to manage the organisation over and above their current workload, leaving limited time to be spent on SACOMM activities. Given this background, the aim of this study is to understand how strategic stakeholder relationship management can be applied to a professional organisation such as SACOMM to assist in its growth and survival?

In order to provide guidance to this professional organisation on this issue, the systems theory as meta-theory was used in the study. Systems theory makes it possible to understand the components and dynamics of a system in order to interpret the problems and develop balanced intervention strategies by advocating connectedness, interrelatedness and interaction. To describe the interaction needed between the systems theories from the corporate communication domain was used.

According to the stakeholder relationship management theory the interests of the organisation and publics should be aligned by managing the organisation-public relationships. Two-way communication theory describes the flow of communication between the organisation and its stakeholders in building and maintaining long-term relationships. Strategic communication management describes how communication should be planned in order to achieve organisational goals, while simultaneously managing relationships with key publics and also reaching the goals of these stakeholders.

To provide data to illuminate the research problem semi-structured interviews were conducted with the president and a founding member of the organisation. This was followed by questionnaires to the SACOMM members attending the annual conference.

It was found that SACOMM focuses mainly on their contribution and less on the contribution of the members as part of an open system, resulting in a one-sided approach to relationship building. This could be explained by the fact that SACOMM does not have a dedicated resource to manage communication or strategic stakeholder relationships, nor does their management have time available to conduct these tasks. For survival and growth SACOMM needs a strong strategic communication management approach in their communication with stakeholders. It can also be deduced from the study that corporate communication theories could assist professional organisations in ensuring their growth and survival.

Keywords: systems theory, corporate communication theory, stakeholder relationship management, strategic communication management theory, two-way symmetrical communication theory, SACOMM, professional organisation

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CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND, CONTEXT AND FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

This chapter contextualises and describes the applicable theory followed by the background to the study. Thereafter the research problem is presented and discussed, as well the theoretical arguments and methodology that was followed.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Smith-Acuna (2011:6) defines systems theory as a set of unifying principles about systems, according to which organisations are viewed as systems, focusing on the functioning of these systems. In general systems are defined as meaningful wholes that are maintained by the interaction of their parts or subsystems.

According to Greeff (2011:2) systems theory dictates that an organisation is a system with its stakeholders as subsystems, and that the activities of systems are affected by the subsystems and vice versa. In order to put the study into context, the South African Communication Association (SACOMM) can be viewed as a system and its stakeholders (particularly its members) as subsystems.

A system interacts with its subsystems by means of communication. In this sense communication is a critical function in organisations, irrespective of their size and capacity. A well-planned communication strategy can yield positive results to advance the particular organisation's objectives and ensure that the organisation fulfils its mission (King, 1989:136; Anderson *et al.* 1999:4). Sims (2002:135) adds to this finding by indicating that effective communication is a basic prerequisite for an organisation's to attain its strategies and manage its behaviour. However, he points out that enhanced communication has remained one of the main problems facing management in organisations.

Seeger *et al.* (2003:19) explains that communication allows stakeholders of an organisation to become familiar with and understand various aspects of the system and its environment. This includes the existing dynamic relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders, as well as the associated risks. Jahansoozi (2007a:398) indicates that, according to the stakeholder relationship management theory, organisations need to build relationships with stakeholders that are mutually beneficial in order to maximise the organisations' impact.

This theory also suggests that two-way symmetrical communication can balance the interests of organisations and their stakeholders (Heath, 2010:38). Such a symmetrical model of communication aims at creating a favourable environment for organisations and their stakeholders in which to engage. When applying this type of communication strategically, it requires designed action plans to promote voluntary changes in behaviour among stakeholders whose endorsements are critical to the success of a reform initiative (Cabanero-Verzosa & Garcia, 2009:1). This in turn enables the organisation to achieve its strategic goals and objectives (Toth, 2007:139).

Jahansoozi (2007a:398) indicates that, according to stakeholder relationship management theory, organisations need to build relationships that are mutually beneficial with their key stakeholders to maximise the organisations impact and allow for the organisation to pursue their objectives. Simola (in Lindgreen *et al.*, 2012:351) advances that active engagement in relationship building is important not only in the short-term but as a continuous process of creating positive connections that add value for all stakeholders. Freeman (2005:122) refers to stakeholder management as the necessity of an organisation to manage its relationships with stakeholder groups on an action-oriented basis. This entails more than identifying stakeholders, the organisation has to create relationships with them.

Manowong and Ogunlana (in Chinyio & Olomolaiye, 2010:121-129) indicate that stakeholder management strategies are applied with the aim to increase the effectiveness of managing stakeholders' different interests and disposition. These scholars further state that in order to realise effective management of stakeholders and improved stakeholders' relationships, there is a need for effective communication, sustained stakeholders' commitment, and increased satisfaction of stakeholders. They also stress the importance of identifying the right stakeholders to engage, understanding their capacity and willingness in order to manage relationships among stakeholders.

For the purpose of the present study the context in which SACOMM operates and manages its stakeholder relationships, was described and analysed, seeing that this environment has a significant bearing on the theories used and research methods suggested for this study.

1.2 CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE STUDY

De Beer and Vorster (2014:4) indicate that SACOMM was established in 1977 at its first conference in the then Rand's Afrikaans University (present University of Johannesburg) as

a bilingual (Afrikaans-and-English) and non-racial association. SACOMM is a professional organisation that represents academics from around Southern Africa who has occupations in communications and related fields. The members hold an annual conference, which is hosted by a different South African university each year. The conference is the main event for SACOMM each year; it provides an opportunity for academics to present their research to their peers, as well as to network, have discussions and thereby promote the cultivation of a community of scholars. This is also the main and most important channel of communication that SACOMM has with their members or prospective members. At the 2014 annual conference 210 of the 218 SACOMM members joined the conference. The conference gives members the opportunity to interact, and present their papers and includes SACOMM's annual meetings.

The other two channels of communication that SACOMM utilises include a ListServ, which sends email communication to members, and their website. The ListServ emails are informational and aim to give members information on new publications of South African communication journals, information on lecturing vacancies and various other selected informational aspects. The website, created in 2012, holds basic information on the organisation.

SACOMM's main stakeholders are identified as: their members, who are mostly academics working at tertiary institutions in South Africa within the relevant fields; students in communication; and other members from the media, or media practitioners. SACOMM's objectives also make mention of communication practitioners and communication industry professionals as members.

The field of communications is an inherently broad one, and contains a wide variety of specialist subfields. To address this diversity, SACOMM has established four different interest groups to serve their members. The purpose of these groups is to allow platforms for focused discussions that relate directly to a particular field of the communication sciences, whilst still operating within SACOMM. These groups (and fields) are (SACOMM, 2012):

- media studies and journalism;
- film;
- corporate communication; and
- communication in general.

SACOMM's reason for existence is based on the following four objectives (SACOMM, 2012):

- Encourage contact and co-operation among Communication Departments in the various tertiary education institutions that offer Communication Studies.
- Provide a forum to promote research, collaboration and debate on the topic of communication between the following role-players: communication practitioners, communication industry professionals, as well as academics and students.
- Promote networking and academic debate.
- Facilitate professional communication practice in Southern Africa.

SACOMM as organisation does, however, face various challenges. The main impediment is the fact that their membership numbers are remaining constant. This can be attributed to the fact that very few academics from universities who are not on South Africa's list of top five universities form part of SACOMM's membership. Tomaselli (2005a:270) states that in developing members and membership SACOMM has attempted and should give continuing attention to do the following:

- Involve more members from government and developmental organisations, which proved to be extremely difficult during the period of university mergers and restructuring. This particularly was the case, as the three management committees during this time were all drawn from institutions forced into mergers, which consumed the management committees' time and kept them from their SACOMM duties.
- Actively involve students as was done by the previous Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education in the design competition for a new logo and the subsequent in-depth rebranding exercise conducted by students from University of Johannesburg. Through their involvement, the numbers of students presenting papers at the annual conference from this time forward increased.
- Re-establish the previously effective subject working groups, which have since become less successful. For example, more volunteers should be involved to give momentum to the Semiotics Working Group, which are linked to the International Association of Semiotic Studies.
- The Sacomm News (ed. by Vanessa Malila) remains an under-utilised asset. Members are vigorously encouraged to submit news items about themselves, their departments, or research, but little interest is shown.

The points raised above are important for SACOMM's existence; the non-actioning thereof could severely impact SACOMM's survival and future growth. Furthermore, in the South African environment there are various other professional bodies to which communication

practitioners and academics can subscribe and which can be viewed as more active than SACOMM. Moreover, the management of SACOMM is voluntary and rotates every few years, which makes it difficult to plan and follow a strategic direction consistently.

De Beer and Vorster (2014:4) indicate that another challenge facing SACOMM is record-keeping, emphasising that SACOMM's archive is incomplete and unsystematic. They further state that the lack of decent archives is caused by the fact that the presidency rotates every two years. As a result the organisation's administration transfers from one campus to the other, which as such leads to the loss of a large amount of records.

Tomaselli (2005a:270) identifies further challenging tasks facing SACOMM:

- Formalise a standardised and regulated publication policy.
- Sustain and build membership.
- Rebuild academic and professional credibility in both the academic and professional sectors.
- Utilise the ListServ, this is a method of communicating with a group of people via email, and the website to publicise SACOMM. The aims of these communication channels, as stated by Tomaselli (2005a:270) should be to integrate South African communication with media academics and professionals into the global community of scholars.
- Bring together scholars and researchers from seemingly antagonistic paradigms into a dialectic relationship where they could learn from each other.
- Develop policy in a variety of sectors that previously were ad hoc.
- Define the disciplines and fields represented by SACOMM more clearly – and build in definitional flexibility to facilitate paradigm shifts and overlaps of disciplines.

The researcher deliberately mentioned the challenges by Tomaselli above to emphasise the extent of challenges facing SACOMM. In another article, Tomaselli (2005b:45) states: "If SACOMM is to become a viable community of scholars, we need to take it beyond the disparate collection of separated individual housemates that it has been. To do this we need to open doors in the house and to focus on the relationships between disciplines and paradigms in SACOMM."

It is clear from the information above that SACOMM is experiencing many challenges and need to take action to ensure their future growth and survival.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

SACOMM, a professional organisation, depends on its members (stakeholders) to exist and thrive. Unfortunately the lack of growth in member numbers and disengaged members, amongst other challenges, pose a threat to the organisation's future. In addition, the model of appointing a new management team every two years, create a lack of consistency in the management of stakeholder relationships with their members. There is also the challenge that academics have to manage the organisation over and above their current workload, leaving limited time to be spent on SACOMM activities, let alone on stakeholder relationships initiatives. In addition, the success and capacity to build relationships of the most important communication channel to members, the annual conference, is not understood.

The answer to SACOMM's dilemma seemingly lies in corporate communication theory. Most organisations have identified communication as a strategic tool to engage stakeholders (Sims, 2002:135). The relationships between SACOMM and their stakeholders, particularly members, should be mutually beneficial, which translates into interdependence between the system and subsystem. These relationships with stakeholders are crucial in ensuring the organisation's future. In order to create such relationships an organisation needs effective and correct communication to foster stakeholder relationships strategically.

To be more precise, strategic communication management suggest that clear information exchanges with its stakeholders will help an organisation fulfil its mission (Hallahan *et al.*, 2007:3; Paul, 2011:17). In addition, strategic communication management suggest that there should be a dialogue, negotiation and collaboration with stakeholders, while shaping the latter's understanding of the mission and objectives of the organisation (Sriramesh, *et al.*, 2013:304). This can only be achieved by means of two-way, balanced communication between SACOMM and their members (Heath, 2013:325). This suggested form of communication will lead to improved relationships with SACOMM's stakeholders, as suggested in the literature on stakeholder relationship management Ledingham & Bruning, (in Heath, 2001:282).

The above-mentioned theory, which seem to hold the answer to SACOMM's survival and growth, however, have only been applied to profit and non-profit organisations, and not specifically to professional organisations. The present study aimed to investigate the application of this theory to the described context and focus on how SACOMM could sustain

and build membership, communication and relationships between themselves and their members.

From the problem described above the following **general research question** was deduced:

How can strategic stakeholder relationship management be applied to a professional organisation such as SACOMM to assist in its growth and survival?

1.4 SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to answer the general research question, the specific research questions flowing from it were formulated as follows:

1. How can the strategic management of stakeholder relationships be applied to a professional organisation, according to the literature?
2. How does SACOMM strategically manage stakeholder relationships, with specific reference to their annual conference?
3. How do stakeholders experience SACOMM's strategic management efforts regarding stakeholder relationships, with specific reference to SACOMM's annual conference?

1.5. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Main research objective of the study was stated as follows:

To determine how a professional organisation, such as SACOMM, can strategically manage stakeholder relationships.

The specific research objectives were formulated as follows:

1. Determine how strategic management of stakeholder relationships can be applied to a professional organisation such as SACOMM, by studying the literature.
2. Find out how SACOMM can strategically manage stakeholder relationships, with specific reference to their annual conference. This is determined by interviews with SACOMM's leadership.
3. Establish the stakeholders' experience of SACOMM's strategic management efforts regarding stakeholder relationships; with specific reference to their annual

conference. This is done by distributing questionnaires among their members who attend the annual conference.

1.6 MAIN THEORETICAL ARGUMENTS

The present study focused on the following theories: systems theory as meta-theory, stakeholder relationship management theory, two-way symmetrical communication theory and strategic communication management theory. This was done to understand how SACOMM build and maintain relationships with its stakeholders.

- **Systems theory** focuses mainly on relationships and the interdependence of systems, and thereby provides a framework for viewing an organisation. Within this theory, interdependence and interconnectedness are emphasised with regard to an organisation, as well as the flow of information and the feedback processes. From the points highlighted above, it becomes clear that relationships between organisations and stakeholders should be mutually beneficial, which translates into interdependence between the system and its subsystems.
- According to Zakhem *et al.* (2008:48) stakeholders refer to “those groups without whose support the organisation would cease to exist.” Ledingham and Bruning (in Heath, 2001:282) emphasise the essence of public relations as **relationship management**, in other words, the strategic use of communication skills to create, develop and nurture relationships between an organisation and its key public(s). Gruning (2008:118-120) agrees that public relations’ contribution is to make organisations more effective by developing relations with both internal and external stakeholders, in order to fulfil the organisation’s mission.
- According to Giles (2002:42) **two-way symmetrical communication** “is often prescribed as the most effective model of external communication because both the organisation and the publics benefit”. This model of communication establishes mutual understanding between the organisation and its stakeholders. Toth (2007:189) mentioned that “by understanding the publics’ perception and attitudes, the organisation can have a realistic expectation about their future behaviour”. Heath (2013:324) is of the view that dialogue by means of the symmetrical model helps to build and maintain long-term relationships.
- Hallahan *et al.* (2007:3) and Paul (2011:17) define **strategic communication management** as the purposeful use of communication by an organisation to fulfil its mission and create clear information exchanges with its stakeholders. According to

Sriramesh, *et al.* (2013:304) the inclusion of stakeholders in an organisation's decision-making process highlights the importance of strategic management of communication in identifying stakeholders' legitimate expectations. Strategic communication is a skill of negotiating and collaborating with stakeholders, which helps to shape the stakeholders' understanding of the mission and objectives of the organisation.

1.7 METHODOLOGY

The present study followed an exploratory research design. The study investigated how organisations establish and manage effective relations with stakeholders. Burns and Grove (2003:195) define a research design as "a blueprint for conducting a study with maximum control over factors that may interfere with the validity of the findings". The design entails a process that describes how, when and where data are to be collected and analysed. The overall function of a research design is to ensure that the evidence obtained enables the researcher to answer the main research question as clearly and unambiguously as possible.

The research followed a mixed-methods approach. This involves collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two forms of data, and using distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. Such a combined research approach gives the researcher the opportunity to understand the research problem more fully than either approach on its own. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011:171) postulates that in mixed-methods research, data collection consists of several important components that need to be carefully considered, namely: sampling, gaining permission, collecting data and recording the data. Furthermore, these scholars emphasise that data collection should include data-collecting methods of both the quantitative and qualitative approaches.

The present study employed the following research elements: a literature review, semi-structured interviews with the SACOMM leadership and questionnaires distributed among SACOMM's members at their annual conference.

1.7.1. Literature review

The literature review focused on answering the question how SACOMM can manage its strategic management of stakeholder relationships. Sources were consulted that are relevant to the following topics: systems theory, stakeholder relationship management, two-way symmetrical communication and strategic communication management theory.

The following databases were considered to ensure the availability of material for the study:

- EBSCO (Academic Search Premier, Communication & Mass Media Complete, Business Source Premier);
- Emerald Online;
- Ferdinand Postma Catalogue (North-West University);
- NRF: Nexus;
- Repertory of South African Journal Articles; and
- The SA ePublications.

This specific study done on the mentioned organisation as research context, SACOMM, was not undertaken previously. According to the Nexus Database, currently no other research is being done on the anticipated topic as well. Research conducted on strategic management of stakeholder relations and applied to professional organisations, is therefore limited. Some studies were however, undertaken on stakeholder relationship management in different contexts to the current study. Some examples include studies of:

- Bourne (2005) on Project Relationship Management and the stakeholder circle;
- Jones (2001) on stakeholder relationship management in African-American and Hispanic market segments;
- Janse van Rensburg (2003) on the strategic management of the communication relationship between an NGO and its stakeholders;
- Meintjes (2012) on a strategic communication management approach to managing stakeholder relationships according to the King III Report on Governance; and
- Kilonda (2013) on the use of social media in stakeholder relations management by NGOs in the Western Cape, South Africa.

1.7.2 Empirical research

Two methods of data gathering were used, namely semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The first part of this study was qualitative, and thus included semi-structured interviews with the leadership of SACOMM; the second part followed a quantitative research approach, which included the distribution of questionnaires to all SACOMM members who attended the annual conference.

1.7.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

According to Burns (in Kumar, 2011:144) “an interview is a verbal interchange, often face to face, though the telephone may be used, in which an interviewer tries to elicit information, beliefs or opinions from another person”. The interview schedule was drawn up based on the themes identified in the literature (see section 3.3.2.4). Before interviews were conducted, consent was acquired from interviewees as well as the permission to be recorded. Data analysis was done thematically, as identified in the literature (see section 3.5). Interviews were conducted with the current leadership of SACOMM to understand the strategy they employ within the organisation to manage strategic stakeholder relationships. The intentionally selected sample of the leadership, as holders of data that is relevant to the study (Creswell, Plano & Clark, 2011:174; Maree, 2012:79) comprised the SACOMM President and a founder member of SACOMM. In conducting the interviews the researcher was aware of ensuring the reliability and validity of the findings. Reliability is concerned with consistency, dependability and replicability of the results obtained; validity is the extent to which a procedure measures that which it proposes to measure. These concepts, and their application in this study, will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

1.7.2.2 Questionnaires

According to Kumar (2011:145) a questionnaire is a written list of questions, of which the answers are to be recorded by respondents. Questionnaires were distributed to the members (academics, students and practitioners) of SACOMM who attended the annual conference. The total SACOMM membership at the time of the conference was 118; therefore most members attended the conference making it an acceptable population from which to draw a sample. The purpose of these questionnaires was to investigate members’ perception of the strategy to manage stakeholder relationships as it is employed by SACOMM. In total 55 questionnaires were returned, which resulted in a 50% return rate.

The data was analysed with the assistance of the NWU Statistical Services. The software SPSS was used to obtain the necessary statistical equations in order to answer the research questions. The statistical analysis methods included basic descriptive statistics, correlations statistics and Cronbach’s alpha calculations were possible (see section 3.3.3.3).

Merriam (1998:206) asserts that reliability in qualitative studies is seen as results, which are consistent with the data that was collected. For Creswell (2013:253) reliability refers to the stability of responses to multiple coders of data sets. In the present study the reliability was

calculated by using Cronbach Alpha were possible. Hoyle et al. (2002:83) in Chapter 3, sub-section 3.3.2.6 describe validity as the extent to which a measure reflects only the desired construct without contamination from other constructs that vary systematically.

1.8. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study was conducted according to the ethical standards of the NWU and was vetted by the ethical committee of the Faculty of Arts and NWU. The ethics approval number is: NWU-00262-15-A7. For this process the researcher had to explain the ethical implications for the study and clarify how these ethical matters would be managed for the present study.

Welman *et al.* (2005:181) emphasise that issues with ethical considerations come into play at three stages of the research project:

- when the participants are recruited;
- during the intervention and/or the measurement procedure to which they are subjected; and
- with the release of the results that were obtained.

Codes of research have specific principles that protect the interests of participants to ensure that they are not harmed and that their participation in research is voluntary. Fontana and Frey (in Welman, *et al.*, 2005:201) identified the following ethical considerations important for researchers:

- *Informed consent*: the researcher should obtain the necessary permission from the respondents after they were thoroughly and truthfully informed about the purpose of the interview and the investigation.
- *Protection from harm*: respondents should be given the assurance that they will be indemnified against any physical and emotional harm.
- *Involvement of the researcher*: researchers should not use unethical approaches and techniques of interviewing.
- *Right to privacy*: respondent's identity should remain anonymous and they should be assured of this fact throughout.

In conducting this study the researcher adhered to the guidelines principles identified above. However, the interview respondents, due to the position they held, would not be anonymous. This was discussed with the respondents and they explained that due to their standing and

position their names would be linked with the positions, and that they were comfortable with the reporting of their names.

1.9 LAYOUT OF THE STUDY

The study has the following layout of chapters:

Chapter 1: Background, context and framework for the study

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework for strategic stakeholder relationship management

Chapter 3: Research method

Chapter 4: Results of strategic stakeholder relationship management in SACOMM

Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendations

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR STRATEGIC STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 discussed the background, context and planning for the study. This chapter progresses the study by answering Research question 1: “How can strategic stakeholder relationship management be applied to a professional organisation, according to the literature?”

To clarify the terms used in the study the following topics will be elaborated on: systems theory, the corporate communication domain and two-way symmetrical communication theory as informed by the stakeholder relationship management theory and strategic communication management theory.

Gambetti and Quigley (2013:15) point out that the concept of corporate communication is derived from the phenomenon of public relations. This view is also echoed by Oliver and Riley (1996:12) and Kitchen (1997:29). Therefore, the terms corporate communication and public relations (hereafter abbreviated as PR) will be used interchangeably, or in correlation with the sources consulted, in the present study.

The literature review identified in Chapter 1 presents a foundation on which the study builds its investigation.

2.2 SYSTEMS THEORY AS META-THEORY

Friedman and Allen (in Brandell, 2011:03) alludes to the fact that systems theory makes it possible to understand the components and dynamics of a system in order to interpret the problems and develop balanced intervention strategies. In this sense, the theory provides an organising conceptual framework or meta-theory for understanding the phenomena in question. Conrad and Poole (2002:24) defines a system as a network of interdependent components. In considering a comprehensive definition, Littlejohn (1992:41) as well as Angelopulo (in Lubbe & Puth, 1994:41) indicates that systems theory was best explained by Ludwig von Bertalanffy, whose design will be examined closer.

Friedman and Allen (in Brandell, 2011:03) mention that Ludwig von Bertalanffy, an Austrian-born biologist (1901-1972), "is credited with being the originator of the form of systems theory used in social work". Von Bertalanffy was dissatisfied with the way linear, cause-and-effect theories explained growth and change in living organisms; he was of the view that change might occur because of the interaction between the parts of an organism. The introduction of systems theory by Von Bertalanffy changed this framework by considering a system as a whole, in terms of its relationships and interactions with other systems, as a mechanism of growth and change. He defined a system mathematically as a series of simultaneous differential equations, and proposed that it consists of mutual dependent relationships as is found within the field of biology.

Other philosophers such as Max Wertheimer identify a central idea that in the systems theory the whole was greater than the sum of the parts, but yet interdependent (Skyttner, 2005:50). Therefore, the general systems theory embraces the concept of order. Systems theory entails the interdisciplinary study of systems in general, with the goal of identifying principles that can be applied to all types of systems in the various fields of research. Since a system implies connectedness and dependency, Friedman and Allen (in Brandell, 2011:04) advance two conditions on which these properties depend:

- that an interaction occurs between parts; and
- that the condition describing the relationship between these parts is linear.

They further state that von Bertalanffy viewed this theory as a method of organising the interaction between components making up a larger organism. Therefore, the systems theory is an organisational design that focuses on the interaction between systems.

Halsall (2008:22) indicates that, in the study of communication theory, a system is defined in terms of the flow of information. Furthermore, in general a system is defined as a collection of components that by virtue of its organisation and function, becomes meaningful in its own right. Halsall (2008:23-24) identifies the following characteristics of systems theory:

- There must be some kind of meaningful order to the arrangement of the (sub-) systems.
- The individual components of the system need to perform functions, which contribute to the systemic operations of the whole system.

Organisations consist of subsystems that are linked in a particular order and function interdependently. The systems theory can, therefore, also be applied to the organisational setting.

2.2.1 Organisations as systems

Conrad and Poole (2002:24) define organisations as systems of individuals pursuing multiple goals by “creating and interpreting messages within complex networks of interpersonal and task relationships”. It should be pointed out that a system exists in a particular environment; therefore certain factors in the environment will affect and influence the system and its outcomes and outputs. It is also expected that the role and function of the system should adapt to standards within the larger environment.

Miller (in Dainton & Zelle, 2011:99) defines an organisation as “an entity characterised by a group of people who coordinate activities to achieve individual and collective goals”. For the purpose of this study, SACOMM is regarded as the system and its stakeholders as subsystems, which comprise academics, students and other members of the organisation.

It is important to understand the functioning of a particular system as it helps in evaluating the successes (to fulfil its purpose) and failures (falling short of its planned outcomes) that might need to be straightened out for the organisation to function properly. Social systems such as organisations, receive inputs from the environment in which they operate; they engage in a process and generate outputs. Friedman and Allen (in Brandell, 2011:07) state that communication and information constitute an input into a system, a process occurring within the system, and an output when interacting with other systems. In the case of an organisation, this interaction would take place with their stakeholders. Anderson *et al.* (1999:4), therefore, define a system as “an organised whole made up of components that interact in a way distinct from their interaction with other entities and which endures over some period of time”. In light of this definition, SACOMM as a system should communicate exceptionally to their stakeholders. The theory used in this study suggests that this distinctive communication should be two-way symmetrical, as this will result in the optimum use of communication and lead to the building of long-lasting mutual and beneficial relationships.

In addition, organisations can be considered open systems that influence and are also influenced by the environment in which they operate. Open systems have the following characteristics as identified by Sullivan and Atlas (1998:18):

- It is an integrated whole: unity of organisational mission or purpose is fostered by the sharing of information, with credibility of leadership based on the ability to use a system-wide perspective for solving problems by means of persuasion rather than relying on legal authority.
- It has interdependent components, and thus discourages “empire building”, because all parts of the system function inter-responsive. In an open organisation, internal responsiveness is cultivated by the collaboration of managers and staff, rather than by imposing authority.
- Interchange occurs with the environment: the system continually interfaces with the environment that it serves, or on which it depends for survival.
- It interrelates at individual, group, and organisational levels. Three characteristics are used to describe the openness of these three levels:
 - *Unity*: Openness increases at individual level as unity when there is a positive self-concept.
 - *Internal responsiveness*: Implies an awareness of individuals’ feelings, wants and needs that increase openness.
 - *External responsiveness*: Refers to positive interaction with others that increases openness. Open systems have a tendency to differentiate or specialise among its subsystems because of inner dynamics as well as the relationship between growth and survival.
- The system has imperfections to fracture in. There are two main problems: lack of clearly defined boundaries and overemphasis on synergism.
 - The *boundary* issue stems from the inability to define limits, because all elements within a system are interrelated to some degree among themselves and with the environment.
 - The idea of *synergism* reflects the systems view because the emphasis of the theory is on relationships and synthesis. Synergism implies that the whole is greater than its parts.

The various authors as mentioned above identify the following common characteristics of a system: dependency, interrelatedness and connectedness.

- *Dependency* emphasises the relation where the needs and interests of two or more stakeholders overlap.
- *Interrelation* implies the influence of both the system and the subsystem on each other.

- *Connectedness* refers to how the systems share information in order to negotiate their interrelatedness. As indicated previously, SACOMM as a system communicates with its subsystems, to create connectedness.

In totality, an open system can be viewed as rooted in an integrated unit. Within this unit, components are mutually responsive and also interface with a system on which it depends for survival. Therefore, in light of the dependency highlighted above, SACOMM is expected to depend on its stakeholders and vice versa, to adapt and adjust within the environment they operate. Systems theory in general focuses on relationships between the systems as a matter of emphasis.

The interrelatedness of a system and its subsystem as applied to the interaction between SACOMM and its stakeholders is elucidated in *Theoretical statement 1* below.

Theoretical statement 1:

SACOMM and its stakeholders are two interrelated, connected and interdependent systems. Together, if managed effectively, they can create synergy. However, they also constantly need to strive for equilibrium within their changing environment.

Understanding that the systems (organisation and stakeholders) need to be in communication with one another to manage their survival and create relationships, raises the question how such communication should take place. The following section will focus on this matter.

2.3 THE DOMAIN OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATION

The present study is positioned within the domain of corporate communication. Although the application of profit context theories to the non-profit sector can be questioned, it has been applied to this sector with significant success. This is argued by Knox and Gruar (2006:115) who applied stakeholder theory successfully to the non-profit sector, although placed within a marketing paradigm.

Garcia (2012:1) argue that NPOs face the same challenges as profit organisations by having to operate within a challenging and changing environment that demand increasingly more from the organisation. In addition the sector, and NPOs themselves, has expanded greatly. This creates the need for organisational methods and planning, particularly those as

communication planning (Garcia, 2012:1). Kong (2007:282) agrees with this statement and argues that the increased competitive environment has forced NPOs "... to adapt for-profit strategy concepts". However, he warns against applying a profit strategy, without considering its adaptation to align with the NPOs reason for existence as one that invest in human and social concerns, rather than profit (Kong, 2007:282). This warning was, however, directed more to corporate profit management theory than communication theories that inherently focus on the non-financial dimension and human issues. Theories from the domain of corporate communication, therefore, can and must be applied to the non-profit sector, including professional organisations, to help these organisations achieve their unique organisational goals.

Van Riel and Fombrun (2007:14-25) define corporate communication as a coherent approach to the development of communication in organisations. This is an approach that communication specialists can adopt to streamline their own communication activities by working from a centrally coordinated strategic framework. In this sense corporate communication entails an integrative communication structure that links stakeholders to the organisation; it also describes a vision according to which an organisation can strategically manage all types of communication (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:14-25).

Goodman (1994:1) defines corporate communication as "the total of a corporation's efforts to communicate effectively and profitably". The statement creates the impression that this type of communication should allow for a one-way/linear forwarding of information. However, when more definitions of the function are investigated, it becomes clear that Goodman implies more than one-way communication from the organisation to the stakeholders. In the same vein Cutlip *et al.* (1994:2) refers to corporate communication as "... the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the publics on whom its success and failures depends". This definition describes communication as a shared task.

Subsequently, the stakeholder relationship management theory explaining the relationship will be discussed. This will be followed by an explanation of the models of corporate communication that will examine the designs on the flow of information between the organisation and stakeholders.

2.4 THE STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT THEORY

Jahansoozi (2007a:398) indicates that the late 1990s saw an increased focus on the importance for organisations to build mutually beneficial relationships with their key publics, which had an impact on the organisation's licence to operate. Ledingham (2003:181) points out that the perspective on stakeholder relationship management implies that corporate communication practitioners balance the interests of the organisation and publics by managing the organisation's public relationships. A description of this theory will be followed by examining the elements of such a relationship.

2.4.1 Description of the theory

Ledingham (2003:190) defines the theory of stakeholder relationship management as "effectively managing organisational-public relationships around common interests and shared goals, over time, resulting in mutual understanding and benefit for interacting organisations publics". The focus is, therefore, not only on serving the organisation's aims and objectives, but also to create a mutually beneficial relationship between the organisation and its stakeholders.

Robbins *et al.* (2012:95) explains the reason for managing stakeholder relationships "... it can lead to other organisational outcomes, such as improved predictability of environmental changes, more successful innovations, greater degree of trust among stakeholders, and greater organisational flexibility to reduce the impact of change". They further indicate "that an organisation depends on these external groups as sources of inputs (resources) and as outlets for outputs (goods and services), and managers should consider their interests as they make decisions and take actions".

This theory emphasises the importance of relationships that bring about understanding, which benefits both the organisation and the public. Freeman (2005:122) refers to stakeholder management as the need for an organisation to manage its relationships with stakeholder groups on an action-oriented basis (through clear actions). Instead of merely identifying stakeholders, it implies creating relationships with them. Freeman (in Friedman & Miles, 2006:1) defines a stakeholder as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives". According to him the stakeholder concept represents a redefinition according to which all organisations should be thought of as a grouping of stakeholders – the purpose of an organisation then should be to manage the interests, needs and viewpoints of the stakeholders.

Manowong and Ogunlana (in Chinyio & Olomolaiye, 2010:121-129) indicate that certain strategies are implemented to increase the effectiveness of managing stakeholders' different interests and their disposition. According to these researchers to realise the effective management of stakeholders and improve relationships with them, the following aspects are required: effective communication and sustained commitment from stakeholders, as well as their increased satisfaction. In order to manage relationships among stakeholders, it is important to identify the correct stakeholders to engage, and to understand their capacity and 'buy in'.

Managerial decisions and actions are vital in shaping organisations' stakeholder relationships (Freeman, 1984; Berman *et al.*, 1999; Phillips, Freeman and Wicks, 2003; Luque *et al.*, 2008). Management's decisions may impact relationships positively or negatively, while managers have the freedom to choose their course of action in managing relationships. Bourne (2010:3) points out that success in managing stakeholder relationships is achieved by a long-term commitment to a structured process consisting of the following actions:

- Identify stakeholders.
- Understand their expectations.
- Manage those expectations accordingly.
- Monitor the effectiveness of activities regarding stakeholder engagement.
- Review the stakeholder community throughout the process.

Building long-term and sustainable relationships requires a high level of commitment, the ability to 'give up some in order to get some', as well as continuous engagement and dialogue between organisations and publics.

Rowley (in Sachs & Ruhli, 2011:40) explains that firms are structurally embedded in networks of relationships with stakeholders; they are also interconnected by those networks. Table 2.1 below summarises the characteristics of the old and new approaches to corporate stakeholder relations.

Table 2.1 illustrates two different approaches to corporate stakeholder relations: management that is fragmented and collaboration that is integrated. For the purpose of this study, stakeholder collaboration seems to be appropriate to achieve two-way symmetrical communication. According to this approach both the organisation and the stakeholder will do their part to ensure that relations are strengthened and are mutually beneficial.

Table 2.1: Characteristics of old and new approaches to corporate stakeholder relations

Stakeholder management	Stakeholder collaboration
Fragmented	Integrated
Focus on managing relationships	Focus on building relationships
Emphasis on buffering the organisation	Emphasis on creating opportunities and mutual benefits
Linked to short-term business goals	Linked to long-term business goals
Idiosyncratic implementation dependent on division interests and personal style of manager	Coherent approach driven by business goals, mission, values and corporate strategies

(Source: Adapted from Svendsen, 1998:4)

According to Stoldt *et al.* (2012:31-32) the relationship between an organisation and its stakeholders is dynamic. Therefore, from time to time, relational attributes may determine how such a relationship will be influenced, as indicated by Ledingham (2003:195) who supports this view and goes further to identify the following axioms of a theory to manage relationships:

- transactional interaction of an individual with one or more other persons;
- dynamic and changing over time;
- goal-oriented;
- analyses relationship quality, maintenance strategies, relationship type, and relationship actors;
- driven by perceived needs and wants of the interacting organisation and stakeholders;
- dependent on the degree to which expectations, expressed in interactions, are met;
- involving communication, however not as the only instrument of relationship building;
- impacted by relational history, the nature of the transaction, the frequency of exchange, and reciprocity; and
- describable by type (personal, professional, community, symbolic, and behavioural) independent of the perceptions of those relationships.

2.4.2 Relationship-building strategies

Svendsen (1998:3) indicates that a collaborative approach views stakeholder relationships as reciprocal, evolving and mutually well-defined. Furthermore, this collaborative model

presents stakeholder relationships as a source of opportunity and a competitive advantage – relationships increase an organisation's stability and capacity. Simola (in Lindgreen *et al.*, 2012:351) points out that active engagement in relationship building is important not only in the short-term but as a continuous process of creating positive connections that add value for all stakeholders concerned.

Some strategies to build relationships include effective communication with publics. For enhanced relationships between organisations and publics, Hon and Grunig (1999:14-16) identify the following actions:

- *Access*: Public representatives are provided access to the organisation's decision-making process.
- *Openness*: The willingness to engage directly regarding the nature of the relationship.
- *Positivity*: Both the organisation and public put in the effort to make the relationship more enjoyable for the parties involved.
- *Assurances*: The evidence of the benefits gained by legitimising stakeholders entails increased satisfaction and higher commitment from both the organisation and publics.
- *Networking*: Entails organisational efforts to build networks with different groups, for example with a trade union.
- *Sharing of tasks*: Both the organisation and stakeholders do their part to resolve problems of common concern.
- *Integrative*: An integrated communication system is established for coordinated communication within the organisation.
- *Distributive*: Follows a strategy of imposing one's position on the other party without concern for his or her welfare.
- *Dual concern*: Follows a strategy promoting the balancing of both the stakeholders' and organisation's interest.

To summarise the above: Both the organisation and the public have the responsibility to reach out to one another and serve each other's interests in a way that advances both parties equally. The gains are confidence and, more importantly, long-lasting relationships that are mutually beneficial. While the two parties often protect their territories, once they are able to trust one another it will be easier to dedicate efforts and resources ensuring that both parties work towards a common goal and shared vision. When the organisation and its publics understand their roles in the relationship they will be able to work individually and

collectively and add value to the relationship. In some instances either party may make the necessary effort, knowing that they may not reap tangible results, but have the assurance that the relationship will be strengthened in the process.

2.4.3 Measuring stakeholder relationships

Stoldt *et al.* (2012:35) make an important observation: "... from a strategic standpoint, evaluating public-relations strategies and tactics should be done in terms of how effective they are in cultivating quality relationships". Public relations imply public relationships. For insight into these relationships it is important to understand each side's perception of the relationship as well as mutual predictions concerning the other party. In light of this, Hon and Grunig (1999:2) indicate the importance of measuring relationships in PR. They assert that "because a growing number of public-relations practitioners and scholars have come to believe that the fundamental goal of PR is to build and then enhance on-going or long-term relationships with an organization's key constituencies". In this regard, Hon and Grunig (1999:18-20) have identified that the outcomes of an organisation's long-term relationships with key stakeholders can be measured by focusing on the following elements:

- *Controlled mutuality*: The degree to which parties agree on who has the rightful power to influence the other;
- *Trust*: One party's level of confidence in and willingness to open up to the other party;
- *Satisfaction*: The extent to which each party is favourably inclined towards the other since positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced;
- *Commitment*: The extent to which one party believes and feels the relationship is worth the time and energy invested to maintain and promote it.

In addition to the four aspects mentioned above, the following two indicators define the type of relationships that PR strive to achieve. Hon and Grunig (1999:20-21) identify these as follows:

- *Exchange relationship*: One party grants benefits to the other one only because the latter has provided benefits in the past or is expected to do so in the future.
- *Communal relationship*: In contrast, parties are willing to provide benefits to the other because they are concerned for the welfare of the other – even when they believe they might not get anything in return. Such a relationship requires of organisations to be socially responsible and add value to society as well as to client organisations.

Building on the two main relationship indicators above, Hung (in Toth, 2007:456) developed the following six types of relationships:

- *Exploitative*: One party takes advantage of the other when it does not fulfil the consented obligations in an exchange relationship.
- *Manipulative*: This occurs when the organisation knows what the public wants, applies asymmetric or pseudo-symmetrical approach to communicate with the public, but merely to serve its own interests.
- *Symbiotic*: Parties recognise their interdependence and work together to advance common interests.
- *Contractual*: Parties agree on what each should contribute to the relationship.
- *Covenantal*: Parties commit to the common good by their open exchange and the norm of reciprocity.
- *Mutually communal*: Both parties provide benefits to the other because they are concerned with its welfare even when there is no compensation.

Hon and Grunig (1999:25-26) emphasises that the “most evaluation of relationships has focused on perceptions that one or both parties to a relationship have of the relationship”. According to them, related to this focus is the measurement of predictions about the relationship that one party has for the other party or parties. This measuring of the relationship takes place independently of the perceptions or predictions of the parties involved in the relationship. For the present research, the researcher developed a questionnaire with reliable scales to evaluate trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, commitment, and communal and exchange relationships. The questionnaire had to be reliable to observe the phenomenon such as perceptions of a relationship in a sense that, even if it were to be employed in a different setting, the study would get similar responses from the different measures.

Jahansoozi (2007b:943) maintains that trust, commitment, satisfaction, control mutuality, and dialogue could be considered as the essential characteristics, because without these the relationship would wither. Furthermore, she points out that the concept of *transparency* is linked to openness and is described as being both a relational characteristic as well as an environmental condition for organisational process. Transparency is beneficial for relationship building as well as rebuilding trust. Therefore, transparency is viewed as a relational condition that promotes accountability, collaboration, cooperation and commitment. These qualities can help build and maintain strategic relationships between SACOMM and its publics, and thereby further effective management.

Theoretical statement 2 summarises the above literature finding:

Theoretical statement 2:

An organisation such as SACOMM should strive for mutually beneficial relationships with their stakeholders in order to ensure their own survival. The health of the relationship can be determined by measuring the level of trust, satisfaction, commitment, control mutuality, and whether it is an exchange or communal relationship.

Effective communication will change the behaviour of both management and publics, which will foster healthy relationships. Improved communication does not translate to immediate behaviour change but keep publics from engaging in negative behaviour, for example, litigation, strikes, protests or even negative profiling of the organisation. Steyn and Puth (2000:188) mention that organisational effectiveness can be achieved by building and maintaining excellent relationships with strategic stakeholders.

Nevertheless, it is clear that an organisation (such as SACOMM) should use two-way symmetrical communication to obtain mutually beneficial relationships with all of their stakeholders. In addition, communication needs to be applied strategically in order to assist the organisation. In light of this, the two-way symmetrical theory of communication management will be examined, followed by the strategic communication management theory.

2.5 TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL COMMUNICATION

Grunig (1992:4) views public relations (PR) as the “management of communication between an organisation and its publics” and with this definition emphasises the communication flow between the organisation and its stakeholders. Four models of public-relations practice have emerged as described by Grunig and Hunt (in Grunig *et al.*, 2002:308) and further elaborated on by Sriramesh and Vercic (2003:326). To an extent these models refer to the development regarding the function of corporate communication (Grunig & Hunt, in Grunig *et al.*, 2002:308), although there are evidence that all of the models are still being used today. Table 2.2 below illustrates the four models of PR.

Table 2.2: Grunig and Hunt's four models of public relations

Model	Type of communication	Characteristics
1. Press-agentry or publicity model	One-way communication	Uses persuasion and manipulation to influence audiences to behave as the organisation desires.
2. Public-information model	One-way communication	Uses different strategies such as press releases, leaflets, reports, guides, fact-packs, videos, or exhibitions to create awareness about their products and services. Organisations may adapt the truth to put them in a favourable light.
3. Two-way asymmetrical model	Two-way communication (imbalanced)	Uses persuasion and manipulation to influence audiences to behave as the organisation desires. Organisations use research to ascertain stakeholders' feelings towards and perceptions of the organisation.
4. Two-way symmetrical model	Two-way communication (balanced)	Based on mutual understanding, both parties can be persuaded to change attitudes and behaviour as a result of the public-relations activity. Stakeholders are taken into confidence on matters that affect them and vice versa.

(Source: Adapted from Grunig & Hunt, 1984:22)

Grunig (1992:39) indicates that press-agentry, public-information and two-way asymmetrical models are asymmetrical, implying that their attention and focus is to change the behaviour of publics without altering the behaviour of the organisations. The first two models outlined in Table 2.2 above are even more extreme in their application of the asymmetrical communication process, as they also are one-way models of communication. Grunig (1992:39) also adds the following in terms of the specific model that is applied:

- *Press-agentry:* PR will do their utmost to gain publicity in the media.
- *Public-information:* Public-relations agents use journalists in residence to disseminate favourable information about the organisation.

- *Two-way asymmetrical*: Research is used to develop messages that would likely persuade the public.

The description of these asymmetrical models, as well as the explanation in Table 2.2 above, indicate the power that corporate communication practitioners have and can wield to disseminate information beneficial to the organisation alone, assuming in the abovementioned models that they are not seemingly as concerned with the interests of other stakeholders/publics.

The fourth model presented in Table 2.2 above depicts two-way symmetrical communication. Garnett and Kouzmin (1997:262) and Grunig (1992:39) describe this form of communication as a mode of PR that is based on research; it utilises communication to manage conflict and improve understanding of strategic publics. The symmetrical model focuses on balancing the interests of the organisation and stakeholders by means of two-way symmetrical communication, which is dialogical, participative and power-distributing, and thereby enhances the collaboration between the organisation and stakeholders (Stepinska, 2014:115). By applying this model both the organisation and stakeholders can be persuaded and it can lead to behavioural change. In other words, this model embraces the characteristics of an open system, as discussed previously.

Heath (2013:324) is of the view that dialogue by means of the symmetrical model helps to build and maintain long-term relationships. A mutually beneficial relationship gives stakeholders a sense of ownership towards programmes and projects and an understanding of the dynamics in the process of negotiation and engagement: sometimes losing ground and other times gaining ground. Giles (2002:42) explains further that the purpose of two-way symmetric communication is to establish mutual understanding between an organisation and its environment. In terms of this model, conversation is encouraged as it enhances legitimacy and autonomy during interactions with stakeholders. The flow, direction and approach to communication, are evident in the definitions circumscribing the functions of corporate communication.

The two-way symmetrical model depicts both the organisation and stakeholders as winners, due to the engagement and understanding of the direction and vision the organisation is taking. Grunig (1992:43) explains how the systems theory correlates with two-way symmetrical communication by emphasising the following aspects:

- *Interdependence*: Organisations cannot isolate themselves from their environment; hence this mutual dependence is created by the two-way flow of communication.
- *Open system*: Organisations are open to interpenetrating systems and freely exchange information with those systems.
- *Moving equilibrium*: Organisations as systems strive towards finding equilibrium with other systems, a state that constantly alters as the environment changes. (Only two-way symmetrical communication can create such equilibrium.)
- *Equity*: People should be given equal opportunities and be respected as fellow human beings.
- *Autonomy*: Maximises employees' satisfaction inside the organisation and their cooperation outside the organisation.
- *Innovation*: Emphasising new ideas and flexible thinking rather than tradition and efficiency.
- *Decentralised management*: The style should be collective; managers should coordinate rather than dictate.
- *Responsibility*: People and organisations must be concerned with the impact of their behaviour on others, and attempt to eliminate adverse consequences.
- *Conflict resolution*: Conflict should be resolved by negotiation, communication, and compromise; and not by force, manipulation, coercion or violence.
- *Interest-group liberalism*: Views the political system as a mechanism for open negotiation among interests or issue groups.

In light of the information above, it is clear that two-way symmetrical communication can enhance the management of relationships between organisations and their stakeholders as it creates a favourable environment for organisations and the public in which to engage. Such communication leads to the development of equal and fair relationships while maintaining the personal interactions between the organisations and its stakeholders. The two-way symmetrical model is effective as it builds mutual trust and respect; communication is also utilised to promote public participation and manage conflict with strategic stakeholders. Above all, the outcome of this form of communication is: improved long-term relationships. Heath (2001:3) points out that at the heart of public-relations practice lies the mutual beneficial relationships that an organisation needs as a 'licence' to operate. Black (2013:90) indicates that the notion of a 'social license to operate' was posed as metaphor to emphasise the need that companies should earn acceptance or approval from their host communities.

Two-way symmetrical communication brings about mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders, and can translate into a win-win solution for the organisation and stakeholders alike. Grunig (in Stromback & Kioussis, 2011:20) adds that by using the two-way symmetrical model practitioners "... more often meet the objectives of their communication and make the organisation more effective". Ledingham and Brunig (2000:65) highlight the value that organisations and stakeholders gain by practicing the two-way symmetrical model in PR. They also emphasise the need for building and maintaining relationships that benefit both the organisation and stakeholders. Furthermore, organisations must communicate symmetrically with stakeholders to build quality, long-term relationships with them.

Heath (2013:324) further states that the two-way symmetrical model is deemed the most excellent approach to conducting corporate communication. Dozier *et al.* (1995:39) concurs by adding that "communicators must know advanced practices that rightfully treat communication as a two-way process", to be able to implement this model. Public-relations professionals can use the power of their knowledge to advocate a symmetrical approach to corporate communication in their organisations (Heath, 2010:38).

According to Heath (2010:38) the two-way symmetrical model appears to be a normative ideal for corporate communication practice. This is because this model explains how corporate communication should be practiced in an ideal environment. In practice, a different approach is needed. Thus Heath (2001:12) proposes the combination of a two-way symmetrical and asymmetrical model (i.e., mixed-motive model). As a more realistic approach, this combined model aim to increase public-relations practitioners' contribution to the effectiveness of an organisation.

2.5.1 Mixed-motive model

Heath (2001:12) points out that in a mixed-motive model, "organisations try to satisfy their interests while simultaneously trying to help publics satisfy their interests". Since the mixed-motive model integrates both asymmetrical and symmetrical two-way communication, the model aims to help both the organisation and stakeholders to form an inner understanding of the organisation concerned. As the mixed-motive model is expanded further, (Dozier, *et al.*, 1995:101) indicate that such a model has a two-way function, and to ensure that users adhere to this requirement, they advocate "research before and after the execution of communication and public relations programs".

Murphy (in Heath, 2013:177) suggests that a mixed-motive version of the two-way symmetrical model provides a better description of the actual practice of corporate communication. He indicates that more recent studies acknowledged the mixed-motive model as the one most practiced in corporate communication. Then he continues to point out that “in mixed motives, each side in a stakeholder relationship retains a strong sense of its own interest, yet each is motivated to cooperate to attain at least some resolution to the conflict; they may be on opposite sides of an issue, but it is in their best interest to collaborate” (Heath, 2013:177).

This model provides an opportunity to balance competing views and interests within the organisation. Hon and Grunig (1999:16) list the following ten strategies that have been identified to advance the mixed-motive or collaborative model for organisations:

- *Contending*: Attempts to convince the public to accept its position.
- *Avoiding*: Evades the conflict either physically or psychologically.
- *Accommodating*: Yields, at least in part, on its position and lowers its aspirations.
- *Compromising*: Meets the public part-way between its preferred positions, but neither is completely satisfied with the outcome.
- *Cooperating*: Works together with the public to reconcile their interests and reach a relationship that is mutually beneficial.
- *Unconditionally constructive*: Even if the other party to a conflict does not reciprocate, the organisation acts by reconciling the strategic interests of both parties.
- *Win-win or no deal*: If a solution that benefits both parties cannot be found, they agree to disagree – no deal. A strategy of no deal is symmetrical since it leaves open the potential to reach a win-win solution at a later date.
- *Principled*: Hold on to higher ethics that cannot be compromised.
- *Mediated*: Parties to a dispute are willing to resolve it since they have common knowledge of how to negotiate with one another.
- *Perseverance*: Showing persistence despite challenges and difficulties during the process.

According to Hoffman (2000:8) such a model presents “the possibility of mutual gain”, and leads to harmony and a favourable environment in which both parties can continue engaging. Naudé (2001:78) states that the principle of the mixed-motives model is based on the “norm of reciprocity”. Grunig (1992:46) points out that “excellent organisations can get more of what they want by giving publics some of what they want”.

Organisations that focus on creating stakeholder relationships need to communicate according to the mixed-motive model. In particular this applies to SACOMM, as context for this research, when considering their approach to communication.

Theoretical statement 3 below captures the essence of the mixed-motive model.

Theoretical statement 3:

The ideal communication approach for SACOMM to ensure that they exist in equilibrium is to employ the mixed-motive communication model. By utilising this model in practice, SACOMM can build stronger relationships with stakeholders that are mutually beneficial. This implies further that SACOMM needs to adhere to the guidelines discussed above when implementing the mixed-motive model.

2.5.1.1 Channels for mixed-motive communication

Organisations can employ various communication channels to engage their stakeholders when using mixed-motive communication. Since SACOMM focuses mainly on the use of a conference to connect to their members, conferencing will be examined as a method of communication, followed by a discussion on the use of electronic media within mixed-motive communication.

Regarding channels for mixed-motive communication, the view of Farnham (2000:193) is relevant. He indicates that conferences and seminars are meetings of selected people who come together to discuss and examine a particular problem. SACOMM in particular holds an annual conference, which is a channel of communication utilised to engage with its stakeholders, namely academics and students. Shephard (2005:25) proposes that individuals can belong to social learning systems in several ways:

- Engage with individuals and groups in the community.
- Reflect their own position in the social learning system to orient themselves with respect to the community.
- Align themselves with other processes, so that concepts and perspectives become coordinated.

In this sense, SACOMM's annual conferences provide a platform where different views are exchanged among its members and with stakeholders, and where the vision of SACOMM as an organisation is shared.

In an effort to build relationships with the publics, PR practitioners can employ mass media (newspaper, television, radio and magazines) to achieve organisational goals. Duhe (2007:99) points out that printed media such as newspapers do not involve stakeholder interaction, whereas television and radio to a certain extent create this interaction. Erasmus (2012:55) states that "with the emergence and growth of the Internet, the decline, purpose, potential and role of traditional media outlets have been under the spotlight in the communications industry over the past few years".

Alberts (2010: [1]) asserts that the Internet has decreased the need for traditional media as it has enabled consumers to join social societies beyond their geographic borders. Above all it has given consumers the power to converse at their leisure 24/7 with friends. According to Alberts (2010: [1]) the demise of traditional media can be attributed largely to the following factors:

- *Decline in readership:* The distribution of free news and information on the Worldwide Web (WWW) has led to the decline in readership of traditional publications.
- *Decline in revenues:* The decline in readership means that advertisers will be inclined to spend their money elsewhere, which leads to a decline in advertising revenue.
- *Real-time updates:* Traditional media cannot compete with the instantly updated user-generated content (UGC) that is immediately available for global scrutiny.
- *Emergence of UGC websites:* Audiences have the unlimited real-time commentary on content, while traditional media are static and a one-way communication tool.
- *Online audio/video:* Audiences can choose what they want to watch and listen to whenever and wherever they want without advertising interrupting their experience.

Table 2.3 below illustrates the number of years it took different media elements to reach a market audience of 50 million. This table confirms that traditional media needed a longer period to penetrate audiences, whereas social media's penetration and adoption took place over a much briefer period.

Table 2.3: Years to reach a market audience of 50 million users

Mass medium	Years
Radio	38 years
TV	13 years
Internet	4 years
iPod	3 years
Facebook	2 years

(Source: Alberts, 2010:[1])

Ideally the mixed-motive approach would advocate using communication channels that allow for rapid feedback and discussion as a mode of interaction. Therefore, the traditional mass media does not seem to be the ideal application for SACOMM's needs.

Moreover, satellite and information and communication technologies (ICTs) have revolutionised the media landscape as they brought a large number of media choices to the public. This has presented the opportunity for two-way symmetrical communication to be interactive, seeing that new media users have become active, whereas in the past they were mostly passive. Duhe (2007:99) stresses the fact that interaction is central to the creation of relationships.

2.5.1.2 Social media and mixed-motive communication

New media is also referred to as 'social media', terms that are "often used to describe the collection of software that enables individuals and communities to gather, communicate, share, and in some cases collaborate or play" (Doorley & Garcia, 2015:128). In recent times social media has played a more prominent part in the public and organisations' mode of communication and participation online. These channels allow access regardless of age, geographic area, gender and education. Social media has become an important tool in people's daily lives; it serves as a platform to distribute, collaborate, inform and comment, observe and participate. Doorley and Garcia (2015:130) identify the following features of social media:

- *Authenticity:* It requires a great deal of consistency between communication and action, and across communication channels and organisational functions.

- *Transparency*: Information needs to be accessible to stakeholders or institutions on matters that affect their interests. Transparency is a new form of power, and it pays off when harnessed.
- *Decentralisation of authority*: Instead of top-down, one-directional information dictated by the leaders of corporations, information has better opportunities to move from the bottom upwards, from the sides, and between different groups.
- *Speed*: The pace at which information is shared and propagated in social media is faster and broader-based than the traditional forms of communication. The interconnected pieces of information are easier to spread and share, and easier to find.
- *Collaboration*: Entails an inherent part of what defines social media – the building of relationships, not just the exchange of information. Participation in social media depends on the audience; organisations should approach these platforms as collaborative media that encourage commitment and sustainability.

Dewing (2010:1) refers to social media as “the wide range of Internet-based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content, or join online communities”. Breakenridge (in Erasmus, 2012:72) advanced a similar view according to which social media is described as ‘anything’ that use the Internet to facilitate conversation between people. While Anderson (2009:[1]) defines social media as a term used to describe the web-based tools, applications, spaces and practices that people use to interact with each other and share information online. For example, social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and MySpace provide online tools that can be utilised to share media and engage in online conversations, while also providing users with online personal space that forms a repository of shared content and social interactions as indicated by Anderson (2009:[1]).

By using social media people can exchange information (photos, videos, news), post their thoughts on blogs and participate in online discussions. Dewing (2010:1) identifies the following Internet services associated with social media:

- *Blogs*: Online journals in which pages are displayed in reverse chronological order; these can be hosted for free on: WordPress, Tumblr and Blogger.
- *Wikis*: Entail a collective website where any participant is allowed to modify any page or create a new page by using a web browser; an example of such a site: Wikipedia.
- *Social bookmarking*: Allows users to organise and share links to websites; for example StumbleUpon and Digg.

- *Social network sites*: Are a web-based service that allows individuals to construct a public profile, articulate a list of other users with whom they share connection and also view and traverse their list of connections and those created by others within the system; prominent examples: Facebook and LinkedIn.
- *Status-update services*: Allow people to share short updates about people or events and to view the updates created by others; example: Twitter.
- *Virtual world content*: Sites that offer a game-like virtual environment in which users interact, for example Second Life, in which users create avatars that interact with others.
- *Media-sharing sites*: Allow users to post photographs and videos; examples: YouTube, Pinterest and Instagram.

Erasmus (2012:77) highlights the most popular social media platforms used in South Africa as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Mxit. Social media gives people the power and authority to shape discussions and the ability to speak their mind freely without restrictions. Dewing (2010:2-3) identifies the following characteristics of social media:

- *Connectability*: It opens up new ways of collaboration and discussion.
- *Replicability*: Content can be copied and shared.
- *Searchability*: Content can be found easily using online search tools.
- *Accessibility*: It can be accessed anywhere, anytime where Internet connection is available.

Kietzmann *et al.* (2011:243) use a honeycomb framework of seven functional building blocks to unpack and examine social media platforms:

- *identity*: the extent to which users reveal themselves;
- *conversations*: the extent to which users communicate with one another;
- *sharing*: the extent to which users exchange, distribute and receive content;
- *presence*: the extent to which users know whether others are present;
- *relationships*: the extent to which users relate to each other;
- *reputation*: the extent to which users know the social standing of others and content;
and
- *groups*: the extent to which users are ordered or form communities

These seven building blocks are relevant to the present study as they indicate how social media could assist in relationship building and provide the features mentioned in the discussion of two-way symmetrical communication.

According to Rutherford (2010:[1]) social media became a popular characterisation of websites that allowed users to interact as contributors to website content. Rutherford further states that social media facilitated user engagement and collaboration; therefore interactive information sharing implied an important migration from traditional websites that were limited to passive viewing of information.

The interactive media thus function as social media as it promote active participation, connectivity, and sharing of knowledge and ideas among users. Oberholster (2014:22) confirms the view above by mentioning that interactivity may be regarded as a key characteristic of Web 2.0 media. Heinonen (in Oberholster, 2014:23) maintains that organisations could benefit from direct contact with employees on social media. As such it may increase the possibility of a relationship of trust as both the organisation and stakeholders are transparent with the information they share.

Strategically, SACOMM can employ these new and advanced ways of communication to retain and attract its stakeholders and build open and trustful relationships with them. Even more importantly, as an open system, SACOMM could gain invaluable input from their stakeholders on conversation as facilitated on social media platforms. *Theoretical statement 4* summarises literatures guidelines on communication channels to use in communicating with stakeholders.

Theoretical statement 4:

Organisations should consider employing all types of media when striving for effective and efficient mixed-motive communication. Social media specifically present evident and strategic advantages to organisations such as SACOMM, as a mixed-motive communication channel.

2.6 STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT THEORY

2.6.1 Definition of the theory

Wilcox and Cameron (2005:23) define strategic communication management as “a deliberate, planned, sustained and systematic series of communication programmes that supports an organisation’s strategic management efforts”. According to Dozier *et al.* (1995:85) communication becomes strategic when it “... assists top management in

managing the pursuit of its purpose and direction, coincident with managing relationships with key publics in the organisation's environment". Thus, for communication management to be considered strategic, it should reflect the vision of the organisation and help achieve its goals as well.

Lindgreen *et al.* (2012:124) indicate that the basis for the stakeholder theory lies in reflective strategic management. This form of theory assumes regular interaction among stakeholders and organisations striving for common goals. Therefore, strategic communication management helps achieve organisational goals while simultaneously managing relationships with key publics. Strategic communication management also focuses on promoting and presenting itself by internal activities of its leaders, employees and communication practitioners.

Hallahan *et al.* (2007:4) view strategic communication management as interacting purposefully to advance a certain mission. Strategic communication management flows from an organisation's strategic plan, focusing on the role of communication to help the organisation achieve its set goals and objectives. The fact is that people are engaged in deliberate practices of communication on behalf of organisations. In this sense, organisations make strategic decisions about the level and type of resources they can devote to such initiatives. Strategic communication management benefits the stakeholders by helping them achieve their goals. The strategic communication management theory also assesses an organisation's communication from an integrated, multidisciplinary perspective by building on ideas grounded in various traditional communication disciplines.

Argenti *et al.* (2005:83) highlight the importance of strategically-driven communication in which communication is aligned with the strategy of the organisation and contributes directly to the organisation's strategic position. According to Higgins (in Steyn & Puth, 2000:32-33) strategic communication entails the management of interaction in terms of "co-ordinating the process of managing the accomplishment of the organisational mission co-incident with managing the relationships of the organisation to its environment". In light of this description, Steyn and Puth (2000:33) identify the aims of strategic management as follows:

- *Monitoring*: Change in one component may affect other components; hence, there should be constant monitoring since strategic management is a dynamic process.
- *Effectiveness above efficiency*: Ascertain how well the organisation is meeting the demands of various groups and organisations that are linked to activities of the organisation.

- *Achieve strategic fit:* Consider the threats and opportunities present in the external environment, and the strengths and weaknesses present internally.
- *Formulate and implement strategies:* Evaluate historical, current, and forecast data on the operations as well as the external environment of the particular organisation.
- *Consider the stakeholder environment:* Assess the impact of implemented strategies on the stakeholder environment, to guide the formulation of future strategies.

According to Steyn (2007:139) strategic management of communication works with the assumption that PR entails a function with a mandate to operate at the strategic level of an organisation. Therefore, the role of PR is to help organisations adapt to its societal and stakeholder environment. The influence of PR leads organisations to align their goals and strategies to stakeholder's values and norms, which means the interests of the organisation and stakeholders are served. Cabanero-Verzosa and Garcia (2009:1) refer to strategic communication as the design of action plans intended to promote voluntary changes in behaviour among stakeholders whose endorsements are critical for the success of a reform initiative.

In the process of building mutually beneficial relationships, organisations gain legitimacy, trust, and establish a sound reputation. Corporate communication provides an opportunity for organisations' leaders to clarify the organisation's position but also to practice two-way communication with its internal and external stakeholders on matters of strategic importance. The goal of strategic communication management is to change behaviour. Such an intervention may be directed towards individuals as well as organisations. In this sense the strategy is stakeholder or client centred. Organisations employ strategic communication in order to understand stakeholders' views on proposed intervention in the processes rather than promoting the organisation's own position on such developmental issues.

Verwey and Du Plooy-Cilliers (2003:2) assert that strategic communication management involves strategic planning in order to ensure effective internal communication. This enables the organisation to achieve short-term goals such as productivity and effectiveness; and long-term goals such as adaptation and survival. Furthermore, the mentioned scholars indicate that "... strategic communication management requires the ability to think strategically and to process complex inter-relationships at all organisational levels, both internally and externally" (Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2003:2). In terms of daily interaction, strategic communication management presents an organisation with the opportunity to communicate in a strategic way, which as such already creates a competitive edge.

Therefore, the strategic management of communication should be linked to all levels of functioning in an organisation.

As indicated above, this form of communication needs strategic planning. Verwey and Du Plooy-Cilliers (2003:4) explain that successful strategic management of communication depends on a number of conditions:

- The overarching goals should be taken from the strategic organisational goals so that the former can be achieved more easily.
- The strategic value of communication should be recognised and embraced by the dominant coalition of decision-makers within the company.
- Top management should support the strategic communication management process and interventions regarding communication within the organisation.
- Communication managers should have direct access to top management, as well as participate in the processes of strategic planning.
- The relevant communication philosophy and its values should be aligned with the corporate philosophy and value system.
- Competency in communication should be developed throughout the organisation in order to ensure that the capacity is created and skills are developed so that the company as a whole can participate in the organisational processes.

2.6.2 The functions of corporate communication practitioners

In light of the investigation above, corporate communication can be perceived as the managing of communication between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholders performed at the functional level of the organisation and aimed at implementing the organisation's strategies. Steyn and Puth (2000:44) point out that both at functional and operational level the emphasis are on "maximising the productivity of resources by capitalising on possible synergies and distinctive competencies that the organisation may possess". Various business units are expected to make inputs towards the development of strategy within the organisation. In this sense, they accept ownership and buy into the direction in which the organisation is moving.

Steyn and Puth (2000:45) explain further that, at operational level, an organisation's strategies are operationalised. This means that operational heads should develop short-term objectives that will help achieve the organisation's business plan. This is important seeing that it help individuals within business units to identify their roles and thereby understand the requirements to meet their units' objectives.

Steyn (2007:140-141) goes on to identify the role of the PR or corporate communication strategist, manager and technician¹. Specifically she distinguished clearly between a managerial practitioner with and one without a strategic mandate:

1. The functional responsibilities of PR as a management function with a strategic mandate (assuming it has a mandate to function at the strategic level of an organisation) includes the following actions:
 - a. Develop a public-relations strategy that addresses the organisation's key strategic goals and positions, which culminate in public-relations goals and themes aligned to organisational goals and positions.
 - b. Plan a public-relations strategy that constantly addresses emerging societal and stakeholder issues identified in the organisation's and stakeholder-management processes.
 - c. Formulate a strategic public-relations plan to achieve public-relations goals.
 - d. Develop, implement, and evaluate communication plans to support the public-relations function's deliberate and emergent strategies.
 - e. Counsel organisational leaders/managers/supervisors on their responsibility regarding communication with their employees.
 - f. Manage the activities of a support function, as outlined below.
2. The functional responsibilities of PR as a *support function* means to develop, implement and evaluate the following supporting communication plans:
 - a. for strategies that are developed at different levels in the organisation;
 - b. for strategies of other organisational functions;
 - c. guiding the communication of the organisation's top management or leadership with employees and other stakeholders.

The explanation above differs from that of a practitioner without strategic mandate. The latter practitioner would only be able to respond reactively to issues on a technical level, without the benefit of understanding and contributing to the strategic direction of the organisation.

In terms of the present study, the role description above, underlines the importance of managing communication strategically in order to achieve the best organisational results while maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship with stakeholders.

¹ Steyn (2007): The strategist scans the environment for issues, stakeholder concerns and reputation risks, then inputs this information into the strategic decision-making process and thereby creates the conceptualisation for the PR strategy. The manager needs to roll out the communication strategy and guide the communication department, while the technician conducts PR work at micro-level.

Theoretical statement 5 offers a summarised view of the literature discussed.

Theoretical statement 5:

The management theory for strategic communication presupposes that communication should be planned carefully to assist and support the organisational objectives. Regarding SACOMM, this implies that communication with its stakeholders should be carefully planned and clearly communicated to advance organisational objectives.

2.7 CONCLUSION

In light of the theories discussed above, one common denominator can be pointed out: These theories emphasise effective communication with various stakeholders by building relationships, interconnectedness and appreciation of strategy. Theories discussed are relevant for the study to help establish how well SACOMM apply these theorems practically. The present study explored the strategic management of stakeholder relations within SACOMM. From the study it became evident: For an organisation such as SACOMM to move forward, it is necessary to enhance its communication and improve its relations with both its internal and external stakeholders.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 dealt with the theories that inform the study on the strategic management of stakeholder relationships, in order to answer Specific research question 1. This chapter discusses the research method utilised in gathering data to understand how strategic stakeholder relationship management can be applied to a professional organisation such as SACOMM.

The chapter focuses on research as a systematic process by which researchers gain further knowledge about a matter than they did before engaging in the process (Merriam, 2009:4). This includes a system of models, procedures and techniques employed to deliver results for a stated research problem (Panneerselvam, 2004:2; Kumar, 2008:5). The processes include, but are not limited to, the following elements: sampling strategies, measuring instruments, comparisons, statistical techniques, and other procedures that produce research evidence (Remler, *et al.*, 2011:4). The methodology employed in the present study is mixed-methods research.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the President of SACOMM and a founder member. In addition, the researcher distributed a questionnaire to SACOMM members as means to gather data. This chapter deals with the research methodology, data collection, analysis and methods of interpretation based on the mixed-methods research; and discusses reliability and validity as research prerequisites.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

Johnson *et al.* (2007:123) define mixed-methods research “as the type of study in which a researcher or a team of researchers combine elements of the qualitative and quantitative approaches for the broader purpose of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration”. This approach involves gathering both numeric and text information. Tashakkori and Creswell (in Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011:4) explain mixed-methods research as one in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences by using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or a program of inquiry. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011:5) advance that a

definition for such a research should incorporate diverse viewpoints. In light of this insight they identify the following core characteristics of mixed-methods research:

- Collects and analyses persuasively and rigorously both qualitative and quantitative data (based on research questions).
- Mixes (integrates or links) the two forms of data concurrently by combining them (or merging them), sequentially by building one on the other, or embedding one within the other.
- Gives priority to one or both forms of data, as emphasised by the research.
- Uses these procedures in a single study or in multiple phases of a program of study.
- Frames the procedures within philosophical worldviews and according to theoretical lenses.
- Combines the procedures into specific research designs that structure the plan for conducting the study.

In undertaking this study, the researcher integrated and linked the two mentioned forms of data simultaneously. Creswell (2003:18) indicates that in the mixed-methods approach, the researcher tends to base the knowledge claims on pragmatic grounds, which leads to an investigation that is results-oriented, problem-centred and pluralistic. Patton (in Ivankova *et al.*, 2007:260) points out that in this form of research; the researcher constructs knowledge about the real-world issues, based on pragmatism. This approach thus places more emphasis on finding the answers to research questions, than on the methods utilised. Pragmatism philosophy, therefore, is considered the most useful in support of a mixed-methods research design.

Creswell and Plano Clark (in Punch, 2014:309) identify four categories of mixed-methods designs, namely:

- *Triangulated mixed-method design*: Done to obtain different but complementary data.
- *Embedded mixed-method design*: One data set provides a supportive secondary role.
- *Explanatory mixed-method design*: Builds or explains quantitative results.
- *Exploratory mixed-method design*: Is two-phased but led by the qualitative approach.

For the purpose of this study the focus is on a triangulated mixed-method design as each data set will complement the other. Denzin (1978:291) defines triangulation as the “combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon”, as well mentioned the following four types of triangulation:

- *Data triangulation*: Use a variety of sources in the study.
- *Investigator triangulation*: Use several different researchers.
- *Theory triangulation*: Use multiple perspectives and theories to interpret the results of a study.
- *Methodological triangulation*: Use multiple methods to study a research problem.

Katsirikou and Skiadas (2010:174) define triangulation as “a way in which quantitative and qualitative methods are combined to triangulate findings in order to be mutually corroborated”. Ritchie and Lewis (2003:43) point out that “triangulation involves the use of different methods and sources to check the integrity of, or extend, inferences drawn from the data”. The utilisation of mixed-methods research makes it necessary to triangulate (in this case methodological triangulation as explained above), in other words, to validate the results obtained from the specific methods (qualitative and quantitative). It is vital for the researcher to triangulate in order to obtain qualitative and quantitative data on the same topic while maximising the strength of the two methods. As a matter of emphasis, triangulation seeks to improve validity and credibility by converging the methods and thus corroborating the data.

Table 3.1 below indicates the research methods used to gather data in order to answer each of the research questions.

Table 3.1: Research methods per research question

Specific research question	Method used to gather data
Specific research question 1: <i>How can strategic stakeholder relationship management be applied to a professional organisation according to the literature?</i>	Qualitative and quantitative methods
Specific research question 2: <i>How does SACOMM strategically manage stakeholder relationships, with specific reference to their annual conference?</i>	Semi-structured interviews with the SACOMM President and founder member
Specific research question 3: <i>How do stakeholders experience SACOMM's strategic management efforts regarding stakeholder relationships, with specific reference to SACOMM's annual conference?</i>	Questionnaire
General research question: <i>How can strategic stakeholder relationship management be applied to a professional organisation such as SACOMM to assist in its growth and survival?</i>	Qualitative and quantitative methods

3.3 RESEARCH METHODS

The research methods used in this study includes a literature study, semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire. Each will be discussed in more detail subsequently.

3.3.1 Literature study

Fink (2010:3) defines a literature review as “a systematic, explicit and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesising the existing body of completed and recorded work produced by researchers, scholars, and practitioners”. As indicated in Chapter 1, sub-section 1.7.1, the literature review is aimed at answering the question on how SACOMM can manage its strategic stakeholder relationships effectively. For this matter, sources were consulted relevant to systems theory, stakeholder relationship management, two-way symmetrical communication and strategic communication management theories. Databases that were considered to provide material for the present study included:

- EBSCO (Academic Search Premier, Communication & Mass Media Complete, Business Source Premier);
- Emerald Online;
- Ferdinand Postma Catalogue (North-West University);
- NRF: Nexus;
- Repertory of South African Journal Articles; and
- The SA ePublications.

To date this specific study has not been undertaken at this organisation (SACOMM). According to the Nexus Database, no other research is currently being undertaken on the anticipated topic as well. Numerous studies have been conducted on strategic communication management and stakeholder relationship management in general (Bourne, 2005; Jones, 2001; Janse van Rensburg, 2003; Kilonda, 2013; Meintjes, 2012). However, no specific studies have been undertaken within SACOMM on a similar topic. For more detail on the other studies on strategic communication management and stakeholder relationship management in different contexts to that of the current study, see Chapter 1, sub-section 1.7.1.

3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

As indicated above, the present study utilised semi-structured interviews because the researcher wanted to gain specific and detailed information from the interviewees. They thus were selected because of their knowledge and leadership positions in SACOMM.

3.3.2.1 Defining a semi-structured interview

Brace (2013:2) states that semi-structured interviews for some implies a schedule consisting of open-ended questions with probing instructions; while for others it means a schedule that contains both open-ended and closed questions. In a semi-structured interview the interviewer elicit information from the interviewee based on prepared questions; as such the interviewer will give the respondent the opportunity to respond to issues in a form of conversation.

Galletta (2013:24) points out that semi-structured interviews are sufficiently structured to address specific topics related to the phenomenon of the study while leaving space for the participants to offer new meaning to the study's focus. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews have a key benefit, namely that they pay attention to lived experience, while also addressing theoretically-driven variables of interest (Galletta, 2013:24).

According to Barriball and While (1994:330), semi-structured interviews can be selected as a means of collecting data for two primary reasons. Firstly, such interviews are well suited to explore the perceptions and opinions of the respondents on complex – and sometimes sensitive – issues, and enable the researcher to probe for more information and to clarify the answers. Secondly, the varied categories of the sample group (profession, educational and personal histories) preclude the use of a standardised interview schedule. Furthermore, Barriball and While (1994:330), point out that in this type of interview validity and reliability do not depend on the use of similar words in each question, but rather on conveying equivalent meaning. Lastly, this equivalence helps to standardise the semi-structured interview and to help ensure that the data can be compared.

De Vos (2002:302) adds by stating that researchers use semi-structured interviews to form a detailed picture of participants' belief, perceptions, or accounts about a particular topic. It must be emphasised that the participant should be viewed as an expert in the subject matter, and therefore should be afforded adequate time to elaborate on the issues under discussion. This also gives the researcher opportunity to probe the participant's responses

for clarity, understanding and critical reflection. Semi-structured interviews typically are used to allow participants the freedom to express themselves about issues.

3.3.2.2 *Semi-structured interview sampling*

Tashakkori and Teddlie (in Ivankova, 2015:182-183) define sampling as “Selecting units (e.g., events, people, groups, settings, artefacts) in a manner that maximises the researcher’s ability to answer questions that are set forth in a study.” Ivankova (2015:183) state that the purpose of sampling is to ensure that the selected people and sources of information adequately reflect the characteristics of the population for whom the study results were intended and might be relevant. Laforest (2009:1) explains that semi-structured interviews can be used to gather qualitative information, and are suited to small samples. The reason is that such samples are useful for studying specific situations or for supplementing and validating information derived from other sources.

There are different types of sampling. To achieve the intended objective of the present study, the present research focused on a particular form of sampling, namely non-probability sampling. The reason for this choice is that it seeks to select people purposefully or intentionally on the basis of whether they have the necessary experience or knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation. Bryman (2012:418) explains that purposive sampling as a non-probability sampling means selecting participants in a strategic way, those sampled being relevant to answer the questions posed. Therefore, the researcher indicated in paragraph 3.3.2 that the participants were chosen because of their knowledge of SACOMM’s setup and of their leadership position in the organisation. Ritchie and Lewis (2003:66) states that “the sample units are chosen because they have particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and puzzles which the researcher wishes to study”.

The non-probability sampling also helped provide information to answer Specific research question 2. The intentionally selected sample (see Creswell and Plano Clark 2011:174) included the President, and a founding member (also a previous President) of SACOMM that still active in the organisation. The reason for the sample is that they are currently accountable and relevant to answering the research questions that are investigated.

3.3.2.3 Conducting the semi-structured interviews

The SACOMM leadership was contacted both by email and telephonically to explain the study's purpose. The researcher conducted interviews with the leadership of SACOMM during the yearly conference held in Potchefstroom in 2014. Ritchie and Lewis (2003:66) mentioned that "sample members' informed consent to participate must be obtained", before the interviews were conducted, consent was sought from interviewees for the sessions to be voice-recorded.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face with the mentioned President and founder member of SACOMM. McBurney and White (2010:252) indicate that personal interviews are advantageous as the interviewer can establish rapport with interviewees; interviewers can also clarify questions and probe for clearer answers from interviewees. In support of the above statement, Johnson and Turner (2003:308) list the strengths of the interview encounter as follows:

- Effective for measuring attitudes and most other content of interest.
- Allows probing by the interview.
- Can provide in-depth information.
- Allows good interpretative validity.
- Rapid turnaround for telephone interviews.
- Moderately high measurement validity for well-constructed and well-tested interview protocols.
- Relatively high response rates area often achieved.
- Useful for exploration and confirmation of data.

The President and founder member of SACOMM were interviewed separately. Both interviews were conducted during the SACOMM conference. The President of SACOMM was interviewed in one of the halls at the North-west University, while the founder member of SACOMM was interviewed sitting together in the researcher's vehicle on the same day. Both were comfortable in the interviewing space. Each of the interviews lasted between 16 and 18 minutes. The researcher did not experience any challenges as the interviews with the identified leadership of SACOMM were arranged in advance, and they were well prepared and ready to participate.

3.3.2.4 Semi-structured interview schedule

The interview schedule was based on the themes identified in the literature. Table 3.2 below lists the questions in the interviews relating to these themes. As mentioned in section 3.3.2.3. above the interviewees were well informed on the purpose of the study and gave their consent to record the interview.

Table 3.2: Semi-structured interview schedule

Interviews questions	Theoretical statements
1. What do you envisage for SACOMM/what is your dream for this organisation/what does this organisation want to achieve?	Theoretical statement 1
2. To what extent do you think SACOMM achieves each of their objectives? Please elaborate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="177 898 1123 1032">(i) To encourage contact and co-operation among Communication Departments in the various tertiary institutions offering Communication Studies. <li data-bbox="177 1048 1123 1182">(ii) To provide a forum to promote communication research, collaboration and debate between communication practitioners, communication industry professionals, academics and students. <li data-bbox="177 1198 1123 1238">(iii) To promote networking and academic debate. <li data-bbox="177 1254 1123 1335">(iv) To facilitate professional communication practice in Southern Africa. 	Theoretical statement 1, 2
3. What do you think your stakeholders expect from SACOMM? (Stakeholders: academics, students, publishers.)	Theoretical statement 1, 2, 3
4. How would you describe the current relationship with your stakeholders? (Trust, satisfaction, mutual control, commitment, exchange and communal relationship.)	Theoretical statement 2
5. How does SACOMM communicate with their stakeholders?	Theoretical statement 3, 4, 5
6. What is the role/aim/value of the SACOMM conference?	Theoretical statement 2, 3, 5
7. Is anyone specifically tasked with planning strategic communication and stakeholder management for SACOMM? How is this currently done? (People responsible, budgets, accountability, etc.).	Theoretical statement 2, 3, 5
8. Do you have anything else that you would like to add?	

The funnel approach was used in assembling the questions for the interview. The interview began by focusing on biographic information, conference-specific information and general questions. This is called the funnel-approach since it starts off with a broad or general statement about the research that is undertaken, and then proceeds to elaborate on the research topic, continually becoming more specific, or narrowing the focus, as it proceeds. Thomas (1998:172) describes the funnel approach as “a question sequence that begins with a very broad query, then progressively narrows the scope of questions to address specific points”.

3.3.2.5 Interview reliability and validity

During the research process the researchers aim to ensure that the findings are reliable and valid. This is in order to ensure that the researchers actually measure what they needed to measure and that the responses to the questionnaire were consistent.

It should be noted that the interviews form one part of the triangulated data for the study. The strategy of triangulation as such functions as a means to strengthen the research by combining methods, and to enhance validity and reliability. For these reasons the strategy of triangulation was employed in the present study. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011:239) define validity in mixed-methods research as “employing strategies that address potential issues in data collection, data analysis, and the interpretations that might compromise the merging or connecting of the two quantitative and qualitative strands of the study and the conclusions drawn from the combination”.

3.3.2.6 Discussion of reliability and validity

Reliability is concerned with consistency, dependability and replicability of the results obtained. Joppe (in Golafshani, 2003:598) defines reliability as the extent to which the results are consistent over time. An accurate representation of the total population under investigation is referred to as reliability. If the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable.

Thus, generally a high level of stability indicates a high degree of reliability as the results can be repeatable. Gerrish and Lathlean (2015:409) explain that reliability is concerned with the degree of consistency in observing the area of interest over time; while Hoyle *et al.* (2002:83) define reliability as the extent to which the data is free from random error.

Hersen and Thomas (2007:25) state that “the majority of reliability studies of structured and semi-structured interviews focus on diagnostic consistency across raters or across different points in time”. In the present research, interviews conducted with both the President and the founder member as information-rich respondents, added to the external reliability of the study. In other words, even if these respondents were to be interviewed again, the researcher would have gained the same information.

Gerrish and Lathlean (2015:408) mention that validity is the extent to which a procedure measures that which it proposes to measure. Hoyle *et al.* (2002:83) describe validity as the extent to which a measure reflects only the desired construct without contamination from other constructs that vary systematically. Zohrabi (2013:258) points out that “the principles underlying qualitative research are based on the fact that validity is a matter of trustworthiness, utility and dependability that the evaluator and the different stakeholders place into it”. Burns (in Zohrabi, 2013:258) emphasises that validity is a criterion to evaluate the quality and acceptability of a research.

The researcher has stated in Chapter 1 that the aim of the present study is to understand the manner in which SACOMM is using strategic stakeholder relationship management to communicate with its stakeholders. The themes, as highlighted in the theoretical statements in Chapter 2, were used as a guideline to develop and analyse the transcribed interviews to help ensure construct validity. For the purpose of this study, construct validity was employed. Bagozzi *et al.* (1991:423) state that in construct validity, key informants are frequently used to measure the properties of an organisation. For the present study key informants from SACOMM were selected because of their knowledge and position in the organisation to provide information on the relationship with its stakeholders.

In addition, the same interview schedule was used for both interviews to increase internal validity.

3.3.2.7 Semi-structured interview's data analysis

Qualitative data obtained from interviews can be analysed by using a technique called thematic analysis. This method is used purely to extract meaning from semi-structured interviews. Sloan (2006:96) indicates that thematic analysis is considered appropriate when the data have been gathered from semi-structured, open-ended interviews and has been audio-recorded and transcribed. Furthermore, thematic analysis is aimed at producing a detailed systematic recording of the themes and issues addressed during the interviews.

Given (2008:868) points out that themes are not generated simply by counting words but themes are assessed by examining constructs that occur in the data.

Mills *et al.* (2010:925-926) define thematic analysis as “a systematic approach to the analysis of qualitative data that involves identifying themes or patterns of cultural meaning; coding and classifying data, usually textual, according to themes; and interpreting the resulting thematic structures by seeking commonalities, relationships, overarching patterns, theoretical constructs or explanatory principles”. Boyatzis (in Mills, *et al.*, 2010:925-926) described five purposes of thematic analysis as a means of:

- seeing;
- finding relationships;
- analysing;
- systematically observing a case; and
- quantifying qualitative data.

As was indicated, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the President and the founder member of SACOMM as means of data collection. While recording the interview, the researcher ensured that the recording was transcribed into text before analysing it in terms of themes. The researcher used the interview questions to develop the mentioned themes for analysis.

Welman *et al.* (2005:214) stated that the purpose of coding “is to analyse and make sense of the data that have been collected”. This makes coding the “first step in thematic analysis technique”. According to Collis and Hussey (in Seliger, 2012:238) codes are labels that enable qualitative data to be separated, compiled and organised. In the process of coding themes, the researcher has to find consistency in the interpretation of codes across cases, according to which those codes will be reduced into higher themes.

3.3.3 Self-administered questionnaires

As the name suggests, a self-administered questionnaire is filled out by the participants in the absence of the investigator (Mitchell & Jolley 2013:286-288). Brace (2013:2) explains the term ‘questionnaire’ by referring to a list intended for self-completion by survey participants, as well as survey instruments intended to be administered by an interviewer. Marsh in Scott and Morrison (2006:189) define a questionnaire as “the use of questions to elicit responses

in self-completion, face-to-face and telephone formats in order to generate data that is quantified in a case-by-variable data matrix”.

Table 3.3 below illustrates the advantages and disadvantages of using self-administered questionnaires.

Table 3.3: Advantages and disadvantages of questionnaires

Advantages	Disadvantages
Cost-effective to administer and advantageous if the selected sample is geographically widespread.	Data collection is limited and cannot pose numerous questions.
Provides a time-effective way of collecting data and can be distributed in large quantities.	Unclear who has completed and returned the questionnaire.
Interviewer cannot influence the data by interventions such as bias in gender, ethnicity or professional seniority.	There is no chance to probe for more in-depth answers.
There is low variability in the questions asked.	Respondents can read the whole questionnaire before providing their answers.
Respondents may find completing a questionnaire more convenient than arranging a face-to-face meeting.	Response rate may not be very high; 50% response rate is barely acceptable.

(Source: Adapted from Burgess, *et al.*, 2006:76)

Gray *et al.* (2007:127) explains that self-administered questionnaires can be conducted in two forms, namely paper-based and computer-based. The present research selected the paper-based method, seeing that this is the least costly technique to gather data. This technique has also been found to have an added advantage of allowing respondents as much time as they need, to consider the questions carefully before answering (Gray, *et al.*, 2007:127).

In addition, the researcher chose self-administered questionnaires to afford the respondents the power to take responsibility for reading and answering questions on their own time. The researcher thus utilised self-administered questionnaires in order to gather information from

the participants whilst giving them the room to exercise their independence in answering the questions posed in the questionnaires.

3.3.3.1 Questionnaires' sampling and distribution

This present study focused on SACOMM members' view of the organisation's efforts in relationship management. SACOMM as a professional academic association for the communication field, as indicated in Chapter 1, consists of academics and students from tertiary institutions across South Africa. In total SACOMM had 118 members in 2014, of which 110 attended the conference.

As indicated in Chapter 1 sub-section 1.2, the main activity of SACOMM is to arrange an annual conference, which is hosted by a different South African tertiary institution or university each year. One of the key objectives of SACOMM, as manifested through the annual conference, is to provide a forum for promoting research, collaboration and debate on communication between communication practitioners, communication industry professionals, academics and students. The SACOMM conference provides a regular platform for academic researchers to discuss new research within the sphere of communication scholarship. The topics include the pressing challenges and difficulties faced in the field of communications on the continent. The conferences have also traditionally been a forum for academics and communication professionals and practitioners to meet and engage on the mentioned issues. The conference is the only yearly physical contact session during which members meet and discuss matters related to communication; hence it is a pivotal event for the organisation.

Against this background, the conference attendees were asked to provide feedback on the strategic value of the conference, as well as general communication from and their relationship with SACOMM. It was indicated that the researcher will use this feedback as part of an M.A. in Communication Studies at the NWU. The attendees were also assured that this questionnaire and research methodology adheres to the required ethical practice standards.

In terms of the questionnaire distributed during the SACOMM conference, a census sampling method was used. Such a sampling method includes all the respondents in the population. It is representative of the population and "... can be used to draw inferences about the characteristics of the population" (Stangor, 2010:112). The questionnaire was distributed to all 110 conference participants. It was inserted in their conference package

and extra copies were also made available at the conference. In total 55 completed questionnaires were received, resulting in a return rate of 50%. Babbie (2013:247) indicates that the response rate guides the representativeness of the sample respondents. Babbie continues and state that “if a high response rate is achieved, there is less chance of significant nonresponse bias than with a low rate”. Therefore, Babbie (2013:247) defines the response rate as “the number of people participating in a survey divided by the number selected in the sample, in the form of a percentage”. This is also called the *completion rate* or, in self-administered surveys, the return rate, in other words, the percentages of distributed questionnaires that are returned.

Du Plooy (2009:113) explains the response rate as the proportion of sampled units that respond, for example in a survey questionnaire. Keyton (2010:161) explains that “an easy way to calculate response rate is to divide the number of people who responded by the number of respondents identified as part of the sample”, hence the indicated number of completed questionnaires (55) for the present study was calculated as a 50% return rate.

3.3.3.2 The questionnaire

Keeping in mind that the study is aimed at understanding the strategic management of stakeholder relationships within SACOMM, the questionnaire had questions covering a wide spectrum of themes. Questions ranged from demographic descriptors, the value of the conference as main communication intervention, to respondents’ general communication received from and relationship with SACOMM.

The types of questions used in the questionnaire were open-ended questions, a rank order question, selection of category questions and Likert-scale questions. Lisch (2014:80) refers to the measuring of customer satisfaction and perceived quality as the Likert scale; this one-dimensional scaling method was developed to measure attitudes. Lisch (2014:80) further explains that the concept of the Likert scale assumes that the extent of agreement or disagreement to statements reflects the attitude of individual respondents towards the underlying theoretical variable. This is relevant to the present study as the Likert scale was used in developing the questionnaire. Please see addendum A for the complete questionnaire.

Table 3.4 indicates how the questions were linked to the themes that were identified in the literature.

Table 3.4: Questionnaire and the themes identified in the literature

Question number	Theoretical statement
1-3	Demographic questions
5	Theoretical statement 1
4, 16, 17	Theoretical statement 2
11	Theoretical statement 3
6	Theoretical statement 4
7	Theoretical statement 1, 3
8, 9	Theoretical statement 2, 3
10, 13, 14	Theoretical statement 3, 4
12	Theoretical statement 2, 3, 4
15	Theoretical statement 1, 3, 4
18	Theoretical statement 2, 3, 5

3.3.3.3 Questionnaire's data analysis

The data from the questionnaires was analysed statistically by means of a software program SPSS; this was done in collaboration with the Statistical Services of North-West University (NWU). Lee *et al.* (2013:5) define statistics as the collection, presentation, and summary of numerical information in such a way that the data can be interpreted easily. Furthermore, Lee *et al.* (2013:5) point out the two types of statistics:

- *Descriptive* statistics deal with the presentation and organisation of data, and summarises numerical information.
- *Inferential* statistics focus on the use of sample data to infer or reach the general conclusion about a much larger population.

Salkind (2014:8) explains that descriptive statistics are used to organise and describe the characteristics of a collection of data. Weinberg and Abramowitz (2002:2) mention that descriptive statistics are employed when the purpose of investigation is to describe the collected data, whereas inferential statistics is used to generalise or draw inferences based on the collected data. As indicated above, the purpose of descriptive statistics is to organise and summarise information. Therefore tables and graphs were used to present the collected data better. Seeing that the research is based on mixed methods of research, it made sense to use both descriptive and inferential statistics, which enabled the researcher to describe the data that was collected, and to make generalisations.

In particular frequencies were used. Frequencies give an overview of the number of times an observation repeats itself. Explained differently, the distribution of the scores within the various categories and can be represented in a table format (Moore & McCabe, 1993:11; Salkind, 2014:432). The mean score was also used to show the "... average where scores are summed and divided by the number of observations" (Salkind, 2014:432).

Correlations, or associations between variables, were tested with Spearman's correlations. An r-value smaller than 0.3 can be considered a small correlation, with $r=0.30-0.49$ a medium correlation and an r-value above 0.5 indicate a high correlation (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:78).

For further analysis, factor analysis was used. Fabrigar and Wegener (2011:3) refer to factor analysis as "a set of statistical procedures designed to determine the number of distinct constructs needed to account for the pattern of correlations among a set of measures". Through factor analysis it was possible for the researcher to determine whether the respondents viewed the same constructs as was identified in the literature.

3.3.3.4 Reliability and validity of the self-administered questionnaires

Watson *et al.* (2008:305) highlights the important part in constructing a questionnaire: ensuring that the collected data is valid and reliable. They further point out that validity depends on the extent to which the questionnaire as a whole addresses the study objectively. Hucker (2005:89) stresses that, for a questionnaire to be valid, it has to be focused accurately by posing the questions it has set out to ask. Scott and Mazhindu (2005:36) refers to validity as the extent to which the questionnaire measures what it is supposed to measure, by obtaining data relevant to the topic that is being measured. The researcher gave the questions to the supervisor for validation, ensuring that they measure what they are supposed to measure (and thus ensuring validity of the data). The questionnaire was also pre-tested with a SACOMM member. This questionnaire was not used as part of the 55 usable copies.

Klenke (2008:37) identifies two major quality criteria in quantitative research:

- *Internal validity*: Is achieved by the degree to which changes in a dependent variable, such as leader commitment to the organisational vision, shows causal relations with the independent variable, such as employee motivation.
- *External validity or generalisability*: Refers to the degree to which the findings based on the research sample apply to the population from which the sample is drawn.

Reliability in questionnaires is used to describe the consistency and reproducibility of a measurement. According to Hucker (2005:89) reliability means that the research method employed is appropriate for the information it intends to compile. Tavakol and Dennick (2011:53) advance that “reliability is concerned with the ability of an instrument to measure consistently.” In this study the Cronbach alpha coefficient were used, where possible, to determine reliability. A Cronbach alpha coefficient closer to 1 is considered excellent, with any value of more than 0.6 considered good (Grunig, *et al.*, 2002:500).

3.3.4 Mixed-methods and combined data analysis

As explained previously, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the President and founder member of SACOMM as a method of qualitative-data collection, the selected sample size was small (only two persons), seeing that these two officials fulfil a specific responsibility in terms of their roles.

In addition, quantitative data was used to quantify the research problem by generating numerical data or information that can be turned into useable statistics. A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to all participants who attended the SACOMM conference. This research method is important, seeing that it helps the researcher understand the perception and opinions the participants have of SACOMM.

As was explained in Table 3.1, the quantitative data was used to answer Specific research question 3, and the qualitative data to answer Specific research question 2. Both sets of data combined were used to answer the general research question.

Creswell and Plano Clark (2011:212) stress that, when analysing data for mixed methods, analytic techniques are applied to both quantitative and qualitative data. According to Cresswell and Plano Clark (2011:203) data analysis in a mixed-methods research entails the separate analysis of the quantitative data (by quantitative methods), and the qualitative data (by qualitative methods). After analysing the data, mixed-methods interpretation involves examining both quantitative and qualitative data to establish how the information addresses the mixed-methods question in a study.

Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (in Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011:213) propose a model for mixed-methods data analysis that divides the data-analysis process into seven stages:

- *Data reduction*: Reducing the collected data by a statistical analysis of quantitative data, or by summarising the qualitative data.
- *Data display*: Reducing the quantitative data to, for example, tables, and the qualitative data to, for example, charts and rubrics.
- *Data transformation*: Transforming qualitative data into quantitative data, or vice versa.
- *Data correlation*: Correlating the quantitative data with quantified qualitative data.
- *Data consolidation*: Combining both data types to create new or consolidated variables or data sets.
- *Data comparison*: Comparing data from different sources.
- *Data integration*: Integrating data into a coherent whole.

In the present study the researcher combined qualitative and quantitative data in order to answer the general research question: *How can strategic stakeholder relationship-management be applied to a professional organisation such as SACOMM to assist in its growth and survival?*

3.4 GAINING PERMISSION AND ETHICAL CLEARANCE

As explained in Chapter 1, section 1.8., the study was conducted according to the ethical standards of the NWU and was vetted, after extensive consultation with the researcher, by the ethical committee of the Faculty of Arts and NWU.

There are various ethical aspects to consider when conducting a study. The most important considerations for the present study included:

- *Obtaining permission for the study* (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011:175): Ethical permission for the study was granted as explained above. Permission to conduct the study was also obtained from SACOMM.
- *Obtaining consent from respondents to take part in the study and ensuring their confidentiality* (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011:175; Fontana & Frey, in Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005:201): The respondents were fully informed on the study and could willingly choose to partake. The interviewees understood that they would have limited anonymity, however, were comfortable with this situation, given the positions they held.
- *Protection from harm* (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005:181): Respondents were assured that they were indemnified against any physical and emotional harm.

- *Ethical conduct from the researcher* (Fontana & Frey, in Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005:201): The researcher adhered to ethical tactics and practices in the obtaining, analysis and reporting of the data throughout the research.

3.5 CONCLUSION

The researcher employed a mixed-methods research design, in order to ensure reliability and validity of the study. It must also be stated that to get the optimum results from both aspects of qualitative and quantitative research, it was in the best interest of the researcher to triangulate the data. This chapter expanded on the importance of thematic analysis, focused on gaining permission for the study and dealt with matters of ethical clearance. In the following chapter (Chapter 4), the two methods that were employed to gather data will be elaborated upon. The methods were used to complement each other as well as to enhance the validity and dependability of the data.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS ON STRATEGIC STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT IN SACOMM

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As indicated in Chapter 1 the present study followed a mixed-method approach, which involves collecting both quantitative and qualitative data to analyse and understand the research problem. Chapter 3 explained the data-collection methods in more detail. This chapter will discuss the findings of the collected data. Qualitative data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with the SACOMM's President and a founder member, while quantitative data was gathered through questionnaires distributed amongst the SACOMM members who attended the conference. It is therefore necessary to analyse the data and consider both the qualitative and quantitative findings.

The findings of the semi-structured interviews and questionnaires will be discussed together in order to capitalise on the mixed-method approach. The results will be presented per Theoretical statement. In the statistical analysis, descriptive statistics will be reported with correlations, differences, factor analysis and reliability calculations to determine whether the findings are statistically significant. Interestingly correlations were found between the different questions in the questionnaire, but no statistically significant differences with regards to the opinions of biographical groups were found through the use of t-tests, as the p-value was greater than 0.05 in all cases. Therefore no differences are reported.

Some background information on the respondents will be given firstly before discussing the results of the analysis per theme.

4.2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE RESPONDENTS

Information will firstly be provided on the participants to the interviews and then on the respondents to the questionnaire.

4.2.1 Background information on interview participants

The semi-structured interviews used in the present study was effective seeing that this method was well suited to explore perceptions and opinions of respondents on complex and sensitive matters, and also allowed further probing and clarification of answers (Barriball &

While, 1994:330). The participants were carefully selected on the basis of their knowledge of SACOMM's setup and leadership positions, as these factors were important to obtain valid and reliable information (see section 3.3.2).

As indicated in Chapter 2, SACOMM has been in existence for the past 40 years. The interviews were conducted with the current SACOMM president, Dr JBJ Reid and founding member, Prof AS de Beer. Dr Reid has been SACOMM's President for two years (2013 and 2014) and one of the few female Presidents to serve SACOMM since its inception. Dr Reid has been a member of SACOMM for the past five years, and was elected President during challenging and positive times for the organisation. This was when a new strategic direction for the organisation was discussed and SACOMM was about to celebrate its 40th anniversary.

Prof De Beer was part of the first meeting to establish an Academic Association for Communication studies (De Beer & Vorster, 2014:5). He later became the President of SACOMM in 1988-1989. Prof De Beer and Gavin Stewart were instrumental in drafting the first constitution of SACOMM which was unanimously accepted. Prof de Beer has been one of the motivating forces behind SACOMM, and was involved throughout its development and the changes and challenges it faced.

Two important aspects that defined SACOMM were mentioned by the interviewees:

- Firstly, SACOMM continuously engages with the National Research Foundation to provide input and guidance on how academics in the communication discipline are and should be evaluated and ranked.
- Secondly, they emphasised that SACOMM, as a non-governmental organisation (NGO), is managed by academic volunteers. Especially the fact that the organisation is operated by volunteers, apart from their academic duties, does influence the amount of time members have available to spend on the organisation.

Both interviewees highlighted the importance of attracting to the organisation more diverse members and people who represent a wider range of tertiary institutions.

4.2.2 Background information on questionnaire's respondents

The diverse positions representing the background of the respondents are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Position held

Position	Percentage	n-value
Student	18.2	10
Junior lecturer	9.1	5
Lecturer	21.8	12
Senior lecturer	14.5	8
Director	9.1	5
Tutor/Locum	9.1	5
Post-doc/Research fellow	5.5	3
Prof/Emeritus	9.1	5
Total	100	53

The number of female respondents were slightly higher than that of the male respondents, with females at 58.2 % and males at 41.8% (n=55). Most of the respondents were students (18.9%), lecturers (22.6%) or senior lecturers (15.1%), while the least number of people were post-doctors/research fellows (5.5%). In total the number of aspiring academics, including students, lecturers (including junior lecturers, lecturers and senior lecturers), and tutors/locums, accounted for 75.4% of the respondents. It could be argued that the majority of attendees were academics who could possibly view SACOMM as a vehicle for personal development and growth.

Respondents were also required to indicate the institution where they come from. This spread of respondents across tertiary institutions in South Africa is presented in Table 4.2 on the next page.

As can be expected a large number of the respondents were from the NWU (Mafikeng, Potchefstroom and Vaal Triangle Campuses) (38.2%) as the SACOMM conference was arranged by and held at the NWU Potchefstroom Campus. UNISA (16.4%) and UJ (10.9%) also represented some of the larger groups to attend the conference, with other institutions only being represented by two or three attendees. It is, however, heartening to see that the institutions that are not ranked in the top 5 universities in South Africa, also had attendees at the conference, and even some of the previously disadvantaged institutions (i.e. Rhodes = 3.6%, NMMU = 3.6%).

Table 4.2: Institution where respondents come from

Position	Percentage	n-value
NWU-Potchefstroom	18.2	10
NWU-Mafikeng	20.0	11
NWU-Vaal	0	0
UOFS (University of the Free State)	5.5	3
UNISA	16.4	9
CPUT (Cape Peninsula University of Technology)	5.5	3
NMMU (Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University)	3.6	2
University of Johannesburg (UJ)	10.9	6
University of Cape Town	5.5	3
RHODES	3.6	2
Other	10.9	6
TOTAL	100	55

The “other” category of respondents included two communication practitioners, and one person from each of the following institutions:

- AFDA Film School;
- Midrand Graduate Institute;
- The Independent Institute of Education (IIE); and
- Vaal University of Technology.

This spread of respondents indicates that SACOMM are making headway in their quest to involve all the South African universities in the organisation. However, the low attendance of practitioners at the conference clearly indicates that SACOMM has not achieved their aim of involving communication practitioners in the organisation.

For the demographic information respondents were also asked to indicate the number of years they have participated as SACOMM members.

The results are presented in Table 4.3 on the next page.

Table 4.3: Number of years as SACOMM members

Number of years as SACOMM member	Percentage	n-value
0-2	44.2	23
3-5	15.4	8
6-8	7.7	4
9-11	15.4	8
12-14	0	0
14+	13.5	7
TOTAL	100	50

From Table 4.3 above it is interesting to note that a significant section of the respondents have only attended SACOMM for less than 2 years (44.2%). This implies large number of new members to SACOMM. From the information above it is also clear that a well-presented older generation of SACOMM members were part of the organisation for more than 9 years (28.9%). A smaller number of members have been involved with SACOMM for 3 to 8 years (23.1%). The members therefore tend to be mostly recent additions, or were involved with the organisation for more than 9 years.

In the following sections the findings will be discussed relating to each theoretical statement identified in Chapter 2. Both the qualitative and quantitative data will be analysed in each section. Reference will also be made to the above-mentioned demographic data of the participants/respondents where necessary in the discussions.

4.3 VIEWS ON SACOMM AS A SYSTEM

Theoretical statement 1 explained the interrelatedness of SACOMM and its stakeholders, hence the need for synergy:

Theoretical statement 1:

SACOMM and its stakeholders are two interrelated, connected and interdependent systems. Together, if managed effectively, they can create synergy. However, they also constantly need to strive for equilibrium within their changing environment.

Both interviewees mention that they view SACOMM as an important part of the communication discipline landscape in terms of interacting with governmental structures such as the NRF, as well as bringing communication scholars in South Africa together. They

expressed the wish that SACOMM should develop into a more inclusive organisation by becoming a broader, more expanded community of scholars and reaching out to universities not listed in the top 5 in South Africa. The interviewees specifically identify and refer to universities not listed in the top 5 in South Africa and historically disadvantaged, as previously disadvantaged universities. As was seen in Table 4.2, SACOMM is succeeding in involving universities such as Rhodes = 3.6% and NMMU = 3.6%, also including one respondent each from institutions such as AFDA Film School, Midrand Graduate Institute, The Independent Institute of Education (IIE) and Vaal University of Technology.

However, when considering the extended period the members have been involved with SACOMM, it is evident (see Table 4.3) that there is a motivated move towards enlisting new members in the organisation. The interdependence of stakeholders with SACOMM is therefore still new in 44.2% of the cases (members for less than 2 years). It would therefore seem that SACOMM is adjusting to changes in their environment and thereby managing to create a higher degree of interdependence between themselves and new subsystems (members).

SACOMM's management reiterated that SACOMM is seen as a breeding ground for upcoming scholars in the communication profession as it presents opportunities to learn about being the academic world. It can thus be inferred that the respondents agree with the view of Miller (in Dainton & Zelle, 2011:99) that an organisation is "an entity characterised by a group of people who coordinate activities to achieve individual and collective goals". This view can be supported by the information shown in Table 4.1, which indicated that a strong contingent of students (18.9%) and lecturers (47.1%) attended the conference. On the other hand, Table 4.2 showed a low attendance of practitioners at the conference. This fact can indicate that practitioners do not view SACOMM as a vehicle that would enhance their careers. It would be to SACOMM's benefit to investigate this finding in more detail to understand the view of the respondents in this respect.

The interviewees pointed out that SACOMM is regarded as the system and its stakeholders as subsystems, which comprise academics, students and other members of the organisation. SACOMM help coordinate a group of people to achieve individual and collective goals. The respondents stated further that it becomes a challenge to meet the expectations of their stakeholders and in so doing, stay in line with their expectations. The interviewees described the expectations of their stakeholders as providing opportunities for academics to network, to having a forum for robust discussion on the discipline and thereby help their member's careers to grow.

The questionnaire's respondents advanced many more expectations than those mentioned by the SACOMM management. In essence the respondents agreed with the interviewees that SACOMM should provide networking opportunities for professionals and academics and help them keeping abreast of trends and research in order to further their knowledge. The respondents explicated their expectations: They expect SACOMM to:

- Serve as an organisation that improves the perception of the communication field in South Africa by helping to improve the rating of the communication curriculum in the Universities and advocate for the best practices in training communication students.
- Facilitate communication between the different streams and more formally assist junior academics to find their feet, as well as provide publishing opportunities.
- Assist researchers by providing international networking opportunities.
- Create an opportunity for the academics to share their research and collaborate in order to create new academic research possibilities.
- Focus their growth actively on including previously disadvantaged universities as (according to the views of the questionnaire respondents) "... they are not participating at the moment".

Tieben (2012:23) indicate that the notion of equilibrium has to do with the "quality between the quantities supplied and demanded in a particular market. In order to remain in equilibrium and to maintain interdependence, SACOMM will need to move closer to their subsystems and in order to meet their expectations through the organisation.

It should be noted that SACOMM is a non-profit organisation. The members try to manage the networks they have established while striving to enlist to the SACOMM network more academics within the communications sphere. At the present stage communication practitioners are not part of the organisations, as was set out in SACOMM's objectives. This is a particular stakeholder group (subsystem) with which SACOMM has not engaged sufficiently for these individuals to become members. SACOMM's current members also have higher expectations for the organisation, than what is currently met by the organisation.

In comparison with the systems theory, SACOMM as a system exists in a particular environment which affects and influences the system and its outcomes and outputs. In terms of interdependence, the points raised above indicate that significant input is still needed for SACOMM to be able to move closer to their stakeholders.

4.4 SACOMM'S APPLICATION OF STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

The second theoretical statement focused on the relationships needed for SACOMM to survive in equilibrium with their stakeholders. This theoretical statement argued that mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders are crucial for an organisation such as SACOMM for its survival.

Theoretical statement 2:

An organisation such as SACOMM should strive for mutually beneficial relationships with their stakeholders in order to ensure their own survival. The health of the relationship can be determined by measuring the level of trust, satisfaction, commitment, control mutuality, and whether it is an exchange or communal relationship.

The interviewees explained that issues regarding SACOMM's relationships with their stakeholders date back to pre-1994 and after the democratic dispensation. They explained that it was indicated that SACOMM was formed as a non-racial institution as stated in their constitution. However, for some reason the organisation was unable to attract historically disadvantaged universities that have an influential footprint in the country. The respondents' experience is that these institutions distrusted SACOMM. As a result, SACOMM currently has a specific intention to include and enlist members from these universities. This strategy entails personal contact from SACOMM's management with those of the mentioned group of universities.

With regard to the current SACOMM members and other universities, SACOMM's management acknowledges that the relationship with stakeholders is agreeable, but it holds a challenge regarding way they communicate with stakeholders on a regular basis. The respondents are of the opinion that insufficient communication, rather than the relationship itself gives stakeholders the impression the information they receive from SACOMM does not meet their expectations. In the long term this impediment has a negative influence on the relationship between SACOMM and its stakeholders. The respondents point out that members get frustrated when they do not receive information on specific aspects or when SACOMM does not meet their expectations. This leads to a perceived lack of trust and the stakeholders view SACOMM as unable to meet their individual and collective objectives. Table 4.4 provides information on the respondents' perception of their relationship with SACOMM.

Table 4.4: Respondents' rating of their relationship with SACOMM

	Very good	Good	Average	Less than average	n-value	Mean Score
How would you rate your relationship with SACOMM?	32.7	55.1	12.2	0	49	1.80

Although SACOMM's management indicated a challenge regarding their relationship with their members, the members seem content with their relationship with SACOMM, although there is room for improvement. Just over half of the respondents (55.1%) indicated that their relationship with SACOMM is good, while 32.7% indicated that they have a very good relationship. It should also be kept in mind that a significant number of members have only recently joined SACOMM (see Table 4.3 above) and are content in their relationship as they are still in the 'honeymoon phase' of their new relationship. This finding can be supported by Spearman's correlation that found that this statement was negatively correlated with the numbers of years respondents were SACOMM members (-0.292, $p=0.047$, $n=47$), although it was a medium correlation. This means SACOMM's relationship with current members is perceived as more positive for members with shorter membership. SACOMM's management should explore ways that will improve this relationship and also attract new members.

The interviewees confirmed that SACOMM does not have a formal strategy for stakeholder relationship in place. In addition, they also do not measure their relationships with stakeholders as a means to manage these relationships. In terms of the six outcomes of measuring an organisation's long-term relationships with key stakeholders, SACOMM is not implementing these measures to assess how effective they are in cultivating quality relationships with their stakeholders. Each of these relationship elements will subsequently be discussed in more detail.

4.4.1. Trust

The interviewees indicated that trust from the members is important to SACOMM. However, as mentioned in section 4.4, certain members trust SACOMM but seemingly not those members from previously disadvantaged universities. However, the respondents are of the

opinion that, because SACOMM assists academics with career development, the members should trust SACOMM.

The reliability calculation for the three statements on trust delivered a Cronbach's alpha of 0.740, which is very high considering only three statements were used. If statement (a) *SACOMM treats me fairly and justly* were omitted the Cronbach's alpha coefficient would improve to 0.747. However, this is such a slight increase that all three statements were kept as it were.

Similar to the findings above, the questionnaire's respondents view their trust of SACOMM as positive, but not overly so. Most respondents only agree with the statements on trust, with a smaller percentage strongly agreeing. These findings are presented in Table 4.5 below.

Table 4.5: Respondents' view of trust in their relationship with SACOMM

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	n-value	Mean score	Mean score of trust
a. SACOMM treats me fairly and justly	38.8	57.1	0	0	4.1	49	1.74	2.07
b. SACOMM takes me into account when important decisions are taken	22.4	53.1	6.1	2.0	16.3	49	2.37	
c. SACOMM has the ability to accomplish its goals	26.5	63.3	0	0	10.2	49	2.04	

From the table above it is clear that significantly more than half of the respondents (57.1%) agreed that SACOMM treats them fairly and just; followed by (38.8%) who strongly agreed. Similarly just over half of the respondents (53.1%) agreed that they are taken into account when important decisions are taken in SACOMM, with 22.4% who strongly agreed with the statement. Interestingly a few of the respondents (6.1%) did disagree with this statement and a small number of them (16.3%) indicated that they "don't know". In addition, a high number of respondents (63.3%) agreed that SACOMM has the ability to accomplish its goals, with (26.5%) who strongly agreed with the statement, while (10.2%) indicated that they "don't know".

As indicated in Chapter 2, sub-section 2.5.3 trust implies the willingness of one party to open up to the other. In terms of the three statements mentioned above it is evident that respondents have the trust that *SACOMM treats them fairly and justly* (mean score 1.74) slightly more than when they are *considered when important decisions are taken* and that *SACOMM can accomplish its goals*, but they are not overly convinced. In a strong relationship the respondents should be responding very strongly and positively to these statements.

The trust construct correlated strongly to the statement *How would you rate your relationship with SACOMM?* (0.589, $p=0.000$, $n=49$). Trust can thus be seen as a possible strong indicator of the relationship with SACOMM.

4.4.2 Control mutuality

Control mutuality is the extent to which parties agree on who has the rightful power to influence the other (Hon & Grunig, 1999:18-20). From the interviews it can be deduced that SACOMM management still view themselves as the driving forces to create a relationship with members (stakeholders). The role of the members in this process was not emphasised. Together with the findings in section 4.3 on interdependence, the findings show that SACOMM management needs to move closer to their members and involve them in relationship building.

The Cronbach's alpha for these two statements was a very high 0.842 indicating the reliability of the statements. Given that there are only two statements, the omission of any one of the statements would not increase the alpha coefficient.

Table 4.6: Respondents' view of control mutuality in their relationship with SACOMM

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	n-value	Mean score	Mean score of control mutuality
d. SACOMM really listens to what I have to say	16.7	43.8	10.4	0	29.2	48	2.81	2.79
e. SACOMM believes my opinion is legitimate	18.4	46.9	4.1	0	30.6	49	2.78	

Similar to the findings above, respondents are positive, but more moderate in their evaluation of control mutuality in their relationship with SACOMM. Nearly half of the respondents (43.8%) agreed that SACOMM listens to what their stakeholders have to say, with 10.4% who disagreed. This could indicate that SACOMM should implement the mixed-motive model of communication to build sustainable and mutually beneficial relationships. This issue was investigated in detail in section 2.5.1.

Furthermore, it was found that 46.9% of the respondents agreed that SACOMM believe their opinion is legitimate, and 4.1% disagreed. Significantly, a high number of respondents (30.6%) stated that they “don’t know” if SACOMM believes their opinion is legitimate. These findings are reason for concern since with a view to sound relationships, stakeholders should know that their opinions are valued by the organisation. By implication, SACOMM thus needs to employ strategies that will afford stakeholders opportunities to make their views known and SACOMM has to demonstrate that they value inputs from their stakeholders Freeman (in Friedman & Miles, 2006:1).

These findings support the findings above in section 4.4 on stakeholder expectations that SACOMM need to make more time for conversation with their stakeholders, in order to ensure that interdependence is created to improve their relationship.

The control mutuality construct correlated, even more than trust, also strongly to the statement: *How would you rate your relationship with SACOMM* (0.638, $p=0.000$, $n=48$). Control mutuality can thus be seen as a possible strong indicator of the relationship with SACOMM.

4.4.3. Commitment

Commitment concerns the willingness of parties to invest time and energy in a relationship in order to maintain and promote it (Hon and Grunig (1999:18-20). From the interviews it was clear that SACOMM management places strong focus and effort on stakeholder relationships. However, the fact that they occupy these positions as management voluntary and in addition to their normal work, limits the time available to spend their energy on cultivating relationships. In other words, the intent is there, but the execution is limited.

The reliability of the two statements f and g as presented in Table 4.7 below also proved to be high with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.621. Since there are only two statements used for the calculation, none could be omitted to increase the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. Similar to

the findings from Table 4.6 above, respondents were cautiously positive, however, a large number selected the *don't know* option, as Table 4.7 below indicates.

Table 4.7: Respondents' view on commitment in their relationship with SACOMM

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	n-value	Mean score	Mean score of commitment
f. SACOMM tries to maintain a long-term relationship with me	20.4	49.0	4.1	0	26.5	49	2.63	2.30
g. I feel loyal towards SACOMM	33.3	52.9	3.9	0	9.8	51	2.00	

Less than half of the respondents (49.0%) agreed that SACOMM tries to maintain a long-term relationship with them, with more than a quarter (26.5%) indicating that they “don't know” if SACOMM is trying to engage them in this manner. Mutually beneficial relations are crucial for the survival of any organization according to Jahansoozi (2007a:398) and Heath (2001:3). This means that SACOMM needs to show and communicate to their stakeholders the intention to build a long-lasting relationship with them. Just over (52.9%) of the respondents agreed that they feel loyal towards SACOMM, with 9.8% of the respondents who disagreed.

The findings above indicate that SACOMM needs to pay attention to commitment in their relationship with their stakeholders. The management should realise that they have an obligation to invest the necessary energy and resources to maintain and promote a sound relationship with their stakeholders.

The commitment construct, even more than trust and control mutuality, correlated strongly to the stated question: *How would you rate your relationship with SACOMM?* (0.765, $p=0.000$, $n=49$). Of the mentioned three constructs, commitment can thus be seen as the strongest possible indicator of the relationship with SACOMM. This would be understandable if one considers the fact that SACOMM needs to show their commitment to their members by advancing their careers and providing them the opportunities for self-development.

4.4.4. Satisfaction

Satisfaction implies the extent to which each party is favourably inclined towards the other (Hon and Grunig, 1999:18-20). The SACOMM management did not particularly mention relationship satisfaction, but focused more on what SACOMM should be doing and how they should be assisting their members. The members' satisfaction in the relationship has, therefore, not yet been established.

The Cronbach's alpha for these two statements was a satisfactory 0.676. There were only two statements used to calculate the reliability and therefore none could be omitted to achieve a higher Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The results are presented in Table 4.8 below.

Table 4.8: Respondent's view of satisfaction in their relationship with SACOMM

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	n-value	Mean score	Mean score of satisfaction
h. Both SACOMM and I benefit from our relationship	26.5	53.1	0	0	20.4	49	2.35	2.27
i. I am satisfied with my interactions with SACOMM	30.0	58.0	4.0	0	8.0	50	1.98	

Similar to the findings from Table 4.7 above, just over half the respondents (53.1%) indicated they agreed that their relationship with SACOMM is mutually beneficial. Unfortunately 20.4% stated that they "don't know" if their relationship is mutually beneficial. The mean scores also show that this is one of the least positively rated statements. Keeping in mind the objective of SACOMM to advance the organisation's and individual's goals, this finding is a clear cause for concern.

Furthermore, it was found that significantly more than half (58.0%) of the respondents agreed that they are satisfied with their interactions with SACOMM, while a small percentage (4%) disagreed. A small percentage (8.0%) also indicated that they "don't know" whether they are satisfied with their interaction with SACOMM.

Typically in a strong relationship, stakeholders should be clear on the benefits they gain from the relationship and should show that they are satisfied with their interaction towards the organisation. The discrepancy in the expectations between SACOMM and their stakeholder groups discussed in section 4.4 above, could explain why stakeholders are not strongly convinced that they benefit from the organisation. The implication is: while it seems that a majority of the respondents are to some extent satisfied with their relationship with SACOMM, SACOMM will have to do the following:

- Take on board the group that *disagreed*.
- Engage those who *do not know*.
- Enhance the experience of those who are still positive towards them.

The satisfaction construct, similar to control mutuality correlated more strongly than trust, but less strongly than commitment, to the statement: *How would you rate your relationship with SACOMM?* (0.630, $p=0.000$, $n=49$). This finding would be understandable considering the fact that SACOMM members need to be satisfied in their relationship with SACOMM in order to rate the relationship as successful.

4.4.5 Communal relationship

Communal relationship describes parties' willingness to provide benefits to the other, because they are concerned for the welfare of the other (Hon and Grunig, 1999:20-21). Seeing that SACOMM is a professional organisation, a strong communal relationship with their members should be expected. From the interviews it was clear that members of management focus strongly on their contribution to a communal relationship by providing opportunities of growth to academics.

With regard to the statement j, presented in Table 4.9 on the next page, Cronbach's alpha could not be calculated for a single statement.

It is significant that less than half (40.0%) of the respondents agreed that SACOMM is concerned with the academic welfare of its members, while (14.0%) disagreed, (2.0%) strongly disagreed and (16.0%) indicated that they "don't know". This is cause for concern seeing that the academic welfare and growth of SACOMM's members' is one of the organisation's main objectives. SACOMM should position itself in such a way that its members have the confidence SACOMM is indeed concerned with the academic welfare of

its members. Thus the members could be expected to benefit a great deal by being associated with the organisation.

Table 4.9: Respondents' view of a communal relationship with SACOMM

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	n-value	Mean score
j. SACOMM is concerned about my academic welfare	28.0	40.0	14.0	2.0	16.0	50	2.38

4.4.6 Relationship overall

When analysing the relationship statements a factor analysis was done to see whether the respondents viewed the relationship concepts similar to the six categories identified in the literature. The factor analysis only identified a single factor and explained 57% of the variance. Cronbach's alpha for the single construct was 0.925, which is very high. No omissions would have improved the findings. The mean score for all the questions on relationship was 2.32, which indicates a moderately strong relationship.

In addition and in alignment with the above, the different elements of the relationship also showed (1) strong correlations with the overall relationship and (2) between the constructs. All the correlations were strong as is indicated in Table 4.10 on the next page.

As mentioned previously, the trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction constructs each correlated strongly to the statement *How would you rate your relationship with SACOMM?* In addition, the overall relationship construct also correlated strongly to the mentioned statement (0.725, $p=0.000$, $n=49$). The indicated relationship elements can thus be seen as possible strong indicators of the relationship with SACOMM, but are seen as a single construct by management and members.

Table 4.10: Spearman’s correlation on relationship constructs

	Trust	Control mutuality	Commitment	Satisfaction
Overall relationship	0.861 p=0.000 n=50	0.927 p=0.000 n=49	0.856 p=0.000 n=51	0.906 p=0.000 n=51
Trust		0.741 p=0.000 n=49	0.657 p=0.000 n=50	0.741 p=0.000 n=50
Control mutuality			0.760 p=0.000 n=49	0.812 p=0.000 n=49
Commitment				0.686 p=0.000 n=51

Overall the members did not depict an overwhelming negative picture of their relationship with SACOMM. They indicated that there is room for improvement, which would benefit both the organisation and stakeholders.

Overall the finding show that SACOMM’s management is committed to work on the relationship with members, but are limited in the time they can allocate. Management did not see separate constructs as part of the relationship. From the interviews it is evident that SACOMM is attempting to build stakeholder relationships from their side, with little input from the stakeholders in this respect. SACOMM seemingly does not put in collaborative efforts to build mutually beneficial relationships with its stakeholders. The results above from the questionnaires support this finding.

As indicated in Chapter 2, Svendsen (1998:3) advances that a collaborative approach to building stakeholder relationships is by viewing stakeholder relationships as reciprocal, evolving and mutually defined. Using such a model for relationship building could assist SACOMM, and provide them with a competitive advantage over similar organisations. Lastly, relationships can bolster the stability in the organisation during difficult times and help expand its capacity rather than diminish it (Svendsen, 1998:3).

4.5 VIEWS ON SACOMM'S USE OF COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Both Theoretical statements 3 and 4 describe the communication necessary to build stakeholder relationships. Theoretical statement 3 explains the importance of using the mixed-motive model to build strong stakeholder relationships, while Theoretical statement 4 highlight specific communication channels, such as the annual conference that can hold strategic advantage for the organisation.

Theoretical statement 3:

The ideal communication approach to be used by SACOMM to ensure that they exist in equilibrium is to employ the mixed-motive communication model. By utilising this model in practice, SACOMM can build stronger relationships with stakeholders that are mutually beneficial. This implies further that SACOMM needs to adhere to the guidelines discussed above when implementing the mixed-motive model.

Theoretical statement 4:

Organisations should consider employing all types of media when striving for effective and efficient mixed-motive communication. Social media specifically present evident and strategic advantages to organisations such as SACOMM, as a mixed-motive communication channel.

The interviewees indicated that stakeholder relationships in SACOMM are managed through the annual conference, as well as the ListServ. The ListServ is an application that distributes messages to subscribers on an electronic mailing list and is run through the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN). The participants also indicated that the ListServ is effective as it does not only serve SACOMM members, but all who were involved with SACOMM in one way or another, and want to subscribe to the information. The interviewees argued that the annual conference's main objective is to share opportunities for research and help communication departments to network and work together. They also mention that through the annual conference and ListServ, they could enlist a number of promising candidates through the SACOMM network and could support their career paths in academia.

To elucidate views on SACOMM's use of communication for relationship building with stakeholders three topics will be discussed: (1) why people attend the conference; (2) the value and contribution of the conference; and (3) communication with SACOMM.

4.5.1 Why people attend the SACOMM conference

In order to determine the most important reason why people attended the conference, a weighted value for each reason was calculated. For example the percentage finding for each of the most important reasons were multiplied by 3; the percentage finding for each of the second most important reasons multiplied by 2; and for the third most important reason by 1 – hence it stayed the same. The values were then added for a final weighted value for each reason.

Table 4.11: Most important reasons why people attend the conference

	Weighted value
Learn from different speakers	210.0
Networking with academics	189.3
Personal growth and development	186.5
Research dissemination	14.4

The highest number of people who attended the conference wished to learn from different speakers while they identify opportunities for personal growth and development and networking. Interestingly not many respondents indicated that they attended the conference to disseminate their research information. From the findings it is clear that researchers do not necessarily use the conference to share and discuss research information.

When respondents had to indicate the best aspect of the conference, the findings showed an interesting tendency as is presented in Table 4.12 below.

Table 4.12: Best aspect of the conference

Aspects of the conference	Percentage	n-value
Academic papers	61.5	32
Well organised	11.5	6
Networking	7.7	4
Variety of topics	7.7	4
Feedback on work	5.8	3
Social functions	3.8	2
Time to think	1.9	1
Total	100	52

In considering the best aspect of the conference, it is clear from Table 4.12 above that it was the academic papers delivered and also the fact that it is well organised. The selection and quality of the academic papers can thus be considered as highly important for the conference.

When considering the worst aspect of the conference, the respondents indicated certain matters that frustrated the presentation, as indicated by Table 4.13 below.

Table 4.13: Worst aspect of the conference

Aspects of the conference	Percentage	n-value
Organisation (Food, venue, events)	34.3	12
Other	28.6	10
Speakers not pitching	20.0	7
Parallel sessions	8.6	3
Parking	5.7	2
Bad papers	2.9	1
Total	100	35

From Table 4.13 the main aspects clearly concern the presentation and organisation of the conference. Speakers that did not turn up to deliver their papers (“not pitching”) also featured in some of the comments made by the respondents. Considering their comments, it is evident that this particular issue can affect the stakeholders’ expectations of the conference. The reason is that attendees are motivated to listen to a specific speaker, who simply does not turn up. Amongst other matters the following frustrations were mentioned:

- The long hours of the conference become tedious.
- Not knowing which were students’ papers.
- Having students chair the sessions.
- No communique out on the conference each morning.
- The conference were not accommodating for individuals outside of a group.

With regard to the organisation, including the food, venue and events of the conference, the findings show that the respondents viewed this as a negative aspect. However, according to Table 4.13 parking was rated rather low.

When considering the rating of the conference services below, it is clear that the participants were happy with the arrangements. This finding is presented by Table 4.14.

Table 4.14: Conference services

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	n-value	Mean score	Mean score of conference services
Registration was fast and efficient	77.4	20.8	1.9	0.0	53	1.25	1.40
Venue and conference facilities were satisfactory	58.8	37.3	3.9	0.0	51	1.45	
Meals were satisfactory	56.9	37.3	5.9	0.0	51	1.49	

When rating the services at the conference, the reliability calculation for the three statements was 0.672. If statement a on the registration was omitted, the Cronbach's alpha would increase to 0.772. However, for the purpose of the present study it was decided to keep together the three statements on the services offered at the conference.

A large number of participants (77.4%) strongly agreed that the registration process was fast and efficient. The majority of the attendees strongly agreed that the venue and the conference facilities were satisfactorily (58.8%), while a similar number (56.9%) agreed that the meals were satisfactory. Very few respondents disagree with the statements and no respondents strongly disagreed. The registration process, venue, conference facilities and meals, should thus form a crucial part of the conference package.

The respondents suggested that in order to improve the conference, the following recommendations should be considered:

- The organisers should sustain the high standard of the conference.
- SACOMM should reach out for more visitors from outside the SACOMM boundaries, including more undergraduate students, diverse attendees from all races, attendees from neighbouring African countries and scholars from previously disadvantaged universities.
- More timely communication from SACOMM is needed as well and feedback on the conference and communicate at the end of the conference.
- The presenters should market and promote SACOMM in order to increase its membership and participation.

4.5.2. Value and contribution of the SACOMM conference

Respondents were asked to indicate according to them which aspects add value the conference. Their responses are presented in Table 4.15 below.

Table 4.15: Value of the conference

Value of the conference	Percentage	n-value
Learn /debate	31.5	17
Both networking and learning	25.9	14
Networking	14.8	8
Present research	11.1	6
Inspiration/ help young academics	9.3	5
Present research and network	7.4	4
Total	100	54

Table 4.15 above illustrates that learning, debate and networking are the main value propositions that represent the motivation for people attending the conference. Findings show that research presentation, or assisting and inspiring younger academics, is not a priority for most attendees. This finding contrasts with the interviewees' statements and the objectives of the organisation. Career growth was highly valued in the interviews and objectives, but not by the members. There is thus no alignment between SACOMM and their members on this matter.

When considering the success of the conference as communication channel, the investigation should focus on the value of the conference for the attendees. Table 4.16 below presents the respondents' assessment of the conference's value.

Table 4.16: Respondents' expectations regarding the conference

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	n-value	Mean score
a. I would recommend this conference to others	63.3	34.5	0	1.8	55	1.40
b. The conference met my expectations	43.6	54.5	1.8	0	55	1.58

Attendees were highly positive about the conference and would recommend it to others (63.3%, strongly agreed and 34.5% agreed respectively). Most attendees also felt that the conference met their expectations. However, some were less enthusiastic about this statement (as the mean scores indicate), although they were positive. To elucidate their answers to this question an open-ended question was added on which respondents could comment. The positive findings were motivated by the respondents following statements:

- Their research interests were addressed.
- They experienced the conference as an encouraging environment for emerging scholars.
- They identified the conference as an important opportunity to learn and network.

Spearman's correlations showed that the two statements in Table 4.16 above, positively correlate strongly (0.669, $p=0.000$; $n=55$). In addition statement (a) *I would recommend this conference to others*, correlated with the relationship construct of satisfaction (0.281, $p=0.046$, $n=51$), which implies that the conference will only be recommended when there is satisfaction in the relationship with SACOMM.

In addition, statement (b) *The conference met my expectations*, correlated to a medium effect with the following:

- The trust statements relating to the relationship (0.350, $p=0.013$, $n=50$).
- The control mutuality statements relating to the relationship (0.310, $p=0.030$, $n=49$).
- The commitment statements relating to the relationship (0.289, $p=0.040$, $n=51$).
- The satisfaction statements relating to the relationship (0.365, $p=0.008$, $n=51$).
- The strongest correlation was with the relationship statements as a whole (0.377, $p=0.006$, $n=51$).
- The combined findings on the conference services (0.316, $p=0.021$, $n=53$).

From the information above it can thus be deduced that the services which are offered at the conference do influence attendees' perception that their expectations of the conference were met. Therefore, if the conference meets the expectations of the attendees, this strengthens the SACOMM relationship with their members.

The next set of statements tested the contribution of the conference. These are presented in Table 4.17.

Table 4.17: The contribution of the conference

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	n-value	Mean score	Mean score of conference contribution
Relationship between academia	49.0	49.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	51	1.57	1.56
Sharing of knowledge	62.3	35.8	1.9	0.0	0.0	53	1.40	
Insight into communication-related questions/problems	56.9	37.3	5.9	0.0	0.0	51	1.55	
Knowledge of the newest, most common communication work	35.3	60.8	3.9	0.0	0.0	51	1.69	
Relationship building between SACOMM and its members	45.3	52.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	53	1.55	

Cronbach's alpha calculation confirmed the construct as realisable with a 0.771 score. If statement (e) *Relationship building between SACOMM and its members*, were left out, then the Cronbach's alpha would increase to 0.801. A factor analysis confirmed that respondents saw the statements below as all pointing to the contribution of the conference. The factor analysis produced a single construct which explained 52% of the variance. However, for the purposes of the present study the statements were considered as a single construct.

It is significant that both the percentage of the number of participants who strongly agreed and agreed was (98%) and (2%) indicated that they have no knowledge of relationships between academia. This could be attributed to the fact that a large number of attendees were students and new to the field of communication. The results shown in Table 4.17 above indicate that the SACOMM conference plays an important role in building relationships with stakeholders.

The majority of participants (62.3%) advanced (strongly agreed) that the conference contributed to the sharing of knowledge, followed by (35.8) who confirmed (simply agreed to) the fact that the conference contributed to the sharing of knowledge. The lowest number (1.9%) disagreed with the statement that the conference contributed to the sharing of

knowledge. As indicated, the highest number of those who strongly agreed and agreed is an indication that the SACOMM conference is a platform to share knowledge.

More than half of the participants (56.9%) strongly agreed with a view that the conference does contribute to improve scholars' insight into communication problems, while (37.3%) just agreed with the statements, and (5.9%) disagreed. It therefore means that the conference does present scholars an opportunity to improve their insight into the field of communication and its related problems.

According to Table 4.17 above, it was found that a large proportion (60.8%) of attendees agreed with the statement that the conference presents a platform to showcase the newest and most innovative communication work, while a smaller number (35.3%) strongly agreed with the statement. The lowest number of people to disagree was (3.9%). It can therefore be inferred that the conference does afford participants with information relating to the newest and most common communication work.

In terms relationship building between SACOMM and its members, just over half of the attendees (52.7%) agreed while just under a half (45.3) strongly agreed, which means that the conference does improve relationship building with its members.

The findings on the contribution of the conference in Table 4.17 above correlated with the following statements in Table 4.16:

- *I would recommend this conference* correlated with the contribution of the conference (0.398, $p=0.003$, $n=53$). Therefore, if attendees were of the opinion that the conference's contribution was valuable, they would possibly recommend the conference to others.
- *The conference met my expectations* also correlated with the contribution of the conference (0.484, $p=0.000$, $n=53$). If the attendees rated the conference contribution as valuable, they would possibly feel that their expectations of the conference were met.

The relationship elements also correlated with the statements on the conference's contribution:

- Trust correlated strongly to the statements on the conference's contribution (0.575, $p=0.000$, $n=50$). This indicates that if the conference is perceived to make a contribution to the individual, the stakeholders might trust SACOMM more.

- Control mutuality correlated to the statements on the conference's contribution (0.422, $p=0.003$, $n=49$). This indicates that if the attendees perceive the conference to make a contribution to the individual, they might experience control mutuality in their relationship with SACOMM.
- Commitment correlated to the statements on the conference's contribution (0.357, $p=0.010$, $n=51$). This indicates that if the conference is valued that it makes a contribution to the individual, the stakeholders might feel more committed to SACOMM.
- Satisfaction also correlated to the statements on the conference's contribution (0.464, $p=0.001$, $n=51$), thus indicating that if the conference is seen as contributing to the individual, stakeholders might feel more satisfied in their relationship with SACOMM.
- The conference's perceived contribution also correlated strongly with the overall relationship construct (0.503, $p=0.000$, $n=51$). Once again, if the conference is perceived to add value and make a contribution to the attendees, the relationship with SACOMM is possibly strengthened.

From the findings above it is clear that the conference should make a definite contribution; it should meet stakeholders' expectations, in order to enhance the relationship with SACOMM and for attendees to view the conference as an event they would recommend to others. Therefore, as expected, the annual conference is found to be a crucial communication tool for SACOMM.

4.5.3 Communication to and from SACOMM

On the question how SACOMM communicates with its members, the responses are presented in Table 4.18 below.

Table 4.18: How SACOMM communicates with its members

	Percentage	n-value
ListServ	62.0	31
No communication/new member	18.0	9
Social media/webpage	6.0	3
ListServ /social media/webpage	14.0	7
TOTAL	100	50

According to Table 4.18 most respondents (62%, n=31) indicated that SACOMM communicates with them via the ListServ. A further 14% (n=7) indicated that SACOMM communicates with them through ListServ and social media. A moderate number of 18% (n=9) respondents indicated that they were new to SACOMM and had not received communication from SACOMM.

From these findings it can be deduced that the email service, or ListServ, is popular with SACOMM seeing that the highest number (62.0%) of participants rated it as a mode of communication. Social media does not seem to be embraced by these communication scholars as the lowest number of participants preferred it. This is an indication that currently email or ListServ does reach SACOMM membership and they find it effective. On the other hand, seemingly SACOMM as a professional organisation is not yet at the stage where it is able to take advantage of social media to benefit its membership.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they wish to receive more communication from SACOMM. The rating of their responses is provided in Table 4.19 below.

Table 4.19: Respondents' interests in more communication from SACOMM

Rating of services	Percentage	n-value
Yes	71.2	37
No	28.8	15
Total	100	52

From Table 4.19 it is clear that a large number of respondents (71.2%) indicated their interest to receive more communication from SACOMM. This presents an opportunity for SACOMM to explore the use of other forms of communication, particularly social media since this platform has the capacity to provide continuous engagement and feedback. The remaining participants (28.8%) expressed the view that they do not wish more communication. The reason may be that these were the older respondents who did not see the need to embrace new technologies. This finding can be answered by the motivational points stated below:

- Utilise social media platforms such as Facebook and a newsletter – attendees seek direct communication as well.
- Keep abreast with the recent development in information and communication technologies (ICT).
- Do more research on speakers and their papers before the conference.

- Inform members of SACOMM's initiatives, what the organisation entails and the benefits it offers.
- SACOMM should provide access to international conferences through their communication platforms.

The findings on SACOMM's interaction with its stakeholders show that currently the organisation is not applying two-way symmetrical communication. More improved communication is realised during the annual conference that is attended by academics and students. It seems as if SACOMM utilised communication more to provide information. This implies that their attention and focus is to change the behaviour of publics without altering the behaviour of the organisations. As was indicated previously (section 2.5), this is a clear characteristic of linear, asymmetrical communication.

As corrective, the theory of two-way symmetrical communication focuses on balancing the interests of the organisation and stakeholders by means of communication that is dialogical, participative and power-distributing. As a result, this form of communication also provides improved collaboration between the organisation and stakeholders.

The lack of two-way communication leads to frustration among stakeholders as they feel that their expectations are not met in terms of the information they need from SACOMM. The result is that the relationship between SACOMM with its stakeholders is impacted negatively.

Giles (2002:42) explains the purpose of two-way symmetric communication as establishing mutual understanding between an organisation and its environment. In terms of this model, dialogue is encouraged since it enhances legitimacy and autonomy during interactions with stakeholders. From the findings it can be inferred that SACOMM is not able to meet the purpose of two-way communication as explained above.

In Chapter 2 Theoretical statement 2 referred to the ideal communication approach that should be used by SACOMM. It was argued that SACOMM could build stronger relationships with stakeholders by applying the mixed-motive communication model.

With specific reference to communication methods, Theoretical statement 3 argued that the annual conference and social media platforms could hold clear and strategic advantages for SACOMM.

4.6 VIEWS ON SACOMM'S APPLICATION OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Theoretical statement 5, as explained in Chapter 2, indicated that communication from the organisation should be planned and communication should be clear, in order to reach organisational objectives.

Theoretical statement 5:

The management theory for strategic communication presupposes that communication should be planned carefully to assist and support the organisational objectives. Regarding SACOMM, this implies that communication with its stakeholders should be carefully planned and clearly communicated to advance organisational objectives.

The respondents indicate that the reason for insufficient communication is the fact that SACOMM is a volunteer organisation. This means that no individual is especially tasked to manage strategic communication within SACOMM; the incumbent President is expected to take responsibility for such a strategy.

SACOMM does not have a central office where it is administered. This situation makes record keeping difficult. In addition, the duration of SACOMM's presidency is two years; therefore filed documents must be handed to a new president, which can cause documents to be lost or displaced. During each term the implementation of strategic communication management depends on whether the current President has the required skills. The interviewees acknowledged that SACOMM as an academic communication organisation should be well-skilled in implementing such a strategy. However, this process is hampered by the fact that SACOMM is a volunteer organisation without permanent staff and a limited budget.

During all the annual conferences thus far, SACOMM has continuously utilised the services of ListServ to communicate with stakeholders. Interviewees also mentioned that they attempted to use other methods of communication e.g. new media technologies but found the newsletter best suited for this particular organisation.

They expressed the expectation that SACOMM should function as an inclusive organisation by becoming a broader, more expanded community of scholars and reaching out to historically disadvantaged universities in South Africa, which unintentionally are still

marginalised. This statement can be aligned to one principle about the formulation and implementation of strategy. The findings show that SACOMM is not familiar with the aims of strategic management as identified by Steyn and Puth (2000:33), namely to manage the interaction with stakeholders.

The theory on strategic communication management can be considered as a vehicle to achieve organisational goals while simultaneously managing relationships with key stakeholders. In Chapter 2, the researcher referred to Hallahan *et al.* (2007:4), who defines strategic communication management as interacting purposefully to advance a certain mission. Strategic communication flows from an organisation's strategic plan, focusing on the role of communication to help the organisation achieve its set goals and objectives. This view is also expressed by Garcia (2009:1) who referred to strategic communication management "as the design of action plans intended to promote voluntary changes in behaviour among stakeholders whose endorsements are critical for the success of a reform initiative". Herein lies a clear challenge for SACOMM as the interviewees did not mention a strategy which is usually a framework for a strategic communication plan of an organisation. It is surprising that within an academic and professional organisation, no particular member is tasked to manage strategic communication within SACOMM.

The inference can be made that SACOMM as a volunteer organisation are ignorant of the importance of strategically-driven communication as identified by Argenti *et al.* (2005:83) according to which communication is aligned with the strategy of the organisation and contributes directly to the organisation's strategic position. SACOMM's management seemingly does not understand the reality that for it to survive it must adapt to the new environment. This is in accordance with the view was expressed by Verwey and Du Plooy-Cilliers (2003:2) in their assertion that strategic communication involves strategic planning in order to ensure effective internal communication. Such a strategy enables the organisation to achieve short-term goals such as productivity and effectiveness, as well as long-term goals such as adaptation and survival.

Participants mentioned different expectations that, according to them, SACOMM should fulfil:

- Serve as an organisation that improves the perception of the field of communication within South Africa.
- Facilitate communication between the different streams and provide members with opportunities to publish their research.

- Network for professionals and academics and keep abreast of new trends and research.
- Advance the frontiers of knowledge and research activities in communication-related study fields in Africa as a whole.
- Assist researchers with their goal to improve communication across the globe.
- Create the opportunity for academics to share their research and create insight into new academic research possibilities.
- Create a platform for learners, academics and corporates to bridge gaps and open the way for ground breaking research.
- Retain and improve the current rating of communication curricula in the Universities and advocate for the best practices in training communication students.
- Build the South African media community and allow early researchers to find their feet.
- SACOMM's growth should be focused on including previously disadvantaged universities as these researchers are not participating at the moment.
- To keep on growing SACOMM should visit scholars from different media institutions inside and outside South Africa.

These expectations from the respondents also indicate the diverse backgrounds of the citizens of South Africa.

4.7 CONCLUSIONS FROM THE FINDINGS

The ***systems theory*** as indicated by Friedman and Allen (in Brandell, 2011:03) explains that this theory makes it possible to understand the components and dynamics of a system in order to interpret the problems and develop balanced intervention strategies. In Chapter 2, the researcher indicated that an open system can be viewed as rooted in an integrated unit; individual components are mutually responsive and also interface with a system on which it depends for survival.

SACOMM views itself as a system that can create synergy within the communication discipline. This organisation is extending its base in linking with other systems such as previously disadvantaged universities and balancing the stakeholders' interests in changing their environment by attracting new members and providing academics with opportunities of career growth. However, the findings show misalignment with communication practitioners and their expectations from such a professional organisation. SACOMM as an organisation

is viewed as a system, but focuses mainly on their contribution within an open system, and less on the contribution of the members.

In order to remain in equilibrium and to maintain interdependence with their stakeholders, SACOMM will need to move closer to their subsystems and the latter's expectations of an organisation such as SACOMM should receive inputs from the environment in which they operate; it means SACOMM has to interact with their stakeholders in order to create symmetrical communication and thereby ultimately to assure its survival. The notions of interrelatedness and dependency according to the systems theory highlights the importance of relationships as well as the value that lies in building and maintaining lasting relationships with stakeholders.

The concept of **stakeholder relationship management** is about effectively managing organisational-stakeholder relationships on matters of common interests and shared goals striving for mutual understanding between the two parties. The findings show that SACOMM needs to revisit certain historic relationships. In addition the relationship with SACOMM members is expressed as generally acceptable, but needs to be improved. SACOMM is still focused on a one-sided approach to relationship building with its members. In addition, the findings indicate that SACOMM (interviewees) and its members (respondents) viewed the individual elements of the relationship as a single concept.

In the main, both the SACOMM and its stakeholders have an obligation to serve each other's interests as it will lead to confidence in the organisation and long-lasting relationships. Robbins *et al.* (2012:95) explains the reason for managing stakeholder relationships "... it can lead to other organisational outcomes, such as improved predictability of environmental changes, more successful innovations, greater degree of trust among stakeholders, and greater organisational flexibility to reduce the impact of change".

The corporate communication theory is concerned with the function of communication management that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the stakeholders on whom its success and failures depends, as pointed out by Cutlip *et al.* (1994:2). This statement emphasises the need for the free flow of communication between the organisation and its stakeholders which, in this case, is focussed on mainly a single form of communication, the conference.

As was investigated previously, **two-way symmetrical communication** seems to be the key SACOMM needs to unlock long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationship with

stakeholders. It would, however, seem that members have a need for more communication from and conversation with and within SACOMM. It is therefore important that an organisation such as SACOMM embraces two-way symmetrical communication as a way to build and sustain long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationships, make a meaningful contribution and assure that stakeholders' will be more satisfied.

Strategic communication management is aimed at achieving organisational goals while simultaneously managing relationships with key publics. As was previously indicated, strategic communication flows from an organisation's strategic plan; it is a communication platform to help the organisation achieve its set goals and objectives. This theory also assesses an organisation's communication from an integrated, multidisciplinary perspective by building on ideas grounded in various traditional communication disciplines. SACOMM does not have a dedicated resource to manage communication, nor does their management have allocated time to these tasks. However, as shown by the findings, SACOMM does need a strong strategic communication management approach in their communication with stakeholders.

In Chapter 2 it was indicated that organisations employ strategic communication management in order to understand stakeholders' views on proposed intervention in the processes rather than promote the organisation's own position on such developmental issues. As a matter of emphasis Verwey and Du Plooy-Cilliers (2003:2) explain that strategic communication management involves strategic planning in order to achieve certain outcome, this is a best practice that SACOMM could utilise to improve its current situation.

Particularly with regard to SACOMM, management will need to employ strategies that will give stakeholders the opportunity to make their views known to shows that they value inputs from their stakeholders. In addition, and not mentioned in literature, is the concept of strategic contingency. SACOMM's management works on a rotation basis, which negatively affects record keeping, planning and strategic continuity.

4.8 CONCLUSION

As the interviewees acknowledged and respondents indicated, SACOMM has an obligation to manage the organisation professionally as acknowledged; an academic organisation of this calibre in the communications profession should fare better than the findings show.

As the literature suggested, SACOMM will have to “give up some in order to get some”, which will create a favourable environment for both the organisation and stakeholders to move forward through a win-win situation.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 5 concludes the study and makes recommendations on how professional organisations such as SACOMM can benefit from embracing strategic relationship management to build and maintain long-lasting relationships with their stakeholders.

In review, Chapter 1 contextualised and described the background to the study, the research problem, as well the theoretical arguments and methodology that was followed. Chapter 2 dealt with the literature review (theories) that inform the study on strategic stakeholder relationship management in order to answer Specific research question 1. Chapter 3 followed with a discussion on the research method which the researcher utilised in gathering data to ascertain how strategic stakeholder relationship management can be applied to a professional organisation such as SACOMM. Thereafter Chapter 4 expanded on the two data-collecting methods to complement each other and enhance the validity and dependability of the data. Quantitative data was obtained through closed-ended questionnaires while qualitative data was gathered through open-ended interviews. This chapter also reports on the results of semi-structured interviews conducted and the questionnaires received.

This chapter will firstly provide an overview of the theoretical framing for the study, followed by answering the specific research questions and general research questions. Finally the recommendations of the present study will be advanced and limitations explained.

5.2 THEORETICAL CONCEPTUALISATION FOR THE STUDY

Before answering the specific research questions, the conceptualisation for the study will be discussed as background to the proposed answers.

Chapter 2 provided an explanation of the theoretical conceptualisation of the study. The systems theory was discussed as a meta-theory that informed the present study on strategic stakeholder relationship management in a professional organisation. This was done by detailing strategies to improve and build long-lasting and sustainable relationships with stakeholders. It was also indicated in Chapter 2 sub-section 2.3 that this study is positioned within the domain of corporate communication. Lastly, the following three theories were

discussed: stakeholder relationship management theory, two-way symmetrical communication and the mixed-motive model and lastly, strategic communication management theories. These theories' outlines (see Table 5.1) provide the context within which the General research question and the Specific research questions were presented.

Table 5.1: Conceptualisation of the study

Domain	Corporate communication
Meta-theory	Systems theory
Theories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder relationship management theory • Two-way symmetrical communication theory and the mixed-motive model • Strategic communication management theory

A brief overview of each theory will follow to provide a framework within which to answer the research questions.

5.2.1 Systems theory as meta-theory

The systems theory was utilised as meta-theory, it is relevant to the present study seeing that it is grounded in relationships, interaction, connectedness and dependency with other systems as a mechanism for growth and change. Such a meta-theory can be viewed as a method of organising the interaction between components comprising a larger organism. The systems theory is an organisational design that focuses on the interaction between systems. In this regard, Halsall (2008:22) emphasises that in the study of communication, a system is defined in terms of the flow of information.

It is important to note that since a system operates in a particular environment, as indicated in Chapter 2 sub-section 2.2.1, certain factors can affect and influence the system. Hence SACOMM as an organisation is regarded as a system, while its stakeholders are regarded as sub-systems that can also influence the system, and vice versa.

5.2.2 Theories relevant to this study

The three theories mentioned in Table 5.1 formed the core foundation of the study within the domain of corporate communication. These theories elaborated on corporate communication and the way it should be practised.

5.2.2.1 Stakeholder relationship management theory

The above-mentioned theory entails the building of mutually beneficial relationships by balancing the interests of organisations and stakeholders in an interaction that enjoys mutual control. Therefore managing the organisation and stakeholder relationship based on common interests and shared goals can lead to a high level of trust between the organisation and its stakeholders (Jahansoozi, 2007a:398; Ledingham, 2003:181, 190; Robbins *et al.*, 2012:95). Commitment to a mutually beneficial relationship creates a conducive environment for a long-lasting connection where both the organisation and stakeholders are willing to 'give up some in order to get some' in different stages of their relationship. The building of relationships is a continuous process that is invaluable while at the same time creating positive connections that add value for both the organisation and stakeholders and will lead to relationship satisfaction.

Above all, parties in such interaction should be committed to a transparent relationship which will yield accountability, collaboration, cooperation and commitment.

5.2.2.2 Two-way symmetrical communication theory

When considering a meta-theory on effective communication the focus should be on the concerns of both the organisation and the stakeholders, which help them to adapt to one another. Two-way symmetrical communication utilises communication to negotiate with stakeholders, resolve conflict and thereby promoting mutual understanding and respect between the two parties (Grunig, 1992:4; Garnett & Kouzmin, 1997:262). As was explained, two-way symmetric communication has the benefits of being dialogical, participative and power-distributing (Stepinska, 2014:115; Heath, 2013:324; Giles, 2002:42). This form of communication will lead to mutually beneficial relationships that are the 'licence' organisations need to operate. Organisations should earn acceptance or approval from their stakeholders in order to achieve their goals in correspondence with the stakeholders achieving theirs goals.

Grunig (in Le Roux, 2010:400) indicates that organisations that adhere to the two-way symmetrical communication paradigm also keep to the following presuppositions in their organisational culture:

- In line with the systems theory and relational paradigm, organisations are seen as interdependent on their environment and are in constantly adapting to a new changing environment by exchanging information freely within this environment.

- The organisation must value equity, innovation and autonomy.
- Individual members and the organisation must take responsibility for their influence on others and use negotiation, compromise and communication to resolve conflict within the boundaries suggested by the two-way symmetrical approach.

Two-way symmetrical communication as highlighted by Grunig and White (1992:45-46) is normative, therefore this strategy can be realised best through mixed-motive model. The mixed-motive model portrays the organisation and stakeholders as winners in their relationship and commitment to advance the organisation's and stakeholder's vision. Lastly, as indicated in Chapter 2, sub-section 2.5.1, the mixed-motive model presents the opportunity for both the organisation and stakeholders to engage continuously as they share a common vision.

5.2.2.3 Strategic communication management theory

This theory is concerned with the direction an organisation follows while managing relationships with stakeholders (Wilcox & Cameron, 2005:23; Dozier, *et al.*, 1995:85; Lindgreen *et al.*, 2012:124; Higgins (in Steyn & Puth, 2000:32-33). Strategic communication is based on an organisation's strategic plan and aimed at achieving set goals and objectives. As indicated in Chapter 2 sub-section 2.6.1, this theory also assesses an organisation's communication from an integrated, multidisciplinary perspective by building on ideas grounded in various traditional communication disciplines. Strategic communication management is about interaction with a purpose while contributing directly towards the organisation's strategic direction (Argenti, *et al.*, 2005:83).

This strategic communication management theory illustrated above presents public relations as a function with a mandate to operate at the strategic level of an organisation while serving both the interests of the organisations and stakeholders. The fact that communication is strategically planned means firstly, that organisations gain legitimacy, trust, and establish a sound reputation which is important for building mutually beneficial relationships. Secondly, through strategic communication management, organisations do not promote their own position but embraces stakeholders' views as a means to advance the organisation ultimately.

5.2.3 Summary of concepts framing the study

The theories above provide boundaries confining the conduct of this particular research in order to answer both the General and Specific research questions. The theories discussed above are mere guidelines to an ideal situation where strategic stakeholder relationship management can improve relations with a view to long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders. Lastly, the theories utilised including the General and Specific research questions guided the researcher's choice of the research design and method.

5.3 ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The theoretical framework discussed in section 5.2 above will be used to answer the Specific research questions derived from the General research question. The understanding from the Specific research questions will help the researcher answer the General research question.

5.3.1 Answering Specific research question 1

Specific research question 1 was formulated as follows:

How can the strategic management of stakeholder relationships be applied to a professional organisation, according to the literature?

In order to answer the specific research question 1, a literature study was done to investigate guidelines on the strategic management of stakeholder relationships. This entailed examining the systems theory, stakeholder relationship management, two-way symmetrical communication and strategic communication management theory.

SACOMM and its stakeholders can be considered two interrelated, connected and interdependent systems. Together, if managed effectively, they can create synergy. However, they also constantly need to adapt in concert with their changing environment. Theoretical statement 1 above summarises the nature of **systems theory**, in terms of the aspects *connectedness, dependency, interdependent, interaction and mutual dependent relationships*. In Chapter 2 it was indicated that in the study of communication theory, a system is defined in terms of the flow of information (Halsall, 2008:22). It was also mentioned that a system exists in a particular environment; therefore certain factors in the environment will affect and influence the system and its outcomes and outputs. It is also

expected that the role and function of the system should adapt to standards within the larger environment.

Against this background an organisation such as SACOMM should harmonise its communication initiatives for improved and mutually beneficial relationships. In addition, SACOMM cannot operate in isolation from their stakeholders or *vice versa*, hence the need to adapt to standards within the larger environment.

Chapter 2 sub-section 2.4.1, presented Ledingham's (2003:190) definition of **stakeholder relationship management theory** as "effectively managing organisational-public relationships around common interests and shared goals, over time, resulting in mutual understanding and benefit for interacting organisations publics". According to this theory, both the organisation and stakeholders must have a common understanding of the required achievements while advancing common interests and shared goals. Furthermore, the fact that the two parties share common goals will propel them to work towards achieving a mutually beneficial relationship.

Two-way symmetrical theory presents the opportunity for both the organisation and its stakeholders to negotiate and dialogue, and thereby participate in a relationship as partners to achieve a mutually beneficial relationship. As indicated in Chapter 2 sub-section 2.5, two-way communication encourages dialogue which improves legitimacy and autonomy during interactions with stakeholders. This theory is vital in the management of relationships between organisations and their stakeholders as it creates a favourable environment for organisations and the public in which to engage. Most importantly, the outcome of this form of communication entails improved long-term relationships.

The **mixed-motive communication model** is aimed at helping both the organisation and stakeholders to form an inner understanding of the organisation concerned. As stated in Chapter 2 sub-section 2.5.1, Murphy (in Heath, 2013:177) indicates that this mixed-motive version of the two-way symmetrical model provides a better description of the actual practice of corporate communication. The organisation and stakeholder may be on different sides but appreciate the need to collaborate seeing that they share common goals. Finally, this model gives parties in a relationship the possibility of mutual gain, as stated by Hoffman (2000:8).

Various **communication channels** can be used to engage stakeholders when using mixed-motive communication. In Chapter 2 sub-section 2.5.1.1, the researcher built on the view by Farnham (2000:193) who indicated that conferences and seminars are meetings of selected

people who assemble to discuss and examine a particular problem. As a matter of emphasis, SACOMM utilises the annual conference to engage with its stakeholders, namely academics and students.

Social media allows access regardless of age, geographic area, gender and education. It serves as a platform to distribute, collaborate, inform and comment, observe and participate. This is a platform that SACOMM as a professional organisation could consider as it is a repository of shared content and social interactions, as typified by Anderson (2009:[1]).

As indicated in Chapter 2 sub-section 2.6.1, **strategic communication management** helps organisations to achieve its goals while simultaneously managing relationships with key publics. Higgins (in Steyn & Puth, 2000:32-33) indicated that strategic communication management means the management of interaction in terms of “co-ordinating the process of managing the accomplishment of the organisational mission co-incident with managing the relationships of the organisation to its environment”. This theory highlights the influence of PR which leads organisations to align their goals and strategies to stakeholder’s values and norms. Thus ultimately the interests of both the organisation and stakeholders are served.

The examination of the theory resulted in the summation of five theoretical statements to guide the study.

- **Theoretical statement 1** argued that, according to the systems theory, SACOMM and its stakeholders are two interrelated, connected and interdependent systems. Together, if managed effectively, they can create synergy. However, they also constantly need to strive for equilibrium or sufficient adaptation within their changing environment.
- **Theoretical statement 2** deliberated that an organisation such as SACOMM should strive for mutually beneficial relationships with their stakeholders in order to ensure their own survival, according to the stakeholder relationship theory. The health of the relationship can be determined by measuring the level of trust, satisfaction, commitment, control mutuality, and whether it is an exchange or communal relationship.
- **Theoretical statement 3** posited that the ideal approach by SACOMM to ensure that they exist in equilibrium with their environment is the mixed-motive communication model within the framework of the two-way symmetrical communication theory. By utilising this model in practice, SACOMM can build stronger relationships with stakeholders that are mutually beneficial. This implies further that SACOMM needs to

adhere to the guidelines discussed above when implementing the mixed-motive model.

- **Theoretical statement 4** argued that organisations should consider employing all types of media when striving for effective and efficient mixed-method communication. In the case of SACOM, their annual conference and possibly social media platforms hold evident and strategic advantages in this regard.
- **Theoretical statement 5** indicated that the management theory for strategic communication presupposes that communication should be planned carefully to assist and support the organisational objectives. Regarding SACOMM, this implies that communication with its stakeholders should be carefully planned and clearly communicated to advance organisational objectives.

By combining the guidelines outlined above, any organisation, including a professional institution, could practise the strategic management of stakeholder relationships. It is thus suggested that SACOMM uses these guidelines to manage their stakeholder relationships strategically.

5.3.2 Answering specific research question 2

Specific question 2 read as follows:

How does SACOMM strategically manage stakeholder relationships, with specific reference to their annual conferences?

This question was answered by using a qualitative research method, namely semi-structured interviews, with the SACOMM President and a founding member of the organisation. The findings of the interviews were reported on in Chapter 4.

Both interviewees expressed the view that SACOMM is an important part of the communication discipline landscape by interacting with governmental structures such as the NRF, and by bringing together communication scholars across South Africa. The two participants expressed their wish that SACOMM should function as a more inclusive organisation by becoming a broader, more expanded community of scholars and reaching out to universities that are not listed in the top 5 in South Africa.

SACOMM's management reiterated that SACOMM is seen as a breeding ground for upcoming scholars in the communication profession as it presents opportunities to learn

about being the academic world. Findings show that the respondents agree with the view of Miller (in Dainton & Zelle, 2011:99) that an organisation is “an entity characterised by a group of people who coordinate activities to achieve individual and collective goals”. In particular attracting practitioners to the organisation has not been successful. It is recommended that SACOMM investigate the findings above in more detail to understand the view and expectations of the current members, future members and practitioners.

The interviewees explained that issues regarding SACOMM's relationships with their stakeholders date back to pre-1994 and to after the democratic dispensation. SACOMM was formed as a non-racial institution as stated in their constitution, but for some reason the organisation did not attract members from historically disadvantaged universities with historical influence in the country. It was found that these institutions distrusted SACOMM; currently SACOMM strives to include and enlist members from these universities through interpersonal contact.

SACOMM's management acknowledged that the relationship with stakeholders is workable, but still holds a challenge regarding the way they communicate with stakeholders on a regular basis. They are of the opinion that the lack of communication, rather than the relationship itself, give stakeholders the perception that SACOMM is not meeting their expectations by providing the information they need from this organisation.

As a result, in the long run the relationship between SACOMM and its stakeholders is affected. Respondents indicated that members get frustrated when they do not receive important information or when SACOMM does not meet their expectations. This leads to a perceived lack of trust and the stakeholders view SACOMM as unable to meet their individual and collective objectives.

To further complicate the relationships, SACOMM's management is changed every 2 years and the organisation continuity suffers in the process. Moreover the management positions are voluntary occupied and conducted over and above the normal work of the team. As a result, limited time is available to allocate to SACOMM management. There is, for instance, not a specific written strategy to manage stakeholder communication.

5.3.3 Answering specific research question 3

Specific research question read as follows:

How do stakeholders experience SACOMM's strategic-management efforts regarding stakeholder relationships, with specific reference to SACOMM's annual conference?

In order to answer this question, questionnaires were distributed to 110 of the 118 SACOMM members at the annual conference, and 55 questionnaires were returned.

As indicated in Chapter 4 sub-section 4.7, SACOMM views itself as a system that can create synergy within the communication discipline. SACOMM seems to be making headway in linking with other systems such as previously disadvantaged universities and achieving equilibrium in changing their environment by attracting new members and providing academics with opportunities or career growth.

Currently there is no alignment with communication practitioners' expectations of this professional organisation. SACOMM needs to move closer to their sub-systems (stakeholders) and pay attention to their expectations of the organisation. As the systems theory suggests, SACOMM should receive inputs from the environment in which they operate; it means SACOMM has to interact with its stakeholders in order to secure its survival. The interrelatedness and dependency as components of the systems theory highlights the importance of relationships as well as the value to maintain lasting relationships.

It was found that SACOMM is still focused on a one-sided approach to relationship building with members; both SACOMM and its stakeholders have an obligation to serve each other's interests as it will lead to confidence in the organisation and forge long-lasting relationships. This professional organisation should value and nurture the relations with its stakeholders as it will result in mutual benefits for both SACOMM and its stakeholders on whom its success and failures depends.

SACOMM must take advantage of two-way communication which promotes the collaboration between the organisation and stakeholders. Two-way communication is vital for SACOMM to build and sustain long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationships, make a meaningful contribution and deliver to satisfied stakeholders.

At the moment SACOMM's conference is not fully capitalised on to serve as a main link to communicate to members and to influence the relationship with stakeholders. The importance of a well organised conference must not be underestimated. Although the

ListServ is used, members do seem to require further interaction and robust academic discussion facilitated by SACOMM, which could be done through social media. SACOMM should investigate this option.

SACOMM does not have a dedicated resource to manage communication, nor does their management have time allocated to these tasks, therefore there is a need for a strong strategic approach toward communication with stakeholders to guide relationship building even when management rotates every two years.

Members are positive towards SACOMM, but not overly so and taking into account that there are many new members, there should be a focus on relationship building through effective and purposeful communication with all stakeholders.

5.3.4 Answering the general research question

The specific research questions combined to answer the general research question:

How can strategic stakeholder relationship management be applied to a professional organisation such as SACOMM to assist in its growth and survival?

The information gained from the literature study, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires together provided input to answer the general research question.

SACOMM and its stakeholders are two interrelated, connected and interdependent systems; they must be managed effectively to create synergy. SACOMM exists in a particular environment; therefore certain factors in the environment affect and influence the system and its outcomes and outputs. It is expected that the role and function of the system should adapt to standards within the larger environment; once this is done, SACOMM should harmonise its communication initiatives for improved and mutually beneficial relationships.

Both the organisation and stakeholders should focus on the larger vision they share seeing that they need one another for survival. This understanding should propel them to work together towards achieving a mutually beneficial relationship that is different for new and older members, and perhaps even differentiated between junior and senior academics. Communication practitioners in particular should also be engaged. SACOMM should consider the opportunities that two-way communication presents of creating a favourable environment to engage with stakeholders, which could result in improved long-term relationships.

The mixed-motive model of communication gives both the organisation and stakeholders the possibility of mutual gain. The time has come for SACOMM to go beyond the annual conference to engage with stakeholders by moving with the times and embrace social media. This platform allows access regardless of age, geographic area, gender and education and provides rapid feedback. Organisations need to align their goals and strategies to stakeholder's values and norms, which means the interests of the organisation and stakeholders are served in terms of a win-win situation for both parties.

SACOMM should function as a more inclusive organisation by becoming a broader, more expanded community of scholars and reaching out to universities that are not listed in the top 5 in South Africa. SACOMM as a breeding ground for upcoming scholars in the communication profession should present opportunities to learn about being in the academic world. SACOMM's lack of communication, rather than the relationship itself, gives stakeholders the impression the organisation is not meeting their expectations by providing them the necessary information, and in the long run the relationship between SACOMM with its stakeholders is affected.

To summarise, SACOMM is making progress in building relationship with their diverse members, but for their own survival and growth need to expand their efforts.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

From the results above certain recommendations will firstly be made for SACOMM in particular, and thereafter for professional bodies in general.

SACOMM should focus on enhancing their relationship with current members new and old, as well as communication practitioners. This can be done by understanding the expectations of the members and incorporating this into SACOMM's goals. In addition, SACOMM continue their initiative to reach out to historically disadvantaged universities in South Africa, as greater membership from these institutions will improve their membership numbers, add value to their knowledge exchange and help them as organisation to survive.

For improved interaction with their members, SACOMM should strive for two-way symmetrical communication as it will lead to real dialogue, give the other party the chance to participate and help distribute power in the relationship. Ultimately it will enhance collaboration between the organisation and stakeholders. In this instance the importance of

the conference as strategic communication and relationship building tool should be understood. In addition, SACOMM should embrace new media (social media) for maximum communication with the stakeholders and interested parties.

In order to achieve both the above recommendations, SACOMM could invest in a strategic stakeholder relationship plan, based on the guidelines mentioned in the literature review and summarised in the theoretical statements.

On an operational level, SACOMM should create more of a continuum in their management structure in order to create more stability in the organisation and improved execution of their strategies. For instance, SACOMM should consider reviewing the current term of presidency seeing that such a brief period (2 years) makes it difficult to implement any strategy. In addition, SACOMM should have a central office where the data on members is administered, which will improve SACOMM's institutional memory.

The following areas need attention:

- *Information:* Institutional memory is important for any organisation; it is therefore advisable that SACOMM have a central office where information can be kept and managed and also appoint permanent staff to do the administration.
- *Technology:* New media technologies can play a role in building improved, long-lasting relationships that are mutually beneficial for SACOMM and its stakeholders. SACOMM should consider developing a strategic plan which will inform the strategic communication plan of the organisation.
- *Constitution:* It is vital for SACOMM to review its constitution, particularly on the President's term of office. With to the current system it does not seem practically possible to get a strategy implemented over a period of two years.
- *Stakeholders:* SACOMM will need to take on board its stakeholders as the organisation depend on them for survival. And more importantly, SACOMM should value inputs made by stakeholders as this will lead to increased confidence in the organisation and foster long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationships.
- *Platform:* Social media emerged as the lowest preferred mode of communication. SACOMM should realise that it is not immune to changes in the rest of the world regarding communicating with its stakeholders. Seeing that the stakeholders can provide immediate feedback, this is an important tool that should be maximised as it will also attract the young and up-coming academics.

- *Model:* In order for SACOMM to meet the expectations of its stakeholders, it should embrace and implement the mixed-motive model. In this way both interests of the organisation and the stakeholders will be met.

In a wider context, professional bodies could benefit from applying corporate communication management theories and guidelines to their organisations. Professional bodies should develop strategies to communicate effectively with their stakeholders and understand their member's expectations. In particular they should focus on their communication with members and should consider taking advantage of new media as it readily available and accessible.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study focused on examining a specific professional organisation's application of strategic stakeholder management. Further broad guidelines could be drawn and findings made if more professional bodies were included in the study.

For future studies that include more than one professional organisation, it could be argued that in-depth interviews with selected members could also add valuable and provide further information to the study to formulate more extensive guidelines for professional organisations.

5.6 CONCLUSION

From the discussions and answers provided to the research question above, it is evident that strategic relationship management can benefit a professional organisation such as SACOMM on various dimensions.

Furthermore, it is clear that similar to any other organisation, SACOMM needs to adapt to the current challenges and changes in their environment, and to the expectations of their stakeholders to grow and survive. As Max McKeown (in Kerpen, 2014) states: "Adaptability is about the powerful difference between adapting to cope and adapting to win."

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ADDENDUM A: QUESTIONNAIRE

Research Evaluation Questionnaire on SACOMM

Dear Participant,

We would appreciate your feedback on the strategic value of the conference, general communication from and relationship with SACOMM. This feedback will be used as part of an M.A. in Communication Studies at the NWU (student: Mr Simukele Khoza, student number: 25619004). This questionnaire and research methodology adheres to ethical practice.

Please know that the information will be treated as confidential and that your participation is voluntary. It should take you about 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Thank you in advance for participating!

BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Position (student, junior lecturer, lecturer, senior lecturer, director, etc.) _____

2. Institution: _____

3. Gender: Male Female

4. How long have you been a member of SACOMM?

Years	0-2	3-5	6-8	9-11	12-14	14+

CONFERENCE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

5. Please rank the three most important reasons for attending this conference (list the most important as 1, the second most important as 2, and the third most important as 3):

- Networking with academic peers
- To learn from different speakers in their field of expertise
- Personal growth and development
- Research dissemination

6. According to you, what is the value of the SACOMM conference?

7. Please rate the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a. I would recommend this conference to others				
b. The conference met my expectations				

Please motivate your answers above:

8. What was the best aspect of the conference?

9. What was the worst aspect of the conference?

10. Any suggestions on how to improve the conference?

11. Please rate our services

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a. Registration was fast and efficient				
b. Venue and conference facilities were satisfactory				
c. Meals were satisfactory				

12. Please rate the following statements:

The conference contributed to improve...	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
a. Relationships between academia					
b. The sharing of knowledge					
c. Insight into communication related questions/problems					
d. Knowledge on the newest, most					

innovative communication work					
e. Relationship building between SACOMM and its members					

GENERAL QUESTIONS

13. How does SACOMM communicate with you other than during the conference?

14. Would you like more communication from SACOMM?

Yes No

Please

motivate: _____

15. What are your expectations of SACOMM? _____

16. How would you rate your relationship with SACOMM?

Very good	Good	Average	Less than average

17. Please rate the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
a. SACOMM treats me fairly and justly					
b. SACOMM takes me into account when important decisions are taken					
c. SACOMM has the ability to accomplish its goals					
d. SACOMM really listens to what I have to say					
e. SACOMM believes my opinion is legitimate					
f. SACOMM tries to maintain a long-term relationship with me					
g. I feel loyal towards SACOMM					
h. Both SACOMM and I benefit from our relationship					
i. I am satisfied with my interactions with SACOMM					
j. SACOMM is concerned about my academic welfare					

18. Any other comments?

Thank you for attending the conference and completing the survey. We appreciate your feedback.

ADDENDUM B: LANGUAGE PRACTITIONER'S LETTER

ADDENDUM C: TURNITIN REPORT