Building and maintaining relationships with alumni through social media: A comparative study

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Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree *Master* in Communication Studies at Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University

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November 2016

ABSTRACT

Online communication is considered as an ideal platform for the implementation of two-way, ethical communication, which can lead to strong, long-term and mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and its stakeholders (Grunig *et al.*, 1992:36; Grunig *et al.*, 2002:2; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:60). In addition, various authors point out that social media, as a core mode of online communication, can provide numerous opportunities for strategic public relations to achieve the above-mentioned goals (Diga & Kelleher, 2009:440; Grunig, 2009:1; Makrez, 2011:230; Solis, 2010:28).

In particular, social media offers tertiary education institutions a cost-effective opportunity to communicate and foster relationships with alumni after graduation, by frequently staying in touch, and building social media communities (Kowalik, 2011:218). Worldwide, higher education institutions increasingly recognise the need to focus on their reputation confronted by a more volatile tertiary environment, with global competition for students and financial contributions (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006:338).

The University of Pennsylvania (Penn, USA) and North-West University Potchefstroom Campus (NWU Pukke, South Africa) both emphasise their relationships with alumni as an avenue to secure the future of the universities. They employ various social media platforms to build these relationships. Examining these two universities in a cross-national comparative study, allowed the researcher to analyse, explain, and make generalisations on social media's function of building and maintaining relationships, and creating communities, with alumni (Hantrais, 1995; Livingstone, 2003:478; Lor, 2011:6).

To understand the complexities in using social media for alumni relations, a theoretical framework was constructed that combines various theories (Pennings *et al.,* 2006:3). Both the domains of corporate communication management and social media usage were investigated from the perspective of the systems theory (Hon & Grunig, 1999:12; Broom *et al.*, 2000:15,17). In particular, the stakeholder relationship management theory identifies relationship outcomes and *relationship building strategies* that can be followed while adhering to *two-way symmetrical* guidelines (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:62; Hon & Grunig, 1999:43-46). In addition, the present study followed the guidelines of Waters *et al.* (2009:102) for the cultivation of social media relationships. These were used in conjunction with other guidelines on *creating a social media community* (Lipshcultz, 2015:76).

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were combined to obtain sufficient in-depth data and ensure the validity and reliability of the research (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:275; Lor, 2011:14). A literature study and qualitative content analysis were undertaken focusing on the respective universities' social media pages. This was done to add to the

conceptual understanding of social media usage for alumni relationships and community building. The qualitative research was concluded through semi-structured interviews with the alumni and social media managers at Penn and NWU Pukke respectively. Thereafter, electronic questionnaires were sent to both universities' alumni.

The main findings of the present study indicated firstly, that tertiary education institutions can utilise social media effectively to build alumni relations and create a social media community. Secondly, it was found that not all the relationship and community building guidelines can be achieved within a single social media platform. Therefore, a combination of such platforms should be employed, and aligned with the usage patterns of the alumni. This implies that a social media strategy is crucial to manage the combined social media that is employed to achieve optimum engagement with alumni. Finally, it was found that social media usage should focus on building a community, rather than aiming to establish and maintain individual relationships with alumni.

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, technology is not only curing and treating illnesses, determining how vehicles function or how urban development takes place. Technology is also affecting the way people communicate with each other (Makrez, 2011:230).

Online communication can be seen as an ideal platform for the implementation of *two-way symmetrical communication* within the organisational context (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:22; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:60). This type of communication functions as an ethical approach to communication, seeing that the outcome could lead to strong, long-term and mutually beneficial relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders (Grunig *et al.*, 1992:16; Grunig *et al.*, 2002:2). Not only does *two-way symmetrical communication* in the organisation provide information and feedback to their stakeholders, it also gives stakeholders the opportunity to channel information and feedback to the organisation.

Given the current technological era, online communication may play a role in providing and receiving information. Unfortunately, numerous organisations still believe that it is unnecessary to deal with stakeholders through online communication channels, since they consider the process to be impersonal (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:60). Diga and Kelleher (2009:440), Grunig (2009:1) and Solis (2010:28) differ from this view and posit that social media, as a form of online communication, can provide a wide range of opportunities for strategic public relations [1] to strengthen relationships between organisations and stakeholders. This implies that the public relations function in organisations, should be responsible for providing recent and accurate information to stakeholders (Taylor & Perry, 2005:209). Makrez (2011:230) confirms that social media is rapidly becoming a core channel for public relations by which to disseminate information. Innovation is also highly valued within the framework of the organisation's strategic communications plan and should form part of such a plan (Qualman, 2013:15). Therefore, public relations practitioners do not only find it necessary to focus on the organisational websites, but also on the use of social media

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[1] For the purposes of this study the terms public relations and corporate communication management will be used interchangeably or in accordance with the sources used (see section 2.3 for a further explanation).

platforms (SMPs) such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, MySpace, LinkedIn, or Instagram (Reuben, 2008:10; Qualman, 2013:15).

Keeping the above-mentioned factors in mind and applying it to colleges and universities, Reuben (2008:11) points out that social media offers higher education institutions an important opportunity to communicate and build relationships with students after graduation (alumni) by frequently staying in touch. Higher education institutions such as colleges and universities are increasingly using and embracing social media daily, and are realising its potential power and possibilities for communication with and to stakeholders (Reuben, 2008:1; Kowalik, 2011:211). In particular, Kowalik (2011:218) points out that social media can play a significant part in building and cultivating relationships with alumni.

As a result, a college or university with sound alumni relations, is more assured of financial growth and health, as well as independence and resilience during challenging times, than a university without such positive alumni relations (Alexander *et al.*, 2004:1; Rensburg & De Beer, 2011:171). The research focus of the present study was on the potential power that social media can exert in the field of communication.

1.2 THEORETICAL CONCEPTUALISATION

Keeping the background above in mind, and taking into account the context of the present study, the following theoretical framing for the study is suggested (see Table 1.1 on the next page).

The systems theory was used to emphasise the interdependence of systems such as the university and alumni (Broom *et al.*, 2000:15, 17; Hon & Grunig, 1999:12). Of particular interest to the present study was the systems' mutual adaptation and interdependency characteristics.

This study applied two theories to explore outcomes of relationship management and strategies for relationship building with alumni, as described from the corporate communication management domain. The two theories are: stakeholder relationship management and the *two-way symmetrical communication* theory (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:62; Hon & Grunig, 1999:43-46).

Table 1.1: Theoretical conceptualisation

Meta-theory	Systems theory			
Domain	Corporate communication management			Social media
Theories and concepts	Stakeholder relationship management	Two-way symmetrical communication	Waters *et al.*'s (2009) guidelines to cultivate social-media relationships	(Concept) Creating a social media community
Concepts	Relationship outcomes - Trust - Control mutuality - Commitment - Relationship satisfaction - Communal vs exchange relationship Relationship building and strategies - Access - Positivity - Openness and disclosure - Assurance of authenticity - Networking - Sharing of tasks	- Power sharing - Transparency - Ethical communication - Balance of interests - Responsible communication - Reciprocity	- Disclosure - Usefulness and information dissemination - Interactivity and involvement	- Trust - Shared norms - Shared resources and knowledge - Reciprocity - Resilience within relationship - Co-ordination and co-operation

(Source: Compiled by the researcher)

Ledingham and Bruning (1998:62) define the concept of stakeholder relationship management as the action that occurs when an organisation and its stakeholders impact on each other's economic, social, cultural and/or political well-being. Hung (2009:394) further indicates that the success of an organisation's stakeholder relationships can be determined by examining the patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange, and liaison between the two parties. Relationship management can thus be regarded as an outcome of *two-way symmetrical communication*, seeing that the implementation of this type of communication can lead to strong, long-term and mutually beneficial relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:160). It is also important that both the organisation and stakeholders, as far as possible, must strive actively toward actualising the normative view of symmetrical two-way communication. In section 2.5, the concepts are discussed that relate to *two-way symmetrical communication*.

Using Ledingham and Bruning's (1998) relationship management theory as framework, the strength and health of the relationship can be measured and evaluated by focusing on firstly, the four relationship outcomes – *trust, control mutuality, commitment, and relationship satisfaction*, and secondly, the type of relationship that is formed – *communal or exchange* (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:165; Hon & Grunig, 1999:42). In addition, Hon and Grunig

(1999:43-46) suggest six *relationship building strategies* that can serve as a guideline for creating, facilitating and maintaining new and/or existing organisation-stakeholder relationships. These strategies are: *access, positivity, openness and disclosure, assurances of authenticity, networking* and *sharing tasks* (Hon & Grunig, 1999:15). Hon and Grunig (1999:43-46) also mention three more strategies for conflict resolution. However, these strategies are not applicable to this particular study, as the alumni who are studied are not in conflict with the university, and the research focus is on building and maintaining relationships. Furthermore, Hung's (2009:396) argument builds on the views of Ledingham and Brunig (1998) and Hon and Grunig (1999), by stating that when the above strategies are implemented and the mentioned outcomes reached, social exchange occurs that will stabilise the relationship further. Chapter 2 of the present study, explores the role of social media in each of the above-mentioned strategies.

Within the social media domain, Waters *et al.* (2009:102) emphasise that relationship management, as discussed above, is the fundamental principle that should underscore the use of social media within the context of an organisation. It is argued further that the use of social media, when applying strategies to cultivate relationships, potentially can lead to even stronger stakeholder relationships (Kaplan & Heanlein, 2010:60). These relationship cultivating strategies are *disclosure, usefulness and information dissemination,* and *interactivity and involvement.*

In addition, this study explored cultivation guidelines for the social media domain from Waters *et al.* (2009:103). The aim was to improve and build on the stakeholder relationship theory and *two-way symmetrical communication* theory, devise guidelines for a strategy for communicating to alumni on social media, and thereby cultivate and maintain healthy relationships with them. Furthermore, the study assessed the importance of applying this knowledge to build and maintain a community on social media platforms (Lipshcultz, 2015:76). In order to apply the mentioned knowledge, the characteristics of social media communities were taken into consideration. These entail: *trust, shared norms, shared resources and knowledge, reciprocity, resilience within the relationship, co-ordination and co-operation.*

The context in which the theory was applied is the higher education sector, as discussed next. Thereafter, the research problem will place the challenges universities experience within the theoretical framework, to define the focus of the study.

1.3 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

To describe the context of the study, firstly, a description of the challenges the higher education sector face, followed by a discussion of the comparative nature of the research.

1.3.1 The higher education sector

Higher education institutions globally recognise the need to reposition themselves due to the new competitive climate that has emerged worldwide. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006:314) explain that this competitive climate is the result of a need among higher education institutions to position themselves in a situation of not only local, but also international competition. This entails the context of increasing competition between institutions for home-based and overseas students. As a result, higher education institutions such as universities currently are obliged to focus on reputation management, which includes amongst other matters, creating meaningful relationships with their alumni (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006:318). As explained in section 1.2, and rather than focussing on reputation management, this study in particular will focus on building and maintaining alumni relations through social media. Kowalik (2011:218) explains the importance of these alumni relations by stating that higher education institutions that know how to nurture and engage alumni, will be able to receive significant contributions from alumni to help ensure its financial and general wellbeing.

Kowalik (2011:218) elaborates that creating alumni relationships and communities specifically through social media, can help universities keep alumni informed of events and graduate achievements, which may lead to increased loyalty and *trust*. Furthermore, social media can reach large numbers of alumni inexpensively (Kowalik, 2011:218).

In the present study, the University of Pennsylvania (hereafter: Penn) and North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus (hereafter: NWU Pukke) will be compared regarding their management of alumni relationships through social media. Both these universities place a high emphasis on their alumni relationships as an avenue to secure the future of the university. Both institutions also actively use various types of social media platforms to build relationships with a large number of alumni. Both Penn and NWU Pukke were available and willing to participate in the research.

Penn in North America was founded in 1740 and currently has 24 806 students and 298 789 living alumni members. Approximately 10 406 of their current students are undergraduates and 11 034 are graduates. There are 1 700 employees who vary between full-time and part-time (Betz, 2015). Penn consists of four undergraduate Schools (Arts and Science, Engineering and Applied Science, School of Nursing and the Wharton School of Business)

and 12 graduate and professional Schools (School of Communications, Arts and Sciences, Dental Medicine, Education, Engineering and Applied Science, Design, Law, Medicine, Nursing, Social Policy Practice, Veterinary Medicine and the Wharton School of Business).

NWU Pukke, South Africa, founded in 1859, currently comprise 54 908 students. Since 2004, it forms part of the North-West University. Currently it has eight faculties (Faculty of Arts, Natural Sciences, Theology, Education Sciences, Economic and Management Sciences, Law, Engineering and Health Sciences) with 15 650 undergraduates and 12 452 graduate students. The university offers diploma and business courses, which covers the other 26 806 students. NWU Pukke also has a database of 60 323 alumni members (Cloete, 2015). Only the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University were used in this study due to the fact that they have dedicated social media resources to work on stakeholders relationship – especially alumni. The social media is then also managed together with the alumni managers.

The primary social media channels used by the universities that are investigated in the present study are: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube. There are, however, other social media channels that the institutions utilise to a lesser degree, namely: Pinterest, Google+, Flickr, blogging and Snapchat. The study thus focused mainly on the mentioned primary social media channels, while the secondary channels are described and discussed where necessary.

Although these universities are operating on different continents and several differences could be found between them, their aim and focus remain similar. This entails the challenges to ensure their survival, successful communication with their alumni and their usage of social media for alumni relations, as pointed out above. The mentioned similarities aligned sufficiently with the goals of the study to proceed with a cross-national comparitive study.

1.3.2 A comparative study

In comparative research, the goal is to improve knowledge on a certain subject. As Pennings *et al.* (2006:3) explain: comparative research is "... a means to a goal, rather than an end in itself".

This applies especially to cross-national comparative studies, where similarities and differences across societies are analysed and explained. In such studies, generalisations can be made from the collected data to gain deeper insight into a specific phenomenon, given that the same research instrument is used – which was the case in the present study (Hantrais, 1995; Livingstone, 2003:478; Lor, 2011:6). Livingstone (2003:479) points out that

there are universal problems – even though the context of those under investigation may differ – which are challenges across nations, such as the use of social media for alumni relations by universities. These problems can be analysed in order to (i) test theory across diverse settings, (ii) develop generic principles that can be adapted widely, (iii) and/or investigate the scope and value of certain phenomena,

In similar vein, Hantrais (1995) describes the benefit of comparative studies as follows:

> *They can lead to the identification of gaps in knowledge and may point to possible directions that could be followed and about which the researcher may not previously have been aware. They may also help to sharpen the focus of analysis of the subject under study by suggesting new perspectives.*

Particularly with regard to the communication field, Brightman (2012:5) and Routio (2007) argue that comparative research can yield a new global theory within an emerging academic field, for example, the use of social media in this case. Livingstone (2003:478) adds that comparative studies are increasingly used in the communication sciences to study phenomena. The present study thus uses comparative research to develop generic principles that can be adopted widely, while also attempting to enhance the scope and depth of the theory on social media usage for alumni relations at universities.

It is important to note the exhortation of Pennings *et al.* (2006:3) that, to achieve the above, a strong theoretical framework is needed to guide the study. Therefore, in the present study, a theoretical framework was conceptualised that captured the full spectrum of the literature on corporate communication management and social media usage (see section 1.2 and Chapter 2).

In light of this approach, the research problem was put forward, as discussed in the following subsection.

1.4 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Universities rely on their alumni for various reasons, but mainly as an added avenue for financial assistance to secure their future growth and help enhance their financial wellbeing, as well as to gather support to generate resilience within a competitive and challenging tertiary education sector (Alexander *et al.*, 2004:1; Rensburg & Beer, 2011:171). To ensure their survival in turbulent times, universities need to ensure that they cultivate and maintain strong relationships with their alumni. This can be done through strategic, *two-way symmetrical communication* (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:62; Broom *et al.*, 2000:17; Grunig,

2006:3; Steyn, 2003:55; Taylor, 2013:40). In addition to ensuring this relationship, such institutions should also use the new preferred channel of communication, social media, thereby adapting to the changing communication needs of their alumni (see Makrez, 2011:230).

Literature points out that by using social media strategically and building strong social media communities, universities can cultivate and strengthen relationships with alumni (Waters *et al.,* 2009:103; Scott, 2013:44; Qualman 2013:ix; Fuchs, 2014:53; Lipschultz, 2015:xiii;). According to the stakeholder relationship management theory, organisations can strengthen their relationships with stakeholders by including certain strategies in social media. Examples are the following: *access, positivity, openness and disclosure, assurance of authenticity, networking, sharing of tasks, mutual control, reciprocity, co-ordination and co-operation, and by creating trust and shared norms, and sharing recourses and knowledge* (Ledingham & Brunning, 1998:62, Hung 2009:394; Taylor, 2013:35). The strategies are implemented to help organisations reach certain outcomes, for example, *controll mutuality, trust, commitment and relationship satisfaction* (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:62; Hon & Grunig, 1999:42).

However, to date, limited research was undertaken on these mentioned social media strategies and guidelines formulated that help universities apply these strategies in practice to alumni relations. Waters *et al.* (2009:103), provide one of the few practical guidelines on this matter. They suggest that in order to achieve a positive relationship with stakeholders through social media, universities should focus on the following strategical components: *disclosure, usefulness and information dissemination, interactivity and involvement.* However, these guidelines have not been tested for alumni relations.

Universities, therefore, face the challenge of building relationships in changing and competitive times with one of their most influential stakeholder groups, namely alumni, by using social media, which is still a developing field. In addition, these institutions have only a few practical guidelines to inform their application. In other words, these institutions are obliged to use the communication channel on which there is limited information for one of their most important stakeholder relationships that can directly influence their financial growth and survival.

With regard to using social media for relationship building, Lipschultz (2015:76) points out that becoming a reliable and solid member within an online community can help an organisation or institution to gain social capital. Therefore, it is important to investigate the

creation and building of communities, as suggested by Taylor (2013:35). The following elements are important in establishing such a community: *trust, shared norms and values, shared resources and knowledge, reciprocity, resilience within the relationship, and, co-ordination and co-operation.* In light of the information above, the present study aimed to answer a general research questions, as well as specific research questions, which will be presented below.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS
The research questions for the present study can be divided into the following general question, and specific questions.

1.5.1 General research question
For this study, the following general research question was investigated: *What can be learned from the use of social media to build and maintain relationships with alumni, when comparing the application thereof by Penn and NWU Pukke?*

1.5.2 Specific research questions
From the general research question, the following specific questions can be drawn:

1. How is social media used, according to literature, to build and maintain relationships with stakeholders, particularly university alumni?
2. How does social media content enhance understanding of social media usage for universities to build and maintain relationships with their alumni?
3. How do Penn and NWU Pukke use social media to build and maintain relationships with alumni, according to their alumni managers' views, and how do they compare?
4. What are the views of Penn and NWU Pukke's alumni on the use of social media for building and maintaining relationships, and how do these views compare?
5. How do the (i) literature, (ii) the analysis of social media content, (iii) the views of the alumni managers and (iv) the views of the universities' alumni, compare?

1.6 RESEARCH GOALS
The research goals for the present study can be divided into a general goal, and specific goals flowing from it.

1.6.1 General research goal
The present study's general research goal was to determine what can be learned from the use of social media to build and maintain relationships with alumni, when comparing the application of these media between Penn and NWU Pukke.

1.6.2 Specific research goals
From the general research goal, the following specific goals were deduced:

1. Explain by means of a literature study how social media is used to build and maintain relationships with stakeholders, particularly university alumni.

2. Explain through a content analysis how social media content enhances the understanding of social media usage for universities to build and maintain relationships with their alumni.

3. Determine through semi-structured interviews how Penn and NWU Pukke use social media to build and maintain relationships with alumni, according to their alumni managers, and compare the data from their respective interviews.

4. Establish through self-administered questionnaires, the view of Penn and NWU Pukke's alumni on the use of social media for building and maintaining relationships, and compare the data from the respective universities.

5. Explore comparisons between the (i) literature, (ii) the analysis of social media content, (iii) the views of the alumni managers and (iv) the views of the universities' alumni, by synthesising the data from the literature, content analysis, questionnaire, and interviews.

1.7 THEORETICAL ARGUMENTS

The following theoretical arguments were used to underpin the study:

- The **systems theory** helped emphasise the interdependence of subsystems such as the university and alumni (Broom *et al.*, 2000:15, 17; Hon & Grunig, 1999:12).

- Within the framework of the **stakeholder relationship management theory** (Bruning & Ledingham, 1998:165), organisations such as Penn and NWU should aim to reach positive outcomes within their alumni relationships (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:62, Hon & Grunig, 1999:42). Examples of such outcomes are: *trust, control mutuality, commitment,* and *relationship satisfaction.* Certain strategies (e.g., those of Hon and Grunig 1999:43-46) can be applied in the organisational context to promote online relationships with specific stakeholders such as alumni. These *relationship building strategies* are: *access*, *positivity*, *openness and disclosure, assurance of authenticity, networking*, and *sharing of tasks.*

- **Two-way symmetrical communication** is necessary between an organisation and its stakeholders to build sound, long-term, and mutually beneficial organisation-stakeholder relationships. Healthy relationships between an organisation and its stakeholders are important for the organisation's survival. Social media can help improve the organisation's efforts to establish sound relationships through strategic *two-way symmetrical communication* (Grunig *et al.*, 1992:36; Grunig *et al.*, 2002:2; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:62; Waters *et al.*, 2010:245).

- Waters *et al.* (2009:103) suggest guidelines by which to manage social media in order to achieve a positive relationship with stakeholders. These guidelines entail: *disclosure, usefulness and information dissemination* as well as *interactivity and involvement.* The guidelines show several similarities with the *relationship building strategies* suggested by Hon and Grunig (1999) and although previously applied to the non-profit sector, it is argued to also be applicable to the tertiary education environment.

- If social media can be used to create mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders, virtual stakeholder communities can be created. Virtual communities can possibly even build stronger relationships between organisations and its stakeholders. Organisations can focus on creating and maintaining healthy communities by focussing on aspects such as *trust, shared norms, sharing resources and knowledge, reciprocity, resilience within the relationship, and, co-ordination and co-operation* (Taylor, 2013:40).

To establish and explain the parameters of the present research, is it necessary first to define the terminology that are used in this study.

1.8 DEFINITION OF TERMS

For clarity in the study, the terms *social media, social network sites* (SNS) and *social media platforms* (SMPs), need to be defined.

Social media entails the democratisation of information by transforming people from content readers into publishers. This implies the shift from a broadcast mechanism, one-to-many, to a many-to-many model, rooted in conversations between authors, people, and peers (Solis, 2010:36). In this sense, social media provide a way for people to share ideas, content, thoughts, and relationships online. Social media differ from so-called mainstream media in the sense that any individual can create, comment on, and add to social media content. Social media can take the form of text, audio, video, images and communities (Scott, 2013:54). Social media is thus a general term referring to any electronic communication that meets the mentioned criteria.

Social network sites (SNS) refer to a web-based service that allows individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile site or page within a bounded system and share it with an articulated list of other users with whom they share a connection. Indviduals may also view and transverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2008:211). In some instances a SNS can also be referred to as a *social media*

platform (SMP), where it refers to a social media communication tool with its own user guidelines and methods of creating interactivity, for example Facebook, Twitter YouTube, LinkedIn or Instagram (Boyd & Ellison, 2008:211).

According to the website, "Social Media Today" (Hartshorn 2010), the difference between social media, SNS or SMPs is extremely vague. Although the terms technically refer to different entities, for the purpose of the present study, the terms are used interchangeably referring to a discernible social media site or platform such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. In this study, the focus is on the use of social media in general, as understood by the general audience such as alumni and social media managers. The study is not foremost concerned with the technical difference between the terminologies used to describe social media sites or platforms.

1.9 RESEARCH APPROACH

Regarding the research approach, this comparative study used both qualitative and quantitative data to explore the phenomenon of social media usage for positive alumni relations. Lor (2011:14) advocates the use of a mixed-method research in a comparative study to obtain sufficient in-depth data and thus contribute to the validity and reliability of the research (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:275). As a result, the present study followed the method of triangulation, where qualitative and quantitative methods were used in combination to generate sufficient data to answer the specified research questions (Flick, 2014:183).

1.10 RESEARCH METHODS

In order to answer the specific research questions, the present study made use of different research methods. This entailed a literature study, qualitative content analysis of the universities' social media pages, semi-structured interviews with their alumni managers and questionnaires to alumni.

1.10.1 Literature study

In establishing a theoretical basis for the present research, a literature study was undertaken to determine how strategies on organisational social media can be implemented to cultivate and build stronger relationships with alumni. The following databases were consulted to ascertain whether there is sufficient information on the topic under investigation: NEXUS, EBSCOHost: Academic Source Premier, Business Source Premier, Communication & Mass Media Complete; Econlit; Ferdinand Postma Library Catalogue; SACat; SAepublications, Emerald and Science Direct. The researcher could establish that there is sufficient information to complete the study.

Several studies were conducted in the context of stakeholder relationship management, for example by Ledingham and Bruning (1998; Bruning & Ledingham, 1999) and likewise by Grunig and Hon (1999). Other articles included Hung (2009) and Morgan and Hunt (1994). Others furthered the research by applying the theories of the mentioned researchers to online communities. Exponents of this approach include Waters *et al.* (2009), who focus on ways to engage with stakeholders through social networking; and Baird and Parasnis (2011) who researched the use of social media for customer relationship management. Diga and Kelleher (2009) published an article on social media, perceptions of decision-making power and public relations roles, while Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) examined the challenges and opportunities that social media hold.

A number of scientific publications also deal with these topics: Solis (2010) focuses on how to build, cultivate and measure success in the new web; Qualman (2013) explains how social media transforms the way people live and conduct business, and Fuchs (2014) investigates social media from the viewpoint of critical theory. Lastly, focusing on social media communication, Lipshultz (2015) presents a wide-scale analysis that examines different social media platforms, which can be utilised for relationship building.

However, none of the above-mentioned studies provide tested guidelines to universities on how to use social media for relations with their alumni. Various studies were done on alumni relations per se. These include: Harrison's article (1994) on college relations and fundraising expenditures on influencing the probability of alumni giving (usually monetary contributions) to higher education; Baade and Sundberg's (1996) research on determinants of alumni generosity; and Wankel and Wankel's (2011) work on higher education administration through social media. Farrow and Yuan (2011), was found to be the only study that focused on building stronger ties with alumni through social media with the aim to increase volunteerism and charitable giving. The context of their research, however, differs from that of the present study in terms of the universities used and the fact that the present study did not investigate the increase in volunteerism and charitable giving. The focus was only on the strategies to build sound relationships with alumni through social media.

A number of academic theses were written on the topic of social media and the marketing context of customer or consumer relationship management. These include Laakso (2013) on managing customer relationships in social media; Kumar (2012) on social consumer relations; and Bernoussi (2012) who investigated the value of social media in customer-relationship management. Furthermore, Cloete (2012) explored the strategic implementation

of marketing communication within the context of social networking communication; Lein and Ugstad (2011) focused on the role of social media in managing customer relationships.

None of the studies mentioned above, dealt with the use of social media in building and maintaining positive relationships between the university and their alumni, as viewed within the framework of stakeholder relationship management and *two-way symmetrical communication* theory. To further the literature study and answer specific research questions, 2, 3, 4 and 5, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used.

1.10.2 Qualitative content analysis

According to Du Plooy (2002:191), a qualitative content analysis is used to document messages, themes or symbols that are repeated and can be compared to certain literature. Babbie and Mouton (2001:491) explain that a qualitative content analysis is used to record phrases or words in a wide variety of content. These can include books, book chapters, essays, interviews, speeches and also informal conversations and headlines. By researching the presence and repetition of certain words, phrases or themes, the researcher can draw inferences or make philosophical assumptions about the author, an essay, a particular audience, the culture and also the time when the essay was written. Due to the wide area this research method covers, it is frequently used by scholars of literature and rhetoric, marketing, psychology and the cognitive sciences.

For the purpose of the present study, a qualitative content analysis was undertaken on Penn and NWU Pukke's social media pages, in particular Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, covering a period of two months in June and July 2015. The content analysis explored the themes derived from literature, as well as new themes that could emerge. The aim of such an analysis is to add to the conceptual understanding of the use of social media for relationship building and maintenance.

Once the collection and analysis had been completed, the insight derived from the data was used as input for the interview schedules and questionnaires, which is discussed subsequently.

1.10.3 Semi-structured interviews

According to Du Plooy (2002:178), semi-structured interviews should be used to obtain specific information about a particular topic, but also to give the interviewees more freedom to react and elaborate on certain aspects that they deem important.

Babbie and Mouton (2001:290) point out seven steps in the interview process, namely: *thematisation, design of the interview, the interview itself, transcribing, analysing, verification and reporting.* These steps were followed to construct and analyse the interview that was used in the present study. This corresponds with Du Plooy (2002:178) who argues that the semi-structured interview should give the participants chance to answer the predefined questions, and add certain aspects to the conversation which they view as important. Researchers should also have the opportunity during the interview to pose questions that had not been planned ahead. This method enabled the alumni managers of Penn and NWU Pukke, with whom the interviews were done, to answer the predefined questions, but also give their subjective views on various topics.

The interviews with the alumni managers took place in person. There were two interviews undertaken with various contributors to alumni, or to the alumni's SMPs from Penn and NWU Pukke respectively. The interviews took place as follows:

- Penn's interviews were done with the Alumni Relations Executive Director and with the two Directors of Creative Design and Information Media.
- NWU Pukke's interviews were done with the Director of Marketing and Communication and the Electronic Media Manager.

1.10.4 Self-administered questionnaires

According to Du Plooy (2002:178) a self-administered questionnaire is a method of data collection, which enables the researcher to gather extensive data. This type of questionnaires does not only include questions, but may contain statements on which respondents can agree or disagree. After the data were gathered it was compared to the literature and the content analysis in a triangulation to determine corresponding aspects or differences.

Questions for this questionnaire were identified from the content analysis of the SMPs, as well as the literature that was consulted. The literature covered the following theoretical designs:

- Hon and Grunig's (1999:43-46) relationship outcomes and types of relationships;
- Ledingham and Bruning's (1998) *relationship building strategies*;
- Grunig *et al.*'s (1992:16) *two-way symmetrical communication*;
- Waters *et al.'s* (2009) social media cultivation guidelines; and
- Taylor's (2013:35) list of benefits of social capital as created through communities on social media.

The questionnaire contained closed questions with the exception of one open question, where the participants were invited to add their own comments and experiences. The questionnaire was set up electronically, which enabled respondents to answer it online. The invitation to participate was sent through an email system, where mails were sent out to the respondents personally and featured on the SMPs of Penn and NWU Pukke respectively.

Penn roughly has an estimated of 298 789 living alumni, where NWU Pukke has indicated an approximate number of 60 323 (Betz, 2015; Cloete, 2016). According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:261) acceptable response rates depend on the population selected for the research and how many participants answered the questionnaire.

When investigating Penn, random sampling was done that represents the average population of Penn's alumni. In the process, the questionnaire was distributed to 5 000 Penn alumni. NWU Pukke agreed to send out this questionnaire to the alumni with whom they have contact. As a result, the questionnaire was sent to 14 000 alumni members from NWU Pukke. The questionnaire to both universities' alumni members was sent only after the universities granted written consent.

The software, FluidSurveys, used to create the questionnaire was also able to capture the responses electronically. Thereafter the data were analysed by means of statistical software, SPSS, and the assistance of the NWU Statistical Services. (The self-administered questionnaire will be discussed in more detail in section 3.3.4).

1.11 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

This present study utilised methodological triangulation as explained above, to help increase the reliability and validity of observations, analyses and findings (Du Plooy, 2002:41). The results from the content analysis, semi-structured interviews, and self-administered questionnaires were synthesised to help answer the research questions.

In addition, it was necessary to reach consistency (reliability) in the data, and ensure that the identified phenomena are studied (validity). Therefore, the researcher recorded and transcribed the interviews and analysed them according to the themes identified in the literature review. The content analysis was also done according to the themes identified in the literature. In both these cases and typical to the qualitative approach, the researcher kept open the option of adding more themes as it emerged from the data. The questionnaire was constructed based on the literature findings and insight from the content analysis, and were analysed with the support of the NWU Statistical Services and Quantify Research Consultants, and statistics on its reliability drawn from the data. Section 3.4 explains the validity and reliability for the present study in more detail.

1.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study was conducted according to the ethical standards as prescribed by the NWU. The research was considered by the NWU Ethics Committee and approved with the number: NWU-00260-15-A7. No special conditions were added to the ethical clearance. It is known that certain ethical issues may arise in social research and therefore the researcher was sensitive in conducting the research. For instance, specific care was taken to ensure voluntary participation, the comfort of the respondents and having the necessary permission to conduct the study, amongst others (ref. Babbie & Mouton, 2001:528). Section 3.4 describes the ethical considerations of the study in more detail.

1.13 CHAPTER DIVISION

The present study was divided into the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction, background and research problem

Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 3: Research method

Chapter 4: Discussion of content-analysis results

Chapter 5: Discussion of interview results

Chapter 6: Discussion of questionnaire results

Chapter 7: Conclusion and recommendations

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1, the context of the study was explained, which led to the research problem, the research questions and research objectives. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate how organisation-stakeholder relationships are built through social media, focusing specifically on the relationships between universities and alumni.

This chapter addresses the following specific research question: *How is social media used, according to literature, to build and maintain relationships with stakeholders, particularly university alumni?*

The social media included in this study, and as explained in Chapter 1, mainly entailed the following platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube. In addition, Pinterest, Google+, Flickr, blogging and Snapchat were added as secondary group, as explained in section 1.3.2.

The first part of this chapter provides the background on certain theories, constructs and themes that were found in the literature. The chapter starts off by discussing the meta-theory. This is followed by a concise overview of corporate communication management in the age of new social media, where each social media platform (SMP) is discussed briefly. Thereafter, the study examines stakeholder relationship management and *two-way symmetrical communication* theory. The following section focuses on how organisations can implement *relationship building strategies* within the social media environment to create and maintain positive relationships with stakeholders. Specific reference is made to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube, and briefly to Pinterest, Google+, Flickr, blogging and Snapchat. The final part of this chapter examines the creation of social media communities and the characteristics of such a community.

The following table (Table 2.1) summarises the theoretical conceptualisation for the study.

Table 2.1: Theoretical conceptualisation

Meta-theory	Systems theory			
Domain	Corporate communication management		Social media (Main social media examined: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube) (Secondary social media mentioned where necessary: Pinterest, Google+, Flickr, blogging and Snapchat)	
Theories	Stakeholder relationship management	Two-way symmetrical communication	Waters *et al.*'s guidelines for cultivation of social media relationships	Creation of a social media community
Concepts	Relationship outcomes - Trust - Control mutuality - Commitment - Relationship satisfaction - Communal vs exchange relationships Relationship building strategies - Access - Positivity - Openness and disclosure - Assurance of authenticity - Networking - Sharing of tasks	- Power sharing - Transparency - Ethical communication - Balance of interests - Responsible communication - Reciprocity	- Disclosure - Usefulness and Information dissemination - Interactivity and involvement	- Trust - Shared norms - Shared resources and knowledge - Reciprocity - Resilience within relationships - Co-ordination and co-operation

(Source: Conceptualised by the researcher)

2.2 SYSTEMS THEORY AS META-THEORY

In the present study, the systems theory was used as meta-theory. The systems theory centres on the concept of a system. A *system* can be defined 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" (Anderson *et al.*, 1999:4).

In concurrence with the definition above, Von Bertalanffy's (1968) framework observes the system as a whole, including its relationships and interactions with other systems, as an instrument of growth and change. Luhmann (1995:xx) views all social systems as communication networks, and states that a particular system selects the type of information it will agree to accept. This generates and preserves the uniqueness of each system.

Friedman and Neuman Allen (2011:880) explain that there are two conditions for these properties: Firstly, some form of interaction need to occur between the parts of the system,

secondly this form/condition explaining the relationship between these parts is linear. When these two conditions are met, the interaction is measurable and can be a subject of scientific investigation (Von Bertalanffy, 1968).

Von Bertalanffy (1968:248) argues that there are contributions (inputs), outputs, and consequences (outcomes) made into and gained from a system. However, what occurs in the system can be confusing, as variations can only be measured by observing and comparing the outputs of the system to its outcomes or goals and the relationships between the outputs, outcomes and goals. Participants can vary or change the inputs, as well as their own activities, which could modify the system from within. Luhmann (1995:136) concurs by claiming that social systems typically receive input from their surroundings, engage in procedures, and produce different outputs based on the uniqueness of each system. In addition to having a structure, social systems serve particular functions. Therefore, to measure the interaction within a system, Von Bertalanffy applies basic methodical principles to different types of systems in order to define and measure actions (Friedman & Neuman Allen, 2011:880). Similarly, Luhmann (1995) points out that an organisation's mass communications and media will be its defining features.

In light of the above, communication and information establishes an input into a system, a process occurs within the system, which produces an output through engagement with other systems. The systems theory can thus be seen as an organisational theory that observes interactions among systems. In an organisation, communication regulates, and either stabilises or disrupts a system (Luhmann, 1995).

According to Friedman and Neuman Allen (2011:885), the exchange of information between the system and its setting is regulated by a process called *feedback.* This is an assesment to determine whether the system's outputs are in line with the perceived *outcomes* (goals) the system has set for itself. In addition to this internal feedback, the system also has a way to measure replies from the external environment. In both circumstances, if the system notices a modification amongst its output and outcomes, it can modify the process by changing the level of inputs.

Furthermore, systems can be differentiated into micro, mezzo, or macro levels depending on a system's size and complexity. These types can be identified as follows (Friedman & Neuman Allen, 2011:885):
- *Micro-systems* – small-size social systems, such as individuals and pairs.
- *Mezzo-systems* – intermediate-size systems, including groups and support networks.

- *Macro-systems* – large systems, such as communities and organisations.

Taking the above into account, the present study focused on various systems or, in other words, systems within systems. Stating it more concretely, the organisation, namely Penn or NWU-Pukke, can both be considered as systems with various inputs, outputs and goals. Within such a system, various subsystems, such as alumni, contribute and affect the organisational whole.

It can be argued further that when building and managing relationships with alumni, the organisation communicates with the masses within a single community and, therefore, can be classified as a macro-system. Using different social media, as smaller subsystems within this larger system, a community of alumni takes shape, confirming that the macro-systems communicates with the alumni members.

Within each of these systems there are certain goals, inputs and outputs for the organisation. However, these elements cannot solely be set and determined within the organisations' system as such. The feedback of *two-way symmetrical communication* allows the external systems to contribute to this main system. In this sense, the system theory is applicable to the present study. On the one hand this theory helps determine universities' inputs, outputs and goals when building relationships with alumni, and on the other hand, it takes alumni's inputs, outputs and goals into account. By using this meta-theory, an organisation such as a university can manage the systems to gain a lifelong relationship with their alumni.

2.3 CORPORATE COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT IN THE NEW SOCIAL MEDIA AGE

In this subsection, corporate communication management is defined and discussed, followed by an examination of the various types of social media.

According to Cornelissen (2014:4), the best way to define corporate communication, is to review the development of this function from the early 1970s, when communication practitioners used the term 'public relations' to describe communication with stakeholders. However, this older term only focused on *outbound* communication to the external public. As a result, organisations neglected *inbound* communications that organisations receive from their external and internal stakeholders.

Therefore, according to Cornelissen (2014:4), public relations as such changed or expanded to new functions that include a range of specialised disciplines such as crisis management, media relations, stakeholder relations, change communication and public affairs. This led to

corporate communications focusing on the organisation as a whole. This includes the public and stakeholders, externally as well as internally. It should thus be evident that there are discernible differences in meaning between the terminologies *public relations* and *corporate communication management*. The study, however, does not focus on the disctinction between the terms and will use the terms interchangeably, or according to the sources that were used (Le Roux, 2011:41; Steyn & Puth, 2000:5).

2.3.1 Corporate communication management

Van Riel (1995:25) defines corporate communication management as "an instrument of management by means of which all consciously used forms of internal and external communication are harmonised as effectively and efficiently as possible" with the overall goal of creating "a favourable basis for relationships with groups upon which the organisation is dependent". Cornelissen (2014:5) adds his own definition of these characteristics as explained by Van Riel (1995:25):

> *Corporate communication is a management function that offers a framework for the effective coordination of all internal and external communication with the overall purpose of establishing and maintaining favourable reputations with stakeholder groups upon which the organisation is dependent.*

In other words, corporate communication management can be viewed as a function that manages and organises the tasks by communication practitioners in various specialist fields such as media relations, public affairs and internal communication.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:59), to date, organisations found it easy to control information made known about them on the internet. Until recently, the communication manager of an organisation was able to ensure a visible, positive press release about the organisation, and such *outbound* communication favoured the organisation. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:60) point out that with the advent of social media, clear changes occured. Stakeholders currently are able to publish their experience of an organisation online without the organisation controling or influencing the post. Social media allows stakeholders to search and write about an organisation online and share their views with a large audience.

This brings about a total new dimension in approaching corporate communication management (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:60; Lipschultz, 2015:69; Scott, 2013:26). Solis (2010:xiii) adds that organisations need to take a different view at the way in which they communicate to their audience, or engage and build relationships – due to the advent of social media. Corporate communication management thus needs to adapt to the social

media environment, which underscores the importance for organisations to understand social media and its functions.

2.3.2 Social media in communication

In essence social media can be viewed in terms of people converted from content readers into content publishers. Social media, therefore, implies that the sharing of information becomes more democratic. It entails the change from a broadcast mechanism, one-to-many, to a many-to-many model, rooted in conversations between authors, people, and peers (Solis, 2010:36). In this regard, social media provides a way for people to share ideas, content, thoughts, and relationships online. In contrast to the mainstream media, any user can create, comment on, and add to social media content. Social media can be seen in various ways and forms such as text, video, audio, photos or images and communities (Scott, 2013:54).

In organisational context, Waters *et al.* (2009:103) describe social media as a way for stakeholders to become part of the organisation. They continue by pointing out that social media can be used in organisations to simplify management functions, to interact with stakeholders, and to cultivate relationships in which they educate stakeholders about the organisation's products or services. Social media can facilitate two-way communication (discussed in more detail below) and, therefore, be used in organisations to enhance interactive relationships with stakeholders (Kent & Taylor, 1998:321; Waters *et al.* 2010:45). Although Waters *et al.* (2009) applied their work to the non-profit section, these generic principles are also argued to be applicable to tertiary institutions.

Each of these SMPs is unique and has features that differ from the other. Their main characteristics can be explicated as follows (Hartshorn, 2010):

- SMPs communicate messages or information to a larger audience, similar to oral or print media, and provide the opportunity for participants to engage on a certain post.

- SMPs provide an opportunity for two-way communication as participants use the site to initiate conversation and comments, and thereby interact and build relationships with the organisation.

- A SMP presence is something that an organisation builds through time by using a combination of platforms to build relationships with their stakeholders by communicating directly to them.

The shift in power in terms of those who may initiate messages is different in SMPs than from that in more traditional communication channels. However, understanding the unique culture of each social network as it relates to an organisation's business and corresponding behaviours that define the subgroups of niche networks, is critical to creating, implementing and managing successful relationships with stakeholders (Solis, 2010:175).

2.3.3 Subgroups of social media platforms
After discussing the main characteristics, the focus shifts to the various subgroups of SMPs, which are explicated below.

2.3.3.1 Facebook
McClard and Anderson (2008:10) describe Facebook as a platform where organisations can have interactions with others through content that is developed by the organisation itself. Content can also be exchanged through social interactions by, for example, sharing and 'liking' posts, photos or visual material. Haydon *et al.* (2012:1) point out that Facebook users connect through this platform with friends. Organisations use this platform to their advantage by communicating and interacting with their stakeholders. Facebook is not only developing to accommodate the individual, but is rapidly becoming a way for organisations to communicate. This makes such SMPs popular with their stakeholders, seeing that the platform can be used for advertising, communicating and building relationships. Adverts on Facebook can even find and link with the individual user's interests.

McClard and Anderson (2008:10) points out that Facebook can be used by individuals to create their own profile. Within this framework, individuals can share their political views, favourite entertainment and other information about themselves in the cyber world. Haydon *et al.* (2012:10) add that individuals can also invite their friends by using Facebook to share videos, pictures and status updates. Friends can also interact on these mediums and can contribute to the conversation. Haydon *et al.* (2012:11) point out that Facebook developed over the years to be more media orientated. As a result, Facebook's focus has shifted to giving news and information about friends and organisations. A trend seems to be that events and incidents that occur in the media is discussed on Facebook.

2.3.3.2 Twitter
Solis (2010:84) refers to Twitter as an online personal broadcasting system and explains that this platform introduced a new behaviour of continual publicising of one's opinion to the masses, into the routine of social media participation. These messages can be posted to anyone from anywhere and then be read by anyone. Dixon (2012:40) and Murthy (2012:1061) concur and describe Twitter as a microblogging service limiting a user to a 140 characters per message (including spaces and punctuation), or otherwise known as a

'tweet'. Murthy (2012:1061) goes further to explain that microblogging is "an internet-based service in which (i) users have a public profile in which they broadcast short public messages or updates whether they are directed to specific user(s) or not, (ii) messages become publicly aggregated together across users, and (iii) users can decide whose messages they wish to receive ..."

To recap, Twitter primarily involves updating individual users' status and sharing content (Dixon, 2012:40). Solis (2010:84) further states that more links and content are shared on microblogging sites, such as Twitter, than on any other form of digital media.

Solis (2010:84) explains further that communication departments of companies and organisations are using Twitter to participate in conversations related and relevant to their organisation. Organisations aim to create and cultivate communities of stakeholders. Adding to this aim, Schaefer (2014:140) explains that the exposed and communal nature of Twitter allows individuals to develop relationships and build communities with new and existing stakeholders.

While using Twitter, individuals can choose a '@username' (i.e. identification name) and 'follow' (i.e. subscribe to) any people or organisations of interest. However, the targeted people or organisations do not necessarily have to 'follow' the users back. This enables users to read the 'tweets' (i.e. message/status update) of these people or organisations in their own timeline. If users 'like' a 'tweet' by another user, they can choose to re-'tweet' (i.e. forward) it to their timeline where the user's own 'followers' will be able to see the same post. Users can also choose to 'mention' (i.e. talk directly to) other users in their 'tweets'. If users rather choose to speak privately to another user, they can do so by sending the other one a 'direct message' (i.e. inbox message). Users can also catagorise conversations by using the # symbol. All the terms mentioned above need to be done inside of 140 characters (Dixon, 2012: 41-45; Murthy, 2012:1061–1064).

2.3.3.3 Instagram
Schaefer (2014:133) explains Instagram as a way for an organisation to share content visually and categorise it in a photo-sharing site. Instagram makes it easy to share content with a mobile phone as well as create content with a professional appearance, and is not time consuming (Scott, 2013:296). Kerpen (2011:246) and Scott (2013:296) further mention that Instagram allows users to take a photo with their mobile phone, manipulate this image with various filters, caption the photo, 'hashtag' it and share it with their followers or on the user's other social sites.

Therefore, authors such as Schaefer (2014:133) and Kerpen (2011:247) emphasise that organisations need to use this fast-growing social network as a method to do the following: reward stakeholders who share their experience of the organisation, hold contests, crowdsourcing, research on hashtags, or identify trends their stakeholders follow.

As with Twitter, Instagram uses the @ symbol to tag other users in the post and the # symbol to create or add to categories and keep track of them later (Kerpen, 2011:247).

2.3.3.4 LinkedIn

LinkedIn is considered the social network for professionals, as this platform showcases the users' business experience and connects them with contacts from their email address book and with individuals linked to their previous employment opportunities (Dixon, 2012:188; Kerpen, 2011:250; Schaefer, 2014:128; Scott, 2013:255).

Dixon (2012:188), Kerpen (2011:250) and Scott (2013:255) further explain that LinkedIn can be used to host links, multimedia presentations, recommendations and job opportunities. Organisations can also contribute to LinkedIn by using groups, or sharing posts or visual material (Dixon, 2012:200). LinkedIn can be considered the seamless tool for engaging to the professional community, and thus an important instrument for school leaders and recruiters, and even universities aiming to engage with alumni.

On LinkedIn, individuals can create a profile with professional information, which include job description, aspirations and education. Thereafter they can begin connecting with other professionals by asking them to join their professional network, whether searching for connections within LinkedIn or adding them through the individual's email contact list. Similar to Facebook, a LinkedIn user can share content, ask for help in groups and make introductions, in similar ways as suggesting a friend to another user (Dixon, 2012:189).

Dixon (2012:200) encourages organisations to create their own LinkedIn page. By allowing stakeholders to associate them with the organisation, will quickly show up in their professional circles for others to see. This allows others, in turn, to associate with the organisation or read up on it. Such a method is useful for past employees, prospective students, and particularly, in the university's case, for alumni.

2.3.3.5 YouTube

YouTube features as an online video-content service. The content on YouTube is created, shared and commented on by its users. Statistics on videos are also made available to all users (Dixon, 2012:81; Song & Wildman, 2013:619).

Kerpen (2011:239) argues that YouTube could be used to showcase an organisation's corporate culture, products and services, as well as expertise. Dixon (2012:82) adds that YouTube is one of the first places people go to receive communication and information, as the videos show up in Google searches. Organisations can thus use YouTube to create practical information, help solve problems and enhance its communication about the organisastion (Schaefer, 2014:131).

Users can create a video with a webcam, cellphone or profesional video equipment. This video is then uploaded to YouTube by logging into an account. While uploading the video, users can include keywords and a discription of the video or links for further uses or information. After this has been done the video is uploaded and viewers can search and view the video, rate the video by 'liking' (i.e. good videos) or 'disliking' (i.e. bad videos) it, and post comments about the video. Viewers of the video can also share content to other SMPs or even embed a video to their website.

The reach of a video can easily be determined because the number of times the video is viewed is tracked by YouTube. In addition, users that upload video content receives feedback on their videos through email (see Dixon, 2012:81-84).

2.3.3.6 Other social media platforms

The focus of the study will thus mainly be on the above-mentioned social media platforms. However, since the universities sometimes also make use of Pinterest, Google+, Flickr, blogging and Snapchat, these platforms will be discussed as briefly as possible additions that can add to stakeholder (e.g. alumni) communication.

- **Pinterest** is a virtual bulletin board where users can 'pin' items of interest and revisit it later (Scott, 2013:298). This helps individuals make compilations of items that have interest for them such as planning a wedding, or decorating a house (Loren & Swiderski, 2013:03).
- **Google+**, launched in 2011, is a more recent SMP that incorporates various tools of the Internet giant, Google (Dixon, 2012:204) such as Google Docs and Google email (G-mail). It offers functionalities similar to Facebook where users can connect with friends (Google Hangout), post photos and share visual material (Scott, 2013:254). In addition, users can use *Huddle* to send group messages, create profiles on Google+, have a stream of what is happening with their connections, or use the *Sparks* function for recommendations (Dixon, 2012:204).
- **Flickr** is a video- and photo-sharing website, where users can upload, store and backup, as well as organise digital photos and videos, and automatically post mobile smartphone photos to an external application. Users can comment, add descriptions

to other users' photos and create groups that are themed (Lewis, 2012:136; Scott, 2013:53; Terdiman, 2004).

- **Blogs** are independent, web journals that contain various opinions on certain topics and can be updated frequently in the form of text, audio, video, et cetera (Dixon, 2012:146; Scott, 2013:81). A blog can be seen as a SMP due to the social integration and sharing with other SMPs (Dixon, 2012:146; Safko & Brake, 2009:177).
- **Snapchat** uses an electronic device's camera to take *snaps* (snapshots) and send it to other users. This application allows the sender to insert text on the *snap* and also choose the amount of seconds (1-10) as well as the number of recipient(s) who can view the *snap* before it disappears from the device (Rouse & McLaughlin, 2013).

It is important to understand the SMP as such, and also how organisations can apply these SMPs to create strong stakeholder relationships.

The theories describing the domain of communication management that highlight specific key points that should be considered, are the stakeholder relationship management theory and the *two-way symmetrical communication* theory, which will be discussed subsequently. Both these theories guide the use of social media from the point of view of managing communication.

2.4 STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT THEORY

Ledingham (2003:190) defines public relations as a management function that tends to build relationships with stakeholders. Broom *et al.* (2000:18) and Cutlip (1994:1) in turn define public relations as patterns of interaction, transactions, exchange and a relationship between an organisation and its stakeholders, to create and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders.

Thomlison (2000:178) elaborates on the definition above of stakeholder relationships, by arguing that relationships can be viewed as a set of expectations between two parties based on their behaviour and interaction. Ströh (2005:111) explains that relationships with stakeholders should be adjusted and maintained constantly to deliver successful interaction that satisfies the expectations of both parties. Thereby such a relationship will hold economic, social, political and cultural benefits for both parties (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:62). Ideally, the organisation and its stakeholders need an interactive relationship to communicate and understand each other's expectations sufficiently (Bruning, 2002:40). The success of such a relationship can be determined by measuring its management outcomes.

2.4.1 Relationship management outcomes

To describe organisational-stakeholder relationships within the framework of stakeholder relationship management, Hon and Grunig (1999) determined certain outcomes by which to evaluate the relationship:

- Trust
- Control mutuality
- Commitment
- Relationship satisfaction

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

It should also be noted that the organisation and stakeholders have to agree on the type of relationship (*communal* or *exchange*) in order to create and build a strong relationship.

2.4.1.1 Trust

Ledingham and Bruning (1998:58) explain t*rust* as the result when an organisation does what it promised to do. This outcome shows similarities with *control mutuality* because both these outcomes depend on each party in the relationship committing to what they have promised. As a result, both parties can assume that the other one will deliver on what was promised or committed to. If the outcome of the relationship between two parties, as it was promised, contributes to both parties' wellbeing, *trust* will form (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999:165). Hon and Grunig (1999:19) add that *trust* is also found in the level of mutual self-confidence between the participants in the relationship, and to what extent they are willing to reveal themselves to each other.

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

- Integrity: The stakeholder's view that the organisation is "... fair and just" (trustworthy) or vice versa.
- Dependability: Determined by whether the stakeholder or organisation do what is promised.
- Competence: The capability of organisations or the stakeholders to deliver on their promises.

Organisation or stakeholder actions, to a large extent, determine whether the parties are trusted (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999:165).

2.4.1.2 Control mutuality

Stafford and Cannary (1991:5) understand *control mutuality* as the agreement by the parties involved on the relationship goals and behavioural routines. Waters (2011:460) adds that these efforts are aimed at achieving interdependence and stability in the relationship,

whether it be a symmetrical or asymmetrical balance. Such a balance will determine to what extent parties can influence one another or are willing to take the risk of being open and vulnerable. When both participants are willing to open themselves to these risks involved in reaching a common goal, they will attain interdependence and stability.

Therefore, from the perspective of relationship management, it is important that an organisation must strive towards shared power with its stakeholders. This should be to the extent that both parties are comfortable with the level of symmetry or asymmetry in their interdependence and mutually shared power.

2.4.1.3 Commitment

Hon and Grunig (1999:20) explain that the concept of *commitment* within relationship management describes the extent to which one participant in the relationship believes that the relationship has a certain value and, hence the motivation to build the relationship and keep it strong. Bruning and Ledingham (1999:59) support this view by stating that the organisation and its stakeholders need to be mutually interested with a willingness to commit to each other. To show *commitment*, both parties must be willing to invest time, money, energy and effort into the relationship (Ledingham & Bruning 1998:165).

2.4.1.4 Relationship satisfaction

If the outcomes mentioned above are reached, it should lead to *relationship satisfaction* by the organisation and its stakeholders (Hon & Grunig 1999:14).

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

2.4.1.5 Shared understanding of an exchange or communal relationship

When *relationship satisfaction* has been reached between the two parties, it is more likely that they would have a shared understanding of the extent to which the relationship is an *exchange* or a *communal* one (Hon & Grunig 1999:4). According to Hon and Grunig (1999:4) and on the one extreme, in an *exchange* relationship, one party provides benefits to the other one, only because the other did it in the past or is expected to do it in future. When something is thus given, another is expected in return.

In a *communal* relationship, on the other extreme, both parties in the relationship give benefits to one another because they are concerned for the wellbeing of the other party,

even when they receive nothing in return (Hon & Grunig, 1999:4). These extremes are placed on a continuum on which the relationship can be plotted. Particularly from the perspective of communication management, the focus is on creating a more *communal* relationship that benefits both parties, than an *exchange* relationship that expects something in return (Hon & Grunig 1999:4).

In order to achieve the mentioned measurement indices for a strong organisational-stakeholder relationship, certain *relationship building strategies* should also be kept in mind – as explicated below.

2.4.2 Relationship building strategies

Hon and Grunig (1999:15) discuss nine *relationship building strategies*. Of these strategies, three focus on conflict resolution and are therefore not included in this study (Hon & Grunig, 1999:15). For the purpose of this study, the following *relationship building strategies* are included:

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

Each of the strategies mentioned above are elaborated below.

2.4.2.1 Access

Hon and Grunig (1999:15) explain the strategy of access, by arguing that when risks are taken, the organisation needs to make information available freely to show their *commitment* and to create *trust*. The extent to which *trust* is established in this case, can also help ensure that both participants are satisfied with the relationship later on. Williams and Brunner (2010:2) explain this strategy by pointing out that the organisation and the stakeholders should both be willing to distribute information to each other openly.

According to Hon and Grunig (1999:15), the goal of this relationship strategy in practice is to make public relations officers accessible to both sides, to ensure that the stakeholders also form part of the decision-making process. Social media *access*, will imply that: contact information is available, both parties can react on online inquiries by giving responses as needed, telephone calls are handled and quick responses given to emails and letters. Both parties must also be able to make inquiries or report a complaint when necessary.

2.4.2.2 Positivity

Positivity refers to the actions of the various participants that make both sides feel more comfortable with the relationship. This strategy focuses on showing that both participants in the relationship are committed to each other and that they have mutual respect, which will result in *trust* and *relationship satisfaction* (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Williams & Brunner, 2010:2).

Hon and Grunig (1999:15) add that, in practice, positivity is linked to the previous strategy, namely *access,* seeing that the flow of information can only be achieved when parties are positively inclined towards each other. The result of this strategy is *trust* and *commitment.*

2.4.2.3 Openness and disclosure

Hon and Grunig (1999:15) and Williams and Brunner (2010:2) point out that from its early stages, an open system creates the climate for an honest and trustworthy relationship. However, both participants must be prepared to engage openly and develop honest discussions to improve the relationship. The strategy creates opportunities in practice for the parties within the relationship to discover each other's needs and motives on social media, which will indicate their common purpose and thus lead to mutual *trust.*

2.4.2.4 Assurance of authenticity

Hon and Grunig (1999:15) state that when one of the participants of the relationship is committed to the relationship, they will show *commitment* and dedication through communicative behaviour (Williams & Brunner, 2010:2). Furthermore, this strategy focuses on the legitimisation of parties and their concerns (Hon & Grunig, 1999:15). In short, acknowledging the other party and what is important to them.

Despite the huge risks that are taken, this strategy can increase *relationship satisfaction.* Williams and Brunner (2010:5) furthers that an organisation's website can even contribute to this strategy by, for example, including the presence of a chat room, a public message board or link to a SMP.

2.4.2.5 Networking

Hon and Grunig (1999:15) posit that networking is considered as the organisation and its stakeholders working together as a system to achieve greater heights, but also in coalition with other systems that focus on the same goals. Ki and Hon (2006:31) add that organisations also build relationships with stakeholders' networks, or with the same network in which their existing stakeholders are engaged, such as environmentalists, unions and community groups. In practice, organisations can showcase their networks online (Ki & Hon,

2006:31). The presence of other organisations' brands and links to their website will strengthen the strategy of networking.

2.4.2.6 Sharing of tasks

As a strategy, to share tasks gives participants the opportunity to help each other attain a common goal in the relationship (Hon & Grunig 1999:15; Williams & Brunner, 2010:2). For instance, mutual decisions need to be approached as the sharing of tasks, where the responsibility of these decisions are divided between the parties (Stafford & Cannery, 1991:12).

When the *relationship building strategies* suggested by Hon and Grunig (1999) are used, it will contribute to the outcomes that constitute a strong relationship between the organisation and stakeholders. Therefore, it is important that organisations apply *relationship building strategies* to their usage of social media to build and maintain relationships with their stakeholders.

2.5 TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL COMMUNICATION THEORY

Two-way symmetrical communication is regarded as a highly responsible and ethical approach to communication since it leads to strong, long-term and mutually beneficial relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders (Grunig *et al.*, 1992:36; Grunig *et al.*, 2002:2). This type of communication helps the organisation provide information and feedback to their stakeholders, but also gives stakeholders the opportunity to return the favour.

Many organisations still believe that it is unnecessary to communicate with stakeholders through online channels and regard this process as impersonal (Kaplan & Heanlein, 2010:60). However, social media is seen as an ideal platform to implement *two-way symmetrical communication* within the organisational context, to create understanding and a conversation between the parties (Grunig & Hunt, 1984: 22; Kaplan & Heanlein, 2010:60). Such a conversation will help both parties pursue their goals, while keeping the best interest of the other party in mind. In this way, the interests of both parties in the relationship are balanced.

Diga and Kelleher (2009:440) point out that the use of social media as a form of online *two-way symmetrical communication*, offers numerous opportunities to strengthen the strategic role of the communication practitioner in providing recent and accurate information to stakeholders (Taylor & Perry, 2005:209). Such information can be provided by making use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube

(Qualman, 2013:14). Following the above, it appears that the role of online communication in building and facilitating organisational relationships with stakeholders, cannot be overlooked.

When an organisation strives toward *two-way symmetrical communication*, the organisation and its stakeholders aim to generate a mutual understanding. They also try to shape and maintain long-term, mutually beneficial relationships by being transparent and by communicating equally and ethically (Grunig, 1989:38, 40; Grunig *et al.*, 2001:14; Grunig & White, 1992:42-43). Both parties must also be willing to forfeit some form of power to each other or, for that matter, share the power of the relationship. Both must also be willing to transform according to the feedback or responses received from the other party, because in some cases the relationship's future depends on it (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:10; Grunig & White, 1992:39).

Grunig (1989:40) furthermore argues that this type of communication becomes almost impossible in practice, hence the need for a more realistic model. This led to the development of the mixed-motive model as practiced from a two-way symmetrical point of view (Grunig & White, 1992:48; Le Roux, 2011:65).

The orientation for the new model is still to have open and transparent *two-way symmetrical communication* that serves both parties' interest but in some cases, asymmetrical communication, such as persuasion, might also be needed in the interaction (Grunig & White, 1992:48; Le Roux, 2011:65). Within the mixed-motive model there is a win-win area, where the organisation and its stakeholders can convince, persuade and influence each other to achieve understanding, especially in case of conflicting interests (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:356; Le Roux, 2011:65). This model also makes room for differences in power or power sharing in communication. It also focuses on reciprocity, as both parties are set on achieving their goals, while keeping the other's best interest at heart (Grunig & White, 1992:46,48; Le Roux, 2011:65). In this process, the voice of the stakeholder is heard in strategic organisational decision-making (Grunig, 2006:5; Le Roux, 2011:66).

The two-way symmetrical model, therefore, explains the type of, or approach to communication the public relations practitioner should use when aiming to build and maintain stakeholder relations.

2.6 APPLYING CORPORATE COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT THEORY TO SOCIAL MEDIA

Kent and Taylor (1998:323) and Fuchs (2014:5) argue that online communication is an effective platform to build relationships and communities through greater interaction. Creating these relationships can be done especially through social media (Waters *et al.*, 2009:102) given that the various communication platforms are aligned (Barker & Angelopulo, 2006:39).

Research shows that communication and relationship management theories provide insight into building relationships and communities through online communication. Hurme's (2001:74) research shows that organisations can engage with stakeholders and online communities on social media by providing regular and relevant information on which they can give feedback to create a conversation.

By keeping the above in mind, it is essential to integrate Hon and Grunig's (1999) *relationship building strategies* with guidelines indicating how the theory of corporate communication management can be applied to social media. Kent and Taylor (1998), Williams and Brunner (2010) and Ki and Hon (2006) applied corporate communication strategies to the web and online communication. Interestingly, corporate communication theories have been applied to websites, but to a lesser extent to social media.

In this regard, Waters *et al.* (2009:103) highlight three main strategies to cultivate relationships through social media, namely:

- *Disclosure:* Being open and making information available on social media through hyperlinks, detailed descriptions about the organisation and its history and providing logos and visual aspects to social media for users to establish a connection.
- *Usefulness and Information dissemination:* Focusing on the type of information that is distributed, using multimedia in posts comprising images, video and audio, using the message board or something similar to engage on discussions.
- *Interactivity and Involvement:* Asking for email addresses and ways to donate, providing a calendar of events, listing volunteering opportunities, contribute to interactivity and Involvement.

The following section aims to integrate corporate communication theory and *social media guidelines*. For clarity, the discussion will be structured according to the *relationship building strategies* discussed in section 2.4.2.

2.6.1 Access

Williams and Brunner (2010:5) point out that providing access on the web is to ensure that contact details such as telephones, a physical address of the organisation, and an email address of branches of an organisation are available, as well as a detailed description of the organisation and its history (Waters *et al.*, 2009:103). Furthermore, access may be increased by ensuring that stakeholders can communicate directly on the SMPs by, for example, writing on their Facebook wall, send an Inbox message, 'tweeting' a Direct Message or Instagram photo to achieve *disclosure* (Waters *et al.,* 2009:103).

Another method to ensure access through *disclosure* is to make available a list of people responsible for social media management (Water *et al.*, 2009:103). In this sense, the speed and frequency of distributing information, becomes paramount (Kowalik, 2011:217; Makrez 2011:234). By ensuring that social media platforms *disclose* the organisation logo or cues to help users recognise the organisation, it also helps provide access and establish a type of connection with the organisation (Waters *et al.,* 2009:103). Contributing with photos and videos, relevant posts and links to useful information, helps stakeholders gain easier access to the organisation.

However, to achieve *interactivity and involvement,* certain features need to be implemented on social media to create a discussion. Furthermore, both participants in the relationship must be willing to participate in the communication by actions such as using and following hyperlinks, taking part in online surveys, reacting on suggestions from online feedback and providing feedback in online chatrooms (Hon & Grunig, 1999:15; Williams & Brunner, 2010:5; Waters *et al.*, 2009:103; Kerpen, 2011:76). If stakeholders deem the information and discussion *useful,* the information will be *disseminated* further.

Therefore, access depends on the organisation's willingness to distribute information freely or to share it with stakeholders in order to show their mutual *commitment* and *trust*. This also makes it possible for the public relations officer to communicate openly with both sides, organisation or the stakeholders.

Accessibility can also be achieved by ensuring the information shared on SMPs are different to each platform. Thereby an organisation makes certain that its different SMPs are useful to a stakeholder. This will result in a stakeholder returning to re-use or re-visit the platform or encourage the stakeholder to visit other SMPs.

The following table (Table 2.2) is a summary of the above-mentioned sources on *access* in the literature.

Table 2.2: The implementation of acces as a relationship building strategy in social media

Hon and Grunig (1999:15)	Ki and Hon (2006:31)	Waters *et al.* (2009:103)	Wankel and Wankel (2011)	Kerpen (2011)
- Make information available freely, including contact information. - Include stakeholders in the decision-making process. - React on online inquires. - React on telephone calls, emails and letters. - Participation is important. - Take part in a form of online chatrooms.	- Fast reaction required on social media.	- Organisations should make available detailed information about the organisation on social media, i.e. contact information. - Linking through hyperlinks to website and to other social media. - Visual characteristics must be engaging.	- Constantly keeping stakeholders up to date with relevant content. - Sharing photos, videos and links to assist accessibility. - Stakeholders need full access to posts, comments, share and use social media.	- Stakeholders need full access to posts, comments, share and use social media. - Stakeholders should be able to ask questions as their access to and discussions with the organisation. - Detailed 'About us' section on social media.

2.6.2 Positivity

Williams and Brunner (2010:5) explain that positivity as a relationship building strategy can be implemented on a site by ensuring that its navigation is made as easy as possible. This can be done by giving clear indications on the SMPs, and making sure that the site is user friendly. Furthermore, an effective search function should be present as well as an outline of what is important. The same applies to different SMPs by, for example, giving descriptive names to images or albums on a different SMP. By correctly archiving and highlighting a post, and adding a clear description when posting on social media, users should still be able to navigate through the post or search the post easily. Positivity means ensuring that the stakeholder finds the content enjoyable, valuable and useful as well as up to date. Stakeholders will be positive towards the organisation if the social media is used differently, cleverly and well planned out.

In an online environment, a positive response is needed to an online message. Positivity can also be measured by the level of communication between the participants in the relationship. Therefore, interactivity is important for two-way communication to take place (Ki & Hon, 2006:31, Bortree, 2007:9). Answering questions promptly, re-'tweeting', linking a post and attending to issues on SMP, also impact positively on stakeholders, by showing that the organisation is willing to engage and assist (Kowalik, 2011:217; Makrez, 2011:234; Kerpen, 2011:87). Kerpen (2011:77-89) agrees but explains that organisations should also

acknowledge positive comments and posts and respond to them. In this way, all stakeholders, whether their interaction is negative or positive, get recognition and this keeps them positive.

Positivity can also be measured by the level of communication online between the participants of the relationship. Waters *et al.* (2009:103) advocate the strategies of *disclosure of information* and *usability*. If the organisation provides the necessary information and distributes the relevant information, this will help the user respond positively towards the organisation. In the case of *usability*, Waters *et al.* (2009:103) point out that in the context of social media, the users deal with various types of information that is made available on the specific SMPs.

An organisation that publishes its press releases or links to the press release or news about the organisation promotes this strategy, which encourages *interactivity and involvement.* Integrating content on different SMPs also helps ensure positivity. For example, an event's photos can be uploaded to Facebook and used as a 'teaser' on Instagram, or a link can be shared on Twitter. This is a certain way of preventing the duplication of information. However, a more effective way is integrating the same content to different SMPs. Organisations need to ensure that these integrations work effectively by supplying the correct information and working links. This will also give stakeholders a more positive view of the organisation.

Kowalik (2011:217), Makrez (2011:234) and Kerpen (2011:87) furthermore point out that enabling stakeholders to post and comment on an organisation's SMPs, not merely gives them access to the site. This strategy has a positive influence on them by providing them with another avenue to communicate with the organisations.

In addition, organisations can make a positive impact by sharing relevant and interesting information about the organisation on a regular basis. Kowalik (2011:217), however, points out that posting too frequently to SMPs, may be considered as 'spam' and may influence stakeholders negatively. Using and implementing a well-planned social media calendar can help organisations plan useful information to share and post on SMPs. As soon as organisations have found a pattern that works for them, their stakeholders will also adapt to the pattern.

Therefore, this strategy entails any input from the organisation or the stakeholders that make their relationship more enjoyable and encourages them to enhance the relationship. This

strategy helps both sides feel more comfortable with the relationship. When there is mutual respect it shows the *commitment* of the stakeholders and organisation. Positivity contributes to the outcomes of *trust* and *relationship satisfaction* (Hon & Grunig, 1999:15).

The table on the next page (Table 2.3) summarises the above-mentioned sources on *positivity* that were found in the literature.

2.6.3 Openness and disclosure

Openness and disclosure, according to Williams and Brunner (2010:5), can be implemented as a strategy on a website and an SMPs by a well-planned, informative and updated 'About us' page. In this way, information can be published about the organisation's history, origin, mission and vision as well as goals. Furthermore, regular relevant news about the organisation and annual reports also need to be available on the organisation's website. Linking the organisation's website to SMPs is not only a way to integrate websites with SMPs but also helps organisations to be open and transparent about themselves. This will ensure that information is accessible to the various stakeholders. Such a strategy also ensures interactivity, as *two-way symmetrical communication* is encouraged.

Table 2.3: The implementation of positivity as a relationship building strategy

Hon and Grunig (1999:15)	Ki and Hon (2006:31)	Waters *et al.* (2009:103)	Wankel and Wankel (2011)	Kerpen (2011)
- Makes stakeholders feel comfortable and at ease. - Makes information available. - Facilitates trust through positivity. - Input that makes the relationship more enjoyable or pleasurable.	- Gives feedback on messages with a positive attitude. - Gives quick responses on online inquiries and messages.	- Relevant links on social media platforms. - Provides relevant photos, links, videos, sound and information on social media. - Makes use of pin boards or message boards. - Placement of relevant information or a link to information such as a press release or organisation news.	- Constantly keeps stakeholders up to date with relevant content. - Shares photos, videos and links. - Open SMPs so that stakeholders have full access to post, comment, share and use SMPs messaging platforms and receive quick responses.	- Open SMPs so that stakeholders has full access to post, comment, share and use SMPs messaging platforms. - Stakeholders should be able to ask questions and get a quick response. - Respond to all posts.

To implement this strategy on SMPs, a strategic plan should be in place that regularly *discloses* relevant information on different SMPs (Williams & Brunner, 2010:5). Making use of 'tagging' or 'mentioning' is another way organisations can ensure openness and disclosure. Using such strategies to include others in posts or to allow stakeholders to include themselves, helps the organisation to be more open. In this way, stakeholders are well informed on what is going on in the organisation and can join in the conversation on different SMPs. This strategy serves as a way to communicate news and activities of the organisation to stakeholders (Waters *et al.*, 2009:103).

Again Waters *et al.'s* (2009:103) strategy of *disclosure* of information and usability needs to be incorporated in the strategy of *openness and disclosure*. This will help build sound relationships and achieve the above-mentioned outcomes.

Kowalik (2011:217) and Makrez (2011:234) explain that organisations should openly post links, photos, videos, audio and information on SMPs. In addition, they should make these platforms accessible and open to all stakeholders to use and contribute. This will help realise the mentioned strategy of openness and disclosure. This is also in line with the design of Waters *et al.* (2009:103) that focuses on *usefulness and information dissemination,* and makes it more likely that users will *interact* and become *involved* in the organisation's actions and operations. Kerpen (2011:109) emphasises that when using SMPs, organisations should be as honest and transparent as possible. Being honest and authentic when posting or replying is another important way in which organisations can disclose information. Moreover, not deleting posts but replying to it, is another way to contribute to this strategy. Honesty and transparency help build direct relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders. Deviations from these values can impede mutual *trust*.

It is enlightening for stakeholders to share insights into the organisation's values and culture, and to encourage an honest discussion of the decisions that have been made. This will ensure that the stakeholders will be more likely to *trust* the organisation, experience closeness, and would want to build and strengthen their relationship with the organisation concerned (Kerpen, 2011:113).

Therefore, when an organisation and its stakeholders aim to promote a climate of long-term relationships, it is essential to have an open system in place. Both parties in the relationship must be willing to participate in open and honest discussions. In a way, both will realise their specific needs and the motivation behind those needs. The strategy does not necessarily

contribute to a long-term relationship between stakeholders and the organisation, but can help build a basis by mutual *commitment* to the strategy (Hon & Grunig, 1999:15). The table on the next page (Table 2.4) summarises the above-mentioned sources on openness and disclosure, which the literature indicated.

2.6.4 Assurance of authenticity

Ensuring authenticity as a strategy can be established by having chat rooms, discussion boards or forums available on the web, the presence of a blog can also strengthen this strategy, according to Williams and Brunner (2010:5).

Regarding social media, this strategy can be implemented on SMPs by making updates regularly and allowing stakeholders to share, comment, 'like', re-'tweet', et cetera. Therefore, posts need to be relevant to the organisation and contribute to the motives of *usefulness and information dissemination* as Waters *et al.* (2009:103) presented it.

Table 2.4: The implementation of openness and disclosure as a relationship building strategy

Hon ad Grunig (1999:15)	Ki and Hon (2006:31)	Waters *et al.* (2009:103)	Wankel and Wankel (2011)	Kerpen (2011)
- Creates honesty and trust. - Promotes open involvement. - Develop honest discussions. - Helps to reach mutual and common goals. - Willingness of both parties to participate.	- Makes social media and websites accessible to everyone.	- Provides relevant link on social media platform to other pages. - Posts relevant photos, links, videos, sound and information on social media. - Makes use of pin boards or message boards. - Places relevant information or a link to information such as a press release or news on the organisation.	- Shares photos, videos and links. - Open SMPs to provide stakeholders full access to post, comment, share and use SMPs messaging platforms, and receive quick responses.	- Open SMPs so that stakeholders have full access to post, comment, and share and use SMPs messaging platforms. - Respond to all posts. - Provide honest and transparent insight about organisation. - Be as honest and transparent as possible when using SMPs.

According to Qualman (2013:38), social media can be considered the new Inbox. SMPs allows users to communicate through platforms hosted by SMPs. Users can employ Inbox-messages, direct messages (DM) or Private Messages (PM) to communicate not only with each other but with an organisation. This strategy requires of organisations to be open in order for users to communicate directly with the organisation in whichever way they feel comfortable, whether it is in a 'tweet', a comment, a wall post or a way of direct messaging on SMPs.

The organisation should respond to these messages as quickly as possible. Answering with messages confirming to whom the user is talking can be another way for the organisations to be authentic. Answering questions or expressing thanks for a compliment already creates an authentic and warm relationship. Qualman (2013:39) and Kowalik (2011:215) further posit that this method of communication substitutes the traditional ways of communicating such as e-mail, message boards, forums and instant messaging (IM). As a result, the information flow becomes more open and also allows a much deeper relationship than the mentioned traditional ways.

Kowalik (2011:217) and Makrez (2011:237) suggest that organisations should find stories that humanise the organisation and its constituents. If possible, organisations should create diverse stories with different angles, for instance about the organisation's stakeholders. This could be done by posting videos and photos, and by ensuring that stakeholders have different ways to access these stories. Using SMPs during live events held by the organisations, also shows that they appreciate comments and input from stakeholders. In this way, the organisation shows that it cares, which creates a sense of authenticity. Furthermore, the organisation *discloses* information, which encourages users to be *interactive* because they feel *involved,* as Waters *et al.* (2009:103) suggest.

Organisations can humanise their SMPs, according to Kerpen (2011:96), by responding to posts and questions. Stakeholders will become more positive and appreciative because of this personal attitude. SMPs can be a place for stakeholders to engage with each other authentically and for organisations to build true and long-lasting relationships with stakeholders (Kerpen, 2011:97). When the organisation creates content with a personal tone, respond to questions, and interacts on posts in a personal manner, the stakeholders will view the organisation as authentic and real.

Kerpen (2011:97) furthermore explains that organisations can create an authentic presence by using SMPs for improvised communication. They do not always need planned-out strategies, because of SMPs' spur-of-the-moment nature. As mentioned previously, the use of various types of SMPs while hosting live events also gives a sense of authenticity to the organisation. This indicates that the organisation is present and up to date. The strategy in this case could mean using a *Twitter fall,* a photo booth, *hashtags* and during such events encouraging conversation on SMPs.

The above-mentioned strategy clearly suggests that the facets of the relationship should be genuine. Such an outcome ensures that both parties in the relationship are committed and satisfied. In addition, each party will be able to understand each other's background and behaviour better (Hon & Grunig, 1999:15).

The following table (Table 2.5) provides a summary of the above-mentioned sources on assurance of authenticity that was found in the literature.

Table 2.5: The implementation of assurance of authenticity as a relationship building strategy

Hon and Grunig (1999:15)	Williams and Brunner (2010:2)	Waters *et al.* (2009:103)	Wankel and Wankel (2011)	Kerpen (2011)
- Mutual commitment. - Good behaviour.	- Presence of chatrooms or something similar. - Presence of a blog or something similar. - Presence of message boards or something similar.	- Detailed information about the organisation on social media platforms. - Availability of contact information. - Connect hrough hyperlinks to the organisation's website. - Visual characteristics should be visible.	- Create stories that humanise the organisation. - Tell these stories through different mediums i.e. video, photos, links and writing stories. - Show what stakeholders are up to and share with other stakeholders. - Use SMPs at live events.	- Respond to posts in a positive manner. - Create a space that is authentic that stakeholders can not only engage with the organisation but with each other. - Use SMPs in an improvised way. - Facilitate conversation with exciting content. - Build an authentic tone of voice.

2.6.5 Networking

Ki and Hon (2006:31) state that an online environment allows organisations to show the multiple networks where they partake in SMPs by following and 'liking' similar, different and other organisations' SMPs. The presence of other organisations' brands and the links to their websites, clearly enhance the strategy. According to Williams and Brunner (2010:5), it is important for organisations to network with similar and different organisations, and even ones with which they are in competition. If organisations can vouch that the strategy of networking is implemented fully, it makes the organisation website or SMPs more believable.

Organisations can also use these partner organisations in their network by sharing their content on their own SMPs by sharing, linking re-'tweeting', mentioning, tagging, et cetera. Promoting events of the organisation gives stakeholders the opportunity to network not only with each other, but with the organisation as such. Such a state of affairs also supports Water's (2009:103) guidelines of *interactivity* and *disclosure.* Jo and Kim (2003) have shown that interactivity is extremely important when organisations aim to build relationships with

their stakeholders. By sharing the content of other networks on SMPs it also *discloses* which partner organisations are part of the network.

Makrez (2011:237) explains that organisations move forward when creating content that engages stakeholders on SMPs. This is a valuable multifaceted mechanism that adds dynamic elements when creating virtual communities, like for instance sharing other stakeholders' success on SMPs. Applied to the present study, an alumni's new business enterprise or a student's accomplishment can be shared. This will encourage activities, emotions and responses from other stakeholders.

Hon and Grunig (1999) explain that the strategy focuses on building and maintaining relationships with relevant stakeholders in the same circle of interest as the organisation or its stakeholders.

The following table (Table 2.6.) summarises the above-mentioned sources on networking that were found in the literature.

Table 2.6: The implementation of networking as a relationship strategy

Hon and Grunig (1999:15)	Ki and Hon (2006:31)	Waters *et al.* (2009:103)	Wankel and Wankel (2011)
- Cooperation - Pursues coalition. - Builds relationships with relevant stakeholders.	- Build networks with other's networks. - Good network system with environmentalists, unions and community groups. - Make networks known on other platforms.	- Make email addresses known. - Create ways to donate money. - Makes available calendar of events. - Announce voluntary work.	- Create stories that humanise the organisation and network with stakeholders. - Share other stakeholders' success. - Create virtual communities through networking.

2.6.6 Sharing of tasks

Williams and Brunner (2010:5) state that the sharing of tasks as a strategy on a website and SMPs can be implemented through community activities. These activities demonstrate to the community how stakeholders are involved or can be incorporated. This means making information *useful* to users. This can be done by *disclosing* the following options or activities: donating time and money, teaching and learning activities, community activities and project involvement for stakeholders (Ki & Hon, 2006:31). This makes it important for organisations to populate its SMPs with ways in which users can donate to causes or volunteer for work.

Such a strategy will make stakeholders believe in the organisation and encourage them to contribute their time and money to help further the same goals as the organisation.

It is, therefore, important to note that most SMPs allow competitions within their boundaries and tolerate links for donation. Such competitions, however, need to be implemented strategically. An organisation can implement these strategies mentioned above on SMPs.

It is important that organisations use SMPs to communicate and open itself up to stakeholders. This can be done by sharing events, decisions and asking for stakeholders to engage. This emphasises the need for stakeholders to interact with organisations on their SMPs. This can be done by ensuring that the SMPs of the organisation is open and that stakeholders can collaborate, create and join in on various conversations (Kowalik, 2011:215; Makrez, 2011:237).

Disclosing the organisation's story by using SMPs, can help encourage stakeholders to share their story as well. In this way, an organisation can show what is important to them and simultaneously receive stakeholders' opinion or own story that is relevant to the organisation (Kerpen, 2011:141-163). This can also be seen as a form of *interactivity,* as suggested by Waters *et al.* (2009:103).

In an online environment, this strategy can be evaluated by measuring the extent to which *interactivity* facilitates two-way communication. Organisations can share relevant stories through their SMPs. This will communicate what the organisation stands for, and will trigger interactivity from shareholders. Such stories can include topics of which stakeholders can form part, for instance, voluntary participation, community activities, donations and involvement in projects (Ki & Hon, 2006:31). Stakeholders will be inclined to relate to the same goals as the organisation and/or share their own story about the organisation on SMPs. The strategy of Hon and Grunig (1999:15) also corresponds to that of Waters *et al.* (2009:103), with its focus on *interactivity*. Certain types of information are also made available to stakeholders and enhances *usability* of the networks and information. These strategies correspond and integrate with that of Hon and Grunig (1999:15).

Thus, opportunities are created where the organisation and its stakeholders can strengthen their relationship mutually. Interactive online communication and facilitating two-way communication are important in this process.

The following table (Table 2.7) is a summary of the above-mentioned sources on sharing of tasks as indicated in the literature.

Table 2.7: The implementation of task sharing as a relationship strategy

Hon and Grunig (1999:15)	Ki and Hon (2006:31)	Waters *et al.* (2009:103)	Wankel and Wankel (2011)	Kerpen (2011)
- Interest groups and organisations working towards similar purpose or task, and strengthen relationships.	- Facilitates interactivity and two-way communication. - Topics should be disclosed where interest groups can become part. - Community activities should be visible on online platforms. - Donations and project involvement must be clearly visible.	- Makes known email addresses. - Creates ways to donate money. - Makes available calendar of events. - Announces voluntary work.	- Asks stakeholders to engage on posts. - Asks stakeholders to share their stories. - Communicates events and news. - Open SMPs.	- Tell organisation's story. - Create stories from stakeholders. - Encourage stakeholders to engage and share their own stories. - Showcase stakeholders' stories. - Share videos, photos and relevant links to tell a story.

2.7 CREATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNITY

According to Lipschultz (2015:76), gaining social capital implies in reality that one becomes a solid, reliable member of the online community. Fuchs (2014:4,45) explains that certain forms of communication, like social media communication, results in more than a mere social relationship. This relationship includes feelings and a sense of belonging together. On the Internet or social media such a relationship facilitates feelings of virtual closeness, human cognition, communication and co-operation. Through strategic communication the social media arena turns into a community. It is, therefore, important to examine the attributes of a community, which will be done below.

Taylor (2013:62) lists attributes that contribute to building a community. These are explained below:

- *Trust:* If an organisation can gain stakeholders' *trust* within a professional relationship, it is likely that participants in the community will share information, knowledge and skills and offer their support.

- *Shared norms and values:* A community implies becoming familiar with the relationship, mutual understanding of perspectives, and meetings to decide how the

community will operate. This means having similar goals and speaking the same 'language' within a particular context.

- *Shared resources and knowledge:* In an effective community, wider access to resources and knowledge will be available to share with like-minded people. As part of community these resources could advance good practice in relationships.

- *Reciprocity:* Communities operate well with the attributes mentioned thus far, which makes it more likely that that other side of the community will reciprocate and contribute to the relationship from their side. In this way, sharing will lead to working through actions such as knowledge, problem solving, expertise, experience and other functions that will benefit the stakeholder and the organisation.

- *Resilience within relationships:* Typically in relationships, resilience develops from sharing and growing together in understanding. Strong communities are resilient in the face of challenges, which allows for constructive conversations around difficult areas.

- *Co-ordination and co-operation:* In order to achieve common goals, co-operation with others is a feature of healthy networks. Numerous users can attest from own experience of networking and relationship building, that healthy relationships inevitably feel co-operative. However, best professional practice extends beyond traditional organisational boundaries. One of the ways in which organisations may improve their practice, is through the wisdom that is brought into the organisation from others by skilled networking.

When these attributes come to the fore, one can argue that a cultivated community will form, whether in the real world, or online. However, one would also have to investigate why these communities are important, which provides the reason why organisations should strive towards a well-functioning community.

Social capital has a positive effect in economic terms and is viewed as a way to understand intangibles that are essential to prospering communities (Lipschultz, 2015:76). In other words, using a SMPs to cultivate social capital should produce opportunities to co-operate beyond organisational boundaries. Such collaboration can grow into "strategic business alliances". In the field of public relations and relationship building, there are several opportunities to create communities and use them for virtual collaboration through social media, which in the end, will yield positive business results (Lipschultz, 2015:76).

2.8 SUMMARY

This chapter explained how literature suggests organisations should build and maintain relationships with stakeholders by using social media. This will help indicate how strategies can be customised to foster sound relationships on social media.

When examining the systems theory as meta-theory, it may seem that corporate communication management in the new social media age must engage as part of a system. This may be inferred from the discussion of SMPs thus far, leading to the argument that it can be viewed as a system within a system.

Therefore, for such systems to continue working effectively, certain communicative actions need to take place. Thus, the focus is on how an organisation strategises to build and maintain relationships with stakeholders. This is done by using online platforms in a two-way symmetrical method while working towards the above-mentioned relationship outcomes and community building on social media. Knowing these outcomes and strategies, it is also important to examine strategies that could be applied to social media, by identifying similarities and differences in these SMPs.

In the following chapter (Chapter 3), the research approach and methods will be discussed. These will be used to test the theoretical perspectives investigated above in practice.

Chapter 3: Research method

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 provided a background and context to the study, while Chapter 2 outlined the theoretical framework for the research. This chapter, Chapter 3, describes the research method that were employed, namely a literature review, qualitative content analysis, semi-structured interviews and self-administered questionnaire. The aim was to generate data that would answer the research questions presented in Chapter 1.

The data collected through the content analysis, are reported on in Chapter 4, the semi-structured interviews dealt with in Chapter 5, and the statistical data gathered from the questionnaire analysed in Chapter 6.

The research approach is discussed subsequently, followed by an explication of each research method employed.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

Gelo *et al.* (2008:272) describe a research approach as the actions or constructions that associate the theoretical framework with methods to elicit reliable, responsible and genuine responses. The research for this comparative study, as discussed in 1.3.1, follows a mixed-method approach, which combine both qualitative and quantitative designs.

3.2.1 Qualitative approach

According to Naudé (2001:95), researchers introduce the qualitative research approach when researching new media, seeing that this is a novel and developing research field. The purpose of a qualitative approach is to understand and portray the behaviour, themes, trends, needs, perception or attitudes of people – for example those using social media. For the present study, limited information is available on how a university can use social media to build alumni relationships. According to Du Plooy (2002:88), a qualitative research approach focuses on exploring certain areas of communication that are limited or have no information available. In this sense, the qualitative approach would be beneficial for the present study.

Du Plooy (2002:30) and Neuman (2014:17) argue that the qualitative research approach is an alternative to constructivism, seeing that the former aims to interpret and construct the qualitative aspects of communication experiences. Qualitative researchers focus on human behaviour and social reality. They study and understand these aspects through the eyes of the ones that are being studied (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:270; Naudé, 2001:95; Du Plooy,

2002:30; Punch, 2014:3). Babbie and Mouton (2001:270) point out that the focus of qualitative research is to gain insight into others' attitudes.

Furthermore, Babbie and Mouton (2001:270) explain that a qualitative approach can be distinguished from a quantitative one, seeing that the qualitative focus is more on the *process* and less on the outcomes of it. This implies an in-depth study and the main research instrument is considered the researchers. Babbie and Mouton (2001:279) and Neuman (2014:17) combine with Du Plooy (2002:30) by outlining the following characteristics of the qualitative research approach:

- The object that is researched and the researcher are closely involved since the researcher is the main research instrument.
- When deciding how to conduct the study, the researcher actively becomes part of the study while facilitating the research. This leads to in-depth research since the researcher is participating actively in the process.
- Specific and a small number of case studies are selected and researched.
- A variety of sources are used to collect data.

The themes and constructs of the research topic are adaptable. This enables the researcher to change the study if necessary and align it with the constructs identified in section 1.2. Thus for the present study, the researcher was able to choose the constructs, identify the necessary research methods, and apply them to certain scenarios. In this case, the researcher applied the themes and constructs identified in Chapter 2 to the way Penn and NWU Pukke use social media. For more insight into the gathered information, quantitative methods were employed to examine the alumni's view of how universities use social media to build relationships with them.

3.2.2 Quantitative approach

Punch (2014:3) gives a simplified definition according to which quantitative research comprises numbers and measurements used to express findings in the form of quantities. Neuman (2014:17) explains that approaches for quantitative research include the following: measuring objective facts, focusing on variables, separating theory and value, statistical analysis and detaching the researcher from the problem. As a result, quantitative data are numerical.

The objective of quantitative research is to predict, describe and explain quantities, degrees and relationships, and to generalise from a sample to the population by collecting numerical data. There are various methods to gather the needed data. However, for the purpose of the present study, and in order to reach as many alumni as possible, a self-administered

questionnaire was used (Du Plooy, 2002: 82). A link to the questionnaire was made available on the universities' SMPs and an email link was sent to alumni members of Penn and NWU Pukke respectively, which they completed and submitted to contribute to this research.

3.2.3 Deductive approach and triangulation

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:273) and Du Plooy (2002:88), an inductive research approach starts off by understanding and examining the environment of the research participants and then evaluating it against theory. In the present study, the theory discussed in Chapter 2 was used as structure to guide the data collection. However, in the part of the study focusing on qualitative research, the researcher was open to defining new constructs not yet mentioned in literature. In light of the above, a deductive approach was followed, where the theory was used as guidance to identify constructs and variables, and to measure relationships (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:86). This was done by applying both qualitative and quntitative methods. Hence, it became evident that the study used the mixed-method approach, which provided data for triangulation.

One of the benefits of triangulation is combining the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research (Punch, 2014:309). This implies the collection of two types of data through both qualitative and quantitative methods in a one-phase design. The data collected from both methods are also considered equal and used as such.

To ensure methodological triangulation in the present study, a self-administered questionnaire was used together with semi-structured interviews and a qualitative content analysis as part of data collection. Denzin (1989:236) defines triangulation as: "The plan of action that the social researcher/scientist collects above his/her own personal preconception that is found in single methodology". According to him, the concept of triangulation includes the use of two or more theories, multiple methods of data gathering and the combination of research, to overcome the shortcomings that a single research method may have.

Babbie and Mouton (2001:275) and Du Plooy (2002:39) point out that triangulation and its implementation leads to the "checked-result method". This method ensures that the researcher's analysis is less judgemental and strengthens the validity and reliability of the study. This implies that qualitative and quantitative methods are used jointly to strengthen the mentioned validity and reliability of observations, analyses and findings of the research (Du Plooy, 2002:41;Flick, 2014:183). In this regard, triangulation can be considered as one of the best ways to ensure such validation and reliability (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:275; Flick, 2014:183).

3.3 RESEARCH METHODS

As was indicated, the present study employed four different methods to collect data. These methods are: literature study, qualitative content analysis, semi-structured interviews and a self-administered questionnaire.

The research questions for the study were determined by and flowed from the general research question. The latter question investigated how Penn and NWU Pukke respectively use social media to build and maintain relationships with their alumni, and what could be learned from comparing their different applications of such media. Therefore, various specific research questions were identified to generate information and provide insight to answer the general research question.

The relationship between the research questions and the research methods are summarised in the table (Table 3.1) below.

Table 3.1: Research questions, methods and concepts from literature

Research questions	Research methods	Concepts/theories (See Table 2.1.)
SRQ1: How is social media used, according to literature, to build and maintain relationships with stakeholders, particularly university alumni?	Literature study	Concepts from the following theories were identified: - Systems theory - Stakeholder relationship management - Two-way symmetrical communication - Waters *et al.* (2009): guidelines for cultivating social media. - Creation of a social media community
SRQ2: How does social media content enhance understanding of social media usage for universities to build and maintain relationships with their alumni?	Content analysis of Penn's and NWU Pukke's SMPs.	**Stakeholder relationship management – relationship building strategies:** *Access, positivity, openness and disclosure, assurance of authenticity, networking, sharing of tasks* **Two-way symmetrical communication:** *Power sharing, transparency, ethical communication, balance of interests, responsible communication, reciprocity* **Waters *et al.'s* (2009) guidelines for cultivating social media relationships:** *Disclosure, Usefulness and information dissemination, Interactivity and involvement* **Creation of a social media community** *Trust, shared norms, shared resources and knowledge, reciprocity, resilience within relationship, co-ordination and co-operation*

Table 3.1: Research questions, methods and concepts from literature (continued)

Research questions	Research methods	Concepts/theories (See Table 2.1.)
SRQ3: How do Penn and NWU Pukke use social media to build and maintain relationships with alumni, according to their alumni managers' views, and how do they compare?	Semi-structured interviews with Penn's and NWU Pukke's alumni managers, and insights gained from the content analysis.	**Stakeholder relationship management – relationship outcomes**: *Trust, control mutuality, commitment, relationship satisfaction, communal vs exchange relationships* **Stakeholder relationship management – relationship building strategies:** *Access, Positivity, Openness and disclosure, Assurance of authenticity, Networking, Sharing of tasks* **Two-way symmetrical communication:** *Power sharing, transparency, ethical communication, balance of interests, responsible communication, reciprocity* **Waters *et al*.'s (2009) guidelines for cultivating social media relationships:** *Disclosure, Usefulness and information dissemination, Interactivity and Involvement* **Creation of social media community:** - *Trust, shared norms, shared resources and knowledge, reciprocity, resilience within relationship, co-ordination and co-operation*
RQ4: What are the views of Penn and NWU Pukke's alumni on the use of social media for building and maintaining relationships, and how do these views compare?	Self-administered questionnaire to Penn's and NWU Pukke's alumni, and insights gained from the content analysis.	**Stakeholder relationship management – relationship outcomes:** *Trust, control mutuality, commitment, relationship satisfaction, communal vs exchange relationships* **Stakeholder relationship management – relationship building strategies:** *Access, positivity, openness and disclosure, assurance of authenticity, networking, sharing of task* **Two-way symmetrical communication:** *Power sharing, transparency, ethical communication, balance of interests, responsible communication, reciprocity* **Waters' *et al*.'s (2009) guidelines for cultivating social media relationships:** *Disclosure, usefulness and information dissemination, interactivity and involvement* **Creation of social media community:** *Trust, shared norms, shared resources and knowledge, reciprocity, resilience within relationship, co-ordination and co-operation*
SRQ5: How do the (i) literature, (ii) the analysis of social media content, (iii) the views of the alumni managers and (iv)the views of the universities' alumni, compare?	Comparison of data from: literature, semi-structured interviews, qualitative content analysis and self-administered questionnaire.	All those mentioned above.

Based on Table 3.1 above, follows a brief exposition of how each method was conducted in the present study.

3.3.1 Literature study

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:565) and Du Plooy (2002:58), a literature study helps make the researcher and the reader aware of existing and recent research on a specific subject. In this regard, the existing literature enables the researcher to question research that has already been done, or to use existing research to answer questions or provide guidelines. Babbie and Mouton (2001:567) point out that when a literature study is used, certain theoretical views must be confirmed from which conclusions can be drawn by gathering additional data.

In establishing a theoretical foundation for the present study, a literature study was done to define how theories and strategies for corporate communication on organisations' SMPs can be applied to build and nurture stronger relationships with alumni. The following databases were consulted to justify research on this topic: NEXUS, EBSCOHost: Academic Source Premier, Business Source Premier, Communication & Mass Media Complete; Econlit; Ferdinand Postma Library Catalogue; SACat; SAepublications Emerald and Science Direct. Sufficient information was found to complete the study.

A variety of studies were undertaken in the context of relationship management. Exponents are Ledingham and Bruning (1998; Bruning & Ledingham, 1999), as well as Grunig and Hon (1999). Other articles included those of Hung (2009), and Morgan and Hunt (1994). Each of these researchers focuses specifically on developing a theory of stakeholder relationship management.

Other researchers take this a step further by applying the design of stakeholder relationship management to various online communities in different sectors. These researchers include:

- Waters, Burnett and Lamm (2009) who focus on engaging stakeholders in general through social networking platforms.
- Baird and Parasnis (2011) who researched relationship management for social media customers.
- Diga and Kelleher (2009) published an article on social media, observations of decision-making power, and public relations roles.
- Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) focused on the challenges and opportunities that social media hold.

Books published on this topic include the following: Solis (2010), focusing on how to build, cultivate and measure success in the new web; Qualman (2013), how social media transforms the way people live and do business; and Fuchs (2014), giving a critical introduction of social media. Focusing on social media communications, Lipshultz (2015) presents a wide-scale analysis on social media with the aim of building relaitonships with

stakeholders. Wankel and Wankel (2011) published a compilation book on social media use for higher education administration. This book includes, amongst others, articles and research from authors such as Kowalik (2011:211) and Makrez (2011:229) on alumni and social media.

Other studies have also been undertaken on alumni relations such as Harrison's article (1994) about college relations and fund-raising expenditures on influencing the probability of alumni giving to higher education. Baade and Sundberg (1996) wrote an article on what determines alumni generosity, while Farrow and Yuan (2011) focused on building stronger ties with alumni through social media to increase volunteerism and charitable giving.

Various theses were done on the topic of social media and relationship management. These include:

- Laaso (2013) on managing customer relationship in the social media.
- Kumar (2012) on social consumer relations.
- Bernoussi (2012) on the value of social media in CRM.
- Cloete (2012) on the exploration of the strategic implementation of marketing communication within a social networking communication context.
- Lein and Ugstad (2011) on social media in customer-relationship management.

Regarding other MA dissertations and PhD theses on this topic, NEXUS provides a list of various studies that focus on social media (ref. Cothill, 2015; Homann & Hugo, 2015 ; Zdanow, 2015). However, these studies are not set within the domain of corporate communication and therefore fall outside the scope of this study that aims to understand how social media can be used for alumni relationsips.There are also studies that focus on social media within the corporate-communication domain, but do not deal with alumni relations of universities (ref. Erasmus & Grobler, 2011; Booth, 2013; Chikandiwa *et al.*, 2013; Mohanlal, 2013) In dealing with alumni relations, Mwangi & Kamau (2009) PhD titled: "The relationship between theological training and practical ministry: a study of Pan African College Alumni: 1983-2004" social media in the study.

The above-mentioned studies differ from the present study by the way in which the theory is applied, the specific context of application, as well as the cross-national nature of the present study. In accordance with the research question (see section 1.5), the present study focused on the context of the alumni realtionships, build and maintained on social media, within tertiary education.

3.3.2 Qualitative content analysis
Du Plooy (2002:191) points out that content analysis is used to document messages, symbols or themes that appear in the items that are researched. This includes content

identified in literature, conversations, emails, meetings and policy documents. Such an analysis can be done in different ways and be implemented on different media such as books, films, music and websites (Du Plooy, 2002:213). Due to the broad field covered by this type of research, it is widely used by researchers of literature and rhetoric, marketing, psychology and the cognitive sciences.

In the present study, the contents of Penn and NWU Pukke's SMPs were analysed qualitatively against the theoretical themes identified in the literature (see Chapter 2). Noteworthy is that the relationship outcomes could not be assessed by means of content analysis, as the opinion of those involved in the relationship is needed to determine the relationship health. The information gained from the content analysis, as well as the literature study, helped the researcher compile the schedules and questionnaires for the semi-structured interviews.

According to various literature sources, certain steps have to be followed when doing a qualitative content analysis (see Table 3.2 below).

Table 3.2: Steps for a content analysis

Steps	Patton (1986:149-150)	Du Plooy (1996:156-164)
Data collection	Collect the relevant data	
Identify the parts of analysis		Choose the parts of analysis
Create codes out of the information	Categorise the information according to recurring themes or patterns	Code the information
Categorise data	Divide the data into significant categories	- Categorise parts of analysis into significant groups - Test validity and reliability in terms of the recurring themes of the study and measure the objectives
Report	Report on what was found	

Table 3.2 above indicates the steps followed for the present study. It is, however, important to note that the mentioned researchers chose not to use any programmes for coding, but preferred doing it manually.

For this study, a qualitative content analysis was done on Penn's and NWU Pukke's SMPs over a period of two months, from 01 June 2015 to 31 July 2015. This time was chosen since it falls in the middle of the year and gave both universities the opportunity to have sufficient content on their SMPs. The findings were compared with the theoretical perspectives identified in Chapter 2. This helped the researcher interpret the data and draw inferences on Penn's and NWU Pukke's use of SMPs respectively to build relationships with stakeholders. This provided additional knowledge to help understand the research problem.

Penn's and NWU Pukke's use of SMPs such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube for the mentioned period, were analysed through the following steps:

1. Collect the data from the SMPs for the mentioned period.
2. Categorise information according to themes identified in the literature.
3. Test the validity and reliability of the findings.
4. Report the findings.

3.3.2.1 Validity and reliability

Due to a strong emphasis on personal understanding in qualitative research, a measure of reliability or consistency may be forfeited for the analysis and results (Babbie, 2004:8, 141-142, 308; Bryman & Cramer, 1997:63; Le Roux, 2011:171; Robson, 2002:101). Thus, within qualitative research, a top priority is to guarantee reliability (trustworthiness) and validity, which implies ensuring that the concepts indicated are truly those which are measured (Bryman & Cramer, 1997:65; Le Roux, 2011:171). Firstly, the focus is on validity.

- *Validity*

In order to validate the research method, construct validity was used as a measuring instrument. Wimmer and Dominick (1994:62) and Du Plooy (2002:136-137) explain this process as follows: *"Relating a measuring instrument to some overall theoretic framework to ensure the measurement is actually logically related to other concepts in the framework."*

Therefore, the constructs can be considered valid as they apply to a certain SMPs by firstly, identifying the variable measured (e.g. an SMP of Penn or NWU-Pukke); secondly, drawing inferences based on identified theory or constructs (see Table 2.1); and thirdly, interpreting the findings and reporting on the results (Du Plooy, 2002:136-137).

- *Reliability*

The researcher had to keep in mind the limitations when doing a qualitative content analysis. These limitations, as pointed out by Du Plooy (2002:132), entail: fatigue of the researcher, emotional or health problems, memory fluctuations, and environmental conditions. In this regard, Babbie (2004:101) and Le Roux (2011:171) advise the researcher to refrain from applying selective observation, where only patterns fitting the researcher's idea of the research problem are observed and other facts ignored.

To minimalise the possible problems as mentioned above and thereby increase reliability, a qualitative content analysis was done by thematically analysing the interviews personally, according to the conceptual structure provided in the literature

study. The mentioned structure was reviewed by another researcher, the study supervisor (Bryman & Cramer, 1997:65; Du Plooy, 2002:133; Le Roux, 2011:171).

3.3.3 Semi-structured interviews

Naudé (2001:104) points out that semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection differ from a normal interview: It does not merely consists of a list of questions, but entails a more open conversation. According to Naudé (2001:104), semi-structured interviews should be a "conversation with a purpose" and take place like a conversation between two friends. Du Plooy (2002:178) adds that a semi-structured interview must be used to gather information on a subject, but also to give the interviewee more freedom to react and discuss matters that may be appropriate, as is the case in a normal conversation. This will also give the researchers the opportunity to add questions they did not prepare before the interview (Du Plooy, 2002:178).

Other characteristics of semi-structured interviews that Naudé (2001:104) highlights are: informal, interactive, dedicated, empathetic and open-ended. Keeping this in mind, it is also important to examine the steps of the interview process. Babbie and Mouton (2001:290) outlines the following phases: (i) design of the interview, (ii) the interview itself, (iii) transcription, (iv) analysing, and (v) verifying and reporting.

3.3.3.1 Interview participants

Interviews were done with the following participants:

- Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director who manages alumni relations at Penn.
- Penn's Alumni Office two Directors of Creative Design and Information Media, responsible for strategic thinking and social media content for Penn's alumni.
- NWU Pukke's Director of Marketing and Communication who manages various strategic marketing and communications, including the relationship with alumni.
- NWU Pukke's Electronic Media Manager who's task is managing and planning electronic communication for various entities, including alumni.

The interviewees mentioned above, actively work with Penn's and NWU Pukke's alumni communication on social media. These participants were the most knowledgeable on the subject of social media and alumni relations, and were thus selected as part of a convenience sample.

The interviews were conducted on different dates.

- The interview with Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director took place on two different days due to time constraints. The dates for these two sessions were 3 August 2015 (elapsed time: 40:30) and 4 August 2015 (elapsed time: 40:24).
- The interview with Penn's two Alumni Office Directors of Creative Design and Information Media took place on 4 August 2015 (elapsed time: 58:53).

These mentioned interviews all took place in the offices of the respondents at Penn in Philadelphia, USA.

NWU Pukke's interviews took place in the offices of the respondents at North-West University Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa.

- The interview with NWU Pukke's Director of Marketing and Communication took place on 14 September 2015 (elapsed time: 28:28),
- The interview with NWU Pukke's Electronic Media Manager on 9 September 2015 (elapsed time: 27:51).

The interviews were done to determine how Penn and NWU Pukke respectively manage communication by using social media to build relationships with their alumni. Thereafter, the researcher compared the findings to theory as well as to the perspectives of the alumni, as suggested in Specific research questions (SRQs) 3 and 5.

3.3.3.2 The interview schedule

As mentioned above, the themes identified in the literature was used as basis for the interview schedule. This schedule aimed to do the following: Firstly, give the respondent the opportunity to elaborate freely on all the questions that were posed and, secondly, allow the researcher to ask additional questions to clarify the respondent's answers.

The interview questions were compiled in such a way that the interviewer, as far as possible, did not lead the respondents directly to mention the specific characteristics of social media as listed in the theoretical conceptualisation list. When the respondents answered, the researcher posed further questions to find out more about the subject. This provided greater openness and deeper insight, a wider range of responses and also much richer data (Du Plooy, 2002:178; Punch, 2014:149). Table 3.3 on the next page presents the interview schedule.

These interviews were recorded by using a recording application on a smartphone, with the consent of the respondents, and later were transcribed.

Interviews that were conducted in Afrikaans, as in the case of NWU Pukke, were translated, and the emphasis on certain words (as seen in chapter 5) are the researcher's own. These transcribed interviews were sorted by a qualitative thematic content analysis of concepts that was identified in the literature.

Table 3.3: Interview schedule

Good day, my name is Jimmy Pressly, a current Master's degree student at the North-West University. I am doing my study on relationship building through the use of social media with University of Pennsylvania and North-West University Potchefstroom Campus' alumni. The interview will consist of the questions that were provided to you beforehand as a guide. I might ask other related questions throughout the interview. Will it be okay if I record the interview while it takes place? Thank you.

Question	Concepts
Questions 1.1 – 1.9	**Social media in general**
1.1. What social media platforms do you use to communicate with alumni?	Platforms used
1.2. Do you use specific social media strategies?	Social media strategy
1.3. Do you use a content calendar to plan out your social media?	Content calendar
1.4. What do you focus on when planning your social media content?	Social media content strategy
1.5. How do you know using social media is worthwhile?	Return on investment
1.6. Would you say using social media ensures ROI?	Return on investment
1.7. Are your social media linked to one another or is there a type of link you do between them?	Links between social media
1.8. Do you monitor social media platforms?	Monitoring of social media
1.9. How do you ensure that alumni recognise you on social media?	Corporate identity on social media
Question 2.1.	**Systems theory**
2.1. Does your school's public relations office, corporate identity, alumni, or any other medium influence the way you use social media?	Interdependency
Questions 3.1 – 3.6	***Waters et al.* (2009): *guidelines* for cultivating social media relationships**
3.1. Are there any guidelines that you implement when using social media to build relationships with alumni?	Disclosure
3.2. How do you disclose information on social media?	Usefulness
3.3. How do you make sure your information is useful to your alumni?	Information dissemination
3.4. How do you distribute information on social media?	Interactivity
3.5. How to you make sure your social media content is interactive on social media?	Involvement
Questions 4.1 – 4.6	**Two-way symmetrical communication**
How do you ensure two-way communication when using social media?	General question
4.1. Do you make use of power sharing to facilitate two-way communication when using social media?	Transparency
4.2. What do you see as transparency and how do you implement it?	Power sharing
4.3. What do you see as ethical on social media and how do you implement it?	Ethical communication
4.4. What do you see as balancing of interests when using social media and how do you implement it?	Balance of interests
4.5. What do you see as communicating responsibly when using social media and how do you implement it?	Responsible communication
4.6. What do you see as positive exchange when using social media and how do you implement it?	Reciprocity

Table 3.3: Interview schedule (continued)

Questions 5.1 – 5.7	Stakeholder relationship management: relationship building and strategies
What relationship building strategies do you use on social media?	General question
5.1. How do you make sure your alumni have access to your social media platforms and that all information is accessible on these platforms?	Access
5.2. How do you make sure your alumni have a positive attitude towards you on social media?	Positivity
5.3. How do you make sure you are open with what you communicate on your social media?	Openness
5.4. How would you say you disclose information on social media?	Disclosure
5.5. How do you ensure authenticity?	Assurance of authenticity
5.6. How do you network with alumni on social media and what opportunities do you create for them to network with you and others on social media?	Networking
5.7. How do you communicate Penn's/NWU Pukke's norms and values to your alumni and how do you encourage them to share in these norms and values?	Sharing of tasks
Question 6.1 – 6.16	**Stakeholder relationship management: relationship outcomes**
How do you know you have a good relationship with your alumni?	General question
6.1. How do you know your alumni trust you? 6.2. Do you care about alumni when making decisions? 6.3. Do you keep the promises that you make to alumni? 6.4. Do you take alumni opinions into account when making decisions?	Trust
6.5. Would you say you and your alumni have control mutuality? 6.6. Do you think your alumni's opinions are legitimate? 6.7. Do you listen to what alumni have to say? 6.8. Would you say alumni have an influence on Penn/NWU Pukke's decisions?	Control mutuality
6.9. Would you say your alumni are committed to you because of the way you use social media? 6.10. Are you trying to create a long-term commitment with your alumni? How important is this to you? 6.11. Would you say your alumni are loyal?	Commitment
6.12. Would you say your alumni are satisfied with your relationship with them? 6.13. Would you say that Penn/NWU Pukke and its alumni benefit from the relationship? 6.14. Would you say your alumni are happy when interacting with you?	Relationship satisfaction
6.15. Exchange relationship 6.15.1. When you offer something to your alumni, do you expect something back from them? 6.15.2. Are you more likely to take care of alumni because they rewarded Penn/NWU Pukke?	Exchange relationship
6.16. Communal relationship 6.16.1. Are you concerned in the welfare of your alumni? 6.16.2. Would you say that you take advantage of alumni who are vulnerable?	Communal relationship

Table 3.3: Interview schedule (continued)

Questions 7.1 – 7.2	Creation of a social media community
General question	Importance of a social media community
7.1. How are you creating a community?	How a community is created
7.2. What are the aspects of a community for you?	Aspects of a community
Question 8: Anything you would like to add?	
Thank you very much for your time.	

- *Validity and reliability*

It can be argued that validity and reliability are related or similar, but the one does not necessarily guarantee the other (Hayes, 2005:25; Le Roux, 2011:194; Wimmer & Dominick, 1994:59). Therefore, both validity and reliability need to be considered when focusing on the use of semi-structured interviews in research (Hayes, 2005:25; Le Roux 2011:194).

- *Validity*

Validity points to the ability of the measuring instrument to measure the concept that it is supposed to measure (Bryman & Cramer, 1997:65; Hayes, 2005:25; Le Roux, 2011:194).

It is important to remember that the validity of interview issues can sometimes be questioned. Interviews overall has a strong qualitative perspective, therefore, it can be a mistake to apply concepts rigidly (Gray, 2014:388). Gray (2014:388) further explains that for a semi-structured interview, validity can be assured by focusing on the research objectives when designing and planning the questions. In the present study, this was done by designing the interview schedule (Table 3.3.) according to Gray's (2014:388) suggestions to design questions in an interview:

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

When analysing the interviews, *construct validity* will again be used in this method to improve validity, as mentioned in section 3.3.2.1 (also see Du Plooy, 2002:137). As pointed out previously, the study focuses on thematically analysing and identifying themes and patterns within the qualitative data as explained by Gray (2014:609).

To ensure validity, firstly a recording application on a mobile phone was used to prevent data from being lost from or added to the interviewee's recording. As mentioned, these recorded interviews were transcribed fully verbatim, to further ensure validity.

- *Reliability*

Suggestions by Gray (2014:389) were used to ensure reliability during the interviews. The researcher made sure that all of the interviewees were asked the same questions by standardising the interview schedule. Interviewees were treated the same and the same interviewer was used throughout the interviewing process.

This was done by allowing the researcher to conduct the interviews personally with all the participants. Two sets of interviews were done with staff from Penn and NWU Pukke respectively, who worked directly with social media. This strategy helped provide reliable and valid information to use in the present study. Furthermore, the double interviews also ensured reliability on the findings of either Penn or NWU Pukke. The same schedule as mentioned in Table 3.3 was used for each interview and all participant were treated the same, with none being favoured.

3.3.4 Self-administered questionnaire

According to Du Plooy (2002:178), a self-administered questionnaire is a method to collect data, where respondents answer a battery of questions. These questionnaires do not include only questions; it may also contain declarations and statements, of which respondents can approve or disapprove.

Questions for the present study's questionnaire were identified from literature as summarised in Table 2.1 (Chapter 2).

The researcher used closed questions, with the exception of one open question where the contributors were requested to add their own comments and experiences. The questionnaire was set up electronically enabling respondents to answer it online or through an email system send out to them. A breakdown to this questionnaire can be seen on the next page.

The same questionnaire was designed for both Penn and NWU Pukke, with the only differences being Choices of field of study (Question 1.3) and Ways of contributing (Question 1.6). The social media platforms (SMPs) of the participating university or campus mentioned in Question 2.1.3 reflected the institution's use of social media, as it differs to a certain extent. All the other questions were the same.

Table 3.4: Questionnaire breakdown

Concepts/theories	Question number in questionnaire
Demographics	**Questions 1.1 –1.6**
- Age - Gender - Faculty /School - Year graduated - Have any of your children studied at the university? - Ways of contributing to the university	Question 1.1 Question 1.2 Question 1.3 Question 1.4 Question 1.5 Question 1.6
General social media	**Questions 2.1.1 – 2.1.3**
- Do you use social media? - What social media do you use? - How often do you use: - Facebook / Twitter / YouTube / LinkedIn / Pinterest / Instagram / Google+ / Blogs / Flickr & Phanfare / Snapchat	Question 2.1.1 Question 2.1.2 Question 2.1.3
Social media usages of the University	**Question 2.2.1**
On what platforms do you follow the University?	
Waters *et al.* (2009): Guidelines for cultivating social media relationships	**Questions 3.1.1 – 3.1.5**
- Disclosure - Usefulness - Information dissemination - Interactivity - Involvement	Question 3.1.1 Question 3.1.2 Question 3.1.3 Question 3.1.4 Question 3.1.5
Two-way symmetrical communication	**Question 3.1.6 – 3.1.11**
- Transparency - Balance of interests - Power sharing - Ethical communication - Responsible communication - Reciprocity	Question 3.1.6 Question 3.1.7 Question 3.1.8 Question 3.1.9 Question 3.1.10 Question 3.1.11
Stakeholder relationship management: relationship building and strategies	**Questions 4.1.1 – 4.1.5; 3.1.1 & 3.1.9**
- Access - Positivity - Openness - Disclosure - Assurance of authenticity - Networking - Sharing of tasks	Question 4.1.1 Question 3.1.9 Question 4.1.2 Question 3.1.1 Question 4.1.3 Question 4.1.4 Question 4.1.5
Creation of a social media community	**Questions 4.1.5 – 4.1.9 & 3.1.11 Question 5.1.1 – 5.1.4 & 3.1.8**
- Trust - Shared norms - Shared resources and knowledge - Reciprocity - Resilience within relationship - Co-ordination - Co-operation	Questions 5.1.1 – 5.1.4 & 3.1.8 Question 4.1.5 Question 4.1.7 Question 4.1.6 Question 3.1.11 Question 4.1.9 Question 4.1.8
Stakeholder relationship management: relationship outcomes	**Questions 5.1.1 – 5.1.21 & 3.1.8.**
- Trust - Control mutuality - Commitment - Relationship satisfaction - Communal relationship - Exchange relationship	Questions 5.1.1 – 5.1.4 & 3.1.8 Questions 5.1.5 – 5.1.9 Questions 5.1.10 – 5.1.12 Questions 5.1.13 – 5.1.14 Question 5.1.15 Questions 5.1.16 – 5.1.17
Do you have any other comments on the University's way of using social media?	**Question 6**

These questionnaires were distributed beforehand to Penn and NWU Pukke, in order for them to give suggestions or indicate whether there are questions they did not want in the questionnaire. Both Penn and NWU Pukke made some minor suggestions regarding punctuation and grammar. The corrections were incorporated for the final questionnaire that went out to respondents.

Both Penn and NWU Pukke also suggested a few major changes to the questionnaire. The suggestion was to remove questions about rewarding alumni, or whether alumni would be able to gain certain advantages from Penn or NWU Pukke. The omissions were made to protect Penn and NWU Pukke and avoided the impression among alumni that such an option does exist.

Questions that were altered or removed are the following:

- Question 5.15: Penn/NWU Pukke does not take advantage of people who are vulnerable, *changed to* Penn/NWU Pukke treats alumni fairly.
- Question 5.16: Penn/NWU Pukke is concerned about alumni's welfare, *changed to* Penn/NWU Pukke feels it is important to build a good relationship with alumni.
- Question 5.17: Whenever Penn/NWU Pukke offers something to me, it generally expects something back, *changed to* If I make a financial contribution or volunteer, Penn/NWU Pukke thanks me in some way.
- Question 5.18: Penn/NWU Pukke takes care of people who are likely to reward them, was *removed completely* seeing that a similar question was already posed in 5.13: Both Penn/NWU Pukke and I benefit from the relationship.

The changed questions were confirmed with the universities and the research process could commence. There was also an agreement by both universities that the mentioned edited questions could be introduced in the semi-structured interviews.

It is also important to mention that Penn's questionnaire was available in English because the majority of their alumni is English. In contrast, NWU Pukke's questionnaire was available in English or Afrikaans, in accordance with the languages spoken by alumni.

As part of a pilot study these questionaires were distributed to i) Penn's Alumni Relations team ii) NWU Pukke's Alumni Relations team iii) random selected group of people. This was done so that the participants of the study, namely Penn and NWU Pukke, could go through the questions and make adjustments as needed and also to assure the questionnaire was user friendly when respondents filled it in.

An example of this questionnaire can be seen in Addendum A.

The questionnaire was built with Fluid Survey, software specifically designed to capture responses. This form of software also generates a link that could be sent to Penn and NWU Pukke's alumni.

Penn has a rough estimate of 75 000 living alumni, whereas NWU Pukke has approximately 60 323 members. Penn agreed to send the link to a representative random sample of 5 000 alumni, which reflects the alumni group as a whole in terms of gender, race and age. A total of 121 questionnaires were completed by Penn alumni. NWU Pukke, on the other hand, decided to send the link for the questionnaire to all of their available alumni. The link was sent to the alumni by the universities themselves as the alumni database is considered as strategically confidential information. In addition a link to the questionnaire was also availble on the institution's SMPs.

The response rate for Penn was 2.42% and for NWU Pukke 6.93%. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:261), acceptable response rates depend on the population and number of respondents answering the questionnaire. Roughly speaking, a response rate of 60% is good and 70% is very good. However, Grunig *et al.* (2001:124) indicate that public relations studies' response rate yielded 12.8% and that such a range is acceptable. Althought the response rate for this study seems low, alumni were reminded and encouraged to complete the questionnaire. It could be argued that Penn's response rate was slightly lower than NWU Pukke's as the questionnaires were distributed during summer holidays in the USA. In addition, the researcher was unable to send the same number of reminders to Penn alumni, as was sent to NWU Pukke alumni.

Both Penn and NWU Pukke agreed to do a follow up on emails and published the questionnaires on their Facebook pages encouraging alumni to complete it. In both Penn and NWU Pukke's emails[2] that went out to these alumni, a message was included from the senders stating that they are working together on this research and that they encourage users to fill out the questionnaire to gain a deeper understanding of the alumni's social media usage (see Addendum A & B for the questionaire and letters).

- NWU Pukke sent their questionnaire on 14 September 2015 and ended 28 September 2015.
- Penn's questionnaire followed on 28 September 2015 and continued to run until 12 October 2015.

Although the response rate was fairly low, a sufficient number of questionnaires were returned to enable satistical analysis.

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[2] An example of the emails can be seen in Addendum D.

The collected responses were converted automatically into an Excel spreadsheet by Fluid Surveys. These spreadsheets were submitted to the North-West University's Statistical Consultation Services on the Potchefstroom Campus, and Quantify Research Consultants for analysis.

Different statistical methods were used to determine certain matters. The following methods were used:

- *Basic statistical analysis/Frequency tables*
  Basic statistical analysis was used to break down the volume of the collected data and reduce it to assist the analysis (Babbie, 2004:443; Bryman & Cramer, 1997:69; Le Roux 2011:197; Wimmer & Dominick, 1994:205). The basic statistics include the calculation of frequency tables, n-values and mean-scores (Bryman & Cramer, 1997:69; Field, 2005:738, 745; Le Roux 2011:197).

- *Correlations (Spearman)*
  For correlation statistics, it is important to take into account statistical and practical significance. Statistical significance shows the confidence level of statistical results, which confirms the result that is indicated did not occur by chance and is indicated by the p-value (Field, 2005:25; Le Roux, 2011:197; Steyn, 2009:1). This value should be less than 0.05 to be considered statistically significant (Steyn, 2009:1; Le Roux, 2011:197). However, this does not indicate that the finding is significant (Le Roux 2011:197; Steyn, 2009:1). The importance of a finding lies in its practical significance. This is interpreted through effect sizes (Grunig, 2002:78; Le Roux, 2011:197; Steyn, 2009). In the present study, effect size was indicated by Spearman's coefficients, where 0.00-0.39 is weak, 0.40-0.59 moderate and 0.60-1.0 is strong.

- *Differentiations*
  Differences are determined between two means or factors calculated from the sample. This was done by means of t-tests (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:472)

- *Cronbach's alpha*
  Cronbach's test calculates the reliability coefficients, which varies between 1.00 (perfect reliability) to 0.00 (not reliable at all). In the social sciences, the values can be considered good when it measures above 0.6. Fewer items tested can influence Cronbach's alpha coefficients and in such cases a lower score can be expected (Gray, 2014:154; Du Plooy, 2002:134).

- ***Factor analysis***

According to Bryman and Cramer (1997:176), "Factor analysis enables us to assess the *factorial validity* of the questions by telling us the extent to which they seem to be measuring the same concepts or variables". Factor analysis uses a number of statistical techniques that are related and identify the minimal number of factors structured to form a concept (Bryman & Cramer, 1997:276-277; Field, 2005:619; Hair *et al.*, 2006:104; Le Roux, 2011:202). This analysis was done to explore and test the constructs mentioned in Chapter 2 (Table 2.1). Factor loadings of 0.3 and above are considered important, with factor loadings of 0.7 viewed as very good (Hair *et al.,* 2006:128-129).

- *Regression analysis*

Babbie and Mouton (2001:465) explains regression analysis as an association between two variables. Stating this more strongly, one might say that one variable causes the other to occur, for example A is a function of B, indicating that the one is a specific function relating to another. In some cases, like in the case of the present study, the dependent variable is simultaneously affected by several independent variables leading to multiple regression analysis (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:466). This then means that A1 can be a function of B, where B is the dependent variable, together with variable A2 and A3. Therefore, A1, A2 and A3 make B a stronger dependent variable (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:467). A low p-value (< 0.05) indicates that the variable is more likely to be a meaningful addition to the model (Frost, 2013a).

When two or more predictor variables in a multiple regression model are highly correlated, it is referred to as multicollinearity (Braunstein, 2007). In addition, Braunstein (2007) points out that to determine multicollinearity it is best to examine tolerance and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). A small tolerance value of less van 0.1 indicates that the variable under consideration fits into the combination of the independent variables and should be added to the regression calculation (Braunstein, 2007), whereas the VIF measures the impact of collinearity among the variables in a regression model and should always be greater than, or at the least equal to, 1 (Braunstein, 2007).

It is important to measure how close the data are to the fitted regression by considering the R-square (Frost, 2013b). The R-square converted to percentage, indicates the variable variation that is explained by a linear model, for example R^2 = 0.6 (therefore 60%), will indicate that the variable explains 60% of the regression model. Overall a higher R-square means the model fits more of your data (Frost, 2013b).

3.3.4.1 Validity and reliability

- *Validity*

Gray (2014:261) explains that for a self-administered questionnaire, the validity lies in questions that focus on the research objectives. An effective way is a table where questions are showcased together with the construct from the literature these questions are testing.

In the case of the present study, this was done in Table 3.2. where questions were included that test themes and constructs as identified from literature in Chapter 2 (see Table 2.1). Therefore, it is important also to note that using thematic analysis validates

this method because all the questions in this questionnaire were developed from these themes.

For further validation of this process, these questionnaires were only distributed to Penn or NWU Pukke's alumni respectively. A questionnaire could only be completed once it was assessed through a specific device. In this way, repetition in data contributed to validation, seeing that respondents filled out the questionnaire twice.

- *Reliability*

Regarding the questionnaire design, reliability focuses on what is measured presently, which should provide similar results at any other given time. This is assuming that the aspect that is measured has not changed, according to Gray (2014:375). He further explains that reliability measures consistency. This includes measurements of stability (over time), equivalence (administering two versions of a test instrument to the same people on the same day) and inter-judge reliability. Such consistency is often measured by using a coefficient reliability scale from 0.00, with up to 1.00, where 0.00 is very unreliable and 1.00 perfectly reliable (Gray, 2014:375). For the present study, Cronbach's alpha was used to test reliability of items (cf. Gray, 2014:376).

Professional services, namely North-West University's Statistical Consultation Services and Quantify Research Consultants, were consulted to help analyse and interpret the results from the questionnaires.

3.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

During research in social sciences, certain ethical considerations need to be taken into account. For instance, individuals should not be forced or coerced to participate in the study if they do not need the research or it disrupts their routine. The researcher should refrain from requesting of participants to share personal information. Those who are selected for the research beforehand, need to be made aware that participation is voluntary and conducted completely anonymous (Babbie, 2004:28, 63; Baxter & Babbie, 2004:86). In the present study, the respondents were given the freedom of choice to participate or not.

Furthermore, no harm should come to the respondents after or during participation in the research. As stated above, this security was ensured by keeping respondents' replies confidential. The questionnaire data was collected electronically and therefore not traceable back to the respondents. The interview respondents, however, were more difficult to keep confidential and therefore their specific permission to take part in the study and make their job titles available, were obtained (Babbie, 2004:29, 64-65; Baxter & Babbie, 2004:88).

During the study, the researcher also has an ethical obligation when analysing and reporting the data by ensuring that the reporting is accurate (Babbie, 2004:68). In this regard, as mentioned previously, professional statistic consultants assisted in analysing the responses and helped ensure validity further.

3.5 SUMMARY

The researcher employed various methods: a literature study, qualitative contents analysis, semi-structured interviews and a self-administered questionnaire, to gather data to answer the specific and general research questions. The aim was to gain insight into Penn's and NWU Pukke's strategy to build sound relationships with their stakeholders. The measurement instruments and methods were developed based on the themes identified in literature.

These above-mentioned methods were incorporated into the study, and inferences drawn from the findings to determine whether and how Penn and NWU Pukke utilise SMPs to build relationships with their respective alumni.

Chapter 4 will explain the findings of the qualitative content analysis, followed by Chapter 5 that will report the semi-structured interview findings and Chapter 6 that will expidite the questionnaire results. Conclusion will be drawn from the data in Chapter 7 by answering the specific and general research questions.

Chapter 4: Discussion of content-analysis results

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 described the research design and methods employed to answer the research questions posed in Chapter 1.

This chapter reports the results obtained from the qualitative content analysis. The analyses were done to help answer Specific research question 2: *How does social media content enhance understanding of social media usage for universities to build and maintain relationships with their alumni?*

In the discussion, the theoretical framework and constructs are applied to each social media platform (SMP) for Penn and NWU Pukke, followed by a comparison of the two institutions.

It was found that the two universities mentioned above, do not follow an exactly similar strategy. Therefore, the researcher needed to allow for differences in their use of the platforms. NWU Pukke, for instance, do not have an alumni platform for each SNS. In certain cases they urge their alumni to follow or use the official university accounts, rather than a dedicated alumni account. This factor will also be indicated where needed in the following discussions. Table 4.1 below lists the networks that have been compared. A list of URL's and QR codes for each SNS can be viewed in Addendum C.

Table 4.1: List of evaluated social media platforms from Penn and NWU Pukke

Platform	Penn	NWU Pukke
Facebook	Penn Alumni	NWU-Puk Alumni
Twitter	@Pennalumni	@NWUPUK
Instagram	Pennalumni	Nwupukke
LinkedIn	University of Pennsylvania	North-West University/ Noordwes-Universiteit
LinkedIn Group	University of Pennsylvania Alumni	N/A
YouTube	University of Pennsylvania	PUKKEtv

4.2 RELATIONSHIP BUILDING STRATEGIES

The stakeholder relationship outcomes, as suggested by the stakeholder relationship management theory (Hon & Grunig, 1999:42; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:65), need to be determined by engaging with the parties involved in the relationship. For that reason, and

from the stakeholder relationship theory, the qualitative content analysis did not focus on the stakeholder relationship outcomes, but only the stakeholder *relationship building strategies*.

The strategies necessary to build and maintain sound relationships are: *access, positivity, openness and disclosure, assurance of authenticity, networking* and *sharing of tasks* (Hon & Grunig, 1999:15)*.* These strategies will be examined by referring to the usage of both Penn and NWU Pukke below.

4.2.1 Relationship building strategies on Penn's social media platforms

According to Hon and Grunig (1999:15), *access* can be implemented by making information, including contact information, freely *accessible.* This is done in various ways on Penn's Facebook page, Twitter page, Instagram account, LinkedIn University page and Group, and YouTube Channel. On Facebook and Twitter, users can get a clear view of the University's location and see how to contact them. The *About us* tab on Facebook and *Bio* on Twitter also provide a well-detailed explanation about Penn and directs alumni to the website for more information. This is in accordance with the proposed strategy of Waters *et al.* (2009:103) and Kerpen (2011). Penn's Instagram account differs from the above as the *bio* they supply only contains a link to the Penn website as a way to lead the user to information about Penn.

Penn *disclose information,* especially on LinkedIn. On this platform they supply information about the university ranging from: graduation rates, the number of undergraduates, graduate students as well as faculties and their contact information. The private group page for alumni, which the alumni can request to join, indicates who the managers are and users can connect with them.

To make their information more *accessible,* enhance *openness,* and influence users *positively,* Penn Alumni's Facebook Pages, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn University page and YouTube Channel make regular use of visuals to enhance their posts and link to their Facebook and Twitter pages. This can be seen in Image 4.1 below. This image and link is newsworthy and relevant to what the alumni wants to read and gives the alumni *access* to further information*.*

Image 4.1: Penn's Facebook use for accessibility, openness and positivity

Penn do not only share news articles, but provide users with access to images and video content on their Facebook page, Instagram account, LinkedIn University Page and YouTube. The focus is on what is happening with Penn alumni, and especially on Penn's alumni events.

Penn also manage to be *authentic*, *accessible* and *positive* by posting items that are not news, but engage their alumni. In this post (see Image 4.2), it is clear that Penn took a day in the USA calendar, known as Best Friends day, and created a post around it showing a photo of a button. The tone of voice around this post is informal, which enhances its *authenticity.* The post spurs on users to engage with Penn, but even more with each other, which encourages *networking.*

This post also humanises Penn and shows that they care about their alumni. It relates a story, not about Penn itself but, about Penn alumni meeting a best friend for the first time at Penn.

Image 4.2: Penn's Facebook use for authenticity, accessibility and positivity

Kerpen (2011) mentions that one of the ways to ensure *authenticity* is to respond to posts in a positive manner and create a space where stakeholders can engage with each other. Penn allow users to comment and connect with one another and react to questions informally, thereby creating an *authentic* communication experience for their alumni.

Another example of being *accessible* and *open and disclosing* various forms of information, would be Penn's post on the same-sex marriage debate in the USA during June 2015. This subject can be risky for universities to comment on and could result in fans unliking the page, or launching an unwanted debate on Penn's SMP. However, Image 4.3 below depicts how Penn decided to participate on this topic to include a section of their community, while not offending another section that may not support same-sex marriages. They ran the risk that offended alumni could unlike Penn, but Penn chose to be transparent in their communication and include groups with different views in their posts.

Image 4.3: Penn's Facebook use for accessibility, openness and disclosure

Penn managed to keep the tone of voice in their posts relaxed and *informal.* This seems to stem the alumni *positive* and shows that Penn act *authentic,* or real, in their communication. Penn use SMPs to relate stories about their alumni's' activities and achievements. In doing so, Penn shows that they care about what happens to their alumni after they have left Penn, and presents a sense of pride towards them. Numerous users will engage with these posts, as it presents people they may be familiar with or of whom they may have heard – thereby encouraging *networking* on Penn's SMP. This can be seen in the Facebook example (Image 4.4) and Instagram example (Image 4.5) below.

Image 4.4: Penn's Facebook used to tell stories

Image 4.5: Penn's Instagram used to tell stories and network

A similar approach is used for Penn's YouTube posts. For example, one video showed the activities at Penn during the summer holidays. The video conveys a sense of nostalgia and aims to help alumni relive their experiences at Penn.

Penn use the same photos and videos that are linked between Twitter and Facebook. It would seem that they share similar content through which they populate their Twitter and

Facebook pages simultaneously. However, their Twitter page seems to be less active than their other SMPs such as Facebook.

Regarding the Twitter page, Penn tend to engage in one-way communication and seemingly does not facilitate feedback and open discussion from their alumni. This failure limits *openness and disclosure* and the building of relationships through this channel. Penn seem to drive the discussion one-sidedly. This may be due to various reasons: the nature of the content published; alumni do not feel comfortable to engage with Penn on this platform; or alumni may prefer to engage with Penn on other platforms. On a positive note, Penn allow Twitter users to view their followers and everyone whom Penn follows on Twitter, which could encourage networking, if the SMP were used more by the alumni. This transparent approach could suggest that Penn view themselves as an open system. It may also imply that Penn need to reconsider their approach with this platform and if found necessary, it should be improved.

Furthermore, Penn Alumni have *access* to Penn's Facebook page, Twitter page, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube accounts and can interact freely. On each platform, users can interact with Penn by using the various available tools specific to the platform they are using (share, like, re-tweet, favourite, etc. See section 2.3 for a detailed discussion of each platform). This means having an open system on SMPs. In addition, it encourages users to get involved *openly* with Penn and also elicits honest and *open* discussions on Penn's SMP.

Penn, however, do not allow fans to write on their timeline or contribute in this way on their Facebook page. Regarding Twitter, direct messaging is only available to users whom Penn follow as well. This action limits *access* and *openness.* Alternatively, alumni can make use of inbox messages, and comment on posts on Facebook. Penn's other SNS also allows commenting on posts and private messaging – this contributes to *openness,* and indicates that Penn does create other channels for alumni to give feedback.

Penn's LinkedIn is open for users to engage in, however they do require the user to be an alumnus, before joining their private LinkedIn Group. When accepted on this group, users are able to connect with each other as well as engage and interact on the platform. In this sense, the group is only *accessible* to alumni, which partly limits the *access* and *openness*, but in turn do contribute towards *positivity* and *assurance of authenticity.* This is because users know they will only be *networking* and connecting with alumni from Penn*.*

Networking on most of Penn's SMP accounts is up to the user. Penn creates many ways users can network not only with the university but with each other. Penn accomplish this by not only advertising their alumni events on Facebook but also giving alumni the opportunity

to attend online courses. Penn use SMPs to inform alumni about social events. This allows alumni to volunteer or participate in these events and *network*. Furthermore, alumni get the chance to improve their résumé, but also to network with others taking this online course.

As mentioned above, Penn create various opportunities for their alumni to *network* with them and with each other, however the alumni need to decide how they use these opportunities. Users can see clearly what is available on Twitter and thorough descriptions of photos, videos or links are presented on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube. These actions also contribute to *access, positivity* and *openness*, as can be seen in Image 4.6.

Image 4.6: Penn's usage of links in their tweets

The image depicted in Image 4.6 above, also illustrates a way Penn uses Twitter. This link takes the users to a Facebook page showing them the same images as in Image 4.2. Thereby Twitter is used in an improvised way, by adding content that is different from the rest, but seemingly did not attract as much attention on Twitter as on Facebook. Therefore, this example shows that using the same type of content across different platforms, may not always ensure the same kind of engagement.

Although not present in this timeframe selected for the qualitative content analysis, Penn do use Twitter at live events and encourage users to join in through a specific hashtag. This also helps Penn's communication to be *authentic* since these tweets are live and in real time. Penn also use Instagram at live events and encourages users to do the same, as is clear from Image 4.7 on the next page.

Image 4.7: A display of Penn using SNS at live events

The image depicted above, was part of an event that Penn hosted on campus. By doing this, users on Instagram attending the event can observe themselves posting live pictures during the event, which contributed to *authenticity*. Users sharing their own photos and videos also implies *sharing of tasks.*

When evaluating Penn's SMPs further, it shows participation through likes and comments from users on Penn's SMPs. Throughout Penn's SMPs the comment section is not used as much, however in certain cases comments and likes on specific posts are clearly visible. It can be argued that this is due to specific content that has been published to an SMP.

Penn furthermore creates honesty and *trust* by *openly* getting involved through different created subgroups in their alumni LinkedIn groups. In these groups, users can connect with alumni and *openly* pose questions about certain fields, or even contribute to these groups. With Penn having these groups in place, it contributes to *sharing of tasks* between Penn and its alumni. In this way, job offers are advertised or relationships are built among the users. In this case both parties, Penn and its alumni, share common goals (*sharing of tasks*), and when analysing their strong LinkedIn community, it seems that both Penn and its alumni are willing to participate in this process. This also shows mutual *commitment* and amenable behaviour from both parties.

Penn's alumni LinkedIn group specifically creates a *community*, by giving participants a chance to share each other's resources and knowledge. This community also creates a place where users are assured that they are connecting with other Penn alumni. This makes the group a safe and trusted space and may lead to resilience in alumni's relationships with Penn and each other. This SMP also shows co-operation and co-ordination, not only between Penn and its alumni, but amongst alumni as well. Such interaction can be achieved in various ways such as job seeking, sharing of knowledge and resources or *networking.*

To recap: Penn and its alumni communicate comfortably with one another, particularly on their LinkedIn Group platform, which shows that both sides are *positive* about the relationship.

4.2.2 Relationship building strategies on NWU Pukke's social media platforms

NWU Pukke provide data, including their address, telephone numbers and relevant information on the university, on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn to create *access* as well as *openness and disclosure*.

A view of NWU Pukke's Twitter page show that they also make information available freely (*access* and *disclosure*). This is done by re-tweeting other stakeholders and allowing users to view more information. This provides users information to other platforms and more *accessibility*. In certain cases, NWU Pukke utilise links and images to make the news, which they share, more *accessible* to users. This is a way to keep their alumni up to date with events on Campus and helps contribute to *access, openness and disclosure*. In other cases, NWU Pukke gives users *access* to images and videos in their posts, but only on specific platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, or in other cases, images are not provided together with news stories (see Image 4.8 on the next page).

Image 4.8: NWU Pukke's news stories without images

However, when NWU Pukke tweet, it mostly includes links and hashtags, and tag other stakeholders in their tweets. By including other users in their tweets or Instagram posts, NWU Pukke have a wider reach, which implies *access* to a larger audience. By using the hashtag #MyNWU, it also gives alumni users access to further content.

As mentioned previously, NWU Pukke do not only keep users up to date with their own content, but also re-tweet relevant content to their users. This provides users *access* to other types of content and information (*openness and disclosure*). When assessed as a SMP, NWU Pukke are very *open* considering the fact that users can comment, like and share on this platform. NWU Pukke also allow users to communicate *openly* on their SMP by allowing these users to post on their Timeline, as shown in Image 4.9 on the next page. In all of NWU Pukke's SMPs, users are not limited in possible interactions and actions on all the SMPs such as liking, tagging, favouriting, or re-tweeting (see section 2.3).

Image 4.9: NWU allowing users to post on their Timeline on Facebook
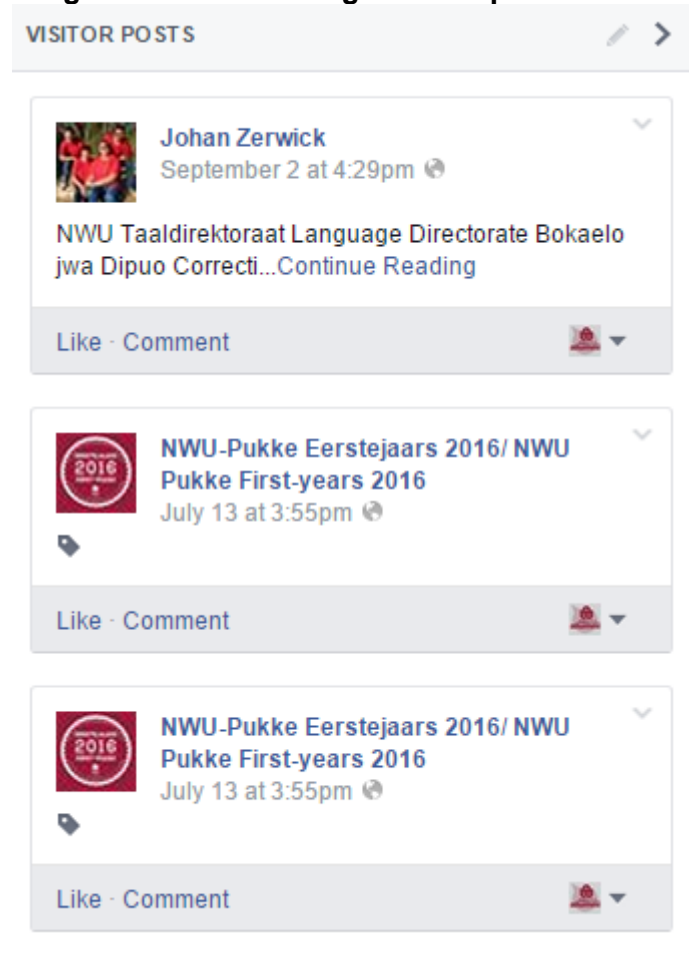
Although NWU Pukke have an *open* system, there is limited interactivity on their SMP. This may indicate that alumni feel limited or not willing to interact with NWU Pukke. Interesting to note was also the varied level of user engagement, depending on the type of post. This may show that certain types (themes) of posts are more relevant to alumni on certain SMPs. For example, in Image 4.10 on the next page, the post has elicited higher engagement than, for example, in the case depicted by Image 4.11 to follow.

Image 4.10: A high response post from the NWU Pukke on Facebook

NWU-Puk Alumni shared NWU-Pukke's photo.
Published by Ilse Beyers [?] · July 29 ·

NWU-Pukke

Bekroonde digter, T.T. Cloete, sterf

Die 91-jarige Prof Theunis Theodorus (T.T.) Cloete is skielik vanoggend aan natuurlike oorsake in 'n privaathospitaal in P...

See More

Like   Comment   Share

Erno 'Scuba' Dykman, Danie Pretorius, Chris de Bruyn and 69 others like this.   Top Comments ·

Hennie Steenkamp Die voorreg gehad om van 1979 tot 1981 by hom klas te kry.Briljant!!!!!
Unlike · Reply · 1 · July 29 at 3:16pm

Ronel Swanepoel Ek het nie in tale studeer nie, maar ek waardeer elke woord van die NG Kerk se Liedboek wat hy geskryf het. Soveel ritme en skatryk woorde.
Unlike · Reply · 1 · July 30 at 11:06am

Image 4.11: A low response post from the NWU Pukke on Facebook

It would also seem that certain SMPs attract larger participation than others. This can be seen when comparing NWU Pukke's Facebook page to its Twitter page. Facebook shows more interaction than Twitter, however, when comparing Facebook and Instagram, the latter's engagement is higher. Although Facebook is *open*, the engagement rate is not that high. This implies that although they have an *open* system, and uses relevant links and imagery on this platform, users still do not contribute as would be expected.

On the other hand, NWU Pukke do contribute to *openness and disclosure* by *openly* getting involved with users on their SMP (*assurance of authenticity*), such as Instagram. They do this by being transparent with users of their platform, as can be seen in Image 4.12 on the next page.

Image 4.12: NWU Pukke's open interaction on Instagram

Encouraging engagement on NWU Pukke's Instagram page, it can be seen as an attempt to reach the same goals as the Facebook page, by providing relevant information to users (*sharing of tasks*). It is also easy for users to interact with NWU Pukke because of this *open* SMP. When users decide to associate themselves with NWU Pukke on SMP by liking or following them on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube, they can feel comfortable that they will encounter fellow alumni on this platform. This also contributes to *positivity* and *assurance of authenticity*.

When analysing NWU Pukke's use of Twitter, it can be assumed that users feel comfortable when connecting through this platform. This is evident from the interaction that NWU Pukke have on their Twitter page with their users. However, this does not necessarily imply that users are *positive* towards NWU Pukke, but rather *positive* in engaging with this institution on Twitter, which may imply that they consider this platform as *authentic.*

NWU Pukke *openly* involve itself by re-tweeting relevant information from their users. This may result in honest discussions on their Twitter page. Even more so, NWU Pukke attempt to utilise hashtags and tagging of other stakeholders to further these discussions to other Twitter users. This facilitates significant *openness*, by also allowing other stakeholders to work to the same mutual goal (*sharing of tasks*). Image 4.13 on the next page, depicts this open engagement between NWU Pukke and Varsity Cup. Both of them need to *disclose*

certain information. By re-tweeting each other's posts, the parties work toward a common goal (*assurance of authenticity, sharing of tasks* and *networking*).

Image 4.13: NWU Pukke's engagment with Varsity Cup

However, there are no signs of replies on NWU Pukke's Twitter page. Again, this may imply that if any questions are posed and NWU Pukke fails to answer them, the result is that users feel *negative* towards NWU Pukke, which gives the impression that the institution is *inaccessible* and *unauthentic.*

By allowing users to associate with NWU on LinkedIn, the university creates an authentic environment. An examination of the alumni that complied, indicates that they are willing to work towards similar goals than the NWU Pukke (*access, positivity, openness and disclosure, assurance of authenticity,* and *sharing of tasks*). Users deciding to follow NWU Pukke on their SMP, indicate a mutual *commitment* toward this institution. In turn, the latter keep these alumni updated with regular content on these platforms to contribute to this mutual relationship.

As mentioned previously, NWU Pukke does make contact information available and, in certain cases, share relevant content through links and visual aspects. However, this is done seldom and should be improved significantly.

When using visuals, links or videos, NWU Pukke strive for clarity on the route it is taking the user. Therefore, the university add captions to their SMP posts (visuals such as photos, videos and also links). These captions give the user an indication of the routes where the

images, video or link lead, as seen in Image 4.14 on the next page. This process helps assure *authenticity,* encourages *positivity* and also gives *access* to more information. This is also a striking example of ways to be *open* about information. Using visuals on a regular basis, such as on NWU Pukke's Facebook and Instagram pages, can also create *positivity, openness and disclosure* and *assurance of authenticity.*

Image 4.14: NWU Pukke using links and images on Facebook

Overall, NWU Pukke add captions to their SMP posts, however in some cases the user must rely on a photo to ascertain what the institution is trying to communicate (see Image 4.15 below). This seems to be done deliberately by the university, to achieve a specific goal in their communication. Regarding Image 4.14 on the previous page, as mentioned, the interaction was not as expected. Users are able to network or post their thoughts, however, for some reason this does not happen. Furthermore, Pukke's SMP for alumni does not specifically focus on telling stories. The nostalgic posts do, however, help humanise the stories, and ultimately make it more *authentic* and real, as shown in Image 4.15 below.

Image 4.15: NWU Pukke using nostalgia without captions to communicate a message on Instagram

The NWU Pukke manage to use storytelling (narratives) as a strategy to humanise their SMP. This particularly applies to the post on Mandela Day, where South Africans are encouraged to give 67 minutes of their time to the community. On this post, a compelling story of the NWU Pukke's contribution was added. These type of posts encourage alumni to do the same for their community; therefore, resulting in the *sharing of tasks* (as seen in Image 4.16 on the next page).

Image 4.16: NWU Pukke encouraging alumni to give 67 minutes on Mandela day

NWU-Puk Alumni
Published by Hootsuite [?] · July 18 · 🌐

Ons laaste stop vir #MadibaDag, was by die Potchfstroom se DBV. Hier het ons vir die diere bietjie liefde gegee en ook kos gelos vir die laaste deel van die Winter / Our last stop for #MadibaDay we visited our furry-friends at the Potchefstroom SPCA. Here we gave some love to the animals and also left some pet food for them for the last stretch of Winter. #WeCare #GeeOm #MyNWU

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ➤ Share

Leanie De Korte likes this.

Write a comment...

Press Enter to post.

134
People Reached

7
Post Clicks

Boost Post

NWU Pukke also are adept at interacting on messages on certain of its SMPs such as Instagram. Prompt interacting with users can also elicit a more *positive* attitude towards NWU. This leads to *networking,* which also assures *authenticity* (see Image 4.15 on the previous page).

Furthermore, as Image 4.15 shows, NWU Pukke utilise visual aspects on Instagram. This is done on a regular basis, which keeps this platform active with new and unique content. These outcomes can also be seen on other SMPs such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube, and provide *access, positivity, openness and disclosure* and *assurance of authenticity.*

In this regard, NWU Pukke also ensure *authenticity* by using similarly-themed thumbnails and imagery on the homepages and across the SMPs. A corresponding type of post on Instagram, for example in Image 4.17 below, indicates how NWU Pukke attempt to humanise their stories on Instagram by focusing on historic events. In the process, the organisation's norms and values are shared to ensure *authenticity*.

Image 4.17: Sharing historic events on Instagram

Authenticity can also be impacted by the tone of voice. The tone that NWU Pukke use on their various SMPs, is formal and uniform across platforms. Such a tone of voice may lead to users disregarding the *authenticity* of the page. The reason may be twofold:

- Users may want to read more informal ('laid back') posts on SMPs.
- Wishes to see different types of posts with different postings across NWU Pukke's various SMPs.

NWU Pukke's open SMP approach allows alumni to *network* freely with each other. However, this does not occur naturally. Even though NWU Pukke provide this opportunity

across their social media platforms, the choice to participate still remain with the alumni. On the other hand, NWU Pukke also re-tweet alumni's tweets, which indicate attempts to create and expand the network. By allowing users to interact with other users, NWU Pukke create other *networks* where they can obtain more information. This strategy can be seen with postings on Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube. These postings also give users a view of parties with whom the NWU Pukke associate itself. This builds a virtual community between users, stakeholders and the NWU Pukke.

NWU Pukke do not acquire of users to donate money on their SMP, but rather give them the opportunity to attend events. These events are not only concerned with alumni, but incorporate various other stakeholders as well. There is another way in which NWU Pukke demonstrate with whom they associate, which also discloses other *networks.* This is done on NWU Pukke's YouTube channel under their other channels, where users can observe who NWU Pukke follow, and then choose to follow these parties as well. This allows users to network with similar channels and also provides more content to the users. In this regard, it delivers *access, openness and disclosure,* and *sharing of tasks*. On the SMP Twitter, NWU Pukke do not invite alumni to tell their own stories. However, alumni do it spontaneously, as can be seen in Image 4.18 below.

Image 4.18: NWU Pukke alumni's spontaneous sharing of stories on Twitter

According to Image 4.18 above, a user shares a story with NWU Pukke on Twitter. In reply, NWU Pukke engage with the alumni by sharing this post. From another angle, on Instagram

NWU Pukke encourage alumni to share stories by using a hashtag, as described in their bio. In their responses, the alumni do share content on Instagram with this institution. This system shows that NWU Pukke and its users are *sharing* the *task* of generating content and are able to communicate with each other through this open system. NWU Pukke use Instagram to share content which they consider relevant to their users, but does not use Instagram at live events.

As an example: NWU Pukke employed Instagram to demonstrate their adaption to a greener lifestyle. The post shows what the Campus is doing and encourages alumni to do the same. Therefore, this kind of post also lead to *sharing of tasks,* seeing that NWU Pukke also communicate their norms and values (see Image 4.19 below).

Image 4.19: NWU Pukke on Instagram encouraging users to adapt to a greener lifestyle

Keeping the arguments above in mind, the following table (Table 4.2) summarises the content analysis done on each SMP of Penn and NWU Pukke with regard to *relationship building strategies.*

Table 4.2: Comparing *relationship building strategies* on Penn's and NWU Pukke's social media platforms

	Facebook		Twitter		Instagram		LinkedIn		YouTube	
	Penn	NWU Pukke	Penn	NWU Pukke	Penn	NWU Pukke	Penn	NWU Pukke	Penn	NWU Pukke
Access:										
Making information and contact information available freely, take part in online chatrooms[1], blogs[1], message board or similar[1], keep users up to date with relevant content[2], sharing photos, videos & links[2,3], contributing to accessibility[2,3], able to comment, tweet, like and add as a favourite	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Open to ask questions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Detailed "About us" section or similar	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
Make contact information available	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	N/A
React swiftly on online enquiries/inquiries[2]	✓	✓	N/A	N/A	✗	✓	N/A	N/A	✗	✗
Participation	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Able to share, re-tweet[2,3]	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓
Able to post on timeline or similar	✗	✓	✗	✗	N/A	N/A	✓	✓	✗	✗
Able to tag	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	N/A	✓	✓
Able to use messaging system	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	N/A
Able to dislike	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	✓	✓
Make email addresses known	N/A	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Include stakeholders in decision-making process, and react on online telephone calls, emails and letters	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Positivity:										
Make users feel comfortable and at ease	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Facilitate honesty and trust	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Posts or information that makes the relationship enjoyable and positive	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Give feedback on messages and posts	✓	✗	N/A	N/A	✗	✓	N/A	N/A	✗	✗
Respond to all posts	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Openness & disclosure:										
Get involved in discussions openly	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Develop honest discussions and be transparent when using SNS	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Help reach common, mutual goals	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Make SNS and websites accessible to everyone	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 4.2: Comparing relationship building strategy on Penn's and NWU Pukke's social media platforms (continued)

	Facebook		Twitter		Instagram		LinkedIn		YouTube	
	Penn	**NWU Pukke**	**Penn**	**NWU Pukke**	**Penn**	**NWU Pukke**	**Penn**	**NWU Pukke**	**Penn**	**NWU Pukke**
Assurance of authenticity:										
Good behaviour and mutual commitment on SMP	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Create stories that humanise the organisation[4]	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	N/A	N/A	✓	✗
Tell organisations' stories through video, photos links and story writing[5]	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Show what stakeholders are up to by showcasing their stories/ successes[4,5]	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
Use SNS at live events	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Facilitate conversations on SNS through applicable content use	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Build an authentic tone of voice	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
Improvise with SNS	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Networking:										
Co-operate and pursue coalition	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Build relationship with relevant stakeholders	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Build networks with other's networks	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	N/A	N/A	✗	✓
Make networks known on other platforms	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Create virtual communities through networking	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Space where users can engage with the organisation and each other[1]	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sharing of tasks:										
Facilitate interactivity	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Disclosed topics	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Visible community activities	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
Create ways to donate money	✗	✗	✗	✗	N/A	N/A	✗	✗	✗	✗
Encourage users to engage and tell their own story	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Communicate news and events	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓

Some of the guidelines mentioned fit into more than one category, but are only mentioned once in the table.

[1]Also categorised under assurance of authenticity

[2]Also categorised under positivity

[3]Also categorised under openness and disclosure

[4]Also categorised under networking

[5]Also categorised under sharing of tasks

It is also important to note that these guidelines are not applicable to all the SMPs. In this regard, an overall relationship building strategy should rather be followed that incorporate the specific SMP as used by the universities and their alumni.

The findings show that both universities focus on *relationship building strategies.* Both Penn and NWU Pukke, however, can focus more on responding timeously to all types of posts, albeit positive or negative. The universities could also explore different ways to build online communities. In particular, NWU Pukke can improve its facilitation of interactivity in its disclosing items and storytelling on its SMPs.

Overall, it is evident that NWU Pukke are more adept in the way they use Twitter for relationship building, whereas Penn focus stronger on the use of LinkedIn for the same purpose.

4.3 TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION ON PENN AND NWU PUKKE'S SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Two-way communication is examined as used by both Penn and NWU Pukke. This includes communication on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube. The investigation will determine whether these universities' interaction through their SMPs took into account the following aspects of two-way communication: *power sharing, transparency, ethical communication, a balance of interest, responsible communication and reciprocity* (Grunig, 1989:38, 40; Grunig *et al.*, 2001:14; Grunig & White, 1992:42-43)*.*

4.3.1 Penn: Two-way communication

It was found that Penn incorporate a two-way symmetrical approach on their Facebook page. This is done by disclosing different types of information and giving users the chance to communicate their thoughts. Such an approach generates conversations between users, or with Penn. As a result, users experience a sense of *power* regarding the content that Penn post on this particular SMP. This response demonstrates that Penn *balance their users' interests* with that of the university. Furthermore, the engagement rates on Facebook are fairly high, indicating that Penn's approach does create *reciprocity* with alumni. (This was shown in Image 4.2 on page 75).

In the main, Penn's posts are highly professional and *transparent* with a unique tone of voice. These posts make available relevant information such as the tweet on the "Pride Party" (see Image 4.20 on the next page). It is clear that Penn are *transparent* in the content they share and what they allow users to share. By joining either the group, or by associating with Penn's LinkedIn University page, users are given the chance to observe other participants on the page. This provides an easy way to connect and engage with other

alumni. Such connections also demonstrate a special sense of sharing knowledge, information and an excellent chance to network. These aspects all contribute to a *two-way* communication strategy.

Image 4.20: Penn being transparent and balancing interests on Twitter

Penn Alumni @Pennalumni · Jun 26

The Annual Penn/Yale Pride party is tomorrow in NYC! fb.me/4bWTHamX1

When referring to Image 4.20 above, posting about this event could be considered risky as it could alienate users. However, it is done in a *responsible* way and shows that the university *balance the interests* of their users. In turn, this creates *ethical* communication. Overall, Penn do employ *two-way symmetrical communication* on Twitter, but do not encourage such interaction through their posts. They rely on their content, hoping that it would be sufficient for users to engage in two-way communication. When considering *two-way symmetrical communication* on Penn's Instagram account, it becomes a possibility when users engage on the various posts. Judging from these posts, it is clear that the communication is *well-balanced* towards the alumni of Penn. These various posts also contribute to two-way communication by showing that Penn uses this platform to communicate in an *ethical* and *responsible* way.

It is more difficult to find examples of *two-way symmetrical communication* on Penn's Twitter account due to the limited interactions. Penn share information, but this action cannot truly be considered as *power sharing* since most of this information derives from Facebook. Two-way communication on Penn's LinkedIn platforms occurs since these platforms are wide open for individuals to take part. Penn have created their LinkedIn group to encourage users to be interactive and have two-way communication, not only with Penn but with fellow users. This shows a certain degree of the *sharing of power* and also *transparency*, because once users join this platform they give others a chance to create content and engage with each other.

Assessing *reciprocity* can also be difficult due to the low engagement rate that Penn have on Twitter. Penn make available information, but there is a limited exchange between them and their users. As mentioned previously, Penn also receive engagements on their post on other SMP. When Penn continue to supply users with content and users keep on engaging on this platform, it is a sign of *reciprocity*.

Penn also facilitate two-way communication in a way on YouTube. This, however, happens indirectly and users are not asked directly. Thus, ultimately, Penn act *transparent* and communicate in an *ethical* and *responsible way*. *Reciprocity* can also be seen to an extent in certain SMPs, by capturing users that like and share certain posts.

4.3.2 NWU Pukke: Two-way communication

It would seem that the NWU Pukke's Facebook posts are driven from a one-way communication approach, which does not encourage or expect a reply from the users. NWU Pukke are open for comments and replies, but due to the nature of its posts seemingly this does not occur regularly. This indicates a low *reciprocity* rate as seen in Image 4.21 below.

Image 4.21: Two post from NWU Pukke showing low reciprocity rate
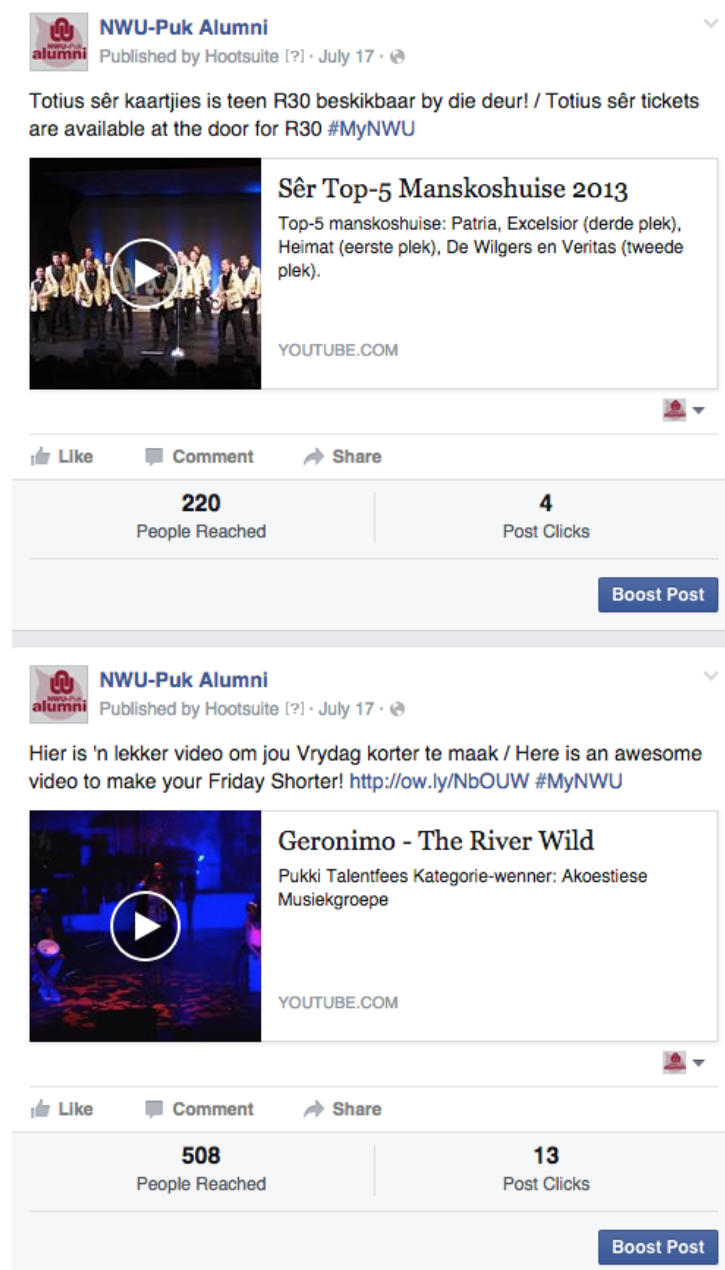
Users may have the impression that there is no form of *power sharing,* or that NWU Pukke are not *transparent* in their postings. However, the results show that NWU Pukke encourage *two-way symmetrical communication* and *power sharing* on Twitter by sharing other users' content. Power sharing is established as users can include NWU Pukke in a tweet when the latter shares their posts. This also includes a sense of *transparency* in what NWU Pukke do.

Furthermore, NWU Pukke's posts are done *ethically* and *responsibly* and *balance* their users' interest. Therefore, there are discernible elements of *two-way symmetrical communication*. However, due to certain factors, these elements do not contribute to NWU Pukke's overall social media strategy. For NWU Pukke, two-way communication also come naturally when considering engagement on their posts. This shows that the platform which NWU Pukke use does allow *two-way symmetrical communication*. However, more can be done to encourage engagement on the Instagram platform.

As mentioned previously, NWU Pukke provide the opportunity for alumni to use LinkedIn and YouTube, however not to its fullest possible extent. Regarding two-way communication, NWU Pukke created the platform, which provides alumni the opportunity to use it as they see fit. The practitioners do not facilitate the interaction or attempt to send out favourable content on their behalf to encourage true two-way communication. In addition, NWU Pukke do not make a real effort to facilitate two-way communication directly, but have certain systems in place to cultivate such interaction.

When examining NWU Pukke's communication and the content they post on Instagram, the communication appears *ethically and responsibly*. These posts, however, do not truly reflect what the organisation is busy doing, and, therefore, lacks a sense of *transparency*.

NWU Pukke use only a single platform for all their stakeholders. Therefore, it is difficult to assess how *balancing of interests* is applied. NWU Pukke does balance its user's interests, but not necessarily those of its alumni. This makes it difficult to distinguish student information and alumni content. It can be argued that NWU Pukke's content is planned in such a way that it is aimed at all of the stakeholders, including alumni. However, when analysing the institution's SMP (excluding their Facebook page) no content is aimed directly at alumni. On the other hand, NWU Pukke, achieve *balance of interest* to an extent, considering that the platform is open for any NWU Pukke fan or follower. The institution's posts on Instagram are such that it can relate to alumni as well.

There is a certain *reciprocity* on NWU Pukke's Twitter page with regard to the content they share and observing the activity they receive. However, again is it difficult to determine whether it targets alumni or another stakeholder group.

It was also found that when NWU Pukke do make time to create content for LinkedIn or YouTube, they do so in an *ethical* and a *responsible* way.

4.3.3 Two-way symmetrical communication: Comparing Penn and NWU Pukke

This comparison of Penn and NWU Pukke wth regards to two-way symmetrical communciation, is summarised briefly in Table 4.3 on the next page.

The findings in Table 4.3 on the next page show that NWU Pukke could make more use of *two-way symmetrical communication* in general, and particularly on LinkedIn. Penn is evidently more focused on *two-way symmetrical communication*, although *power sharing* seems to be an aspect on which this institution could improve.

4.4 WATERS *ET AL.*'S (2009) GUIDELINES FOR CULTIVATING SOCIAL MEDIA RELATIONSHIPS

Waters *et al.*'s (2009:103) guidelines for social media relationship cultivation propose that the following aspects should be implemented to build and maintain a strong relationship on social media: *disclosure, usefulness and information dissemination, interactivity and involvement* (Waters *et al.*, 2009:103)*.*

4.4.1 Penn's application of Waters *et al.*'s (2009) guidelines

Penn *disclose* on its SMP what its information entails. In other words, when using links or images, this institution provides a caption about the content which it publishes on its SMP. Adding to this, Penn use the various SMP-specified sections to *disclose information* about themselves, thereby contributing to *information dissemination.* In this regard, they also provide users with channels to contact them, the location where they can be found, which includes a link to their website.

Penn utilise their SMP to communicate news and events as well. This also contributes to *disclosing information* on Facebook. Allowing users to share this news or posts on different SMPs, help further *information dissemination,* seeing that it is distributed even further to other users.

As mentioned previously, most of Penn's SMPs are open allowing users to interact. This is done by using the specific tool provided to them on the SMP to comment, share, like, re-

tweet, favouriting, et cetera (see section 2.3) on posts. However, Penn do not allow users to post to their Facebook page directly.

Table 4.3: Comparing *two-way symmetrical communication* on Penn's and NWU Pukke's social media platforms

Constructs	Facebook		Twitter		Instagram		LinkedIn		YouTube	
	Penn	NWU Pukke	Penn	NWU Pukke	Penn	NWU Pukke	Penn	NWU Pukke	Penn	NWU Pukke
Power sharing	�	�	�	✓	�	�	✓	�	�	�
Transparency	✓	�	✓	✓	✓	�	✓	�	✓	✓
Ethical communication	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Balance of interest	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	�	✓	✓
Responsible communication	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reciprocity	✓	✓	�	✓	✓	✓	✓	�	✓	�

Using Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn, Penn also allow their users to see who they follow and who is following Penn. This can be considered a way to share contact information of different users or other Penn Twitter users and stakeholders (*disclosing information, information dissemination,* and *interactivity and involvement*).

By using these SMPs on a regular basis, Penn's social media also contribute to *disclosing information* and encouraging *interactivity* and in turn make alumni feel *involved.* Penn often post links, images or videos on their SMP. This can be considered as *useful information and distributing information* in various ways. Making these links, images and videos relevant to the user, also contributes to *usefulness* and informing the users about Penn.

Furthermore, Penn link other SMPs through Facebook by placing content from other SMPs on their SMP. This can also provide *usefulness* and informing other users that these platforms are available to them.

Penn boast an extensive LinkedIn usage with its users. Their IT practitioners create platforms for users to communicate with each other, share knowledge and gain insights from other Penn alumni. In this network, Penn do not only communicate to its alumni, but allow alumni to communicate with each other. Hence, this platform can be extremely *useful* to Penn alumni.

Penn also enhances this *interactivity and involvement* as a strategy by making calendar events known and by telling users how they can become part of volunteering activities. Penn, however do not allow ways for users to contribute financially on the Penn SMP.

One of the aspects of Penn's social media strategy is using a type of pin or message board for information. SMPs such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube, have similar platforms for such boards and Penn make it available to their users. Users are able to communicate on Penn's SMP through these channels, therefore, ensuring *interactivity* and *involvement.*

4.4.2 NWU Pukke's application of Waters *et al.*'s (2009) guidelines
NWU Pukke also *disclose information* on their SMP. They do this by making contact information available in their *About us*-section or the space allocated to the specific SMP, then adding their location and a link to their website.

NWU Pukke share on their SMP links, videos and photos that are relevant to their alumni. Thereby they apply the strategies of *disclosing information; usefulness and information dissemination,* and encourage *interactivity and involvement*. NWU Pukke use these forms of communication to share news and other relevant information. However, its usefulness to

alumni can vary. This institution's Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube posts appeal to a larger crowd. Therefore, it cannot be confirmed fully whether these apply to alumni as well.

NWU Pukke also provide a short caption with stories to keep users informed on various matters. This is another form of *disclosing information*. However, their posts are not always accompanied by a detailed description about the content communicated to the user, hence in a way it can impede the strategy of *disclosing information*. Nevertheless, NWU Pukke do *disclose information* by making use of a fairly open SMP. Users can comment, share, message, like and contribute to the SMP (See section 2.3). This also encourages users to be *interactive* and perceive that they are *involved* on this institution's SMP.

NWU Pukke also add to this strategy by sharing news on these platforms and *disclosing* other important information. They use their SMPs regularly to communicate and *disclose* different types of information to its users. Also on Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube, NWU Pukke allow users to tap into the fellowship of the Campus and engage with other users, which can be viewed as an alternative way of *disclosing information*.

The university also shares through posts from other SMP to show alumni its other platforms, therefore, applying *usefulness* and *information dissemination.* NWU Pukke do not actually communicate events, volunteer work or ways to donate on their SMP, which can limit *interactivity and involvement.*

Table 4.4 on the next page gives a comparison of Penn and NWU Pukke's social media platforms regarding Water's *et al.* (2009) guidelines for cultivating social media relationships with alumni.

From Table 4.4 on the following page it is clear that both Penn and NWU Pukke in the main communicate well with through news and information they share about themselves and will keep alumni well informed when using these SMPs. Regarding the guidelines of Water's *et al.* (2009), however, it would seem that both universities do not create ways to donate money on SMP, and could improve their calendars of events and announcements for voluntary work. Even though these enhancements are not always possible on social media, both Penn and NWU Pukke can accomplish this by placing relevant links to these options.

Table 4.4: Comparing Waters *et al,*'s (2009) guidelines for cultivating social media relationships between Penn's and NWU Pukke's platforms

	Facebook		Twitter		Instagram		LinkedIn		YouTube	
	Penn	NWU Pukke	Penn	NWU Pukke	Penn	NWU Pukke	Penn	NWU Pukke	Penn	NWU Pukke
Access:										
Detailed information about what is available on SNS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✕	✓	✓	✓	✕
Make available contact information and email address (or similar)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✕	✕	✓	✓	✕	✕
Open SNS platform	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Positivity:										
Relevant links on SNS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✕	✕	✓	✕	✓	✓
Relevant photos, videos, sound and information	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✕	✓	✓
Placement of relevant information, i.e. news, press releases	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✕	✓	✕	✓	✓
Applicable visual elements on SNS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Make use of pin boards, message boards, or similar	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Openness and disclosure:										
Communicate events and news	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✕	✓	✓
Assurance of authenticity:										
Linking through hyperlinks and other social media	✓	✓	✓	✓	✕	✕	✓	✓	✓	✓
Networking and sharing of tasks:										
Create ways to donate money on SNS	✕	✕	✕	✕	✕	✕	✕	✕	✕	✕
Calendar of events should be available on SNS	✓	✕	✓	✕	✕	✕	✕	✕	✕	✕
Voluntary work should be announced on SNS	✓	✕	✓	✕	✕	✕	✕	✕	✕	✕

Keeping the above in mind, and both Penn and NWU Pukke evidently do allow interactivity and engagement, but do not encourage it. Both these universities show interactivity and engagement to a certain extent on their SMPs, but in most cases they do not ask alumni to interact on content. Penn and NWU Pukke rely heavily on their content to generate engagement on their SMP. Both these institutions should improve their content to become more interactive and encourage engagement.

4.5 CREATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNITY

Although the formation of a community on SMP needs to be confirmed by those using the SMP (the alumni), during the content analysis the researcher did seek evidence of the formation of a community. The qualitative content analysis showed that certain aspects pointing to the creation of a community could be seen on both Penn and NWU Pukke's SMPs respectively.

Penn's alumni LinkedIn group, who share information, resources and create networks, is a striking example of how a community for alumni is created. Especially the characteristics of shared resources and reciprocity could be identified in this example.

Both Penn and NWU Pukke seem to encourage community building on their SMP. On the SMPs of both universities, the formation of an online social media community across the platforms could be inferred when considering information and resource sharing, cooperation and reciprocity. However, the characteristics of cooperation, the sharing of information and resources as well as reciprocity, should all be tested with the alumni. This should be done to determine whether, and to what extent, the alumni experience these characteristics. This raises the matter of the importance of online community, which will be discussed in the following section.

4.6 LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE UNIVERSITIES' USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The present study examined both Penn's and NWU Pukke's usage of social media in terms of themes identified and discussed in Chapter 2. From this examination is clear that there are certain similarities, but also differences between the universities.

Regarding both universities' implementation of *relationship building strategies,* it can be assumed that all of these strategies do not apply for every SMP. Furthermore, these guidelines may not fit each SMP as described in the literature, but can be adapted to do so. This fact also became clear during the analysis: The way these guidelines are implemented on the SMPs of the two universities are tailored for their specific platform.

Keeping this fact in mind, it will still be advised to follow an overall relationship building strategy when it comes to the use of social media and relationship building with its alumni. It would, therefore, seem that both Penn and NWU Pukke overall are dedicated to *relationship building strategies* with their alumni through the use of various SMPs. However, both universities should focus on responding timeously to all types of posts on all SMPs, albeit positive or negative. It is also clear that both Penn and NWU Pukke prioritise one SMP above the other platforms, in order to build better communities and stronger relationships.

Furthermore, both Penn and NWU Pukke can improve the way they implement *two-way symmetrical communication* in their strategy and usage of social media. When comparing Penn and NWU Pukke, evidently Penn is more focused on *two-way symmetrical communication* than its South African counterpart.

Waters *et al.* (2009) set guidelines for ways in which SMP can be utilised to build relationships with stakeholders. As mentioned previously, these guidelines do not apply to all SMPs. Penn and NWU Pukke can use their SMP in an improvised way to ensure that these guidelines are implemented. Thus, it is clear that both universities can invest in these mentioned guidelines proposed by Waters *et al.*'s (2009) and implement them to build relationships with their alumni on a larger scale. As was pointed out, both Penn and NWU Puk already use this approach, but both can utilise it in a more focused way on their SMP.

When investigating both universities' use of social media in a larger context, apparently there is a form of community with their alumni when using the SMP. However, this 'fellowship' will also have to be defined and adapted for each university and each SMP to reach its full potential as an online social media community. This can only be accomplished by testing this communication strategy with the current alumni to determine whether, and to what extent, the alumni experienced it. The findings of such an investigation will lead to a final conclusion on the formation of a community.

4.7 CONCLUSION

Chapter 4 processed the findings of a qualitative content analysis to answer Specific research question 2. This was done by describing the social media content to help analyse strategies that could help universities utilise SMP to build and maintain relationships with alumni.

It became clear that Penn and NWU Pukke employ the various SMP differently. In certain cases, Penn use a certain platform more focused or more efficiently than NWU Pukke, and vice versa. Penn and NWU Pukke in specific instances use social media platforms according to the guidelines suggested in the literature, however in other instances they divert from it. It

also became apparent that Penn and NWU Pukke share a number of similarities in their usage of social media platforms when they communicate with alumni.

Chapter 5 will examine the findings of the semi-structured interviews and provide a background and understanding on ways in which Penn and NWU Pukke's alumni managers use social media platforms to build and maintain relationships with alumni and how the usage of these two institutions compare.

Chapter 5: Discussion of interview results

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports on the data obtained in the semi-structured interviews conducted with exponents from the two universities: Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director and two Directors of Creative Design and Information Media, on the one hand; and NWU Pukke's Director of Marketing and Communication, and Electronic Media Manager on the other hand. The information from these interviews is used to answer Specific research question 3: *How do Penn and NWU Pukke use social media to build and maintain relationships with alumni, according to their alumni managers' views, and how do they compare?*

The chapter is organised according to the constructs identified in the literature in Chapter 2 and as summarised in Table 2.1. Chapter 3 (see section 3.3.3) described the process that was followed in the interviews and presented the interview schedule in Table 3.2.

First, a general overview is provided of both Penn and NWU Pukke's social media platforms (SMPs). This will be followed by a discussion of both universities' views on the theories of relationship outcomes, *relationship building strategies* and *two-way symmetrical communication*. (Responses in Afrikaans are translated, and the emphasis on certain words are the researcher's own.) Thereafter the focus falls on Waters *et al.* (2009) guidelines for social media usage and the creation of a social media community. Each of these discussions is followed by a brief comparison of Penn and NWU Pukke.

5.2 GENERAL OVERVIEW OF PENN AND NWU PUKKE'S SOCIAL MEDIA

5.2.1 Penn's social media

Penn manages various SMPs as mentioned by both its Executive Director and two Directors of Creative Design and Information Media. These platforms mostly handle alumni accounts separately from the general Penn accounts for their alumni, and populates the accounts with content related specifically to alumni matters.

During both interviews it was clear that Penn does not follow an established strategy in its usage of social media. However, certain best practices do apply when posting on one of Penn's alumni SMPs. These practices include creating a link or adding an image to the post,

as explained by one Director of Creative Design and Information Media, "We make sure […] there is always an image with a post, […], as well as a link to something …"

Penn confirmed that they use online software such as Hootsuite to monitor their SMPs and to schedule posts in advance. Although this is the case, Penn does not have a specific content calendar when it comes to making/planning posts. Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director explains that scheduling posts and using online monitoring tools in advance is worthwhile, not because it is low cost, but rather since it creates positive readings in their analytics, and increases interaction from alumni. One of the Directors of Creative Design and Information Media adds by explaining, "Return on Investment (ROI) for us is engagement …"

From these interviews, it became clear that Penn considers social media interaction with alumni within the framework of the systems theory. The Penn Alumni Office takes note of the activities on the official social media pages and attempts to incorporate the official Penn channels and the SMP's information into theirs. This office also adheres to Penn's overall social media policy and guidelines when creating their own posts on the Penn alumni's SMP.

Regarding this approach, Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director also mentioned that one of the Director of Creative Design and Information Media, "Is part of a larger University communications team and they meet at least once a month and talk about the overall strategy. We have our own communications team here. There is also a large university communications team and we work very closely." She explained further that they share each other's posts on various platforms and work together within a larger system.

Both Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director and the two Directors of Creative Design and Information Media, also explained that their SMPs are mostly linked and that the same type of information is disclosed on their various SMPs. In some cases, the content can even be similar due to the above-mentioned linkage between Penn's SMPs. This means that the same information appearing on the one, will also register on the other.

5.2.2 NWU Pukke's social media

NWU Pukke in its official capacity utilises various SMPs such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube and Pinterest. However, the managers only use Facebook as SMP, specifically for alumni communications. The other official NWU Pukke SMPs are seen as serving various NWU Pukke stakeholders, including alumni. NWU Pukke's strategy guides alumni to follow the university's official channels and SMP's. It should further be kept in mind that using social media for alumni relations is fairly new to the NWU Pukke. The Director of Marketing and Communications explained this state of affairs as follows:

Everything that you use is up to you and you need to do what feels right, but this doesn't mean that you are always right. This is why it is important to do the research so that we can see what they [alumni] are using. We know social media are the 'the rage' at the moment, and we have begun working on it, but there isn't research to determine why and what …

In NWU Pukke's case, there is acknowledgement on the need for a social media strategy, however it is still being developed, expanded and implemented. The Director of Marketing and Communication explains, "There is a strategy, however, I do not think the strategy has been deployed 100%." In both interviews, it was mentioned that NWU Pukke follows a set content calendar in order to schedule posts.

NWU Pukke's Director of Marketing and Communication valued their social media presence, and stated that it is definitely worthwhile to them. He stressed, "This is the best return on investment that you can receive nowadays." The Electronic Media Manager of NWU Pukke concurred and pointed out that NWU Pukke can see its alumni enjoy engaging with the university on SMPs. In both interviews, the participants indicated that return on investment does occur when social media analytics are taken into account and when monitoring platforms through Hootsuite.

In alignment with the systems theory, both interviewees agreed that regarding communicating on social media, they consider themselves part of the larger NWU *system*. The Electronic Media Manager explains, "The university's corporate identity is very clearly visible on all of these social media platforms so that alumni can easily recognise us on all of them."

5.2.3 General comparison of Penn and NWU Pukke's social media

Comparisons of Penn and NWU Pukke's general usage of social media highlighted the following facts:

- Both Penn and NWU Pukke make use of various SMPs. However, Penn has more platforms that are aimed specifically at alumni, whereas NWU Pukke expect of alumni to follow the official university platforms.
- Both Penn and NWU Pukke admit that they do not have a set strategy in place for their SMPs. However, both attest to having a plan that is being developed.
- Keeping this in mind, Penn's participants mentioned that they do not really use a content calendar, whereas NWU Pukke does.

- Penn also seems to be more certain that their social media are useful and worthwhile to their alumni; conversely NWU Pukke realises their SMPs are important, however participants were unsure if their alumni consider it worthwhile.
- Both universities regard alumni's engagement as their return on investment when working through social media.

From the findings, it is evident that both universities do value alumni and their contact with alumni. In this contact, the cultivating of relationships is crucial. The relationship management aspects, as identified in the interviews, are discussed subsequently.

5.3 RELATIONSHIP OUTCOMES ON PENN AND NWU PUKKE'S SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

The stakeholder relationship management theory focuses firstly, on relationship outcomes, which determine the health of the relationship; and secondly, on *relationship building strategies*, which can be used to enhance the relationship. The outcomes that determine a strong relationship include the following four aspects: *trust, control mutuality, commitment, and relationship satisfaction,* as well as *communal and exchange relationships* (Hon & Grunig, 1999:15).

5.3.1 Penn's description of relationship outcomes

Penn's participants asserted that they feel their relationship with alumni includes mutual *trust*. According to Penn's Directors of Creative design and Information Media, alumni do appreciate that the university is keeping in touch with them and incorporates them in the university life.

Judging from the various clubs and events that Penn's alumni attend globally, this university's relationship with its alumni indicates that the alumni *trust* Penn and are willing to participate in its events. A participant from Penn explained:

> *I think that we've had some challenges. In fact, earlier this morning, I was on the phone with the president of our black alumni society. And he graduated in the early 2000s, but he's working with a lot of people who graduated in like the '70s, '80s and '90s, and he was just telling me that we were following up on a retreat they had last Saturday, and how it's starting to shift from like it used to be, a very angry group, to positive, and it seemed like the university has recognised these challenges.*

In both interviews with Penn, the participants also agreed that Penn considers its alumni's opinions when making decisions. It was emphasised that most of Penn's events and decisions are guided by what alumni say, want and need. Penn's Alumni Relations

Executive Director pointed out that this does not only apply to Penn's alumni office, but throughout the whole university:

> "I mean, in fact, that's how we make decisions. It's not what I want […] I ask them, 'What do you want? What can we help you with?' It is thus important for Penn to take alumni's opinion into account. This will also help maintain a sound long-term relationship with them, create trust and give the alumni a sense of control mutuality and commitment."

Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director believes that *control mutuality* takes place in the way their Board of Trustees function. The board investigates problems or opportunities for the university, which very often include alumni. Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director explains the Board of Trustees as follows, "They represent […] all of the other alumni regionally, you know? They're from different industries and […] different genders and race."

According to Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director, due to the problems and opportunities mentioned above, these trustees will consult the University President and help her work out a plan that would attend to alumni's needs. In this case, the input may be considered a form of *control mutuality.* The reason is that Penn's alumni representatives have the chance to communicate the needs of alumni and thus influence the University President to invest in alumni. This is mutually beneficial for Penn's alumni and Penn, and important to Penn as a participant pointed out:

> The kind of the end goal is […] we need this community to support the university with their finances, with their money, with their time, because we have volunteers who give us time and expertise, we don't have to pay for. So, it increases our influence and ability to educate students because they give us their time, talent, expertise in the field, and finances. So, we will not survive into the next century without our alumni.

Through these actions, Penn has the chance to get to know its alumni better. For example, when the university hosts an event or responds to alumni's needs, the latter tend to *trust* Penn. This is because Penn's management listen to their alumni's needs, which ultimately contributes to a form of *control mutuality*. In addition, both Directors of Creative Design and Information Media of Penn's alumni relations agreed that there is a certain form of *control mutuality* in the way they distribute and disclose information on their SMP. By presenting the information that alumni want, demonstrates the university cares for alumni's needs, and the alumni's engagement show their appreciation.

However, Penn's Directors of Creative Design and Information Media did not think that their alumni are more *committed* to them because of the way they use social media. One of the Director of Creative Design and Information Media pointed out, "Their *commitment*

depending on social media is extremely small, almost insignificant […] since social media is kinda new." Conversely, Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director believes that "it's definitely made an impact, because we had seen since […] we started using […] social media, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of people who are engaged with us, because they're paying attention to social media, and it's impacting their other behaviours."

Despite an assumed contrast between the two statements above, in both interviews it was clear that a long-term relationship with alumni is important to Penn. Therefore, it can be inferred that *commitment* is important to Penn, albeit on or outside its SMPs.

Taking the outcomes above into account, it may also point to *relationship satisfaction*. Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director stated that Penn's alumni are *satisfied* with their relationship by their inter-connection with Penn through various ways, including social media. This reaches a point where the relationship is not only beneficial to Penn but also to their alumni. When asked if the relationship benefits both parties, the Alumni Relations Executive Director explained it as "mutually beneficial", and she emphasises that this wording is included in Penn's mission statement.

Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director further explains that they do ask for money, volunteerism and expertise, but at the same time they are giving back in various ways. Penn gives back by "giving them [alumni] access to intellectual content, their classmates and coming back to campus and those memories".

She continued, "… because of the way that we've been able to raise money and have these great trustees and volunteers, Penn has moved in the rankings from […] number 50th in the country to […] top 5. So, every single person on this planet who has a Penn degree, their degree is worth more." This means that any person who has a Penn degree has a better qualification in a certain sense because of the improved rankings.

Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director also discussed interactions between Penn and its alumni, indicating that alumni enjoy interacting with them. She emphasised: "They love it!" This disposition is evident on SMPs, which share information at events and all over the world through the Penn travel programme and get-togethers.

From these interviews, it might seem that Penn tries to build these relationships with alumni without expecting something in return. Penn however do welcome contributions from their alumni, but does not make contributing mandatory. Out of this it may seem as if an *exchange* releationship is what is desires in the future. When looking at the relationship of Penn and its alumni, juding from the interviews, Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director

admits that they do welcome contributions and that it helps Penn in various ways. However, current relationships with Penn alumni seems more *communal* when taking into account that Penn does not insist on contributions.

5.3.2 NWU Pukke's description of relationship outcomes

Noticeably, the Director of Marketing and Communications and the Electronic Media Manager both, mostly have different views on relationship outcomes.

According to NWU Pukke's interviews, the university bases the *trust* in its relationship with alumni on the way the latter attend events. NWU Pukke's Electronic Media Manager explains[3] the institution's view:

> *... by the way they [alumni] enjoy attending events and reunions. We have a good turnout at these events; then also of course through the way they leave comments on the Facebook Page […] which is mostly positive. They understand the hard times the university is going through, and also understand it when the university goes through good times.*

The Director of Marketing and Communication of NWU Pukke believes that currently alumni do not necessarily *trust* the university. He explained: "I don't think they trust us at this moment. […] I also would not say they distrust us, but there is a really strong attitude of, 'I will wait and see.' It isn't all positive and all negative, but an anticipating attitude."

This Director also believes that NWU Pukke do take alumni's opinions into account when making a decision. However, the Electronic Media Manager contradicted this statement and states that NWU Pukke rather would take note of what alumni require, but does not necessarily take action to satisfy the alumni's choice. Nevertheless, both participants, could confirm that alumni's opinions are extremely important. The Electronic Media Manager emphasised that alumni support each other and also the university, and for this reason alumni's opinions are valuable to the NWU Pukke.

The Director of Marketing and Communication mentioned that there is a form of *control mutuality* when one considers the knowledge that alumni have in their specific fields and that NWU Pukke would make use of this knowledge. For the rest, the Director did not think that the university shares this form of mutuality with its alumni.

The Electronic Media manager emphasised, *"*They [alumni] are a very proud group of people and are likely to rather support each other after they have left the university. They may not give back to the university financially, but would for example, employ other NWU Puk alumni."

Both participants agreed that there is no real benefit from this relationship. In this regard, the Electronic Media Manager explained that the university do not actually gain any benefit. It is

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[3] As explained in chapter 3, the interviews with the participants from NWU Pukke were done in Afrikaans, and translated.

rather the alumni who would benefit from the fact that a NWU Pukke alumnus would more likely hire a fellow alumnus in the field.

The Electronic Media Manager explained further that it is difficult to maintain *control mutuality* because their alumni have been divided into two groups after a merge ten years ago. This lead to one group of alumni supporting the old Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, and the other group, promoting North-West University.

However, both the Director of Marketing and Communication and the Electronic Media Manager agreed that NWU Pukke has an extremely loyal alumni group. The Electronic Media Manager pointed out, "They [alumni], really wants to know what is happening at their university."

However, the two participants differed about the role of social media in this mentioned loyalty and *commitment*. The Electronic Media Manager explained her view, "I think it plays a huge role to ensure their *commitment*." On the other hand, the Director of Marketing and Communication was of the opinion that, to date, these aspects have not featured strongly, but will to a certain extent. He explains that social media is a way for the NWU Pukke to ensure debating and two-way communication rather than just silently steering communication in one way. The Electronic Media Manager explained further that it is extremely important to have a long-term relationship with one's alumni because, "a university's buildings are built and demolished, its personnel come and go, its students come and go, but the alumni remain alumni".

In light of the responses above, both the Director of Marketing and Communication and the Electronic Media Manager are convinced that their alumni are *satisfied* with the relationship they have, but both participants also believe there is much room for improvement. For the Electronic Media Manager, this *satisfaction* is evident through the way alumni engage on social media when an item about the university surfaces in the news. According to the Director of Marketing and Communication, the alumni's *satisfaction* becomes clear through their attendance of university events.

In the case of NWU Pukke it was clear from the interviews that NWU Pukke does not expect anything back from their alumni. NWU Pukke's Director of Marketing and Communication does however explain that their alumni will always be their best marketers due to their loyalty and by contributing to their lives they ensure this feeling of loyalty stays with their alumni. The Director of Marketing and Communication further also mentioned that they do not really have any contribution methods in place for alumni to contribute in any way. Juding from this, NWU Pukke's relationship with their alumni seem more *communal*.

5.3.3 Comparing relationship outcomes between Penn's and NWU Pukke's social media usage

When comparing the relationship outcomes, it was found that both universities attempt to build sound relationships with their alumni through social media. This can be confirmed by the outcomes discussed below.

Both universities believe that they enjoy some form of *trust* among their alumni, however, clear measurements of this outcome are not evident. Penn seems to be more certain of a *trust* relationship with its alumni, although the participants mentioned having certain alumni groups who were difficult in the past. NWU Pukke's participants, on the other hand, mentioned that their alumni attend their events, but the relationship does not show that their alumni *trust* them.

The responses show a clear difference in the way the universities view *control mutuality* in the relationship with their alumni. The participants from Penn were highly confident about the fact that they include their alumni in decision making and listen to what they have to say. This is done through their social media use, and also through online LinkedIn communities, the convocation and by sitting on donor committees of the university. In contrast, NWU Pukke's participants perceived less *control mutuality* in the relationships with their alumni. Although they do listen to alumni, consider their opinion legitimate, the alumni's voice is not always heard in decision-making amongst the higher management level of the university. The NWU Pukke has the desire actively to enhance *control mutuality* with its alumni.

Both these parties clearly understand the importance of *commitment* to a long-term relationship with alumni. Penn seems to foster long-term relationship with alumni, but the participants had mixed feelings about the role of social media in building such a relationship. NWU Pukke's participants believe that they have the power to build and maintain a committed relationship between alumni and themselves. However, it is unclear to the university to what extent social media contribute to *commitment* in this relationship.

Once again when examining these two parties, a clear difference emerges in the way Penn and NWU Pukke view *relationship satisfaction*. Penn's participants indicated a belief of a mutually beneficial relationship with their alumni where both parties gain from the relationship. They also have ways to demonstrate and measure such a mutual relationship. In contrast, NWU Pukke does not experience *relationship satisfaction* with its alumni, but are aware that it should improve on this matter. The participants did, however, perceive their alumni as satisfied with the current relationship they enjoy with them, but that it could be improved.

It is thus evident that Penn and NWU Pukke in some cases share the same viewpoints and sentiment about the above-mentioned outcomes, however there also are distinct differences their views. These outcomes, and how both Penn and NWU Pukke view it, should reflect in the strategies they use to build and maintain relationships with their alumni.

It seems in the case of *communal* and *exchange* relationship types, both Penn and NWU Pukke does not always feel comfortable to ask alumni for something in return. Both these universities rather try and build a *communal* relationship with their alumni ensuring that they are loyal to the institution. However, Penn seem to be working to more of an *exchange* relationship with their alumni, considering that they have contribution methods in place.

5.4 RELATIONSHIP BUILDING STRATEGIES ON PENN AND NWU PUKKE'S SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

The theory of stakeholder relationship management highlights aspects that can help foster and maintain a strong stakeholder relationship. These aspects are: *access, positivity, openness and disclosure, assurance of authenticity, networking* and *sharing of tasks* (Hon & Grunig, 1999:15).

5.4.1 Relationship building strategies for Penn

Disclosing information on the various SMPs that Penn uses is a method to ensure alumni have *access* to these platforms. In both interviews the participants explained that they post this information on their website and publish it through their printed media. One of the Directors of Creative Design and Information Media mentioned that they also link the platforms to increase accessibility. Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director elaborated that Penn gives alumni cards containing the relevant social information. The aim is encouraging alumni to engage on the platform and report their own experiences on these platforms.

The Alumni Relations Executive Director explained that they include specific 'hashtags' and their SMPs in their printed guides, for example during homecoming, to make it *accessible* to their alumni. This implies that alumni create user-generated content, which makes alumni feel included, and in a way, this contributes to *sharing of tasks* on SMP.

Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director stated that overall Penn's alumni definitely are *positive* towards the university as a whole. The reason is that the qualification they obtained at Penn enables them to enter a career and generate an income. She further explained that Penn ensures the posts they share on their SMPs are relevant to their alumni. This could be considered another way to make information not only *accessible,* but also elicit a *positive*

feeling about Penn and inform alumni on news and events at their alma mater. Through their SMPs their attempt is:

… being careful and strategic in what content we post, and kind of eliciting feelings that make them feel nostalgic and happy and, positive memories. But also, […] people always re-post when we put something […] that's been in the news that's a positive thing about Penn. I think that's how we do it" (researcher's own emphasis).

One of the Directors of Creative Design and Information Media explained that they use certain rules of thumb on their social media when posting. This would be for instance, including a link or image that ensures alumni perceive the content as visually appealing and professional. She also mentioned that they include relevant content on the Page to ensure their alumni 'like' it and has a *positive* attitude towards them.

During the interviews with Penn it was clear that the practitioners communicate relevant information to their alumni, but they also consider it important to communicate diverse forms of information to their alumni. This ensures they keep the information reliable, trustworthy, *authentic* and *open*. In this regard, the participants emphasised that they communicate and *disclose information* to their alumni *openly* and give them a chance to present their thoughts and opinion about matters important to them. The fact that alumni also can contribute on the SMPs, clearly indicates a *sharing of tasks.*

As explained by the Alumni Relations Executive Director, the above-mentioned sharing includes daily news articles about Penn in newspapers. The university also employs their internal news team to create posts about popular and current events. During the interview the Alumni Relations Executive Director also mentioned that they place on their SMPs relevant information, news, popular articles and reports of activities on campus. This helps ensure *openness and disclosure* and *authenticity* in their communication. Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director explained:

I think similar to when we're putting things in writing, we're making sure that the things that we're posting are factual, accurate, true, and we consider the source. So, whether it's self-generated content where we're doing the research to ensure that it's authentic or taking it from another news source (researcher's own emphasis).

One of the Directors of Creative Design and Information Media also mentioned that when crisis communication occurs they often would collaborate with Penn's Communication Department to be certain they communicate the correct information.

In addition, Penn does not refrain from sharing controversial or sensitive information (*openness and disclosure*) on their SMPs for example, about a same-sex marriage webinar;

they would also communicate an incident such as a student's suicide adding to *openness* and *disclosure.*

In both interviews it was also clear that Penn uses *authentic* logos and images on their platforms to authorise it as the official account of Penn. In other words, Penn's alumni can associate themselves and connect with these SMPs and be assured they are interacting with an official account.

Regarding the strategy of *networking,* Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director asserted that they provide alumni a chance to *network* with them and among each other on various platforms. Of these SMPs, the largest two probably are the Penn LinkedIn Group and their Facebook Page where they utilise various sub-groups.

Penn's Alumni Relations Director explained that their LinkedIn Group is constructed highly exclusively and used only for Penn alumni. This entails a private group where alumni can only be accepted by administrators who monitor their information on the alumni database. She explains further that current students have the chance, and very often do, to look up people in the same field as they, and connect with them through the Penn LinkedIn group.

Penn does not only have an overall Facebook Page for alumni, but also sub-groups to cater for different graduate years. These Facebook sub-groups are even more inclusive since Penn only allows alumni from a specific graduate year to partake in the group. Penn's Alumni Relations Director explained that these sub-groups enable users to find old friends and re-connect with one another. They also tend to share stories and pictures on these groups. This interaction allows Penn to communicate and *network* with regard to events, and reunions; also to focus on specific year groups. This indicates a strong inclination to *networking* with their alumni and these sub-groups also enhances *authenticity* in the communication.

In this way Penn's management can network directly with their alumni and also narrow down the target by communicating with a certain group of alumni. Alumni from this sub-group are aware that the group includes other Penn alumni from the same graduate year. This in turn gives them the chance to network with one another, and thus contribute to authenticity. The various mentioned platforms allow other alumni to trace others and correspond among each other, which makes it an excellent form of *networking.* These Facebook Pages also are channels through which alumni communicate freely, advertise jobs, and post pictures. They engage with each other's posts. This implies that they are *sharing the task* of Penn's alumni staff, seeing that they also act as publishers themselves.

Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director explained that they *share the same norms and values* with their alumni through posting:

*Education and, the **sharing** of knowledge, […] a lot of things that we post are, related to research or teaching, or instruction, or students that are doing things that are interesting; alumni that are doing things that are interesting, […] and it's all around, you know, making the world a better place."*

The Director added that they also maintain general workplace practice of being professional in what they do on social media, especially when communicating to alumni.

One of the Directors of Creative Design and Information Media mentioned that they also try to encourage users to create their own content while attending events and informs them of different 'hashtags' to use at this event. This is a way for users to relate their own stories and generate their own content. The Director added that, in some cases, they would ask alumni to share or 'like' certain posts on their SMPs or encourage them to use a specific SMP at an event to *share* their experiences with other Penn alumni.

5.4.2 Relationship building strategies for NWU Pukke

Similar to Penn, NWU Pukke also includes social media information on printed media and their practitioners *disclose* this information at events and include it in newsletters. Social media links are also made available on their webpage. This allows alumni *access* to NWU Pukke's SMPs.

The Electronic Media Manager pointed out that NWU Pukke's alumni in particular, use and are familiar with Facebook. Therefore, NWU Pukke focuses strongly on Facebook as a SMP. However, the Director of Marketing and Communication explained that certain people find it hard to adopt the new media platforms such as newer SMPs. This makes it more difficult to communicate with them since they are not active on the newer platforms, which results in very limited *accessibility* for these groups of alumni.

The Electronic Media Manager and Directors' view may differ since they refer to different generations within the alumni group. Younger alumni tend to be more active and adoptive on SMPs, whereas older alumni are less active. The Electronic Media Manager is also younger than the Director, and this could explain why their views differ, in correlation with their generational group. Interestingly, NWU Pukke has information in their alumni's age profile, but this is not used purposely to establish their social media strategy for alumni.

In light of this fact, NWU Pukke also makes certain that they are recognisable by using the official corporate identity of the university as, both the Director of Marketing and Communication and the Electronic Media Manager pointed out in the interviews. Again, this

provides alumni the *assurance* that they are engaging on and receiving information from an official NWU Pukke platform.

The Electronic Media Manager also explained that they post relevant information and graphics on SMPs and view this as a way of *assuring authenticity*. On the other hand, the Director of Marketing and Communication felt that NWU Pukke is *authentic* by their nostalgic focus and by giving alumni the chance to communicate with them and making sure they are heard on these platforms.

The Director of Marketing and Communication explained that they ensure *positivity* "by giving them a voice, firstly, and secondly, to show them that their degree is quality." He further points out: by making sure this is done and that their alumni are aware of it and has a voice, gives them a sense of belonging, which would make them *positive* towards the university. He also is of the opinion that by touching the nostalgic side in their social media posts, is a sound strategy. It assures that alumni remember the 'good times' at the institution and show a more *positive* attitude towards NWU Pukke.

In addition, the Electronic Media Manager reported that they try not to bombard alumni with useless information, but rather keep information relevant. In this way, alumni will stay *positive*, know the information is *authentic* and will not find NWU Pukke's posts negative or irritable.

NWU Pukke's Electronic Media Manager argued that the university do have an *open system* on their SMPs. She explained, "We [NWU Pukke] always try to communicate both sides of a situation." She added that alumni have the freedom to comment what they think, and may give their opinions, and that this contributes to being *open* and *sharing tasks*. The Director of Marketing and Communication also stated that they are transparent in the content they communicate, especially in a crisis-communication scenario. He explained that it is important that alumni are given a chance to voice their opinions, which would also contribute to an open system.

The Electronic Media Manager emphasised that the platforms are open for alumni to communicate and *network* openly with each other if they want to. Both the Director of Marketing and Communication and the Electronic Media Manager admitted that they only provide the opportunity for alumni to *network*, but do not specifically lead actions or campaigns to encourage it. The Director of Marketing and Communication mentioned that they would like to increase networking between alumni in the future.

Regarding *sharing of tasks*, in both interviews the participants admitted that they do not purposely communicate the university's norms and values. The Director of Marketing and Communication, however, mentioned one exception – they do promote the value of quality learning on these platforms. The reason is that it is the issue to which the majority of alumni can relate, as well as content that NWU Pukke want their alumni to communicate to others.

The Electronic Media Manager is of the opinion that it is really not necessary to communicate this quality to alumni. The reason is that they are knowledgeable about these norms and values from their studies at NWU Pukke and the experience they had. Therefore, they will continue to communicate these aspects and practice it. In this way, the alumni help maintain what NWU Pukke stands for.

5.4.3 Comparing relationship building strategies between Penn's and NWU Pukke's social media platforms

An evident similarity between Penn and NWU Pukke is how both define and emphasise *access* as strategy of disclosing links to their SMPs through various methods. Less emphasis is placed on *access* as way of making information available and accessible on their SMPs. They both, however, indicated that the type of information shared on social media should be relevant, and they consider social media as a way of making information *accessible* to their alumni.

Comparing the responses to *positivity* as a relationship building strategy, showed that both deemed it crucial to make their alumni feel they are important and belong to Penn or NWU Pukke. Both also emphasised that relevant information is important and that they need to communicate nostalgic moments to keep alumni *positive* towards them.

Both parties view *openness and disclosing* of information in a very similar way. For both it is important to share information in order to keep the platforms balanced. Both also believe that it is recommendable to inform alumni in a crisis situation. NWU Pukke believes that the platforms should be *open,* allowing alumni to voice their opinion on the information they share. Penn take this strategy further by also sharing information from other media companies that are relevant to Penn.

The responses from the interviews show a clear difference in the two universities' view of *authenticity:*

- Penn: making sure its facts and information are factual and reliable.
- NWU Pukke: a way for alumni to know that they can use social media for a legitimate voice and a way to communicate with the university.

Both parties agree that they aim to be legitimate by sharing all types of relevant information, even if it seemingly represent the organisation in a bad light.

Furthermore, there is a major difference between the way Penn and NWU Pukke view the importance of *networking:*

- Penn considers it paramount and has various platforms and methods in place to realise this strategy.
- NWU Pukke knows that it is important but has neither truly established any structure yet to ensure networking, nor encourage it on its social platforms.

When examining Penn's approach to the strategy of *sharing of tasks,* it is interesting to note that this is not done purposely. However, through their statements, it is evident that, to a certain extent, this strategy is incorporated in their social media mix.

Regarding norms and values, the responses show that both Penn and NWU Pukke do not communicate these internal qualities directly. They rather assume that their alumni practice it and know what their university stands for. Furthermore, NWU Pukke's management emphasise the quality of their school, their degrees and research. Their aim is that the alumni enter the world and communicate these similar qualities, and showcase it in their daily lives.

The responses indicate similarities and a number of smaller differences in the universities' views on the basic *relationship building strategies.*

5.5 TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL COMMUNICATION ON PENN AND NWU PUKKE'S SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

To ensure that an organisation strives toward *two-way symmetrical communication* with stakeholders, the following aspects should be evident in its communication: *power sharing, transparency, ethical communication, balance of interest, responsible communication,* and *reciprocity.*

5.5.1 Penn's social media platforms

At first when the researcher posed the questions about *two-way symmetrical communication*, interviewees were sceptical in both instances. Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director explained that it is difficult to measure two-way communication, although she knows from previous experience and through metrics that people view Penn's posts on social media. She added that alumni do not always engage on these SMPs to create the feedback necessary for two-way communication. However, in a broader sense, aspects of

two-way symmetrical communication did emerge during these interviews. In this regard, Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director explained about *transparency:*

> *If you look at, some of the things that are posted, there are some things that aren't just like happy and sunshine. We've had some challenges with health on campus and there were some student suicides and there've been some articles […] the week before there was an article in the New York Times about a Penn student who was very honest about her experience at Penn. […] That's one way, I think that we will deal with challenging issues as well as the things that make Penn look really good. We're not hiding.*

One of the Directors of Creative Design and Information Media added that when such things happen, they tend to seek help from the official Communication Office at Penn. Thus they post the same information as the Communication Office, or acquire their assistance to create a similar post, but original. He explains that this is another way of showing that Penn is *transparent* in what they do. In both interviews the participants mentioned that they do not delete comments from SMPs unless the content is unlawful.

In light of the explanation above, Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director also mentioned about being *ethical* and communicating *responsibly* on these SMPs. She explicated her stance:

> *In general, we have standards of professional conduct in our office that extend beyond social media. So, we follow those professional standards of conduct. I think we don't choose any political position. We are accepting and encouraging free speech, but […] anything that's racial or homophobic we don't allow, that's how we conduct ourselves professionally.*

Both Directors of Creative Design and Information Media concur by explaining that on their SMPs they aim for consistency in what they allow or not. For instance, they decline to post advertisements or information promoting businesses even if requested by their alumni on Penn's Alumni Facebook page. However they do allow it on the Facebook sub-groups and LinkedIn group. By not allowing it at all, they are acting *ethical and responsible.* This is to avoid creating a president and bombard their alumni audience with non-official Penn-related information. Judging from these interviews, Penn's participants understand *ethical and responsible* communication as similar.

When considering *two-way symmetrical communication*, Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director viewed positive exchange *[reciprocity]* on social media as audiences engaging in certain ways through "… likes, comments, shares, re-posts, re-tweets, favouriting a tweet, liking on Instagram and putting a little comment". The Director explained further that their

focus is to encourage by "trying to make the content something that people would want to like". Therefore, they consider features such as activities and events with which people will resonate, and post it on their SMPs. She also mentioned that alumni get the opportunity to attend free webinars advertised and hosted on their SMPs. They also view this as facilitating positive exchange *[reciprocity]*.

As mentioned in section 5.4.1, Penn's management strategically consider the content they post on their SMPs. This ensures that the content is relevant to their alumni, thereby *balancing the interests* of their alumni with their own. Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director emphasised that by using social media they are:

> *Careful and strategic in what content we post and kind of eliciting feelings that make them feel nostalgic and happy and, positive memories. But also, […] people always re-post when we put something […] that's been in the news that's a positive thing about Penn. I think that's how we do it. […] so that combination lets us know that we are at least reaching people and inspiring some sort of feeling in them, revoking a feeling of nostalgia.*

This is how Penn ensures *balanced interest* regarding its alumni. During these interviews, participants made no specific mention of *power sharing* (see 5.3.1). It can be argued that there is a form of *power sharing* when considering that Penn listens to alumni's opinions and takes these views into account. The mention of a Board of Trustees (see 5.3.1) can be understood as another form of *power sharing.* The reason is that alumni as trustees then have the chance to influence activities at Penn. Power sharing is thus viewed as a management issue, rather than an aspect that can be addressed through social media posts and engagement.

5.5.2 NWU Pukke's social media platforms

From NWU Pukke's participants, it became clear that there is no considered form of *power sharing* on social media. As mentioned in section 5.3.2, during the interviews participants stated that they do listen to alumni's opinions, but give no guarantee that they will take it into account in decision-making. However, both participants mentioned the subject of *transparency*, and agreed that NWU Pukke does put in the effort to ensure their social media is *transparent*. The Director of Marketing and Communication explains *transparency* as "… when one can publish sensitive information and take the comments into consideration, but not be offended when people differ from you". In turn, the Electronic Media Manager mentioned that it is important to give alumni a voice and hear what they have to say. She explains further that they try never to remove content unless it is offensive towards others.

Considering and allowing transparency also means employing *ethical and responsible* SMPs, or as Electronic Media Manager explains, "We try not to publish information that will offend people …" From the responses, it is evident that NWU Pukke also equates *ethical and responsible communication* or consider these two aspects as related.

As NWU Pukke's Electronic Media Manager also mentioned (see section 5.3.2), their main focus is to make sure the information or content that they share on social media is relevant and content from which alumni can truly benefit. In this regard, it can be seen as a form of *balancing interests.*

The Director of Marketing and Communication emphasised that they need to be responsible on these platforms because this in turn adds to a factor such as positive exchange *[reciprocity]*. The Director explained:

> *Alumni's degrees are the key to their career and they in turn send people to study at the university. Therefore, it is important to him to know that all is well at the university. Therefore, he should be able to participate so that in the end he or she can be a brand ambassador.*

Being a brand ambassador plays a major part for NWU Pukke. The reason is that management are aware of the fact that their alumni provide a form of marketing. Therefore, the university realises the importance of keeping in touch with their alumni.

5.5.3 Comparing Penn's and NWU Pukke's social media platforms: Two-way symmetrical communication

Both Penn and NWU Pukke claim that their SMPs are used mostly for two-way communication, however both parties also mentioned that not too many alumni do engage regularly.

Although Penn does not mention it specifically, there is a stronger form of *power sharing* at this USA university than at NWU Pukke, South Africa. A noteable fact is that the latter university openly admits that they do not *share power* with their alumni.

Both Penn and NWU Pukke feel they make an effort to be *transparent* in their activities on social media, and both also, interestingly, equate *ethical and responsible communication*.

In light of the facts above, is important for NWU Pukke to keep its alumni content and engage with them from their perspective. This will help the alumni take a positive stance towards NWU Pukke and share this positivity with future students. In this way, the engagement provides a measure of *power* to the alumni. The same may apply to Penn,

however, it focuses more on acting professional, keeping the former students informed, and giving them opportunities to further their studies or reconnect with other alumni.

Regarding positive exchange *[reciprocity]* there is a distinct difference:

- NWU Pukke: this strategy is not considered for social media.
- Penn: this entails alumni contributing on their various SMPs.

Both Penn and NWU Pukke understand *balance of interests* as the sharing of relevant and useful information on their SMPs.

When considering both universities viewpoints on *two-way symmetrical communication*, they seem to have similar thoughts on this subject. Both Penn and NWU Pukke see *two-way symmetrical communication* as a possibility between them and their alumni. When taking these responses into account it would seem that Penn and NWU Pukke sees two-way communication as open communication between them and their alumni. This does not necessarily place emphasis on the symmetrical aspect of *two-way symmetrical communication*.

5.6 WATERS *ET AL,*'S (2009) SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES: PENN COMPARED TO NWU PUKKE

Waters *et al.* (2009:103) propose specific *social media guidelines* to create a sound relationship on SMPs with stakeholders. These guidelines are: *disclosure, usefulness and information dissemination, interactivity and involvement*.

5.6.1 Social media guidelines and Penn's social media platforms

As mentioned in sections 5.4.1 and 5.4.3, Penn's practitioners do not only showcase their alumni on various platforms, but also ensure they *disclose* various types of information. Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director explained that they effect such disclosure in different ways.

> *[We] have an internal, news service. So, here's what they do: our researchers will go through all the newspapers, both print, online, like the* New York Times, *and* Wall Street Journal, *and* Business Times, *you know,* Philadelphia Magazines, *things like that. And then every day we get an email with DAR information – Development, Analytical and Relations. Newsworthy articles, and there is a lot of content in there that we can use. […] also, we just pay attention to what's going on, if we get, an email from an alumnus who tells us that they are doing something special we try to feature it.*

Another aspect regarding this topic is the fact that in both interviews, Penn's participants confirmed that they work closely with their Communication Office, especially in situations of crisis communication.

Additional guidelines from Waters *et al.* (2009) are *usefulness and Information* dissemination, which goes hand in hand with *access and openness* (and *disclosure,* which already was discussed in 5.4.1 and 5.4.3 above). It is evident that the social media strategies of Penn and NWU Pukke show some similarities but also differences with regard to the above-mentioned *relationship building strategies*.

Furthermore, as mentioned previously, interviews with both institutions indicated clearly that they attempt to make *information useful* to alumni on the various SMPs. In both cases the interviewees emphasised that the content should be relevant to alumni.

Regarding *interactivity and involvement*, both Penn's Directors of Creative Design and Information Media concur that certain posts entail more interaction than others, however they do not find extensive *interactivity* in general. They added that the *interaction* which does occur is not always between Penn and its alumni, but mostly among the alumni themselves.

On the other hand, Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director explained: Although they do not have an established strategy, they are considering to make their information *interactive*. This is done by ensuring there is a link to the content they post.

As mentioned previously, one of the Directors of Creative Design and Information Media, mentioned that they continually include links, photos, captions or videos when posting on social media. This also contributes to *interactivity* and confirms the statement of Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director that alumni respond to each other's posts on Penn's SMPs.

In both interviews the participants also mentioned that they involve alumni by sharing certain posts on their SMPs that apply to alumni, or highlight activities of students or alumni on Penn's platforms.

5.6.2 Social media guidelines and NWU Pukke's social media platforms

Disclosure as practiced by NWU Pukke was already mentioned in 5.4.2. and 5.4.3. The university's operators disclose the communication channels and SMPs on their printed media, and consider this as contributing to the mentioned guideline. However, as the Electronic Media Manager pointed out, they focus on disclosing information that is especially relevant for alumni. Conversely, the Director of Marketing and Communication felt that they have and should share all information from their internal newsroom. The Director continued

by stating that, "Research now shows that we [NWU Pukke] selectively should gather the right information to share." As mentioned previously, NWU Pukke also provides links to its SMPs through various other channels – as means of disclosure.

Furthermore, the guideline of *usefulness and information dissemination* corresponds with access and openness as well as *disclosure,* as discussed already in 5.4.2 and 5.4.3

The Director of Marketing and Communication stated that for them to make *information useful and relevant* the main focus falls on research. He explained, "I think it [usefulness] can be determined through research and then implementing the feedback of it and the measuring your growth." NWU Pukke's Electronic Media Manager concurs and also points out that *information* they share has to be *relevant* and should focus on alumni.

Both the Electronic Media Manager and the Director of Marketing and Communication confirmed that there is no real *interactivity* on their SMPs. The Electronic Media Manager pointed out the lack of a specific strategy to encourage *interactivity*. She explained, "It is extremely hard getting people to respond. They only respond when they have questions about something …"

Adding to this the Director of Marketing and Communication feels that they do not act *interactive,* especially regarding alumni. He explains his view, "Interactivity will largely be regarding your content. They [alumni] will become interactive when you spread the information."

Considering the NWU Pukke's responses to the questions on the guidelines of Waters *et al.* (2009), it is safe to assume that the participants perceived some of these guidelines to be applicable to the university. Therefore, management strive to implement the guidelines in various ways. However, according to the responses, NWU Pukke seems unsure of how to implement and apply these guidelines in order to maintain a sound relationship on social media with their alumni.

5.6.3 A comparison between Penn and NWU Pukke's application of social media guidelines

As was the case previously, numerous similarities can be pointed out between Penn and NWU Pukke on applying the guideline of *usefulness*. Both institutions have strong feelings about sharing relevant information to alumni, and are convinced that research should be done beforehand to determine the content that the alumni will view relevant.

Both parties indicate uncertainty about the strategy of *interactivity*. Both Penn and NWU Pukke are aware this is an important aspect for social media, however they do not have established ways to ensure interactivity

Regarding *disclosure,* it is clear that NWU Pukke attempts to incorporate this aspect. However, as pointed out previously, this South African institution understands and emphasises that it need to be more specific about relevant information for its alumni. NWU Pukke further seemingly only focuses on disclosing its channels and SMP on the university's printed media. Thus, management do not necessarily view disclosure as specific information on their SMPs serving alumni. In contrast, Penn's role-players seem to understand and satisfy alumni's needs in its SMP, and already to a certain extent comply with Waters *et al.* (2009) guidelines. Penn, therefore, evidently knows what type of information works for alumni followers on its SMP. The operators use information strategically to achieve their goals for alumni relationships on social media.

To recap: Penn, clearly thinks about ways to make information *interactive*. Conversely, NWU Pukke does consider interactivity, but openly admits that the university does not have it or encourages it on various SMPs.

The responses to the above-mentioned interviews show that Penn seems to apply these guidelines accordingly on its SMP platforms. In contrast, NWU Pukke takes note of the guidelines, but does not seem to use it to its advantage when interacting with alumni on SMPs.

5.7 CREATION OF A COMMUNITY ON PENN'S AND NWU PUKKE'S SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Literature indicates that an organisation's social media efforts should be more than engaging followers; it should be aimed at creating a community (Lipschultz, 2015:76). When examining communities on social media, the following aspects emerge: *trust, shared norms, shared resources and knowledge, reciprocity, resilience within the relationship* and *co-ordination and co-operation.*

5.7.1 Community building for Penn

Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director stressed that it is extremely important for them to create a community on social media, as some alumni are geographically far away from the university. She explains further that this was not feasible in the past, but currently with social media it became a possibility. By using social media, "I feel connected to a place that was so important to me. And I can see pictures, I can see what students are doing. So, it is important to me."

One of the Directors of Creative Design and Information Media also stressed the importance of building a community, but does mention that it can be difficult due to the variety of platforms that are used, especially considering the numerous Facebook sub-groups for graduate year groups. She believes discussions and conversation do take place. It is clear from this response and the success of the mentioned sub-groups that it is important to nurture and pay attention to such sub-groups, which she typified as "a great place for them [alumni] to go to, where they can *share, and review information* or where they can say, 'This is a great thing that's happening.'"

Penn also focuses on creating communities, according to the Alumni Relations Executive Director, by making social media a priority and "being thoughtful about what we [Penn] are posting, what kind of questions we're asking, what kind of platforms we're using, how we make pictures available". She added that it is about the way Penn conducts itself on social media.

Adding to this point, a Director of Creative Design and Information Media, explained, "It's important that, as an Ivy-League Educational Institution, we are as involved as can be on these different sites of our community." Therefore, this involvement and interaction can be considered as a way that Penn and its alumni *share the same norms* of Penn and an Ivy League institution within this community.

Regarding core facets of social media, Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director highlighted the aspects of a community as follows:

An environment that kind of shares information [shared resources and knowledge], shares pride points [shared norms] and gives people access to students. And it doesn't have to be live, but virtual. Seeing what the students are doing, […] feeling part of something that you're proud of [resilience within the relationship], and also feeling safe within that community, and secure, and special. […] It's also that idea of loyalty [trust]. We're loyal to you, so you're loyal to us as a member of this community, and these are the expectations [reciprocity]. This is how we conduct ourselves in this community, that we speak well of Penn and of one another, and we support the things that are important to the institution [co-ordination and co-operation].

Penn stresses the importance of a community of alumni, not only in actual life but also virtually, on social media. It can be assumed that Penn does reflect on its attempts to create a community on social media. This can be inferred from the fact that its management strategise about the platforms that would help create a community and the content that should be shared to keep this community strong and relevant.

5.7.2 Community building for NWU Pukke

During both interviews with NWU Pukke, the participants commented that they are aware of the importance to build communities among alumni, and that social media should be used in the process. However, the interviewees stated clearly in both cases that it is a struggle to build communities.

The Electronic Media Manager's response in this regard makes is clear that they attempt to build communities within their alumni by ensuring alumni's contact details are to be kept up to date in order for the university to stay connected with them. She also explained that they would strive for a community where alumni are able to "share work experience*, resources,* and career opportunities." In the same vein, the Director of Marketing and Communications admitted that the alumni community is still developing. This takes place currently over a longer period and on an extremely small scale. It also tends to fall outside the organised university events. He does, however, concurs that it is important to start focusing on building an alumni community by using SMP.

Furthermore, the Director indicated the aspects of which such a community should consist: "People who have a communal interest within a smaller group [shared norms], […] such as residences. Within such [communities] you form opinions. And with that you can advance the institution [*trust*, reciprocity, co-ordination and co-operation, shared resources and knowledge]." He also contends that South Africa does not have this type of culture, and it should be nurtured within their current alumni. However, this may be a generational issue, rather than an issue particular to South Africa as a country.

Adding to this point, the Electronic Media Manager explains that the aspect of an alumni community should be a:

> *… hub where resources are available for alumni's use and a place to come together where opinions [shared resources and knowledge, resilience within the relationship] can be shared and people can differ, where alumni have access to certain types of things that the university makes available to them.*

NWU Pukke's management clearly know the importance of a community, but admit that they are more focused on an actual community with their alumni, rather than building an online, virtual community on SMP. NWU Pukke does, however, consider it important to begin building such a community using their SMPs.

5.7.3 Comparison between Penn and NWU Pukke's social media platforms: Community building

When comparing the responses from the interviews between the universities, it is evident that both Penn and NWU Pukke understand the importance of a community. They also, to an extent, share the ideas on the nature of such a community and the aspects it should consist of. Both Penn and NWU Pukke believe a social media community comprises the following aspects: *trust, shared norms, shared resources and knowledge, reciprocity, resilience within the relationship* and *co-ordination and co-operation*, as described in literature (Taylor, 2013:62).

However, there is a clear difference. On the one hand, Penn seemingly has these aspects in place and utilises SMPs to create this type of community with their alumni. This can be inferred when participants refer to their sub-groups on Facebook. The university management also consider possible actions from their side to help form this community within social media, through the content which Penn makes available on these various platforms. On the other hand, interviewees from NWU Pukke admitted that community building is not yet a focus at this stage. Nevertheless, they strive toward this goal.

From their measurements, it is evident that both universities do understand the importance of creating relationships with alumni and then forming communities on social media. However, their measurement does not include the relationships on social media. The focus of both universities' measuring thus is not on *creating a social media community*.

5.8. CONCLUSION

Chapter 5 answered Specific research question 3 on how Penn and NWU Pukke's alumni managers build and maintain a relationship with alumni by using social media. Thereafter, a comparison was drawn between the two universities.

When considering the information obtained from interviews with Penn and NWU Pukke, major and minor differences could be identified between the two, as well as a number of similarities. Penn and NWU Pukke agree on most of the aspects, however, Penn is already implementing certain guidelines, whereas NWU Pukke admits that this is still under consideration.

A striking example of contrasting approaches, would be their view of social media communities. Penn and NWU Pukke share an understanding of the importance of such communities. Both Penn and NWU Pukke understand the need for a social media strategy to guide their actions on their SMPs when creating social media communities.

The following chapter (Chapter 6) will focus on answering Specific research 3, to understand the view from alumni on both universities' usage of social media. This is done by reporting the data from the self-administered questionnaire.

Chapter 6: Discussion of questionnaire results

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters focused on methods of qualitative research. By employing these methods, data were gathered and insights gained about the way Penn and NWU Pukke use their social media platforms (SMPs). It also shed light on the managers of Penn's and NWU Pukke's views on the usage of their SMPs to communicate with their alumni. This chapter further explores the usage of social media to build relationships with alumni, however, in this case, through a quantitative approach in the form of a self-administrated questionnaire(s). This research approach was used in which data were analysed and used to answer Specific research question 4: *What are the views of Penn and NWU Pukke's alumni on the use of social media for building and maintaining relationships, and how do these views compare?*

To answer this specific research question, the researcher used data from the self-administered questionnaire that was distributed to alumni. This questionnaire contains five main sections of quantitative questions and one open question, all based on findings from the literature. This research instrument was distributed to alumni from both Penn and NWU Pukke, by the universities themselves. The communiqué also briefly outlined the research. As explained in section 3.3.4, for Penn sampling was done to reflect its alumni's population, whereas for NWU Pukke the survey was sent to all the alumni on its database.

A total of 121 questionnaires were completed by Penn, and 997 by NWU Pukke's respondents, which resulted in a response rate of 2.42% for Penn and 6.93% for NWU Pukke.

The demographic overview is discussed first, followed by the data gathered from the literature themes that were identified in Chapter 2.

6.2 DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW OF PENN'S AND NWU PUKKE'S ALUMNI

The age and gender of the respondents is reported on firstly, followed by their field of study, year graduated, their children studying at the institution, and their contribution to the university. Thereafter, the usage of their SMPs are described.

6.2.1 Age distribution of alumni

The following table (Table 6.1) summarises the age distribution of Penn's and NWU Pukke's alumni.

Table 6.1: Age of Penn's and NWU Pukke's alumni social media users

Age group	Penn		NWU Pukke	
	Percentage	N-Value	Percentage	N-value
Younger than 20	0.0	0.0	0.2	2
20-29	15.7	19	40.5	404
30-39	12.4	15	15.2	152
40-49	14.9	18	15.0	150
50-59	15.7	19	15.2	152
60-69	18.2	22	8.2	82
70-79	16.5	20	5.0	50
Older than 79	6.6	8	0.5	5
Total	100	121	100	997

Penn's social media users who participated in this survey (n=121), are distributed evenly across the ages provided in the questionnaire. Surprisingly, the highest age group who participated is over 79, with no participants younger than 20.

When examining NWU Pukke's respondents, the majority are in the 20-29 (40.5%; n=404) age bracket. Noticeably, only two alumni were younger than 20 (0.2%; n=2). The NWU does offer 2 year diplomas, which can be studied after school when students are 17 years old, explaining why these two alumni could be younger than 20 years. It is significant, as explained by NWU Pukke's Director of Marketing and Communications, that the managers view and focus on NWU Pukke's alumni as older persons. Therefore, according to the managers, a large number of alumni have not yet adapted to using SMPs. In contrast, the findings show that the alumni group does represent all ages, with a strong younger segment. Therefore, social media seemingly are more accepted and should be used more effectively by NWU Pukke. More data on the alumni's social media usage would corroborate this argument (see section 6.3).

There is thus a minor difference in the distribution of age groups between the two universities' alumni. Penn's social media interaction reflects the age distribution of its whole alumni population, as is indicated by the sampling method used for Penn. When examining the overall picture of NWU Pukke, this also reflects the university's alumni profile. Penn's alumni is distributed throughout the age groups, whereas NWU Pukke's alumni is represented strongly in the under 60 age group, with a large contingent of 20-29 year olds.

Regarding age distribution, it would be expected that Penn's alumni would use social media less than NWU Pukke's alumni, due to the higher age profile. This assumption, however, still needs to be investigated (see section 6.3).

6.2.2 Gender

The findings indicated that of Penn's alumni, 63.6% (n=77) are female and 36.4% (n=44) are male. From NWU Pukke's respondents, 53.4% (n=532) are female and 46.6% (n=465) are male. This finding once again reflects Penn's and NWU Pukke's overall alumni profile.

Regarding the gender profile, Penn has more female respondents, whereas NWU Pukke's respondents are more balanced between males and females in this case. The difference between Penn and NWU Pukke's alumni gender distribution is thus fairly limited.

6.2.3 Alumni's field of study

Since Penn and NWU Pukke's fields of study (Faculties and Schools) differ, each is reported in separate tables below: Tables 6.2 and 6.3.

Table 6.2: Penn's respondents: Field of study

Field of study	Percentage	N-value
Arts & Science	49.6	60
The Wharton School	18.2	22
Engineering and applied Science	6.6	8
Graduate School of Education	4.1	5
Law School	4.1	5
Dental Medicine	3.3	4
Nursing	3.3	4
Social Policy & Practice	3.3	4
School of Communication	2.5	3
Design	1.7	2
Perelman School of Medicine	1.7	2
Veterinary Medicine	0.8	1
Other	0.8	1
Total	**100**	**121**

Table 6.2 above, clearly shows that out of 121 respondents almost half are from the Arts and Science study field (49.6%; n=60), with 18.2% (n=22) from the Wharton School. The rest of the respondents are from the other 11 fields of study. The 'other'-option includes courses that has been discontinued at Penn. These findings reflect the alumni profile of Penn fully.

Table 6.3 on the next page, shows that the majority NWU Pukke's alumni studied in the field of Arts (28.3%, n=282), as well as the Economic and Management Sciences (27.0%, n=269). The 'other'-option reflects discontinued courses at NWU Pukke, for instance a Degree in Drama. Once again, the distribution above reflects NWU Pukke's alumni profile fully.

Table 6.3: NWU Pukke's respondents: Field of study

Field of study	Percentage	N-value
Arts	28.3	282
Economic and Management Sciences	27.0	269
Natural Sciences	13.8	138
Health Sciences	10.7	107
Engineering	6.7	67
Education Sciences	5.5	55
Law	4.9	49
Theology	2.3	23
Other	0,7	7
Total	**100**	**997**

The fields of study could not be compared directly as it differed between Penn and NWU Pukke according to the universities' unique structures. However, the results show that each of the universities has one faculty with a larger number of alumni than the other faculties. Noticeably, these faculties are also the larger units within each of the universities, and in both cases, the largest faculty for both is Arts.

6.2.4 The year alumni graduated

Respondents were asked to indicate in which year they completed their studies, specifically their first degrees.

Table 6.4: Penn and NWU Pukke's alumni: Year graduated

	Penn		NWU Pukke	
Year graduated	Percentage	N-value	Percentage	N-value
1950-1959	7.4	9	0.8	8
1960-1969	13.2	16	4.3	43
1970-1979	20.7	25	8.9	89
1980-1989	14.0	17	15.2	152
1990-2000	14.9	18	14.3	143
2001-2011	14.0	17	28.9	288
After 2011	15.7	19	27.5	274
Total	**100**	**121**	**100**	**997**

As Table 6.4 above illustrates, Penn's respondents are distributed across all the options that has been provided, as was the case with their age distribution. NWU Pukke's respondents also reflected the age distribution, especially for those who graduated between 2001-2011 (28.9%; n=288), and after 2011 (27.5%, n=274). As mentioned when the age profile was compared, it is evident that NWU Pukke has a stronger contingent of younger alumni. In both the universities' cases the results gives a full reflection of their alumni profile.

6.2.5 Children studying at the alumni's alma mater

According to Penn's respondents 45.5% (n=55) indicated that their children did not study at Penn, with 18.2% (n=22) indicating their children do study at Penn, and 36.4% (n=44) who found this question as 'Not applicable' to them.

The NWU Pukke's respondents indicated that 28.7% (n-value=286) of their children did not study at the university, with 21.6% (n=215) whose children do study at the university, and 49.7% (n=496) who indicated that this question was 'Not applicable' to them.

A median of 20% of both Penn and NWU Pukke's respondents indicated that their children also studied, or do study, at their alma mater. Interestingly, in both cases the largest percentage of respondents found that the question is not applicable to them.This maybe bacuase they do not have children aged above 18 yet.

6.2.6 Contribution to alumni's alma mater

Respondents were asked to indicate if, and how, they contribute to their alma mater. The results are presented in Table 6.5 below.

Table 6.5: Contribution to the university

	Penn		NWU Pukke	
Methods of contribution	**Percentage**	**N-value**	**Percentage**	**N-value**
Financial contribution	66.9	81	5.6	56
Giving talks at the university	6.6	8	-	-
Attending university events	29.8	36	25.1	250
Attending alumni events	54.4	66	18.0	179
Part of the Convocation	-	-	16.0	160
Giving talks at a faculty	-	-	3.7	37
Contact with Career Centre for job opportunities	3.8	38	-	-
Other	-	-	11.7	117
None	14.9	18	45.6	455

In this question the respondents could select more than one option, therefore the total percentages will not summate to 100%.

From Table 6.5 above, it is clear that Penn's alumni contribute mostly through financial means (66.9%, n=81) and attending alumni events (54.4%, n=66). A limited number of respondents indicated that they do not contribute to the university (14.9%, n=18).

In contrast, 45.6% (n=455) of the NWU Pukke's respondents indicated that they do not contribute to the university. The highest number of those contributing to the NWU Pukke indicated that they attend university events (25.1%, n=250). Only a limited number of respondents (5.6%, n=56) specifically contributes financially to the university.

From the findings above and as stated in the interviews, it is evident that Penn's alumni individuals have a larger number of choices on ways they could contribute to the university. The percentage of alumni who contributes to the university is also very high. The NWU Pukke's alumni seemingly do contribute significantly to the university, over and above attending events. This university could encourage and guide its alumni to contribute more to their alma mater, especially against the background of the #feesmustfall campaign, which underlined the need for third stream (alternative and/or additional) financial support. Perhaps also showing alumni more options could help them select a suitable contribution method, be it financially or otherwise.

These findings are similar to those of the interviews, where it was found that the two universities have different contribution profiles (see section 5.3).

6.2.7 Conclusion on demographic information

Regarding the demographics, it was found that the distribution of the respondents' age, gender, and year of graduation fully reflect the alumni profiles of the two universities. Penn's alumni are distributed more throughout the age groups, whereas NWU Pukke's alumni show a stronger younger contingent. Both mentioned findings can be understood when also considering the year of graduation.

A limited difference was found between the percentage of males and female respondents between Penn and NWU Pukke. In general, although a large number of respondents for both universities indicated that the question was not applicable to them, nearly 20% of both Penn's and NWU Pukke's respondents confirmed that their children also studied, or do study at the respective universities.

The findings show that each of the mentioned universities has one faculty with more alumni than any of the other faculties. In both cases, it is the Faculty of Arts, which are also the largest faculties at both institutions.

Regarding alumni contributions, Penn shows a stronger record, both financially and otherwise. NWU Pukke's alumni contribute mainly by attending alumni events. More encouragement to alumni and further options for contributing to the institution could benefit the NWU Pukke, particularly given the current economic and activist environment of higher education in South Africa.

6.3 PENN AND NWU PUKKE'S RESPONDENTS' SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

The respondent's general social media usage is discussed, followed by their usage of the universities' SMPs.

6.3.1 Alumni's general social media usage

In response to the questions whether they use social media, 77.5% (n=93) of Penn's respondents and 92.25% (n=917) from NWU Pukke indicated that they do use social media. Stated differently, only 22.5% (n=27) of Penn's and 7.75% (n=77) of NWU Pukke's respondents indicated that they do not use social media.

Both Penn and NWU Pukke's alumni use social media, and it would seem well worth the university's efforts if their managers were also more active on these platforms. The following table (Table 6.6) indicates which SMPs the respondents frequented for general use.

Table 6.6: Social media platforms used by Penn's and NWU Pukke's alumni

Social media platforms	Penn		NWU Pukke	
	Percentage	N-value	Percentage	N-value
Facebook	69.4	84	86.0	857
Twitter	35.5	43	37.3	327
YouTube	46.3	56	66.3	661
LinkedIn	57.9	70	55.6	554
Pinterest	19.0	23	42.4	423
Instagram	30.6	37	32.2	321
Google+	17.4	21	38.3	382
Flickr & Phanfare	5.0	6	1.5	15
Blogging	10.7	13	6.1	61
Snapchat	13.2	16	2.7	27

Respondents were allowed to choose the platforms they used, hence the total percentages in the Table 6.6 above, would not total to 100%.

Regarding Penn's usage, it is evident that their respondents prefer most of the mainstream SMPs such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Instagram. The usage decreases for the smaller and more recent SMPs such as Snapchat, Flickr, Google+, and blogging.

The most frequented SMP for NWU Pukke alumni, is Facebook with a percentage of 86% (n=857). YouTube and LinkedIn are the second and third most popular platforms used by NWU Pukke's respondents, followed by Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram and Google+ (in that order). Significantly regarding Google+, it is important to put its popular usage into perspective. This popularity may reflect respondents ignorance of Google's SMP and that they confuse it with the Google search engine, as well as the fact that users are automatically part of Google+ if they have a Gmail-account.

The least used SMPs for both Penn and NWU Pukke were Flickr, Snapchat and blogging. The reasons for such low usage, could be that Snapchat is still a newer platform. Flickr's album-type functionalities are available on more well-known SMPs such as Facebook, and photos can also be shared on Instagram. Lastly, findings show that blogging evidently is not a channel that is used widely. This could be because information on a blog is already released through other social media channels such as the user's Facebook Page. Therefore, increased updated information can be found on the more familiar social media sites.

When examining both Penn and NWU Pukke, it is clear that the mainstream social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn) draw more attention from these respondents than other more recent platforms. As mentioned previously, NWU Pukke's managers have the perception that their alumni are not adapting to the SMPs. However, contrary to management's beliefs, respondents to this questionnaire for NWU Pukke indicated a wide age range and attest to using a variety of SMPs.

Interestingly, cross tabulations between respondents' age and their social media usage (as described in Table 6.6 above), showed a very limited to medium correlation between respondents' age and choice of SMP at both universities. This indicates that age may not be the main driver that determines the alumni's usage of social media.

In response to the further questions, individuals also indicated how often they spend time on their chosen platforms. These questions probed for more in-depth information about each

platform. The results for Penn and NWU Pukke' frequency of usage are reported in two separate tables (6.7 and 6.8) below.

Table 6.7: Frequency of SMP usage – Penn

Social media platforms	Less than once a month	1-4 times a month	2-3 times a week	Less than 2 hours a day	More as 2 hours a day	Mean	N-value
	%	%	%	%	%		
Facebook	2.4	4.8	23,8	48.8	20.2	3.82	84
Twitter	11.6	23.3	25.6	32.6	7.0	2.81	43
YouTube	12.5	26.8	44.6	16.1	0.0	2.97	56
LinkedIn	15.7	35.7	35.7	11.4	1.4	2.33	70
Pinterest	30.4	39.1	17.4	8.7	4.3	2.75	23
Instagram	13.5	16.2	10.8	37.8	21.6	3.18	37
Google+	38.1	23.8	38.1	0.0	0.0	2.85	21
Flickr & Phanfare	33.3	66.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.80	6
Blogging	8.3	41.7	33.3	16.7	0.0	2.48	12
Snapchat	0.0	12.5	18.8	56.3	12.5	2.63	16

The question to which Table 6.7 above presents the responses was, "How often do you use these SMPs?" Furthermore, it should be noted that respondents were allowed to choose the platforms they used, hence the totals in the table above will not summate to 100%.

Focussing on the main SMPs that Penn's alumni frequent, it is evident that two are used most regularly and particularly on a daily basis: Facebook (48.8%, n=41, mean=3.82) and Instagram (37.8%, n=14, mean=3.18). Respondents seemingly use Twitter on a weekly and daily basis – in short, more frequently than LinkedIn (mean=2.33), which is used weekly and monthly, and YouTube (mean=2.97), which indicates weekly usage.

When considering the findings of Table 6.7 above, and relating them to those of the prior Table 6.6, it is clear that Penn's alumni use Facebook the most and most frequently. LinkedIn is the second highest usage option that alumni choose, but it is only used monthly or, at most, weekly.

Although SMPs such as Snapchat does not indicate a high usage, those who do use it do so frequently (daily). The channels such as Flickr and blogging are used only monthly.

Considering the information above, it would benefit Penn's managers the most to be active on Facebook mainly for daily or weekly postings, followed and supported by activity on Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. For posts that deliver a more long-term educational/training message, LinkedIn would be suitable. Nevertheless, according to *social media guidelines* of Waters *et al.* (2009) and the view of Taylor and Perry (2005:209) on two-way communication, it is important to keep SMPs active and up to date. This can be done by disclosing current and relevant information and continually updating these platforms with new data.

In a response, one of Penn's Directors of Creative Design and Information Media pointed out the difficulty to build a relationship and community with alumni through such numerous SNSs. Nevertheless, findings show that alumni are active on these platforms. This argues the case that it may still be worthwhile to build relationships with alumni on these various platforms.

The same question ascertaining how often respondents spend time on their chosen SMPs were also posed to the NWU Pukke respondents. This was done to reach a more in-depth description of usage on each platform. The responses are presented in Table 6.8 below.

Table 6.8: Frequency of SMP usage – NWU

Social media platforms	Less than once a month	1-4 times a month	2-3 times a week	Less than 2 hours a day	More as 2 hours a day	Mean score	N-value
	%	%	%	%	%		
Facebook	1.5	6.8	20.1	51.0	20.6	3.82	855
Twitter	11.9	29.0	31.2	22.2	5.7	2.81	369
YouTube	6.4	28.1	36.5	20.0	8.9	2.97	654
LinkedIn	19.8	39.0	30.4	9.9	0.9	2.33	546
Pinterest	13.4	30.3	29.8	21.0	5.5	2.75	419
Instagram	11.3	17.6	23.5	37.3	10.3	3.18	319
Google+	21.6	18.1	25.1	24.0	11.2	2.85	375
Flickr	46.7	33.3	13.3	6.7	0.0	1.80	15
Blogging	14.8	39.3	32.8	9.8	33.3	2.48	61
Snapchat	25.9	18.5	33.3	11.1	11.1	2.63	27

As is the case with the previous questions, respondents were allowed to choose the platforms they used, which means the totals in Table 6.8 above will not add up to 100%.

When examining the mainstream platforms as shown in Table 6.8, NWU Pukke's Facebook, is the platform chosen the most, where 51% (n=436, mean=3.82) alumni use the platform daily. It is furthermore evident that NWU Pukke respondents use Twitter on a daily (22.2%, n=82), weekly (31.2%, n=115), and monthly (29.0%, n=107) basis. Regarding NWU Pukke's respondents' usage of YouTube, findings indicate they mainly use it weekly (mean=2.97).

Similarly, to Penn, NWU Pukke's respondents use LinkedIn on a monthly basis (39%, n=213, mean=2.33). The two other platforms that NWU Pukke's alumni use fairly often is Pinterest – monthly and weekly (mean=2.75), and Instagram – daily and weekly (36.5%, n=239, mean=3.18).

NWU Pukke's 'blog-platform', Newsroom, is read by 27 of the respondents. However, this does not occur often, as indicated by 39.3% (n=24) of the respondents who report that they only read Newsroom 1-4 times per month. In addition, Snapchat, frequented by 16 of the respondents, is utilised 2-3 times a week (33.3%, n=9).

To clarify the findings further, correlations were investigated between the data of Penn and NWU Pukke. Calculated through Cramer's V, correlations showed as measured by this V: 0.1=weak, 0.3=moderate and 0.5=strong correlations.

Table 6.9: Correlation between Penn's and NWU Pukke's alumni's regular usage of SMPs

Platform	Cramer's V	Measurement	Regularity of usage	
			Penn	NWU
Blogging	0.888	Large	Monthly and then weekly	Monthly and then weekly
Facebook	0.842	Large	Daily	Daily
LinkedIn	0.812	Large	Monthly and weekly equally	Monthly and then weekly
Twitter	0.606	Large	Daily and weekly	Daily and weekly
Flickr	0.477	Medium	Monthly	Monthly or less
Instagram	0.181	Small	Daily	Daily and weekly
Pinterest	0.098	Small	Monthly or less	Monthly and then weekly
YouTube	0.059	Small	Weekly	Weekly and monthly
Google+	0.220	Small	Weekly or monthly	Weekly and daily
Snapchat	0.014	Small	Daily	Weekly or monthly

Once again the data correlates between the universities and confirms that in both cases the mainstream social media, namely Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, is used more often than the more recent SMPs. This finding confirms that the universities should focus their efforts on these channels, particularly on Facebook and LinkedIn. The alumni of both universities agree that blogging and Flickr must not be pursued as an avenue to build stakeholder relations with alumni.

Regarding Google+ it was reported previously that respondents were uncertain about an existing Google SMP. This finding confirms the correlations in Table 6.9 above that users are not always aware or knows the difference between Google as search engine, Google's email service, Gmail, and Google+ as SMP. The findings also show that Penn's alumni are seemingly more familiar with Snapchat than NWU Pukke's alumni.

Similar to Penn, NWU Pukke's managers could benefit from being active on Facebook mainly for daily or weekly postings, and supporting this activity with Twitter, Pinterest (more for NWU alumni), Instagram and YouTube posts. Once again, LinkedIn could be used for long-term educational/training messages. The universities also differ in the regularity of posts on Youtube (Penn weekly and NWU weekly and monthly). In this regard, YouTube can

be used on a monthly basis as Penn's alumni may use this SMP more frequently if there are content that interest them.

6.3.2 Alumni's use of the universities' social media sites

The following table (Table 6.10) presents the responses on the alumni's usage of the universities' social media sites.

Table 6.10: Platforms on which alumni follow their university – Penn/NWU Pukke

Social media platforms	Penn		NWU Pukke	
	Percentage	N-value	Percentage	N-value
Facebook	52.9	64	63.2	630
Twitter	20.7	25	15.0	150
Instagram	14.9	18	9.2	92
LinkedIn	27.3	33	10.6	106
YouTube	2.5	3	17.1	170
Pinterest	2.5	3	1.5	15
Flickr/Phanfare	1.7	2		
Blogs	5.0	6	12.1	121
None	7.4	9	20.9	208

Respondents could choose all the platforms they used and, therefore, the total percentages of Table 6.10 above will not summate to 100%.

Regarding Penn's following on their own SMPs most of the respondents indicated that they follow Penn on Facebook (52.9%, n=64), then LinkedIn (27.3%, n=33), and Twitter (20.7%, n=25). Penn has the lowest following on Flickr & Phanfare *(*1.7%, n=2*).*

Considering the correlation between age and the platforms that Penn's alumni follow, Cramer's V only indicated one strong correlation above 0.300 between age and the use of Instagram (0.552, p<0.000). One can, therefore, deduce that no strong correlation could be drawn between the age of Penn's alumni and the various SMPs, except for Instagram, seeing that younger alumni frequent Instagram.

Facebook is evidently the most popular platform on which NWU Pukke's alumni follow their university, showing a percentage of 63.2% (n=630) of respondents who chose this platform. The least followed SMP for NWU Pukke's alumni is Pinterest with 1.5% (n=15). This finding contrasts with the findings above (see section 6.3.1), where it was indicated that this is a platform regularly used by a large number of the NWU alumni.

Findings also indicate a large number of respondents who do not follow NWU Pukke on any of the SMPs (20.9%, n=208). Given the fact that most of NWU Pukke's alumni are younger, it would be expected that more of them would follow their university on social media, in contrast to management's view (see section 6.2.1). The findings show that the alumni frequently work on social media, but does not necessarily follow the university on these platforms. Therefore, there is a significant opportunity for NWU's management to use social media increasingly in relationship building with alumni.

Once again, the data supports the finding that for both universities the well-known and older SMPs (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn) are used more as compared to recent platforms such as Snapchat and Flickr. NWU Pukke alumni seemingly receive Pinterest better than those of Penn. However, in both cases, Penn's and NWU Pukke's blogs are not well received by users. This information once again confirms the conclusions reached in section 6.3.1.

The findings show that Penn has a notably lower percentage of users who are not following them on any SMP (7.4%, n=9), whereas NWU Pukke has a much higher percentage of alumni who do not follow their university on social media (20.9, n=208), even though NWU Pukke's respondents consist of a larger group with a younger age.

When using Cramer's V to measure the correlation between NWU Pukke's alumni's age and their various SMPs, none of the measured platforms show a strong correlation. One medium correlation was found linked to age and NWU Pukke's Facebook page (0.461, p<0.000), which indicates that younger alumni frequent NWU Pukke's Facebook more. Except for the medium correlation with Facebook, it can be deduced that there is no strong correlation between the age of NWU Pukke's alumni and SMPs managed by NWU Pukke.

6.3.3 Conclusion on the alumni's social media usage
The demographic profile of the respondents reflects the alumni profiles of the universities. The respondents favour certain SMPs in their general usage and to follow their alma mater. This usage frequency of SMPs is not related to their age.

The findings indicated that universities must ensure they meet their alumni on these platforms. Interestingly, the alumni evidently prefer the 'older' and larger SMPs. In addition, the alumni also use the different SMPs for various purposes, for example, Facebook for immediate information and LinkedIn for longer-term educational information. The following table (Table 6.11) summarises the suggestions derived from the data above.

Table 6.11: Suggested social media usage

Platform	Penn	NWU
Facebook	Use daily for all alumni. Most users.	Use daily, focused to some degree on younger alumni. Used by many.
Twitter	Use on a daily basis for a younger group of alumni.	Use on a weekly basis, although not used by many alumni.
Instagram	Use on a daily basis for a younger group of alumni.	Use on a daily basis, focused on a core group of younger alumni.
LinkedIn	Use on a monthly/ bi-weekly basis for most of the alumni	Use on a monthly basis, used by a large portion of alumni.
YouTube	Use on a bi-weekly basis for most of the alumni	Use on a bi-weekly basis for all alumni.
Pinterest	Use on a monthly basis, for a core group of alumni regarding the low usage rate	Use on a monthly basis, regarding a large group of alumni, focused on females.
Flickr/Phanfare	Use monthly, although not necessary regarding the low usage rate.	SMP not used.
Blogs	This can be used monthly, however a very small number of alumni uses it.	Use monthly, however, a very small number of alumni uses it.
None	Most alumni use their platforms and only a small number report not using these platforms.	Find a way to communicate the use of SMPs to these users considering a large number does not follow the SMPs.

Furthermore, interviews with both Penn and NWU Pukke's managers about their SMPs showed that in some way both groups found it difficult to build a relationship with alumni, or do not believe that alumni are using these many platforms. Judging from the information above, it can be assumed possible to build relationships with alumni through several platforms, and thereby cultivate online communities. This is feasible due to the fact that both universities' alumni are using these platforms in some way.

6.4 RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT BY PENN AND NWU PUKKE ON THEIR SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Regarding the relationship management of the two universities, the relationship outcomes are analysed first, followed by the strategies to build relationships.

6.4.1 Relationship outcomes

The relationship outcomes that were presented and discussed in Chapter 2 are *trust, control mutuality, commitment, relationship satisfaction,* and *communal relationship* and *exchange relationship* (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Williams & Brunner, 2010).

The reliability calculation for Penn on statements 3.1.8, 5.1.1 to 5.1.17 for the construct relationship outcomes was CA=0.954. A slight increase is apparent when eliminating statement 3.1.8 (CA=0.958) or statement 5.1.18 (CA=9.60). However, due to the fact that these eliminations would result in a minimal difference, they were not removed from this construct.

The CA calculation for the NWU Pukke on the same construct (statements 3.1.8; 5.1.1 to 5.1.17) resulted in a CA=0.926. If statement 5.1.18 about NWU Pukke's reliability calculation was eliminated, it would increase the CA to 0.929. This, however, is a nearly insignificant difference, therefore, the statement was not excluded. For both Penn and NWU Pukke, the CA for the construct of relationship outcomes tested highly reliable.

Each element of the relationship outcomes is analysed statistically and discussed below.

6.4.1.1 Trust

The reliability calculation for *trust* (statements 5.1.1. to 5.1.4. and 3.1.8) for Penn=0.828 and for NWU is 0.744. Eliminating statement 3.1.8 would increase the CA for Penn to 0.885. This, however, is again a small increase and therefore, the statement was not excluded. The CA for NWU Pukke would not have increased with any statement being omitted. The results for the relationship outcome of *trust* are summarised in Table 6.12 below.

Table 6.12: Relationship outcomes: *Trust*

Statements	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always	Mean	N-value
			%				
5.1.1. Whenever Penn/NWU Pukke makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about its alumni							
Penn	1.6	4.8	43.5	40.3	9.7	3.52	62
NWU Pukke	4.1	17.3	34.3	37.6	6.7	3.25	700
5.1.2. Penn/NWU Pukke can be relied on to keep its promises							
Penn	3.2	1.6	25.8	54.8	14.5	3.76	62
NWU Pukke	1.6	6.1	34.6	49.4	8.3	3.57	700
5.1.3. Penn/NWU Pukke does not mislead its alumni							
Penn	3.2	6.5	19.4	54.8	16.1	3.74	62
NWU Pukke	3.0	7.9	24.6	50.9	13.7	3.64	700
5.1.4. Penn/NWU Pukke is known to be successful at the things it tries to do							
Penn	1.6	0.0	11.3	51.6	35.5	4.19	62
NWU Pukke	0.1	1.3	15.4	62.7	20.4	4.02	700
3.1.8. I feel empowered when I read Penn's/NWU Pukke's posts on social media							
Penn	13.8	27.7	33.8	15.4	9.2	2.78	65
NWU Pukke	7.9	15.3	29,8	34.9	12.2	3.28	763

From Table 6.12 above, it is clear from results on the first three statements that Penn's alumni *trust* their alma mater. Especially regarding the fourth statement (5.1.4), alumni clearly feel that Penn' is successful in the things it tries to do (56.1%=usually and 35.5% always). The alumni seemingly do not feel strongly empowered when reading Penn's posts on social media (mean=2.78). However, overall, most responses to these questions indicate Penn's alumni experience *trust* between themselves and Penn. This concurs with Penn's interviews where the managers disclosed they do think their alumni trusts them by judging from the way they attend their events worldwide and become members of Penn's alumni clubs.

When considering NWU Pukke's respondents, their results indicate that the mean scores for all the statements – although positive – is slightly lower than that of Penn. Differently from Penn, NWU Pukke's alumni indicated that they feel very strongly that NWU Pukke are successful in what it does (usually=62.7%, mean=4.02).

The first statement was about taking alumni into consideration when making important decisions. NWU Pukke's alumni answered less positive than Penn. The findings indicate that 78.6% of the respondents selected 'sometimes', 'usually' and 'always', as compared to Penn's 93.5% for the same options. This corresponds with the interviews from both Penn and NWU Pukke. With regard to Penn's managers, it is evident that they really do take into account alumni's opinions when making important decisions. The response reflects respondents' strong feelings about this matter. On the other hand, for NWU Pukke there is a difference. The managers disclosed that they do listen to alumni and consider their opinions as legitimate. However, they added that they do not always take the alumni into account when making decisions. When examining the percentage in the findings, it is clear that alumni do perceive this shortcoming in their alma mater, however, their answers also indicated that the respondents seemingly still felt that NWU Pukke does take them into account when making decisions.

Regarding statement 3.1.8, NWU Pukke's alumni seemingly feel more empowered when they read posts about their alma mater (mean=3.28), than Penn's alumni does when reading posts about Penn (mean=2.78). The findings show that NWU Pukke's managers let alumni feel more empowered through the types of posts they have on social media than the case is with Penn.

Further statistical analyses indicated three notable findings:

- A strong correlation was found between Penn and NWU Pukke on statement 5.1.3. that indicated that both universities' alumni seem to agree that their alma mater does not mislead them (Cramer's V=0.876).
- Penn's responses indicate a strong correlation between alumni able to rely on Penn to keep its promises (statement 5.12), and Penn not misleading its alumni (statement 5.1.3) (0.815, p=0.000, n=62).
- No specific correlations (medium to large) were found for NWU Pukke amongst the statements about *trust*.

In summary regarding *trust*, the findings show it is crucial that the alumni believe the institution will be successful and will not mislead them.

6.4.1.2 Control mutuality

The reliability calculation for the relationship outcome of *control mutuality* (statements 5.1.5. to 5.1.9) delivered a high score of 0.785 for Penn and 0.782 for NWU respectively. The CA would increase to 0.859 for Penn and 0.840 for NWU Pukke if statement 5.1.8 were removed. This particular statement was asked in the negative, and future studies could

consider rather asking it in the positive. However, since the CA for both Penn and NWU Pukke is already highly satisfactory, the statement was not removed from this construct. Table 6.13 below summarises the results for *control mutuality*.

Table 6.13: Relationship outcomes: *Control mutuality*

Statements	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always	Mean	N-value
	%						
5.1.5. Penn/NWU Pukke believes alumni's opinions are legitimate							
Penn	1.6	1.6	29.0	45.2	22.6	3.85	62
NWU Pukke	1.6	9.6	32.0	45.9	11.0	3.55	700
5.1.6. Penn/NWU Pukke really listens to what alumni have to say							
Penn	1.6	6.5	32.3	48.4	11.3	3.61	62
NWU Pukke	2.9	11.9	43.4	35.0	6.9	3.31	700
5.1.7. When I have an opportunity to interact with Penn/NWU Pukke, I feel that I have some sense of control over the situation							
Penn	1.6	19.4	37.1	33.9	8.1	3.27	62
NWU Pukke	3.6	14.7	29.9	42.7	9.1	3.39	700
5.1.8. Penn/NWU Pukke won't cooperate with me							
Penn	35.5	45.2	16.1	16	1.6	1.89	62
NWU Pukke	30.0	41.1	18.0	8.6	2.3	2.12	700
5.1.9. I believe alumni have an influence on the decision-makers of Penn/NWU Pukke							
Penn	3.2	8.1	48.4	32.3	8.1	3.34	62
NWU Pukke	6.3	17.9	41.7	29.0	5.1	3.09	700

From Table 6.13 above, it is clear Penn's alumni believe their university considers their opinions as legitimate (statement 5.1.5), listens to what they have to say (statement 5.1.6), and believe they have an influence on the decision-makers of Penn (statement 5.1.9). NWU Pukke's alumni, similarly, are positive about these statements, but to a slightly lesser degree than Penn, as becomes apparent when considering the mean values. As mentioned previously, Penn's alumni managers have a similar perception, which corresponds with the interviews from Chapter 5, namely that the way trustees represent the overall alumni gives them a voice and a sense of control in the relationship. NWU Pukke's alumni feel stronger than those of Penn that they have a measure of control over an interaction event with the institution (statement 5.1.7; NWU Pukke mean=3.39, Penn mean=3.27).

However, it is significant, judging from the interviews (see section 1.5.3), that Penn allows more control for alumni in the relationship, as reported by Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director. On the other hand, NWU Pukke's Electronic Media Manager admitted that the alumni's voice are not always considered. Regarding cooperation between the institutions and alumni (statement 5.1.8), Penn's alumni feel slightly stronger than NWU Pukke's alumni that there is some form of cooperation.

In summary, it is evident that both universities' alumni experience *control mutuality* in the relationship, although there are minor differences, as mentioned above, in the strength of their positivity towards the statements.

A correlation was found between Penn and NWU Pukke regarding the above-mentioned statements. A medium correlation can be seen in the interaction between the two universities and its alumni, where the latter feel they have some form of control over their alma mater (statement 5.1.7; Cramer's V=0.468), and how they cooperate with each other (statement 5.1.8; Cramer's V=0.348). Interestingly, a weak correlation was reported on Penn's and NWU Pukke's perception that alumni are able to influence the universities when making decisions (statement 5.1.9; Cramer's V=0.215).

Further statistical analyses indicated correlations between the statements of each university:

- Strong correlations were reported between Penn believing its alumni's opinions are legitimate (statement 5.1.5) and: (i) Penn does not mislead its alumni (statement 5.1.3; 0.614, p=0.000, n=62); (ii) Penn known for being successful at the things it does (statement 5.1.4; 0.644; p=0.000, n=62); (iii) Penn really listening to its alumni (statement 5.1.6) (0.812, p=0.000, n=62); and (iv) Penn's alumni believing they have an influence over Penn's decision-makers (statement 5.1.9) (0.603, p=0.000, n=62).
- Strong correlations were found between NWU Pukke believing the alumni's opinions are legitimate (statement 5.1.5) and the institution really listening to the alumni (statement 5.1.6) (0.759, p=0.000, n=700).
- For Penn, a strong correlation was reported between statement 5.1.1., being concerned about alumni when making an important decision, and believing that alumni have an influence on Penn's decision-makers (statement 5.1.9; 0.604; p=0.000, n=62).
- For NWU Pukke, the following correlations were found: between being concerned about alumni when important decisions are taken (statement 5.1.1) and: (i) considering alumni opinions as legitimate (statement 5.1.5; 0.617, p=0.000, n=700);

and (ii) the institution really listens to its alumni (statement 5.1.6; 0.646, p=0.000, n=700).

As is the case with Penn reported above, NWU Pukke shows the same correlation regarding the statement that the alumni feel NWU Pukke listens to them because their opinions are considered legitimate. This finding in particular, highlights the listening action within social media. Furthermore, seemingly Penn's alumni believe that they are not being misled and that Penn keeps the promises made with its alumni. For NWU Pukke, alumni would see the university as legitimate if the institution listens to them and show concern for the alumni when making decisions.

In summary, the findings show that considering alumni's opinions as legitimate, is extremely important for *control mutuality*.

6.4.1.3 Commitment

The reliability calculation for the relationship outcome of *commitment* (statements 5.1.10. to 5.1.12) was very satisfactory at 0.864 for Penn and 0.742 for NWU. In both cases the CA would not have improved with the omission of any of the statements. The results for *commitment* are summarised in Table 6.14 on the next page.

Judging from Table 6.14 on the next page, it is clear that both Penn's and NWU Pukke's alumni feel their university attempts to maintain a long-term relationship with them (statement 5.1.10). The same feeling applies to Penn and NWU Pukke's alumni when considering whether alumni benefit from the relationship with their alma mater (statement 5.1.12). However, the mean scores indicate that Penn's alumni feel they benefit slightly more from the relationship than alumni of NWU Pukke. Both Penn's and NWU Pukke's alumni feel almost equally strongly about the statement that they experience a sense of loyalty towards their university (statement 5.1.11). The respondents, therefore, seemingly do experience *commitment* in their relationship with their alma mater. This confirms the assertion that both Penn's and NWU Pukke's managers strive to build a long-term relationship with their alumni, as the managers explained during the interviews. The findings show that these endeavours are duly noticed by alumni. This indicates, therefore, that both universities are in a way successful at what they do.

Table 6.14: Relationship outcomes: *Commitment*

Statements	%					Mean	N-value
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always		
5.1.10. Penn/NWU Pukke is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to me							
Penn	1.6	4.8	25.8	37.1	30.6	3.90	62
NWU Pukke	4.3	12.3	17.6	44.6	21.3	3.66	700
5.1.11. I feel a sense of loyalty to Penn/NWU Pukke							
Penn	1.6	16.0	9.7	33.9	53.2	4.35	62
NWU Pukke	1.3	2.3	9.1	32.9	54.4	4.37	700
5.1.12. Both Penn/NWU Pukke and I benefit from the relationship							
Penn	1.6	8.1	22.6	35.5	32.3	3.89	62
NWU Pukke	4.0	13.6	28.4	36.7	17.3	3.50	700

An extremely strong correlation was found between Penn's and NWU Pukke's responses to statement 5.1.11, as indicated with a correlation calculation of Cramer's V=0.995. From this finding, it is clear that Penn's and NWU Pukke's alumni feel equally strong about their loyalty towards the university.

Further statistical analyses of correlations between each universities' statements indicated the following results:

- Penn aims to maintain a long-term *commitment* with its alumni (statement 5.1.10) correlates strongly, with: (i) Penn not misleading its alumni (statement 5.1.3; 0.635, p=0.000, n=62); (ii) Penn known for being successful at the things its tries to do (statement 5.1.4; 0.648, p=0.000, n=62); (iii) Penn perceived as believing that alumni's opinions are legitimate (statement 5.1.5; 0.677; p=0.000, n=62); (iv) Penn really listening to its alumni (statement 5.1.6; 0.623; p=0.000; n=62); (v) alumni believing they have an influence on Penn's decision-makers (statement 5.1.9; 0.602. p=0.000, n=62); and (vi) alumni's view that both Penn and its alumni benefit from the relationship (statement 5.1.12) (0.703, p=0.000, n=62).

- Penn is known to be successful (statement 5.1.4) also correlated strongly with feeling a sense of loyalty with Penn (statement 5.1.11; 0618, p=0.000, n=62).

- Alumni's view that both Penn and its alumni benefit from the relationship (statement 5.1.12), correlated strongly with: (i) able to rely on Penn to keep its promises (statement 5.1.2; 0.626, p=0.000,n=62); (ii) Penn not misleading its alumni (statement 5.1.3; 0.681, p=0.000, n=62); (iii) Penn known to be successful at the

things it does (statement 5.1.4; 0.658; p=0.000, n=62); and (iv) Penn also being perceived as believing that alumni opinions are legitimate (statement 5.1.5; 0.679, p=0.000, n=62).

- Penn being concerned about alumni when making decisions (statement 5.1.1) correlated strongly with Penn alumni believing they do influence the decision-makers of Penn (statement 5.1.9, 0.604, p=0.000, n=62).

- Believing that NWU Pukke would take alumni into account when making decisions (statement 5.1.1) correlated strongly with: (i) NWU Pukke believing alumni's opinions are legitimate (statement 5.1.5; 0.617, p0.000, n=700); and (ii) NWU Pukke really listening to what alumni have to say (statement 5.1.6; 0.646, p0.000, n=700).

From the findings above, it can be inferred that *commitment* also influences elements of *trust* and *control mutuality*. Thus, alumni want to see their alma mater maintaining a long-term *commitment* to them, in order for both parties to benefit from the relationship, which fosters a sense of loyalty among alumni toward the institution.

6.4.1.4 Relationship satisfaction

The reliability calculation for the outcome *relationship satisfaction* (statements 5.1.13. to 5.1.14) was highly satisfactory for Penn at 0.960 and NWU at 0.737. Eliminating any of the statements would not have increased the CA for either of the universities. The table on the next page (Table 6.15) summarises the findings for this mentioned outcome.

Comparing Penn and NWU Pukke with regard to *relationship satisfaction*, alumni from both universities seemingly feel strong about being content in their interactions with their alma mater (statement 5.1.13) and enjoy dealing with them (statement 5.1.14). When considering the mean scores, NWU Pukke's alumni, however, feels stronger than Penn's alumni about enjoying their interaction with their university (statement 5.1.14). In summary, the findings show that the alumni are satisfied in their relationship with their respective institutions. According to Hon and Grunig (1999:15), *relationship satisfaction* shows when prior outcomes are reached. Judging from the statistics above it is clear that, overall, these outcomes are met by the alumni's respective alma maters, which leads to *relationship satisfaction*.

Table 6.15: Relationship outcomes: *Relationship satisfaction*

Statements	%					Mean	N-value
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always		
5.1.13. I am happy in my interactions with Penn/NWU Pukke							
Penn	1.6	0	32.3	40.3	25.8	3.89	62
NWU Pukke	1.9	8.3	21.0	47.6	21.3	3.78	700
5.1.14. I enjoy dealing with Penn/NWU Pukke							
Penn	1.6	0	30.6	38.7	29.0	3.94	62
NWU Pukke	1.3	3.9	15.7	43.6	35.6	4.08	700

Further statistical analyses indicated the following results:

- A strong correlation was found for Penn between respondents being happy regarding their interactions with the institution (statement 5.1.13) and enjoying dealing with Penn (statement 5.1.14; 0.909, p=0.000, n=62).

- In addition, alumni being happy in their interactions with Penn (statement 5.1.13) correlated strongly with: (i) Penn keeping its promises (statement 5.1.2; 0.634, p=0.000, n=62); (ii) Penn not misleading its alumni (statement 5.1.3; 0.630, p=0.000, n=62); (iii) Penn believing alumni's opinions are legitimate (statement 5.1.5; 0.600, p=0.000, n=62); (iv) Penn listening to alumni (statement 5.1.6; 0.656, p=0.000, n=62); (v) Penn trying to maintain a long-term relationship with alumni (statement 5.1.10; 0.700, p=0.000, n=62); (vi) alumni feeling a sense of loyalty towards Penn (statement 5.1.11; 0.668, p=0.000, n=62); and (vii) believing that both Penn and alumni benefit from the relationship (statement 5.1.12; 0.613, p=0.000, n=62).

- The statement of alumni enjoying dealing with Penn (statement 5.1.14) strongly correlated with: (i) Penn keeping its promises (statement 5.1.2; 0.635, p=0.000, n=62); (ii) Penn not misleading its alumni (statement 5.1.3; 0.632, p=0.000, n=62); (iii) Penn believing alumni's opinions are legitimate (statement 5.1.5; 0.678, p=0.000, n=62); (iv) Penn listening to alumni (statement 5.1.6; 0.678, p=0.000, n=62); (v) alumni feeling that they have a sense of control over interactions with Penn (statement 5.1.7; 0.622, p=0.000, n=62); (vi) Penn trying to maintain a long-term relationship with alumni (statement 5.1.10; 0.741, p=0.000, n=62); (vii) feeling sense of loyalty towards Penn (statement 5.1.11; 0.640, p=0.000, n=62); and (viii) believing that both Penn and alumni benefit from the relationship (statement 5.1.12; 0.649, p=0.000, n=62).

- NWU Pukke also showed a correlation between alumni being happy in their interactions with NWU Pukke (statement 5.1.13); and believing that both NWU Pukke and alumni benefit from the relationship (statement 5.1.12; 0.647, p=0.000, n=62).

The findings above show that Penn's alumni feel their alma mater accept their opinions as believable and legitimate. It can be argued that because Penn's managers listen to their alumni and treat them all fairly and do not mislead them, their alumni consider these as reasons to believe their opinions are legitimate. It is also evident that alumni find dealing with Penn a pleasant experience because Penn treats each alumnus the same way and is committed to a long-term relationship with each individual. NWU Pukke's managers seem to instil a feeling of *satisfaction* when interacting with their alumni. This gives the alumni the perception that both parties benefit from the relationship. In particular, the alumni enjoy their interaction with the institution on social media.

Both Penn and NWU Pukke show strong correlations between the university and its alumni benefiting from the relationship and being satisfied with the interaction with their alma mater. Furthermore, the findings show that *satisfaction* with the relationship is related closely to *trust*, *commitment*, and *control mutuality*. This concurs with arguments by Hon and Grunig (1999:15) on relationship outcomes, namely that should the above-mentioned outcomes be reached it would lead to *relationship satisfaction*. This would in turn explain the strong correlations with the mentioned three relationship outcomes.

6.4.1.5 Communal vs exchange relationships

The reliability calculation for *communal* and *exchange* relationships (statements 5.1.15. to 5.1.17) indicated a highly satisfactory score at 0.840 for Penn and 0.763 for NWU. Eliminating statement 5.1.17 for both Penn and NWU Pukke, would increase the CA to 0.855 and 0.850 respectively. Since the difference in the CA is minimal, and the CA in both cases are very high, the statements were kept as part of the constructs. The results for the comparison between the mentioned relationship outcomes are summarised in Table 6.16 on the next page.

Table 6.16 on the next page shows that Penn's alumni feel strongly that Penn treats them fairly (mean=3.97). The universities' alumni furthermore feel very strongly about the fact that their alma mater wants to have a sound relationship with them (always=48.4%; mean=4.26), and that Penn thanks them in a way when they contribute to the university (always=50.0%, mean=4.18).

Table 6.16: Relationship outcomes: *Communal* vs *exchange* relationships

Statements	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always	Mean	N-value
	%						
5.1.15. Penn/NWU Pukke treats alumni fairly							
Penn	1.6	1.6	22.6	46.8	27.4	3.97	62
NWU Pukke	1.6	7.0	23.3	49.4	18.7	3.77	700
5.1.16. Penn/NWU Pukke feels it is important to build a good relationship with alumni							
Penn	1.6	0	17.7	32.3	48.4	4.26	62
NWU Pukke	1.0	5.9	20.3	46.1	26.7	3.92	700
5.1.17. If I make a financial contribute or volunteer, Penn/NWU Pukke thanks me in some way							
Penn	3.2	6.5	9.7	30.6	50.0	4.18	62
NWU Pukke	7.4	6.3	22.1	41.7	22.4	3.65	700

NWU Pukke's alumni also feel strongly about all three these statements (5.1.15 to 5.1.17), but when comparing the mean scores, it is to a lesser degree than Penn. Noticeably, when considering statement 5.1.17 about alumni contributing financially or through volunteerism, NWU Pukke's alumni feel strongly that they get something in return (usually=41.7%; mean=3.65.). However, taking this into account, it seems strange that these statistics are this high, considering that only 5.6% of the alumni indicated in Table 6.5 that they contribute to NWU Pukke financially; 11.7% contribute in other ways; and 45.6% do not contribute at all. This can also imply that alumni who reacted to this statement may assume that NWU Pukke thanks its alumni who contribute financially or as volunteers.

With regard to *communal* as against *exchange* relationships, it is clear that neither Penn, nor NWU Pukke only leans toward one of these relationship forms. This means that both universities have *communal* and *exchange* relationships and their alumni are positive about both types of relationships. This finding, however, differs from the interviews conducted with the universities' managers. In the case of Penn, it was clear that the managers view the relationship in a certain way. They assume that if they contribute in various ways towards the alumni's positive experiences, that the university do in a way receive financial gain, knowledge, information on what is happening in practice, et cetera. This seems in line with the theory of Hon and Grunig (1999:4) on exchange relationships, which implies that one party provides benefits to the other only because the other party did this in the past or is expected to so in the future. In NWU Pukke's case, mangers stated that there are no real benefits from the relationship with alumni since they do not ask alumni anything in return, but

considering that both the institution and its alumni are very loyal to one another and having each other's best interests at heart. Hon and Grunig (1999:4) characterise this as a *communal* relationship, here both parties give mutual benefits because they are concerned with each other's well-being even when not receiving anything in return.

Further statistical analyses indicate that Penn and NWU Pukke share a medium correlation regarding the statement that their alma maters treat alumni fairly (Cramer's V=0.305 for statement 5.1.15).

Correlation calculations between the statements for each university resulted in the following:

- Strong correlations were found between Penn treating alumni fairly (statement 5.1.15) and: (i) Penn can be relied on to keep its promises (statement 5.1.2; 0.653, p=0.000. n=62); (ii) Penn does not mislead its alumni (statement 5.1.3; 0.698, p=0.000. n=62); (iii) Penn is successful in what they try to do (statement 5.1.4; 0.625, p=0.000. n=62); (iv) Penn believes alumni's opinions are legitimate (statement 5.1.5; 0.709, p=0.000. n=62); (v) Penn really listens to its alumni (statement 5.1.6; 0.682, p=0.000, n=62); (vi) alumni having a sense of control over interactions with Penn (statement 5.1.7; 0.623, p=0.000, n=62); (vii) Penn trying to maintain a long-term relationship with alumni (statement 5.1.10; 0.733, p=0.000, n=62); (viii) alumni feeling a sense of loyalty towards Penn (statement 5.1.11; 0.644, p=0.000, n=62); (ix) both parties benefitting from the relationship (statement 5.1.12; 0.690, p=0.000, n=62); (x) alumni being happy in their interactions with Penn (statement 5.1.13; 0.803, p=0.000, n=62); and (xi) alumni enjoy dealing with Penn (statement 5.1.14; 0.846, p=0.000, n=62).
- NWU Pukke also reported a strong correlation between treating alumni fairly (statement 5.1.15); and alumni being happy in their interactions with Penn (statement 5.1.13; 0.615, p=0.000, n=62).
- Strong correlations were found between Penn feeling it is important to build a sound relationship with alumni (statement 5.1.16) and: (i) Penn believing alumni's opinions are legitimate (statement 5.1.5; 0.612, p=0.000. n=62); (ii) Penn trying to maintain a long-term relationship with alumni (statement 5.1.10; 0.733, p=0.000, n=62); (iii) alumni being happy in their interactions with Penn (statement 5.1.13; 0.621, p=0.000, n=62); (iv) alumni enjoying dealing with Penn (statement 5.1.14; 0.701, p=0.000, n=62).
- NWU Pukke also reported a strong correlation between feeling it is important to build a good relationship with alumni (statement 5.1.16) and (i) trying to maintain a long-term relationship with alumni (statement 5.1.10; 0.601, p=0.000, n=62), (ii) alumni

being happy with their interactions with NWU Pukke (statement 5.1.13; 0.648, p=0.000, n=700).

- A strong correlation registered between Penn thanking alumni for a financial contribution (statement 5.1.17); and alumni feeling a sense of loyalty towards Penn (statement 5.1.11; 0.600, p=0.000, n=62).

The findings above show: because Penn treats its alumni fair, the alumni enjoy interacting with the institution. Comparing the results for Penn and NWU Pukke, more correlations were found regarding these statements for Penn. It was also clear that the type of relationship relates to the constructs of *trust*, *control mutuality*, *commitment* and *relationship satisfaction*.

In particular, it is evident from the findings that treating alumni fairly and building a sound relationship, is considered important.

6.4.1.6 Conclusion on relationship outcomes

For the conclusions, the study considers alumni's responses in the self-administered questionnaire about Penn and NWU Pukke on relationship outcomes. After testing the responses, it is clear that both universities' alumni overall feel that the following outcomes are met well by the universities: *trust*, *control mutuality*, *commitment*, *relationship satisfaction* and *communal* versus *exchange* relationship. To ensure *trust*, alumni of both universities need to believe their institution has the potential to be successful.

Furthermore, the importance was shown that alumni should feel the institutions listens to them by considering their opinions as legitimate and not mislead them, treat them fairly, in order to establish *control mutuality*, and taking them into account when making decisions. In addition, it was confirmed that the university also should not be seen to mislead alumni and should keep its promises. These actions would generate *commitment*, which also would influence the experience of *trust* and *control mutuality*.

The alumni for both Penn and NWU Pukke evidently feel strongly about their loyalty towards their university and want to see both parties benefit from the relationship. The findings show that both universities' alumni enjoy their interaction with the institutions and perceive the universities wanting to create a long-term relationship with them (*commitment*), which creates *relationship satisfaction* and *trust*, and adds to *control mutuality* in the relationship.

The relationship between the universities and alumni seems to be a combination of *communal* and *exchange* relationship types. Both the universities and its alumni are

comfortable with the type of relationship that developed, which in turn increases relationship *trust*, *control mutuality*, *commitment* and *relationship satisfaction*.

In certain cases, Penn's and NWU Pukke's alumni feel stronger about certain statements. These differences are as follows:

- Penn's alumni have a stronger feeling about *control mutuality* than those of NWU Pukke.
- Penn's alumni feel they benefit more than do those of NWU Pukke.
- NWU Pukke's alumni feel more satisfied with their relationship than do those of Penn.

Penn and NWU Pukke's alumni feel the same about the following relationship aspects:

- Alumni of both Penn and NWU Pukke perceive *trust* between them and their alma mater.
- Both groups of alumni feel strong about being committed to their universities and vice versa.
- Both Penn's and NWU Pukke's alumni seem to be pleased with enjoying a *communal* and an *exchange* relationship with their university.

6.4.2 Relationship building strategies on Penn's and NWU Pukke's social media platforms

The *relationship building strategies* as discussed in Chapter 2 are: *access, positivity, openness and disclosure, assurance of authenticity, networking and sharing of tasks* (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Each of these strategies is analysed and discussed below.

The reliability calculation for Penn regarding statements 3.1.1, 3.1.9 and 4.1.1 to 4.1.5 for the construct *relationship building strategies* was CA 0.812. A minimal difference can be seen for the same construct when examining NWU Pukke with the CA being 0.878. In this case, the construct tested seven statements indicating that the CA is not only reliable, but also very high. The CA would not have increased by eliminating any of the statements.

From the findings in Table 6.17 on the next page, both Penn's and NWU Pukke's alumni feel strongly that they have access to content (statement 4.1.1); that the university shares information openly (statement 4.1.2); and that their alma mater is authentic in what it does on social media (statement 4.1.3). Furthermore, alumni of both universities also seem to feel they share the same norms and values of their alma mater, although not that strongly (statement 4.1.5).

Table 6.17: Relationship building strategies

Statements	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always	Mean	N-value
			%				
4.1.1. Penn/NWU Pukke gives me access to content							
Penn	1.6	3.1	26.6	48.4	20.3	3.83	64
NWU Pukke	2.3	3.9	17.9	54.4	21.6	3.55	745
4.1.2. I feel that Penn/NWU Pukke is open about what it does on social media							
Penn	3.1	1.6	31.3	50.0	14.1	3.70	64
NWU Pukke	2.7	6.3	22.4	51.6	16.9	3.55	744
4.1.3. I feel Penn's/NWU Pukke's social media use is authentic							
Penn	1.6	4.7	28.1	51.6	14.1	3.72	64
NWU Pukke	3.0	3.9	21.2	53.1	18.8	3.55	744
4.1.4. Penn's/NWU Pukke's social media is a great way for me to network with other alumni, businesses or organisations							
Penn	20.3	18.8	32.8	25.0	3.1	2.72	64
NWU Pukke	8.2	16.3	23.1	36.1	16.3	3.55	743
4.1.5. I feel that I am sharing the university's norms and values							
Penn	6.3	10.9	32.8	42.2	7.8	3.34	64
NWU Pukke	3.5	8.	19.5	45.4	23.3	3.55	744
3.1.9. Penn/NWU Pukke shares positive and negative stories on social media							
Penn	7.7	30.8	38.5	18.5	4.6	2.82	65
NWU Pukke	4.1	8.4	28.2	42.3	17.1	3.60	762
3.1.1. Penn /NWU Pukke shares information on social media platforms							
Penn	3.0	4.5	33.3	33.3	25.8	3.74	66
NWU Pukke	3.1	3.8	20.3	49.0	23.7	38.6	767

When considering networking with Penn, the alumni do not feel they necessarily can network with other alumni, businesses or organisations on Penn's SMPs (statement 4.1.4; mean=2.72). This is contrary to NWU Pukke's alumni who feel that their university's SMPs can be used to network with various stakeholders (mean=3.55). It would seem that Penn's alumni has extremely high expectations of being able to network.

A further contrast between the responses of Penn and NWU Pukke is the way alumni of both universities feel about their alma mater sharing positive and negative stories on social media. The findings show that Penn's alumni do not agree with statement 3.1.9 (rarely=30.8% and sometimes 38.5%; mean=2.82). This is also in contrast to a response by

Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director and Directors of Creative Design and Information Media on this topic – that Penn does share news in a balanced way (see section 5.4.1). On the other hand, NWU Pukke's alumni feel very strongly about the fact that NWU Pukke shares both positive and negative stories (usually=42.3%; mean=3.60).

Considering Cramer's V on these statements, the correlations vary for the statements between Penn and NWU Pukke. A strong correlation was found between Penn and NWU Pukke on the fact that the institution gives alumni access to content (statement 4.1.1; Cramer's V=0.46) and the perception that the institution's social media usage is authentic (statement 4.1.3; Cramer's V=0.640). On the other hand, a medium correlation between these two universities was found regarding them being open on social media about what they do (statement 4.1.2; Cramer's V=0.333).

When examining these statistics and comparing them to the *relationship building strategies*, evidently both Penn's and NWU Pukke' alumni overall feel that their universities do comply with most of these statements. As stated above, differences can be identified between the views of Penn's and NWU Pukke's alumni on certain of these statements.

Further statistical analyses showed the following results:

- Strong correlations were found between Penn giving alumni access to content (statement 4.1.1) and: (i) Penn being open about what it does on social media (statement 4.1.2; 0.636, p=0.000,n=64); (ii) Penn being successful at the things it does (statement 5.1.4; 0.620, p=0.000, n=62); and (iii) both parties benefitting from the relationship (statement 5.1.12; 0.685, p=0.000, n=62).
- Further strong correlations were found between feeling that Penn is open about what it does on social media (statement 4.1.2) and: (i) Penn keeping its promises (statement 5.1.2; 0.602, p=0.000, n=62); and (ii) Penn not misleading its alumni (statement 5.1.3; 0.683, p=0.000, n=62).
- A strong correlation was found between respondents that felt that NWU Pukke is open about what it does on social media (statement 4.1.2), and viewing the university's social media usage as authentic (statement 4.1.3; 0.683, p=0.000, n=744).
- The strongest correlation for NWU Pukke was that the alumni feel they share NWU Pukke's norms and values (statement 4.1.5) and feel part of a community (statement 4.1.6) (0.683, p<0.000, n=744).

- The strongest correlation for Penn was found between Penn sharing information on SMPs (statement 3.1.1) and Penn spreading information widely on social media (statement 3.1.3) (0.732, p<0.000, n=66).

From the findings above, it is evident that Penn's alumni feel their university's sharing of information on its SMPs demonstrates to the alumni that their alma mater is distributing its information widely. Once again compared to Penn, NWU Pukke has fewer correlations regarding statements for relationship strategies.

Finally, the universities' openness about what they say on social media, clearly contributes to *trust*.

6.5 TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL COMMUNICATION ON PENN'S AND NWU PUKKE'S SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Considering the reliability calculation for Penn on statements 3.1.6 to 3.1.11 for the construct of *two-way symmetrical communication*, the CA=0.838. Considering the same reliability calculation for NWU Pukke on statements 3.1.6 to 3.1.11 for the construct *two-way symmetrical communication*, the CA was slightly higher than for Penn at CA=0.910. The CA would not have increased with the omission of any of the statements.

In both cases, the CA is considered very high, which indicates reliability, especially given that this construct was tested with only six statements. The results for *two-way symmetrical communication* is summarised in Table 6.18 on the next page.

From Table 6.18 on the following page, it is clear that Penn's alumni feel their university is (39.4%) transparent only sometimes when posting on SMPs (statement 3.1.6) and they also just sometimes (33.8%) feel empowered when reading Penn's posts (statement 3.1.8). In contrast, NWU Pukke's alumni feel that their university is usually (42.6%) transparent in what its managers post on its SMP (statement 3.1.6) and they usually (34.9%) feel empowered when reading these posts (statement 3.1.8). When examining the mean score of statement 3.1.8, Penn's score (mean=2.78) is noticeably much lower than that of NWU Pukke (mean=3.49), and the latter's alumni feel more positive about these statements. A very strong correlation (Cramer's V=0.573) was calculated between alumni's responses from Penn and NWU Pukke about feeling informed when reading their institutions' social media posts (statement 3.1.7). The findings showed that both institutions' respondents were positive that they did feel informed.

Table 6.18: Two-way symmetrical communication

Statements	% Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always	Mean	N-value
3.1.6. I experience a sense of transparency in what Penn/NWU Pukke posts and shares on social media platforms							
Penn	10.6	12.1	39.4	27.3	10.6	3.15	66
NWU Pukke	5.6	8.7	24.1	42.6	19.0	3.61	763
3.1.7. I feel informed when I read Penn's/NWU Pukke's posts on social media							
Penn	6.2	6.2	29.2	38.5	20.0	3.60	65
NWU Pukke	3.9	5.2	22.4	44.7	23.7	3.79	763
3.1.8. I feel empowered when I read Penn's/NWU Pukke's posts on social media							
Penn	13.8	27.7	33.8	15.4	9.2	2.78	65
NWU Pukke	7.9	15.3	29.8	34.9	12.2	3.28	763
3.1.9. Penn/NWU Pukke shares positive and negative stories on social media							
Penn	7.7	30.8	38.5	18.5	4.6	2.82	65
NWU Pukke	4.1	8.4	28.2	42.3	17.1	3.60	762
3.1.10. Penn/NWU Pukke is responsible when using social media							
Penn	3.1	1.5	12.3	50.8	32.3	4.08	65
NWU Pukke	2.8	2.2	14.1	48.0	33.0	4.06	761
3.1.11. My experience is positive when using Penn's/NWU Pukke's social media							
Penn	4.6	3.1	15.4	40.0	36.9	4.02	65
NWU Pukke	3.1	4.3	18.1	47.4	27.0	3.91	762

When considering positive and negative stories on social media (statement 3.1.9), it is clear that Penn's alumni does not necessarily feel their alma mater complies with sharing both types of stories (rarely=30.8%, sometimes=38.5%, mean=2.82). In contrast, NWU Pukke's alumni are more positive about this statement (usually=42.3%, mean=3.60).

Similarities between opinions from alumni of Penn and NWU Pukke are strong and positive when analysing the responsibility the respective universities have to use social media (statement 3.1.10; Penn mean=4.08; NWU Pukke mean=4.06; Cramer's V=0.983). Although still displaying a similar sentiment, the alumni's experience when using their alma mater's SMP (statement 3.1.11; Penn mean=4.02; NWU Pukke mean=3.91) is both positive, but shows a medium correlation (Cramer's V=0.453).

In light of the above-mentioned statistics on *two-way symmetrical communication*, NWU Pukke's alumni clearly feel stronger than those of Penn about this form of communication.

Noticeably, alumni from both Penn and NWU Pukke enjoy the interaction they have with their alma maters on its SMPs.

Further statistical analyses indicated the following correlations:

- Respondents indicated a strong correlation between feeling informed when reading Penn's social media posts (statement 3.1.7) and: (i) experiencing Penn's social media use as authentic (statement 4.1.3., 0.638, p=0.000, n=64); and (ii) sharing the university's norms and values (statement 4.1.5; 0.603, p=0.000, n=64).

- Penn's alumni feel positive about their university's social media (statement 3.1.11) and it correlates strongly with: (i) Penn can be relied on to keep its promises (statement 5.1.2; 0.666, p=0.000, n=62); (ii) Penn does not mislead its alumni (statement 5.1.3; 0.678, p=0.000, n=62); (iii) Penn trying to maintain a long-term relationship with its alumni (statement 5.1.10; 0.693, p=0.000, n=62); (iv) both parties benefitting from the relationship (statement 5.1.12, 0.763, p=0.000, n=62); (v) alumni are happy in their interactions with Penn (statement 5.1.13; 0.674, p=0.000, n=62); (vi) alumni enjoy dealing with Penn (statement 5.1.14; 0.680, p=0.000, n=62); (vii) Penn treating alumni fairly (statement 5.1.15; 0.658, p=0.000, n=62); and (viii) alumni believes Penn is responsible in the way it uses social media (statement 3.1.10; 0.734, p<0.000, n=65).

- NWU Pukke's alumni seem to be positive about a sense of transparency when using their institution's SMPs (statement 3.1.6), which strongly correlates with: (i) alumni feel informed when using social media (statement 3.1.7) (0.723, p<0.000, n=0.762); (ii) feel empowered when using the university's social media (statement 3.1.8; 0.675, p=0.000, n=762); (iii) have a positive experience when using the social media (statement 3.1.11; 0.624, p=0.000, n=761); and (iv) NWU Pukke is open about what it does on social media (statement 4.1.2; 0.614, p=0.000, n=744).

- There were strong correlations between NWU Pukke's respondents feeling informed when reading their social media (statement 3.1.7) and: (i) feeling empowered when using their social media (statement 3.1.8; 0.671, p=0.000, n=763), and (ii) having a positive experience when using NWU Pukke's social media (statement 3.1.11; 0.656, p=0.000, n=761).

- Respondents also indicated a strong correlation between having a positive experience when using NWU Pukke's social media (statement 3.1.11); and: (i) NWU Pukke being responsible when using social media (statement 3.1.10; 0.666, p=0.000, n=761); and (ii) feeling that NWU Pukke's social media usage is authentic (statement 4.1.3; 0.623, p=0.000, n=744).

From the findings, it can be inferred that due to NWU Pukke's transparency on social media, its alumni feel well informed.

Furthermore, the findings show that together with *two-way symmetrical communication*, the following elements are important: openness, authenticity and sharing the same values and norms. Having a positive experience of the university's SMP, also relates to elements of *trust*, *commitment*, *relationship satisfaction*, as well as *communal* and *exchange* relationships. Noticeably, sharing positive and negative stories does not correlate strongly with other *two-way symmetrical communication* elements.

Both Penn's and NWU Pukke's managers did not provide extensive insight into *two-way symmetrical communication* and the various elements needed to realise this communication on their SMPs. Therefore, it is surprising that in both universities' cases the alumni perceive a certain extent of *two-way symmetrical communication* on the SMPs.

In the case of relationship strategies, NWU Pukke's correlations between statements are much more and stronger. Regarding statements on *two-way symmetrical communication*, Penn shows a strong correlation between statements over all.

6.6 WATERS *ET AL.*'S (2009) SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES APPLIED TO PENN's AND NWU PUKKE'S SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

The reliability calculation for Penn on statements 3.1.1 to 3.1.5 for the construct of Waters *et al.* (2009) and its *social media guidelines*, was CA=0.849. The CA would increase to 0.857 if statement 3.1.4 were to be eliminated. The difference in CA score is, however, minimal. Therefore, statement 3.1.4. was left within this construct. The reliability calculation for NWU Pukke on statements 3.1.1 to 3.1.5 for the construct *social media guidelines* was slightly higher than for Penn at CA=0.883. The CA would not have increased with the omission of any of the statements. In both cases the CA is considered very high, especially since this construct was tested with only five statements. The results for these calculations are summarised in Table 6.19 on the following page.

Juding from Table 6.19 on the next page, Penn's alumni seem to feel they share information across the various platforms (statement 3.1.1; sometimes 33.3%, usually 33.3%, mean=3.74). Furthermore, Penn's alumni feel strongly that the information their institution shares is useful to them (statement 3.1.2; sometimes=43.9%, usually=22.7%, always=21.2%, mean=3.50), and that Penn uses social media to share information widely (statement 3.1.3; sometimes=36.4%, usually=31.8%, always=24.2%, mean=3.68).

Table 6.19: Waters *et al.*'s (2009) *social media guidelines*

Statements	% Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always	Mean	N-value
3.1.1. Penn/NWU Pukke shares information on social media platforms							
Penn	3.0	4.5	33.3	33.3	25.8	3.74	66
NWU Pukke	3.1	3.8	20.3	49.0	23.7	3.86	767
3.1.2. I find the information useful that Penn/NWU Pukke shares on social media							
Penn	3.0	9.1	43.9	22.7	21.2	3.50	66
NWU Pukke	3.3	6.1	27.1	45.9	17.6	3.68	767
3.1.3. Penn/NWU Pukke uses social media to spread information widely							
Penn	4.5	3.0	36.4	31.8	24.2	3.68	66
NWU Pukke	3.5	5.6	18.9	48.0	24.0	3.83	768
3.1.4. I can comment, share and post on Penn's/NWU Pukke's social media platforms							
Penn	21.2	9.1	18.2	19.7	31.8	3.32	66
NWU Pukke	7.4	8.0	15.8	38.6	30.2	3.76	766
3.1.5. I feel involved with Penn/NWU Pukke, when I am using Penn's social media platforms							
Penn	4.5	13.6	34.8	19.7	27.3	3.52	66
NWU Pukke	6.8	11.8	24.6	35.9	20.9	3.52	764

When examining the responses of Penn's alumni to the last two statements (3.1.4 and 3.1.5), there is a noticeably larger divide in the way the alumni feel. A large number of Penn's alumni feel that they can interact with their alma mater in various ways on the SMPs (always=31.8%), whereas another part of Penn's alumni feel that they are unable to do so (never=21.2%). A similar case emerges when examining the responses of Penn's alumni to statement 3.1.5. The findings show that 34.8% of Penn's alumni sometimes feel involved when using Penn's SMPs, whereas 27.3% feel that they are always involved when Penn communicates with them through social media.

Considering the same aspects when analysing the response by the alumni of NWU Pukke to the above-mentioned statements (3.1.4 and 3.1.5), NWU Pukke's alumni seemingly are very positive. It was found that 45.9% of NWU Pukke's alumni feel the information their university shares on its SMP usually is helpful and informative (statement 3.1.2). This applies to NWU Pukke's sharing information on its SMPs (statement 3.1.1; usually=49.0%, always=23.7%), spreading information widely on social media (statement 3.1.3; usually=48.0%, always=24.0%), interaction on social media (statement 3.1.4; usually=38.6%, always=30.2%) and involving alumni by what the university posts (statement 3.1.5;

usually=35.9%, always=20.9). NWU Pukke's alumni feel very strong about the managers' application of these guidelines to their SMPs.

Further statistical analyses indicated the following strong correlations:

- Penn sharing information on their SMPs (statement 3.1.1) correlates strongly with Penn sharing information widely (statement 3.1.3; 0.732, p<0.000, n=66).
- NWU Pukke's information shared on social media (statement 3.1.1) also correlated strongly with: (i) finding the information on NWU Pukke's social media sites useful (statement 3.1.2; 0.610, p=0.000, n=767); and (ii) NWU Pukke sharing information widely (statement 3.1.3; 0.673, p=0.000, n=767).
- Penn's alumni finding the information on their social media sites useful (statement 3.1.2) correlates strongly with: (i) Penn sharing information widely (statement 3.1.3; 0.680, p<0.000, n=66); and (ii) alumni feeling involved when using Penn's social media (statement 3.1.5; 0.642, p<0.000, n=66).
- NWU Pukke's alumni finding information on the social media sites useful (statement 3.1.2) correlates strongly with: (i) sharing information widely (statement 3.1.3; 0.620, p<0.000, n=767); (ii) feeling involved when using NWU Pukke's social media (statement 3.1.5; 0.601, p<0.000, n=764); (iii) feeling informed when reading NWU Pukke's social media posts (statement 3.1.7; 0.629, p<0.000, n=763); and (iv) having a positive experience of NWU Pukke's social media (statement 3.1.11; 0.628, p<0.000, n=761).
- A strong correlation was found between NWU Pukke sharing information widely (statement 3.1.3) and: (i) feeling informed when reading NWU Pukke's social media posts (statement 3.1.7; 0.606, p=0.000, n=763); and (ii) having a positive experience of NWU Pukke's social media (statement 3.1.11; 0.603, p<0.000, n=761).
- Alumni feeling involved when using Penn's social media (statement 3.1.5) also correlated strongly with feeling informed when reading Penn's social media posts (statement 3.1.7; 0.642, p<0.000, n=66).
- There was also a strong correlation between NWU Pukke's respondents feeling involved with the university when using its SMPs and: (i) having a sense of transparency when using NWU Pukke's SMPs (statement 3.1.6; 0.637, p=0.000, n=763); (ii) feeling empowered when using the social media (statement 3.1.8; 0.615, p=0.000, n=763); and (iii) having a positive experience of NWU Pukke's social media (statement 3.1.11; 0.617, p=0.000, n=761).

- A further strong correlation showed between respondents perceiving that Penn shares information on SMPs (statement 3.1.1) and Penn using social media to spread information widely (statement 3.1.3; 0.732, p=0.000, n=66).
- A strong correlation was found between respondents feeling part of the NWU Pukke community (Statement 4.1.6) and feeling involved with the university when using its SMPs (Statement 3.1.5; 0.610, p=0.000, n=744).

From the findings above, it can be inferred the respondents feel that when information is shared by Penn, it is spread through most of its platforms (statement 3.1.5), with the result that alumni are informed sufficiently. In the case of the guidelines from Waters *et al.* (2009), it is clear that NWU Pukke's respondents indicated more correlations with statements than respondents of Penn have done.

It is also clear that *social media guidelines* correlate strongly to *two-way symmetrical communication*. Interestingly, statement 3.1.4 was not specifically mentioned when correlating the *social media guidelines*. Most SMPs are open and allow social media users to comment, share and post on these sites. Given this fact, it may be that respondents did not view this as an important statement since they are used to employing social media interactively without thinking about it.

6.7 CREATION OF A COMMUNITY ON PENN'S AND NWU PUKKE'S SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

First the reliability calculation is considered for Penn regarding statements 3.1.8, 3.1.11, 4.1.5 to 4.1.9 and 5.1.1 to 5.1.4 for the construct *creation of a social media community* the CA=0.889. The elimination of any one of the constructs would not have increased the CA. A minimal difference was apparent for the same construct when examining NWU Pukke on this matter (3.1.8, 3.1.11, 4.1.6 to 4.1.9 and 5.1.1 to 5.1.4) with the CA=0.880. If statement 5.1.3 was eliminated in the reliability calculation of NWU Pukke's responses, it would increase the CA to 0.884. This, however, is a minimal difference, hence this statement was not excluded. The construct tested ten statements and can be considered highly reliable. Table 6.20, on the next page, summarises the results for these calculations.

Table 6.20: Creating a social media community

Statements	% Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always	Mean	N-value
4.1.5. I feel that I am sharing the university's norms and values							
Penn	6.3	10.9	32.8	42.2	7.8	3.34	64
NWU Pukke	3.5	8.3	19.5	45.4	23.3	3.55	744
4.1.6. I feel like I am part of a community							
Penn	3.1	7.8	32.8	32.8	23.4	3.66	64
NWU Pukke	3.8	10.2	24.7	41.7	19.6	3.55	744
4.1.7. I feel that I share resources with others							
Penn	10.9	37.5	25.0	17.2	9.4	2.77	64
NWU Pukke	7.7	20.2	31.2	29.4	11.6	3.55	744
4.1.8. I feel there is co-operation between social media users and Penn/NWU Pukke							
Penn	6.3	18.8	51.6	17.2	6.3	2.98	64
NWU Pukke	4.3	10.3	32.7	39.2	13.4	3.55	744
4.1.9. Penn's/ NWU Pukke's social media is coordinated across platforms							
Penn	4.7	10.9	39.1	37.5	7.8	3.33	64
NWU Pukke	3.2	8.3	31.5	44.3	33.0	3.55	743
3.1.11. My experience is positive when using Penn's/NWU Pukke's social media							
Penn	4.6	3.1	15.4	40.0	36.9	4.02	65
NWU Pukke	3.1	4.3	18.1	47.4	27.0	3.91	762
5.1.1. Whenever Penn/NWU Pukke's makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about its alumni							
Penn	1.6	4.8	43.5	40.3	9.7	3.52	62
NWU Pukke	4.1	17.3	34.3	37.6	6.7	3.25	700
5.1.2. Penn/NWU Pukke can be relied on to keep its promises							
Penn	3.2	1.6	25.8	54.8	14.5	3.76	62
NWU Pukke	1.6	6.1	34.6	49.4	8.3	3.57	700
5.1.3. Penn/NWU Pukke does not mislead its alumni							
Penn	3.2	6.5	19.4	54.8	16.1	3.74	62
NWU Pukke	3.0	7.9	24.6	50.9	13.7	3.64	700
5.1.4. Penn/NWU Pukke is known to be successful at the things it tries to do							
Penn	1.6	0.0	11.3	51.6	35.5	4.19	62
NWU Pukke	0.1	1.3	15.4	62.7	20.4	4.02	700
3.1.8. I feel empowered when I read Penn's/NWU Pukke's posts on social media							
Penn	13.8	27.7	33.8	15.4	9.2	2.78	65
NWU Pukke	7.9	15.3	29.8	34.9	34.9	3.28	763

As presented in Table 6.20 above, statements 3.1.11, 3.1.8, 4.1.5 and 5.1.1 to 5.1.4 have been discussed previously. In summary, alumni's experience when using their alma mater's SMPs for both universities (statement 3.1.11), showed a strong sense of positivity from users, with NWU Pukke's users feeling slightly stronger. The SMP users for Penn and NWU Pukke show slightly different responses about feeling empowered by their alma mater's posts (statement 3.1.8) with NWU Pukke's alumni seemingly feeling stronger about this statement than Penn's alumni. Another strong correlation was found between both Penn's and NWU Pukke's alumni on feeling positive that they share the university's norms and values (statement 4.1.5). Penn's alumni in this case evidently feel more strongly that their university is concerned about them when making important decisions, keeping its promises and not misleading its alumni (statements 5.1.1 to 5.1.3). On the other hand, regarding the university known to be successful in its endeavours, NWU Pukke's alumni feel stronger than those of Penn (statement 5.1.4).

On being part of a community (statement 4.1.6), once again Penn's alumni seem to be divided (sometimes=32.8%, usually=32.8% and always=23.4%), but all strong feelings were positive. Another statement about which Penn's alumni seems to feel strong though divided, is the coordination between SMPs (statement 4.1.9; sometimes=39.1%, usually=37.5%). Sharing recourses clearly is not one of Penn's strong points, according to alumni of whom 37.5% indicated that Penn rarely shares resources (statement 4.1.7). As mentioned previously, Penn's alumni do not specifically perceive co-operation between social media users and the university (statement 4.1.8; mean=2.98).

Furthermore, the findings show that NWU Pukke's alumni also feel positive about being part of a community (statement 4.1.6; sometimes=24.7%, usually=4.17%, mean=3.55), along with cooperation between social media users and the university (statement 4.1.8; sometimes=32.7%, usually=39.2%, mean=3.55). Significantly, about sharing resources with other users (statement 4.1.7), Penn's alumni feel strongly that this does not really occur (statement 4.1.7; rarely=37.5%, mean=2.77). It is clear that NWU Pukke's alumni also do not strongly agree with this statement, however, seemingly they feel somewhat stronger and divided on the matter (statement=4.1.7, rarely=20.2%, sometimes=31.2%, usually=29.4% mean=29.4). The findings also indicate that NWU Pukke's alumni are divided on whether their alma mater's social media is coordinated (statement 4.1.9).

Once again, a medium correlation was found between Penn's and NWU Pukke's alumni perception about being part of a community (statement 4.1.6; Cramer's V=0.481).

A further medium correlation was apparent between Penn and NWU Pukke about coordination across the universities' SMPs (statement 4.1.9; Cramer's V=0.458).

Further statistical analyses revealed various correlations. Due to the large number of correlations for Penn, the results are represented in Table 6.21 below.

Table 6.21: Correlations between specific statements for Penn*

State-ments		4.1.6. I feel like I am part of a community	5.1.2. Penn can be relied on to keep its promises	5.1.3. Penn does not mislead its alumni	5.1.5. Penn believes alumni opinions are legitimate	5.1.9. I believe alumni have an influence on the	5.1.10. Penn is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to me	5.1.11. I feel a sense of loyalty to Penn	5.1.12. Both Penn and I benefit from the relationship	5.1.13. I am happy in my interactions with Penn/NWU Pukke	5.1.14. I enjoy dealing with Penn/NWU Pukke	5.1.15. Penn treats alumni fairly
4.1.5. I feel that I am sharing the University's norms and values												
	Cor	0.651										
	N	64										
3.1.11. My experience is positive when using Penn's social media												
	Cor	0.617	0.666	0.678			0.693	0.763	0.674	0.680	0.658	0.693
	N	64	62	62			62	62	62	62	62	62
3.1.7 I feel informed when I read Penn's posts on social media												
	Cor	0.645										
	N	64										
5.1.2. Penn can be relied on to keep its promises												
	Cor			0.815					0.626	0.634	0.635	0.653
	N			62					62	62	62	62
5.1.3. Penn does not mislead its alumni												
	Cor				0.614	0.635			0.681	0.630	0.632	0.698
	N				62	62			62	62	62	62
5.1.4. Penn is known to be successful at the things it tries to do												
	Cor				0.644	0.648	0.618		0.658			0.625
	N				62	62	62		62			62

p-value=0.000 in all cases

When reporting on the statements regarding building social media communities, it is clear from Table 6.21 above that overall, there are numerous strong correlations. In particular, alumni finding their experience with Penn's social media positive (statement 3.1.11) shows a very strong correlation with Penn' alumni feeling a certain sense of loyalty towards their alma mater (statement 5.1.11) (0.763, p<0.000, n=62). It can, therefore, be inferred that Penn's alumni's experience on social media is positive because this is the platform where they can voice their opinions and share their concerns and ideas. Penn seems to take this communication and feedback to heart when making its decisions.

Another strong correlation was found for Penn being trustworthy in keeping promises (statement 5.1.2) and not misleading its alumni (statement 5.1.3) (0.815, p<0.000, n=62). It is safe to assume that because Penn's alumni know this institution kept its promises in the past, this created a platform and a community of alumni that can *trust* the university and who feel their alma mater will not mislead them.

Statement 5.1.2 shows several other strong correlations. From the findings it is clear that Penn's alumni feel strongly that their university can be relied on to keep its promises (statement 5.1.2), which correlate with: (i) both Penn and its alumni benefitting from the relationship statement 5.1.12 (0.626, p<0.000, n=62); (ii) Penn alumni being happy about their interactions with Penn (statement 5.1.13; 0.626, p<0.000, n=62); (iii) enjoy dealing with Penn (statement 5.1.14; 0.635, p<0.000, n=62); and (iv) Penn treating its alumni fairly (statement 5.1.15; 0.653, p<0.000, n=62). Judging from these findings, it is clear: Penn's managers keeping their promises to their alumni, may impact the relationship they have with their alumni. As a result, Penn's alumni may feel that they benefit from the relationship, enjoying positive experiences when interacting and dealing with Penn, and feeling that they are treated in a fair and righteous way.

Another statement that shows numerous correlations with others, is statement 5.1.15, about Penn treating its alumni fairly. In this case, the responses of Penn's alumni show that the statement above correlates strongly with: (i) having a positive experience when using Penn's SMPs (statement 3.1.11; 0.693, p<0.000, n=62); (ii) Penn being able to keep promises it makes (statement 5.1.2; 0.653, p<0.000, n=62); (iii) Penn not misleading its alumni (statement 5.1.3; 0.698, p<0.000, n=62); and (iv) Penn known to be successful in what it does (statement 5.1.4; 0.625, p<0.000, n=62).

From the findings above, it can be inferred that because Penn treats its alumni fairly they have a positive experience when using Penn's SMP, which further contributes to Penn keeping its promises to alumni. Treating alumni fairly, also seems to create strong *trust* between alumni and its alma mater – this is demonstrated by the strong correlation of Penn's alumni feeling that their alma mater does not mislead them. This fairness and righteousness that Penn's managers display also make the university known to be successful in its endeavours.

Regarding NWU Pukke, the following strong correlations were reported:

- A strong correlation was found between using the institution's social media for networking (statement 4.1.4), and alumni feeling that they share resources with others (statement 4.1.7; 0.613, p=0.000, n=743).
- Respondents feeling part of a community (statement 4.1.6) correlated strongly with: (i) feeling they share the university's values and norms (statement 4.1.5; 0.694, p=0.000, n=744), (ii) feeling they share resources with others (statement 4.1.7; 0.663, p=0.000, n=744), and (iii) perceiving co-operation between social media users and the university (statement 4.1.8; 0.637, p=0.000, n=744).

- Respondents experiencing co-operation between social media users and the university (statement 4.1.8) correlated strongly with: (i) feeling they share resources with others (statement 4.1.7; 0.653, p=0.000, n=744); and (ii) Penn's social media is coordinated across platforms (statement 4.1.9; 0.621, p=0.000, n=743).
- Respondents that reported their social media experience with NWU Pukke as positive (statement 3.1.11), correlated with: (i) feeling that Penn is open about what it does on social media (statement 4.1.2; 0.616, p=0.000, n=744); and (ii) experiencing Penn's social media usage as authentic (statement 4.1.3; 0.623, p=0.000, n=744)

The findings show that NWU Pukke does not readily share resources, according to the opinions of its alumni. However, it was found when NWU Pukke's alumni share the same norms and values as the university, they do feel part of a community.

Penn seemingly has more correlating statements on building a social media community than is the case with NWU Pukke.

6.8. SUMMARISING THE FINDINGS ACCORDING TO CONSTRUCTS AS IDENTIFIED IN LITERATURE

It is also important to examine each of the constructs closely and investigate possible correlations between them. The following table (Table 6.22) below illustrates correlations between the main constructs, followed by a discussion.

Table 6.22: Correlations between constructs for Penn and NWU Pukke

Construct		Penn					NWU Pukke			
		Two-way symmetrical communication	Relationship strategies	Creating a social media community	Relationship outcomes		Two-way symmetrical communication	Relationship strategies	Creating a social media community	Relationship outcomes
Social media guidelines	Correlation coefficient	0.702	0.670	0.638	0.560		0.772	0.759	0.702	0.576
	N	66	66	65	65		764	767	763	763
Two-way symmetrical communication	Correlation coefficient		0.853	0.846	0.709			0.843	0.838	0.726
	N		66	65	65			764	764	763
Relationship strategies	Correlation coefficient			0.828	0.696				0.865	0.727
	N			65	65				763	763
Creating a social media community	Correlation coefficient				0.831					0.844
	N				65					763

Table 6.22 above summarises the constructs that has been used as themes for the present study. When comparing these themes, Penn's and NWU Pukke's respondents show strong correlations between most of the constructs. As seen in Table 6.22 above, very strong correlations in Penn's responses are shown with *two-way symmetrical communication* and relationship strategies. Another strong correlation for Penn's respondents can be found between *two-way symmetrical communication* and *creating a social media community*. Relationship strategies and *creating a social media community* also has a very strong correlation, and the same applies to community building and relationship outcomes. It is significant to note: Penn's respondents do not show a strong correlation between the constructs of *social media guidelines* and relationship outcomes.

Furthermore, notably NWU Pukke's respondents in general, indicate a slightly stronger correlation between the given constructs compared to Penn. Taking the same into account for NWU Pukke and considering the responses, the correlation over all between the thematic constructs correlate well with one another. NWU Pukke's responses show a very strong correlation between *two-way symmetrical communication* and relationship strategies, as well as two-way communication and *creating a social media community*. Another strong correlation was found for NWU Pukke's responses on relationship strategies and *creating a social media community*. The same can be said for *creating a social media community* and relationship outcomes, which also indicated a very strong correlation. However, NWU Pukke's responses, similar to that of Penn, do not show a strong correlation between *social media guidelines* and relationship outcomes.

It is significant that both Penn and NWU Pukke's correlations between constructs follow the same pattern. Although the guidelines do indicate the creation of a social media community, evidently the best methods to create a social media community are through two-way communication as well as relationship strategies and relationship outcomes.

6.9. OPEN QUESTION IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE

At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were given the opportunity to answer an open question where they could insert their own thoughts and opinions.

Overall only a few of Penn's respondents filled out the open question. However, certain themes did emerge about alumni's opinions. These themes can be summarised as follows:

- Four respondents (3.31%, n=4) reported negatively on the way Penn uses social media. These remarks were aimed mostly at Penn's use of Facebook as a one-way communication tool. This may be due to the fact that the managers of Penn's SMPs

do not correlate their actions with constructs from the literature, as discussed in section 5.2.3. If Penn's SMP managers start implementing *two-way symmetrical communication* in practice by following the literature on this theme, their social media usage would improve.

- Two respondents (1.65%, n=2) indicated they would appreciate it if Penn reports more intensely on social media, and use clear descriptions, about activities at campus. Both also wanted more specific news about certain topics. This concurs with Grunig and White (1992:48) as well as Le Roux (2011:65) who argue that transparency is important when communicating with stakeholders to ensure long-term relationships. Penn's SMP managers seemingly feel they are transparent and open in their actions on social media.

- Another four respondents (3.31%, n=4) congratulated Penn on the use of its social media and explained that it is a great way to keep in touch with their alma mater. One of these respondents added that social media feels warmer than just communicating through email. Another one felt positive about the content Penn shares on the activities at the campus. This is in line with the construct of community building, by taking into account that it can be seen as cooperation and coordination, shared resources and knowledge, as well as resilience within the relationship (Taylor, 2013:62).

In summary, it is evident from the findings that respondents seek *two-way symmetrical communication* on social media, as well as transparency; and have the need for a relationship with their institution and for the establishing of a social media community.

More of NWU Pukke's respondents used the opportunity to give feedback on the open question. The following main themes emerged from their responses:

- Sixty-two (6.22%, n=62) of these respondents felt highly positive about NWU Pukke's usage of social media, and congratulated NWU Pukke on this matter. These positive remarks ranged from respondents enjoying the content that NWU Pukke shares, to them feeling closer to their alma mater, and satisfied about the university usage of social media to keep all its stakeholders informed. This finding corresponds with the literature on *creating a social media community*. It also ensures NWU Pukke shares resources and knowledge by informing alumni about activities at their alma mater. Such actions then lead to *trust*, reciprocity, resilience within the relationship, coordination and cooperation, as well as shared norms and values (Taylor, 2013:62).

- In contrast, 19 users (1.91%, n=19) were not satisfied with NWU Pukke's social media endeavours. In this regard, users felt that NWU Pukke's usage of social media

can improve by being more relevant and interactive. These comments can be strengthened by the literature when following Taylor and Perry's (2005:209) suggestion that users should be provided with relevant, recent and accurate information, which would contribute to *two-way symmetrical communication*. This, furthermore, concurs with the guidelines of Waters *et al.* (2009), suggesting interactivity for enhanced relationships on social media. A number of respondents suggested that NWU Pukke use the social media more regularly. Others were of the opinion that the university should not just employ this media to communicate one way and only on positive news stories. These respondents also wanted to be informed more about activities at their alma mater.

- A number of respondents (2.81%, n=28) appreciated NWU Pukke's way of handling and informing them about crisis situations, but suggested that the university should also share more positive news on its SMPs. This concurs with Taylor and Perry (2005:209) who point out that relevant, recent and accurate information can contribute to *two-way symmetrical communication*. Adding to this strategy is the importance of transparency when communicating with stakeholders, as suggested by Grunig and White (1992:48) and Le Roux (2011:56).

- Seventeen (1.71%, n=17) respondents commented that they would rather follow their residences' Pages since these are more up to date than NWU Pukke's Page. In addition, five users (0.50%, n=5) reported that they are satisfied with the communication through email and do not feel the need to use social media. Two respondents added that they would want more news on activities at the residences.

- Three respondents (0.30%, n=3) also felt strongly about language. Two of them praised the university for keeping Afrikaans relevant in universities, and on social media, whereas one respondent mentioned that communication in Afrikaans can be hard to follow.

- NWU Pukke is currently in a restructuring process. Taking this into account, the questionnaire was sent out during the handover to a new Vice Chancellor. Four respondents remarked that they are uncertain about the future of the institution and would like to be kept updated more about this process through social media. In the same vein, 16 respondents (1.61%, n=16) felt very strongly about the fact that NWU Pukke's social media is used only to promote the university management's own agendas and does not cater for its students or alumni.

Once again comparing this response to findings in the literature, it is clear that NWU Pukke should focus on being open and disclose information fully (Hon & Grunig, 1999:15; Williams & Brunner, 2010:2). Such disclosing of information on SMPs

(Waters *et al.*, 2009) would result in alumni trusting NWU Pukke and having access to relevant, recent and accurate information, which also ensures transparency (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:58; Hon & Grunig, 1999:15; Grunig & White, 1992:48; Taylor & Perry, 2005:209; Le Roux, 2011:65).

- It is significant that six respondents (0.60%, n=6) reported they really sought more ways to contribute financially or share knowledge and resources on the SMPs. A number of these respondents felt the need to be part of a NWU Pukke community. However, the fact that they are unable to contribute in a way, let them feel they forfeit a sense of community with NWU Pukke.

  This correlates with literature, primarily, the *social media guidelines* of Waters *et al.* (2009). These scholars suggest that the names should be disclosed of users who were able to donate and contribute through SMPs. This provides useful information on the platforms and encourages higher interactivity. If these strategies are implemented it would lead to financial and other contributions through social media. These interactions, in turn, would ensure a stronger online community through shared resources and knowledge as well as coordination and cooperation, as suggested by Taylor (2013:62).

A number of respondents also made suggestions about ways the NWU Pukke could improve their social media usage:

- Two users (0.20%, n=2) felt that NWU Pukke's social media links and content need clearer descriptions before they would read it, and found the posts tended to be too long.
- Thirty-five respondents (3.51%, n=35) reported that NWU Pukke is using social media well, but suggested ways to improve the usage. A large number of these respondents was not informed of all the SMPs that NWU Pukke currently does employ, and wished to receive some form of communication containing these links. Others suggested that the social media posts could be more integrated between platforms and more relevant to specific niche markets of alumni. One member felt very strong that the diverse alumni age groups need different content that is tailored to their needs. On this point, others reported that social media communication can be made more personal.

In summary, the findings show that NWU Pukke's users are concerned about the university's lack of transparency in its usage of social media. Taking these opinions into account, NWU Pukke can focus on being more open and transparent when building relationships with

alumni. Such relationship strategies clearly create stronger online communities in which NWU Pukke's alumni would want to partake.

6.10 FURTHER STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Taking the findings above into consideration it is evident that building a social media community becomes more important for the universities when utilising SMPs. Further examination is needed of this particular construct to determine how alumni expect their respective universities to use social media to this effect.

To begin with, a factor analysis was done for this particular construct to understand how it is structured. For all three factor analyses Principal Axis Factoring with Varimax rotation were used which explained 60.43% (Penn), 53.29% (NWU Pukke) and 53.73% (the universities combined) of the variations.

Table 6.23 below summarises the information of the factor analysis for *creating a social media community*.

Table 6.23: Factor analysis for creating a social media community

Statements	Factor loadings for Penn		Factor loadings for NWU Pukke		Factor loadings for both universities combined	
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2
4.1.5. I feel that I am sharing the university's norms and values	0.72		0.68		0.69	
4.1.6. I feel like I am part of a community	0.74		0.80		0.79	
4.1.7. I feel that I share resources with others	0.66		0.74		0.74	
4.1.8. I feel there is co-operation between social media users and Penn/NWU Pukke	0.75		0.78		0.78	
4.1.9. Penn's/NWU Pukke's social media is coordinated across platforms	0.63		0.65		0.65	
3.1.8. I feel empowered when I read Penn's/ NWU Pukke's posts on social media	0.64		0.66		0.66	
3.1.11. My experience is positive when using Penn's/ NWU Pukke's social media	0.45*		0.68		0.65	
5.1.1. Whenever Penn/NWU Pukke makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about its alumni		0.65		0.62		0.61
5.1.2. Penn/NWU Pukke can be relied on to keep its promises		0.93		0.81		0,83
5.1.3. Penn/NWU Pukke does not mislead its alumni		0.87		0.53		0.56
5.1.4. Penn/NWU Pukke is known to be successful at the things it tries to do		0.67		0.51		0.54

For Penn this statement could fit into either factor. For consistency it was added to the first factor.

Both for Penn, NWU Pukke and the combined data, the same two factors were calculated in each case. Factor 1 listed the elements of a community (statements 4.1.5 to 4.1.9, 3.1.8. and 3.1.11.) and factor 2 the original elements of *trust* grouped together (statements 5.1.1 to 5.1.4). The reliability calculations for the two factors *trust* and *community* proved highly reliable in all cases as is indicated in Table 6.24 on the next page.

Table 6.24: Reliability calculations for two factors on *creating a social media community*

Constructs	Penn		NWU		Combined	
	CA	Items	CA	Items	CA	Items
Community	0.88	7	0.91	7	0.91	7
Trust	0.89	4	0.74	4	0.76	4
Combined: Creating a social media community	0.90	11	0.89	11	0.89	11

The CA would only increase very minimally from 0.893 to 0.896 if statement 5.1.3 were omitted from the combined (Penn and NWU) calculation for the combined construct of *creating a social media community*. This statement was thus kept as part of the construct.

Table 6.24 above, indicates that *creating a social media community* is constructed from two elements, namely the original statements on *trust* by Grunig and Hon (1999), and the other statements on creating a community. It would thus seem that *trust* is inherent to *creating a social media community*.

The following step was to identify which construct used in the study would most likely lead to the creation of a social media community. Cronbach's alpha calculations showed high scores for all the constructs tested in the study namely, *relationship outcomes, relationship building strategies, two-way symmetrical communication, Water's et al. (2009) social media guidelines* and *creating a social media community.*

Unfortunately, a number of similar statements were used to describe two different constructs, as well as explain and calculate the reliability scores of these constructs. To improve the statistical analysis' inherent accuracy, the duplicate statements had to be removed, thus allowing the researcher to investigate the relationship between the constructs through regression analysis. The duplicate statements were 3.1.1., 3.1.8., 3.1.9., 3.1.11 and 4.1.5. These statements were moved to a construct, which Cronbach's alpha reading proved the highest with these included statements, as explained in Table 6.25 on the next page.

Table 6.25: Reliability readings of constructs after eliminating duplicate statements

N	CA	Statements	Description of statements moved
Construct: Trust			
762	0.76	5.1.1. Whenever Penn/NWU Pukke makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about its alumni 5.1.2. Penn/NWU Pukke can be relied on to keep its promises 5.1.3. Penn/NWU Pukke does not mislead its alumni 5.1.4. Penn/NWU Pukke is known to be successful at the things it tries to do	Statement 3.1.8 was moved to *creating a social media community*
Construct: Control mutuality			
762	0.78	5.1.5. Penn/NWU Pukke believes alumni opinions are legitimate 5.1.6. Penn/NWU Pukke really listens to what alumni have to say 5.1.7. When I have an opportunity to interact with Penn/NWU Pukke, I feel that I have some sense of control over the situation 5.1.8. Penn/NWU Pukke won't cooperate with me 5.1.9. I believe alumni have an influence on the decision-makers of Penn/NWU Pukke	All statements stayed the same
Construct: Commitment			
762	0.75	5.1.10. Penn/NWU Pukke is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to me 5.1.11. I feel a sense of loyalty to Penn/NWU Pukke 5.1.12. Both Penn/NWU Pukke and I benefit from the relationship	All statements stayed the same
Construct: Relationship satisfaction			
762	0.75	5.1.13. I am happy in my interactions with Penn/NWU Pukke 5.1.14. I enjoy dealing with Penn/NWU Pukke	All statements stayed the same
Construct: Communal & exchange relationship			
762	0.77	5.1.15. Penn/NWU Pukke treats alumni fairly 5.1.16. Penn/NWU Pukke feels it is important to build a good relationship with alumni 5.1.17. If I make a financial contribute or volunteer, Penn thanks me in some way	All statements stayed the same
Construct: Relationship building strategies			
807	0.82	4.1.1. Penn/NWU Pukke gives me access to content 4.1.2. I feel that Penn/NWU Pukke is open about what they do on social media 4.1.3. I feel Penn's/NWU Pukke's social media use is authentic 4.1.4. Penn's/NWU Pukke's social media is a great way for me to network with other alums, businesses or organisations	• Statement 3.1.1. was moved to *Water's et al (2009) guidelines for social media* • Statement 3.1.9. was moved to two-way symmetrical communication • Statement 4.1.5. was moved to *creating a social media community*

Table 6.25: Reliability readings of constructs after eliminating duplicate statements (continued)

		Construct: Two-way symmetrical communication	
826	0.85	3.1.6. I experience a sense of transparency in what Penn/NWU Pukke posts and share on social media platforms 3.1.7. I feel informed when I read Penn's/NWU Pukke's posts on social media 3.1.9. Penn/NWU Pukke shares positive and negative stories on social media 3.1.10. Penn/NWU Pukke is responsible when using social media	Statement 3.1.8. and 3.1.11. were moved to *creating a social media community*
		Construct: Waters *et al.*'s (2009) social media guidelines	
830	0.88	3.1.1. Penn/NWU Pukke shares information on social media platforms 3.1.2. I find the information useful that Penn/NWU Pukke share on social media 3.1.3. Penn/NWU Pukke uses social media to spread information widely 3.1.4. I can comment, share and post on Penn's/NWU Pukke's social media platforms 3.1.5. I feel involved with Penn/NWU Pukke, when I am using Penn's social media platforms	All the statements stayed the same
		Construct: Creating a social media community	
807	0.91	3.1.8. I feel empowered when I read Penn's/NWU Pukke's posts on social media 3.1.11. My experience is positive when using Penn's/NWU Pukke's social media 4.1.5. I feel that I am sharing the University's norms and values 4.1.6. I feel like I am part of a community 4.1.7. I feel that I share resources with others 4.1.8. I feel there is co-operation between social media users and Penn/NWU Pukke	The trust statements (5.1.1. tot 5.1.4) were moved to the construct of *trust*

From Table 6.25 above, it is clear how the statements were used as part of a single construct, eliminating duplication. As mentioned previously, these statements were not eliminated completely, but moved to constructs where the Cronbach's alpha showed high reliability. Statement 3.1.8 was eliminated from *trust* and two-way symmetrical communication*,* and moved to *creating a social media community.* Statement 4.1.5 was removed from *relationship building strategies* and included in *creating a social media community.* Statement 3.1.1 was excluded from *relationship building strategies*, but included in *Water's et al. (2009) social media guidelines.* In the case of statement 3.1.9, Cronbach's alpha reading did improve when removing it from *relationship building strategies* and including it in two-way symmetrical communication. Moreover, statement 3.1.11 was removed from *two-way symmetrical communication* and added to *creating a social media community*. It is also clear from Table 6.25: when these statements were eliminated from certain constructs and moved to others, it still yielded a very high reliability rate, resulting in a reliable regression analysis.

Two questions remained to be answered. Firstly, does *trust* form a sub-construct of *creating a social media community*, or is it a separate construct in its own right, which leads to the creation of a social media community? A regression analysis was done with *creating a social media community* as the dependant variable, in order to answer this question. The results are indicated in Table 6.26 below.

Table 6.26: Regression analysis with *creating a social media community* as dependent variable

Variables entered	Model	Adjusted R square	T	p-value	Unstandarised coefficients B	Collinearity Statistics	
						Tolerance*	VIF*
Relationship building strategies	1	0.699	14.71	0.00	0.441	0.342	2.927
Two-way symmetrical communication	2	0.760	8.81	0.00	0.274	0.283	3.538
Commitment	3	0.783	8.78	0.00	0.182	0.628	1.593
Water's social media guidelines	4	0.788	4.69	0.00	0.129	0.344	2.905

For statistical accuracy tolerance needs to be > 0.1 and variance inflation factor (VIF) smaller than 10.

As was explained above, *creating a social media community* was chosen as dependent variable, and a regression analysis done by adding one of the constructs to the model. Table 6.26 above clearly shows the result in terms of a stronger adjusted R Square. This becomes apparent when adding the other constructs in succession. This leads to the assumption that when only considering *relationship building strategies* as a variable for *creating a social media community*, it evidently only created 69% of the social media community. However, when adding the constructs *two-way symmetrical communication, commitment,* and *Water's et al. (2009) social media guidelines,* it yielded a 78% of what *creating a social media community* entails.

Furthermore, this regression analysis did not include *trust* as an important variable related to *creating a social media community.* Therefore, it raised the possibility that *trust* can be seen as separate dependent variable, or possibly part of the dependent variable, *creating a social media community.* It is important to consider that *trust* as a construct tested strongly and formed a separate factor within the construct of *creating a social media community,* as was apparent from Table 6.26 above. Following up on this finding, a further regression analysis was done with *trust* as dependent variable, as presented in Table 6.27 on the next page.

Table 6.27: Regression analysis with *trust* as dependent variable

Variables entered	Model	Adjusted R square	T	p-value	Unstandarised coeefficients B	Collinearity Statistics	
						Tolerance*	VIF*
Control mutuality	1	0.557	15.601	0.00	0.476	0.484	2.068
Communal vs exchange	2	0.602	7.818	0.00	0.200	0.493	2.03
Relationship building	3	0.610	3.968	0.00	0.098	0.6	1.667

For statistical accuracy tolerance needs to be > 0.1 and variance inflation factor (VIF) smaller than 10

From Table 6.27 above it is clear: where *trust* was chosen as dependent variable and a regression analysis was done, each construct, helped form the dependent variable, as was the case presented in Table 6.28. Furthermore, it is important to note the higher yield rate that *creating a social media community* had as dependent variable (0.788), compared to *trust* as the dependent variable (0.610). When comparing these yield rates, it can be inferred that trust seemingly is not a single separate dependent variable, but rather a very strong sub-construct of *creating a social media community,* as was shown in the factor analysis.

To test this assumption, a regression analysis was done where *trust* and *creating a social media community* was chosen as combined dependent variable. The results are presented in Table 6.28 below.

Table 6.28: Regression analysis with *creating a social media community* and *trust* combined as dependent variable

Variables entered	Model	Adjusted R square	T	p-value	Unstandarised coeefficients B	Collinearity Statistics	
						Tolerance*	VIF*
Relationship building	1	0.704	13.712	0.00	0.306	0.326	3.071
Control mutuality	2	0.778	11.317	0.00	0.222	0.521	1.918
Two-way symmetrical communication	3	0.818	9.210	0.00	0.209	0.281	3.559
Commitment	4	0.836	8.894	0.00	0.150	0.503	1.989
Water's social media guidelines	5	0.837	2.770	0.01	0.055	0.343	2.912

For statistical accuracy tolerance needs to be > 0.1 and variance inflation factor (VIF) smaller than 10

Again, Table 6.28 clearly shows that each listed construct contributed to the combined dependent variables, beginning with *relationship building* contributing 70%; and adding *control mutuality, two-way symmetrical communication, commitment* and *Waters et al. (2009) social media guidelines,* which each yielded a contribution of 83.7%. It is clear from this regression analysis that *creating a social media community* and *trust* as a combined dependent variable tested even stronger than when using these two factors separately as single dependent variables. Thus, it calculated to a reliability score of CA=0.89.

It can, therefore, be assumed that when implementing the constructs *relationship building strategies, control mutuality,* two-way symmetrical communication*, commitment* and *Waters et al. (2009) social media guidelines,* all these will help create a strong social media community, of which *trust* forms a crucial part. These might also then be the constructs that Penn and NWU Pukke would need to focus on in an effort to create a social media community.

6.11 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, *Specific research question 4* was answered. This concerns the views of Penn's and NWU Pukke's alumni on the use of social media to build and maintain relationships, and how these views compare. Thereafter, a comparison was drawn between the two universities' responses.

When considering the information obtained from the data discussed above, Penn and NWU Pukke both show differences in the alumni's views and the respective institutions' usage of social media, especially for relationship and community building. Similarities between Penn and NWU Pukke were also apparent in certain cases. It was clear that both these universities use social media differently with regard to the type of platforms and frequency of use. Nevertheless, the way the alumni receive their alma mater through these platforms seems to correlate in a strong way. The argument could, therefore, be made that both Penn and NWU Pukke should focus on their implementation of these SMPs, ultimately to create a virtual online community with its respective alumni.

The following chapter (Chapter 7) will focus on answering *Specific research question 5,* to understand how the following aspects compare: (i) the literature; (ii) content analysis of the universities' SMPs, (iii) the views of the universities' alumni; and (iv) the views of the alumni managers.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and recommendations

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The focus of the present study was to apply certain research methods that determine how universities build and maintain relationships with alumni through social media. The research utilised a trans-national study where two universities were compared, namely University of Pennsylvania (Penn) and North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus (NWU Pukke).

In this regard, Chapter 1 provided a short 'plan of action' for the progress of the present study. This included the following aspects: the methods, questions and objectives for the research and a cursory overview of the literature. Thereafter, Chapter 2 focused on the theoretical conceptualisation of the study. Chapter 3 presented and discussed the research methods applied to gather data in order to answer the research question. This explanation was followed by Chapters 4, 5 and 6, which reported on the data gathered through the methods explained in Chapter 3. In particular, Chapter 4 focused on the qualitative content analysis, Chapter 5 investigated the semi-structured interviews, and Chapter 6 analysed the results of the self-administrated questionnaires to alumni.

With the above in mind, a cross-national comparative study was conducted, which focused on resemblances and variances across societies and cultures in terms of social media usage to build alumni relations. These aspects were analysed and explained, as practiced at Penn and NWU Pukke respectively. By applying similar research instruments and methods to both universities, certain assumptions could be made to gain insight into to the phenomenon under investigation (Hantrais, 1995; Livingstone, 2003:478; Lor, 2011:6). Furthermore, universal problems and challenges were identified and analysed regarding the universities' use of social media for alumni relations. This was done through the following methodology, as suggested by Livingstone (2003:479):

- Test the theory in literature across diverse settings.
- Create basic principles that can be adapted more widely.
- Investigate and research the range of a certain phenomenon.

It was also important for the researcher to consider the differences between the two mentioned universities: Penn as a North-American Ivy League institution, with 24 806 students and 298 789 living alumni (Betz, 2015), and NWU Pukke, a campus within a large university for North-West, South Africa, consisting of 54 908 students and 60 323 living alumni (Cloete, 2015). Both universities have different ideas and strategies regarding social media usage. This is based on different cultures and audiences in terms of American versus South African individuals.

Higher education institutions such as universities active in the current volatile tertiary environment also need to focus specifically on relationship building with their alumni (Hemsley-Brown & Oplakta, 2006:318). Tertiary education institutions should understand how to nurture relationships and engage alumni. Such a relationship should lead to a support structure that buffers the institution against challenges and problems. This can be accomplished through financial contributions from alumni that add to financial health, as well as other types of support that can help strengthen and develop the university (Kowalik, 2011:218). For instance, sound relations can be build with alumni by informing them about events and graduate achievements, which leads to a well-nurtured alumni community (Kowalik, 2011:218).

It was, therefore, important for the present study to use comparative research. This helped formulate general principles that could be adopted across nations, while attempting to improve the scope and depth of the theory on the subject of social media usage for alumni relations by universities. To operationalise the research of the mentioned phenomenon, the study was set within a specific theoretical frame, which is explicated below.

7.1.1 Theoretical framing of the study

For the framing of the study, it is important to reflect on the theoretical parameters that were set as described in Chapters 1 and 2. The meta-theory and theories that were presented and discussed, provided the structure within which the study was conducted. A theoretical framework that combines several theories, was used and is explained in Table 7.1 below (ref. Pennings *et al.,* 2006:3).

Table 7.1: Theoretical framework

Meta-theory	Systems theory			
Domain	Corporate communication management		Social media	
Theories	Stakeholder relationship management	Two-way symmetrical communication	Waters *et al.*'s (2009) guidelines to cultivate social-media relationships	(Concept) Creating a social media community

The systems theory highlights the interdependence between parties, in this case the universities and its alumni. From the viewpoint of this theory, both domains of corporate communication management and social media were investigated (Broom *et al.*, 2000:15, 17; Hon & Grunig, 1999:12).

The theory informing the building of stakeholder relationships, proposes strategies that should be followed to reach positive outcomes for the organisational-stakeholder relationship (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999:165; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:62, 165, Hon & Grunig, 1999:42-46). In addition, applying two-way symmetrical communication guidelines to social media can ensure healthy, long-term, and mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and its stakeholders (Grunig *et al.*, 1992:36; Grunig *et al.*, 2002:2; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:160; Waters *et al.*, 2010:245). This also is the exact type of relationship and bond that would benefit both the university and alumni on various levels: economic, social, political and cultural (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:62).

It can be challenging to establish and maintain the described university-alumni relationships on social media. For this purpose, Waters *et al.'s* (2009:102-103) created guidelines focusing specifically on the cultivation of social media relationships. Extending this argument, Lipshcultz (2015:76) and Taylor (2013:62) suggest social media guidelines that can be used not only to cultivate relationships, but ultimately, create virtual stakeholder communities on social media platforms (SMPs). Such communities are considered to benefit the organisation even more than merely fostering relationships with individuals.

The theoretical and meta-theoretical designs discussed above, serve as background for the specific research questions, which are answered subsequently.

7.2 ANSWERING THE SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study was structured according to specific research questions. Each of these questions is answered in light of the information and data gained in the previous chapters.

7.2.1 Theoretical conceptualisation

The first specific research question focused on the theoretical conceptualisation and was conducted through a literature review (see Chapter 2):

How is social media used, according to literature, to build and maintain relationships with stakeholders, particularly university alumni?

As explained above, the following theoretical designs were used: stakeholder relationship management theory, two-way symmetrical communication theory, Waters *et al.*'s (2009)

guidelines for cultivation of social media relationships, and the theory on creating a social media community. The central concepts of each theory were identified and extracted to test the practice further and provide results for the present study. Using these concepts, Table 7.2 below was developed as a guideline for the chapters that followed.

Table 7.2: Constructs per theory

Theories	Stakeholder-relationship management	Two-way symmetrical communication	Waters *et al.*'s (2009) guidelines for cultivation of social media relationships	Creation of a social media community
Concepts	Relationship outcomes - Trust - Control mutuality - Commitment - Relationship satisfaction - Communal vs exchange relationships Relationship building strategies - Access - Positivity - Openness and disclosure - Assurance of authenticity - Networking - Sharing of tasks	- Power sharing - Transparency - Ethical communication - Balance of interests - Responsible communication - Reciprocity	- Disclosure - Usefulness and Information dissemination - Interactivity and involvement	- Trust - Shared norms - Shared resources and knowledge - Reciprocity - Resilience within relationships - Co-ordination and co-operation

The theory informing stakeholder-relationship management contains firstly, relationship outcomes, which can be used to test the health of the relationship, and secondly, relationship building strategies that can be applied to ensure healthy relationships. The suggested outcomes for a successful relationship would include (Ledingham & Brunig, 1998; Hon & Grunig, 1999):

- *Trust:* A relationship in which there is trust, and includes actions from the parties that show integrity, dependability and competence (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999:165; Hon & Grunig, 1999:19).

- *Control mutuality* is created when both parties to the relationship agree on the symmetrical, or asymmetrical, balance provided by the goals and behavioural routines of the parties involved (Stafford & Cannary, 1991:5).

- *Commitment* in the relationship refers to the willingness to invest in the relationship based on the belief that value is established in the interaction (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999:165; Hon & Grunig, 1999:20).
- *Relationship satisfaction* is achieved when the outcomes described above are reached and participants feel mutually positive about how the other party maintains the relationship (Stafford & Cannary, 1991:5; Hon & Grunig, 1999:14; Waters, 2011:460).
- *Communal vs exchange:* entails an agreement and acceptance from both parties in the relationship regarding the level of communality or exchange in the relationship. Thus, a communal relationship indicates concern for the wellbeing of the other party without expecting exchange in the process (Hon & Grunig, 1999:4); exchange relationships expect exchange when one party provides something to the other (Hon & Grunig, 1999:4).

Hon and Grunig (1999) furthermore explain that to reach these relationship outcomes, organisations have to apply certain strategies for relationship building. These strategies are: *access, positivity, openness and disclosure, assurance of authenticity, networking and sharing of tasks,* as explicated below (Stafford & Cannery, 1991:12; Hon & Grunig, 1999:15; Williams & Brunner, 2010:2):

- *Access:* implies the distribution of information to the other party freely to create trust and show commitment.
- *Positivity:* towards each other in the relationship can help ensure information flow and access to information, which in turn will lead to trust and commitment in the relationship.
- *Openness and disclosure:* by acting as open systems that are aware of their interdependence, it will create openness, honest discussions and disclosure of information in the relationship, which will lead to mutual trust.
- *Assurance of authenticity:* ensures that both parties acknowledge the other party and their concern, showing commitment and dedication.
- *Networking:* implies working with stakeholders and even their networks, to achieve synergy.
- *Sharing of tasks:* To obtain the goals of the relationship it is necessary to share tasks such as decision making.

The method needed to build the relationships as described above and apply the suggested strategies for relationship cultivation (considered as ethical), can be described as two-way symmetrical communication (Grunig *et al.*, 1992:36; Grunig *et al.,* 2002:2). According to the

literature, it is important that stakeholders feel they have a certain amount of *power* in the relationship. This is accomplished when organisations are *transparent, communicating responsibly and ethically, balancing interests* and have a certain form of *reciprocity.* These aspects would imply that an organisation includes *two-way symmetrical communication* into its corporate strategy for communication management. Such a form of communication expects that both parties should be willing to share the power of the relationship, and transform according to the feedback or responses they receive (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:10; Grunig & White, 1992:39). Unfortunately, this form of communication is not always possible in practice (Grunig, 1989:40). As a result, the mixed-motive model was developed as practiced from a two-way symmetrical point of view (Grunig & White, 1992:48; Le Roux, 2011:65).

Social media offers organisations an ideal platform on which to implement the mixed motive model, and strive for two-way symmetrical communication. The reason is that this medium allows conversation to take place (Kaplan & Heanlein, 2010:60), and ensures the stakeholders' input into an organisation's strategic decision-making (Grunig, 2006:5; Le Roux, 2011:66).

With the development of Web 2.0, it became even more important for organisations to apply the criteria above in the new electronic domain. Waters *et al.* (2009) suggest that when considering SMPs organisations should implement certain guidelines to establish and maintain a relationship with stakeholders. In this regard, Waters *et al.* (2009) propose that organisations should *disclose* information about themselves on SMPs, supply stakeholders with *useful information*, focus on *dissemination of information*, ensure the information that are shares is *interactive* and in some way *involves them.*

Lipshcultz (2015:76) and Taylor (2013:62) point out even more importantly than relationships, that organisations should strive to *create communities* on their SMPs to maintain social capital. This capital will deliver positive business results such as a positive economic effect on the organisation and co-operation beyond organisational boundaries (Lipschultz, 2015:76). Taylor (2013) explains that to increase the chances of such a community, it is important for stakeholders and the organisation to *trust* each other, and they should *share norms, resources and knowledge.* Furthermore, they should have a form or *reciprocity*, show *resilience within the relationship,* and stakeholders and the organisation should *co-ordinate* and *co-operate* mutually.

The concepts identified and presented in Table 7.2 on page 189, provide a summary to answer *Specific research question 1* on guidelines from literature to manage social media for alumni relations. The concepts were also used as follows: to structure Chapters 4, 5 and 6; create the interview questions for the semi-structured interviews; evaluate both universities' SMPs through a content analysis; and compile the questionnaire distributed to both Penn's and NWU Pukke's alumni to complete.

7.2.2 Reviewing social media content

The second specific research question focused on a content analysis of the social media used by Penn and NWU Pukke, as elaborated on in Chapter 4. *Specific research question 2* reads as follows:

How does social media content enhance understanding of social media usage for universities to build and maintain relationships with their alumni?

Considering the theory summarised in Table 7.2, and as explained in Chapter 2, both Penn's and NWU Pukke's SMPs were analysed regarding the following constructs: *relationship cultivation strategies, two-way symmetrical communication, Waters et al.'s (2009) social media guidelines,* and *creating a social media community.* Relationship outcomes were found difficult to assess by analysing the SMPs. Thus, it should rather be examined by requesting the parties involved in the relationship to provide their views.

The researcher aimed to test the theory against the practice, and be sensitive to new information that may emerge from the examination and the insights gained from the analysis. The platforms analysed for both Penn and NWU Pukke, were Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube. These platforms were presented in Table 4.1 (in Chapter 4) or more specific URL and QR codes to these platforms are provided in Addendum C. The mentioned SMPs were monitored for two months during June and July 2015.

For the mentioned analysis, the researcher had to allow for differences in the two universities' usage of SMPs. For instance, Penn has SMPs dedicated to alumni, whereas NWU Pukke does not have separate alumni platforms for each SMP. The latter institution does, however, encourage its alumni to follow the general official university accounts. Both universities, therefore, utilise social media to build relationships with their alumni, but in a slightly different way.

From the analysis, it was clear that even though the universities may use the SMPs differently, the importance was emphasised of an overall relationship building strategy. NWU Pukke, for instance, excelled at using Twitter, while the same was true for Penn on LinkedIn. Most importantly, the guidelines should be tailored for each specific platform.

Table 4.2 (in Chapter 4) summarised the comparison of *relationship cultivation strategies*. Although both universities use these strategies, both should focus more on responding timeously to positive and negative posts. Both universities can benefit from such a focus, but NWU Pukke in particular, can improve their interactivity by disclosing more information and using storytelling. Findings show that both Penn and NWU Pukke's managers do, however, ensure that they implement most of the main key points of relationship management on their SMPs. The analysis indicated that certain strategies for relationship cultivation are more applicable to specific SMPs than others. The universities, therefore, need to incorporate all the relationship cultivation strategies into a single social media strategy that serves the various SMPs they intend to use.

For *two-way symmetrical communication*, the following elements apply: power sharing, transparency, ethical communication, a balance of interest, responsible communication and reciprocity. Regarding these elements, both Penn's and NWU Pukke's SMPs fared very good. Nevertheless, there is room for NWU Pukke to improve on the use of two-way symmetrical communication in general, and on LinkedIn and for Penn in particular, to encourage power sharing on their SMPs. Overall, Penn seemed slightly more focused on ensuring two-way symmetrical communication. Table 4.3 (Chapter 4) summarised the findings.

In applying *Waters' et al.'s (2009) social media guidelines*, it was found that both Penn and NWU Pukke keep its alumni well informed about newsworthy items. However, both struggle to open avenues for alumni to donate on SMPs, make calendar events available, or encourage voluntary work to benefit the universities. Such contributions could be achieved by placing relevant links to these types of options. As summarised in Table 4.4 (Chapter 4), both Penn and NWU Pukke allow interactivity and engagement, but can improve on these opportunities. A possible option is packaging content to generate interactivity and engagement, which could benefit the universities.

The qualitative content analysis showed that certain aspects pointing to *creating a social media community* became apparent on both Penn and NWU Pukke's SMPs respectively. Penn's alumni's LinkedIn group was found to be a positive example of creating a social

media community. This group in particular, shares information, resources, created networks and showed reciprocity. The characteristics of information and recourse sharing, cooperation and reciprocity were apparent in both universities' SMPs. However, the characteristics of cooperation, the sharing of information and resources as well as reciprocity, can not only be affirmed by also considering the opinions of the alumni (see section 4.2).

The analysis of the SMPs provided the understanding that an overall social media strategy is needed that incorporates the use of various platforms, with some platforms being used as leading platforms and some as supporting platforms. This is the case even though organisations, such as universities, may use specific SMPs in slightly different ways from one another.

7.2.3 Universities' view on social media usage

Regarding universities' view of social media, the data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with participants from both Penn and NWU Pukke (see section 3.3.3). These interviews were done with the following participants:

- Penn: Alumni Relations Executive Director and the two Directors of Creative Design and Information Media.
- NWU Pukke: Director of Marketing and Communication and Electronic Media Manager.

Due to the context, Penn's interviews were conducted in English, and those of NWU Pukke in Afrikaans. These interviews were reported (see Chapter 5) according to the themes identified in the literature study, and were guided by *Specific research question 3:*

How do Penn and NWU Pukke use social media to build and maintain relationships with alumni, according to their alumni managers' views, and how do they compare?

Both Penn and NWU Pukke strive to embrace social media by using various types of platforms. However, NWU Pukke only uses Facebook as a separate alumni platform, whereas Penn mostly separate their alumni platforms from their other SMPs. Both Penn and NWU Pukke also admitted that they are still busy developing a social media strategy. Only NWU Pukke makes use of a fixed content calendar to plan and schedule their social media activities.

Penn, on the other hand, shows more confidence in the way their managers utilise and consider social media. According to Penn, social media that target alumni is worthwhile and useful to them. NWU Pukke is aware of the importance of using social media for alumni

relationships, but is unsure if their alumni consider this channel as worthwhile. Both universities regard alumni's engagement as its return on investment when communicating through social media.

When considering *relationship outcomes* (trust, control mutuality, commitment, and relationship satisfaction; Hon & Grunig, 1999:15) as used on SMPs, both universities attempt to build sound relationships with alumni. Regarding the outcome of trust*,* both Penn and NWU Pukke evidently believe they have a form of trust with their alumni. Penn, however, seems more sure of this trust on SMPs than NWU Pukke. None of the universities displayed clear measurements of trust, for instance NWU Pukke's managers indicated that they measure trust in terms of the number of alumni attending events.

The two institutions clearly view the outcome of control mutuality differently. Penn is confident that the managers include their alumni's opinions in decision-making and listen to them not only through regular communication, but also through social media. NWU Pukke, on the other hand, attests to listening to its alumni and asking for their opinions. Although NWU Pukke's managers attempt to incorporate the alumni's voice, it is not always considered in decision-making on higher management levels. This is an aspect that NWU Pukke's participants mentioned they would want to improve.

Both Penn and NWU Pukke indicated a confidence in the way they view alumni's commitment to the relationship. However, it is significant that both Penn and NWU Pukke are unsure of the extent to which social media plays a role in its commitment with alumni relations.

Penn and NWU Pukke indicated different views of relationship satisfaction. Penn believes that they have a mutually beneficial relationship with their alumni, and also measure this relationship. In contrast, NWU Pukke's managers experience limited relationship satisfaction with alumni and believe they can improve on relationship satisfaction with theses stakeholders, although they are of the opinion that their alumni are satisfied with the current relationship.

From the interviews, it also clear that Penn acknowledges the communal and exchange elements of the alumni relationship, more so than did NWU Pukke. It would seem from the interviews that NWU Pukke focuses more on the communal aspects and less on the exchange elements, where alumni can contribute in return to the university.

It is clear from the findings above that Penn and NWU Pukke view three of the relationship outcomes differently (i.e., control mutuality, relationship satisfaction, and communal and exchange relationships), but two more outcomes similarly (trust and commitment). Penn bases its relationship outcomes on the alumni by being pro-active and understanding what alumni would consider as a sound relationship. Conversely, NWU Pukke focuses its outcomes to the stage *after* the alumni have given their opinion and attended events. Penn's managers also admit that these relationship outcomes are not attained throughout, and that they reached their current state through hard work over time. NWU Pukke's managers, on the other hand, openly admit that they do not always have these outcomes in place and need more effort to build and maintain alumni relationships. Most importantly, the universities' social media strategies should reflect their views on the various relationship outcomes.

Analysing the various *relationship building strategies* (access, positivity, openness and disclosure, assurance of authenticity, networking, and sharing of tasks; Hon & Grunig, 1999:15), it becomes evident that Penn and NWU Pukke do not always share the same views on these strategies, or necessarily view the strategies as described in theory.

Both Penn and NWU Pukke view *access* as disclosing links to their SMPs through other platforms, including traditional and digital media. However, Penn and NWU Pukke place less emphasis on making information available and accessible when considering access. They rather view the type of information shared on social media and their participation on these platforms, as a way of making information available to be assessed by alumni.

Both Penn and NWU Pukke underline the importance to invest in alumni on their SMPs and create a positive climate and a sense of belonging for this audience. Both agree that this can be accomplished by displaying relevant information on SMPs and, to keep alumni positive, they should communicate nostalgic moments between the institutions and alumni.

Penn and NWU Pukke agree that to contribute to openness and disclosure, the information on their SMPs not only need to be communicated and shared when relevant, but should also keep alumni up to date with information and notify them in a crisis situation. Noticeably NWU Pukke feels a SMP should be completely open for alumni to voice their opinions on the information shared. In turn, Penn also shares other relevant information generated by other media companies.

Regarding authenticity, participants from both Penn and NWU Pukke agreed that all types of information, even negative information, need to be shared. However, Penn believes that

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information should be exact and factual to increase its authenticity, whereas NWU Pukke believes that an authentic strategy should rather focus on giving alumni a voice to communicate with the university more effectively.

When considering networking as a relationship building strategy, Penn and NWU Pukke indicated different views. NWU Pukke, is aware this strategy is important for relationship building on social media, but to date has not ensured or encouraged networking on its SMPs. In contrast, Penn considers networking as important and has established platforms and methods to ensure networking takes place.

Another difference is the way both Penn and NWU Pukke views sharing of tasks as a relationship building strategy. Although Penn does not deliberately apply this strategy, it seems to be incorporated naturally in its social media approach. NWU Pukke, on the other hand, provides alumni with information on achievements, hoping that they would share the posts with their networks.

Thus, when examining Penn's and NWU Pukke's view of relationship building strategies, evidently there are differences and similarities as identified above. It is, however, clear that both Penn and NWU Pukke do feel that their SMPs are spaces where alumni have the chance to communicate with their alma mater, in the believe that this interaction makes their SMPs two-way symmetrical.

Neither Penn, nor NWU Pukke's managers, mentioned significant ways in which they encourage *two-way symmetrical communication* as described by literature and identified by characteristics such as: power sharing, transparency, ethical communication, balance of interest, responsible communication, and reciprocity (Grunig & White, 1992:46,48; Le Roux, 2011:65). Although both universities claim that their SMPs are used for two-way communication, both mentioned that alumni do not engage with them regularly. They both, however, strive for the ideal of open communication between themselves and their alumni.

Penn seems to share power and create reciprocity to a larger extent than NWU Pukke. Both universities however, make an effort to be transparent in their social media communication, and to create a balance of interests. Both also equate such attributes to being ethical and responsible. Similarities between the two institutions with to two-way symmetrical communication, are the fact that both Penn and NWU Pukke believe they are transparent by sharing positive as well as negative stories on their SMPs.

Furthermore, the focus was on Penn's and NWU Pukke's opinions about *Waters's et al.* *(2009) social media guidelines* for cultivating relationships (disclosure, usefulness and information dissemination, interactivity and involvement). Findings regarding disclosure show that Penn discloses information on specified SMPs for alumni. NWU Pukke, on the other hand, does not do the same, taking into account that the latter institution feels the messages on their general platforms speak to their alumni's needs as well. Therefore, they only focus on Facebook as a specific platform for alumni.

Both universities emphasise disseminating useful information on their SMPs. In addition, they feel that research should dictate which information their alumni will find useful. Both also understand the importance of interactivity, but lack established ways (a set strategy) to ensure such engagement on their SMPs, although Penn seems more apt at creating interactivity. From this analysis, it is clear that both universities need to work on enhancing Waters's *et al.*, (2009) social media guidelines. This should be done by creating their own social media strategy, although Penn seemingly to has been more successful thus far in applying more of these guidelines than NWU Pukke.

Regarding Penn's and NWU Pukke's view of *community building* on SMPs, in both interviews it became clear that participants believe this construct entails the following outcomes: trust, shared norms, shared resources and knowledge, reciprocity, resilience within the relationship and co-ordination and co-operation, similar to how the literature describes it (Taylor, 2013:67). Both universities also understand the importance of a community. Penn, however, seems to be closer than NWU Pukke to implementing community building, seeing that the university management considered various actions and content, which could be made available to create such communities. NWU Pukke agrees that building social media communities is important, but to date has not reached a point where they began implementing this strategy in their SMPs.

It is significant that both universities measure neither the health of their alumni relations as created on social media, nor the health of the communities created on social media.

7.2.4 Alumni's view on social media usage

To ascertain the alumni's views on social media usage, self-administered questionnaires were distributed to a sample of Penn's alumni and all of NWU Pukke's alumni. Data was gathered to understand the respective alumni's view on their university's usage of social media to create relationships with them. The data was analysed to answer *Specific research question 4:*

What are the views of Penn and NWU Pukke's alumni on the use of social media for building and maintaining relationships, and how do these views compare?

This first section of the questionnaire included demographic information and respondents' social media usage, followed by questions on each of the themes and constructs identified in the literature. (See Table 7.2 on page 189, and Addendum A for an example of the questionnaire.)

The *demographic data* showed that the respondents who returned questionnaires did reflect the alumni profiles of both universities. Penn's alumni seemed to be spread out according to the age groups, whereas NWU Pukke indicated a younger respondent group. This is also reflected in the years these alumni graduated. Both Penn and NWU Pukke also have a larger group of female respondents than males, and approximately 20% of the respondents of both universities indicated that their children also studied, or are busy studying at the universities. A further similarity about the study field of respondents from both universities, is that the Faculty of Arts is the largest and comprises the most alumni in both cases.

When considering contributions to the university, it is clear that Penn's alumni are used to contributing and gladly help out their alma mater, whereas for NWU Pukke a larger group of respondents reported that they do not contribute to their university at all. In this regard, NWU Pukke could encourage its alumni through social media to increase contributions to the university, financially and otherwise, especially against the background of the #feesmustfall campaign, which underlines the need for alternative funding.

Investigating the respondents' *social media usage*, it was clear that alumni in both cases do use social media – the NWU Pukke with a stronger contingent on these platforms than Penn. The respondents also seem to favour certain social media sites, especially the older and larger SMPs such as Facebook, for contact with their alma mater. In addition, they use the different SMPs for specific information requirements. Significantly, it was found that social media did not correlate with the respondents' age. From these findings, Table 6.11 (Chapter 6) summarised the social media that should be used by the universities to communicate with alumni.

The findings show that Facebook stands out as popular SMP for both Penn and NWU Pukke. However, these institutions differ in the frequency their respondents use the other platforms. In this regard, Penn's users frequent Twitter and SnapChat more, whereas NWU

Pukke's alumni use Instagram more often. However, an investigation of Penn's and NWU Pukke's social media activities, show strong correlations in respondents' usage of blogging, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. Facebook was also found to be the strongest platform of their university that respondents use for both Penn and NWU Pukke.

In their responses, the social media managers from both Penn and NWU Pukke pointed out several challenges in building relationships with alumni on social media. Nevertheless, this is clearly an avenue with huge potential that can be unlocked.

The response to questions on *relationship outcomes* delivered high Cronbach's alphas to indicate reliable results. Overall it would seem that Penn's and NWU Pukke's respondents were positive about the following relationship outcomes: trust, control mutuality, commitment, relationship satisfaction and communal vs exchange relationship (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Williams & Brunner, 2010). Aspects that were indicated as important to alumni included: believing the university has the potential to be successful, and show commitment to the relationship by considering alumni's opinions as legitimate, not misleading them, treating them fairly; the university keeping its promises, and taking alumni into account when making decisions.

Penn's alumni felt stronger about control mutuality and that they benefit more from the relationship, than was the case for alumni from NWU Pukke, who felt more satisfied with their relationship.

Penn and NWU Pukke's alumni concurred on the trust and commitment that do exist between the alumni and their alma mater in the relationship. Both groups also felt pleased with the level of communal and exchange relationships with their university. However, the findings show that NWU Pukke could capitalise more on the exchange part of their relationship since alumni are prepared to contribute to the university in various ways, as respondents explained in the open question. In summary, both universities' alumni enjoy their interaction with the institutions on social media and believe that the university is creating a long-term relationship with them.

The elements that were considered for a *relationship building strategy*, were access, positivity, openness and disclosure, assurance of authenticity, networking and sharing of tasks (Hon & Grunig, 1999). The statistical analysis of these elements also proved to be highly reliable. The alumni of both institutions felt that information is distributed widely, they have access to content, the communication on social media is authentic, and that their social

media usage do contribute to a trustful relationship. To a lesser degree, they indicated that they share the same norms and values of their alma maters.

Regarding the relationship, NWU Pukke's alumni feel that their alma mater creates opportunities on its SMPs for networking, whereas Penn's alumni do not feel as strongly about this. Ironically, when examining both the interviews and content analysis, Penn's alumni contribute more to their university in networking, than the alumni of NWU Pukke.

A further contrast is evident in the way Penn's alumni feel about their alma mater sharing positive as well as negative stories. Penn's Alumni Relations Executive Director and Directors of Creative Design and Information Media claim that they do comply with this guideline, whereas their alumni indicated that Penn does not. NWU Pukke's alumni, on the other hand, felt very strong about the fact that NWU Pukke does share both positive and negative stories.

When considering *two-way symmetrical communication*, the results of Cronbach's alpha calculations were very high for both institutions' cases. This indicated sufficient reliability of the data gathered. Although both institutions' alumni enjoy their interaction with their alma mater, it seems that NWU Pukke's group felt stronger than that of Penn about two-way symmetrical communication. In contrast to NWU Pukke's alumni, those of Penn felt that their university is only sometimes transparent, and they only sometimes felt empowered when engaging on social media. Both institutions' respondents were positive about feeling informed, experienced their institutions as responsible in the way they use social media, and were fairly positive about their interaction on social media. From these findings, it would seem that due to NWU Pukke's transparency on social media, their alumni feel well informed.

Openness, authenticity and sharing the same values and norms seem to contribute to two-way symmetrical communication. This construct in turn contains the elements of trust, commitment, satisfaction and, communal versus exchange relationships. Sharing positive and negative stories did not correlate strongly with the other elements of two-way symmetrical communication. It is significant to note that both groups of alumni perceive a measure of two-way symmetrical communication in the institutions' social media usage. This is the case, even though the social media managers did not provide clear insight into their usage of two-way symmetrical communication and their application of the various elements to their SMPs.

Once again the statements on *Waters et al.'s (2009) social media guidelines*, indicated highly reliable Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Penn's respondents indicated that their

university widely share useful information across their various SMPs. Penn's alumni were, however, divided about the extent to which they are able to interact with Penn on the various SMPs and how involved they feel when using these SMPs. In contrast, NWU Pukke's alumni were more positive about these statements and saw NWU Pukke's information as helpful and informative. The alumni were also highly positive about how NWU Pukke shares information, how widely it is shared, the interaction on social media and involving alumni through the contents of the posts. Interestingly, NWU Pukke's alumni indicated more correlations than the alumni of Penn between statements on Waters *et al.*'s (2009) guidelines and other statements.

The statements on social media guidelines of Waters *et al* (2009) seemingly also correlated strongly to two-way symmetrical communication. Notably, the statement on alumni's ability to comment, share and post on SMPs, was not mentioned specifically when correlating the social media guidelines, even though these functions are available on all SMPs. The reason could be that the alumni expect social media to be interactive, and they possible have higher expectations of their alma mater's usage of these platforms.

The statements on *creating a social media community* also tested to be reliable. Penn's alumni indicated that some feel a strong sense of community, whereas others experience no strong form of an online community. In contrast, NWU Pukke's alumni experience a very strong social media community and the respondents commended their institution's attempts to create such an online community.

Overall, there is a clear difference in the way Penn and NWU Pukke uses social media to foster stronger relationships with their alumni. When comparing the interviews and the content analysis with the self-administered questionnaire, a number of discrepancies emerged. NWU Pukke's management are aware that they can improve on their efforts, however, their alumni seem to think that their alma mater is successful. In contrast, Penn's management are more confident in their social media approach and providing their alumni opportunities through social media, but their alumni feel that their alma mater does not always comply with this requirement. Penn's alumni do not particularly experience co-operation between social media users and their university.

Significantly, from the findings it is clear that both universities' alumni wish to see an improvement in the sharing of resources with other social media users. Between Penn and NWU Pukke, their alumni indicated a medium correlation on whether they feel positive about being part of a community. Building social media communities indicated many strong correlations with other statements. This clearly indicates that building such a social media

community may be a central construct describing universities' social media usage to build relationships with their alumni.

To summarise the correlations between the various main themes/constructs: Penn's and NWU Pukke's respondents show strong correlations between most of the constructs (see Table 6.2.1; Chapter 6). Very strong correlations were shown between *two-way symmetrical communication, relationship outcomes, relationship strategies,* and *creating a social media community.* Both universities did not indicate a strong correlation between *social media guidelines* and *relationship outcomes.* From this data, it is evident that *two-way communication, relationship strategies* and *relationship outcomes,* are the most applicable methods to create a social media community, however, more statistical analysis is needed to reach clearer answers.

Regression analysis of the data indicated that the construct of a social media community consists of the two sub-constructs of *trust* and *community* as the end-product of social media communication. The constructs that lead to such a social media community include: *relationship cultivation strategies,* displaying *control mutuality,* applying *two-way symmetrical communication,* showing *commitment* and applying *Waters et al.'s (2009) social media guidelines.*

7.2.5 Comparing the findings

The findings of the present study are compared subsequently, by considering *Specific research question 5:*

How do the (i) literature, (ii) the analysis of social media content, (iii) the views of the alumni managers and (iv)the views of the universities' alumni, compare?

In order to answer this specific research question, data from the following sources were considered: the literature, as well as from the management and alumni's views. To inform the results, these were compared with information from the content analysis. Table 7.3 on the following page, provides a summary of these findings.

This summary indicated that there are areas on which both Penn and NWU Pukke could enhance in their efforts to use SMPs to build alumni relationships.

7.3 ANSWERING THE GENERAL RESEARCH QUESTION AND MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS

The general research question reads as follows:

What can be learned from the use of social media to build and maintain relationships with alumni, when comparing the application thereof by Penn and NWU Pukke?

The main findings indicate that tertiary education institutions can make good use of social media to build alumni relations and create a social media community. The main question, therefore, should focus on how this can be accomplished.

Special attention should be paid to how constructs such as two-way symmetrical communications are interpreted by the university and its alumni on social media. For instance, merely providing alumni the option of open platforms, would not be sufficient. The reason is clear: alumni expect to contribute much more to the university and want to have an impact on their alma mater. Therefore, it is particularly important that universities listen to its alumni on social media. Both Penn and NWU Pukke should improve on truly listening to their alumni and their needs. These institutions could either follow up on the findings of the present study, or conduct their own research on their alumni's needs and wants.

Table 7.3: Comparison of the findings according to the different research methods used

	Literature	Content analysis	Social media management's view	Alumni's view
Meta-theory: Systems theory Corporate	Social media in practice requires interdependency between universities and their alumni on these platforms. Therefore, the focus should be on the domain's corporate communication and social media usage, to generate guidelines that social media managers could follow when communicating through the SMPs.	Certain elements of the systems theory emerge when performing the content analysis, such as the interdependence between the universities' and its alumni.	- Both Penn's and NWU Pukke's social media managers acknowledge the interdependence between their alumni and university. - When using social media to build relationships with their alumni, they align it with the university's larger goals and strategy.	Alumni seemingly seek a relationship with the universities to which they contribute, which highlights their mutual interdependence.
Stakeholder relationship management theory: Relationship Outcomes and relationship cultivating strategies	Ledingham and Brunig (1998), and Hon and Grunig (1999) propose the following outcomes for healthy stakeholder relationships: - Trust - Control mutuality - Commitment - Relationship satisfaction - Communal vs exchange relationships Hon and Grunig (1999) suggested the following strategies to cultivate Stakeholder relationships: - Access - Positivity - Openness and disclosure - Assurance of authenticity - Networking - Sharing tasks	- The relationship outcomes cannot be evaluated through a content analysis of the institutions' SMPs. - Penn and NWU Pukke's SMPs testifies to most of the strategies for relationship management as suggested by Hon and Grunig (1999), however clearly these strategies was not continually applicable to all the SMPs which were measured.	- The social media managers strive to reach the relationship outcomes and apply the relationship cultivation strategies through the use of their SMPs. However, the way these SMPs reflect these outcomes and the application of the cultivation strategies, sometimes differ. - NWU Pukke's managers feel that SMPs should be completely open for alumni to voice their thoughts and opinions, although they do not take it into account as much as what Penn does during decision making. - Both universities claim to be transparent on SMPs, sharing both positive and negative stories on these platforms.	- Overall, both Penn and NWU Pukke's alumni perceive the relationship outcomes as important, and feel their alma mater attains these outcomes. - Penn's alumni feel they benefit more from the relationship than those of NWU Pukke. - NWU Pukke's alumni feels more satisfied with their relationship with their alma mater, than those of Penn. - Both universities' alumni are positive about the extent of a communal or exchange relationship with their alma mater. - NWU Pukke's alumni feel they have a better chance at networking on SMPs, compared to Penn's efforts of creating a networking environment for their alumni on SMPs. - Penn's alumni feel their alma mater does not share positive and negative stories on SMPs. In contrast, NWU Pukke's alumni feel very strong about their alma mater sharing both negative and positive stories.

Table 7.3: Comparison of the findings according to the different research methods used (continued)

Two-way symmetrical communication	It is important to ensure stakeholders feel they share power with the organisation and it is transparent, communicates responsibly and ethically, balancing interest and making sure reciprocity takes place. These elements ultimately contribute to a two-way symmetrical communication strategy in building and maintaining relationships with stakeholders.	There seems evidence of two-way communication on both universities' SMPs, excluding NWU Pukke's LinkedIn page.	Both universities seem to understand two-way symmetrical communication as an option that help the alumni communicate in return to them. In both cases, two-way symmetrical communication could be even more enhanced on social media.	-	Although both universities' alumni feel strongly about two-way symmetrical communication, those of NWU Pukke indicated it more strongly than Penn.

Waters _et al._'s (2009) guidelines for social media relationship cultivation	Waters _et al._ (2009) propose three main strategies for building relationships with stakeholders on SMP:
	
	   - Disclosing information.
	   - Posting useful information.
	   - Interactivity involving stakeholders on these platforms.
		Both universities struggle to provide options that give alumni the chance to donate money on SMPs, make calendar events available, and announce voluntary work.	- Penn and NWU Pukke agree about the importance of sharing useful information widely for alumni on SMPs.
			- Both universities indicate challenges to improve interactivity on social media.
				-	NWU Pukke's alumni feel stronger towards statements on these guidelines than Penn's alumni.
					- However, both experience the statements as very positive.

Table 7.3: Comparison of the findings according to the different research methods used (continued)

Creation of a social media community	Organisations need to, instead of merely creating relationships, establish social media communities on their SMPs. Taylor (2013) identifies the following criteria for creating social media communities: - Trust - Shared norms - Shared resources and knowledge - Reciprocity - Resilience within the relationship - Co-ordination and co-operation	- Even though they do not focus on it consciously, there is evidence of community building on Penn's and NWU Pukke's SMPs.	- Both universities understand the importance and benefits of creating a social media community. - Although both Penn and NWU Pukke encourage community building on their SMPs to a large extent, Penn at this stage has a more active focus on this communication method than does NWU Pukke.	- Penn's alumni are divided on whether they experience a social media community. - NWU Pukke's alumni feel very strong and positive about an online community. - Alumni from both universities feel that their alma mater can devise more ways to encourage community building. - In both cases alumni want to contribute and feel part of a larger community. - The social media community construct consists of the sub-constructs of trust and community. - The other constructs contribute to building a social media community. These are relationship building cultivation strategies, control mutuality, two-way symmetrical communication, commitment, and Water's *et* al (2009) social media guidelines.

In addition, both universities can investigate options where alumni get the chance to contribute towards the larger institution through social media. This does not necessary implies financial contributions, but also through providing information and their time. The findings indicated that both Penn's and NWU Pukke's alumni have a strong generous nature and the desire to become part of a larger community, thereby helping their alma mater improve. If Penn and NWU Pukke could invest time into involving their alumni, it can also ensure stronger communities. Ultimately, it could contribute to improved tertiary higher education institutions, which utilise the resources of their alumni.

Furthermore, it was found that not all the relationship and community building guidelines can be realised within a single social media channel. Therefore, a combination of SMPs should be used, given that the social media selected are those used by alumni and aligned with the usage patterns of the alumni.

Consistent messaging across the various channels would require a social media strategy. Such a strategy could manage the combination of SMPs that are employed for optimum engagement with the alumni. Penn and NWU Pukke can thus invest in a strong social media strategy. This will help both universities understand the goals they want to achieve by using their SMPs. Such an understanding will result in a stronger drive when working on their SMPs. It will also send a clear message, applicable and of interest to their alumni who frequent these platforms, of what the university intends to achieve. Such an approach will easier involve alumni and commit them to support or even contribute to the university.

Very importantly, the findings showed that social media usage should focus on building a community. This should be done rather than merely building individual relationships with alumni or focusing on strategies such as engagement and interactivity as the end goal of social media usage. According to the analysis, such a social media community is based on two sub-constructs of *trust* and *community.* In order to create a social media community, universities should use *relationship building strategies,* focus on *control mutuality* in the relationship, apply *two-way symmetrical communication* strategies, show *commitment,* and adhere to *Water's et al (2009) social media guidelines.*

For each university in particular, the following suggestions can be made:

- *Penn:* It is important that they utilise the reservoir of their alumni connections. From the findings, it is clear that the alumni seem positive over all. However, they are not

content throughout with regard to their alma mater's social media usage. Investigating the alumni's real needs for these platforms will give Penn an even further advantage above other universities, and ensure a stronger relationship between Penn and its alumni. Considering that Penn's alumni are highly positive in this regard, spending time to uncover their needs, could lead to even stronger relationships and committed contributions from the alumni.

- *NWU Pukke:* This institution can truly benefit by creating opportunities to receive more contributions from their alumni. The findings show that the university's focus is not that strong on using SMPs to build relationship and communities with its alumni. Conversely, the alumni seem overly positive about the institution and demonstrate that they really want to contribute. This is a clear sign that when NWU Pukke put in more effort into its social media usage, this will ensure stronger relationships, close-knit communities and contributions for the university.

Overall, universities and organisations can broaden their outlook on using social media to build and maintain relationships with stakeholders. It is clear that the current strategies to ensure social media users interact and engage individually, is outdated. Organisations, such as universities should rather focus on groups (rather than individuals) by creating stronger communities and bringing these communities closer together by functioning as the mutual point of interest for all these social media users. This is what social media users currently want and need. Organisations (and universities) whose managers understand this development, will have a better chance of succeeding. By following the above-mentioned framework (see Table 7.2), universities would be able to capitalise on alumni relationships in order to assist them during turbulent times.

7.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The present study provided new information and gains for the field of SMP usage in stakeholder relationship building and maintenance. However, certain limitations should be considered. This is followed by suggestions for future study on this topic.

The first limitation is that the organisations that were studied and compared may not follow a similar strategy for their social media, and may also not be at the same maturity level in its social media usage. The findings show that Penn already had reached a phase with their social media where they need separate accounts on the various SMPs for alumni. Conversely, NWU Pukke only has a separate Facebook page for alumni and further encourages alumni to use the other official NWU Pukke platforms. The reason is that the

latter university employs a larger strategy that focuses its social media usage on all the stakeholders (alumni, students, parents of students, etc.). The present study considered the SMPs as used by alumni, whether other stakeholders were included or not. Therefore, it was assumed that the possible use of these SMPs by other stakeholders would not influence the results. In this regard, future studies should keep in mind the difference and impact of the organisation's social media strategies when conceptualising the research.

Secondly, the period selected to analyse an organisation's social media page, potentially may influence the research findings. For instance, the present study chose a fairly busy period of activity on both the universities' SMPs when conducting the content analysis. Future researchers should be aware of seasonal changes in organisations' social media usage.

Thirdly, a cross-national study in particular held clear challenges. The researcher was unable to send reminders or encourage Penn's alumni to participate in the study, which led to a lower response rate. The questionnaires were also distributed during summer holidays in the USA. Future research should remember: Such a cross-national study requires careful planning and agreement with the organisations' managers on encouraging respondents to partake in the study.

Fourthly, only two institutions from different continents were investigated in the present study. Although the findings from of both universities delivered sufficient information, future research should consider including more universities from different countries. This will provide even more accurate comparisons. In addition, it could yield even better results on organisations from different countries' usage of social media. By adding a European or Eastern view to the research problem addressed in a similar type of study, it could provide significant results.

Fifthly, the questionnaire that tested the construct of *building a social media community* was restricted to a certain context, namely that of two distinct environments of higher education. This construct could be tested and investigated further across different contexts and industries. This may pave the way for a standardised measurement instrument for this concept in social media usage.

Finally, the strategies and outcomes for relationship building of Hon and Grunig's (1999) and Water's *et al.* (2009) showed shortcomings. The findings showed that their proposed strategies and guidelines were not necessarily applicable to all the SMPs under

investigation. Future studies should consider exploring which guidelines are most applicable to which SMP, in order to build the most productive relationships and social media communities.

7.5 FINAL CONCLUSION

This chapter draws conclusions on all of the specific research questions as well as the general research question posited in Chapter 1.

From the broader scope investigated by the study, it is clear that universities and organisations need to include social media into strategies that would help them begin to build or maintain relationships with their stakeholders. This will not only lead to stronger relationships with stakeholders, or alumni in this case, but improve the chance of financial aid and will also contribute to stronger and tight-knit social media communities. Furthermore, when working with social media, universities should not only strive to build healthy relationships with individual stakeholders, but rather focus on creating online communities as outcome of their efforts. Establishing such relationships and communities would benefit universities and help ensure their survival within such a volatile environment.

To summarise, universities should consider implementing the above-mentioned strategies and tailor them to fit the needs of the organisation and its stakeholders. In the process the alumni managers should also consider the unique gains of SMPs with regard to two-way symmetrical communicating. This can improve the way universities communicate and foster relationships with future communities.

Future research following up on the above-mentioned guidelines of the present study, may improve knowledge in the field of community building by creating and maintaining online relationships with stakeholders.

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ADDENDUMS

ADDENDUM A

Alumni Relations Through Social Media Questionnaire

Good day Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. This questionnaire forms part of my Masters degree in communication at the North-West University, South Africa. I'm working on a cross-national comparative study of two universities, exploring the theme of building alumni relationships through social media. This questionnaire will take about 10 minutes to complete. Please be assured that your response will be anonymous and confidential.   Should you have any concerns or queries, you are welcome to e-mail me at jimmy.pressly@nwu.ac.za.   Kind Regards   Jimmy Pressly

1. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION:

1.1. Age

○ Younger than 20

○ 20-29

○ 30-39

○ 40-49

○ 50-59

○ 60-69

○ 70-79

○ Older than 79

1.2. Gender:

○ Male

○ Female

○ Other

1.3. Field of Study:

○ School for Communication

○ Arts & Sciences

○ Dental Medicine

○ Design

○ Engineering and Applied Science

○ Graduate School of Education

○ Law School

○ Nursing

○ Perelman School of Medicine

○ Social Policy & Practice

○ Veterinary Medicine

○ The Wharton School

○ Other

1.4. Year Graduated: (with your first degree)

○ Before 1950

○ 1950-1959

○ 1960-1969

○ 1970-1979

○ 1980-1989

○ 1990-2000

○ 2001-2011

○ After 2011

1.5. Have any of your children studied (or are studying) at Penn?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Not Applicable

1.6. I contribute to Penn/NWU Pukke through: [Choose as many as applicable]

☐ Financial contributions

☐ Giving talks at the University

☐ Attending University events

☐ Attennding Alumni events

☐ None

2. SOCIAL MEDIA:

2.1 Social Media Usage Please answer the following questions about your own <u>general</u> social media use.

2.1.1. Do you make use of Social Media Platforms?

○ Yes

○ No

2.1.2. What Social Media Platforms do you use? [Select as many as applicable]

☐ Facebook

☐ Twitter

- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ LinkedIn
- ☐ Pinterest
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ Google+
- ☐ Flickr & Phanfare
- ☐ Blogging
- ☐ Snapchat

2.1.3. How often do you use these Social Media Platforms?

	Less that once a month	1 - 4 times a month	2-3 times a week	Less than 2 hours a day	More than 2 hours a day
Facebook	○	○	○	○	○
Twitter	○	○	○	○	○
YouTube	○	○	○	○	○
LinkedIn	○	○	○	○	○
Pinterest	○	○	○	○	○
Instagram	○	○	○	○	○
Google+	○	○	○	○	○
Flickr & Phanfare	○	○	○	○	○
Blogging	○	○	○	○	○
Snapchat	○	○	○	○	○

2.2. Social Media Usage related to the University of Pennsylvania/ North-West University:Please answer the following questions with regard to any official Penn/NWU Pukke's social media platform.

2.2.1 On which of the following platforms do you follow the University? [Select as many as applicable]

☐ Penn/NWU Pukke on Facebook

☐ Penn/NWU Pukke on Twitter

☐ Penn/NWU Pukke on Instagram

☐ Penn/NWU Pukke on LinkedIn

☐ Penn/NWU Pukke on YouTube

☐ Penn/NWU Pukke on Pinterest

☐ Penn on Flickr & Phanfare

☐ Penn/NWU Pukke Blogs

☐ None

3. SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS:

3.1. Please rate the university's social media accounts that you follow according to the following statements:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
3.1.1. Penn/NWU Pukke shares information on social media platforms	○	○	○	○	○
3.1.2. I find the information useful that Penn/NWU Pukke share on social media	○	○	○	○	○
3.1.3. Penn/NWU Pukke uses social media to spread information widely	○	○	○	○	○

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
3.1.4. I can comment, share and post on Penn/NWU Pukke's social media platforms	○	○	○	○	○
3.1.5. I feel involved with Penn/NWU Pukke, when I am using Penn/NWU Pukke's social media platforms	○	○	○	○	○
3.1.6. I experience a sense of transparency in what Penn/NWU Pukke posts and share on social media platforms	○	○	○	○	○
3.1.7. I feel informed when I read Penn/NWU Pukke's posts on social media	○	○	○	○	○
3.1.8. I feel empowered when I read Penn/NWU Pukke's posts on social media	○	○	○	○	○
3.1.9. Penn/NWU Pukke shares positive and negative stories on social media	○	○	○	○	○
3.1.10. Penn/NWU Pukke is responsible when using social media	○	○	○	○	○
3.1.11. My experience is positive when using Penn/NWU Pukke's social media	○	○	○	○	○

4. PENN/NWU PUKKE'S SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

4.1. Please rate how you experience the Penn/NWU Pukke's Social Media accounts that you follow according to the following statements:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
4.1.1. Penn/NWU Pukke gives me access to content	○	○	○	○	○
4.1.2. I feel that Penn/NWU Pukke is open about what they do on social media	○	○	○	○	○
4.1.3. I feel Penn/NWU Pukke's social media use is authentic	○	○	○	○	○
4.1.4. Penn/NWU Pukke's social media is a great way for me to network with other alums, businesses or organizations	○	○	○	○	○
4.1.5. I feel that I am sharing the University's norms and values	○	○	○	○	○
4.1.6. I feel like I am part of a community	○	○	○	○	○
4.1.7. I feel that I share resources with others	○	○	○	○	○
4.1.8. I feel there is co-operation between social media users and Penn/NWU Pukke	○	○	○	○	○
4.1.9. Penn/NWU Pukke's social media is co-	○	○	○	○	○

ordinated across platforms

5. RELATIONSHIP WITH PENN/NWU PUKKE

5.1. Please rate the following statements with regards the relationship you have with Penn/NWU Pukke:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
5.1.1. Whenever Penn/NWU Pukke makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about its alumni	○	○	○	○	○
5.1.2. Penn/NWU Pukke can be relied on to keep its promises	○	○	○	○	○
5.1.3. Penn/NWU Pukke does not mislead its alumni	○	○	○	○	○
5.1.4. Penn/NWU Pukke is known to be successful at the things it tries to do	○	○	○	○	○
5.1.5. Penn/NWU Pukke believes alumni opinions are legitimate	○	○	○	○	○
5.1.6. Penn/NWU Pukke really listens to what alumni have to say	○	○	○	○	○
5.1.7. When I have an opportunity to interact with Penn/NWU Pukke, I feel that I have some sense of control over the situation	○	○	○	○	○
5.1.8. Penn/NWU Pukke won't cooperate with me	○	○	○	○	○
5.1.9. I believe alumni have an influence on the decision-makers of Penn/NWU Pukke	○	○	○	○	○
5.1.10. Penn/NWU Pukke is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to me	○	○	○	○	○
5.1.11. I feel a sense of loyalty to Penn/NWU Pukke	○	○	○	○	○
5.1.12. Both Penn/NWU Pukke and I benefit from the relationship	○	○	○	○	○
5.1.13. I am happy in my interactions with Penn/NWU Pukke	○	○	○	○	○
5.1.14. I enjoy dealing with Penn/NWU Pukke	○	○	○	○	○
5.1.15. Penn/NWU Pukke treats alumni fairly	○	○	○	○	○
5.1.16. Penn/NWU Pukke feels it is important to build a good relationship with alumni	○	○	○	○	○
5.1.17. If I make a financial contribute or volunteer, Penn/NWU Pukke thanks me in some	○	○	○	○	○

way

6. Do you have any other comments on Penn/NWU Pukke's way of using Social Media?

ADDENDUM B

LETTERS FROM PENN AND NWU PUKKE

Dr. Tanya le Roux

Skool vir Kommunikasiestudies & African Centre for Disaster Studies (ACDS)

NWU (Potchefstroomkampus)

Privaatsak X 6001

Potchefstroom, 2520

Suid-Afrika

6 August 2015

Dear Dr. le Roux,

I am writing this letter to confirm the University of Pennsylvania's participation in a research study being conducted by your student, Jimmy Pressly, entitled "Building and Maintaining Relationships with Alumni through Social Media: A comparative study between University of Pennsylvania and North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus." He has our permission to use the information he receives from interviews and from the survey administered to Penn alumni. I would also like to confirm that University of Pennsylvania will have access to all of the data and information from the study when it is completed.

Please let me know if we can be of further assistance. I can be reached by e-mail at ebetz@upenn.edu.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Elise M. Betz

Executive Director, Alumni Relations

University of Pennsylvania

Dr. Tanya le Roux

Skool vir Kommunikasiestudies & African Centre for Disaster Studies (ACDS)

NWU (Potchefstroomkampus)

Privaatsak X 6001

Potchefstroom, 2520

Suid-Afrika

28 August 2015

Dear Dr. le Roux,

I am writing this letter to confirm the North-West University Potchefstroom Campus participation in a research study being conducted by your student, Jimmy Pressly, entitled "Building and Maintaining Relationships with Alumni through Social Media: A comparative study between University of Pennsylvania and North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus." He has our permission to use the information he receives from interviews and from the survey administered to NWU Potchefstroom Campus Alumni. I would also like to confirm that North-West University Potchefstroom Campus will have access to all of the data and information from the study when it is completed.

Please let me know if we can be of further assistance. I can be reached by e-mail at theo.cloete@nwu.ac.za

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Theo Cloete

Director, Marketing and Communication

North-West University

Potchefstroom Campus

ADDENDUM C

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS OF PENN AND NWU PUKKE

SNS	University of Pennsylvania SNS's		
	Name	URL	QR code
Facebook	Penn Alumni	https://www.facebook.com/pennalumni?fref=ts	
Twitter	@Pennalumni	https://twitter.com/Pennalumni?lang=en	
Instagram	Penalumni	https://instagram.com/pennalumni/	

LinkedIn Page	University of Pennsylvania	https://www.linkedin.com/edu/school?id=19328&trk=edu-cp-title	
LinkedIn Group	University of Pennsylvania Alumni	https://www.linkedin.com/grps?home=&gid=58092&trk=anet_ug_hm	
Youtube	University of Pennsylvania	https://www.youtube.com/user/UnivPennsylvania	

SNS	North-West University Potchefstroom Campus		
	Name	**URL**	**QR code**
Facebook	NWU-Puk Alumni	https://www.facebook.com/pukalumni?fref=ts	
Twitter	@NWUPUK	https://twitter.com/?lang=en	
Instagram	Nwupukke	https://instagram.com/nwupukke/	

ADDENDUM D

Email blurb

Social media is the new way of communicating, the new way of storytelling and it is the new way of building relationships with one another. Most business has adapted to social media and so has lots of higher education institutions. But are these relationships effective? Do they really work as well as we think?

My Masters study in communication focusses on exactly that. I am exploring the theme of using social media to build relationships with stakeholders. More specifically, using social media to build relationships with the alumni of University of Pennsylvania and the North-West University, South Africa. Comparing these two will show what works and what doesn't and will hopefully lead to theory building on this issue.

Thank you for contributing to this study and giving your insights. Your opinion makes my research possible.

Jimmy Pressly