

Relationship management with conservation volunteers: A strategic communication approach

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ABSTRACT

Communication plays an important role within an interdisciplinary problem-solving context such as nature conservation. Within this context, conservation organisations depend on, and compete for, volunteers to help them reach their conservation goals. Therefore, the relationship with volunteers, built and maintained through communication, becomes crucial.

Conservation volunteerism is a subsector of ecotourism where organisations such as Shamwari Conservation Experience (SCE) offer individuals opportunities to act as conservation volunteers, to help reach the organisation's conservation goals. These volunteers do not only provide labour input for the organisation, but also assist the organisation financially as they pay for the volunteer opportunity. Such conservation organisations attract volunteers through their communication. Importantly, the volunteers then function as communicators of behalf of the organisation during and after their stay at the venue. Since communication is essential in this context, the present study investigated how relationships with volunteers can be managed at SCE through a strategic approach to conservation communication.

Viewed from the domain of corporate communication management, the theoretical framework is based on the systems theory and two-way symmetrical communication. Specifically, it is argued that strategic conservation communication, as informed by the constructs of strategic communication management and stakeholder relationship management, could benefit conservation organisations.

Qualitative and quantitative data was gathered to elucidate the research problem. The aim was to assess how SCE manages its communication to and relationships with volunteers, and how volunteers assess SCE's communication and their relationship with SCE. To attain this aim, methodological triangulation was used. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with SCE managers and coordinators as well as a select number of volunteers, to gather qualitative data. That data were supplemented by results from a content analysis of SCE's Facebook Page. For quantitative data, self-administered questionnaires were distributed among volunteers to extract their viewpoints.

The present study found that SCE does not follow a specific approach for strategic communication about conservation matters in its management of stakeholders. However, SCE mostly is successful in managing volunteer relationships. The findings show that SCE volunteers are generally satisfied with their experience at SCE, where participants felt they contributed to

conservation activities and became more aware of conservation issues. Noticeably, volunteers gave a positive assessment of the way which SCE manages their relationships with the organisation.

This study also found that there is a strong focus within the organisation on conservation but not necessarily on conservation communication. The data also indicated that strategic conservation communication could be employed to help conservation organisations reach their goals and build sound relationships with volunteers. This may give them an edge within a competitive voluntourism market.

Keywords:

Strategic conservation communication, stakeholder relationship management, conservation volunteerism, volunteering, volunteer coordinators, Shamwari Conservation Experience (SCE)

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The achieving of conservation goals and objectives is not based solely on a scientific, biological foundation, but rather concerns a multi-disciplinary field (Primack, 2008:5). This field is influenced by social sciences disciplines such as education and communication (Hunter & Gibbs, 2007:14). According to Bogart *et al.* (2008:441), critical practical implementation actions from various disciplines are necessary to achieve conservation outcomes. This implies engaging individuals and social systems such as conservation volunteers that are critical to the success of programmes that improve environmental quality (Guiney & Oberhauser, 2009:187), through an effective process of strategic communication. The organisation examined in the present study is Shamwari Conservation Experience (hereafter abbreviated as SCE). This is a specific example that highlights the important contribution of volunteers to strengthen conservation goals.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study builds on a framework based on the following theoretical designs: the systems and two-way symmetrical communication perspective, strategic conservation communication, as informed by strategic communication management theory, and stakeholder relationship management theory.

According to Ledingham and Bruning (1998:56), the function of strategic communication management is to determine the needs of the stakeholders and to understand their opinions and the issues that influence them. This will help form a mutual understanding and strong relationship between the organisation and its stakeholders. Understood from a conservation point of view in particular, successful conservation programmes rely on a better understanding of volunteers, and ways to engage audiences effectively. In this sense, conservation goals can be communicated effectively to reach success (Bussell & Forbes, 2002:244; Jacobson, 2009:7).

Effective communication is one of the most critical strategies for conservation (Jacobson, 2009:7). Conservation goals focus on biological problems, but the solutions lie with people. Therefore, conservation strategies must focus on affecting people's beliefs and behaviour toward the environment. Communication on conservation is an important tool utilised to influence people and thereby attain the intended conservation goals (Jacobson, 2009:6).

At first glance the assumption would be that volunteers provide only financial assistance and is a source of labour within conservation efforts. However, in reality, volunteers have a far more significant role in the success of conservation programmes. This societal group develop into ambassadors and communication channels that reach other stakeholder regarding the conservation programme for which they volunteer. In this regard, they inspire and encourage others to participate in these programmes and distribute the SCE message. As mentioned previously, SCE is one of many conservation programmes in South Africa that rely on volunteers to achieve its conservation objectives. Therefore, since stakeholder relationships with volunteers are crucial and volunteers become a central communication channel for communication with other stakeholders, this study is set within the communication management and environmental communication domain.

1.2.1 A systems perspective

The purpose of public relations (hereafter abbreviated as PR¹) is to help organisations adjust and adapt to their environment and to the transitions occurring within their milieu. These include social change, political movements, cultural shifts, the natural environment and technological development. Organisations must accept the public responsibility imposed by an interdependent society, communicate with publics that are distant and diverse, and integrate with the communities they serve (Cutlip *et al.*, 2002:2).

According to Cutlip *et al.* (2002:15), a systems perspective is used to analyse and understand PR. In the process, mutually dependent relationships are established and maintained between an organisation and its publics. The concepts of adjustment and adaption, as advocated by the systems theory, are central in strategic communication management.

Cutlip *et al.* (2002:15) defines a system as a set of interacting units that endure through time within an established boundary. This is done by responding and adjusting to change pressures from the environment in order to achieve and maintain goal states. Generally, systems are viewed as either closed or open. A closed system is completely isolated from its environment and does not accept information or input from that sphere. Hence, there is no exchange of matter or energy (Cutlip *et al.*, 2002:21). An open system communicates and shares information freely with its environment; receives matter and energy openly, and has the potential for growth (Barker *et al.*, 2001:20). Furthermore, the survival and growth of an open system depends on its experiences

¹ For the purpose of this study, the terms *communication management* and *PR* will be used interchangeably or in correlation with the cited source, where applicable. See section 2.3. for a further discussion.

and reactions to changes within its environment (Cutlip *et al.*, 2002:21). According to Cutlip *et al.* (2002:21), open systems exchange inputs and outputs through penetrable boundaries. These systems also adjust and adapt to counteract or accommodate environmental variations.

Moreover, no system is completely open or closed; rather relatively open or closed. Barker *et al.* (2001:22) states that self-regulation and inner control determines how the system reacts and adapts to the environment, based on feedback. According to Cutlip *et al.* (2002:23), feedback can be positive or negative, depending on the way the system responds. In this way, systems can adjust and adapt their goals, structures and processes according to the feedback they receive.

The organisation as a system can modify its conservation communication goals and messages to achieve mutually beneficial relationships with volunteers and to grow in an ever-changing environment. Furthermore, communication (or PR) management is influenced by the communication models organisations follow, which is informed by their worldviews. The world views applied in this study is discussed next.

1.2.2 The role of worldview in communication management

Grunig and White (1992:32) state that people, like the communication practitioners and organisations as collectives, have ideas, beliefs and assumptions about the world that effect how they practice communication management. These worldviews can be defined as a set of assumptions that practitioners form about phenomena such as ethics, human nature, religion, and politics, which then are labelled as either asymmetrical or symmetrical approaches (Deatherage & Hazleton, 1998:58). According to Deatherage and Hazleton (1998:57), asymmetrical and symmetrical worldviews influence the selection of PR models that are used. Deatherage and Hazleton (1998:58) indicate that practitioners adhering to an *asymmetrical* worldview seek to influence publics in a way that benefit the practitioner's organisation and not necessarily the public. Conversely, practitioners who follow a *symmetrical* worldview are supposed to have mutual understanding as a primary goal for PR. The asymmetrical worldview should influence the selection and use of asymmetrical models for PR, whereas symmetrical worldviews should influence the selection and use of a two-way symmetrical model (Deatherage & Hazleton, 1998:58).

Communication practitioners may have their own opinions regarding the management of communication. Nevertheless, they should manage communication (and follow a specific model) according to the organisation's social structure, culture, and worldview (Wiggill, 2009:42).

Deatherage and Hazleton (1998:58) identify different sets of beliefs and presuppositions that define the two worldviews as asymmetrical and symmetrical.

Asymmetrical worldview: This is characterised by the following presuppositions (Deatherage & Hazleton, 1998:58):

1. *Internal orientation:* Members of the organisation have an external view of the organisation and cannot perceive it as outsiders do.
2. *Closed system:* Information is set to flow away from the organisation and not into it.
3. *Efficiency:* Leaders of the organisation are believed to know best and have superior knowledge about members of the public.
4. *Conservatism:* Change is undesirable and modification should be resisted.
5. *Tradition:* Past practices provide stability and maintain the organisation's culture.
6. *Central authority:* Top management should maintain power throughout the communication process.

Symmetrical worldview: On the flipside of the coin, this approach has the following characteristics (Deatherage & Hazleton, 1998:58-59):

1. *Interdependence:* Organisations cannot isolate themselves from their environment (cf. the systems theory).
2. *Open system:* The organisation is open to interaction with other systems and information is exchanged freely.
3. *Moving equilibrium:* Organisations as systems strive toward an equilibrium with other systems and its environments.
4. *Equity:* Employees should be given equal opportunity and stakeholders can provide valuable input into an organisation.
5. *Autonomy:* People are more constructive, innovative and self-fulfilled when they have the autonomy to influence their own behaviour and are not controlled by others.
6. *Innovation:* New ideas and flexible thinking is supported.
7. *Decentralisation of management:* Managers should coordinate rather than dictate, and this devolution increases autonomy, employees' satisfaction and innovation.
8. *Responsibility:* People and organisations should be concerned with the effect their behaviour has on others.
9. *Conflict resolution:* Conflict should be resolved through negotiation, communication and compromise, and not through force or manipulation.

10. *Interest-group liberalism*: In opposition to classical liberalism that champions the governing body's interests and can be closed-minded. The new liberalism views the political system as a mechanism for open negotiation among interest groups, and expects citizen groups to champion interests of ordinary people against unresponsive governing and corporate structures.

Bruning and Lambe (2008:142) point out that a two-way symmetrical approach requires research and communication. Therefore, PR scholars and practitioners focus on interpersonal communication and stakeholder relationship management to understand how worldviews affect relationships between organisations and their stakeholders. It is important to steer PR away from a journalistic approach (with publicity as primary focus) to a relationship-building approach, where initiation, development, enhancement and maintenance of mutually beneficial relationships are key. This will help develop a theory of communication management (Bruning & Lambe, 2008:142).

It is clear from the discussion above that an organisation's worldview determines which communication model will be practiced and what the PR practitioner's role is in aligning strategic communication with the business's needs. Practitioners are required to be more interactive with key members/stakeholders and should understand two aspects: how stakeholder groups view the world, and how stakeholders' and organisational views harmonise (Bruning & Lambe, 2008:143). When practitioners possess this type of information, they can design programmes, strategies, and initiatives in sync with their stakeholders' needs (Bruning & Lambe, 2008:143). This will help them manage their communication with stakeholders strategically. From this starting point, management of strategic conservation communication and stakeholder relationship management will be discussed below.

1.2.3 From strategic communication management to strategic conservation communication

According to Hallahan *et al.* (2007:3-4), strategic communication management examines organisational communication from an integrated, multi-disciplinary perspective. According to this view, management, marketing, advertising and PR form part of the various professional fields that engage in the development, dissemination and assessment of communication on behalf of an organisation and its causes. These mentioned disciplines communicate purposefully to advance the organisation's mission – which is the essence of strategic communication management. Organisations compete for stakeholders' attention in a constantly changing environment and have to make strategic decisions about the level and nature of resources they will devote to get that attention (Hallahan *et al.*, 2007:4). It is, therefore, crucial to identify, manage and understand

issues, behaviour and opinions of stakeholders/publics. This help the organisations adapt to and enrich its environment (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:56). The result is mutually beneficial relationships with internal and external stakeholders on whom the organisation depends to meet its goals (Steyn, 2000:3).

Hallahan *et al.* (2007:10) indicate that people do not necessarily differentiate between the various forms of communication practiced by an organisation. Thus, all communication activities should be considered and practiced from a strategic and integrated perspective. Finally, the goal of strategic communication management by an organisation is to influence the way in which information is provided, how relationships with stakeholders are maintained, and how communication contributes to the organisation's purpose.

Steyn (2007:139) points out that strategic PR management (i.e. strategic communication management) views PR as a strategic managerial function with a directive to function at the strategic level of an organisation. In its strategic role, PR help organisations adapt to its societal and stakeholder environment. This is done by focusing on the formulation of strategies aimed at strategic stakeholders. In this process, societal issues and publics are included that emerge around an issue. To serve the organisation and the public interest, Steyn (2007:139) mentions that PR influences management to address reputation and align the organisation's goals and strategies with the values and norms of their stakeholders and surrounding society.

Conservation is one such an issue that has received increased attention. According to Cox (2010:1), communication about the environment has increased dramatically: from news about global warming and TV programmes showcasing loss of biodiversity, to online environmental blogging. The ways people are talking about the environment are also changing due to the global concern about the environmental changes affecting human lives. Conservation communication refers to these forms of communication about environmental and conservation issues. Such communication is used to influence conservation policy, change people's behaviours, gather funds, and recruit volunteers to assist with conservation problems and programmes (Jacobson, 2009:6).

According to Bogart *et al.* (2008:444), conservation actions are driven by people's values concerning nature. Thus, conservation solutions entail an interdisciplinary problem-solving approach where communication strategies play a key role in the implementation thereof. Jacobson (2009:7) posits that successful conservation programmes rely on understanding how to engage audiences in order to reach conservation goals effectively. If conservation efforts are to succeed, communication initiatives must build on the existing positive attitudes towards the

environment and the public's knowledge of conservation. The opinions and actions of concerned individuals and groups influence environmental agendas and the survival of conservation institutions (Jacobson, 2009:8). Therefore, conservation organisations should build and rely on healthy relations with the public. Jacobson (2009:23) states that conservation communication involves source, message, media and audiences with the view to expand environmental support for the organisation's goals. Recognising these elements is crucial for the development of communication programmes that target stakeholders, communicate conservation issues, and foster support for conservation efforts.

There are numerous opportunities in which scholars of environmental communication can work alongside communicators on specific campaigns. They can develop joint communication strategies that can be observed and measured in terms of targeting specific social and cultural groups (Anderson, 2015:380). The field of strategic environmental communication brings together scholars from diverse academic disciplines. In this regard, Anderson (2015:382) stresses the importance of finding a creative and collaborative way to bridge divides between these fields, in order to influence policy.

1.2.4 Stakeholder relationship management

An organisation should be clear on who their stakeholders are and how organisational decisions can affect the stakeholders (Grunig *et al.*, 1992, Grunig *et al.*, 2002). The organisation should also know how to address issues that stakeholders raise since this action creates a mutual understanding and a beneficial environment for both parties (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:548). Ledingham and Bruning (1998:56) state that stakeholder relationship management is conceptualised as a management function that utilises communication strategically to develop long-term relationships between organisations and their stakeholders, rather than relying on activities designed to only enhance organisational image (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:56-57).

Hon and Grunig (1999:20-21) distinguish two types of stakeholder relationships that PR programmes (strategic communication management) strive for:

- *Exchange*: One party provides benefits to the other since the other has provided benefits in the past, or will do so in future.
- *Communal*: Both parties provide benefits to each other. They are concerned for the welfare of the other, although they may not receive anything in return.

In addition an organisations' long-term relationship with key stakeholders can be measured by focusing on a further four existing elements of relationships (Hon & Grunig, 1999:2-3), namely, control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, and commitment. These elements apply to both exchange and communal relationships (mentioned above). In order for organisations to strengthen relationships between themselves and stakeholders, the relationship must be maintained. There are various ways in which relationships can be built and maintained (Hon & Grunig, 1999:14). These strategies include: access, openness, positivity, assurances, networking and the sharing of tasks.

The above-mentioned aspects constitute the theoretical framework for the present study. Table 1.1 below is a representation of this theoretical conceptualisation. The theoretical framework is discussed in Chapter 2.

Table 1.1: Overview of theoretical framework

Title	Relationship management with conservation volunteers: A strategic communication approach		
Domains	Communication management, Environmental communication		
Paradigms	Systems theory, Two-way symmetrical communication		
Meta-theories	Corporate communication management, Conservation communication		
Theories	Strategic communication management	Stakeholder relationship management	Strategic conservation communication

1.3 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

For the purpose of this study, it is important to describe and understand what 'volunteering' entails and explore the volunteer landscape in South Africa, as well as the background of the organisation.

1.3.1 Explaining volunteering

Volunteering can be defined as an activity that (i) involves spending time unpaid, (ii) doing something that aims to benefit the environment, individuals or groups other than, or in addition to, close relatives, and (iii) that are carried out as an act of free will (Buizer *et al.*, 2012:154; O'Brien *et al.*, 2010:528). Volunteering can be conducted in various sectors such as healthcare, sport and education. However, in the present study volunteering is placed within the context of environmental/conservation volunteering. Environmental volunteering can be defined as the

engagement of volunteers to achieve environmental gains with reference to practical environmental action such as conservation work (O'Brien *et al.*, 2010:529).

Buizer *et al.* (2012:154) distinguish formal from informal volunteering. Formal volunteering involves membership of an organisation or group, and informal volunteering is done individually, rather than through a particular organisation or group (Steinberg *et al.*, 2002:488).

According to Abell (2012:159), an important aspect of volunteering is the need for recognition, positive self-identity and the desire to belong to the organisation or project for which the help is being offered. Volunteering provides participants with increased environmental knowledge, positive reinforcement of existing values and a framework for future action (Abell, 2012:164). Abell (2012:166) asserts that volunteering should contribute to a positive identity for the volunteer; it should lead to a higher self-esteem, help the participant feel valued, and provide opportunities to use and develop existing knowledge. Within a volunteer programme there is an ongoing process of learning. Buizer *et al.* (2012:155) points out that volunteers can be recognised as the producers of different kinds of knowledge, rather than mere workers and receivers of knowledge.

1.3.2 Conservation volunteerism in South Africa

Conservation tourism is a rapidly growing subsector of ecotourism that focuses on paying volunteers as active participants in conservation projects. Volunteering was once the preserve of charities but has evolved to private companies seeking to create income by selling international conservation work (volunteer opportunities) to tourists as a commodity (Cousins *et al.*, 2009:1).

Cousins *et al.* (2009:1) states that the growth of ecotourism over the past decade has demonstrated the scale of demand for holidays, which promises a positive impact on the environment. Conservation tourism is a fusion of ecotourism and volunteer tourism (also known as *voluntourism* or *volunteerism*) where participants pay to work on their own time without remuneration on a conservation project (Cousins *et al.*, 2009:1). Volunteer tourism is one of the fastest growing alternatives to tourism and is an interactive experience where individuals volunteer in an organised way, and assist in projects that, for example, restore certain environments, alleviate poverty in local communities and conduct research on animal population and ecology.

Volunteers seek an experience that is mutually beneficial. On the one hand, by joining a specific project, the experience/organisation contributes to the volunteer's personal development. On the other hand, importantly, the volunteers have a direct and positive effect on the natural, social and

economic environments in which they operate (Cousins *et al.*, 2009:1). Volunteer experiences often cross the boundary between work and leisure, and this combination attracts young volunteers in particular. Conservation tourism can also be viewed as part of the growing demand from Western tourists for more proactive and emotive experiences. This caters for candidates who are interested in conservation, wish to make a difference, participate for personal and professional development, want to meet like-minded people or have a passion for specific sites and animals.

Volunteer opportunities are marketed as 'tourism with a conscience' or 'conservation holidays'. In this way, tourism is attracting financial and human capital for conservation efforts and research. The importance of coordinators such as those working for SCE cannot be emphasised enough. These organisations provide the expertise and guidance for each project the volunteers undertake. Coordinators also have to convey the right conservation message on why a task is important and relevant, and at the same time ensure that volunteers are able to collect quality data.

Cousins' (2007) studied the role of UK-based operators for conservation tourism and provides insight into the UK's conservation tourism industry. Cousins' (2007:1029) findings show that the UK's outbound conservation tourism industry is increasing year by year. Similar data of the South African conservation volunteerism landscape is lacking and in need of more studies and research. Basic information is not available, for example, on the number of conservation volunteer organisations in South Africa, or the number of international volunteers it receives each year.

1.3.3 Background to Shamwari Conservation Experience

Shamwari Conservation Experience (SCE) is part of and situated on the Shamwari Game Reserve (SGR) in South Africa. SCE operates under the SGR umbrella, but is managed by its own operations team with partial oversight by top management from SGR.

The conservation efforts of SGR consist of six main departments, namely the wildlife, reclaiming land, ecology, animal health, breeding centre, and security departments (Anon, 2014). SCE's volunteering programme works in conjunction with the various departments to conserve the environment and wildlife, and to uplift the local communities surrounding SGR. Hundreds of volunteers and students from across the world participate in conservation efforts on the reserve and their visits range from a minimum of two weeks to three months. Individuals can either come as a 'Gap year' volunteer, with a specialised group, or join a veterinary work experience course

(Anon, 2015). It is important to note that volunteers and students joining the volunteer programme pay for the experience, boarding and food, and do not receive any payment.

Volunteer experiences for individuals take participants behind the scenes and expose them to various aspects of conservation management on the reserve. Tasks vary from physical work (restoration, game capture and rehabilitation of reserve landscape) and monitoring animals, to lectures or assisting at the Animal Rehabilitation Centre (ARC) (Anon, 2015). Under the guidance of experienced coordinators, volunteers participate in daily activities and tasks as set out by the program. SCE depends on the volunteers to conduct their conservation work as organisation effectively.

Furthermore, because of the size and scope of the reserve and its conservation activities, within all departments permanent workers are not sufficient to deal with the amount of work that needs to be done on a daily basis. SGR has a handful of resident labourers (approx. 15-25 people) who work on a permanent basis to maintain the Reserve's over 25 000 hectares' landscape. Volunteers, who assist these workers, usually have little to no experience of certain types of conservation work when they arrive at SCE. Thus, in certain situations such as game capture, volunteers will work alongside experienced staff (other than their coordinators). Permanent workers are available for the more skilled areas of maintenance. This includes building fences, fighting fires and capturing game where the volunteers help fill the gaps left by a lack of staff.

It is important to note that students and volunteers distribute the SCE message to other stakeholders on behalf of SCE, as well as SGR, and act as ambassadors for the conservation experience.

1.3.3.1 Roles of SCE employees

The present investigation does not consider SGR's management, but only focuses on the management operating at SCE. In this regard, the roles of employees can be listed as: Marketing and Product Development Manager, Operations Manager, Senior Volunteer Coordinator, Student Facility Manager, Volunteer Coordinators and Social Media Coordinator. Each of these titles is occupied by different people and entails different responsibilities. Only the roles and tasks relating to the communication of SCE will be highlighted:

- *Marketing and Product Development Manager:* Is in charge of all marketing of SCE, and fulfils the role of top manager who liaisons with other top managers from SGR and report SCE's operations to those managers. He plans how the SCE brand can be expanded as

well as where and how to add a product to the SCE brand. Other responsibilities entail networking with tour operators, hosting at site inspections, and tourism exhibitions.

- *Operations Manager:* Amongst other tasks, this individual has the role of welcoming volunteers when they arrive and is usually the first contact the volunteers have with SCE. The Operations Manager and the Senior Volunteer Coordinator allocate coordinators and vehicles to student groups and volunteers, and oversee operations at SCE.
- *Senior Volunteer Coordinators:* These two officials are responsible for all volunteer-related activities and its operations (including vehicles) with other coordinators. These persons oversee all programmes designed for groups and volunteers, and attend meetings with the SGR wildlife team, in order to relay messages from the SCE team, and vice versa. One of the Senior Volunteer Coordinators operates in the south of the reserve, and the other in the northern section.
- *Volunteer Coordinators:* They are responsible for and lead all daily activities with their assigned volunteers and student groups. The Volunteer Coordinators are allocated to the group for the duration of their stay. The number of volunteers present at SCE will determine the number of coordinators and vehicles utilised on the reserve. The coordinators give an induction to new volunteers and student groups to familiarise participants with the programme, activities and rules of the reserve. Their responsibility is to communicate all activities to volunteers and students, for example, why they perform a task and what the following days' work will entail. In this regard, the coordinators are an important link in the communication process, seeing that they provide the following important input: build relationships with volunteers, communicate conservation and environmental messages, teach participants about conservation problems, portray SCE values, explain why activities are done and what participants can expect during their stay.
- *Social Media Coordinator:* This person is responsible for the SCE content on social media. This entails writing blogs, and taking pictures and videos to portray the conservation experience. This person spends extensive time monitoring what is said about SCE on social media. Such a coordinator is also crucial in the process of building relationships with participants, by joining the volunteers on activities and encouraging them to be more active on social media. The Social Media Coordinator and the Marketing and Product Development Manager often work together on communication material such as videos for

tourism exhibitions. Both managers also network with various organisations online, for example with tour operators and universities planning trips to SCE.

SCE staff often has a complex relationship with volunteers, seeing that several outcomes depend on the interpersonal relations that SCE builds with participants. These outcomes include: achieving conservation goals, messaging conservation communication and satisfying participants' needs. The coordinators are key in this process as they educate participants, relay the organisation's messages and are responsible to create and execute the programme and experience.

1.3.3.2 Nature of SCE stakeholders

Both the individual volunteers and student groups are important to the success of SCE. Student groups that frequent SCE seem to consist mostly of candidates from UK-based Schools, Colleges and Universities. They join the experience as part of a module or work course for their respective degrees or qualifications. Each group has its own reason for joining. The reasons range from doing research at SGR to learning more about ecology, ecosystems and biodiversity. Other groups join SCE as part of a holiday abroad, to gain life experience and see the world, or partake in the Vet Eco Experience groups with participants from around the world. SCE's individual volunteer base represent various nationalities, such as British, American, Australian and Swiss, to name but a few.

SCE's stakeholders can further be classified as current participants (both volunteers and individuals part of a group), ex-participants and potential or future participants. In other words, they are those who have booked to join the programme, or are interested in volunteering, or those who merely support the programme. The relationship that SCE builds with each group is essential to achieve their conservation goals and ensure continual support from participants. Current and ex-participants are crucial to SCE. They help spread the message about the programme, projects and people as part of this experience, through WOM.

SCE also relies on tour operators to recruit volunteers abroad. Therefore, it is important that SCE maintains a sound relationship with tour agents. This helps ensure that the right message reaches interested parties and that SCE's programme is highly visible among all other volunteering projects on offer. How SCE practitioners showcase their programme on various media, is crucial to retain their supporter base, and should also attract those who plan to volunteer in the future. This moves the focus to the recruitment and retention of volunteers, and thus to the problem statement as posited in the following section.

1.4 **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Firstly, according to Bussell and Forbes (2002:244-245), competition for volunteers has become more serious. Conservation organisations need to better understand their volunteers and build and maintain better relationships with the volunteers. These actions would attract meaningful numbers of volunteers and share the conservation message. Literature on communication management suggests that volunteers and volunteering should be managed by a strategic conservation communication plan. In this regard, strategic communication comprises the following aspects:

- Purposeful use of communication messaging and channels (Hallahan, 2007:3).
- Managing volunteer issues and adapting to the changing environment (Steyn, 2000:3).
- Managing and improving the quality of the relationship between the organisation and its volunteers (Grunig, 1992, 2002).
- Determining how the organisation can manage volunteer issues proactively to achieve cooperation and reach mutual beneficial relationships with them (Steyn, 2000:4).

Secondly, volunteering should be seen as a channel through which conservation messages are distributed and knowledge is exchanged on behalf of SCE. Asah and Blahna (2013:867) explain that conservation volunteers provide services that help organisations attain conservation goals in spite of financial constraints. Furthermore, volunteers should be recognised as the producers of various forms of knowledge, instead of mere workers and receivers of knowledge (Buizer *et al.* 2012:155). Volunteers thus become ambassadors and communicators of the conservation programme on behalf of the organisation by their use of different media. SCE are unable to control the messages that volunteers communicate both in a personal capacity and online (social media), but can influence those messages by establishing a strong relationship with the volunteers.

In order for SCE to survive and achieve their conservation objectives, they need volunteers. Furthermore, SCE's volunteering programme competes against other conservation programmes that recruit volunteers to join their programmes. If organisations such as SCE, fail to recruit, retain and build mutual beneficial relationships with volunteers, it will inevitably result in failed conservation actions. This issue introduces the research questions, which are formulated in the following section.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions consist of general research question and specific research questions:

1.5.1 General research question

From the above-mentioned problem statement the following general research question can be formulated:

How can relationships with volunteers be managed at Shamwari Conservation Experience through a strategic conservation communication approach?

The general research question flows into specific research questions that address the problem statement in more detail.

1.5.2 Specific research questions

The following specific research questions could be deduced:

1. How can relationships with volunteers be managed through a strategic approach to conservation communication, according to the literature?
2. To what extent does Shamwari Conservation Experience manage volunteer relationships by applying strategic conservation communication management?
3. How do volunteers experience the extent to which Shamwari Conservation Experience apply strategic conservation communication in managing relationships with them?

1.6 RESEARCH AIMS

The present study has general and specific research aims, which are posited below.

1.6.1 General research aim

The general research aim can be formulated as follows:

Determine how Shamwari Conservation Experience can manage volunteer relationships through a strategic conservation communication approach.

1.6.2 Specific research aims

From the general aim, the following specific research aims can be inferred:

1. Understand how relationships with volunteers can be managed effectively through a strategic approach to conservation communication, by means of a literature study.
2. Determine to what extent Shamwari Conservation Experience manages volunteer relationships in applying strategic conservation communication, by interviewing management and conducting a content analysis of its Facebook Page.
3. Determine through questionnaires to volunteers and semi-structured interviews with a selected number of volunteers, to what extent they experience Shamwari Conservation Experience's application of strategic conservation communication in managing relationships with them.

From the theoretical framework, problem statement and research questions, the following main theoretical arguments can be formulated.

1.7 MAIN THEORETICAL ARGUMENTS

The main theoretical arguments follow certain trajectories, as expounded below.

- A systems approach is used to analyse and understand PR. This implies mutually dependent relationships that are established and maintained between an organisation and its publics. The system theory explains the structure and operation of organisations and their interaction with the environment. The mentioned theory defines an organisation as a set of parts (or subsystems) that interact within a boundary and which respond and adjust to the environment outside the boundary. This provides a useful theoretical underpinning for the role of PR since it indicates how an organisation's survival and prosperity depend on relationships within itself and with its environment. SCE as a system can modify its conservation-directed communication goals and messages to achieve mutually beneficial relationships with volunteers as external stakeholders (Barker *et al.*, 2001:20; Cutlip *et al.*, 2002:21-23).
- Two-way symmetrical communication is key to an improved understanding between an organisation and its stakeholders. This entails conversation, conflict resolution, and negotiation to find a win-win situation for all parties involved. Two-way communication help

reach an accommodating balance between parties. This is where the needs of the other party are taken into account and where feedback facilitates mutual understanding of each party's position. Two-way communication allows organisations to adjust to changes within their environments and to address stakeholder concerns and issues, on which they depend to reach their goals (Dozier *et al.*, 1995:57; Fawkes, 2012:36; Grunig *et al.*, 1995:169).

- According to Steyn (2000:3), the emphasis in strategic communication management is on identifying and managing issues and stakeholders/publics. By understanding and managing volunteers and the issues surrounding them, an organisation can foster and manage mutually beneficial relationships through strategic communication. Strategic communication includes the following aspects: audience analysis, goal setting, message strategy, channel choice and programme assessment.
- Conservation communication is used to influence conservation policy, change people's behaviour, gather funds and recruit volunteers for conservation matters and programmes (Jacobson, 2009:6). This also entails effective communication of conservation issues, activities and ways to solve environmental problems. The focus is on ways that messaging can help create awareness and gain support for conservation. Strategic communication on conservation can, therefore, assist an organisation in various ways: drawing up plans for conservation goals, reaching key stakeholders, gaining and keeping their support and ascertaining the suitable messages of conservation communication to ensure positive outcomes for both the organisation and stakeholders.
- Through stakeholder relationship management and by building communal relationships, the organisation can gain trust and support from the volunteers. According to Abell (2012:166), volunteers will get involved and identify with a project so closely that others they communicate with will recognise their positive experience of the project. In other words, when volunteers become emotionally engaged in conservation or with the programme in which they partake, they can communicate potentially positive messages about the organisation. Volunteering helps develop a positive identity for the volunteer. For this reason, stakeholder relationship management as part of strategic communication is essential to encourage the stakeholders' loyalty towards the programme.

After discussing the main theoretical arguments as basis, the research approach for the study will be explained next.

1.8 RESEARCH APPROACH

Triangulation can imply collecting data by using different types of sampling, analysing data through more than one investigator, or from two or more theoretical and conceptual perspectives (Du Plooy, 2009:40-41). The present study made use of triangulation as research approach. In this case, it means using both qualitative and quantitative research methods to examine the same phenomenon. Such an approach is referred to as triangulation or mixed-methods research (Benoit & Holbert, 2008:623; Du Plooy, 2009:40). Triangulation is used to increase reliability and validity in the study, seeing that both the qualitative and quantitative methods can compensate for mutual shortcomings, and are applied best when they complement each other (Benoit & Holbert, 2008:622).

Triangulation enables the researcher to study complex research problems, allowing for greater diversity of views that a single research method cannot offer. Therefore, it allows in-depth understanding of a research problem. Combining the two research methods can provide a richer understanding of the given occurrence and can provide deeper insights.

1.9 RESEARCH METHODS

The methods used in the present research are a literature study, to examine research related to the topic, and an empirical study that collects data to answer the research questions. These questions were examined by employing the following methods: semi-structured interviews with management of SCE and volunteers; a content analysis of SCE's online Facebook communication output; and self-administered questionnaires to students and individual volunteers.

1.9.1 Literature study

A literature study is necessary to determine prior research on the subject that the present study investigated. By analysing literature, theories, concepts and applying those elements, the researcher gained a better understanding of the conservation volunteer environment and strategic conservation communication.

A literature study was used to examine existing literature on the usage of stakeholder relationship management and strategic communication, and how SCE can apply it. The following databases were consulted to determine the availability of literature for the purpose of the research;

- Catalogue of books: Ferdinand Postma Library (North-West University)
- NRF: Nexus
- EbscoHost: Communication & Mass Media, Environment Complete
- JSTOR
- GoogleScholar

An initial analysis indicated that sufficient material and literature were available to do research on these various topics, but no similar study could be found within a South African context.

Previous studies on strategic communication management and stakeholder relationship management form the foundation on which the present study's literature review is based. Several studies have been undertaken on the application of PR (Rhee, 2004) in two-way symmetrical communication, in order to build relationships with stakeholders (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Ledingham, 2003; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Strategic communication management stresses the importance of identifying and managing issues and stakeholders. This helps an organisation adapt to its environment and build mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders (Steyn, 2000; Steyn & Puth, 2000).

Limited research links conservation communication directly to more traditional communication designs such as two-way symmetrical and PR paradigms. Therefore, the present study conducted research on ways to employ strategic communication management and stakeholder relationship management as part of conservation communication. Several studies were found that investigate the relation between communication and environmental conservation (Cox, 2010; Cox & Pezzullo, 2016; Hunter & Gibbs, 2007; Jacobson, 2009). These studies indicate a need for clearer incorporation of strategic communication management and stakeholder relationship management theory, in order to support conservation efforts and achieve conservation goals. This study focused on ways these managerial strategies could be implemented in theory to build relationships with volunteers at SCE (Asah & Blahna, 2013; Bell, 2003; Lorimer, 2008; Measham & Barnett, 2007).

Measham and Barnett (2007) focused their research on improved understanding of volunteers' motivations in order to sustain the commitment of these individuals. The scholars determined motivations that underpin environmental volunteering. They found different modes of life where volunteering comes to the fore: activism, education, monitoring, restoration and sustainable living. These scholars argue further that certain environmental programmes are more sustainable in the long term. These are the programmes allowing volunteers to pursue their interests, increase

social contact and feel they are making a difference. Concern over the fine line between supporting and abusing volunteers to carry out tasks is also mentioned.

An organisation aiming for effective recruiting and retaining of volunteers, need a clear understanding of its target group (Bussell & Forbes, 2002). In this regard, Bussell and Forbes found that those who volunteer form part of an extremely diverse group of people who are active in a variety of contexts. This leads to a complex definition of volunteering, which includes the knowledge that people may volunteer for reasons other than selfless motives. Bell (2003) emphasises that effective communication is necessary to ensure that conservation objectives are met. This entails two-way communication between volunteers and staff and maintaining relationships by keeping volunteers in the loop through regular communication. It also requires well-briefed staff who understand the benefits of the volunteer programme for conservation, and open communication that allows feedback for a process of improvement.

1.9.2 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are associated with both quantitative and qualitative social research and are often used alongside other methods (Davies, 2006:157-158). According to Du Plooy (2009:198), semi-structured interviews contain standardised items, questions and/or a list of topics, but the interviewer can deviate and ask follow-up questions based on the respondent's replies. A semi-structured interview represents characteristics of both a structured questionnaire and an in-depth interview. The advantages of interviews are that they enable the interviewer to follow up and probe responses, motives and feelings. The potential added value for this method is that the recording of non-verbal communications, facial expressions and gestures can enrich the qualitative aspects of the data. The more guided or focused the interview, the less problematic the analysis (Davies, 2006:157-158).

Cohen *et al.* (2007:349) defines an interview as an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest. Interviews enable participants to discuss their interpretations of the research and express how they perceive situations to form their point of view. The order of the interview may be controlled while still providing space for spontaneity. The interviewer can also press the participant for complete answers and responses about complex issues. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005:146), interviews can produce significant and extensive information, and the researcher can pose questions on a wide variety of aspects. These include facts, people's beliefs and perspectives of the facts, feelings, motives, present and past behaviour, and conscious reasons for actions or experiences. Interviews are also likely to yield information the researcher did not plan for (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:146).

In the present study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the management and coordinators of SCE responsible for the volunteer programme. The aim was to determine how the organisation manages volunteer relationships by applying strategic conservation communication. In addition, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with volunteers and were selected randomly, after the populations were clustered according to 'student' or 'individual' volunteers. The researcher conducted interviews until data saturation was reached. Semi-structured interviews with volunteers helped add to the knowledge gained through the questionnaire.

The data were rich and relevant for an understanding of the mentioned organisation's strategic communication on conservation, and the relationship that was established and maintained with volunteers, although the data was not representative of the whole South African conservation volunteer population.

1.9.3 Content analysis of online media

Leedy and Ormrod (2005:142) explains content analysis as a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of material for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes or biases. The present study used a content analysis to examine how SCE applies strategic communication in order to manage relationships with volunteers. According to Guthrie and Abeysekera (2006:115), in this process qualitative information are organised into pre-defined categories in order to find patterns in the reporting of information.

Since people see, read and hear information in various ways, the actual message to recipients may differ from the message disclosed by a source. Content analysis cannot provide the complete intended message. However, this is a useful and important tool of documentary analysis, which provides objective and rigorous methods for investigating social meanings (Scott, 2006:41).

For the purpose of this study, a content analysis of SCE's Facebook page was used to determine how this organisation communicates to volunteers. By analysing SCE's Facebook Page, the researcher drew conclusions on whether their content supports stakeholder relationship management efforts within strategic conservation communication; also how this social network platform can be managed to achieve the desired relationship with volunteers.

1.9.4 Group, self-administered questionnaires

According to Du Plooy (2009:188), a survey helps the researcher collect large amounts of data about variables such as people's attitude, lifestyle, demographics and motives. In a group-

administered questionnaire the measuring instrument is administered directly to a sample of individuals as a group, at a single session and same venue. This helps the researcher explain the planned research and the objectives of the study, and answer possible queries from participants (Du Plooy, 2009:189-191).

A questionnaire is a set of carefully designed questions posed in exactly the same form to a group of people, in order to collect data about the same topic (McLean, 2006:252). In this regard, a questionnaire is a widely-used instrument to gather survey information, and provide structured, often numerical data (Cohen *et al.*, 2007:317). The present study used a combination of open and closed questions in the questionnaire to gain as much knowledge as possible on how volunteers perceive SCE's application of strategic communication on conservation, in order to manage relationships with them.

Cohen *et al.* (2007:321) point out that closed questions (multiple choice and rating scales) can be completed forthwith and are straightforward to code. However, the respondent cannot add any remarks or explanations. Furthermore, there is a risk that the categories may not be thorough and could contain possible bias. Open-ended questions enable participants to write a free account in their own terms. They have the freedom to explain and qualify their responses and avoid the limitations of pre-set categories of responses. This helps the researcher gain a fuller understanding of the given issue (Cohen *et al.*, 2007:321; McLean, 2006:253).

A questionnaire as measuring instrument was administered directly to a group of volunteers at a specific place, date and time. SCE's volunteering programme hosts between 800 -1 000 volunteers annually. The researcher selected 200 volunteers through cluster sampling, to complete the survey. The self-administered questionnaire was introduced by the researcher. The students and volunteers who joined the volunteer programme are from different backgrounds and cultures, which implied that English may not be their first language. In such a case, the presence of the researcher is helpful since queries or uncertainties can be taken up immediately with the questionnaire designer. Thus, the researcher, who is present, can explain the questions to the students and volunteers. This typically elicits a good response rate and ensures that all the questions are completed and filled in correctly (Cohen *et al.*, 2007:344).

The application of two research methods in this regard, added to the integrity of the study. To ensure the integrity of the study, the mentioned research methods were assessed for its reliability and validity as discussed below.

1.10 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Evaluation of studies is an essential prerequisite for applying the findings. Traditionally such evaluation has centred on assessing reliability and validity.

Reliability can be described as the degree of consistency or dependability with which an instrument measures the attributes it is designed to measure (Golafshani, 2003:598; Long & Johnson, 2000:30). The traditional understanding of reliability entails the standardising of data-collection instruments. Long and Johnson (2000:30-31) propose the following three tests for reliability of qualitative work:

- *Stability*: is reached when identical questions are posed to a respondent at different times, and produce consistent answers.
- *Consistency*: refers to the integrity of issues within a single interview or questionnaire, implying that the respondent's answer on a given topic remains consistent.
- *Equivalence*: is tested by using alternative forms of a question with the same meaning during a single interview, or when the observations by two researchers coincide.

In quantitative terms, *validity* means establishing whether a measuring instrument actually measures what it set out to do. In qualitative terms, an account is valid or true if it accurately represents those features of the phenomena that it intended to describe, explain or theorise (Golafshani, 2003:599; Long & Johnson 2000:31-32). Validity is established by focusing on three main aspects: content, criteria and constructs.

- *Content validity*: depends on sampling and the construction of an instrument, and measures the degree to which the whole phenomenon under investigation is addressed.
- *Criterion-related validity*: compares the instruments and findings with an established standard, to determine the correlation between measured performance and actual performance.
- *Construct validity*: considers the proximity of the instrument to the construct in question.

The research methods used in the present study were examined to establish its reliability and validity.

- A *literature study* on strategic conservation communication and stakeholder relationship management was the framework on which the questionnaire and interview questions were

based. This ensured that the collected data support the theoretical argument that launched the research.

- *Interviews:* To increase reliability, interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed for its qualitative content. The interviews of the managers were analysed based on the theoretical structure constructed from the literature study. The aim was to analyse how management and coordinators of SCE build relationships with volunteers and to what extent the literature study supported this analysis. To improve validity, interviews were triangulated with literature and the questionnaire filled out by the volunteers. Furthermore, interviews were not discussed with other managerial members or volunteers.
- *Content analysis:* A content analysis was done of SCE's Facebook Page and outcomes from the volunteers' questionnaire. This led to recommendations on ways to improve relationship management with volunteers through strategic communication on conservation matters. The procedure was systematic and the criteria used to categorise the content were unbiased to help ensure objectivity. The content was quantified by thematic units such as repeating patterns or ideas, which were interpreted in the context of the study and research questions.
- *Questionnaires:* Identical questionnaires were distributed to a group of volunteers, or students to complete. To avoid reluctance or inability of the respondents to provide information, a proper literature study was done to ensure the questions are designed properly. All respondents filled out the questionnaire voluntary. The content of the questionnaire was approved by the Statistical Consultation Service of the North-West University. This ensured that the questions do represent the particular concept accurately, and that there is a relationship between the question and constructs of the study. Questions and instructions were formulated clear, simple and unambiguous manner to avoid confusing the respondent and to ensure better understanding.

1.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present study was conducted according to the ethical standards as expected from the NWU. In addition, the study was considered by the Faculty of Arts and NWU's Research Ethics Committees, after which it received the ethical clearance number: NWU-00261-15-A7. No further special conditions for the study were set out by the indicated ethics committees. The ethical considerations are discussed in more detail in Section 3.5.

1.12 CHAPTER LAYOUT

The study was reported in terms of the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction and problem statement

Chapter 2: Literature study

Chapter 3: Research methodology

Chapter 4: Research results: Qualitative data

Chapter 5: Research results: Quantitative data

Chapter 6: Conclusions and recommendations

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE STUDY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 explained the background to the present study and challenges in the deployment of conservation volunteers at organisations such as Shamwari Conservation Experience (SCE), which depend on the volunteers to reach their goals. Therefore, the present study focuses on strategic communication management in a wildlife conservation sector. The aim is to determine how SCE can build and manage relationships with participants through a strategic approach to communication on conservation.

In this chapter, and to answer *Specific research question 1*, the following theoretical designs are discussed within the domain of communication management and environmental communication: systems theory, two-way symmetrical communication, strategic communication management and stakeholder relationship management. Thereafter, conservation communication will be explained, followed by the application of strategic communication management to this context to inform strategic conservation communication.

Table 2.1 on the next page summarises the theoretical conceptualisation and structuring for the study.

2.2 SYSTEMS THEORY

A perspective on management's PR contribution to organisations is derived from the systems theory. Gregory (2012:64) mentions that Cutlip and Center were some of the first academics who worked from the perspective of social systems and ecology in PR to explain the structure and operation of organisations and their interaction with the environment. Mehta and Xavier (2009:193) explain that the systems theory developed from the study of biological systems where organisms need to adjust to their environments to survive. This concept of ecology was introduced to the study of PR.

Table 2.1: Theoretical conceptualisation

Domains	Communication management, Environmental communication		
Paradigms	Systems theory - Open system - Interdependence	Two-way symmetrical communication - Mixed motive communication	
Meta-theories	Corporate communication management, Conservation communication		
Theories	Strategic communication management	Stakeholder relationship management	Strategic conservation communication
Constructs	• Proactive planning • Strategic process: Environmental scanning (research), analysis, strategic planning, implementation, control and evaluation • Adjustment (emerging strategy) • Communication practitioner roles: Public relations strategist, manager, technician • Strategic mandate • Communication channels • Communication messages • Prioritising publics	• <i>Types of relationships:</i> Exchange and communal • <i>Relationship cultivation strategies:</i> Symmetrical; Access, positivity, openness, assurances, networking, sharing tasks, integrative, distributive • <i>Stakeholder involvement:</i> Admiration, nurturance, instrumental aid, • <i>Relationship outcomes:</i> Control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, commitment	• Communicating environmental issues • Conservation goals • Communication channels and messaging

An ecological understanding of PR views organisations as dependent on their environments for support, growth and survival. Therefore, they need to adapt and adjust to changes within their environment (Cutlip *et al.*, 2002:2). According to the systems theory, organisations comprise of a set of parts (or subsystems) that interact within a boundary and which responds and adjust to the environment outside the boundary (Gregory, 2012:64).

The above-mentioned perspective (Cutlip *et al.*, 2002:2) holds implications for organisations to:

- Accept the public responsibility imposed on them by an interdependent society.
- Communicate with publics who are distant and diverse.
- Integrate into the communities they serve if they wish to survive and prosper.

The social systems perspective understands organisations as part of a wider social system, which consists of groups and individuals (publics). In this system, any or all individuals or groups can impact the organisation (Gregory, 2012:64). Therefore, PR practitioners should develop and maintain relationships with these individuals or groups.

From the outlook of an open-systems theory, the role of the 'boundary spanner' (i.e. PR practitioner) is to link the internal (organisational) system with the external environment. According to Cutlip *et al.* (2002:3), PR practitioners must anticipate and monitor changes in an organisation's environment and help interpret these changes to management. Practitioners need to extend their vision beyond the present, to predict and describe possible future scenarios. This will help organisations act proactively rather than only reactively to changes in the environment.

These practitioners help the organisation function effectively in least two ways (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:93) by monitoring the environment: firstly, show management what the situation is and secondly, help management decide how to operate depending on its external context. The emphasis in a proactive open system is on reciprocity (mutuality and exchange), wherein communications with publics a two-way symmetrical approach is followed (Gregory, 2001:42). This approach is advocated by Grunig and Hunt (1984) and explained in Section 2.4 of the present study.

Within the mentioned system, PR practitioners give input to an organisation's decision-making processes and thus form part of the dominant coalition. According to Gregory (2001:42-43), PR in an open system makes the following assumptions:

- The goals of the organisation are mutually acceptable and supported by the organisation and its publics.
- A broad range of publics are researched and is considered influential in bringing about behavioural change inside and outside the organisation.
- PR practitioners are fundamental decision-makers themselves, instead of merely communicating results of decision-making.

In a closed system, organisations operate separately from their subsystems with less coordination and interaction than in an open system. A closed system thus negates the mutual influence of each subsystem or functional area. Communication programmes are less central and more management-oriented (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:94). In other words, success is measured by output volume rather than by quality results (Gregory, 2001:42). Gregory (2001:42) adds that PR practitioners do not always form part of the dominant coalition and therefore, are limited in their influence of decision-making or advise on the organisation's environment. According Gregory (2001:42), the closed-systems approach has the following assumptions: firstly, that the purpose of PR is limited to bring about change in the environment, and secondly, that organisations have the power to change their environments and do not need to change themselves.

The relationships between organisations and their stakeholders, as is the case with SCE and its volunteers, are key in corporate communication, as expounded below.

2.3 STUDY DOMAIN: PUBLIC RELATIONS AND CORPORATE COMMUNICATION

The present study is set within the domain of corporate communication management. Harlow (cited by Fawkes, 2012:5) mentions that various definitions have been sourced to describe PR, however, many definitions describe what PR *does* rather than what it *is*.

According to the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), early definitions of PR emphasised 'press agency' and 'publicity', whereas contemporary definitions incorporate concepts such as 'engagement' and 'relationship building'. PRSA adopted the following definition in 1982: "Public relations helps organisations and its publics adapt mutually to each other." They modernised the definition in 2011-2012 to: "Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics" (PRSA, 2016). The Institute for Public Relations (IPR) defines public relations as: "The planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and understanding between an organisation and its publics." Fawkes (2012:5) explains that this definition focuses on key words such as 'planned' and 'sustained'. This suggests that relationships between organisations and publics are not automatic but have to be established and maintained. Thus, PR should not be treated as a series of unrelated events.

In a general sense, The Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA) defines PR as: "The management, through communication, of perceptions and strategic relationships between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholders" (PRISA, 2016:1; Skinner *et al.*, 2010:4).

PR are about reputation, the result of what one does and says, and what is said about oneself. In this regard, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) gives the following description:

“Public relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics” (CIPR, 2016).

From the exposition above it is clear that definitions emphasise that PR is a management function where strategic issues of two-way relationships and communication are developed and executed (Fawkes, 2012:6). The Stockholm Accords encapsulates this thinking by defining corporate communication in terms of actions by PR practitioners (Skoogh *et al.*, 2010:3):

- Participate in defining organisational values, principles, strategies, policies and processes.
- Apply social networking as well as research skills and tools to interpret stakeholders' and society's expectations as a basis for decision-making.
- Provide an analysis and recommendations for effective governance of stakeholder relationships by enhancing transparency and trustworthy behaviour by the organisation.
- Create an open system that allows the organisations to anticipate, adapt and respond to their environments.

Fawkes (2012:7) explains that organisations communicate, deal, negotiate and foster relationships with 'publics'. This term refers to diverse groups of people – not only consumers, but suppliers, employees, trustees, members and local residents, among many others, who have different needs and demands with regard to information about an organisation. Cutlip *et al.* (2002:2) describe the purpose of PR as helping organisations adjust and adapt to a changing environment. In such an environment, PR practitioners monitor public opinion, social change, political movements and technological developments. These environmental factors are interpreted to develop strategic plans for implementing change in an organisation.

Slabbert and Barker (2014:72) point out that corporate communication and PR are often used synonymously, especially when referring to PR management. In certain instances, corporate communication is regarded as the evolution of PR, or includes this function. Cornelissen (2008:4-5) states that corporate communication began to take hold because the term 'public relations' was used to describe communication with stakeholders. In this regard, it was considered a tactical function through which organisations mainly communicate with the press. However, currently, corporate communication is viewed as an umbrella term used for all internal and external strategic

communication aimed at building and maintaining sustainable relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders (Slabbert & Barker, 2014:71). The above-mentioned characteristics can be incorporated into a single definition:

“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” (Cornelissen, 2008:5).

There are various definitions for corporate communication (Wood, 2012:107). In relation to PR, this form of communication is seen as the process of establishing trust, social capital and legitimacy. In terms of the functionalist view, corporate communication implies the ‘harmonising’ of all communication within an organisation to ensure consistency with the company’s mission and objectives (Wood, 2012:107). It is argued that corporate communication lies not as much in harmonising all communications, than establishing meaningful values. This is done by communication that encourages the organisation to behave consistent with its culture and objectives. The aim is to build social capital and establish legitimacy, which also encourages stakeholder support (Wood, 2012:108). Skinner *et al.* (2010:388) focuses on the technical dimension and defines corporate communication as the process by which the identity of an organisation is translated into an image that needs to be projected outwardly.

The definitions mentioned above, focus on building relationships with stakeholders through communication because of the mutual impact between these two parties. This impact varies and is crucial to manage for an organisation’s survival. This is accomplished through two-way symmetrical communication that help the organisation build mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders. Such communication can also adapt to the environment and align organisational goals with that of stakeholders (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:91).

There is no clear distinction between the fundamental theories of corporate communication and PR, seeing that both employ symmetrical communication with stakeholders. In essence, a mutually beneficial relationship should exist between the organisation and its stakeholders due to their mutual reliance for prosperity and survival.

The present study thus focuses strongly on relationships with stakeholders. In this sense, corporate communication is the preferred term for all internal and external strategic interaction by the organisation, since stakeholders’ interests are considered central (Slabbert & Barker, 2014:72). As mentioned in chapter 1, for the purpose of the present study, the words corporate

communication and PR will be used in correlation with the cited source, with the understanding that the researcher prefers the term *corporate communication*.

As was explained above, both PR and corporate communication engage in symmetrical communication with stakeholders. Therefore, the communication models will be described subsequently. These models represent the evolution of organisational communication and its purpose within the present study.

2.4 TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL COMMUNICATION

In 1984, J.E. Grunig introduced four models of organisations' PR behaviour. This was based on J.E. Grunig and Hunt's (1984) investigation of PR's historical development. According to Grunig *et al.* (1995:169), the four models represent values, goals, and behaviours that organisations hold or practice through PR actions. Grunig (Grunig *et al.*, 1995:169) identifies four communication models: press agency, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical.

The purpose of the press agency/publicity model is achieving mass-media coverage for the client in any way possible, to serve propaganda goals (Cilliers, 2004:14). The model is focused technically on one-way communication (Dozier *et al.*, 1995:57; Fawkes, 2012:34). The public information model provides information to people where accuracy is essential but the model does not attempt to persuade recipients (Fawkes, 2012:34). This model is also technical and focuses on one-way communication (Dozier *et al.*, 1995:58). The two-way asymmetrical model encourages feedback, but is imbalanced since it intends to change the attitudes or behaviour of the stakeholders rather than the organisation (Fawkes, 2012:35; Wiggill, 2009:33). The two-way symmetrical model describes a level of equality in communication where each party is willing to alter its behaviour to accommodate the needs of the other (Fawkes, 2012:36). In light of this synergy, this model is applied in the present study, as paradigm for communication.

Table 2.2 below summarises the four different models and their characteristics.

Table 2.2: Characteristics of the communication models

Model	Type of communication	Characteristics	Communication model
1. Press agent / publicity	One-way communication. Complete truth not essential.	Propaganda , persuasion to influence audience. What organisation wants.	Source to receiver
2. Public information	One-way communication. Truth is important.	Dissemination of information . The use of press releases and other forms of one-way communication to send out information to public.	Source to receiver
3. Two-way asymmetrical	Two-way communication (imbalanced).	Uses persuasion and manipulation to influence audiences to behave as the organisations would like them to do.	Source to receiver
4. Two-way symmetrical	Two-way communication (balanced).	Uses communication to negotiate with the public, resolve conflict and promotes mutual understanding and respect between them (organisation) and its stakeholders.	Group to group

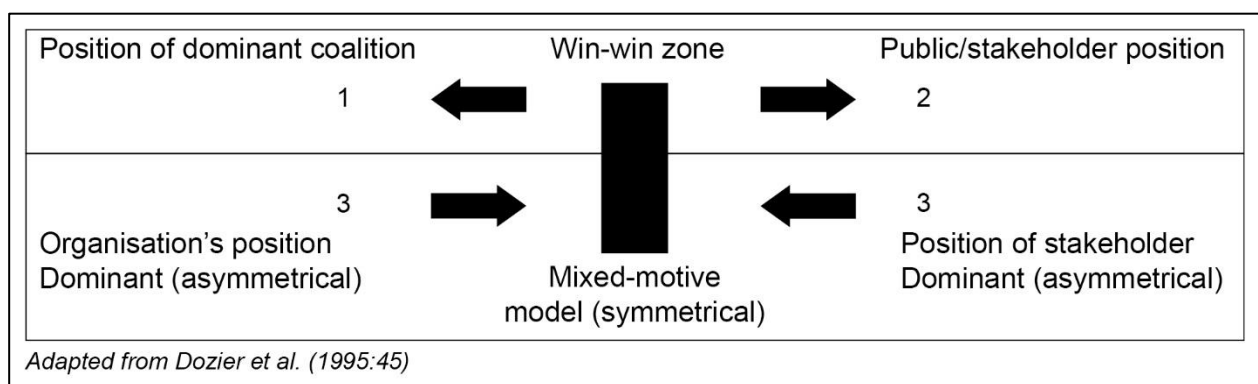
Adapted from Grunig and Hunt (1984:22)

The symmetrical model for communication entails communication where management and publics exchange views with other groups. The possible result is that both management and publics are influenced and adjust their attitudes (Fawkes, 2012:36). Communication is used to improve understanding of key stakeholders and presents a win-win situation where all parties involved benefit (Dozier *et al.*, 1995:13). This model utilises negotiation, conflict resolution strategies and bargaining to change ideas and attitudes of the organisation as well as its stakeholders (Dozier *et al.*, 1995:13). Dozier *et al.* (1995:46) describe the task of the communication manager in this model as: negotiate with activist publics; use conflict resolution strategies to deal with stakeholders; help management understand the opinions of stakeholders; and determine how stakeholders can react to the organisation.

Regarding models, Cilliers (2004:17) points out that organisations do not necessarily employ only one model. In practice, a combination of the models can be used depending on the situation and

diversity of stakeholders. Where a combination of two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models are used, are referred to as mixed-motive model. Wiggill (2009:37) explains that the mixed-motive model is based on the principle of reciprocal communication (mutual understanding) where organisations realise that they most likely will benefit if their stakeholders' demands are met. According to Grunig *et al.* (2002:312-317, 362), the two-way symmetrical model is the norm and the most ethical way of communication. Nevertheless, several communication practitioners follow an asymmetrical model since there is a feeling that the two-way symmetrical model may be too idealistic, and thus unrealistic (Wiggill, 2009:36). This view resulted in the development of the mixed-motive model, which is depicted in Figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2.1: Mixed-motive model



Hagan (2007:422) points out that Grunig adopted Murphys' (1991) mixed-motive continuum where the opposite ends represent the dominant coalition's position and that of the publics/stakeholders respectively. In the middle of the continuum both parties strive for symmetry. This takes place within the win-win zone where the organisation and the public must be willing to accommodate the interests of the other (Hagan, 2007:422), and both parties can engage in negotiation as well as persuasion (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:355). The opposite ends of the continuum are considered asymmetrical zones where the organisation or stakeholders' positions dominate and where, according to Grunig *et al.* (2002:356), their interests are separate and conflicting. Through negotiation and collaboration, it is possible for organisations and publics to find common ground in the win-win zone.

This model suggests that unsatisfactory relationships can be found on either side of the win-win zone where both parties exploit each other. Left of the win-win zone, the organisation dominates to the stakeholders' disadvantage, and vice versa to the right of the zone (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:357). As illustrated in Figure 2.1 above, *Arrow 1* indicates that the dominant coalition can use communication (i.e. pure two-way asymmetrical communication) to manipulate or persuade stakeholders to accept their position, rather than negotiate for a relationship within the win-win

zone. *Arrow 2* indicates how the stakeholders communicate to persuade the organisation's dominant coalition to accept their position outside the win-win zone. When communication practitioners from the organisation help stakeholders persuade the dominant coalition to accept an unfavourable position which only benefits the stakeholder, then the cooperation model takes shape (Wiggill, 2009:39).

Cooperation in the mixed-motive model describes how communication is used to convince the dominant coalition to accede to the stakeholder/public and their position (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:357). In Figure 2.1 above, *Arrow 3* represents the two-way symmetrical model where communication practitioners negotiate with the dominant coalition and the stakeholder to secure a position and relationship within the win-win zone. When communicating with stakeholders, the communication practitioner may use research-based, two-way communication in an attempt to persuade them to move towards the organisation's position. When communicating with the dominant coalition, communication practitioners will use research-based environmental scanning to persuade this coalition to move towards the stakeholder's position. These practices are referred to as the two-way model (Wiggill, 2009:39), replacing the two-way symmetrical and asymmetrical models. Grunig *et al.* (2002:358) claims that this model specifies the ideal PR situation in which organisation strive to reach the win-win zone and where they try to build sound relationships with stakeholders. The outcome and characteristics of a stakeholder relationship in the win-win zone can be used to evaluate the success of PR by an organisation.

In practice, the model as well as the communication practitioner's role (see 2.5.2) depends on the following variables: the worldview of the organisation (see 1.2.2) and how this party choses to manage its communications (one-way or two-way) as well as the purpose of their communication (i.e. inform, persuade, or build relationships).

2.5 STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT

Firstly, definitions of strategic communication are presented below, followed by the process of strategic management.

2.5.1 Defining strategic communication management

A corporate communication strategy provides the focus and direction for an organisation's communication with stakeholders, and determines the content of communication in order to reach organisational goals (Steyn, 2000:11). According to Steyn (2003:170), a key concept in strategic communication management is the term *strategy*. This refers to an organisation's pre-selected

means or approach to achieve its goals and objectives while adjusting to current and future external conditions. Strategy is seen as a course of action and the allocation of resources to carry out an organisation goals, and can be an indication of the organisation's future position (Steyn, 2003:171). Steyn (2000:3-4) explains strategy as the thinking or logic behind actions: where organisations positions themselves for the future by making choices and deciding on the values they wish to deliver and to whom.

Furthermore, strategy entails the decisions and actions regarding communication in the relationship between an organisation and its stakeholders, and portrays the attitude of the organisation towards its stakeholders. Strategy, according to Steyn (2000:11), is developed within the context of the organisation's vision, mission, corporate culture, policies and strategies (internal environment). The focus is to assess the external environment and its stakeholder context, which is a key concept in strategic management (Steyn, 2003:171).

Steyn (2007:140) defines PR (or strategic communication) management as managing communication between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholders. It is implemented or performed on a functional level within the organisation (Steyn, 2007:139) Thus, strategic PR management (i.e. strategic communication management) perceives PR as a strategic managerial function at the strategic level of an organisation. In its strategic role, PR help organisations adapt to its societal and stakeholder environment. To serve the organisation and public interest, PR impels the leaders to address reputation and align the company's goals and strategies with values and norms of the stakeholders and surrounding society (Steyn, 2007:139).

Communication management and strategy formulation is based on research. Steyn and Puth (2000:16) distinguish two types of communication research: environmental scanning and evaluation research.

- *Environmental scanning*: formal and informal research to gain information about an organisation's external (macro-) environment (Gregory, 2012:66).
- *Evaluation research*: the process of evaluating the planning, implementation, and impact of communication programmes (Cutlip *et al.*, 2002:202; Steyn & Puth, 2000:17).

Communication strategy can also be deliberate or emerging.

Deliberate PR strategy: This approach uses communication to build relationships with strategic stakeholders, portray the organisation as a good corporate citizen, maintain a sound reputation,

and communicate change initiatives (Steyn, 2007:159-160). Deliberate PR strategy is formulated in the *structured* context of the organisation's vision, mission, corporate strategies, policies and goals and also functions as a framework for socially responsible actions (Steyn, 2007:142)

Emergent PR strategy: It outlines the communication needed to react to a volatile societal environment and crisis situations that may arise. According to Steyn (2007:160), this PR strategy is important to ascertain when and how to use communication to solve an organisation's problems in *unstructured* situations. In this strategy, final objectives are unclear and elements are still being developed as the process continuously adapts to events and people. Therefore, this PR strategy drives the communication to address constantly emerging societal and stakeholder issues (Steyn, 2007:160).

According to Mersham *et al.* (1995:34), it is crucial for communication practitioners to have a clear understanding of communication theories. This helps them formulate realistic, attainable objectives, which could provide effective programmes to manage strategic communication. The strategic communication theory is used to forecast the public's reaction, active or passive, towards certain issues and problems, and to establish the extent and type of communication behaviour (Tkalac, 2007:530).

The strategic communication management theory, according to Kim and Grunig (2011:122), distinguishes active segments of a population (active or aware publics) from less active ones (latent or non-publics) to avoid cost-ineffective communication brought about by mass-oriented campaigns. This communication theory provides a knowledge basis for the strategic management of PR. This includes ways to identify strategic publics in and around an organisation and to interact with them effectively (Kim & Grunig, 2011:122). The theory's main assumption is that people who communicate actively, develop organised cognitions much easier and more probably will have a disposition towards an object, and will more likely show certain behaviours linked to the situation (Tkalac, 2007:530). The strategic communication theory helps communication practitioners identify the kind of publics who are more involved with particular issues and to understand their attitudes and behaviours as well as how other publics receive the company's messages (Sung, 2007:177).

As was explained previously, PR strategy works from the assumption that PR/corporate communication is practiced as a strategic management function (Steyn 2007:158), which links it to strategic communication. PR strategy matches an organisation's concerns, expectations, values and norms of its societal and stakeholder environments (Steyn, 2007:159). This strategy helps organisations act pro-actively by adapting to changes in the environment that were identified

by environmental scanning and boundary-spanning. As pointed out by Steyn (2007:159), PR strategy creates an advantage for the organisation through the following actions: early detection and timely managing of stakeholder and societal issues, involving stakeholders in the decision-making process, and determining the content of the communicated messages to avoid conflict and ensure a win-win solution for both parties.

Corporate communication strategy provides the framework for the operational communication plans necessary to carry out a strategy. This strategy does not follow a traditional linear approach but an adaptive one. A linear approach implies a strategy where the emphasis is on planning. The contrasting approach adapts to trends, events and stakeholders in the environment (Steyn & Puth, 2000). The corporate communication strategy thus focuses on relationships, symbolic actions and communication. According to Steyn (2000:12), this strategy emphasises attitudinal and cognitive complexity among stakeholders and utilises an interpretive strategy. This means that organisations understand their existence relies on its ability to attract individuals to co-operate in mutually beneficial exchange (Steyn, 2000:6).

Steyn (2007:162) mentions that PR strategy provides an integrated approach for dealing with multiple stakeholders and issues, and is the responsibility of the PR manager and strategist. The functional responsibilities of these PR practitioners can be either with without or a strategic mandate (i.e. support function):

PR function without a strategic mandate: The practitioners do not have a role in strategic decision-making at top managerial level and have no contribution in creating a PR strategy. Their responsibility lies in providing support when developing, implementing and evaluating communication plans. This support focuses on the following aspects (Steyn, 2007:140-141):

- The strategies developed at different organisational levels, for example, corporate and business units;
- Strategies from other organisational functions such as marketing and human resources; and
- Communication from top management and leaders with employees and other stakeholders.

PR function with a strategic mandate: The practitioners manage the following activities as outlined by Steyn (2007:140-141), which also describe all the steps of the communication strategy:

- Develop a PR strategy that addresses the organisation's key strategic goals and positions, working towards aligned PR goals and themes.
- Address emerging societal and stakeholder issues identified in the stakeholder management process, by developing and using a PR strategy,
- Formulate a strategic PR plan to achieve PR-related goals.
- Develop, implement and evaluate communication plans to support the PR function's emerging strategies.
- Advise organisational leaders and managers on their communication responsibilities toward their employees.
- Manage the activities of the communications department as a support function to the organisation.

The communication strategy is also conceptualised at the different levels of the organisation. According to Wiggill (2009:58), the levels of strategy refer to the content or focus of strategies and these strategies are implemented at different levels within an organisation with different stakeholders (Steyn, 2003:172). Steyn identifies five levels of strategy formulation, namely: enterprise, corporate, business-unit, functional and operational of which only two are relevant to the present study due to SCE's structure and context:

- *Enterprise strategy*: This is the broadest strategy (Steyn, 2003:172), and describes how organisations fits into their social environment in terms of their mission, purpose, principles, values and role within society (Wiggill, 2009:58).
- *Corporate strategy*: At the corporate level, the organisation's overall profile is defined, strategies for diversification and growth are decided on and corporate resources are managed through mostly financial interventions (Steyn, 2003:173; Wiggill, 2009:58).

The corporate strategy makes communication relevant in communication management of strategic stakeholders, and aligns communication goals with organisational goals. Thus, this strategy forms the vital link between the enterprise strategy and the corporate communication function.

The model of Steyn and Puth (2000) for strategic communication as discussed above, can be followed by a corporate communication manager or practitioner who is responsible for developing a corporate communication strategy. According to Grunig and Hunt (1984, cited in Wiggill, 2009:62), the development and implementation of such a strategy leads to the practice of two-way symmetrical communication.

It is worth noting that communication practitioners have different roles to fulfil within an organisation, as will be discussed subsequently.

2.5.2 Tasks of strategic corporate communication practitioners

Corporate communication roles imply that practitioners perform various tasks within an organisation daily and that these tasks should contribute to the organisation's overall performance (Steyn & Puth, 2000:14).

Steyn and Puth (2000:16) report four communication practitioner roles that were identified in the 1980's: the expert prescriber, communication facilitator, the problem-solving process facilitator and the communication technician. Research indicates that scholars were unable to differentiate between the first three roles. Furthermore, communication practitioners in effect only practice two distinct roles, namely those of a PR manager and PR strategist. In South Africa only three roles for a communication practitioner were identified, namely: PR strategist, manager and technician, which are discussed in more detail below.

PR strategist: According to Steyn (2002:44; 2007:143, 146), this practitioner has the following managerial functions:

- Fulfils a strategic role at top management, societal or environmental level.
- Approaches strategic management from outside-in, scans the environment to gather information and identify the organisation's key/strategic stakeholders, publics and issues.
- Functions as boundary spanner to acquire information which could help the organisation adapt to the future challenges. This information is interpreted to indicate possible consequences for the organisation's strategies and its stakeholders.
- Anticipates and monitors environmental developments, societal issues and the consequence for the organisation's policies and strategies on stakeholders and the surrounding society.
- Provides PR's inputs into the formulation of the organisation's strategy – helping corporate management, business units, and functional areas to identify reputation risks and other issues that need to be communicated.

Through the above-mentioned actions, the PR strategist manages the organisation's interdependence with the environment, liaisons with the public and stakeholders. This helps reduce uncertainty and conflict, and stabilises relationships with stakeholders (Steyn 2002:45).

PR manager: according to Steyn (2007:146), this practitioner has the following functions:

- Fulfills the role at organisational, functional or middle-management level.
- Contributes to strategic thinking and planning by identifying messages that can be communicated to stakeholders and societal environments.
- Helps portray the organisation's identity and values to the external environment.
- Develops PR policy and strategy represented in messages that show all facets of the organisation.
- Screens the consequence of societal issues, organisational strategies and behaviour on stakeholders and decides how and what should be communicated to solve problems or to capitalize on opportunities.

PR technician: Steyn (2007:147) points out the following functions:

- Works at the operational level of the organisation.
- Follows an inside-out approach to strategic management by contributing to the planning and decision-making on how messages should be communicated to reach stakeholders and publics.
- Helps develop a communication and implementation strategy to portray all facets of the organisation to the stakeholder and surrounding society.
- Partake in developing and implementing PR activities that demonstrate the organisation's identity and values to stakeholders and surrounding society.
- Support all strategies on enterprise, corporate and functional level by aligning communication activities to the organisation's mission and goals.

From the above-mentioned responsibilities of communication practitioners in the three different roles, it is clear that each has an important part to play in reaching an organisation's goals. Communication practitioners have a strategic role to gather information about the organisation's environment and stakeholders. This means applying two-way symmetrical communication, and promoting reciprocal communication between the organisation and its stakeholders to help reach a mutual understanding between the parties.

According to Murray and White (2005, cited in Wiggill, 2009:57), communication practitioners who grasp the complex organisational context and stakeholder requirements, help management understand the impact of organisational decisions on stakeholders.

2.5.3 Categorising publics according to communication strategy

Gregory (2012:69) points out that organisations depend heavily on stakeholders/publics (esp. their opinions) for their existence. Thus, the strategic management of relationships with stakeholders is critical to build and maintain organisations' reputation. As a result, organisations develop strategies to help mediate issues with prioritised stakeholders. In this regard, strategies will depend on whether the stakeholders are supportive or non-supportive and active or inactive (Rawlins, 2006:11; also see section 2.7.1. to explain the difference between stakeholders and public).

Rawlins (2006:12) differentiates between three types of publics involved in communication strategies namely, key publics, intervening publics, and influentials. Rawlins (2006:2) uses the term 'publics' to refer to a stakeholders that "arise on their own and choose the organization for attention" due to a specific issue affecting them.

Key publics: These are publics whose participation and cooperation are required to accomplish organisational goals. As stakeholders they have the highest priority according to their power and influence, their level of active involvement in issues. Since they are linked to urgency in issues – this group is considered *priority publics* (Rawlins, 2006:12). For an organisation to communicate effectively with priority publics, management should understand and get to know these stakeholders as close as possible. This group can be profiled according to their demographics; lifestyle, values, media preferences and self-interests. Thus an organisation can create strategies that appeal to these characteristics and by choosing channels that could reach them effectively.

According to Rawlins (2006:12), publics become active on issues that affect and involve them. Therefore, their self-interest should be addressed in strategies for PR or strategic corporate communication. To manage stakeholder relationships effectively, the interests of key stakeholders must be addressed and relationships with them managed in a coherent and strategic manner.

Intervening publics: These stakeholders relay information to priority publics and act as opinion leaders. If an organisation is satisfied that its messages stop at a public, then it is viewed as a priority public. In contrast, when the receiving public distributes these messages to others, it is viewed as an intervening public. Rawlins (2006:12) points out that the media is in most cases an intervening public and not a priority public.

Other stakeholders such as key staff can be important intervening publics because they pass on information/messages to others. In the case of the present study, conservation coordinators relay crucial conservation messages to volunteers. Often the successes of campaigns are determined by the strength of relationships between an organisation and intervening publics (Rawlins, 2006:12).

Influentials: These parties can be intervening publics, but also affect the success of PR efforts by supporting and working with or against an organisation. Some members of publics may turn to opinion leaders to verify or disprove messages relayed from organisations. The opinion of these personal sources (i.e. opinion leaders) often have more weight than the PR message from organisations as such (Rawlins, 2006:12). It is thus crucial that organisations re-consider how their messages will be interpreted by these influentials who act as either intervening or supporting publics towards organisational/PR campaigns.

In the present study, volunteers were regarded in their roles as key, intervening and influential publics. The reason is that they may influence on aspiring volunteers (i.e. future stakeholders) and thus can shape the organisation's conservation messages. In summary, volunteers in their various roles are a crucial stakeholder group for an organisation such as SCE, and strategic communication should include them.

The implementing of strategic plans for each stakeholder requires calculated knowledge on reaching them in an effective way. Choosing the right communication channel and message is crucial to reach the desired stakeholder and convey the intended message. This message should represent the organisation's overall communication strategy and specific goals and plans. The various communication channels to be used will be examined in the following section.

2.6 COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

The communication channel is the medium through which messages pass. It is the bridge that connects the source and the receiver (DeVito, 2007:15). Bauer and Erdogan (2009) points out that the channel used to communicate a message, affects how accurately the message will be received. Therefore, channels vary in terms of the richness in the information it conveys.

Cutlip *et al.* (2002:194) states that creating new communication channels can be difficult, time consuming and expensive. Channels target different publics and people associate different values with specific channels of communication. For the purpose of this study social media and word-of-

mouth communication will be discussed. These two communication channels are of particular importance to volunteer relationships in the SCE context.

2.6.1 Social media platforms

Seeing that it can be expensive to create new communication channels, social media becomes a viable alternative. When managed strategically, these platforms can assist an organisation significantly, because it is considered to be a fast, inexpensive and interactive way to reach the various types of stakeholders (Valentini, 2015:170).

According to Eyrych *et al.* (2008:412) and Curtis *et al.* (2010:90), social media allows PR practitioners to reach out and engage their publics, thereby practicing two-way communication. Organisations with a defined PR department are more likely to adopt social media and use it to achieve organisational goals, reach target audiences, promote causes and develop applicable communication strategies (Curtis *et al.*, 2010:92).

The use of social media PR functions have positive consequences (Allagui & Breslow, 2016:21). The extended use of these platforms may have the following constructive outcomes: lead to higher levels of engagement; have a positive behavioural impact; help develop relationships by better opportunities for online engagement (i.e. IT relationship cultivation).

Social media has the capacity to enhance two-way symmetrical communication between organisations and their publics. Therefore, this communication is considered essential to build mutually beneficial relationships. However, Valentini (2015:171) makes a valid point by stressing that online two-way communication can only occur when individuals and organisations actually create and share content and if there is a constant flow of conversation between these two parties.

Valentini (2015:171) also argues that posting content online does not necessarily imply that a social media platform can build and maintain relationships between organisations and their stakeholders. When an organisation utilises social media to post content for improved communication with stakeholders, this does not mean that the posted content created conversation among followers, or had established a relationship with their followers (Valentini, 2015:171). Therefore, Valentini (2015:175) points out that PR scholars may be unrightfully positive about the applicability of social media to establish and build relationships with stakeholders.

Organisations should thus first research the effect of social media in reaching their goals and then communicate it to stakeholders. In this way, they will ascertain the real, and not perceived benefits of social media. Waters *et al.* (2009:103) proposes three strategies that organisations should adopt on social networks such as Facebook to cultivate relationships with stakeholders:

- *Disclosure*: Organisations should disclose who they are, their mission and values. In this regard they also advocate openness and transparency.
- *Usefulness*: Social networks such as Facebook Pages of organisations, should be useful to stakeholders. Usefulness can lead to stakeholders' satisfaction if their needs are addressed and met.
- *Interactivity*: This entails the exchange of information and conversation. If interaction takes place freely between the organisation and its stakeholders, it can lead to improved relationships.

Social media is viewed as a method utilising IT technology to communicate, establish relationships and build trust between individuals or organisations and its publics (Safko, 2010:4). This implies the various forms of media content that is openly available for the end user. These media create a channel through which stakeholders can communicate with an organisation, and vice versa (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:61; Turner & Shah, 2010:99).

According to Valentini (2015:173), currently, two billion people are active in social media and this figure is expected to reach 2.55 billion by 2017. People are turning towards social media for entertainment, information, social contact and social status. It is an individual's decision to join or follow a specific social network site. Over 75% of all Internet users frequent social media platforms, and for younger users Instagram is more important than Facebook and Twitter. For the age group 18-49, YouTube has a larger reach than any cable network, with little over 1 billion monthly users. Of all Internet users the following preferences apply 77% for Facebook; 63% for YouTube; 24% for LinkedIn; 24% for Google+; 21% for Twitter (Lee, 2015).

Seeing that social media have a wide-spread reach in the world and holds several benefits, organisations cannot afford to be invisible on social media. When messaging on social media is strategic and goal oriented, organisations can look forward to establish and maintain long-term relationships with stakeholders. Therefore, companies should invest in a social media strategy that supports their communication strategy. This will help them communicate their cause effectively, reach their stakeholders and build positive relationships with their supporters.

2.6.2 Word-of-mouth communication

Another effective communication channel is word-of-mouth (WOM). In this type of communication, stakeholders elicit others' interests about an organisation or product. Often WOM is the driving force that motivates prospective clients to endorse or *like* an organisation. Valentini (2015:173) considers word of mouth as an important strategy to help increase visibility and awareness of the brand. In the context of the present study, this can be the case with SCE, as volunteers share their experience with family and friends who become familiar with SCE, and are encouraged to become a SCE volunteer as well.

The importance of stakeholder relationship management will be explained next.

2.7 STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

According to Ledingham and Bruning (1998:56), the current literature defines PR as the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the publics/stakeholders on whom they depend in order to be successful. PR implies organisational research and practice that focus on the following aspects: relationships with key publics, the dimensions on which these relationships are built, and the impact of such relationships on both parties (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:56). In this sense, the traditional view of PR as mainly a communication activity, is redefined and reconceptualised in stakeholder relationship management as a management function that applies communication strategically (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:56). As pointed out by Ledingham (2003:182) the desired outcome of PR practice is stakeholder *relationships*. Therefore, an organisation practicing strategic communication management will achieve positive stakeholder *relations*.

The stakeholder relational perspective defines the organisational function of PR by clarifying the role of communication within this function and providing a process to determine how PR can help achieve the organisation's goals (Ledingham, 2003:182). This perspective supports the notion that PR initiatives should generate understanding and benefit the public and the organisation alike. Furthermore, relationship management requires that PR practitioners should be familiar with strategic planning. Ledingham (2003:182-183) highlights four developments that introduced the relational perspective as a framework for PR study and practice:

- Recognition of the central role of relationships in PR: the insight that relationships, not the organisation, the public or the communication process, is the unifying factor in PR.

- PR reconceptualised as a management function: the managing of organisation-public relationships introduced managerial concepts to the theory and practice of PR.
- Identification of components and types of organisation-public relationships. This implies their connection to public attitudes, perceptions, knowledge and behaviour, and relationship measuring strategies. It meant a new perspective on the composition of organisation-public relationships, linking them to public perception, attitudes and behaviour.
- Construction of models for organisation-public relationships that accommodate relationship antecedents, processes, and consequences.

The relational perspective is important since it highlights a key mission of PR. This mission is to develop goals around relationships and apply communication as a strategic tool to help organisations achieve their goals.

2.7.1 Defining stakeholders and stakeholder relationships

According to Rawlins (2006:2), business literature provides numerous definitions for 'stakeholder'. These include the following: any group or individual who is affected or can affect the achievement of an organisation's objectives; a group or individual on whom the organisation depends to survive and prosper; expanded to include groups with interests in the organisations, regardless of the organisation's interest in them. Many scholars criticise this definition of a stakeholder, due to a focus on meeting a stakeholder's needs without really knowing who they are or how to identify them. Rawlins (2006:2) argues that this is due to the numerous different, yet basically similar, definitions of the identity and nature of a stakeholder.

'Publics' is the term in the PR literature used for stakeholders that link them to a specific issue. The relationship perspective holds that PR balances the interests of organisations and publics by managing their mutual relationships (Ledingham, 2003:181). Relationships between an organisation and its publics should thus be central to the study of PR (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:56). Hung (2007:444) define organisation-public relationships as a state that exists between an organisation and its key publics in which the actions of either can impact the well-being of the other. This impact can be in an economic, social, cultural or political sense.

Hung (2007:444) point out that within the systems theory, the behaviour of organisations and their publics have a mutual effect. This relationship takes shape where an organisation creates consequences that affect publics, or when the publics' behaviour holds consequences for the

organisation. In the same vein, Hung (2007:444) view the beginning of a relationship between an organisation and its strategic publics when both parties act interdependently and their mutual impact needs to be managed by the organisation. According to Hung (2007:445), the latter definition would be more applicable as it emphasises the need to manage the mentioned relationship.

Some of the definitions presented above merely point out that all parties involved can have an effect/consequence on the other, but not all definitions stress the importance of managing that relationship. When PR activities focus on relationship building, it moves the practice of PR away from a journalist type approach where publicity was primary, to a managerial approach, where the maintenance of mutually beneficial relationships is paramount (Bruning & Lambe, 2008:142).

A relationship-building approach to the study of PR led to the re-conceptualisation of communication practitioners' roles and expectations as well as the needs of stakeholders (Bruning & Lambe, 2008:142). Key stakeholders are, as a result, more active and are more willing to speak out on issues concerning them or the organisation they support. Therefore, organisations should see key stakeholders as active, interactive and equal participants of an on-going communication process.

Relationship management requires practitioners to be more interactive with key stakeholders. Therefore, practitioners should understand how stakeholders view their organisation as well as the environment, and how these views relate to or disagree with those of the practitioners. By placing stakeholders according to the type of relationship, practitioners can design programmes and plan initiatives to gain maximum support of publics.

2.7.2 Types of relationships

According to Hung (2007:456) and Grunig *et al.* (2002:552), psychologists Clark and Mills (1993) developed or identified two types of relationships for the study of organisation-public relationships. These two types help explain the desired nature of the relationship between the organisation and its publics (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:552). The two types are exchange and communal relationships, which will be expounded below.

Exchange relationship: This is described as interaction where one party awards benefits to the other, only because the other has provided, or will provide benefits in the future. In an exchange relationship, a party is willing to allow benefits to the other because it expects to receive comparable benefits in return. This assumes a debt or favour that should be returned (Hon &

Grunig, 1999:20). Exchange is the essence of marketing relationships between an organisation and its customers and is part of the marketing theory. Grunig *et al.* (2002:552) points out that an exchange relationship is usually not enough for the publics, who expect that the organisation should contribute to the community, where the organisation may get little to nothing in return.

Communal relationship: This is where both parties benefit from the other because they are concerned about the other's welfare, even when they do not get return on their efforts (Hon & Grunig, 1999:21). According to Grunig *et al.* (2002:553), PR professionals add value to an organisation when they develop communal relationships with the various publics that are affected by the organisation, not just those who give the organisation something in return. Communal relationships are important if an organisation wants to be socially responsible (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:553), and build a reputation for being concerned about the community and publics whom they serve. Such an approach leads to less opposition and increased support from publics over time (Hon & Grunig, 1999:21).

To conclude, communal describes the type of relationship cultivated by a PR programme, whereas the exchange type of relationship is produced by other fields such as marketing (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:522). According to Grunig *et al.* (2002:553), the extent to which a public perceives a communal relationship with an organisation positively, indicates the success of the PR management function.

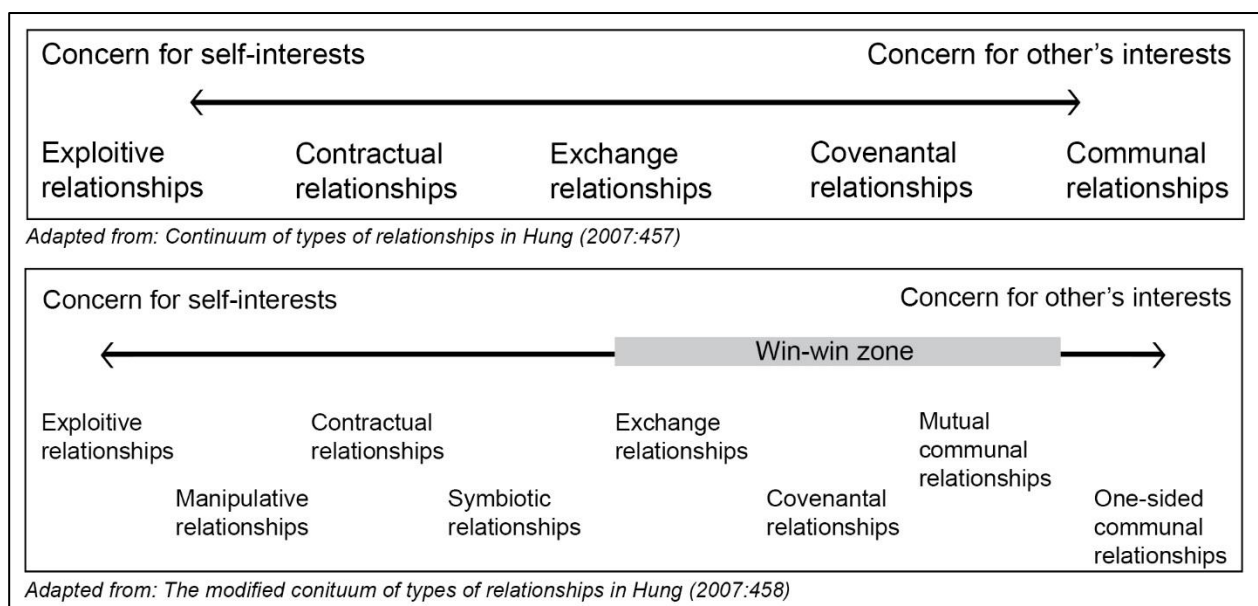
Hung (2007:456) adopts theories on communal and exchange relationships and develops six types of relationships:

- *Exploitive relationships* take shape when one party takes advantage over the other. This happens when the other follows communal norms, or when one party does not fulfil its obligation in an exchange type of relationship.
- *Manipulative relationships* occur when an organisation, with full knowledge of publics' needs, applies asymmetrical or pseudo-symmetrical (pretend/fake communication) approaches in its communication with publics. This means that the organisation serves its own interests/agenda.
- *Symbiotic relationships* take place when organisations realise their interdependence with their environment. Organisations work with publics to reach common interests and both understand they have the power to affect each other.

- *Contractual relationships* implies that each party is aware of their specific role in the relationship (what they are supposed to do). This is similar to drawing up a contract at the beginning of the relationship.
- *Covenantal relationships* mean that both sides commit to a common good by their open exchange and the norm of reciprocity.
- *Mutual communal relationship* is a sophisticated level of relationship (Hung, 2007:457), which has a communal structure, for example where each party has a concern for the welfare of the other (Clarke & Mills, 1993). Mutual communal relationships differ from covenantal ones, by emphasising open exchange between two parties, instead of merely the psychological intention to protect the welfare of the other (Hung, 2007:457).

Grunig (2001) developed a continuum describing the above-mentioned types of relationships from exploitive to communal (cf. Hung, 2007:457). This continuum is depicted in Figure 2.2 below.

Figure 2.2: Continuum of relationships types



In Figure 2.2 above, the two ends of the continuum (opposite sides of the arrow) represent the exploitative relationship (concern for oneself) and communal relationship (concern for others). Between the two extremes, other types of relationships can be found such as contractual, exchange, and covenantal, depending on how both sides agree to their mode of interaction. Hung (2007:457-458) expanded this continuum, as Figure 2.2 above indicates, by adding the categories of symbiotic and manipulative relationships, and dividing communal relationships into mutual communal and one-sided communal.

From the exposition above, it is clear that an organisation's interaction with stakeholders is complex, depending on the type of mutual relationships. This can also vary from extremely one-sided (only self-concern) to fully concerned for the other, as a communal relationship suggests. Hung (2007:454) mentions that an organisation's intentions and motivations towards its operational environment will affect the type of relationships it strives for with its stakeholders.

The type of above-mentioned relationship, furthermore, depends on the goals the organisation wants to achieve. This also applies to a conservation organisation that exists because of volunteers, and thus depends on active participation from volunteers to reach its goals. Such an organisation should examine the type of relationship that would be ideal to reach its conservation targets. To keep the relationship healthy, PR practitioners need to implement strategies to cultivate the interaction and ensure that strong, long-lasting contact continue to grow between themselves and their volunteers.

2.7.3 Relationship-cultivation strategies

Previous literature on interpersonal communication and PR employed the term 'maintenance' when developing strategies for quality relationships (Hung, 2007:458). Grunig (2002) considered using the term 'cultivation' instead, as proposed by Hung (2007:459). Hung (2007:459) first uses definitions of relational maintenance on relationships to explain the rationale of using cultivation.

In terms of these definitions, relationship maintenance means keeping a relationship: (i) in existence; (ii) in a specified state or condition; (iii) in satisfactory condition; (iv) in repair. According to Hung (2007:459), the first broad definition does not provide a strategic focus on maintaining relationships, and the second definition negates the constant changes and tensions in relationships. Hung, therefore, adopts the third and fourth definitions since they establish the context of a relationship and take into account that the organisation and its publics need to put in an effort to make the relationship worthwhile and a pleasant experience.

Regarding research on types of relationships, Hung (2007) points out: If organisations develop an exploitive relationship to maximise their benefits, it damages their interaction with publics and can taint their reputation. Grunig (2002) asserts that behaviours in relationships should be an on-going process of cultivation (Hung, 2007:459). Therefore, according to Hung (2007:459), the term 'cultivation strategies' fits into the context of stakeholder relationship management.

Furthermore, Hon and Grunig (1999) suggest that relationship strategies should be divided into symmetrical and asymmetrical approaches.

Symmetrical strategies: These entail the following aspects (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:551-552; Hon & Grunig, 1999:14-17; Hung, 2007:460-461):

- *Access:* Members of publics, the community or activist leaders provide access to PR practitioners and senior managers, who provide representatives of publics similar access to the organisation's decision-making processes.
- *Positivity:* Actions and outcomes by the organisation or public to make the relationship enjoyable and beneficial for the parties involved. Organisations do whatever is necessary to make publics feel more content with the relationship.
- *Openness or disclosure:* Organisations and members of publics are open and frank with each other. They are willing to disclose thoughts, feelings, concerns, and problems as well as mutual satisfaction or dissatisfaction, by direct discussions. However, it should be noted that openness does not guarantee a high-quality relationship.
- *Assurances of legitimacy:* By legitimising publics first, organisations gain/earn legitimacy from their stakeholders. Assurances of legitimacy involve efforts by both parties to reiterate their commitment to maintaining the relationship.
- *Networking:* Organisations build networks with the same groups their publics do, such as environmentalists, unions, or community groups.
- *Sharing of tasks:* The parties share in solving joint or separate problems, for example; managing community issues, providing employment, conducting research and maintaining funding – which are in the interest of the organisation, public or both.

Asymmetrical strategies: Certain strategies with dual concern are asymmetrical since they emphasise the organisation's interest over the public, or vice versa. When strategies are asymmetrical, the organisation will not effectively develop and maintain positive, long-term relationships. Such strategies include the following (Hon & Grunig, 1999:16-17, Hung, 2007:460-461):

- *Contending:* The organisation attempts to persuade the public to accept its position.
- *Avoiding:* The organisation leaves or ignores the conflict with publics either physically or psychologically.
- *Accommodating:* The organisation yields, at least in part, on its position and lowers its aspirations.
- *Compromising:* The organisation meets the public's expectations partially, but both sides are not completely satisfied with the outcome.

Symmetrical dual concern: Other dual-concern strategies are symmetrical. According to Hon and Grunig (1999:17) these strategies are most effective to establish and maintain a long-term relationship:

- *Cooperating:* The organisation and the publics work together to reconcile their interests and to build towards a mutually beneficial relationship.
- *Being unconditionally constructive:* The organisation will do whatever it deems best for the relationship, even if that means giving up its position and the public does not reciprocate by responding to the good gesture.
- *Asserting win-win or no deal:* When an organisation and its publics cannot find a solution that will benefit them both, they agree on a no deal instead of an asymmetrical decision. A strategy of no deal is symmetrical because it leaves open the possibility to reach a win-win solution later on.

By implementing the cultivation strategies mentioned above, an organisation creates an inclusive culture for its stakeholders. This can lead to satisfactory mutual relationships and ensure that the publics are pleased with the organisation as a whole. In the following section the stakeholder involvement theory will be discussed to underline the importance of admiration, nurturance, instrumental aid as well as level of involvement of such 'new' relationship cultivation strategies.

2.7.4 Stakeholder involvement scale

Bortree and Waters (2010:1) investigated the impact of involvement in an organisation-public relationship and measured the mediatory effect of involvement on cultivation strategies and the quality of relationships. They found that stakeholder involvement has played a significant role in the evolution of PR, from a function of strategic communication to one of relationship management. Their study measures involvement in a non-profit organisation-volunteer relationship. They utilise Zaichkowsky's (1985) personal involvement scale/inventory to examine the impact of involvement on relationship quality. In this regard, Bortree and Waters (2010:1) identify new cultivation strategies, thereby furthering the work of Hon and Grunig (1999). In addition, the notions of nurturance and instrumental aid, and their findings indicate that involvement plays a role in mediating the impact of cultivation strategies on the quality that volunteers perceive in the non-profit relationship with and organisation.

Involvement: Models that were used to research the outcomes of involvement, incorporate cultivation strategies (Hon and Grunig, 1999, Ki & Hon, 2009) and the testing of relationship quality. However, according to Bortree and Waters (2010:1), studies of relationships in

interpersonal communication suggest that a person's engagement or involvement can predict the nature of the relationship and determine the influence of partner behaviour. These tendencies impact organisation-public relationships where active or more involved publics will experience the cultivation strategies different to those who are uninvolved with the organisation. For the active publics, this may create the perception of higher relationship quality.

Rawlins (2006:9) views stakeholder involvement as the level of engagement that can be measured by the extent to which people connect themselves personally with a situation or problem. Regarding the present study, SCE's participants will only involve themselves with the organisation when they perceive the need to volunteer, or feel that they can contribute to conservation in this way. The level of involvement will change from inactive to active from the stage of planning and booking their trip, to actively volunteering as such, and therefore, moving from an aware to an active public (Rawlins, 2006:9).

Bortree and Waters (2010:1) mention that the non-profit relationship between organisations and volunteers provides an appropriate context to study the role of involvement. This is because certain non-profits struggle to retain volunteers. Volunteers who evaluate their relationships with non-profit organisations more positively are more likely to continue volunteer work in the future (Bortree & Waters, 2010:1). In this sense, Bortree and Waters (2010:2) propose two new cultivation strategies that may impact the organisation-volunteer relationship in a non-profit setting, namely nurturance and instrumental aid.

Volunteering primarily has been related to the non-profit sector. Thus, not many researchers connect volunteerism to a profit-oriented organisation such as the SCE. The nature of volunteering and why people volunteer is the same for a non-profit and for-profit setting. This makes it easy to research relationship cultivation strategies and the proposed new cultivation strategies (nurturance and instrumental aid) in a relationship between an organisation and volunteers, whether it is non-profit or for-profit.

Bortree and Waters (2010:2) explain the relationship between an organisation and its publics (see 2.7) as a means to establish the management function of PR. This also invoked the concept of interdependence, when both organisations and their strategic publics need and rely on one another. Such interdependence has mutual consequences that need to be managed constantly. Bortree and Waters (2010:2) also incorporate Hon and Grunig's (1999) relationship cultivation strategies (see 2.7.3) in their model to evaluate relationships between organisations and its publics. In this regard, they further examine the role of admiration, nurturance, instrumental aid and involvement in their body of work.

Admiration: This often neglected dimension is vital to understand relationship dynamics (Bortree & Waters, 2010:2-3, following Hon & Grunig, 1999). Admiration can be defined as the degree to which relationship partners respect and value one another and include the approval of the other's behaviour as a key component of admiration (Bortree & Waters, 2010:3). Organisations adopt various policies and programmes to be admired by their stakeholders ultimately, for example, being a good corporate citizen or having environmentally-friendly policies. Bortree and Waters (2008) explored the role of admiration in the organisation-public relationship. They found that this construct helped predict whether adults would continue to volunteer at non-profit organisations (Bortree & Waters, 2010:3).

Nurturance: This strategy may be useful to help assess the quality of a relationship between an organisation and its publics. In this sense, nurturance can positively influence the perceived quality of a volunteer and non-profit relationship (Bortree & Waters, 2010:3). Nurturance has been used to explain interpersonal relationships between, for example, parents and children and siblings. Thus, nurturance includes aspects of taking care of another person. When considering younger stakeholders, this strategy becomes critical to the development of lasting relationships. According to Bortree and Waters (2010:4), volunteer management has the responsibility to engage young volunteers and involve them in the organisation. These scholars also found that non-profit managers who actively introduce individuals to other volunteers, invite them to the organisation's meetings, and specifically request their participation, can expect involvement in the organisation long after their first volunteering period has expired (Bortree & Waters, 2008; 2010:4). This suggests that nurturance should be considered as a cultivation strategy to manage organisation-public relationships.

Instrumental aid: This entails helping another person accomplishing something, and is often referred to as 'guidance', which plays a key role in relationship building. According to Bortree and Waters (2010:4), successful relationships are formed between a person and a mentor, or student and teacher, when there is a bond; and not merely interaction, but true guidance. In terms of the present study, this applies to volunteers, especially students and other individuals participating in SCE. These stakeholders must be trained to help carry out tasks and projects implemented by the organisation.

Bortree and Waters (2010:4) investigated the relationship between a supervisor/coordinator and volunteer. They found that it can make a lasting difference in retention of volunteers and attracting others candidates to the organisation. Volunteer coordinators need to ensure that volunteers benefit from the experience besides the interactions that reflect a mutually-beneficial relationship. According to Bortree and Waters (2010:4), individuals who learn new skills or strengthen existing

ones during their volunteer experience, are likely to give back to the organisation in future. This may be in the form of further volunteer work or a donation in charity. The returns may also include spreading the word of SCE and conservation by interpersonal communication, using social media and getting involved in other conservations, especially at home. The possible outcomes from such mutual relationships and its importance will be examined in the following subsection.

2.7.5 Relationship outcomes

The most meaningful evaluation of relationships is to measure its outcome (Hon & Grunig, 1999:18). Scholars have identified six basic outcomes as indicators: control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, commitment, communal and exchange relationships. According to Hon and Grunig (1999:20), the communal and exchange relationships (already discussed in 2.7.2) affect the intensity of the other four relationship indicators. Thus, the focus will be on four outcomes as significant indicators of successful relationships (Hon & Grunig, 1999:18-20, Hung, 2007:462):

- *Control mutuality*: This measures the degree to which parties agree on who has the rightful power to influence the other. A degree of power imbalance is natural in organisation-public relationships. One-sided attempts by one party to take control can lead to perceptions of lower communication skills and cause the other party to be less satisfied with the relationship, which increases the level of activism. For positive, stable relationships, organisations and publics should have some degree of mutual control.
- *Trust*: It describes both parties' willingness and confidence to open themselves up mutually in the relationship. Trust can show three dimensions: *Integrity* is the belief that the organisation acts fair and just. *Dependability* means that the organisation is doing what it said. *Competence* is the ability of the organisation to carry out what it set out to do.
- *Satisfaction*: Is a measurement of how favourably each party feels towards the other because positive expectations are reinforced about the relationship. This also implies a satisfying relationship because the benefits outweigh the costs.
- *Commitment*: This is the extent to which one party believes and feels that the relationship is worth investing time and energy to maintain and promote. Two dimensions are *continuance* commitment (a line of action taken) and *affective* commitment (with an emotional orientation).

In order to maintain quality relationships between organisations and its stakeholders, it is essential to manage communication strategically, seeing that this forms the foundation for relationship building with stakeholders. It is crucial that organisations build strong, long-lasting and mutually-

beneficial relationships with its strategic stakeholders. This will help organisations reach their goals. This strategy especially applies to the present study. In this context, SCE would not exist without volunteers, and participants' involvement is key to achieve the organisation's goals and outcomes.

Seeing that the organisation under investigation in the present study functions within the context of wildlife conservation, strategic communication on *conservation issues* will be discussed subsequently.

2.8 CONSERVATION COMMUNICATION

Conservation communications are an important tool for influencing people and thereby achieving conservation goals. It is important that conservation strategies influence people's beliefs and behaviours toward the environment (Jacobson, 2009:6). According to Jacobson (2009:7), for successful conservation programmes one should understand how to engage diverse audiences and communicate conservation goals effectively in different settings.

Recent trends emphasise the need for conservation communications. For example, the number of constituents or stakeholders of public lands and natural resources are increasing. As a result, conflicts in land management continue to grow together with demands from diverse interest groups (Jacobson, 2009:7). Jacobson (2009:7) paints a picture of the complexities facing conservation efforts and why conservation communication is necessary. The scholar visualises the varying viewpoints on a proposed wildlife refuge from the following stakeholders: landowners over property rights, politicians concerned with votes, business people confronted by taxes, hunters concerned with access, preservationists bent on protecting the ecosystem and animals-rights activists campaigning for particular animals. The examples indicated that stakeholders' interests often overlap, which can lead to conflict. Due to these complexities, Jacobson (2009:7) stresses the importance of effective communication as one of the most critical strategies for conservation and land management.

Although people are increasingly exposed to conservation issues due to the Internet, social media, mass media and other communication channels, the public's knowledge about conservation is still limited (Jacobson, 2009:8). According to Bickford *et al.* (2012:74), one of the largest barriers that hinders people from actively engaging in behaviour that supports a more sustainable future, is their environmental illiteracy. If conservation efforts are to thrive, communication initiatives should build on existing positive attitudes towards nature (Jacobson,

2009:8). This will help expand the public's narrow focus and limited knowledge about the environment. Improved ecological understanding should inform publics' decisions and actions.

Conservation organisations rely on healthy relations with the public and their stakeholders to achieve their goals. As a result, these types of institutions must be sensitive to their audiences and listen to their concerns and opinions (Jacobson, 2009:8). Jacobson (2009:9) mentions that institutional goals must be integrated with the publics' concerns, and institutions must influence public opinion to support their conservation mission. It is clear that appropriate, strategic communication can shift public support in favour of conservation actions and campaigns. This will help improve pro-environmental behaviour, reduce vandalism, decrease poaching, increase visitors' satisfaction, and influence policies and decisions that affect natural resources (Jacobson, 2009:9).

Mangel *et al.* (1996) makes various suggestions on how to conserve living resources. From these principles it is clear that conservation efforts are diverse. Achieving conservation goals, therefore, requires a multi-disciplinary way of thinking and consideration of the relationship between nature and people – conservation encompasses both natural and social science (Bickford *et al.*, 2012:75). In the process, communication is seen as key in all aspects of conservation (Mangel *et al.*, 1996). In this regard, communication should be “interactive, reciprocal and continuous” (Mangel *et al.*, 1996:340). This directly involves the foundation of strategic communication with stakeholders as point of departure for conservation communications.

As is the case with SCE, Brightsmith *et al.* (2008:2833) found that conservation biologists are partnering with organisations who provide volunteer opportunities. The aim is to raise funds and labour for field projects, which has the added benefit of involving citizens in science and environmental monitoring. Conservation programmes provide scientists with a captive audience for environmental messages and help build a global conservation community. Such instances are ideal for applying strategic conservation communication within a multi-disciplinary approach, as explained above (Bickford *et al.*, 2012:76).

Effective communication improves prospects for effective conservation significantly by helping stakeholders understand the problems and the potential results of alternative courses of action. Environmental communication will be explained next for further insight into the complexities of this field of study and to demonstrate how environmental communication can be applied.

2.8.1 Environmental communication

Cox and Pezzullo (2016) have researched the concept of environmental communication. According to them (2016:21) communicating about the environment cuts across all media: cable TV news, social media, YouTube, newspapers, public rallies and in classrooms. The ways people talk and learn about the environment are changing as a result of the various media they use to interact with the world.

The sense of urgency about the environment and its problems have invited interest in environmental communication. People's understanding of the environment and the ability to work together cannot be separated from their need to communicate with others. This occurs through language and visual images. How people interact influences their perceptions and understanding of environmental problems (Cox & Pezzullo, 2016:21). Milstein (2009:344) explains environmental communication as a field within the communication discipline. It is also a meta-field that cuts across disciplines where research and theory are united by the topical focus on communication and human relations with the environment. Those who study environmental communication are interested in the way people communicate about the natural world. They believe that communication has far-reaching effects during environmental crises.

Milstein (2009:344) points out that theories from diverse study areas are applied to understand and develop environmental communication as a whole. Central to environmental communication theory are assumptions that the way people communicate affect their perceptions of the living world; in turn, these perceptions help shape how they define their relations with and within nature, and the way they act towards nature (Milstein, 2009:345).

Furthermore, communication about the environment is not only used for conceptualising about issues. It is used to construct, produce and adapt human relations with the environment. Therefore, environmental communication should be informed by social, economic and political contexts and interests. Milstein (2009:345) indicates that these settings help shape the way communication portrays the environment. Human's relations with nature are negotiated within the settings of cultural communication, mass media, public communication, interpersonal communication and popular culture (Milstein, 2009:345). Environmental communication theory thus draws from various theories to form conceptual frameworks for further study and to extend its theory and practice.

In this regard, Cox and Pezzullo (2016) indicate that communicating about the environment is centred on two core concepts:

1. The importance of human communication to influence perceptions and relations with the natural world;
2. The role of the public sphere in influencing decisions about the environment through different perspectives.

Cox and Pezzullo (2016:31) describe environmental communication as a subject of study but also a daily activity. This field of study is constructed on people's understanding of nature and how their actions influence the environment. Human's understanding of and actions toward their environment are shaped by the information they are provided (e.g. scientific research and evidence). It is also impacted by ways in which communication channels such as news, films, social networks, public debate, popular culture and everyday conversations, form or sway their view of the environment (Cox & Pezzullo, 2016:31).

It is challenging to define environmental communication due to the wide range of subjects included in this field of study, therefore, Cox and Pezzullo (2016:32) investigate the areas of study to move a step closer to a comprehensive definition. Possible areas of study for environmental communication are explicated below (cf. Cox & Pezzullo, 2016:34-39).

Environmental rhetoric and the social-symbolic 'construction' of nature (Cox & Pezzullo, 2016:35):

Early studies on environmental communication focused on the rhetoric of environmental writers and campaigns. These scholars examined how language helps construct or represent nature to people, for example environmentalists' rhetoric about climate change that reshaped people's perspective on this matter. This led to support for reducing carbon footprint and demands for governments to act more environmentally responsible. Studies of language and symbolic forms, on the other hand, help people understand the constitutive power of communication to generate ideas and meanings about the environment, for example, the use of visual images to convey the disastrous effects of a natural disaster such as an oil spill on an ecosystem.

Public participation in environmental decision-making (Cox & Pezzullo, 2016:36):

According to Cox and Pezzullo (2016:36), when citizens are given a voice in environmental affairs, their participation improves the quality and legitimacy of a decision and can lead to improved environmental quality. Unfortunately, there still are several barriers that prevent citizens from getting involved in decision-making about their own communities and natural environments (Cox & Pezzullo, 2016:36). Numerous scientists, environmentalists and governments are scrutinized

for their failure to invite, and unwillingness to encourage, locals to participate in decisions that ultimately affect them.

Environmental collaboration and conflict resolution (Cox & Pezzullo, 2016:37):

Dissatisfaction with certain antagonistic forms of public participation has lead scholars and practitioners to explore alternative means of resolving environmental conflict (Cox & Pezzullo, 2016:36). Collaboration though communication is encouraged between, for example local governments and stakeholders to solve problems rather than turn to activism. Collaboration can be defined as the constructive, open, civil communication through conversation that focuses on the future. The emphasis is on learning and a degree of sharing power or levelling of the playing field, which is important when attempting to resolve environmental conflict (Cox & Pezzullo, 2016:37).

Media and environmental journalism (Cox & Pezzullo, 2016:37):

Research within environmental media focuses on ways in which the news, advertising and commercial programming portray nature and environmental problems and the media's effect on the publics' perceptions and attitudes towards nature (Cox & Pezzullo, 2016:37). Studies in environmental media also explore the power of social media when people and organisations are engaged with environmental concerns.

Representations of nature in advertising and popular culture (Cox & Pezzullo, 2016:38):

Using nature images in film, television, photography, music and commercial advertising is not a novel enterprise. However, Cox and Pezzullo (2016:38) report a growing number of studies that examine how popular cultural images/products (green advertising, wildlife films, tabloids) influence people's attitudes about the environment. Other studies focus on how popular media maintain or reject attitudes of cultural dominance or exploitation of the natural world.

Advocacy campaigns and message construction (Cox & Pezzullo, 2016:39):

A growing area of study, according to Cox and Pezzullo (2016:39), is research on public information and advocacy campaigns by environmental groups, scientists and corporations that inform the public about issues such as climate change, deforestation and over-fishing. The purpose of such campaigns is to educate, change attitudes and mobilise the masses for a cause. Nevertheless, practitioners need to overcome several challenges in order to reach audiences. An

example is the challenge to communicate the risks of climate change to the lay public and to influence their sense of urgency to act on it. Fortunately, social media had a large impact on environmentalists' and conservation/environmental organisations' visibility and effectiveness to reach audiences and convey messages.

Science and risk communication (Cox & Pezzullo, 2016:39):

Science and risk communication refer to the ways environmental risks are conveyed to affected publics (Cox & Pezzullo, 2016:39). This type of communication includes a wide range of practices. Examples range from news-media reports on the risks of pollution and the depletion of water resources due to hydraulic fracturing ('fracking'), to government reports of possible cancer suffered from exposure to pesticides that are sprayed on agricultural fields.

Cox and Pezzullo (2016:40) understand environmental communication as "the pragmatic and constitutive vehicle for our understanding of the environment as well as our relationship to the natural world; it is the symbolic medium that we use in constructing environmental problems and in negotiating society's different responses to them". Defined this way, environmental communication serves two functions (Cox & Pezzullo, 2016:40-41):

- *Pragmatic:* It educates, alerts, persuades and helps people solve environmental problems. Communication is the means through which people solve problems and is often part of public education campaigns. For example, a pragmatic function of communication occurs when an environmental group educates its supporters and rally their support to protect a wilderness area, or when an electricity provider attempts to change public perception of coal by investing in TV advertisements promoting 'clean coal' as an energy source.
- *Constitutive:* The communication helps construct or compose representations of nature and environmental problems as subjects of people's understanding. Such communication invites particular perspectives and evokes certain values by creating conscious referents for recipients' attention. For example, different images of nature invite people to perceive forests and rivers as natural resources for use or exploitation, or as essential to protect since it is a vital life-support system.

To summarise, a campaign to protect a wilderness area may educate and rally supporters (pragmatic) but also has the possibility that its advocates perceive 'wilderness' as 'unspoiled

nature', thus constructing or composing nature in new ways for people's understanding (constitutive).

The present study follows the design of Cox and Pezzullo (2016) on environmental communication. Building on their views, many areas of study as listed above supports characteristics of strategic communication. These include the following:

- Public participation in decision-making, collaboration and conflict resolution all link with the systems theory and two-way communication.
- Advertising and message construction about environmental issues or nature implies communication channel selection, and strategic planning of messages for an audience.
- Environmental collaboration and conflict resolution also connects with stakeholder relationship management.

It is clear from the theory and discussion above, that environmental communication shares several characteristics with communication management. Therefore, the present study proposes that *strategic conservation communication* can be incorporated in or listed as a field of study in environmental communication, and is discussed in more detail in the following section.

2.9 STRATEGIC CONSERVATION COMMUNICATION

Organisations related to wildlife conservation are key social actors when communicating concerns surrounding wildlife and associated challenges (Verma *et al.*, 2015:648). These organisations should be aware of their own reliance on public support. Therefore, they should be well versed in launching activities for public outreach and raising awareness, which will help them reach their conservation goals. Methods of outreach, according to Verma *et al.* (2015:648), range from educational campaigns, advertising and branding of projects, to research on citizen science. It also includes varying degrees of public participation (such as volunteering in this case), and media strategies.

Conservation organisations employ these methods to address continued environmental degradation but often fail to reach the desired outcome. Failure to address environmental problems successfully, causes concerns about possible communication gaps between researchers, policy makers, the media, conservation practitioners and the public. This requires an increasing prominence and the consolidation of conservation communication (Verma *et al.*, 2015:648).

Conservation communication entails the planned and strategic use of communication (channel choice, intended messages) with targeted stakeholders, and specifically the media. The aim is to support effective policy-making, public participation and implementation of projects geared towards environmental sustainability (Oepen *et al.*, 1999:10). As reported by Oepen *et al.* (1999:10), conservation communication implies two-way social interaction that helps the role-players understand key environmental factors and their interdependencies, and respond to problems fully. Conservation communication aims to create a shared vision of a sustainable future where social groups cooperate to solve or prevent environmental problems. In other words, this is not merely about the dissemination of information on environmental matters (Oepen *et al.*, 1999:10).

However, conservation communication is rarely integrated as a strategic tool into programmes of cooperation in social development (Oepen *et al.*, 1999:7). For this reason, a stakeholder group on conservation communication known as the Development Assistance Committee's Working Party on Development Cooperation and Environment was established in 1997. The aim was to implement environmental communication as a strategic tool. The group consisted of individuals from Germany, Canada, Belgium, Sweden, UNEP (United Nations Environment Program) and IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature). According to Oepen *et al.* (1999:7), this group strived to create a working, peer-reviewed paper that can be used as a tool to demonstrate how conservation communication can become an integrated component of projects. These projects would help ensure that human and financial resources are allocated to advocate environmental stability.

Environmental programmes or projects often have limited success. Often these endeavours find little to no multi-faceted communication or inter-institutional cooperation. Oepen *et al.* (1999:8) indicates that environmental projects have limited success due to the following reasons:

- Environmentalists believe that scientific facts and ecological concerns are convincing on their own.
- Communication barriers are often disregarded.
- One-way dissemination of information is used, thus disregarding understanding, instead of using two-way communication to reach a win-win situation.
- Communication is often conducted on a sporadic basis, using top-down media and thereby neglecting public participation.
- Decision-makers do not know how to incorporate a communication strategy in their environmental projects and, thus, are not willing to invest in such an approach.

When embedded in a well-defined communication strategy, conservation communication makes use of methods, instruments and techniques from fields such as development communication, PR, marketing and education. Therefore, according to Oepen *et al.* (1999:8), conservation communication can be seen as a management tool that connects environmental issues, related socio-political processes and public participation. In this sense, communication on conservation matters is related to education and training, by providing technical know-how and action-oriented change.

Isolated (conservation) initiatives that are not integrated into a comprehensive communication strategy may cause inflated expectations, irrational appeals and incorrect dissemination of information/messages. This is similar to the result that profit organisations will experience in such circumstances (Cornelissen *et al.*, 2006; Jacobson, 2009; Oepen *et al.*, 1999; Steyn, 2002; 2007). Therefore, Oepen *et al.* (1999:15) encourages organisations, when implementing projects, to define up front the purpose and intended recipients of the information, and how stakeholders/beneficiaries should translate it into communication and action. This is best achieved in a systematic and comprehensive strategy for communication on conservation (Oepen *et al.*, 1999:15).

It is interesting to note that Oepen *et al.*'s (1999) suggested conservation communication strategy are similar to the one suggested by literature on strategic communication management. The steps entail the following: a situation analysis and problem identification; identification of stakeholders; establishing communication objectives; developing the communication strategy; determining the publics, appropriate channels and messages; producing the messages; and testing and evaluation.

Oepen *et al.* (1999:41) points out that from the stages of planning, implementation, through to evaluation of a conservation communication strategy, there is a need for an 'expert' to oversee the process. Such a supervisor has the following roles: provides training in methods, instruments and media for specific environmental communication strategies; develops a local pool of experts to address issues (e.g., a water-assessment specialist or ecologist); acts as an intermediary between national and regional levels; and builds relationships with strategic allies.

The present study, however, does not focus on the steps comprising the communication strategy, but rather on the need for strategic conservation communication. Therefore, the specific steps of the communication strategy will not be discussed in more detail.

To manage stakeholder relationships in the context of conservation volunteers, the organisation need to be aware that it depends on its environment for survival. The organisation must be able to adjust and adapt to changes as well as continually interact with key stakeholders, seeing its survival depends on the participation of people. Establishing two-way communication between the organisation and its stakeholders is another vital component to successful relationships. Two-way communication enables parties to exchange views, feelings and opinions to understand one another better, and to find a win-win situation for all. Strategies should also be implemented to cultivate relationships where possible. Most importantly, relationships should be measured to help an organisation evaluate its strategies for communication and stakeholder relationship management. Ultimately, this means that strategic conservation communication should be employed.

2.10 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, communication management was discussed based on a systems theory and paradigm of two-way symmetrical communication. Theories were also investigated, namely strategic communication management, stakeholder relationship management and strategic conservation communication. This was done to focus on the meta-theories of corporate communication management and conservation communication. This chapter set out to explain how communication management and stakeholder relationship management can be combined with and used in conservation communication. The aim was to establish strategic conservation communication management, as well as its application and importance for conservation organisations to build mutually beneficial relationship with volunteers, as a conceptual framework for improved volunteer relationships.

This chapter proposed the incorporation of a strategic conservation communication strategy as an important tool in dealing with volunteers. This would help a conservation organisation such as SCE reach its conservation and communication goals, and in the process build healthy long-term relationships with volunteers – on whom the company depend for its survival. Chapter 2 thus explained the theoretical foundations of the research at hand. In the following chapters, the research methodology will be discussed (ch 3), followed by an examination of the collected data (ch 4, and ch 5).

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter identified different aspects of strategic conservation communication management and stakeholder relationship management. The focus was on ways these theories can contribute to the building and maintaining of relationships with volunteers and enhance conservation communication messages of Shamwari Conservation Experience (SCE). These variables were framed further within paradigms, meta-theories and theories, as discussed in Chapter 2.

This chapter focuses on the research design and describes the methods used to test theoretical findings against the *Specific research questions* as presented in Chapter 1 (1.5.2). The aim is also to explain the specific research methods employed for obtaining, analysing and interpreting data.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

A research design, according to Babbie and Mouton (2001:72), addresses the planning of scientific inquiry. A research design is a plan that indicates how the research is conducted, whom or what is involved, and when and where the study will take place (Du Plooy, 2009:85).

The present study followed a combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Du Plooy (2009:40) and Babbie and Mouton (2001:275) explain triangulation as using two or more data-collection methods to gain insight into a specific problem. Triangulation is one of the best ways to enhance validity and reliability in research, seeing that the combined use of research methods can partially overcome the deficiencies of using only a single method. Thus, it can counter biases that stem from the use of single methodologies (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:275).

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005:94), quantitative research can be used to answer questions about relationships between measured variables, with a purpose to predict, explain and control phenomena. Qualitative research is used to answer questions about the complexities in the nature of phenomena, in order to describe and understand what is being researched. A qualitative approach helps the researcher understand and explain a concept. With reference to the present study, such a research focuses on interpreting and constructing the qualitative aspects of a communication experience (Du Plooy, 2009:30). Both approaches, as indicated by

Leedy and Ormrod (2005:94), involve similar processes, namely conducting a literature study to identify measurement criteria, as well as collecting and thereafter, analysing the data.

Denzin (1978, cited by Jick, 1979:602) defines triangulation as “the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon”. Multiple viewpoints, as Jick (1979:602) points out, allow for finer accuracy. Furthermore, the convergence or agreement between two methods enhances the observers’ belief that results are valid. The effectiveness of triangulation is based on the premise that the weaknesses in each approach will be compensated for by the counter-balancing strengths of the others.

Robson (2002:174) identifies four types of triangulation:

- Data triangulation, the use of more than one method of collecting data;
- Observer triangulation, using more than one observer in the study;
- Theory triangulation, using multiple theories or perspectives;
- Methodological triangulation, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, as used in the present study.

Triangulation, according to Jick (1979:608), allows researchers to be more confident about their results as multi-methods can provide an enriched explanation of the research problem (Jick, 1979:609). Jick (1979:609) also points out triangulation’s typical shortcomings, for example, replication if the research design is not constructed carefully.

3.3 RESEARCH METHODS

The research methods were selected to generate data in order to answer the *Specific research questions* as indicated in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Specific research question and related research method

Specific research questions	Research method
1. How can relationships with volunteers be managed through a strategic approach to conservation communication, according to literature?	- Literature study
2. To what extent does Shamwari Conservation Experience manage volunteer relationships by applying strategic conservation communication management?	- Semi-structured interviews with SCE managers and coordinators - Content analysis of SCE's Facebook page
3. How do volunteers experience the extent to which Shamwari Conservation Experience apply strategic conservation communication in managing relationships with them?	- Semi-structured interviews with students and volunteers - Group, self-administered questionnaire (students and volunteers)

Each of these research methods will be discussed in more detail below.

3.3.1 Literature study

The aim of the literature study was to identify theories and constructs and its application, to determine how SCE can build relationships with volunteers and students through strategic conservation communication. To achieve this, the following databases were consulted to determine whether literature is available to launch the study:

- Catalogue of books: Ferdinand Postma Library (North-West University)
- NRF: Nexus
- EbscoHost: Communication & Mass Media, Environment Complete, Environmental Communication
- JSTOR
- Emerald
- ScienceDirect
- GoogleScholar

The literature study indicated that there are sufficient material and literature available for research on the mentioned topics. However, no similar study could be found in a South African context that focuses on strategic conservation communication management and stakeholder relationship management for conservation volunteering.

Several overseas studies were found with a seemingly similar focus to the present study. The need for conservation communication to communicate conservation messages are advocated by Jacobson (2009). Bickford *et al.* (2012) addresses the need for a multi-disciplinary approach to solve environmental problems. Mangel *et al.* (1996) stresses the need for communication to improve prospects for effective conservation through stakeholders' involvement. Anderson (2015), Cox and Pezzullo (2016), and Milstein (2009) elaborate on environmental communication as an area of study and what it entails. Oepen *et al.* (1999) share guidelines for implementing a strategic environmental communication plan. None of these studies, however, include the application of strategic conservation communication for volunteer management, and/or within the South African landscape.

Further studies in the literature explored the internal communication and image management of conservation organisations. Preston *et al.* (1994) suggest that collaboration between professional ecologists and business leaders is necessary for conservation and development in South Africa. The scholars indicate that these entities have a mutually unfavourable image regarding their roles in conservation development and stances on conservation issues. They argue that the lack of communication between these groups is the cause of misguided perceptions and the lack of co-operation in developing conservation. In this regard, Van der Merwe (1995) examines the role of communication management to help conservational organisations function more effectively. Van der Merwe (1995) suggests that communication strategy can help overcome obstacles, effectively target audiences and guide an organisation to select the right media mix. Although these two studies refer to communication management, they do not deal with strategic communication on conservation, in order to manage volunteers.

The majority of studies on conservation volunteering examines volunteers' motives (Abell, 2012; O'Brien *et al.*, 2010; Measham & Barnett, 2007) or their contribution to a project (Asah & Blahna, 2013; Bell, 2003; Buizer *et al.*, 2012). Higgins and Shackleton (2015) examine the benefits from and barriers to participation in environmental volunteering in South Africa. Most of these studies point out important factors that should be included or researched in an overall communication strategy. However, none of these researchers incorporated strategic management of volunteer-stakeholder relationships through conservation communication. For example, if an organisation knows the benefits that a volunteer seeks, it can incorporate strategies to improve volunteers' satisfaction. This can be done through environmental scanning and understanding of the stakeholders' environment. Furthermore, research on volunteers' motivation can indicate which strategies to communicate messages can be used to reach people.

3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

Within the context of qualitative research, semi-structured interviews were used to answer *Specific research questions 2 and 3* partially. According to Robson (2002:270), semi-structured interviews comprise predetermined questions, of which the order can be modified based on the interviewer's perception of what is appropriate. Questions' wording can be changed and explanations given, and additional questions included if needed. In the present study, semi-structured interviews were used to explore the views of SCE managers and volunteers. The aim was to learn and understand the participants' perceptions and feelings, that could otherwise not have been observed, and thereafter identify possible aspects that was not described in the literature study.

3.3.2.1 Sampling

A purposeful sampling method was used to select participants for the semi-structured interviews with SCE employees and volunteers. Purposeful sampling means selecting participants according to the aims of the research, and according to status and their role or function in an organisation (Coyne, 1997:624). According to Patton (1990, cited in Coyne, 1997:624), the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich participants who disclose significant information about issues or characteristics important to the research topic. Participants were selected from the SCE staff group, the coordinator positions, and from the volunteers.

Six individuals of SCE staff were selected based on their role within the organisation and programme. Three people fulfilled managerial roles and three coordinator roles. The managerial positions are: (i) Marketing and Product Development Manager, (ii) Operations Manager and (iii) Senior Volunteer Coordinator (who fulfils a more managerial role whilst still being a coordinator). The coordinator positions are: (i) Senior Volunteer Coordinator (although having a similar title to one of the managerial roles, this person fulfils a more operational role), (ii) Volunteer Coordinator and (iii) Social Media Coordinator. Although SCE employs more coordinators and freelance coordinators during specific periods of the year, the most experienced and longest serving coordinators were selected based on their experience and knowledge of SCE and the programmes it offers.

The selection of volunteers for interviews was based on their interest in SCE and conservation, willingness to participate in the study, time spent at SCE, and their knowledge of the programme. Based on these characteristics, six volunteers were chosen purposefully for an interview. No student volunteer participated in the interviews either due to unwillingness or time restrictions.

One volunteer participant's interview was also conducted through Skype due to logistical constraints. This interview was also voice-recorded and transcribed, together with the rest.

3.3.2.2 Interview procedure

The researcher was present for the duration of the data-collection process, and it was easy to set a time and place for each face-to-face interview. Managers and coordinators were approached and asked to indicate a suitable date and time that would not interfere with their schedule. Interviews with SCE managers and coordinators were conducted in a lecture room, or private room on the premises during August to early September 2015. Seeing that the coordinators were occupied with student groups and individual volunteers, interviews with the coordinators were conducted on specific days when they had no volunteers to cater for, or had time available. The researcher, along with the selected coordinator, requested permission from the Senior Coordinator and Operations Manager to ensure that the interview did not interfere with their responsibilities.

The researcher was known to the volunteers and approached a number of them to participate in a face-to-face interview. Thereafter a date and time for the interview was agreed on. The interviews were conducted in the lecture room on the premise, or in the office. Interviews were carried out 'after hours' (after the day's programme, thus after 18:00) or on weekends if/when the selected volunteer remained on the premises. Interviews with selected volunteers took place only after they filled out the questionnaire and after at least attending SCE for as long as a week, and thus having a clearer idea of the programme. Interviews with volunteers took place from late July to end of August, and again in November 2015.

At the beginning of the interview, the interviewer informed the participants of the present study's title and the purpose of the interview, and thanked them for participating. The participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality regarding their responses, and the recording of the interview was discussed. Thereafter the interview was conducted according to the interview schedule as discussed below (3.3.2.3). In the case where participants were bilingual, they could choose to answer either in Afrikaans or English. Where participants answered in Afrikaans, their responses were translated to English.

The fact that the researcher could spend time at SCE to collect data worked well since it made it possible to conduct interviews in terms of flexible dates and times most convenient to the individual participants.

3.3.2.3 Interview schedule

As discussed by Du Plooy (2009:198) and Babbie (2004:300), the schedule for semi-structured interviews contains standardised questions and/or a list of topics from which the interviewer is free to deviate, and may ask follow-up or probing questions based on the participant's reply. Legard *et al.* (2003:141-142) identify certain key features of the in-depth aspect of semi-structured interviews:

- It intends to combine structure with flexibility.
- The format is interactive.
- The researcher uses a range of probes to elicit in-depth responses through exploration and explanation.
- The activity is generative in the sense that new knowledge or thoughts are likely to emerge or be created.

Two sets of interview schedules were compiled, one for the managers and coordinators of SCE, and the other for the volunteers who participated in the program at SCE (see Annexures A and B). Both interview schedules started off with more general questions, followed by more specific questions that relate to constructs identified in the literature study. The interview schedule for managers and coordinators of SCE, focused on aspects such as: communication between SCE and volunteers, SCE's communication planning and how it fits into their strategic mandate, which SCE follows to manage of stakeholder relationships. The volunteer interview schedule addressed the following matters: How individual volunteers describe communication between themselves and SCE, experiences of SCE's communication based on its strategic mandate, and their thoughts and feelings about SCE's relationship building with them.

3.3.2.4 Data analysis

Each interview was transcribed and analysed through qualitative thematic analysis. Such data analysis entails the non-numerical examination and interpretation of observations, to discover meanings and patterns of relationships (Babbie, 2004:370). According to Gelo *et al.* (2008:276), qualitative data analysis is carried out on collected data by using content or thematic analysis. This type of analysis examines data for recurrent instances of comments on the various themes, which are then grouped together (Gelo *et al.*, 2008:276). The researcher also examined new themes that were identified in the interviews (Schmidt, 2004:253, 257).

The interview findings are discussed in Sections 4.2 and 4.3.

3.3.2.5 Practical challenges

Challenges encountered in completing the qualitative semi-structured interviews were mostly related to interviews with volunteers. Although volunteers were willing to participate, there were issues with regard to the time of interviews. Interviews with volunteers were scheduled according to the conservation programme (after hours or during lunch). However, due to fluctuations in the programme, interviews needed to be moved to a later time. Seeing that the researcher resided on the premises, interview times could be adjusted according to the programme and the interviewees' time preferences.

Managers and coordinators of SCE were under pressure to reach work objectives; hence their available time was limited. This challenge was overcome by the fact that the interview procedure was flexible and participants could choose a time that suited their schedule the best.

3.3.2.6 Personal observations

The researcher made the following observations during interviews. SCE managers and coordinators were extremely helpful in discussing the research topic, and open to discuss their programme and how they operate it. Each participant has his/her own opinions and have been an SCE employee for several years. As a result, these individuals have their own perceptions of the questions and the operation of SCE programmes, relationship building strategies and their media output. Volunteers were keen to discuss with the researcher their thoughts and feelings about SCE.

3.3.3 Content analysis of online media

Content analysis is the study of recorded human communication (Babbie, 2004:314) and is used to answer questions such as: "Who says what, to whom, why, how, and with what effect?" (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:384). This type of analysis is used in various types of communication research such as mass-media content, transcripts of group discussions, or in an organisation's communication.

A distinction can be drawn between quantitative and qualitative content analysis although a combination of both methods can be used. Irrespective of the method used, content analysis employs the following units of analysis (Du Plooy, 2009:214):

- Physical units such as the medium of communication, number of pages, time duration;
- Syntax units such as paragraphs, phrases, words;
- Thematic units repeating patterns of ideas related to issues;
- Propositional units such as questions, statements and arguments. In the present study thematic units (concepts) were used.

Du Plooy (2009:214) mentions two requirements for quantitative content analysis: a systematic procedure should be followed, and the criteria used to categorise the content must be impartial and unbiased to ensure objectivity and validity. According to Du Plooy (2009:219), traditionally, qualitative content analysis was not conducted or reported in numerical terms, but rather guided by questions and reported as descriptions of attributes.

Hsieh and Shannon (2005:1277) identify three types of qualitative content analyses, namely conventional, directed, and summative. All three approaches are used to interpret meaning from the content of text data. In this sense, all three adhere to a naturalistic paradigm, but are different in its use of coding schemes, origins of codes, and threats to trustworthiness (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1277). The present study utilised directed content analysis. Such an analysis starts off with a theory or relevant research findings and guidelines for initial codes. The summative content analysis involves counting and comparing key words or content, and then interpreting the underlying context (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1277). The goal of a directed approach is to validate or conceptually expand a theoretical framework or theory. Existing theory or research provides pre-directions about the variables of interest or about the relationships among variables, and can thus help determine the initial coding system.

The content analysis on SCE's Facebook page was conducted in July 2015. This was selected as a busy month due to the large number of student groups and individual volunteers who frequent the organisation. All written content and images on Facebook were analysed for the particular month. Facebook is the most popular social network with 1.5 billion active users and has the highest engagement in time spent on the network (Chaffey, 2016). This means that if Facebook is well managed within a strategic communication plan, an organisation is likely to experience high stakeholder engagement (Allagui & Breslow, 2016:21). Due to Facebook's mentioned popularity, it has a high probability of follower involvement. Regarding the present research, SCE's Facebook page was found to have the most followers of their social platforms. Therefore, this channel was targeted and analysed according to a directed content analysis.

3.3.4 Group, self-administered questionnaires

Group, self-administered questionnaires were selected as survey and quantitative research to answer *Specific research question 3*. Du Plooy (2009:190) indicates strengths and limitations to group-administered questionnaires. These strengths include: low costs associated with the survey, high response rate, and relatively brief data-collection time. Furthermore, responses can be standardised and the researcher can answer questions from respondents. The limitations are that follow-up questions cannot be posed and respondents are not anonymous, however, responses are kept anonymous and confidential (Du Plooy, 2009:191). In addition, the main disadvantage of this type of survey is that it is not easy to draw a sample representing a diverse target or accessible population, at a single place, at the same time. The present study focused on students and volunteers who participate in a programme at SCE and have spent at least two weeks on the premises. Therefore, the limitations mentioned by Du Plooy (2009:190-191) were mostly not a factor within the present study.

The respondents filled in the questionnaire on hard copy. As SCE is situated on a game reserve and participants have to purchase data to use Wi-Fi, the researcher could not expect them to complete an online survey. Completing the questionnaire in groups on the game reserve's premises helped ensure a highly favourable response rate.

3.3.4.1 Sampling

For a representative sample, quantitative researchers may resort to probability sampling (Gelo *et al.*, 2008:274). This means that each member of the population has the same probability to be included in the sample, which thus represents the population (Babbie, 2004:186). According to Babbie (2004:189), there are two key advantages to probability sampling:

- It is more representative than other types of sampling because it avoids biases (i.e. when those selected are not typical or representative of the larger population).
- It permits researchers to estimate the sample's accuracy or representativeness.

The strategy of probability sampling chosen for the present study was cluster sampling. According to Gelo *et al.* (2008:275), this form of sampling involves a random selection of respondents within naturally occurring groups in the population. The two separate clusters selected for the questionnaires were student volunteer groups and individual volunteers participating at SCE. These cluster samples are seen as representative of the whole population who might participate

at SCE. Since it is difficult to obtain a list of all prospective participants in SCE throughout a year, another form of sampling, such as systematic sampling, would not be possible.

All student volunteer groups and individual volunteers who were participants at SCE when the study was conducted were thus asked to fill in the questionnaires. Seeing that SCE hosts up to 1 000 participants annually, the researcher endeavoured to obtain 200 participants to fill out the questionnaire with 50% part of a students' group and 50% being volunteers.

3.3.4.2 Compiling the questionnaire

The questionnaire (see Annexure C) was structured according to the constructs identified in the literature study. The structure consisted of an introduction and four sections or categories. Table 3.2 below provides a representation of the questionnaire that describes the goal of each section, the construct related to the section as well as the question number and type of measurement scale that was used.

As pointed out in Table 3.2 below, the questionnaire followed a specific structure. The introduction set out the title and aim of the research and discussed the issue of confidentiality. Section 1 asked participants to fill out demographic information; Section 2 consisted of questions on SCE's communication management and channels as well as the participant's use of communication channels. Section 3 focused on relationship cultivation strategies and Section 4 on relationship outcomes.

In order to test the respondents' perceptions of the various constructs, a Likert-type scale was used. According to Babbie (2004:169), such a scale measures responses to categories in survey questionnaires to determine the relative intensity of different items. Commonly the Likert-scale consists of basic categories such as 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' through which respondents rate statements. Category questions were also used, together with a single open question.

The North-West University's Statistical Consultation Service verified and reviewed the measurement levels and coding of the questionnaire before it was finalised.

Table 3.2: Representation of questionnaire

Construct	Section	Questions	Type of measurement scale
Demographic information			
Demographics	1	1-5	Multiple choice
Communication			
Communication in general	1 2	6 7	Likert-scale
Two-way symmetrical communication	2	8	
Information received about SCE	2	6	
Volunteers communicating about SCE	2	9, 10	
Relationship cultivation strategies			
Access	3	11,12	Likert-scale
Positivity	3	13	
Openness and disclosure	3	14	
Networking	3	15	
Sharing of tasks	3	16	
Assurance of legitimacy	3	24	
Stakeholder involvement scale - Admiration - Nurture - Instrumental aid	3	17-24 17, 18 19, 20, 23, 24 21, 22, 23	
Relationship outcomes			
Trust - Integrity - Dependability - Competence	4	25-30 25,26 27,28 29,30	Likert-scale
Control mutuality	4	31-33	
Commitment	4	34-36	
Satisfaction	4	37-39	
Communal and exchange	4	40-43	
Strategic conservation communication			
Strategic conservation communication	1 3 4	7 21 39	Open ended Likert-scale

3.3.4.3 Pre-testing the questionnaire

Babbie (2004:256) points out that no matter how careful researchers design a data-collection instrument such as a questionnaire, there is the possibility of errors, for example, ambiguous questions and questions respondents are unable to answer. To protect against such errors, Babbie (2004:256) stresses the importance of pre-testing the questionnaire partially or fully.

According to Robson (2002:254), the draft questionnaire is best pre-tested informally, by using respondents from the group of interest.

For the present study, the draft questionnaire was completed by four volunteers under the supervision of the Operations Manager at SCE. The respondents involved in the pre-testing of the questionnaire were not part of the final sample, but did represent the characteristics of the sample's population. Only two changes were made after pre-testing the questionnaire:

- In Section 1, Question 4 was changed to be more specific, from "Indicate whether you are a student or volunteer at Shamwari Conservation Experience" to "Indicate whether you are a student as part of a group or individual volunteer at Shamwari Conservation Experience".
- Secondly, a question in Section 3, "SCE believes that my opinion is valuable (legitimate)", was repeated in Section 4. Therefore, the particular question was retained only in Section 4.

3.3.4.4 Questionnaire procedure

The data from the questionnaires were collected from mid-July to mid-September and again mid-October to mid-November 2015. Although SCE host volunteers throughout the year, most student groups are accommodated from April to end of September. Hence it was important to collect data when both groups of participants were present. The Operations Manager provided the researcher with the relevant details on the month's activity, which allowed the researcher to plan accordingly.

Regarding the school, college and university groups, the researcher first engaged the lecturers or teachers responsible for the group to inform them of the study and ask permission to address the students and invite participants to the study. Each student group was informed a number of days to a week in advance of when and where the questionnaires would be administered, also ensuring that it did not interfere with the conservation programme. Student groups usually spend two to three weeks at SCE. Therefore, the questionnaires were administered only after participants were at least a week in residence. This was done to ensure that they understood SCE, the programme and their coordinators. Students were gathered in a lecture room, questionnaires were distributed and the study and the issue of confidentiality explained. The researcher thanked students for their participation and also made it clear that filling out the questionnaires was a voluntary act. Thereafter, the questionnaires were filled out and collected from respondents.

The data-collection process for volunteer questionnaires took longer, seeing that the number of volunteers present at every given week at SCE varied and they are not part of a formal student group. Every Monday, new volunteers arrive depending on the number that left the same day and on the overall availability of accommodation and transport. The volunteers were also at SCE for more than a week before the questionnaires were administered. Each week the researcher had a different number of volunteers who filled out questionnaires; during certain weeks it was more than 12 people, while other weeks as few as 4. Volunteers completed the questionnaires in a lecture room and the same procedure was followed as with the student groups as mentioned above.

3.3.4.5 Response rate

A total of 214 questionnaires were collected of which 2 were unusable. From the number of usable questionnaires, 112 belonged to individual volunteers, and 100 to student volunteers. This delivered a response rate of 99%. The response rate is high owing to the specific data gathering procedures that were followed with engaged respondents.

3.3.4.6 Data analysis

The data obtained from the self-administered questionnaires were analysed statistically by using SPSS Statistics version 22. The North-West University's Statistical Consultation Services assisted in the process of data analysis.

The statistics used for the objectives of the present study include the following: descriptive statistics, t-tests, ANOVA (analysis of variance) calculations, Spearman's correlation coefficient, factor analysis, and for reliability, Cronbach's alpha. Frequency analysis were used to report data for the percentages of respondents who shared a certain opinion. The n-value differs due to the fact that this value represents the total number of participants who answered a specific question. Means show the hypothetical values that indicate the centre of distribution (Field, 2009:35), and standard deviation indicate the spreading of data.

The t-test method is typically used to compare the mean scores of two different groups and thus test the significance of difference between the groups. To determine the difference in means of several different groups (not only two samples where the t-test is used) the ANOVA (analysis of variance) is used. ANOVA establishes possible statistical significance on one or more independent variables between different groups (Struwig & Stead, 2001:162). Statistical significance tests, such as t-test and ANOVA's, are used to show if results are significant. In

reporting data, statistical significance is indicated by the p-value, where $p < 0.05$ is considered as sufficient evidence that the result is statistically significant (Ellis & Steyn, 2003:51).

Correlation coefficient is determined by the type of data, and for the purpose of this study, Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient was used. This correlation coefficient is used to measure the strength of the association/relationship between two variables. A positive correlation means that a higher value on one variable will indicate a higher value on the other (Field, 2009:181). When reporting data correlations, coefficients were interpreted as follows:

- $r = 0.1 - 0.29$ small correlation
- $r = 0.3 - 0.49$ medium correlation
- $r = \geq 0.5$ high correlation

Together with statistical significance, practical significance can also be determined and reported by effect sizes (Ellis & Steyn, 2003:52). To determine practical significance, the effect size can be measured by using the standardised difference between the means of two populations. This is the difference between two means divided by the estimate for standard deviation (Ellis & Steyn, 2003:52). Effect sizes were reported on as follows:

- $d = 0.2$ small effect size
- $d = 0.5$ medium effect size
- $d = 0.8$ large effect size

Correlation coefficients, which are statistically and practically significant, are reported on in Chapter 5 of the present study.

Exploratory factor analysis is used to identify whether the correlations between a set of observed variables stem from a relationship to one or more latent variables (Field, 2009:628). Factor analysis is reported in a correlation matrix table, with the percentage of variance explained by the reported factors. This type of analysis is done to investigate how respondents viewed the constructs compared to the theoretical suggestions.

To ensure the reliability of the data, Cronbach's alpha was used. According to Du Plooy (2009:134), Cronbach's alpha coefficient can be used to determine the reliability of a measurement where there is no right or wrong answer. Cronbach's alpha establishes the consistency with which respondents reacted to items on the measurement. By calculating

Cronbach's alpha coefficient of a measurement, it can determine whether the questionnaire provided consistent results from a similar group of respondents. According to Field (2009:674), this is the most common method to measure scale reliability. Field (2009:675) points out that the number of items on a scale can influence the alpha and should be kept in mind when interpreting the data. A reliable coefficient ranges from 0 (no reliability) to 1 (perfectly reliable) (Du Plooy, 2009:131). Generally, a scale of more 0.6 or 0.7 is considered good and an alpha that approaches 0.9 is excellent (Field, 2009:675, 679).

3.3.4.7 Practical challenges

Challenges encountered during data collection of the questionnaire were related to time. As the questionnaires could not interfere with the programme, the data had to be collected after hours, when students and volunteers have completed the day's activities. The researcher had to keep in mind that respondents could be fatigued after an extensive working day. Therefore, data collection took place as soon as possible after the day's activities were finished.

Seeing that there were respondents from various countries for whom English was not their first language, some respondents found certain questions harder to understand than native English speakers. The researcher was sensitive towards the fact that many non-native English speakers may find it difficult to understand all the questions in the questionnaire. In a few cases participants asked the researcher for synonyms to explain words in the questionnaire since English is their second language. Another observation was that a number of participants, especially from Germany and Switzerland, asked those in their group whom they felt understood English better to describe the question or provide a specific word in their native language.

3.3.4.8 Personal observations

The researcher personally observed that students and volunteers were keen to fill out the questionnaires and was willing to participate in the study. Some volunteers even came to the researcher early on in their stay at SCE, asking when they could fill out the questionnaire.

3.4 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Scholars generally agree that all research must have truth-value, applicability, consistency and neutrality in order to be worthwhile (Morse *et al.*, 2002:15). Reliability and validity are conceptualised as trustworthiness, rigor and quality in a qualitative paradigm. Qualitative and quantitative paradigm requires its own criteria for addressing rigor and trustworthiness. To

achieve rigor within a quantitative paradigm, internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity is important. Within a qualitative paradigm, the following criteria are necessary reach trustworthiness: credibility, fittingness, auditability and confirmability.

Without rigor, research is worthless, becomes fiction and loses its usefulness. Therefore, extensive attention should be given to reliability and validity in all research methods (Morse *et al.*, 2002:14). According to Morse *et al.* (2002:14), some researchers (Altheide & Johnson, 1998, in Morse *et al.*, 2002:14; Leininger, 1994, in Morse *et al.*, 2002:14) argue that reliability and validity are terms unique to a quantitative paradigm and not pertinent in qualitative research. Other researchers (Lincoln & Guba 1985, in Morse *et al.*, 2002:14) suggest that new criteria should be adopted in qualitative research to determine reliability and validity (Morse *et al.*, 2002:14). Morse *et al.* (2002:14) indicate that these new criteria substituted reliability and validity. Among these new criteria, the parallel concept of 'trustworthiness' contains four elements: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Reliability and validity in qualitative research have been replaced unobtrusively by criteria and standards aimed at evaluating the significance, relevance, impact and utility of research (Morse *et al.*, 2002:14).

The criteria or methods used within the present study to reach reliability and validity are discussed in the following subsections.

3.4.1 Reliability of the study

Within quantitative research, reliability implies the extent to which results are consistent over time, and provides an accurate representation of the total population under research (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:119; Golafshani, 2003:598). If a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable. Golafshani (2003:598) identifies three types of reliability in quantitative research which relate to:

- the degree to which a repeated measurement remains the same;
- the stability of a measurement over time;
- the similarity of measurements within a given period.

Although the term reliability is a concept used for testing or evaluating quantitative research, the idea is used in all types of research. According to Golafshani (2003:601), the most important test of any qualitative study is its quality and its function to provide understanding of a situation that would otherwise be incomprehensible. When reliability is seen as a way to evaluate quality, then

this element in a qualitative study has the purpose of generating understanding (Golafshani, 2003:601).

Shenton (2004:63, 64) points out four criteria that qualitative researchers should be considered when they strive for trustworthiness. These are: (i) credibility (preferred to internal validity), (ii) transferability (preferred to external validity), (iii) dependability (preferred to reliability), and (iv) confirmability (preferred to objectivity):

- *Credibility*: Refers to the consistency of the findings with reality. In other words, how the researcher's conclusions correlate with the interviewee's observation of the phenomena. In the present study, findings were not discussed with respondents after the interview was done, but triangulation helped provide credibility to the data.
- *Transferability*: Indicates that the study can be applied to other situations. However, in the present study, it should be noted that the data obtained are not representative of the whole conservation volunteer landscape. The aim of semi-structured interviews with SCE managers, coordinators, and volunteers was to understand the relationship between them and their mutual reliance. Specific findings and characteristics of relationship management related to the interviews may share some aspects if the same interview schedule is applied to another conservation organisation, but it is highly unlikely due to the uniqueness of the SCE programme.
- *Dependability*: Entails the degree to which the information gathered provides a dependable view of the actual interview. For the present study, interviews were voice recorded and transcribed to increase dependability for the data analysis.
- *Confirmability*: Refers to the researcher's objectivity and assurance that the findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the respondents, and not of the researcher. Confirmability was reached by triangulating qualitative and quantitative data and by describing interviewees' perceptions as accurately as possible.

During the present study, qualitative and quantitative methodologies were combined to verify the findings. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with SCE managers and coordinators as well as volunteers. Questions were formulated within the context of strategic communication management and stakeholder relationship management, as described in Chapter 2. The relationship scales of Hon and Grunig (1999) were used in the questionnaire, while having been established and verified through research beforehand. The researcher added Bortree and Waters' (2010) stakeholder involvement scale to Hon and Grunig's (1999) relationship scale. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated for each of the relationship cultivation strategies and relationship

outcomes. This was done to determine whether the questions and statements helped establish the students and volunteers' perceptions of the different constructs.

3.4.2 Validity of the study

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:122), validity is the extent to which an empirical measurement adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration.

3.4.2.1 Measurement validity

Measurement validity deals with the degree to which the measuring instrument actually measures what it claims to have done (Babbie, 2004:143; Du Plooy, 2009:135). Measurement validity is different to internal and external validity. Various methods can be used to determine such validity. These methods include: content, expert-jury, criterion-based, and construct validity. The methods employed within the present study to establish validity are examined below, followed by a discussion of internal and external validity.

- *Content validity*: Babbie (2004:145) defines content validity as “the degree to which a measure covers the range of meanings included within a concept”. Content validity is addressed through face validity and expert-jury validity; Face validity, according to Du Plooy (2009:135), is determined by the quality of an item judged by the researchers to be a reasonable measure of a variable (on its face, the measuring item seems to measure what it claims to do). In the present study, while compiling the questionnaire, questions were formulated in such a way to ensure a clear meaning to each question, and to address the relevant constructs. Expert-jury validity indicates that other researchers regarded as experts on the subject matter evaluated the merit of the measure (Du Plooy, 2009:136). While the different questions were formulated for the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, the study leader was involved to ensure that questions were adequate and included the key constructs as identified by the literature.
- *Criterion-based validity*: Babbie (2004:144) describes criterion-related validity as the degree to which a measure relates to some external criterion. In the present study, concurrent validity was used as a “measurement correlated with a measure of the same thing that has previously been validated” (Du Plooy, 2009:136). During the construction of the questionnaire, stakeholder relationships between SCE and students/volunteers were based on Hon and Grunig's (1999) relationship scale. It was also based on theoretical

constructs of stakeholder relationship management theory and Bortree and Waters' (2010) stakeholder involvement scale.

3.4.2.2 Internal and external validity

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005:97), the internal validity of a research study is the extent to which its design and the data that were gathered allow the researcher to draw accurate conclusions about cause and effect, and other relationships within the data. On the other hand, Leedy and Ormrod (2005:99) describe external validity as the extent to which a research's results can be applied to situations beyond these results as such (i.e. conclusions drawn from the study can be generalised to other contexts). Within the present study, the results were particular to an organisation (SCE). In other words, the same results will not be found at other volunteer organisations due to its unique characteristics, but the framework of the study can be applied to other such organisations.

Triangulating the research findings from the questionnaire with the findings of the interviews, enhanced the validity of this study. This is known as triangulation, which combines quantitative and qualitative approaches (Robson, 2002:174) to study a phenomenon from different viewpoints or by different methods. The use of both research methods completed the description, analysis and evaluation of the research questions and objectives. Such a combined approach allowed the application of triangulation to help ensure reliability and validity.

3.5 ETHICS OF THE RESEARCH

Certain ethical considerations need to be kept in mind when doing social research. Babbie (2004:28-29) highlights two basic ethical issues: voluntary participation and no harm to subjects.

Voluntary participation: This involves free choice to participate in the research. Social research often requires of people to reveal personal information or thoughts and feelings about a subject. This also means requesting respondents to participate when they did not request it themselves, and thereby taking time and energy from them (Babbie, 2004:63).

Keeping these aspects in mind, it is crucial for ethical research that individuals participate voluntarily and without coercion. In the present research all managers, coordinators, students and volunteers were free to participate or not.

Avoiding harm: Du Plooy (2009:96) views the principle of ‘do no harm’ as avoiding the following: causing embarrassment, physical discomfort, emotional stress or humiliation to participants for the duration of the study (either during or after the research).

According to Babbie (2004:65), protecting the subjects’ interests and well-being means guarding their identity and keeping all information received from respondents confidential. In the present study, confidentiality was ensured by treating respondents anonymously, numbering questionnaires and capturing questionnaire data. The researcher also did not discuss information from questionnaires with any of SCE’s management or coordinators.

Another key ethical consideration is reporting the truth when analysing the data and the way in which data are reported (Babbie, 2004:68). This was ensured by the assistance of the North-West University’s Statistical Consultation Services in the data analysis.

This study was also ethically approved by the North-West University and allocated the ethics number: NWU-00261-15-A7.

3.6 CONCLUSION

Chapter 3 provided background to the research design of the study as well as a rationale for the use of triangulation to reach the research goals. It further explained the research questions and objectives, measuring instruments, data-collecting methods and analysis as well as ways to ensure reliability and validity of the study.

Chapter 4 and 5 to follow provide insight and report the results of the data that were collected from the semi-structured interviews, content analysis and questionnaires.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH RESULTS: QUALITATIVE DATA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter explained the research methods used to gather information in order to answer the research questions. This chapter focuses on the results from the semi-structured interviews with Shamwari Conservation Experience (SCE) managers, coordinators and volunteers, which will provide qualitative insight into *Specific research questions 2 and 3*.

Specific research question 2: To what extent does Shamwari Conservation Experience manage volunteer relationships by applying strategic conservation communication management?

Specific research question 3: How do volunteers experience the extent to which Shamwari Conservation Experience apply strategic conservation communication in managing relationships with them?

4.2 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH SCE MANAGERS AND COORDINATORS

The interviews with SCE managers and coordinators were analysed against constructs identified within literature and are also reported according to those constructs (see Table 2.1).

The six SCE managers and coordinators who were interviewed had been working with SCE for between 2 to 15 years. It is clear from the number of years they had been involved with SCE, and the positions they hold (see 1.3.3.1), that the participants are capable to describe and explain how SCE manages its strategic communication and build relationships with stakeholders in the process.

It was found that the participants have different qualifications, with no one having received any formal education in communication. The participants can be placed broadly within two main qualification backgrounds, namely nature conservation and business management. Keeping this in mind, it can be expected that the participants in the present study would answer questions about strategic communication management and stakeholder relationship management from their unique point of view.

4.2.1 General overview of SCE's communication according to SCE managers and coordinators

SCE's overall communication goals as described by the participants are related to three main motives: (i) environmental/conservation education, (ii) awareness for the SCE programme and conservation activities/projects. All the participants mentioned they wanted to "educate people about what actually happened behind the scenes" regarding conservation efforts on a game reserve. One interviewee stated: "I think we want to accomplish environmental education where we teach people what we know about conservation issues." Education as described by the participants centres on conservation issues such as rhino poaching, the lion-cub-petting industry and canned lion hunting. One participant explained that they "have to get them [the volunteers] face to face with problems so that they can also contribute solutions. And it gets people thinking, I think it is practically involving people, it keeps them on their toes and it keeps their mind stimulated." Together with environmental education, two participants emphasised the importance for the game reserve to operate in a financially, socially and ecologically sustainable way.

A participant pointed out that the community aspect of the programme is aimed at uplifting the local community and "educating not only the tourist, but also the communities surrounding the area". Awareness is an aspect to which several interviewees referred as creating awareness for the programme and for conservation on the reserve and in South Africa. One participant described SCE's awareness goals in the following way: "The main objective is to increase awareness [of the programmes] around the globe ... The interviewee continued: "It's telling the story of the individuals who arrive and trying to communicate all the tasks they get involved with, what their day-to-day activities are and what basically happens here during their working week, to encourage more and more people to understand what the programme is about."

For another participant, awareness of SCE adds to the programme's sustainability:

The word being spread, the education, the awareness that it brings. That in its own is an achievement, which is far greater than any financial achievement, because that once more comes back to sustainability. It's not specifically about that monitoring exercise on the ground, it's actually about the spin-off, and I think that comes back to the fact that when we started the student experience at Shamwari it wasn't intended, it wasn't started for financial gain. It was started and intended to Shamwari and conservation.

From a purely conservation viewpoint, SCE is focused on providing a responsible and ethical conservation experience, and practitioners aim to incorporate this fact into their communication.

A number of interviewees referred to their messages as staying true to what they do. For them a key message is to make sure that people do not expect a touch-orientated experience (i.e. the hands-on animal work advertised by other volunteer programmes in South Africa). One participant mentioned that they get numerous inquiries from people wanting to work only at or with certain activities that SCE offers. However, SCE does not cater for those applicants who only want to be part of certain aspects of the programme. This finding suggests that it is important for SCE to showcase a wide range of conservation objectives to its participants.

4.2.2 The view of SCE managers and coordinators on systems theory and two-way symmetrical communication

The systems perspective describes how organisations form part of a wider system consisting of publics, in which entities can have a mutual impact (Gregory, 2012:64). This motivates why it is crucial to maintain mutually beneficial relationships between the organisation and its publics, in order to maintain the open system. To determine whether SCE operates as either an open or closed system, interview findings can be compared to the two main characteristics of systems theory applied in the present study, namely open systems and interdependence (see 2.2).

4.2.2.1 Open system

SCE regularly interacts with individual volunteers and student groups. During interviews, SCE management felt they are very open in their communication and interaction with all the parties concerned. One manager in particular oversees the relationships with tour agents and asserted: “We need the agents, we need our partners, they will always be there and that’s because it’s impossible for us to get out there and tell the story. We just ensure that our agents are telling the right story.” Another participant explained that it is about finding a connection and encouraging interaction between SCE and participants as well as participants among themselves.

Another way that SCE encourages information exchange is through a feedback system where participants can rate their experience and give recommendations. A participant mentioned that they do not merely discuss feedback for its own sake, but to determine how they should act or cope better if a situation should arise similar to the one that was complained about.

A few interviewees indicated that they would prefer to establish an environment where participants feel free to approach staff if they have problems: “We expect our guests to communicate honestly with us.” One coordinator explained that in certain cases participants may not get along, or that cliques form within groups. He referred to the fact that people will jest about and sometimes banter

occurs. However, he will only step in and address group behaviour if their actions harm someone or are detrimental to the programme. This approach, furthermore, allows for an open system to be created.

Authors such as Cutlip *et al.* (2002) and Barker *et al.* (2001) point out that no system is completely open or closed. SCE cannot be classified as entirely open as this enterprise sometimes has to disregard the stakeholder in its decision-making. For example, individual participants cannot dictate their daily activities, seeing that they would only choose the “nice” activities. Another example is participants complaining about the fact that dinner is served early in the evening. SCE could not change this condition, seeing that kitchen staff need to get back home. As another participant explained: “I think we take what is said seriously, but we discuss it to determine what was the actual problem, was it the individual who had certain preferences, or was it a specific situation that should not normally happen that way?”

Thus, in certain ways, SCE does operate as a fairly closed system; but is far from being entirely closed. An interviewee explained that if a person has a specific interest in an activity, for example birding, they will try to accommodate this person by incorporating more birding activities into the programme. This is an indication of two-way communication where SCE is willing to alter its programme to accommodate other parties.

4.2.2.2 Interdependence

A key aspect was evident from the interviews, and also supports the systems theory. This is the fact that SCE managers and coordinators do realise they operate within a complex system with several key members and partners that has a hand in the success of the programme. In other words, there are indications of interdependence between SCE, its own staff, Shamwari Game Reserve (SGR), tour operators and all volunteers, according to which they rely on one another to reach goals. A fundamental part of the successful outcome of this conservation experience is that both SCE and its participants benefit from their interaction. SCE goals are achieved through the volunteers’ participation, and these individuals gain experience on various levels, be it personal or professional.

In addition, SCE attempts to accommodate volunteers in order to promote interdependence. For instance, student groups are given the opportunity to develop a tailor-made programme according to their needs, based on a checklist they fill in on arrival. This implies cooperative adjustment to another system, in which SCE is willing to adjust its programme to cater for the needs of its stakeholders.

When asked if SCE and the SGR would survive without volunteers, one participant stated that they (Shamwari) would have to employ a larger number of staff and many staff hours would be needed to do the job. He is of the opinion that filling in the man-hours needed for conservation on the reserve should not be their greatest achievement. All participants agreed that the volunteers have a significant influence in the success of the programme and its future, as one participant stressed: "Without them we can't have a programme." Most participants have a high appreciation for what the volunteers do, how hard some of them work and their continuous enthusiasm. One participant described that one sees the passion grow in participants, whether it is on the reserve or in the community.

It is clear that they wish to make a difference, small or large. The volunteers' participation in manual conservation work helped SCE reach conservation goals, but even more, they become communicators on behalf of SCE. In this regard the volunteers spread the word of SCE (also conservation messages) either in person, or through other communication channels: "With regard to the social media side, some of them get very involved and help spread the word ... those who fully buy into the programme and understand every aspect of it, they are the best ones as our advocates ... Increases the opportunity for exposure."

SCE managers and coordinators believe that volunteers do benefit from the experience, both personally and professionally. There is a general consensus that several young people from abroad will join a volunteer programme to enhance their CVs. Therefore, colleges and universities do give credit to students who have completed conservation programmes. Most of the student groups who join the SCE programme do so as part of a course or module within their semester. According to one participant, three types of people join SCE. Older people generally enrol for personal reasons, to take a break from their busy lives; younger people join for an enjoyable experience, or are taking a Gap-year and want to explore the world. The other groups of younger participants join the programme for more professional reasons such as to gain experience in conservation work, or acquire references to place on CVs. An interviewee mentioned that a number of learners join a volunteer programme to see whether they really want to pursue a career in nature conservation.

One participant mentioned the fact that SCE does not only focus on its programme and to benefit SGR but: "I think it's a type of high that's going to give you a lasting sensation of feeling and another thing it's not just the Shamwari story, it's about Africa really, it's about us selling the Eastern Cape and the continent, it's a bigger picture."

All interviewees reiterated that the coordinators are the most important role-players who help establish interdependence between the volunteers and SCE. The coordinators are responsible for the frontline education, accompanying participants into the field and to ensure that conservation and the organisation's goals are met. They are seen as central to the success of SCE. Although each coordinator is unique, SCE does allow for individual differences, as a participant points out: "Communication from each coordinator will be different, or they do it in their own way ... as long as they follow the blueprint." This ensures coordination between SCE and the volunteers, seeing that they also function interdependently.

To ensure a flowing, open system functioning interdependently with its stakeholders, the close-knit SCE team shares tasks and power. This allows for the decentralisation of management that allows fast adaptation to daily/external changes.

4.2.2.3 Two-way symmetrical communication

With regard to the two-way symmetrical theory, participants discussed specifically a two-way symmetrical approach and the mixed-motive model (see 2.4).

From the interview findings, SCE's communication output can be placed within the **public information** and **mixed-motive model**. SCE's online communication and interpersonal communication with participants are used to describe why this enterprise's communication is applicable to both models. From an online perspective, most of SCE's communication messages help provide a clear picture of who SCE is and the conservation experience this enterprise offers (i.e. through distribution of information). One participant stated unequivocally that SCE does not have to hard-sell anything, seeing that they are telling the story of Shamwari, SCE and the team. This participant points out that people who buy into the SCE story will ultimately join the programme: "If you buy into the basics you can never be disappointed," and: "It's a case of come and help us, and if you like it, please come and join us again." The participant added that the focus of the experience does not centre around the 'you' (specific person who participates), but it is about the bigger picture and the 'us experience'. From that point of view the participant explained: "I haven't included or purposely put any big hooks into our marketing message ... we use a few adages as in behind the scenes." The participant mentions that he uses common threads or four pillars of the experience; conservation, wildlife, ecology and community, when communicating with the trade (tour operators). These pillars circumscribe the bigger picture, the greater project and how the volunteers fit into it – their ecotourism footprint: "Just as long as it's a great experience and great value for money, I think the marketing side, the identity, will almost show itself."

Even when incorporating the information model, it is interesting that the participants refer to this (communication output) as marketing rather than communication. The reason could be that they were not schooled in communication and did not grasp the technical difference between marketing and communication. Throughout the interviews it was clear that participants focused on relationship building with volunteers through their communication efforts.

Another way in which SCE's communication leans towards public information is its social media messaging. One participant describes SCE communication messages as entailing the following:

Type of messages, if you talk about the website it's just – it's what you call holistic information just to make sure they have got access to everything they need about the programme, the place, what you need to bring, what to expect, what the weather might be like – all that sort of stuff ... The message is all about communicating what we are up to, communicating what you do, creating excitement, creating want and enhancing people's knowledge of what the conservation programme is about.

Two-way communication occurs between SCE and its stakeholders in various ways. Interaction take place between different managers and stakeholders. For example, there is two-way communication between the Operations Manager and other office staff and interested parties. The latter includes those seeking information about the programme and/or those booking. Furthermore, two-way communication takes place between the Marketing Manager and tour operators. The Social Media Coordinator interacts with followers (either through direct comments, or by *liking* follower comments on posts) on various social networks.

The other key environment where two-way communication occurs is through interpersonal communication between staff and participants. Coordinators' function is to lead the experience and educate, which implies one-way communication. However, the relationship between the coordinator and volunteers is so close that two-way communication actually is a given. The depth of two-way communication between participants and their coordinator did vary from person to person, but the opportunity is there to engage. Many participants mentioned how they encourage volunteers to ask questions and make an effort to get to know each person and involve them.

In establishing two-way communication, interpersonal communication is paramount especially between the coordinators and participants. Such communication centres around "what it takes to run a place like this", that "environmental education has to be emphasised". This includes day-to-day schedules and changes and health and safety talks, as one participant explains: "It is to brief volunteers what they are doing, why they are doing it, so that they can be informed."

One interviewee emphasised the importance of conveying a wide range of perspectives when educating people and lecturing on aspects such as hunting. The problem is that many view hunting as anti-conservation, whereas others consider this activity as a key contributor to conservation in South Africa. One participant explained that if they send the wrong message it can lead to a misconception of their goals. This can impact negatively on SCE's mission and objectives, thus the practitioners and coordinators should focus on a strong, cohesive conservation message.

Participants were asked to describe how participants communicate to SCE in return, particularly when considering the mixed-motive model. Interviewees mostly referred to interpersonal communication with coordinators and mentioned involvement on social media as ways in which students and volunteers respond to SCE's communication. On arrival, participants are greeted by the Operations Manager or the Facility Manager when they are handed out various forms with house rules, indemnity regulations, or information on whom they can contact (person and telephone numbers) in case of grievances. Each participant is told that the office has an open-door policy and they are encouraged to discuss problems with their coordinator should it arise. As one interviewee asserted: "I can't think they feel we are not approachable." Most participants agreed that the coordinator is usually the person volunteers will approach with questions and grievances. The reason is that they spend the most time with the coordinator and thus trust develops between them. An Operations Manager explained: "We have an open-door policy where we are always available to help if there is a problem, but the relationship they build with the coordinator might make them feel that they are their first contact point."

With regard to social media, a participant gave an example of how volunteers communicate with SCE: "The way they communicate back on Instagram [by] tagging us and that's happening more and more frequently." She also mentioned that the returning participants and those who are about to arrive, are usually more involved on social media. When the Social Media Coordinator was asked whether she could observe that people use their *hash tags* on various platforms, she replied: "Definitely on Instagram, not so much on Facebook." She also mentioned that Facebook only recently [since 2013] joined the *hash tags* and that people are not used to using this function on Facebook, but rather on Instagram and Twitter.

It is evident from the results that no outright communication model is 'followed' by SCE but rather characteristics of several models emerge when analysing their communication practices. There is extensive dissemination of information and a myriad opportunities for two-way communication by role-players through various communication channels. In certain situations, communication is

used to persuade participants to alter their behaviour and comply with rules. Therefore, it be can assumed that SCE is moving more towards a mixed-motive model in their communication.

The views of SCE managers and coordinators regarding strategic communication will be discussed in the following subsection.

4.2.3 SCE managers and coordinators on strategic communication

To describe interviewees' views on strategic communication, the following three trajectories will be followed:

- Strategic planning and communication approach to achieving goals (proactive planning, strategic process, adjustment through emerging strategy, prioritising publics and evaluation);
- Tasks performed by SCE managers and coordinators (communication roles and strategic mandate); and
- Communication channels and communication messages (types of channels and networks and key messages).

4.2.3.1 Strategic planning

This subsection focuses on proactive planning, strategic process, adjustment through an emerging strategy, prioritising publics and evaluating SCE's communication.

According to Steyn (2000:11), communication strategy is a functional strategy that provides the focus and direction for an organisation's communication with stakeholders. This strategy also establishes the content of communication needed to reach the organisation's goals. All the participants conceded that they did not outline a specific design for strategic communication, nor had they calculated communication plans to direct their goals, although they are aware of the necessary interventions on the ground in order to reach those goals. There is, however, extensive planning and thorough preparation for groups and individuals who join the programme. SCE management and staff hold meetings to discuss the following aspects: scenarios for the following months, the expected number of individuals and groups to arrive and when, the personnel (coordinators) allocated to the groups, residential arrangements, special requests of the groups, and where and when to transfer staff to the various sites. This happens weekly where key members plan ahead for the following weeks and months. A senior manager described his planning process as follows:

I, to be quite honest, have... never sit daily, weekly and say: "How am I going to communicate this?"... I don't think I can certainly say that I have any conscious formalised thoughts on it or plan for communication, how I am going to communicate anything specifically, until I have to, because it's part of our bigger picture, or otherwise out of crisis. But what supports that and what allows me to do that I think is more important, is because we have structure in place.

Interview findings show that SCE's strategy on communication output is influenced by different situations how and when they arise. SCE's **strategic planning** is based strongly on requirements for the successful outcome of the programme (operationally speaking). Interviewees' responses about adjusting to changes and being **pro-active** in its communication can justify this statement further (i.e. that their communication is situationally based and reactive). When the researcher asked interviewees whether they think their communication is more *pro-active* or *re-active*, most participants indicated a combination of the two, depending on the situation. When dealing with the students and volunteers, the coordinators attempt to communicate pro-actively as much as possible. This is done by informing participants beforehand of the expected schedule for the following day, and by writing this programme on a white board in the dining room. However, when there are changes in the programme, the communication follows suit: thus reacting to changes and communicating these adjustments to participants. One interviewee mentioned that their communication is only as good as the person enforcing it.

Strategic communication entails an organisation's pre-selected means to achieve objectives while adjusting to external conditions (Steyn, 2003:170). All interviewees from SCE agreed to the fact that they have to be flexible to **adjust** to daily and or scheduling changes due to the nature of the programme and the setting in which they work. As explained by a participant: "We operate in a stochastic environment where anything can happen and nature is like that, it's random, it's unpredictable." However, the same participant added: "It is within us to make sure that we manage it right." The possibility of last-minute changes is also explained to volunteers when they arrive. This participant also mentioned: "Last-minute changes actually come with a bit of excitement. They come with game capture, veterinary work, darting animals, firefighting, things like that and generally that's taken up fantastically [by the participants]."

One participant emphasised how important **internal communication** is with regard to changes in their schedule. She also mentioned that changes to the schedule impact her strategy (through social media) and her readiness to capture the activity. For example, it was explained that one has 24 hours' notice before an activity occurs such as darting an animal, then there is adequate time to prepare properly and be ready to capture the moment: "I can make sure everything is

charged up as much as I can, but there might be other little things I need to take with.” In contrast, a participant stated, “That’s why I don’t think we capitalise on what we do.” This participant felt they as coordinators need to work on their internal communication and suggested that if it can improve, so will their efficiency. This participant also mentioned that “understanding the impact a change of plan has on every single individual involved in the programme” and that the adjustment “comes down to awareness of the impact it has on other people”.

Regarding further strategic communication planning, a participant emphasised that they could improve. Several participants agreed that when discussing external communication and planning, it may be a good idea to sit at the beginning of the year and ask: “What do we want to achieve?” and furthermore, reflect on the way they will approach it since they lack thought in this regard, as one interviewee pointed out. An interviewee made the following statement on whether SCE has a strategic communication plan, and if not, whether they will be able to work within such a plan if it is created:

But no strategic communication plan, it doesn't exist. And it's frustrating at times, but every time I think about trying to put one together for this place I can't see how it will work ... So, are we ticking along? Yes. And I think that's the best way to describe it ... It will be much harder to operate underneath a strategic plan, because you can't predict what's going to happen when you go out and you don't know whether you are going to pick up what you need to be able to tell the story that you want to tell. So, it requires a little bit more prepping, a bit more planning and it would require more money.

In contrast, one participant mentions that for her the nature of the current programme is strong and the advertised content is compelling enough and draws a large, diverse audience.

Within a strategic communication plan, it is important that the strategy is formulated based on prior research (Steyn & Puth, 2000:16). According to Gregory (2012:66), **environmental scanning** refers to formal and informal research to gather information about an external environment. Environmental scanning thus can help an organisation anticipate changes within its environment that may impact the organisation. Although SCE does not necessarily actively conduct research on all external stakeholder groups, one senior manager does keep an eye on the voluntourism market:

For me there it's more to see how the market is being driven and more so how the market is being controlled, how I can avoid that from Shamwari and my product, as in SCE, how we can dodge that bullet of control. We do see a lot of control of the market, in particular from

the agent perspective. The agents are our partners, but once more we want to be in control of our own product that we can stay true, it's not then purely financial ... All the agents that we have had a good financial yield and a sustainable relationship with, are people that have been here and experienced it.

The research by this manager on the voluntourism sector can be used to formalise SCE's enterprise strategy. Steyn (2003:172) explains that an enterprise strategy relates to how organisations orientate themselves in the environment where they operate by focusing on their unique mission, purpose and value within that society. An enterprise strategy is the first step in formulating other strategy levels, and should focus on getting to know the stakeholders and which strategies will reach them. Thus, the networking and research of this specific manager within the voluntourism market, particularly with tour operators, can help shape the content (what) and method (how) of communication. The conservation volunteer programme the practitioners promote can influence the way in which a future volunteer may perceive SCE.

The above-mentioned interviewee explained his perception that the ecotourism market is filled with organisations that market themselves as responsible, but actually are far from it: "That's why it's important to me that our direct market is strong and is good and our identity is good and we do the right thing." He feels that SCE, by functioning efficiently, can counteract irresponsible or unethical conservation programmes. One reason why this manager has a firm grip on the way in which the tour-operator industry portrays SCE, is because of the 'spin' these agencies place on messages (esp. viewed from a marketing perspective). According to one manager, numerous messages on conservation tourism are false. Therefore, his focus is to spread the right message of SCE (either directly or through external parties). He explains: "I think we have taken the straight and narrow road, which is the one that Shamwari walks in conservation and we have done the same with our marketing."

With regard to SCE's **stakeholder profile**, one interviewee explained the correlation between the diverse audience they attract and their social media output:

It's your audience which is the biggest battle for this, because there is anybody who can be interested, involved and excited by what we do here. So, if anything, the biggest battle I think we have is to be generic and to be able to attract lots of different people. Now, the only way not to do that is actually by doing five or six posts a day of each platform tailored, which you can now do on Facebook and Instagram, and you can narrow your audience to the ones you want to see it. Now you can do that, but for me, I think that's making a big judgment call on the kind of people of what they want to see and what they don't want to see.

The Social Media Coordinator was asked whether she could observe a clear distinction between age groups and users of social media platforms. She responded that with nearly 10 000 followers on Facebook there is a melee of human beings from age 16 (and even lower) all the way up to 80. She added: "So, with regard to being able to target stuff, is incredibly hard, plus you have got, I think it's over 30 countries represented, that we have got followers." She explained that diverse social media platforms attract different age groups: "Facebook is now becoming an older category platform; it's not the 18 to 24 year olds anymore, and on the basis of Instagram that is 16 to 21 year olds now." This participant continued explaining that in some ways there is the need to create messages that "blow the socks off the youngsters", to get them excited by the visuals, whereas the older generation needs a more complete picture. Thus, each platform dictates what is posted, for example, Instagram which is more pictorial and less text, while Facebook posts contain a fair amount of text and pictures alike.

During the interview, the researcher and the Social Media Coordinator discussed the voluntourism market, and how it can be expected that people from different backgrounds would share a commonality such as conservation. A shared interest between participants ultimately can make the management of social media easier from SCE's perspective. The reason is that the practitioners do not require an exhaustive strategy on messages that would reach each specific stakeholder group most effectively. As an interviewee pointed out: "But it's that commonality, so as long as you hold onto what the experience is about, I think you will capture their imagination." She explained further that although a 16-year-old female from the UK will not be in the same frame of mind as a 75-year-old female from America, they may still be interested in SCE's programme. These two groups of people may have different perspectives of the conservation experience but certain interests may be similar. Even if SCE's programme and what they showcase attract people from all walks of life, this enterprise can benefit from researching main stakeholder groups. Research can help identify characteristics of each group, what messages they respond to, and the applicable channels to communicate with them.

The weekly programme as created by the coordinator will determine the content communicated on **social media**. The Social Media Coordinator explained that she plans a **strategy** at the beginning of every week. Her aim is to go out with the volunteers for half a day each day or, depending on the activity, to capture what they are doing and build relationships. She attempts to do weekly posts that link with the website. Furthermore, there is a monthly photo competition that creates awareness and engages users with the Page. She explains her strategy as providing a minimum of one post per platform per day, and a minimum of three *tweets* per day. She adds: "There are days when I do two to three post a day all week, depending on what's going on and whose here."

Other participants commented on various aspects of social media management. For example, deciding on what to post is important as one continuously has to visualise how the outside world will perceive what one does and posts. This supports Rawlings's (2006:12) statement that it is crucial for organisations to consider how stakeholders will interpret their messages.

The researcher asked participants when a post would create a problem for them, and also how they decide on which information not to post. An interviewee explained that one should avoid boring one's followers, not convey overly technical information, as against a catch phrase and topical picture that attracts people. One participant mentioned that for him it is important that anything posted one should be able to justify within one or two sentences. Also key is to provide balance on all media, between manual work and the more appealing 'animal side' of things. An interviewee was asked what he thought of SCE's social media and he remarked, "So I think it's a nice overview. Yes, it could be a bit top heavy on the high-profile stuff, but from the marketing perspective we are running a business here as well ... If we took off all the high-profile stuff would we suffer? I don't think so, because our guests are talking for us." The Social Media Coordinator was asked to list key words or hash-tags used on SCE's networks. These are: #conservation, #teamshamwari, #gapyear, #volunteer, #volunteerinafrica, #students, #travelinafrica, #sabbatical, #conservationprojects, #conservationexperience, #workingholiday.

Strategic communication theory advises organisations to create media strategies for stakeholder groups. What is clear from interview findings about social media usage is that SCE's stakeholders are extremely diverse in their demographic composition. This means that targeting a specific group would require more insight and research. Having said this, findings suggest that they do reach various stakeholder groups because messages portray their programme, which also is the commonality. Therefore, it may not be necessary to focus as much on the diverse demographics of the stakeholders, than rather on the single SCE message that entails the commonality for all the groups.

Evaluation research refers to the evaluation of the planning, implementing and impact of communication programmes (Cutlip *et al.*, 2002:202) and can be used to establish whether communication objectives were reached (Steyn & Puth, 2000:17). SCE evaluates its programme by a feedback form that participants fill in before departure, and assesses the social media feedback and growth (number of new followers who join SCE's networks). SCE uses these methods to measure its success against participant satisfaction. SCE staff feel they have made an impact when a participant does not want to leave or makes plans to return in the near future.

With the relationship between coordinator and participant, evaluation is a continual process. Coordinators easily pick up if a participant is unhappy or dissatisfied and will endeavour to address his/her concerns. Participants who feel they can trust coordinators are those who will highlight situations or problems that SCE needs to address. Thus, evaluation takes place daily as SCE is focused on making the experience enjoyable for all. Measuring social media's 'success' is easier as one can literally see the numbers of *likes*, tags and posts increase, as well as the number of people who join the various Pages. Various insights can also be accessed through the *likes* on Facebook to give practitioners an indication of their reach, growth and what posts were more successful than others. Information about posts that has the largest impact can indicate what stakeholders want to see and what not, but as was highlighted, there should be a balance on the Page. SCE does not only aim to showcase activities on social media for the *likes*, but they are committed to showing all activities to ensure people have a clear and comprehensive picture of SCE.

The interviews made it apparent that from a yearly, long-term perspective there is little strategic communication planning done on exactly how to reach goals. Nevertheless, there is structure and planning in place from an operational perspective. From the programme's point of view the SCE staff follow a blueprint, and the programme will influence how and what they communicate daily as well as what is portrayed on social media. They are pro-active in setting up a programme, for example for each student group that comes in, or for a certain number of volunteers who are with a coordinator. The programme will dictate where attention is given to projects, and by default conservation, and whether other goals are achieved. In this regard, the SCE managers and coordinators allocate and perform specific tasks. The following subsection describes these tasks.

4.2.3.2 Communication roles and strategic mandate

Interviewees were required to describe the various tasks performed by staff members to determine each one's role within the communication process. Interview findings show, where applicable, how tasks performed by managers and coordinators relate to the different roles of PR as proposed by Steyn (2002; 2007). Interviewees were asked who they thought was responsible for communication at SCE and to list the tasks of the communication facilitator.

According to all interviewees, all managers and coordinators are in some way responsible for communication at SCE and each has a role to play. It was indicated that the more senior staff are those who make final decisions, which are then filtered through to the rest of the team. Interviewees felt that they all have a responsibility to make sure that they fulfil the role of getting

the message across at their level, as one interviewee said: “I don’t think there is necessarily only one person responsible for communication; we all play a part on different levels.”

The following is a description gathered from all interviews on each person’s roles and tasks:

The tasks fulfilled by the Marketing and Product Development Manager reflect various operations from all three roles of PR: strategist, manager and technician. This manager fulfils the role of PR strategist since he gathers information on, and monitors, the voluntourism market. He uses this information to help SCE adapt to changes within this environment and ascertaining how best to portray the SCE brand. Information on voluntourism or ecotourism can assist in the planning and implementation of new endeavours. This helps the PR manager liaises more effectively with tour agencies and operators. From such a position, this manager helps portray SCE to the external stakeholders, and thus contributes to strategic thinking by identifying messages to be communicated to external parties. This manager develops and ensures activities take place (e.g. at trade shows) in order to present SCE to that specific stakeholder environment, thus fulfilling the role of a technician as well.

The Operations Manager oversees the following: initial contact with interested parties (enquiries), day-to-day communications and emails, the sending of information packs, bookings, transport, health and safety, weekend activities enquiries (for participants), and communication with the Facility Manager. The Operations Manager and the Senior Volunteer Coordinator both fulfil managerial roles where they communicate with the reserve, everyone involved with SCE and the coordinators. They determine conservation outcomes such as levels of work done in the reserve and what projects are being done. They oversee maintenance work on the facilities and generally are the people to contact for activities on the SCE side. Although Senior Volunteer Coordinators do not deal with the bookings, they work alongside the Operations Manager on all aspects related to the running of the programme.

During the interview, the Operations Manager explained that their roles overlap a lot. This manager and Senior Volunteer Coordinator also fulfil responsibilities belonging to all three PR roles. The Operations Manager processes information gathered by communicating with stakeholders, and assesses what needs to be done to implement their requests (PR strategist). In this regard, the Operations Manager emulates the role of a manager by portraying SCE’s identity through the everyday communications with external parties. The Senior Volunteer Coordinator does the strategic planning regarding the volunteer programme, such as what conservation activities need attention, in order to reach goals.

The various roles that the Senior Volunteer Coordinator and Operations Manager fulfil have the strongest resemblance to the roles and tasks associated with a PR manager. These two mentioned managers and the PR manager all fulfil roles at middle management level, contribute to strategic planning, play a key role in portraying SCE to external environments and are the ones who solve problems (Steyn, 2007:146). As is the case with the PR manager, both these others also work as technicians, an important role to ensure successful daily operations of SCE.

The Facility Manager is responsible for the day-to-day management of the facilities, the provision of food and accommodation, and assisting the Operations Manager. This person is key to ensure these components of SCE operate successfully. Therefore, a more technical role is performed.

SCE coordinators can be seen as fulfilling the role of a PR technicians as they work at the operational level of SCE. Coordinators communicate SCE's goals and daily activities: they are the educators, and tend to the welfare of participants. Thus, the coordinators implement activities that contribute to SCE's overall mission and goals. They also build relationships with participants, get to know students and volunteers, assess who has special interests and identify those who wish to follow a career in conservation. These coordinators relay to management problems or concerns that participants share with them. This implies an inside-out approach in dealing with problems. One interviewee describes the coordinator as the bridge or link between participants and management and another described the coordinators' role in the following way:

Well, I mean they are probably the fundamental part, not that they would admit that they are. They are the catalysts to everybody buying into what we do here, because they are the ones who educate at the frontline ... [Coordinators] get people to invest, commit, return and be involved when they leave; they are a fundamental part of it. If they don't engage with the volunteers in a way that excites them and motivates them to further communicate what we are up to, then actually they are not helping the cause at all. Because the passion that they feel for this project in itself is essential for that to be passed on to the volunteers, and that's what they buy into. So, for me they are the catalysts of it.

The Social Media Coordinator performs tasks that are associated with a PR manager and technician: this person tells the SCE story, portrays the programme to the rest of the world and decides on messages that are communicated to the external environment. The Social Media Coordinator gathers information and pictures in order to portray SCE on various networks. Furthermore, this manager answers queries from interested parties on electronic media, and builds a relationship with the stakeholders (personally with participants and networking online with stakeholder groups). One role that the Social Media Coordinator fulfils, which can be linked to the

roles of a PR strategist, is the monitoring of the social media landscape. However, this is mostly done by assessing how followers react to social media messaging, Assessments in turn give direction to future messages. It is, however, unclear exactly how SCE uses social media monitoring to gain information on stakeholders, the voluntourism environment and issues, and how they use such information in assisting with strategic communication planning.

When one interviewee was asked whether he feels management communicates adequately about goals, new projects or their direction as a brand, he answered that communication from higher levels of management lacks significant direction. 'Lower'-order managers feel that they should be involved with decision-making but do not always know in which direction to go. This interviewee perceived a divide between future prospects and ideas, and on-the-ground operations. He explained: "It feels like they are busy with their stuff over there and we are busy with our stuff over here." On the other hand, many interviewees feel they are free to operate without too much oversight from other departments and managers from SGR, and that they prefer it that way.

When the researcher probed the interviewee on ways in which communication between all managers and parties involved could improve, he pointed out that it may be a good idea to have a meeting with top management and senior coordinators once every two months. This meeting would be above and beyond the weekly Friday meetings with the Operations Manager, Facility Manager, coordinators and Social Media Manager to discuss new ideas, plans, goals, direction and future prospects.

From the interview findings, it is clear that SCE staff fulfil various tasks at different levels within the company, and that from a communication practitioner's perspective roles overlap. Findings suggest that the various roles performed by staff are focused mainly on the successful outcome of the programme or for operational results. Some tasks that staff performed do match characteristics of a strategist, but overall SCE can benefit significantly by appointing a communication practitioner in a strategic role (PR strategist). Although there is a manager who keeps tabs on the voluntourism market (from a marketing and tourism perspective), someone in a strategic role can assist management in reaching their conservation communication goals and build relationships with volunteers. Because stakeholder management and relationships are crucial to SCE's success, a communication strategist can focus on aligning SCE's goals with the need of its stakeholders.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that although SCE's employees do not have formal communication education, in many ways they do carry out and assist the communication process.

Thus, by default they occupy several of the roles mentioned by Steyn (2007). At present, there is no formal communication practitioner at SCE to set up and run a strategic communication plan. Therefore, several of the employees have to fulfil such duties without necessarily knowing it. The Marketing and Product Development Manager, Operations Manager, Senior Volunteer Coordinators and the Social Media Coordinator mostly fulfil the role of the PR manager. Volunteer coordinators fulfil the role of the PR technician when their roles are compared with that of PR practitioners (Steyn, 2002; 2007).

Part of the PR practitioners' role is to manage communication with stakeholders. SCE's communication channels and messages are discussed subsequently, as described by interviewees.

4.2.3.3 Communication channels and messages

Communication is important to reach stakeholders, help them understand the objectives of an organisation and to gain their support (Gregory, 2010:10). Organisations should manage their communication output strategically on all channels they decide to use. Interviewees were asked to report on the various communication channels they use to communicate with participants. They also had to indicate where, according to them, students and volunteers acquired their information about SCE. Interviewees listed the following communication channels which they use: website, emails, social media, telephone, expos, tour operator, printed media, television and interpersonal communication.

Most interviewees were of the opinion that peoples' first interaction with SCE came about through a general Internet search such as a Google Search, or through tour operators' websites, or by word-of-mouth (WOM) communication. One interviewee described the process as a chain reaction where someone may see that a friend was a participant and then will do an internet search, or vice versa, According to another interviewee: "Everybody has visited the website before they get here."

As an interviewee explained, trade partners (tour operators) are the most important channel through which people gain information about SCE; secondly, electronic media such as website and social media; thirdly he mentioned expos, and lastly print media. All the interviewers agree that tour operators are a key factor in bringing in people and that they will rely on them throughout: "They are an integral part and the biggest thing is agents have a huge amount of reach and they can also be a one-stop shop." This participant also mentioned that SCE is not necessarily overly reliant on tour operators for volunteers, but they do rely on them to introduce student groups. She

added: “Ironically, once people have been here, more often than not they will come back and they will book direct, because they feel more comfortable with what they are booking and they know what they are doing.”

Managers and coordinators were asked whether they thought tour operators were portraying the correct message of who SCE is. They were also asked what activities they offer. One participant stated: “Most agents we work with do put effort into making sure they give the right information.” One coordinator mentioned that they still get people who join the programme expecting to work hands-on with animals, petting, cuddling, and hugging them. This is the case even though volunteers receive a standardised information pack that is sent to tour operators. This pack describes the various activities volunteers get involved in. According to this coordinator, tour agents sell packages to people which are completely different to what they will encounter at the venue. According to another interviewee, there are several reasons why someone may send their application to SCE without knowing exactly what the programme is about. “But if they have done their research they should know ... it’s not like the programme isn’t completely transparent as to what it includes.”

The way SCE achieves its goals relate to the daily **communication messages** with participants. This entails what participants are told and taught about various conservation aspects and what activities participants actually do. For example, the coordinator, while monitoring predators or elephants, will educate volunteers on animal behaviour and generally teach them about various aspects of fauna and flora. The actual monitoring entails finding that specific species, be they single or within their social structure, and collecting data on the spatial or feeding ecology of the animal. This data is then transferred to a database where, after an allocated time, the information is relayed to the wildlife team and ecologist. Thus, the activity dictates what is taught in the subject, leading to an educated participant well-grounded in various aspects of conservation.

Education and awareness form part of a continual process; the interactions between coordinator and participant therefore help SCE reach its goals. With regard to specific activities, such as animal monitoring or erosion control, a senior member stated it is important that all coordinators explain clearly the reason and importance of the activity, indicating how it contributes to conservation outcomes. The same person also pointed out that they are not there to sell game drives and that for him it is important that their social media reflects the true purpose of each activity. Thus, SCE does achieve goals such as education, awareness and conservation outcomes but there is no set strategic communication plan which is followed to achieve these goals.

Interviewees were asked whether they have different communication messages when communicating with student groups as opposed to volunteers. Participants agreed that the message should be the same for SCE's goals, tasks performed and key conservation messages. One participant described that for the student group they give these members the opportunity to develop a tailor-made programme on the basis of a check list the group fills in. On this list the students indicate what activities they would like to include during their stay. This may be activities such as extra ecology talks, snake handling and educational exhibits.

Several interviewees made the point that with student groups communication is easier, as they have teachers or tutors accompanying them, which means the CSE staff can communicate through the teacher to the group. As for volunteers, one participant explained that volunteers take a number of days to orientate themselves, but eventually they also form their own groups with its own leadership. This makes it easier for staff to manage the volunteers. Interviewees were also asked which key messages they incorporate in their communication with participants. The following key messages were mentioned: the environment, conservation, volunteering, sustainable tourism, behind-the-scenes work, uplifting communities, and SCE's three pillars, namely financial, social and ecological sustainability.

All students and volunteers who at any given time participate at SCE is considered a **key public**. Key publics, according to Rawlins (2006:12), are those who are required to accomplish organisational goals through participation and cooperation. To communicate with key publics effectively it is crucial to get to know and understand them. Interviewees provided examples of how they assess participants and groups and determining ways to communicate with them. An interviewee pointed out that the type of group one has would guide one on how one communicate with them. She explains that a younger group or school group requires that one educates in a more simplified, explanatory manner. With volunteer groups there may be significant age differences. Thus, on the one hand CSE staff have to ensure their explanations are not too complicated. However, on the other hand, they must ensure people do not feel they are being talked down to. She also mentioned that the lectures (presentations) would differ when having student groups as opposed to adults. This is also an example of how SCE makes adjustments to accommodate differences in participants. Ultimately, this makes certain that that communication messages reach each group effectively.

The interviewees does realise that participants are their communicators outside of SCE's environment. Current participants and ex-participants (influentials) can promote the success of SCE if they support the experience and show approval (Rawlins, 2006:12) for SCE through either online activity, or inter-personal communication. The opposite is equally true: if participants are

dissatisfied with SCE and use media to show their disapproval, it can have a cumulative negative impact on others' perception of this organisation. It is thus vital that SCE practitioners consider how their participants will interpret what they say during the programme and what is showcased on social media platforms.

From the perspective of strategic communication, the following section discusses interview findings on SCE's strategy to build relationships with its stakeholders.

4.2.4 The views of SCE managers and coordinators on stakeholder relationship management

The views of SCE managers and coordinators on stakeholder relationship management are discussed according to the following key concepts: types of relationships, relationship cultivation strategies and relationship outcomes. SCE relies on participants to reach its goals and the volunteers are key in spreading the word about SCE. Without volunteers there will be no SCE. As one participant puts it: "My job is volunteers."

4.2.4.1 Types of relationships

When interviewees were asked to describe the relationship between SCE and participants, the overall response was highly positive. "We want to create a home away from home" one interviewee mentioned, which indicates that SCE wanted to build relationships with volunteers. Another interviewee described the relationship between SCE and participants as more personal than professional. According to an interviewee, there is no relationship before arrival but the minute the participants arrive the relationship starts "and their level of commitment and interest in the programme then dominates how strong that relationship becomes, also how long they are actually here". It is therefore up to the participant to show a strong commitment to the programme, making a relationship possible. This points to the concept of **exchange relationships**. Hon and Grunig (1999:20) state that in an exchange relationship, benefit will only be given to a person if the benefactor received some sort of benefit first. From this specific interviewee's viewpoint, a relationship with participants is determined by their actions towards SCE.

Grunig *et al.* (2002:553) mention that numerous stakeholder relationships start as an exchange interaction that evolves into a communal relationship. However, to achieve mutually beneficial relationships, an organisation should first build communal relationships and can then expect beneficial exchanges between itself and its stakeholders. It is realistic to assume that both SCE and participants will hold some form of expectation of the other. Participants seek a conservation

experience that will deliver on promises and exceed their expectations, while SCE wishes to host people who are willing to help reach conservation goals. If SCE staff wish to build mutually beneficial relationships with volunteers and seek a participant who works extremely hard and becomes an ambassador, they need to invest in the relationship first. They should be concerned about the welfare of their participants and give them their best possible experience, even if they get nothing in return, which links to the concept of **communal relationships**.

Most interviewees agreed that there are relationships at different levels with participants, especially those who remain longer and those who they get to know more: “The people who are here for six, eight, ten or twelve weeks the relationship with them always – is always, always stronger.” One of the reasons for this, according to the interviewee, is that even though participants may come and go, the staff is the one constant factor whom participants encounter while they are at the venue. When asked if the relationship is based on both parties’ growth and future interviewees had a different perspective on the outcome of the relationship:

- “I like to think that the volunteers come with an idea that it’s not about us and them, but it’s actually about something completely external. That it’s about the community, it’s about the environment ...”
- “At the end of the day we have to build those relationships to get return guests ... return guests are always the best marketing and ... word of mouth ... works both ways.”
- “I definitely think we benefit each other; the story volunteer carry away from here is the most important because I think they do the most marketing for us.” And: “I think we help them in achieving their goals.”
- Another interviewee mentioned that it is not just the people of SCE who benefit (by earning a living through the job) but that work done by SCE and the participants is beneficial to other departments and aspects of SGR (helping with tasks in other departments).

Interview findings provide evidence that there is a symbiotic relationship between SCE and participants. SCE realises that they depend on participants to reach their goals but that SCE is also beneficial to the volunteers (see Hung, 2007:456 on interdependence). Additional discussions will provide further evidence that SCE does apply many relationship cultivation strategies, indicating that SCE builds communal relationships with participants. In any relationship organisation has with its stakeholders, a form of exchange can be expected, as is the case with SCE. Moreover, SCE does show volunteers they are committed to getting to know them and wishes to establish a connection with people, as will become clear in the following subsection.

4.2.4.2 Relationship cultivation strategies

According to Hung (2007:459), it is important that organisations keep relationships in a satisfactory condition or that they repair damaged relationships with stakeholders. For this reason, management of stakeholder relationships should be cultivated continually to reach the best possible outcome for both parties. How SCE builds relationships with participants are discussed below according to the relationship cultivation strategies as proposed by Grunig *et al.* (2002), Hung (2007), as well as Hon and Grunig (1999), and the cultivation strategies proposed by Bortree and Waters (2010).

All interviewees (SCE managers and coordinators) felt they are approachable, which indicates that participants do have **access** to SCE. Referring specifically to relationships between coordinators and volunteers, there is a general feeling among participants that the most significant people who build relationships with participants are the coordinators, as described by one interviewee: “I think the relationship between the company and the volunteers is always going to depend on the coordinators involved hands on.” This interviewee also mentioned that one coordinator is fully in charge of a designated group for its whole stay. It is true that the participants will have contact with the office (staff) in other necessary matters, “but that coordinator is going to be their relationship with SCE”.

A number of the interviewees referred to the fact that each coordinator has his or her own field of expertise. Therefore, when volunteers have the opportunity to join various coordinators they will gain valuable knowledge, because as one volunteer explains: “I know only so much.” The general consensus is that coordinators not only play a role in building relationships, but also in achieving goals. This is in line with Bortree and Waters’ (2010) cultivation strategy of **instrumental aid**. According to these scholars (2010:4), guidance plays a key role in building relationships, and SCE’s coordinators are most important in building mutually beneficial relationships.

On the other hand, an interviewee made the point that according to him, the coordinator should not be the “be all and end all” of the programme. The interviewee feels that people should gain much more by experiencing the whole of South Africa and meeting people from around the world. However, he does agree that the coordinator is the glue for the programme. Another interviewee also referred to the fact that there is even a healthy relationship between the participants and the kitchen staff, who cares about the welfare of the participants. For example, the kitchen staff will bake a cake for a participant’s birthday. This indicates that the whole SCE team makes an effort to build a relationship with the volunteers.

SCE goes about building relationships with participants by combining various tactics. A number of interviewees mentioned the fact that to learn someone's name is important, also asking questions in order to get to know a person, as one put it: "Get them involved; by asking them questions you force them to speak; it forces interaction; it's not manipulating, it's just bringing them into the interaction that you need from everyone." By encouraging volunteers to partake in activities and conversations it creates an environment where these participants have the freedom to share thoughts. This may indicate that SCE encourages participants to be **open** with the staff and **disclose** what they are feeling.

The interviewee mentioned said that he wants to get everyone involved on an equal basis (**sharing of tasks**). He pointed out that if one gets to know someone, there is automatically a feeling of warmth. The participants then experience someone who is making an effort to get to know them. An interviewee explained it is about finding a connection and encouraging interaction, be it between staff and volunteers or among volunteers themselves. Another interviewee referred to the fact that staff members get involved by saying: "We want to place a cookie in someone's room to say 'hallo' ..." Furthermore, SCE staff are constantly attempting to improve their standards on how they treat people, for example welcoming guests to SCE (**encouraging positivity**). This interviewee also emphasised that it comes down to the willingness of SCE staff members to do special things or to organise something special for the participants. One interviewee pointed out that the building of relationships has much to do with listening. From these responses it can be inferred that interviewees are committed to building and maintaining relationships. This can be related to the cultivation strategy of **assurances of legitimacy**.

A number of interviewees pointed out that it is important that SCE gives recognition to returning guests, and pay more attention to them since that they are seen as friends. Interviewees mentioned how they offer discounts or give people a special price on the programme if they return to SCE for a third or fourth time. But it was also stated that a healthy balance is needed in the treatment of returnees; SCE wishes to give them special attention without causing a negative impact on the other volunteers.

One interviewee explained that it sometimes does happen that they wish to award someone who works harder than other people, but that he does not think they do it. He emphasises that there is nothing wrong with treating a returnee somewhat better than the run-of-the-mill person who joins the programme. He stated that everyone should be treated the same, but that it is important to reward loyalty to the person who has returned for a third or fourth time. He mentions that they are also under pressure to provide different and improved activities each time for returning participants because, "that's the only way you will get him back for a fifth or sixth time". It is clear

that SCE is committed to maintaining relationships with volunteers, especially those who are returnees. There is a level of commitment to SCE because if volunteers were dissatisfied with the experience they would not have returned. This indicates that there are **assurances of legitimacy** from both parties.

A number of interviewees confirmed that it is not always possible to build relationships with each person due to the number of participants at a given time, such as 30-40 people. One coordinator explained that they attempt to keep the whole group content, because when one or two people are discontent it can influence the whole group (**positivity**). She mentioned that they keep an eye out for people who are quiet or those who keep to themselves. They would then try to communicate with these individuals to ascertain if things are in order, or whether SCE's staff can assist in any way. For one interviewee it is about time and organic growth: "The more time you spend with somebody the more you learn about them."

One manager showed particular interest in building relationships when there is a keen interest from a participant: "I expect the coordinators [to introduce me to participants], in particular [those] with potential, people that are showing special interest in our product, in what we do, championing us. I like to champion those people, because it's a give and take." This specific manager does most of the networking with tour agents and works within the voluntourism market. He is focused on **networking** with participants who may be able to help spread SCE's name (through marketing) or those who wish to get involved in the programme in the future (i.e. operational and product development). Another way in which SCE's employees show appreciation is to give participants a 'certificate of recognition' at the end of their stay. They will also give reference letters to those who ask.

Interviewees' views on the outcomes of the relationships they build with students and volunteers are discussed next.

4.2.4.3 Relationship outcomes

Interviewees were asked to consider participants' opinions on how volunteers feel they are treated – if their welfare is taken into account, they think they can rely on SCE to keep its promises, and if they are confident in SCE's abilities. These questions help determine whether SCE feels they achieve certain relationship outcomes. Interviewee findings are analysed below according to Hon and Grunig's (1999:18-20) design of relationship outcomes.

From SCE's side, interviewees indicated that volunteers and students are well looked after, from the professional conduct of the coordinators, to the accommodation and food. One interviewee mentioned the fact that food is cooked for participants (which is not the case with several other volunteer programmes), participants' rooms are cleaned and their washing is taken care of. Not only the programme and building of relationships have an impact on how participants rate their experience. Other factors, such as their accommodation, food provided and other services contribute towards the overall **satisfaction** of their stay.

Interviewees noted that it is important to include everyone as much as possible and that everyone's experience should be the same. This aspect refers to **integrity in the organisation**: everyone in the organisation is treated the same. A participant mentioned that participants may feel they are not treated fairly when cliques form within larger groups. He explains that these groups can be classified as 'cool' or 'not so cool', and that when participants are not part of a specific group they may feel like outsiders or that they are mistreated. He added that a coordinator could not do much about such a situation (the forming of cliques). However, it is the duty of the coordinators and the programme to treat everyone as equals.

On the question whether volunteers can rely on SCE to keep its promises, one participant replied:

Yes 100%, yes definitely and I think once more there is no hooks, there is no hard sell ... There are example projects, there are example tasks, there are examples of what we are about and what we are trying to achieve. So, you are actually buying into this cloud really, but it's a case of if you like the cloud. So, yes, I don't think there are any false – I know that there are no false expectations that we do or need to create fortunately.

SCE works within an environment with several variables outside their control. Through various media channels they communicate to their audience what can be expected from the experience, but in the introductory talk it is highlighted that nothing is a given. An interviewee mentioned that for this reason they have ensured the perception (of participants) are correct from the start. Several may not have expectations, or where they do have, SCE needs to meet or exceed these expectations. The same interviewee stated that it mainly depends on the coordinator and the kind of relationship between participant and coordinator. It also depends on how coordinators transfer messages and explain a situation, especially where the expected outcome was not reached. Examples are when a lion needs to be darted, but the group are unable to track the lions, or if they find them but the veterinarian is not available. In such cases participants may feel disappointed and may start thinking promises are not kept (although promises cannot be made). From the findings it is clear that it is the coordinator's

responsibility to manage the group and explain when activities do not work out the way they planned it.

'Keeping promises' means **dependability**. One interviewee referred to the fact that from a volunteer's perspective SCE keeps its promises, and staff members accomplish what they say they will do. However, from a staff perspective it is the opposite. This interviewee mentions that SCE employees know what they promise and they set a benchmark. However, participants do not have that benchmark but still achieve what they wanted to by following the programme. This unfortunately does not always apply to the staff. When asked how this issue can be addressed, the interviewee suggested: "We have got to get inter-departmental here on the basis of us communicating with each other to put plans in place so that we make the things happen we want to do." Overall from an SCE perspective, SCE interviewees feel participants can depend on them to achieve what they set out to do and that they are competent to do so. From one interviewee's response, it is clear that staff members can do more to ensure they live up to their own standards and to achieve what participants hope to experience at SCE.

On the question whether volunteers have confidence in SCE's abilities (**competence**), several interviewees stated that it all depends on **trust** and confidence. As one interviewee mentioned, it is important to instil confidence in participants. The example was given of a group that encountered travel problems before they reached SCE and their confidence was low with the start of the programme. It was then up to SCE to prove these new participants wrong. An interviewee said that trust in SCE's abilities is determined by decisions coordinators make on the ground and how they will manage a situation. This is reflected in one interviewee's comment: "I trust the coordinators and I should hope that the volunteers trust us."

An interviewee gave an example of where SCE staff listened to a volunteer and acted: An ex-volunteer complained that she had not been introduced to the others. She felt she was left to her own devices to get to know those around her. The SCE staff decided to address this matter by having a Braai-night every Monday with all volunteers, old and new, as well as with the coordinators and managers. The staff consider this as a way to give new participants the opportunity to get to know people, putting names to faces and to encourage interaction. This situation in a certain way can relate to **control mutuality** because SCE addressed a situation that was important to a participant. This shows that participants can influence SCE to adjust the way they operate. As was stated previously, SCE employees do listen to volunteers' opinions but employees first have to evaluate recommendations to determine if it is feasible and if it will contribute to a more successful programme or not.

Interviewees were asked whether they thought participants admire their programme. **Admiration** refers to the degree to which relationship partners respect and value one another (Bortree & Waters, 2010:3). Admiration can be seen as a relationship outcome but also a cultivation strategy. An organisation will only be admired by its stakeholders if it is respected, seen as a good corporate citizen, or if the stakeholders can infer that the organisation seeks to build sound relationships with them. All interviewees felt that the programme overall is admired by their participants. One interviewee stated that people admire their programme because for them it is a “once-in-a-lifetime experience”. Another interviewee explained: “I think if we purely had to go on like a hard feedback system there, would you tell people about SCE?” ‘Would you come back again?’ I think the large majority is yes.” The following statement illustrates how SCE is perceived:

I think it's because it's beyond their expectations. Very few people have got an intense knowledge of this kind of place and so they don't imagine living in the bush, they don't imagine living in a game reserve. They don't imagine being in an open vehicle 24/7 working on a game reserve, being taught how to use machetes, sitting watching lion prides. I think ultimately their expectations are blown out of the water and ultimately that comes down to ignorance of knowing what the programme is about in the first place. But even the people who do know – we get ecologists, biologists, conservationists coming here, and even then they go away having been fulfilled.

Throughout the findings on strategies and outcomes of relationship cultivation it is clear that SCE is **committed** to establishing and maintaining relationships with participants. According to interviewees numerous participants in return show commitment to SCE: The interviewees refer to participants who are in tears when leaving SCE, and that most wished to spend more time at this venue. Participants also report to staff they are already planning when they will return.

The following subsection will expound the interviewees' views on strategic conservation communication.

4.2.5 The views of SCE managers and coordinators on strategic conservation communication

Previous sections discussed interview findings that relate to SCE's goals. These discussions examined how interviewees view themselves as an organisation (systems theory), how they approach communication management (strategic communication), as well as how they build relationships with stakeholders (relationship management). This section focuses on interview

findings that determine whether participants on the programme felt they made a difference at SCE and contributed to specific conservation outcomes.

Interviewees' views on strategic communication are reported below according to the following constructs of strategic conservation communication: communicating environmental issues, conservation goals, and communication channels and messaging.

Environmental issues: A key principle in conservation communication is utilising communication as a tool to influence people's beliefs and attitudes towards the environment. Jacobson (2009:7) emphasises that the success of conservation programmes lies in understanding and engaging stakeholders and communicating conservation goals effectively. According to Bickford *et al.* (2012:74), more people have become aware of **environmental problems** but few work actively towards a sustainable future due to the lack of environmental literacy. SCE practitioners are in an authoritative position since they can influence people's views, beliefs and actions toward conservation issues and management.

Conservation goals: SCE management and staff need participants to reach their conservation goals, therefore participants do impact SCE's functioning. However, this impact is also mutual. Through the SCE experience, participants can gather information and educate people back home. Participants may find validation for their studies by volunteering and can be inspired to take action on various conservation issues. Because of the impact SCE can have on participants, SCE employees should remember the responsibility they carry.

Communication channels: According to Bickford *et al.* (2012:75), conservation biologists and scientists are seen as more involved in nature conservation. However, to gain support from the general public, biologists and scientists need to incorporate the public in activities. Bickford *et al.* (2012:75) propose that scientists change their way of communicating by for example, explaining complex scientific or environmental issues, to promote nature conservation and get people more involved. Brightsmith *et al.* (2008:2833) point out that conservation biologists are partnering with organisations who provide volunteer opportunities and that the participants of such an experience can become research assistants.

In summary on SCE managers and coordinators' views on strategic conservation communication, the following points can be raised. The participants at SCE get involved in citizen science, such as gathering data and animal monitoring. The interaction between volunteer and scientist can provide another dimension to a volunteer experience: people may form a different perspective on research done as part of a programme in which they actually contribute towards science. In this

way, scientists also play a key role in educating people on certain issues and teaching them techniques related to specific research. Brightsmith *et al.* (2008:2833) argue that volunteers are able to collect high-quality data that can be used in publications but that sufficient training and appropriate tasks need to be given to ensure usable data. SCE annually hosts one specific university group. A tailor-made programme for the students focuses on gathering data for ongoing research projects. These students study Zoology and they have the option to follow a South African field course module. While studying this module they end up spending time on SGR.

One interviewee felt extremely positive towards SCE hosting this specific group, seeing that accommodating these students provides benefits to SCE in various ways. The interviewee explained that it enhances SCE's reputation that this university group chose their facility "for solid scientific research" and that they as coordinators "learn as well". This interviewee indicated that they are open to hosting more groups with tailor-made programmes, especially those groups focusing on more research-based activities. He added that if the research done by a specific group exceed SCE employees' expertise, the group would need to bring a lecturer or scientist along, which means that they (SCE coordinators) can learn from them. He explained: "We can maybe adapt that programme, carry on the data collection, keep the project running. I think it really is incredible to allow for citizen science and ongoing volunteer programmes and projects."

To date, extensive conservation research and data collection have been done within the borders of SGR, the reserve. Nevertheless, SCE can capitalise on citizen science by inviting more conservation scientists to do research at the venue, where they use the facilities and volunteers assist with data collection. One specific coordinator on the SCE team used the volunteers to help with data collection for his post-graduate studies, which added a further dimension to the SCE programme. This dimension can influence the view that lay public as well as conservation biologists have of SCE. In this regard, it can impact SCE's reputation and can be used to attract a different stakeholder group.

In addition to providing a new characteristic to the volunteer experience, allowing scientists to conduct research in SGR with the assistance of SCE and volunteers can add to stakeholder satisfaction. It is possible that volunteers can feel they have contributed to 'real' science on top of the various other conservation activities at SCE. If more research does take place at SGR with the help of coordinators and volunteers it would be crucial that the researcher educates the parties concerned on the various aspects of the research. Allowing more citizen science at SCE clearly will benefit the discipline of conservation research, SCE, SGR and participants in various ways.

As mentioned previously, SCE's organisational goals revolve around awareness for the programme, conservation and environmental education. A senior coordinator provided the researcher with a report containing a summary of SCE's achievements in 2015 (see Annexure D). This participant explained that he measures the manual work undertaken on the reserve, such as the kilometres of road maintenance and areas of invasive species controlled. He went on to explain that at the end of the year he provides a summary of their tasks and outcomes to SGR's wildlife team to demonstrate the impact of SCE on conservation efforts in the reserve. One participant summarised the need for conservation work on SGR in saying that they need volunteers to help achieve SGR's conservation goals and "that if we had to close this business unit down [SCE] we would need to carry on doing what we are doing, just without [volunteers]".

Volunteers were asked whether they thought students and volunteers feel they have actually made a difference in conservation on the reserve. One participant pointed out that it depends on the person involved. He explained that they host individuals who join the programme for various reasons: some come to work while others join for a fun experience. He added that for this reason their programme has to be versatile to cater for diverse people. This interviewee explained that the motive behind volunteers' participation could influence their perception of whether they have made a difference or not. If someone only wanted to work, they may be disappointed when they do not perform manual work daily, whereas those who were seeking a fun-filled experience, will be disappointed if the programme was not more diverse. This interviewee emphasised that the crucial matter is to have a balanced programme.

It is also necessary to realise that it is impossible to keep everyone contented and satisfied throughout the programme. One interviewee highlighted the importance of daily reinforcing conservation messages regarding physical conservation work since participants may not see the outcome of various tasks. Therefore, coordinators should explain how participants have made a contribution. How effectively SCE communicates their conservation messages and goals to participants can be established by interview findings of SCE volunteers (see 4.3). The content analysis of SCE Facebook Page (see 4.4) can provide insight on how SCE portrays its programme and conservation messages through this communication platform.

4.2.6 Conclusion on the views of SCE managers and coordinators

The interviews with SCE managers and coordinators provide insight in how they view SCE as a system, how they facilitate two-way communication, which strategic communication processes they manage, and how they build relationships with participants.

A key finding is that participants focused mostly on conservation and not strategic conservation communication, and indicated that their communication can improve in many ways. Although the interviewees stressed that their communication should improve, findings suggest that SCE does encourage and facilitate open, two-way communication between itself and its stakeholders. To some extent SCE does practise the mixed-motive model, which is a positive aspect. The conclusion that SCE's practitioners do follow the mixed-motive model is based on their two-way interaction with stakeholders in conjunction with the dissemination of information through communication messages. SCE and participants are willing to accommodate the interests of the other party. However, there is a level of control and persuasion involved when dealing with participants, in order to ensure the conservation programme operates as it should.

An interviewee's statements on SCE's planning and management of communication highlighted that their communication will be a continuous issue due to the nature of the business where nothing is constant. However the interviewee asserted: "We are doing a fine job at trying to get near as perfect as we can." Another interviewee explained:

Yes, I think you know as I said, we are not great communicators; it can only be better. It's not our game, communication; it's a scary thing, because it shows shortfalls ... Of course, it can only be better and obviously I think, well I know what we are trying to achieve about this.

Two further responses from interviewees on communication focus on the future: "So undoubtedly communication is our future, it's what's going to sell." And: "Communication is key to us being sustainable as a project."

Interview findings suggest that participants feel they can do more to plan their communication and achieving goals from a long-term perspective. However, several interviewees could not see how a strategic communication plan would work. Other participants mentioned that their internal communication needs improving and that they would appreciate more feedback from top management. More senior management members indicated that they wish to be included more in future prospects in order to make adequate plans.

It should be mentioned that SCE is successful in its programme, otherwise this enterprise would not have drawn the large numbers of volunteers from across the globe to participate each year. SCE offers several options to a diverse group of people and have several structures in place to manage its programme, communication, and relationships with stakeholders effectively. In this regard, SCE practitioners understand that relationships are key to their enterprise's success, future existence and reaching conservation goals. Therefore, it can be said these practitioners do

practise strategies for relationship cultivation. Interview findings suggest that participants' various roles and responsibilities at SCE do display characteristics of all three communication practitioner roles, namely PR strategist, manager and technician.

To apply informed conservation communication strategies could help SCE a great deal. A way to achieve this outcome could be by consulting with or employing a communication practitioner. Such a practitioner can connect SCE's internal and external environment. This person can oversee communication and stakeholder management, which will give SCE managers and coordinators the time to focus on their specific roles within the organisation. Even if a communication facilitator did operate, management and staff according to their job descriptions would still be vital to the success of SCE. For example, the coordinators would still be those who make it possible for the programme to continue. In this sense they are the main facilitators who build relationships with participants as well as educate and guide activities on the ground. A communication facilitator at SCE could work at two levels:

- *Strategic* level within SCE by taking a stakeholder approach to organisational goals, message construction and output through research and networking,
- *Operational* level by implementing strategies (facilitate managerial decisions) and relaying participant and coordinator interests to management.

Such a practitioner can formalise a strategic conservation communication plan where organisational, conservation and stakeholder goals are aligned to benefit the various parties concerned. It was clear from the interviews that long-term plans would be difficult to execute and attain due to the environment in which the practitioners operate. A strategic plan for conservation communication can be built around the particulars describing SCE and its programme where strategies can be effective to achieve goals.

The following subsection describes volunteers' views and opinions on how they assessed SCE's management of communication and relationships.

4.3 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH SCE VOLUNTEERS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six SCE volunteers, who have been part of the programme between two to eight weeks. Two participants were returning volunteers. Once again the responses are reported on against the constructs identified in the literature (see Table 2.1) and analysed.

4.3.1 General insights from interviews with SCE volunteers

All the participants had different reasons for joining the SCE programme. However, it was clear that a love for nature conservation was at the heart of their intention to take part in the programme. The reasons offered included:

- “I didn’t just want to go on holiday, wanted to do something meaningful with that time, being out in nature, do something different.”
- “I wanted to come and educate myself through the interest I had of, not only animals but like how it all kind of worked in the system.”
- “I have an increased awareness of wildlife, and all kinds of problems. I think my solution to all of that is to go do, to help that contribute in some way and help other to do so.”
- “Back home I study veterinary nursing, so I’ve always been into animals and wanted to visit Africa and the conservation side of things, because we don’t get that back home.”
- “Because of the animals.”
- “For many years, going back 40 years, I had an interest in animals and conservation and now ... I have the opportunity to go and volunteer.”

When interviewees were asked whether they expect their experience at SCE to benefit them personally or professionally, all but one referred to the professional dimension. All interviewees emphasised that the experience has a personal impact on them, more so than a professional one. However, they also emphasised that they may learn more and that the experience may function as an enabling link in their future professional lives.

Rawlins (2006:4) defines stakeholders as enabling links who enable an organisation to have resources and autonomy to operate. Within the relationship of SCE with its volunteers, both entities can be classified as enabling links in their own field of operation:

- *Volunteers* provide resources for SCE, making it possible for the enterprise to operate.
- *SCE* from a stakeholder perspective, too provide resources that volunteers can use to ‘operate’ within their professional lives.

Focusing especially on student groups, or those who join the Vet Eco Experience, it is clear they join the programme to learn more and to expand their knowledge within their respective study fields. Abell (2012:166) states that volunteering should provide opportunities for participants to use and develop existing knowledge. This knowledge can assist in future careers, or as one SCE

coordinator explained, if he wanted a career in conservation, it would be important for him to include a conservation programme on his CV.

It is noticeable that the study field or career of most volunteer interviewees lies outside the realm of nature conservation. Nevertheless, a number of interviewees mentioned that if an opportunity to work within conservation crosses their paths they would like to be part. As one participant stated: "I'd like to do conservation work more ... as a career; I always try to think of ways to do that. I don't have an academic background [in conservation]; being here is the most important thing." All volunteer interviewees confirmed that they would be able to use what they have learnt at SCE to educate others or to spread the message about conservation. For example, one participant studies costume design in the UK and mentioned that she realised she could incorporate the information gained at SCE in her work and spread the word. As was mentioned previously, another participant regards conservation volunteering as an extension of the volunteer work he does for the London Zoo, thus building on his knowledge of nature and conservation with every visit.

The variety of reasons why people volunteer can make it difficult for SCE to cater to the needs of all participants. This was highlighted by SCE interviewees describing that they have to operate generic in order to attract diverse people. Once again the important factor is commonality; in this case the common denominator is nature and conservation.

The following section will discuss volunteers' views on SCE's goals, SCE as a system, as well as whether they feel SCE encourages two-way communication.

4.3.2 SCE volunteers' views on systems and two-way symmetrical communication

To determine interviewees' views on SCE as a system, it has to be determined whether volunteers consider themselves as a contributing factor to the system. Two-way communication between SCE and volunteers can furthermore provide evidence whether SCE is an open or closed system.

4.3.2.1 Open system and interdependence

When interviewees were asked their opinion of SCE's goals, they referred to education and conservation as a key component of what SCE strives to achieve. The responses were: "Educating us," and: "Support Shamwari business, help conserve wildlife and give them an environment where they can act naturally and interact naturally." Two other participants mentioned the WOM side of what people gain from the experience: "I think the more they can

spread the word and get people out here, the more hopefully people take back with them and spread the word.” An interviewee stated that she thinks that when they at SCE reviews what they have done, they can be proud that thousands of people have joined the programme and that they have drawn several repeaters. She emphasised that for her the focus is not only SCE, but the country, and that they at SCE have the opportunity to share their passion with a significant number of people.

What volunteer interviewees regarded as SCE’s goals, match those listed by SCE interviewees: conservation, education and awareness. When participants were asked whether according to them, they play a role in reaching these goals, the following was said:

- “Yes. I think you do as a volunteer here, the work you do, the monitoring and data ... Does feel like you do contribute.”
- “I do feel like at least I’ve made a contribution. Whether I’ve made a difference or not, I’ve made a contribution.” And: “I made a difference for Shamwari. They will never get it done if volunteers weren’t around. There is no way to keep up with everything with this much space. But the effort is being made.”

Interviewees focused mainly on physical aspects and information that is spread through WOM when referring to their roles in helping SCE reach its goals. The two main elements that interviewees identified reflect three components that can determine whether volunteers view SCE as an open system:

- The exchange of matter and energy between SCE and participants – SCE relies on participants’ contribution to reach its goals while participants rely on SCE to provide an experience, which indicates **interdependence**.
- The importance of participants and their actual contribution that represents **stakeholder involvement**.
- Participants’ satisfaction which can lead to WOM support of SCE, signifies that volunteers can become **influential publics**.

From a systems perspective, most interviewees felt they did contribute towards conservation in the SGR, and that their input and work are valued. This was underlined by one interviewee who elaborated: “You’re not just like slave labour or they’re just using you. No, it’s very much like they integrate you.” One interviewee viewed participants’ contribution within SCE and its existence in terms of their relation to SGR. This participant explained the importance of students and

volunteers as “probably not that high to be honest ... to Shamwari as a business”. He added: “I think it is something they chose to offer and they do get benefit out of it.” He referred to the fact that they get work out of participants but that Shamwari as a business would still carry on without them, and that they would pay someone to cover the work students and volunteers do if they were not present. He also considered SCE as an effective PR exercise for Shamwari: it highlights their conservation side and their support for conservation. He explained this view: “I can see Shamwari is a business and is run like one; they are not a conservation business.” When asked whether he thinks SCE exists for the right reasons, he responded: “I think they are here for the right reasons, but it is still a business.”

When interviewees were asked if they thought both SCE and participants benefit from the relationship, all participants strongly agreed that both parties do benefit. One participant explained: “I think both benefit but in separate and different ways.” This participant referred to the short-term and long-term benefits for SCE in the projects they do. As for participants: “They get exposure to the industry, or in other ways such as a holiday experience.” Findings suggest that from a volunteer perspective there is interdependence as both parties gain from the relationship. When queried about the importance of participant involvement, interviewees mostly referred to how their input benefits SCE with regard to ecological conservation goals:

- “I don’t think they would even come close to doing [the work] without the students and volunteers.” And: “I can’t imagine Shamwari having to pay for enough people to take care of everything that we do.”
- “I think they [participants] make an impact on conservation but in a long-term way.” And: “I think without the conservation experience at Shamwari it would be tough for them, just to maintain that big area they have to keep up.”

Participants on the SCE programme can be classified as functional linkages. The reason is that they provide *input* functions such as labour (physical assistance to SCE’s conservation goals) and they also have an output function because they are consumers of what SCE offers (Rawlins, 2006:4). Several participants mentioned that over and above the manpower they provide in doing maintenance, the more volunteers there are, the more people can be educated. Those people take back what they have learnt to society at large and spread the message of conservation. Two participants also added that the amount that one puts in determines how much one can get back from the experience.

One interviewee described that the more questions they ask and the more involved they are, the more they learn from the coordinators. This statement is in line with what Rawlins (2006:9) terms stakeholder involvement. This is where the level of involvement can be measured by the extent to which people connect to a situation or problem. Throughout, from the process of applying to actually participating, volunteers will move from inactive and aware publics to active publics who physically participate and handle a problem. While volunteering, the level of involvement for each person will differ according to ways they apply themselves and their motivations for joining.

The level of participant involvement will also be determined by the coordinator's efforts in encouraging participants to be more actively involved. This can be seen in the type of interaction the coordinator has with the volunteers, the conversations and questions and the physical contribution expected from the volunteers.

4.3.2.2 Two-way symmetrical communication

Two-way communication can be seen as an indicator to determine if a system is open or closed. This type of communication implies conversation and the exchanging of views, and ways communication can be used to reach understanding in order to accommodate the needs of the other (Fawkes, 2012:36). For a system to be open, information sharing and communication should be encouraged and should take place without restriction. To discern whether there is two-way communication between SCE and participants, interviewees were asked if SCE's staff is open to questions and feedback, and how interviewees, in return, communicate with SCE. Most participants pointed out interpersonal communication and the use of social media as ways of communicating with SCE.

All participants indicated that SCE is very open to participant interaction, information exchange and questions. Those interviewees who applied directly to SCE was highly satisfied with their communication with the Operations Manager, felt that they received feedback timely and their enquiries were answered. Participants felt that the coordinators are truly open to feedback and questions, and really approachable: "I never felt that my questions are not important. They don't ignore me or someone else." This participant added that the coordinators are willing to respond to questions. If someone does not understand a matter, they will explain until the person understands. One interviewee thought that a particular coordinator was effective in describing activities step by step, and that he did not rush in explaining the process. She referred to how one coordinator made sure people were engaged when he taught them new aspects: "That's what I quite like here: they don't leave you hanging and misunderstanding either."

Regarding stakeholder relationship management, an interviewee pointed out that she finds the coordinators adept at reading situations and people. She gave an example where a participant did not want to attend the anti-poaching lecture or did not want to talk about it. The coordinator showed understanding and was accommodating towards her request and feelings. One participant indicated that the relationship they have with the coordinators influences the way in which they communicate with these staff members. She explained that her conversations with the coordinators can be more in depth because they got to know one another and mutual trust developed. She asserted that the longer volunteers are at SCE the more comfortable they may be to ask probing questions.

With regard to social media, most participants referred to *liking* and commenting on SCE's posts as a way of engagement. One participant explained that when she posts on her personal account, she tags Shamwari Conservation Experience (mentioning the location) and that on occasion she would tag a coordinator in a picture or post if they were friends. An interviewee described how she wrote a blog every two to three days on the daily activities and experiences during her first visit at SCE. She mentioned how she posted photos and placed written content on her Facebook Page almost daily. This is an example of how SCE's name and experience reaches other people around the world through participants' use of social media.

What participants showcase is how others may perceive SCE, seeing that users of social media may not perform their own Google search on SCE, or *like* SCE's Facebook Page or other platforms. Thus, the image others receive about SCE may be based solely on the volunteers' impressions and what they show in pictures. An interviewee indicated that if a post done by SCE reminds her of her time at the venue, or if it has an emotional connection, she will comment. She further confirmed: "I still *like* about 80% of posts." This indicates that certain individuals provide a very high level of social media feedback and involvement to SCE's Facebook Page.

Another participant underlined the importance that SCE interacts with her on social media. She mentioned that when SCE *likes* her comment or make a return comment, it "makes me feel a little important, you feel special for them." She added that she does not expect interaction continually. This also applies to those coordinators with whom she is friends on Facebook: she does not expect them to continue with the relationship after she had left SCE. However, there will be a lasting emotional connection with SCE staff members: "You have so many memories and experiences together."

This interviewee's response about SCE staff members responding to her comments on their Facebook Page or on her personal account is extremely important. According to Eyrych *et al.*

(2008:412), social media allows organisations to reach out and engage in conversations with their publics, which can strengthen mutual relations. By *liking*, or commenting on a current or ex-participant's posts, SCE employees show they remember that person, that there is an open communication channel between them, which reinforces the relationship. This can lead to continual and or higher levels of online engagement from participants.

Findings suggest that from a volunteer perspective SCE is relatively open. The participants understand that SCE needs volunteer involvement to help reach its goals. This implies a culture of open two-way communication. With regard to a coordinator-volunteer relationship, SCE can be considered an open system, seeing that their practitioners interact daily where knowledge, information, views and perspectives are exchanged freely. Because SCE's coordinators interact with volunteers on a day-to-day basis they are the ones best placed to assess volunteers' opinions about SCE. This helps SCE find ways to react, adjust and adapt to accommodate their stakeholders effectively.

The nature of the conservation experience implies that SCE has to be an open system, because it cannot survive or reach its goals without input from participants. Such input can be in the form of energy exchange/physical participation or in the manner in which participants spread awareness, positive attitudes and information about SCE. For the latter to happen there needs to be open communication that ensure transparency and feedback from participants, aimed at improving stakeholder relations. Thus these communication aspects need to be managed strategically. Volunteer interviewees' views on strategic communication are discussed subsequently.

4.3.3 SCE volunteers' views on strategic communication

Volunteers' daily experiences of SCE's way of communication and organisation are applied to determine their views of strategic communication. The following framework with three focal points are applied to depict interviewees' views: strategic planning by SCE; tasks performed by SCE staff, and communication channels and messages.

4.3.3.1 Strategic planning

Participants were asked if SCE's way of communication is well planned to support its goals. Most interviewees typified SCE's social media as being organised and well planned in describing what SCE is about. As one interviewee remarked: "Social media is on a good way. It is very regular; see it all the time." Most participants had difficulty answering exactly how SCE's communication

is structured to support its goals. This can be seen in the following remarks: “I would have to make an assumption on the core values of the company.” And: “I think they should purposefully call out the elements. Tell the true objectives of SCE and Shamwari.” Another interviewee stated that she is not sure whether the reserve has an overall goal for maintenance. She mentioned that the staff probably examine how much gets done in a day, how they can be more efficient and how matters can be done differently. A few more responses focused on the planning:

- “I think they are becoming more well-planned from what I’ve heard from previous years.”
- “You can’t have it planned for the whole week because ... goals change with, like weather, timings, things happen that you might not expect.”
- “It’s still structured at the same time.”

Interviewees were asked whether SCE has the ability to adapt to daily or scheduling changes, how changes affect them, and if they are well informed when changes occur. From the interviews, it is clear that participants feel they have to be flexible and able to adapt and go along with the programme:

- “I think in general most people are really good with just going along with it; even if they might be grumbling on the side, they make it work.”
- “For me it was good [SCE’s communication]; some people feel like they don’t give us enough information, but for me it was fine.” And: “It has something to do with yourself, being flexible. I’m happy to go along with any change of plans.” And: “Communication was clear enough, we were always informed of why this and that, why we can’t go out.”
- “I adjust to things very easily and I’m very tolerant, I think. So to me it doesn’t matter if we change the day, whereas some people expect structure.”
- “You have to be flexible ... and things are inevitably bound to change ... we were always told if things changed.”

From a volunteer’s perspective, interview findings show that communication management is based on the operational running of the programme. These findings support those that were extracted from interviews with SCE managers and coordinators on strategic communication management. Both groups surmised that communication planning and implementation of such a plan would be difficult, however, as volunteer participants mentioned, certain key communication messages should be highlighted purposefully. In this regard, volunteer participants’ views on tasks performed by SCE staff will be discussed in the following subsection.

4.3.3.2 Tasks performed by SCE staff

Participants were asked who they thought was responsible for SCE's communication and what that person's roles and tasks include. Several participants mentioned that they thought more than one person oversees communication, with the Operations Manager and Social Media Coordinator "getting the most votes". Most participants had no trouble explaining what the roles and tasks of the Social Media Coordinator are, and all of them thought this person had a significant role to play in SCE's communication.

One participant mentioned that the Social Media Coordinator is highly skilled at introducing and explaining her role to people, encouraging them to join the various social networks. This includes asking participants for pictures, or interaction in general. Another participant indicated that coordinators send information and pictures about daily activities to the Social Media Coordinator. One participant also described this coordinator's role as twofold: overseeing all of SCE's Pages on various platforms, as well as the website, but also "coming up with new channels", meaning that it is this coordinator's responsibility to make SCE visible if they choose to be present on new channels.

The discussion above clearly indicates that participants view the Social Media Coordinator as the communication manager. There are other staff members who fulfil various communication practitioner roles when performing their tasks, but they are not seen as fulfilling the role of communication manager. Because communication facilitators in various roles assist in message output, the following subsection discusses interviewees' views on SCE's communication channels and messaging.

4.3.3.3 Communication channels and messages

To establish where prospective participants obtain information in order to make their decision to volunteer at SCE, a combination of channels was listed.

Most of the interviewees received initial information about SCE through brochures or booklets from tour agencies. Thereafter they did further research on SCE's website visited its Facebook Page. One interviewee read an article in a newspaper about SCE and another heard about SCE by WOM. This participant said that she "knew the quality of the reserve" and that she read blogs posted by ex-participants, and reviews posted to various media. An interviewee mentioned that his initial contact with SCE was through the animal sanctuary at the reserve; he is a member of

the organisation dealing with this sanctuary and SGR is endorsed by this organisation. He thus discovered SCE through the SGR website.

All participants mentioned that for them research was important in order to make the right decision on where to volunteer. They mentioned that they examined various media platforms before booking (esp. websites and social media). One participant reported that she asked for more information about SCE from the specific tour agency she contacted and that a person who went on a site inspection at SCE contacted her to inform her about the programme. When describing the various communication channels that SCE uses to communicate with participants, interviewees all mentioned Facebook as their primary channel of choice, followed by Instagram. One participant mentioned that she watched SCE's videos through Facebook and did not necessarily consult SCE's YouTube channel.

All interviewees fully agreed that SCE's coordinators are a communication channel, and for most interviewees they are the most important channel. Participants were asked what impact they thought coordinators had on the SCE message they received and whether coordinators portrayed the SCE message effectively. The following statements were made: "Huge impact. What they say is SCE's message." And: "Most important – during the stay the coordinators are the most important persons ... spend so much time with them and rely so much on them." Also: "... never felt unsure or uncomfortable." One participant referred to a specific coordinator: "I think he is very good at communicating, teaching people. He is interested in everything – it's not just one side of things ... very good at answering people's questions ... encouraging people to ask lots of questions." Another participant remarked: "I think it is good for people to mix up with which coordinator you go with, because you do get a different experience with each one ... they all have their strengths and weaknesses."

Volunteer interviewees made other remarks as well about SCE coordinators:

- "Certain people are very helpful, go above and beyond of what you'd expect."
- "I think sometimes it is tough for the volunteer because even the coordinator figures it out as they go along, but they are very open about that; they say it out-front."
- One participant mentioned that the coordinators are good at coming back to volunteers with answers to questions they didn't know: "If they don't know it [a question], they won't hesitate into finding out, even if it is Googling it like in the truck, or looking up a book, or going to another coordinator..."
- "There is no [coordinator] at all where I thought the person is not sure of a situation."

Participants' views mostly reflected how SCE's communication is situationally based and that planning is difficult since the programme can change often. On the question whether SCE is well organised, one participant stated:

At times. I think they have a plan going in, sometimes the execution is figure it out as we go along, and a lot of the time it depends on the supplies and what it is that we are doing ... You kind of have to be in the situation before you know how it is going to work. If it is something that is repeated later, then they have that to go on. I haven't seen anything that is unreasonably disorganised or anything like that.

Participants also referred to the way in which the coordinators react to changes, as one pointed out: "They adapt quite well actually, given the number of people involved." A participant did indicate that certain coordinators are better than others in informing people of changes. A number of interviewees did mention that a change of plans is usually greeted with a measure of excitement as it is a variation on the usual programme:

Something comes up that [the veterinarian] can have us participate in and we can get involved in. [They] change things at the drop of the hat, because they know it is something that we'll want to do. Being involved with, they could just blow it off and say well they'll never know the difference but I think they try include us when they can.

All interviewees agreed that SCE staff inform them daily of scheduling changes, but they did refer to other participants who would have appreciated more information. One participant referred to the use of the information board (the information board describes the day's programme and activities as well as the following day's programme). The participant noted:

Sometimes the board isn't updated consistently or in a timely fashion. It might not get updated till the next morning. If there is a last-minute change, then it is totally understandable, but if it isn't, I think it is fair to expect, once we are done with the day and having dinner, that they think about what will happen the next day and then write it on the board for tomorrow. Because not everyone stays here [at the communal facility] all night and hangs out to see what's going to happen.

When a participant was asked whether she thinks a weekly schedule would work, she stresses that it has to be "day by day". Another participant explained: "I think people need to realise that it's very much a day-to-day thing." Many interviewees commented that trying to abide by a weekly schedule will be difficult and that it would not be feasible due to the continually changing nature

around them. Participants indicated that they are generally satisfied with how changes are communicated and that most people adjust easily. An interviewee explained how she was absent at dinner when a coordinator discussed an activity, but he saw her outside and stopped to inform her of the plans. She added: “They made a point of letting you know what is going to happen.” Interview findings indicate that participants reacted positively to SCE’s reactive planning to situations or changes.

The findings gathered from interviews with volunteers on SCE’s communication channels and its communication, support the results of interviews with SCE managers and coordinators in a number of respects. Before volunteers decide on a programme, they do their research on various platforms. Both groups agree that the coordinators play a significant role in the success of the programme, making communication possible and relaying conservation messages. Volunteer interviewees were generally satisfied with how changes are communicated, however, there is still room for improvement, as a number of SCE interviewees also pointed out.

The following section focuses on how volunteer interviewees experienced stakeholder relationship management at SCE.

4.3.4 SCE volunteers’ views on stakeholder relationship management

Stakeholder relationship management is a management function that utilises communication to develop long-term relationships between an organisation and its publics (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:56). Organisations should know who their stakeholders are, how their decisions affect them (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:548), and have open channels of communication with publics to establish how and where to improve stakeholder relations to reach mutual understanding.

According to Hung (2007:444), organisation-public relationships arise when organisations and their publics are interdependent, with mutual impact. Organisations should therefore manage their relationships. (See 4.2.2 for a more detailed explanation of the concept of interdependence between SCE and participants.)

The findings from the interviews with volunteers on stakeholder relationship management can indicate how volunteers experience SCE’s approach to building relationships with them and if they recognise the relationship as being communal. Because SCE’s coordinators work daily with participants it is their responsibility to seek ways of cultivating the interaction to attain communal SCE-volunteer relationships. Interview findings are categorised according to three themes: ways in which SCE cultivated relationships with participants; participants’ views on the outcome of their

relationship; and the type of relationship participants felt they had with SCE. These themes are expounded below.

4.3.4.1 Relationship cultivation strategies

How participants experienced relationship **cultivation strategies** (Hon & Grunig, 1999:14-17) by SCE managers and coordinators can be used to establish the nature of the relationship between SCE and participants. Participants stated that they felt SCE cares about them, that they make participants feel comfortable and “they definitely want you to enjoy yourself”. This response links to the cultivation strategy of **positivity**, and in addition, aligns with what Cousins *et al.* (2009:1) term a cross-boundary experience, where volunteer projects comprise both work and leisure, where volunteers seek such an experience. One participant described that there constantly is an SCE staff member close by, a staff member in the office and someone to answer questions. This participant was a returnee and reported that she received a very warm welcome: “It feels like coming home.”

Participants felt that the coordinators are very approachable. This response implies that participants have **access** to SCE staff. Other participants did point out that the office staff at times feel isolated or that there is disconnection between the managers and volunteers, but as an interviewee emphasised: “You only need them when you need them.” Participants mostly dealt with the office staff on arrival or if they need assistance with aspects outside the programme.

Interviewees also referred to the office staff as being extremely helpful. In this regard, a participant described how a manager made a doctor’s appointment for her and organised transport for her. Another participant mentioned how a manager helped him sort out a personal problem back home. Because office staff take turns to welcome new arrivals, participants may be introduced to all office staff; as one participant explained, he walked into the office by mistake on his first day and only then ended up meeting a specific manager. It is clear that from a volunteer perspective, participants feel they have more access to coordinators than managers.

Participants mentioned different ways in which the coordinators show they want to build relationships with the volunteers. Interviewees reported that the coordinators make a point to know everyone’s names, that they treat everyone the same, they are patient, professional and helpful and that they “make sure everyone shares tasks”. These characteristics link to **assurances of legitimacy**. On the question whether the coordinators treat all participants the same, one interviewee pointed out: “I’ve never seen a coordinator be dismissive, ignore or

anything like that to anyone. Even though I might recognise that they don't really click with that person, they make an effort with that person."

Another participant indicated that SCE consistently tries to build relationships: "While you're here I can say that is continual." But the participant also mentioned that she is not sure whether the relationship will continue when she leaves and that she has no expectation in this regard. Participants did feel that the coordinators are positive in their work, are enthusiastic by what they are doing, and are effective in getting participants enthusiastic as well.

Two participants mentioned the fact that the longer a volunteer is with SCE, the better the relationship, and that those people may be treated slightly differently. These two interviewees explained that participants who stay longer take up more roles to assist the coordinator or that the coordinator gives them more things to do: "Once you have that relationship and the trust and the respect, you start engaging more, you start playing more of a role." One interviewee also pointed out that the coordinators communicate with the group through more experienced volunteers. This statement was also suggested by an SCE coordinator who stated that a leader would emerge from a group, or that groups will form. He said this makes communicating with volunteers easier as these users share messages within the group, or the leader in the group will share information. This links to the cultivation strategy of **sharing tasks** and according to which coordinators entrust certain tasks to participants.

All participants agreed that their welfare is taken into account and that SCE makes an effort with all who have joined. As a participant explains: "If somebody is not feeling well or seems like they are not plugged in, I think they [SCE staff] are all good at recognising and checking on people." This participant mentioned that they had somebody who felt unwell while out on the reserve, and that the coordinator said to the person to let her know if things got worse. The situation this interviewee described links to **nurturance**, where taking care of another person is key (Bortree & Waters, 2010:3).

Bortree and Waters (2010) suggest that admiration, nurturance and instrumental aid can contribute to relationship quality. All participants said they **admire** SCE; some indicated that they came to SCE in the first place because of admiration for this enterprise. Reasons participants gave why they have a high regard for SCE include the various aspects of the programme, and the perception that they are contributing to conservation. One interviewee referred to the structure (of the programme), facilities and organisation that contribute to her overall experience when stating: "I'm back, so yes [I admire them]. You wouldn't have my money if I didn't." Another participant remarked: "I do admire them, because when I think about it, I would recommend it to

everyone, to my best friends. And why? Because it has a good combination of doing something meaningful, learning a lot, not only about nature and conservation, but learning about other people and myself.”

Bortree and Waters (2010:4) explain that **instrumental aid** does not only refer to a person helping another accomplish tasks, but also to those who become mentors. This happens when a bond develops between two parties, and there is guidance instead of mere interaction. SCE Coordinators can influence the retention of volunteers by cultivating mutually beneficial relationships. For example the coordinators can advise or train participants in specific conservation practices who wish to make nature conservation their profession. This type of guidance ensures volunteers benefit significantly from the relationship as well.

According to all participants, SCE’s coordinators are the most important individuals who build relationships with them. A number of participants mentioned that they only had one coordinator for their whole stay while others had the opportunity to work with several coordinators. All participants had high praise for the coordinators. They also pointed out certain outstanding characteristics of individual coordinators:

- “He is so enthusiastic about what he is doing, his excitement is contagious.”
- “She is always willing to answer questions.”
- “You have a bond with the coordinator who you join.”
- “Most people will put [a specific coordinator’s name] down as their favourite coordinator.”

On the questions whether SCE’s coordinators have the skills and knowledge to do the work, provide a good experience, and guide people, all participants answered in the affirmative. Some felt that the coordinators ticked all the right boxes, and others even described coordinators as “brilliant”, and that the coordinator made their experience.

An interviewee described the role of the coordinators within the overall experience as follows:

If the coordinator weren’t excited about what they are doing or interested in answering questions, or interested in sharing things people don’t ask questions about, like “Hey, you might not know this but ...”, then it would be a totally different experience and might not be a positive one.

Interview findings provide a clear picture on the volunteers' perceptions of how SCE strategy to build relationships with them. Participants' views on this relationship are highly positive. They feel they are taken care of, that the coordinators display an optimistic attitude in their actions and ways of communication, and play a significant role in making it a positive experience for volunteers. The way volunteers experiences relationship cultivation by SCE impacts participants' views on the outcome of their relationship with SCE, as explained next.

4.3.4.2 Relationship outcomes

Hon and Grunig (1999:18-20) identify four indicators of successful relationship outcomes, namely control mutuality, trust, satisfaction and commitment. If coordinators do take participants' opinions into account, it can point to certain relationship cultivation strategies such as **openness and disclosure**. Should participants feel they can voice their opinion, this could mean that SCE staff created an environment where participants feel comfortable to share thoughts and feelings with them.

To ascertain whether volunteers have some **level of autonomy** during their stay at SCE, participants were asked if they could refer to a situation where the coordinators listened to their opinion. One participant gave an example where they were on night patrol and saw an aardwolf. They went off the track into the field and then the coordinator could not find the road back. However, the interviewee thought she knew the way back and remarked: "I'm sure the road is in that direction ...," and they ended up finding the road. In the interview the interviewee reported: "... didn't give me the feeling that he didn't like that I told him that." Another participant gave an example where she, in the presence of a freelance coordinator (not permanently employed by SCE), gave advice on how to get out of a literally muddy situation. She added: "They didn't treat me like they resented it [the suggestion]. When you're in the heat of the moment, I know you don't think of everything, especially when you've got people you're responsible for."

All participants were of the opinion that the coordinators are very open to all people's opinions and that they acknowledge what people say and feel. An interviewee referred to a presentation they had on anti-poaching. She related how the group became deeply involved with the conversation, all feeling they had valuable points to make. The interviewee reported that everyone had an opportunity to speak, voice their opinions and to hear the diverse perspectives of the topic at hand. This situation indicates that the coordinator gave all those present a chance to speak and therefore to be involved in the conversation. According to Buizer *et al.* (2012:155) volunteers themselves can produce different types of knowledge. An SCE coordinator felt strongly about getting participants involved in conversations as he felt that they can contribute by bringing

different ideas to the table. This indicates a level of **control mutuality** between SCE and participants since participants feel they can think and act independently and express themselves freely. By listening to participants' views, suggestions and opinions, SCE staff allow participants to influence them on some level, which is key in relationship management and mutual understanding.

Trust as a relationship outcome refers to integrity, dependability and competence. Interviewees were asked whether they felt they are treated fairly, if SCE keep its promises and does what it said it will do; also if SCE has the ability to accomplish all it set out to achieve. All participants felt that they are treated fairly by SCE and a few participants typified SCE as ethical. Interviewees all felt that they can trust SCE and all its staff. As one participant pointed out: "I think they genuinely care about my well-being."

With regard to volunteers' views on **dependability and competence**, several participants felt that SCE and the coordinators do have the ability to accomplish what they set out to do. One participant did comment that maintenance tasks are not always completed or achieved because SCE does not have sufficient equipment for participants to carry out the tasks. The interviewee went on to explain that for larger groups or when there are several groups at one stage, there is not enough equipment. Thus, if SCE had more shovels or gloves, it would make people feel more comfortable. She added: "If they [participants] knew there were enough material and gloves and didn't have to run for the best machete, it would make the coordinator's life easier. Everything would be more calmed down and relaxed."

Furthermore, Interviewees did perceive SCE's staff as capable, as one points out: "You can tell people can do their jobs." With regard to living up to promises, a participant remarked: "They won't make promises they know they can't achieve." On SCE's handling of participants' requests, an interviewee explained: "They'll say, we'll check on it and see what we can do."

One interviewee mentioned that she felt the coordinators are very adept at remembering what a person asked. For instance, the coordinator remembered to stop at a specific area because the volunteer wanted to take a picture of an erosion-control site they worked on. In another case a volunteer was very interested in learning more about a specific plant and all the associated plants within a family; and the coordinator showed her the varieties during the following days. These examples indicate that the coordinators are **committed** to the requests of people. Also, if participants show interest in a topic the coordinators will make a point of educating and showing the participant all they can on the topic. The level of commitment that SCE shows towards the interest, needs, questions and welfare of participants can ultimately lead to participant

satisfaction. Volunteers' views on relationship cultivation and outcomes determine the type of relations between participants and SCE. The type of relationship interviewees felt they had with SCE is described next.

4.3.4.3 Types of relationships

Interviewees were asked to describe the relationship between themselves and SCE and whether they thought the relationship was of a sound nature. All participants' answers reflected a very positive relationship between themselves and especially the coordinators. According to Abell (2012:159), an important aspect of volunteering is the need for recognition, positive self-identify and a desire to belong to the organisation or project to which help is offered.

The findings show that overall interviewees were highly satisfied with their experience at SCE. Their reasons were: they learnt many things, SCE staff looked after them, they contributed to conservation in some way, and had an enjoyable experience. The findings also point to the coordinators as being the most important staff members to help build and maintain relationships with participants. Thus, the interviews with volunteers indicated a communal relationship between SCE and volunteers. SCE staff members are concerned about their participants' well-being, they attempt to build a relationships with all individuals concerned, and they strive to live up to volunteers' expectations by providing a varied and enjoyable conservation experience.

The conservation program, communication and education thereof impacts participants' views on the relationship they have with SCE. Interviewees' views regarding strategic conservation communication is explained next.

4.3.5 SCE volunteers' views on strategic conservation communication

According to Oepen *et al.* (1999:10), environmental communication is a two-way social interaction process enabling people to understand key environmental factors, their interdependencies and how to respond to problems in a comprehensive way. Most participants mentioned the fact that the outcome of their work will only be visible in the long term. One participant explained: "There aren't many activities that are done just for the sake of it. ... At previous places there are kind of superfluous activities that you do." This response gives an indication of how participants perceive the conservation efforts of SCE. They know what needs to be done, that projects or activities are not presented only to keep participants busy, but to give them a purpose.

One participant stated that she would like to think she made a difference but that in many cases the outcome of what they did will only be visible in a year's time. She gave the example of doing alien-vegetation control where they did not see the effects of their efforts straight away. However, the coordinator made her feel confident that these efforts would impact positively on the environment. This view was also supported by another participant. She explained that coordinators communicate effectively to participants. They assure the volunteers that the outcome of certain activities may only be visible after a long time, but she felt they could emphasise this aspect more. She added: "I think it needs to be communicated that you are doing good ... even though you are just doing a little bit like road [work], which is what I've learnt, but I learnt that because I carried on going, whereas I think people here for two weeks might not see where that work goes." The situation as described above was echoed especially by a senior coordinator during the interviews when he stressed the importance of telling and informing participants of the difference their work has made. Even if their efforts will only be visible in a year or two, it is extremely important that participants know and trust that their contribution had an impact.

Because the outcome of projects takes time, SCE can make sure people see the end result of their work through social media. Various platforms can be used to showcase conservation projects and its impact on people who have worked on the project. Pictures, videos and descriptions can be used in this regard. Engaging ex-participants through social media and showing their contributions can impact in various ways:

- It serves as a confirmation to ex-participants that their work actually did contribute;
- By tagging a specific group or persons in a post, it can reaffirm their connection to SCE.
- Online involvement of ex-participants can receive a boost.
- Aspiring participants can see that volunteer participation has an impact and can validate the participant's decision to join SCE.

For one interviewee not only the social aspect influences the way she perceives her relationship with SCE. Her perception is also based on aspects such as the setting and location (i.e. South Africa, the Eastern Cape, bushveld and animals). This response connects with fundamental motives on which authors such as Milstein (2009) and Cox and Pezzullo (2016) base their work in environmental communication. Both authors suggest that the way people perceive and feel about the environment will influence how they talk about and act towards nature. This participant made comments such as "For me South Africa is a very deep emotional thing" and: "You have a relationship with the animals and their situation." Since this participant has an emotional connection to the environment in which SCE operates it can influence her view of SCE as a whole.

Seeing that emotional attachments to nature can influence volunteers' perception of an organisation it is up to the organisation to reinforce those positive values that people attribute to nature and conservation (Abell, 2012:164).

In light of the discussion above, SCE can seek ways to reinforce people's strong feelings towards nature and conservation through various goals, projects and tasks. By strengthening individuals' positive views about conservation, SCE can host participants who are satisfied with their experience, but who also have a concern for the welfare of SCE. The education and awareness that the experience brings can influence how participants talk about environmental issues and how they relay this information to others. A participant referred to the fact that she can spread the message about the importance of conservation back home, that she can tell her friends and family stories about her experiences and what she has learnt. She explained: "They are more aware about conservation through me. ... I think my friends that will go to South Africa will now not do cub petting because I told them the story behind it and why it is bad."

Effective communication can enhance prospects for effective conservation by allowing stakeholders to understand the problems and the potential results of the course of action followed or alternative actions taken (Mangel *et al.*, 1996:352). A strategic conservation communication plan can outline the following aspects: the conservation goals that SCE wishes to achieve, how messages should be formulated to support its conservation goals (establishing communication objectives), and how to reach and inform key stakeholders effectively.

With regard to the communication messages, participants referred mainly to the coordinators and what they said. One participant referred to messages related to animals as "... wild, the animals are wild, although they are on a reserve. They are wild and we should respect that." He also mentioned that the animal population is managed, and that animals are financially valuable. An interviewee touched on the various aspects of the programme. She said that the amount of information from the coordinators, what they said about nature and conservation, how they made her see the world, combined with the work volunteers did, resulted in a good balance for her.

Several participants referred to the educational messages they receive, such as learning more about wildlife, the environment, the poaching crisis in the country, anti-poaching strategies, as well as the canned lion hunting industry and the cub-petting industry. Participants felt that all the coordinators' conservation messages are consistent, and does not conflict when informing participants' key activities. A participant commented: "Different coordinators have different ways of communicating." The participant added that they learn different things from different coordinators as each coordinator has expertise in a specific area.

Another type of message participants mentioned was how the coordinators make it clear that in nature one cannot promise anything: There is no guarantee that one would be able to view a specific or elusive animal. An interviewee made the following remark regarding coordinators who repeat messages:

I think the coordinators are consistent in explaining in what we're doing and why we're doing it. They recognise the fact that there are new people every week and that they need to repeat those messages or repeat how you use a machete.

Key themes that stood out for interviewees from SCE are: conservation, the Big Five, wildlife management, sustainability, ecotourism, responsible tourism, ecosystem, animal monitoring, alien plants and anti-poaching. Only one participant referred to the 'three pillars' as described in the introductory talk (financial, social and ecological sustainability).

Interviewees were asked whether they think SCE has a different message when communicating with student groups as opposed to individual volunteers. Answers varied between "same messages" and "different ones". One interviewee remarked: "I assume yes, I would say student groups; they are usually on their own and that means they focus on topics in conservation. Volunteers are mixed up, age, background, where they come from. It has to be more neutral; can't focus on special type of thing all the time." Another replied that he thinks it is much the same. An interviewee mentioned the fact that student groups are accompanied by teachers. She observed that the communication between the coordinator and the teacher of the group is excellent.

On the question whether interviewees felt that activities portrayed on social media is a true reflection of what they actually do, several participants answered in the affirmative. As one asserted: "I do think what they put on Facebook represents what actually is going on." This participant also mentioned that SCE does not "sugar-coat things" to make it look in a certain way. She added that there is a healthy balance between showing conservation and showing the community perspective on matter. Another participant explained: "You can only look through about four pictures and you'll probably have a group picture, an animal picture, a work picture. Then you get the sense of that's your day." One commented: "I think visually it is better to have a visual and a description, rather than just having a description."

One participant described SCE's Facebook Page content as comprising the following aspects: activities participants do such as working and watching animals, extensive information about current volunteers and their activities, animals. When this participant was asked whether she would wish to see more educational information on Facebook such as facts, conservation news

and conservation related issues, she replied that she would be very interested in such information. She referred to the fact that she loves posts that ask followers to identify the animals, birds or snakes in different pictures, or a question that asks the reader to provide more information about a specific animal. She mentioned that she likes to check the comments to see who is right or wrong and: “That makes me want to read more.” She sees it as a “constant learning process”.

4.3.6 Conclusion on SCE volunteers’ views

Interview findings provided a clear picture of the relationship between SCE and volunteers. Overall, interviewees had an agreeable experience with several positive interactions:

The first time it exceeded my expectation and that’s why I wanted to come back. I actually had the lowest expectation for this one, because it is a bigger programme and I figured I would just be a number and just a face in the crowd and it wasn’t like that at all. The accommodation and food, and everything that we did, everything was better than I expected.

Findings of the interviews with volunteers suggest that SCE uses mixed-motive communication and that its communication is planned strategically, which leads to better relationships. SCE coordinators are the main channel for building relationships with participants and relationships seem to strengthen when volunteers are able to see how conservation goals are being achieved.

The interviewees made the following recommendations:

One interviewee suggested that the office staff should join in on the Tuesday introductory talk to highlight some of the aspects covered the Monday on arrival. As he pointed out, one felt overwhelmed on the day of arrival. One was bombarded with information and forms to fill in. Due to tiredness and being overwhelmed, one could forget important information relayed on that day. On the other hand, the interviewee felt certain aspects were not explained and he suggested a staff member should “tell us how this place operates; no one comes in to tell us about the day-to-day running of this place: ‘If you have problems come see me.’” This person also feels the accommodation is set up for students with extensive structures in place, and therefore not adult-friendly enough.

Another participant mentioned that he was almost discouraged from joining SCE because of the large number of student groups for whom SCE caters. He suggested programmes and facilities could be modified and adapted to cater for a more mature group. The participants on a sabbatical,

or those who have retired, may have the financial means to pay more for a volunteer experience, which makes it possible to offer them more, such as other 'luxuries' they seek. Other recommendations made by interviewees included updating the information board consistently and to acquire more equipment for manual work.

This section focused on volunteers' perceptions of SCE's strategic conservation communication management and how SCE builds relationships with these publics. The following section examines communication and relationship management as seen on SCE's Facebook Page. This is done by means of a content analysis.

4.4 CONTENT ANALYSIS OF SCE's FACEBOOK PAGE

A content analysis of SCE's Facebook Page for July 2015 was conducted to determine whether its online content supports stakeholder relationship management efforts within strategic conservation communication. As stated in Chapter 3 (see 3.3.3), Facebook is SCE's main social media and electronic communication platform. The content analysis of SCE's Facebook Page was measured against constructs that were identified within the literature and are also reported according to those constructs (see Table 2.1).

4.4.1 Overview of SCE's Facebook Page

Research shows that SCE's Facebook-follower base grew from 2 784 users in 2014 to 10 381 people in 2015 and average *likes* for all posts grew from 36 to 106 from 2014 to 2015. The average reach on posts at the end of 2015 was 1 004 people. According to SCE's 2015 social media report, one post reached 19 888 unique Facebook users.²

A further overview of SCE's Home Page indicates that 3 234 people checked in at SCE and there are 130 reviews with a 4,9 out of 5-star average.³ This overview shows the growth of SCE's Page and coincide with SCE appointing someone who manages the Page daily. Before 2014, this enterprise's Facebook Page was the responsibility of a volunteer coordinator, which meant that there were time constraints in managing the Page daily. The following table (Table 4.1) summarises SCE's Facebook activity for the month of July.

² 'Post reach' refers to the number of people on Facebook who have seen a post (in this case by SCE), either because the post was boosted (by means of paid advertisement) by SCE or as it appeared on followers' news feed or through a friend (Facebook, 2016).

³ Check-ins and reviews are total figures for the page and not for a specific period such as month or year.

Table 4.1: Overview of Facebook content

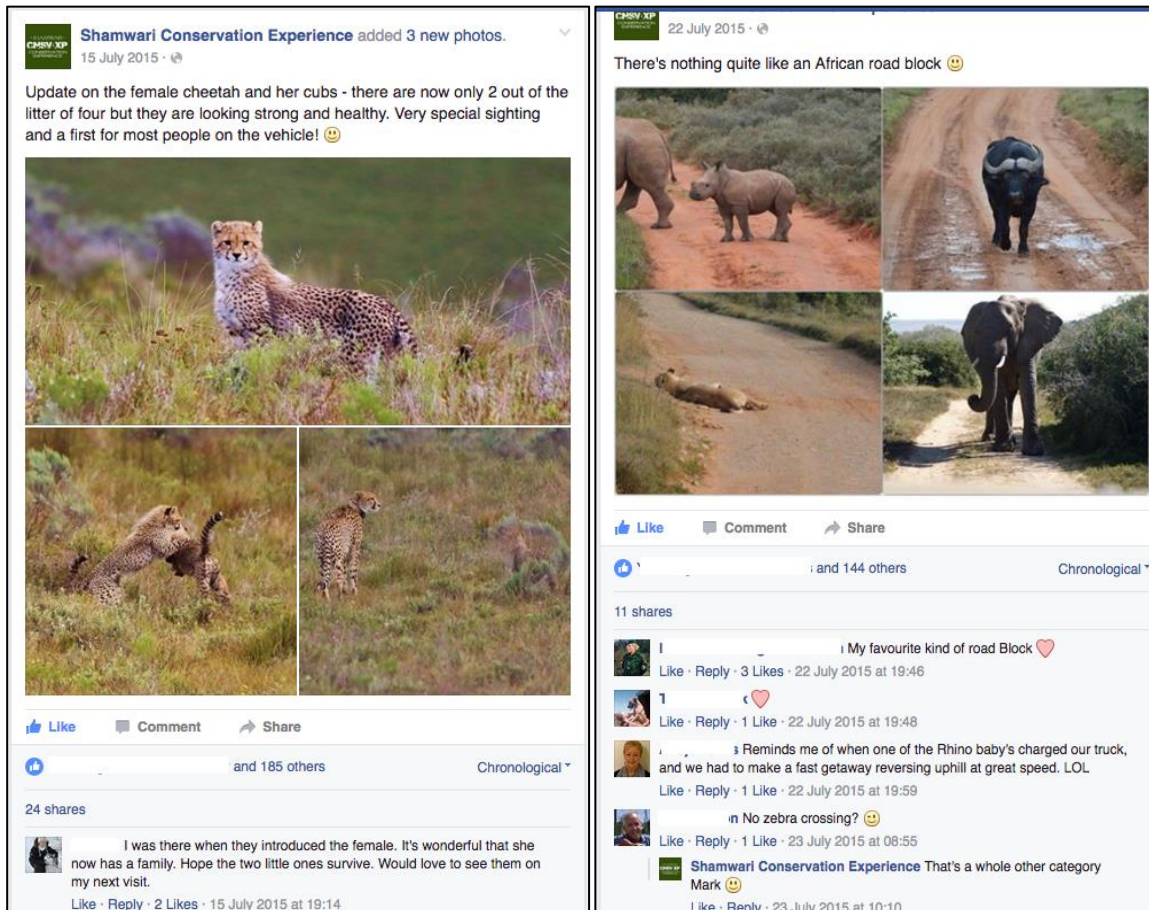
Number of posts	40 posts
Themes/categories	Animal sightings, nature/landscape, people (volunteers/student groups), Vet Eco Experience, photo competition, physical activity, community work, information about what groups get up to, Blog (from Vet Eco Experience participant), pre-vet students
<i>Hash tags</i>	#teamshamwari, #aturday
Posts with pictures (pictorial)	38 posts
Post with videos	2 posts
Post without pictures/ video	0 posts
Total <i>likes</i> : all posts in July	2 043 <i>likes</i> (the most on a single post was 188)
Total Shares: all posts in July	172 shares (the most on a single post was 35)
Total of comments (from followers) on all posts	73 comments from followers
Tagging done by SCE	Current participants, College/school groups, Tour agency, SGR, veterinary-related organisations
Tagging done by followers	Followers tag a friend within the comments section on a post
Feedback from SCE on follower comments (comments and <i>likes</i>)	Total <i>likes</i> back from SCE = 65 <i>likes</i> Total comments back from SCE = 15 comments
Information about enquiries/bookings	3 posts encouraging people to “click on the contact button” “get in touch” “find out more” these posts have a short description of activities participants get involved with 2 comments in reply to someone’s comment about the programme. These two comments invited people to go the website (link was provided) and an email address given in one of the posts on who to contact for an enquiry for costs and availability

The most popular Facebook post during July 2015 contained pictures of a female cheetah with her cubs. This post received 188 *likes*. Second most popular was the “African roadblock” post with pictures of various animals causing a roadblock, scoring 147 *likes*. The most popular post through ‘shares’ between users was the July photo competition whereby the top 10 pictures or finalists were revealed and people were asked to vote for their favourite; this post had 35 shares. The least popular post by *likes* was of a blog by a Vet Eco Experience participant, which received

7 likes. During the July there were only three posts with less than 10 likes. In additions, two videos were shared, one through SCE (a video of an Aardwolf with 881 views), and a link to a video that an ex-volunteer created about the experience.

Image 4.1: Most-liked post (a) &

Image 4.2: Most-liked post (b)



4.4.2 Applying systems theory and two-way communication

An open system presupposes that information is shared freely among an organisation and its environment, where both parties receive and give in order to grow and understand the position of the other (Cutlip *et al.*, 2002:21). SCE's Facebook Page can be classified as an **open system**, seeing that anyone can join the Page – due to the full and free access. With the extensive reach Facebook has globally, it is a key network that should be utilised to communicate and interact with distant and diverse publics (Cutlip *et al.*, 2002:2). The Social Media Coordinator explained that their followers on Facebook represent over 30 countries from ages 16 to 80. With such a diverse demographic interested in SCE's operations, Facebook is key to its communication output and relationship management.

Disclosure – stakeholders receiving information

Waters *et al.* (2009:103) mention that the social media strategy of disclosure is important because the public requires openness and transparency from organisations. According to Waters *et al.* (2009:103), organisations should do the following: (i) provide a detailed description of themselves and their history; (ii) use hyperlinks to connect followers to their website; and (iii) provide visual cues to connect with followers, which contributes to disclosure. When clicking on the “About” tab on SCE’s Facebook Page, two options provide information:

- The “Overview” section provides contact information of SCE such as physical address and telephone numbers as well as a link to their website; this includes a map showing its location.
- The “Page Info” tab for further information gives a description of the conservation opportunities SCE provides, the type of groups it caters for, awards won and contact information.

By employing these options, it will be useful for SCE to give a detailed description of its vision, mission and the goals it sets out to achieve. This allows followers to understand the focus of SCE and the purpose of the programme, especially for new followers of the Facebook Page who have not yet participated at SCE’s venue.

SCE’s Facebook Page thus makes strategic communication management and stakeholder relationship management possible. Facebook is used to share and communicate to various stakeholder groups what SCE is, who they are, and what they do. Due to the pure social, participatory nature of social media (Eyrich *et al.*, 2008:413; Safko, 2010:4) it can be classified as an open, two-way symmetrical channel for communication and relationship management, but only if the organisation’s social networks are managed as such (Valentini, 2015:171).

Analysing SCE’s Facebook Page provides evidence that this network tends to be two-way symmetrical, open, and interactive with continual presence of followers and richness in information. Daily information is posted about groups’ endeavours, which any follower can *like*, comment on, or share. Followers can also tag friends in the comments section and SCE can be tagged in individual Facebook posts. SCE is highly active in returning communicating to followers, be it by *liking* a comment made on their post, or by commenting. The content posted is rich in information because it describes the situation (participants involvement); adds a visual indicator (supporting written content); and most of the time tagging participants in posts.

By posting pictures of participants at ‘work’ and tagging them further, indicates SCE’s commitment to participants and help draw people to the Page, as Image 4.3 below illustrates. This is a public way of showing the participants at SCE that they are valued and that the enterprise depends on them. One volunteer interviewee supported this perspective by stating that when SCE replies on her comments she feels valued: “... makes me feel a little important, you feel special to them.” The content analysis shows that SCE regularly gives feedback on followers’ questions. Feedback makes it possible to communicate directly with followers, which helps clarify uncertainties, as Image 4.4 below indicates.

The two screenshots below, Images 4.3 and 4.4, depict how SCE tags participants in posts and gives feedback on enquiries.

Image 4.3: Tagging of participants on Facebook



Image 4.4: Feedback to stakeholders



Stakeholders creating information

Social media is not only an effective channel where stakeholders can *receive* information from an organisation. It is also a platform where stakeholders can *create* information. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:61) describe user-generated content as all forms of media content that are publicly available and created by the end-user. According to Bough and Agresta (2011:2), for this reason social networks can be classified as **two-way communication** channels. User-generated content at SCE from participants and followers are extremely important. Students and volunteers are not only physically present and partaking in the programme. SCE's content is about them, thus they form the content themselves.

Participants thus also provide SCE with content such as pictures, videos, and blogs. User-generated content from participants adds legitimacy to SCE's message output: if a blog or picture is shared which a student or volunteer created, then followers of the Page receive information about SCE from various sources. Holloman (2012:7) points out that users of social media seek

trust, transparency and truth. Allowing participants to share and create content for SCE's Facebook Page can help unlock these positive qualities.

User-generated media can also be seen as a form of WOM publicity. Valentini (2015:170) explains that WOM is time and again the driving force behind getting followers enthusiastic about an organisation. If there are major differences between what SCE portrays and what participants show, this can cause conflicting views on who SCE is, which makes it difficult for to knowing whom to trust. Volunteer interviewees described how they perceived SCE's Facebook Page as a true reflection of the actual experience. The following screenshot (Image 4.5 below) showcases how SCE incorporates user-generated content on its Facebook Page.

Image 4.5: Sharing an ex-volunteer's video



SCE encourages two-way communication from participants and followers by inviting them to partake in the monthly photo competition. Each month a new theme is selected and followers can send in pictures that depict the theme. The rest are then asked to vote for their favourite picture and the one with the most *likes* is declared the winner. What is seen on several of these screenshots are that followers communicate with each other by commenting on a post by SCE. Thus, the followers' interaction is not only with SCE but with the larger community that SCE creates through social media.

An analysis of SCE's Facebook Page provided evidence that this social network entails an open system and that two-way communication does take place and is encouraged between followers and SCE. The following section describes the application of strategic communication within such an open system, as seen on SCE's Facebook Page.

4.4.3 Strategic communication management as seen on SCE's Facebook Page

Macnamara and Zerfass (2012:302) as well as Allagui and Breslow (2016:21) stress the importance of incorporating social media into the strategic communication plan if an organisation was to optimise its effectiveness. In addition, White (2012:31) argues that social media should align with and support organisational goals.

Interview responses of SCE managers and coordinators indicated that SCE does not have a strategic communication plan, but that the Facebook posts are managed as being linked to the activities of the volunteer program. Furthermore, SCE practitioners intend to create awareness through the monthly photo competition. It could thus be argued that SCE follows an informal communication strategy, but that a formal strategy could benefit this enterprise even more. This social media strategy supports one of the approaches SCE employees listed during interviews: awareness for the programme. The other two main organisational goals (conservation and environmental education) and how Facebook support these goals are discussed in Section 4.4.5.

Waters *et al.* (2009:103) stresses the importance that the information posted in social media should be useful. SCE's high follower involvement shows that people do receive substance from the Page, otherwise they would not engage this many times.

It could be argued that only the photo competition is planned proactively and that the rest of the social media posts are reactive. However, SCE's practitioners are aware who they will host each month and therefore set up a two-week programme. Thus, the Social Media Coordinator can plan

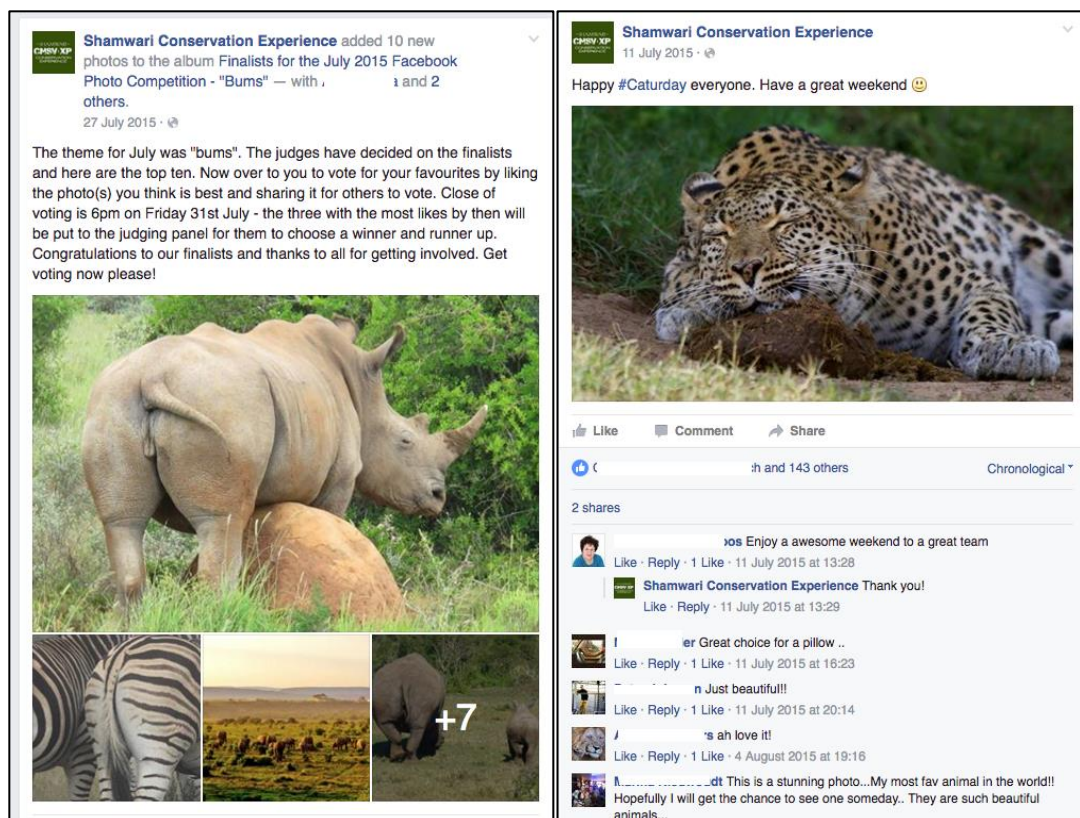
when to join a specific group to gather content. Nevertheless, in light of the continually changing environment of the wild, the gathering of content for a post is reactive to nature.

An overview of the Facebook content for July 2015 reveals an array of posts (messages) targeted at different groups that are present – from the Vet Eco students, to volunteers and other groups. The topics also vary and include posts about animals, community work, nature scenes and content from participants. Thus a well-planned variety is posted on the different levels of the programme. In terms of communication management this strategy helps portray SCE to external stakeholders.

It should be kept in mind that the programme can change rapidly. Therefore, using content that was gathered from the coordinators or participants is vital, especially if the Social Media Coordinator cannot be at an activity physically to capture the moment. The images below (4.6 and 4.7) show posts that can be considered as based on strategic planning.

Image 4.6: Photo competition post &

Image 4.7: “Caturday” post



According to Steyn (2007:139-140), strategic communication management means assessing the organisation's stakeholder environment. This helps the organisation determine which content to

communicate in order to reach stakeholders, adapt to changes that occur, and assess the effectiveness of its communication. In this regard, environmental scanning and evaluative research can be conducted through Facebook by monitoring content (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012:298). Facebook can be used to assess how diverse SCE's stakeholder demographic is. Then it can function as a platform to become familiar with them and ascertain which stakeholder groups are most active to inactive. From the content analysis, it is clear that all posts during July targeted a younger demographic, which is SCE's main intended stakeholder group. Although an older demographic does form part of the volunteer groups (and certain pictures do show the presence of older people), no specific message reinforces the idea that the programme is for people of a more mature age.

One way of evaluating how followers respond to posts are by examining the *likes*, comments, shares and tags. A high number of these three responses can indicate that a post is successful, but the reverse is also true. An organisation such as SCE, however, has to keep a balance between popular posts and showcasing its programmes. During SCE interviews, a number of participants did mention that it is important to show the truth and what they actually do and not to be biased towards a particular activity. A coordinator emphasised that for him showing an image of a volunteer working hard gets priority above a picture of animals. In contrast, the content analysis provided evidence that posts with pictures of animals enjoys more *likes* than actual conservation work or posts about a specific group.

Social media provides a platform for stakeholders to engage actively with organisations, which makes participation easier. Macnamara and Zerfass (2012:299) explain that due to social media, communication practitioners are concerned that they lose control over an organisation's messages. These scholars warn that organisations should be sensitive in their treatment of public comments on social media. This will avoid undermining the foundations of social media: openness, participation and the spectrum of diverse content.

From the findings, it is clear that SCE is fairly comfortable to allow a certain degree of loss of control regarding messages on its social media. The fact that those that reply and comment on social media still focus on the theme of conservation does make it easier for SCE to some extent (refer to Image 4.1 and 4.7 above). Currently, the conversations on Facebook are of a positive nature, but SCE's views on "loss of control" or allowing followers' interaction may change if the communication turns negative or elicits undesirable interaction towards SCE.

The analysis above shows the importance of cultivating and maintaining sound relationships with stakeholders. The following section delves deeper into SCE's strategies to build relationships with followers and participants, as observed on this enterprise's Facebook Page.

4.4.4 Stakeholder relationship management as seen on SCE's Facebook Page

Facebook allows organisations to develop relationships with important stakeholder groups (Waters *et al.*, 2009:103). The third social media strategy that Waters *et al.* (2009:103) refer to, focuses on developing relationships with stakeholders – **interactivity**. These scholars describe various ways to involve stakeholders. Examples are: requesting e-mail addresses, providing a calendar of events, or listing volunteer opportunities to involve stakeholder groups offline. The concept of interactivity, according to Waters *et al.* (2009), is reversed when the SCE-stakeholder environment is described. The actual, physical involvement and participation in the conservation programme is the starting point for the relationship. This implies that interactivity through social media is mostly a product of the already established inter-personal relationship. A coordinator described how most people will only join Facebook after they arrived at SCE. Therefore, in this context, online interactivity is not so much about finding ways to involve stakeholders, but to encourage online involvement as an *extension* of the physical involvement.

In this case, the concept of interactivity can be linked closely to the design of Bortree and Waters (2010) regarding stakeholder involvement. According to this approach, the actual level of **volunteer involvement** has a large impact on volunteers' view of an organisation and their relationship with that company. In the present study, online participant interactivity as examined through the content analysis implies how followers *like*, comment on, share and tag SCE as well as how they use Facebook themselves. A volunteer interviewee shared that one gets emotionally attached to the animals and thus invests in SCE – in this regard, Facebook reminds her of her time at this reserve. She reported that she *liked* comments on posts that evoke those emotions. This indicates how ex-volunteers continue to be involved with SCE through Facebook after they have left. In Image 4.1 above an ex-participant commented on the post of the female cheetah and her cubs by confirming: "I was there when they introduced the female. It's wonderful that she now has a family. Hope the two little ones survive. Would love to see them on my next visit." This is an example of online stakeholder involvement that revisits actual involvement during the experience. Social media expands on what participants experienced and can keep them informed on the outcomes of projects, how situations played out, or how certain animals are faring.

Various posts on SCE's Facebook Page relate to several of Hon and Grunig's (1999) and Hung's (2007) relationship cultivation strategies. The symmetrical cultivation strategy of access,

openness and disclosure was discussed in Section 4.4.2 where evidence was provided to indicate that anyone has **access** to SCE's Facebook Page and that such a social network allows people to post what they truly feel. On the point of **disclosure**, an outsider may not be able to see or know if or what information SCE chose to withhold or not to share. The only way of knowing whether there is full disclosure would be by comparing participants' accounts of their experience with content that SCE posted. Another way to see if SCE allows disclosure from followers is by not deleting but addressing concerns or situations that was presented on Facebook.

From the findings, it was evident that no comment made on SCE's posts indicated dissatisfaction or displeasure from followers. Despite this fact, a volunteer interviewee did mention "things they can and can't talk about" such as the number of rhinos on the reserve. Certain forms of information are confidential for the protection of the reserve and those entrusted to look after its fauna and flora. SCE makes a point in not 'advertising' rhino sightings or adventures on their social media. When pictures of rhinos do appear on SCE's Facebook Page it is usually related to a photo competition (e.g. the July photo competition) or in relation to a calendar event such as World Rhino Day, but this seldom occurs.

The cultivation strategy of **positivity** is showcased in various ways on SCE's Facebook Page, from posts being positive to portraying exuberant participants on pictures. Many activities that are presented are meant to be enjoyed, and those activities are depicted through posts. Another way SCE is positive in their communication is by engaging with followers' comments in a fun-filled way. As example is Image 4.2 "African road-block", on which a follower commented: "No zebra crossing? ;-)", where SCE replied: "That's a whole other category Mark 😊". Several posts support positivity such as the following screenshot of and a rare sighting of an aardwolf (Image 4.8) during the day and a "hippo-belly-flop" post (Image 4.9) with pictures taken by a participant.

Image 4.8: Aardwolf video

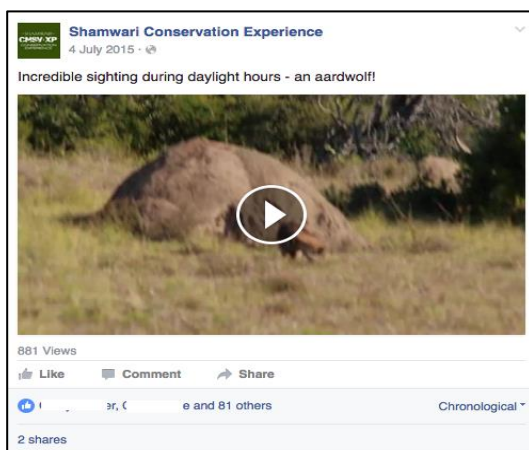


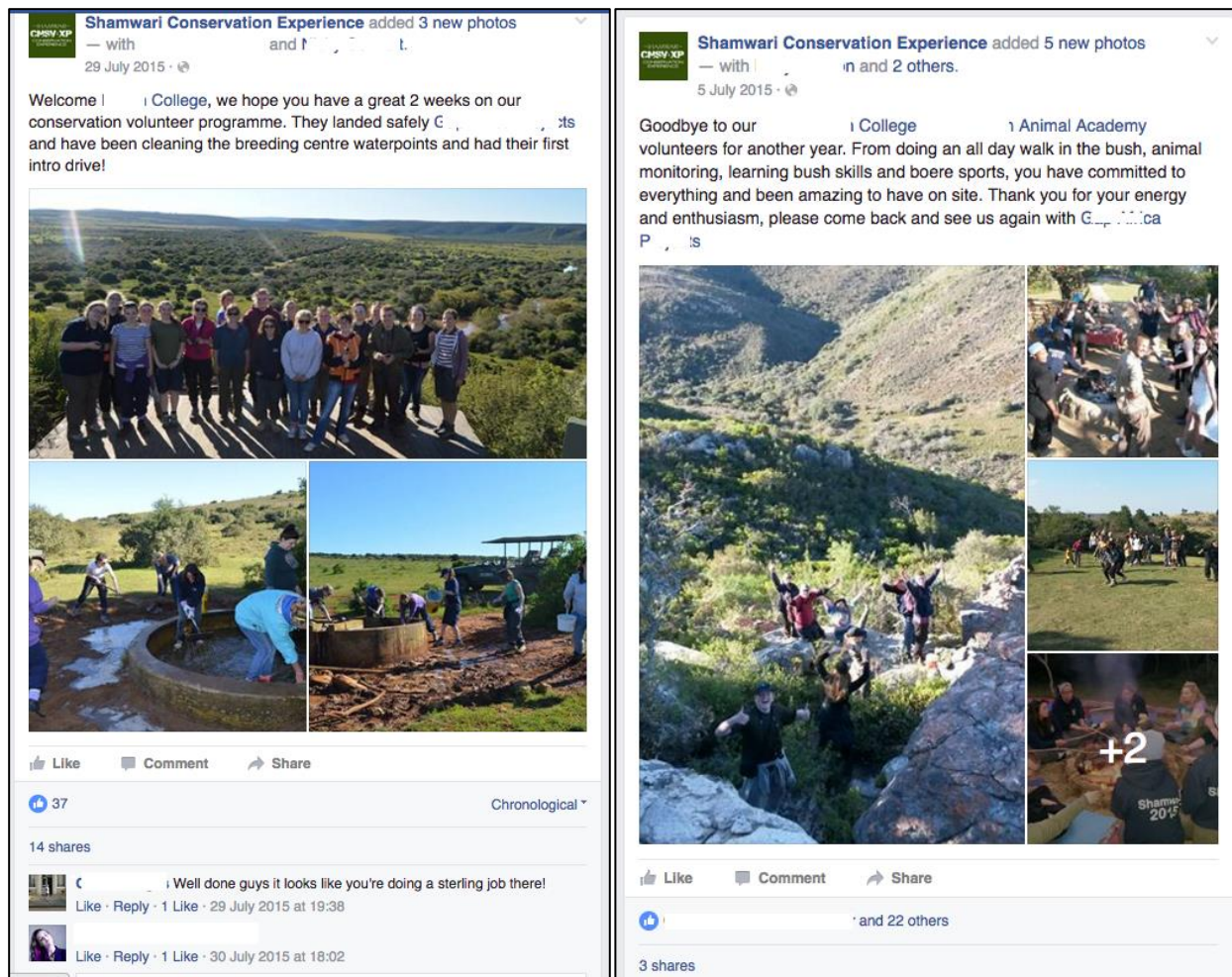
Image 4.9: Hippo belly-flop



SCE earns **legitimacy** from participants or groups by welcoming visitors to the reserve and thanking them for their participation and commitment when they leave. SCE also **networks** with tertiary establishments and tour operators by tagging them in posts. By tagging certain communities, SCE grows its supporter base because people may encounter this enterprise through online content which these communities share. The two screenshots (Images 4.10 and 4.11) below show how SCE establishes connections with groups as its networking strategy.

Image 4.10: Welcoming a college group to SCE &

Image 4.11: Thanking and saying goodbye to a college group



SCE's Facebook posts also demonstrate other aspects of relationship cultivation strategies. Another example of applying the cultivation strategy of **assurances of legitimacy** is by using user-generated content. By posting pictures or videos taken by participants SCE confirms its commitment to building relationships and shows that it values stakeholders' input. The incorporation of a blog or other content from a participant can be categorised as **sharing of tasks**. As was indicated previously, participants are considered important to help achieve on the ground conservation or community goals through the tasks they complete. Therefore, sharing tasks in a social media context is a highly relevant strategy. By asking participants to send in pictures for the monthly photo competition and encouraging them to vote for their favourite picture, are further ways to boost involvement and maintain relationships online.

Bortree and Waters (2010) propose that admiration, nurturance and instrumental aid should be classified as relationship cultivation strategies. The concept of **nurturance** (in this case, coordinators engaging volunteers and getting them involved) emerged on various posts

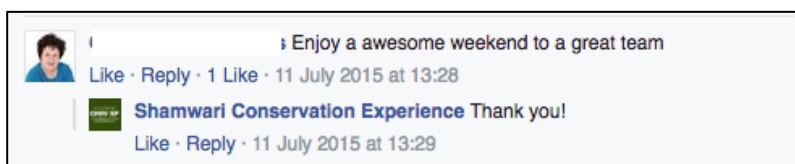
throughout the content analysis. SCE's Facebook Page shows that followers are encouraged to partake in, for example, the photo competition. SCE actively introduces student groups on its Page, which can be seen as a way to nurture the relationship online. Although individual participants are tagged in posts relating to their group (e.g., students, volunteers) there is a clear distinction between introducing the Vet Eco Experience participants and student groups and the volunteers. It is true that groups arrive at the same time and by association belong to the same experience, but SCE has to ensure volunteers enjoy the same attention online as the groups. SCE can do more in terms of the cultivation strategies of assurances of legitimacy, nurturance and networking with the groups with which volunteers are associated.

In light of the classification by Bortree and Waters (2010), certain SCE posts did demonstrate a certain level of **admiration**. The following two posts below (Images 4.12 and 4.13) depict this relationship cultivation strategy. One comment refers to a future participant showing excitement in anticipation prior to arrival, and the other comment shows appreciation for SCE.

Image 4.12: Excitement from future volunteer



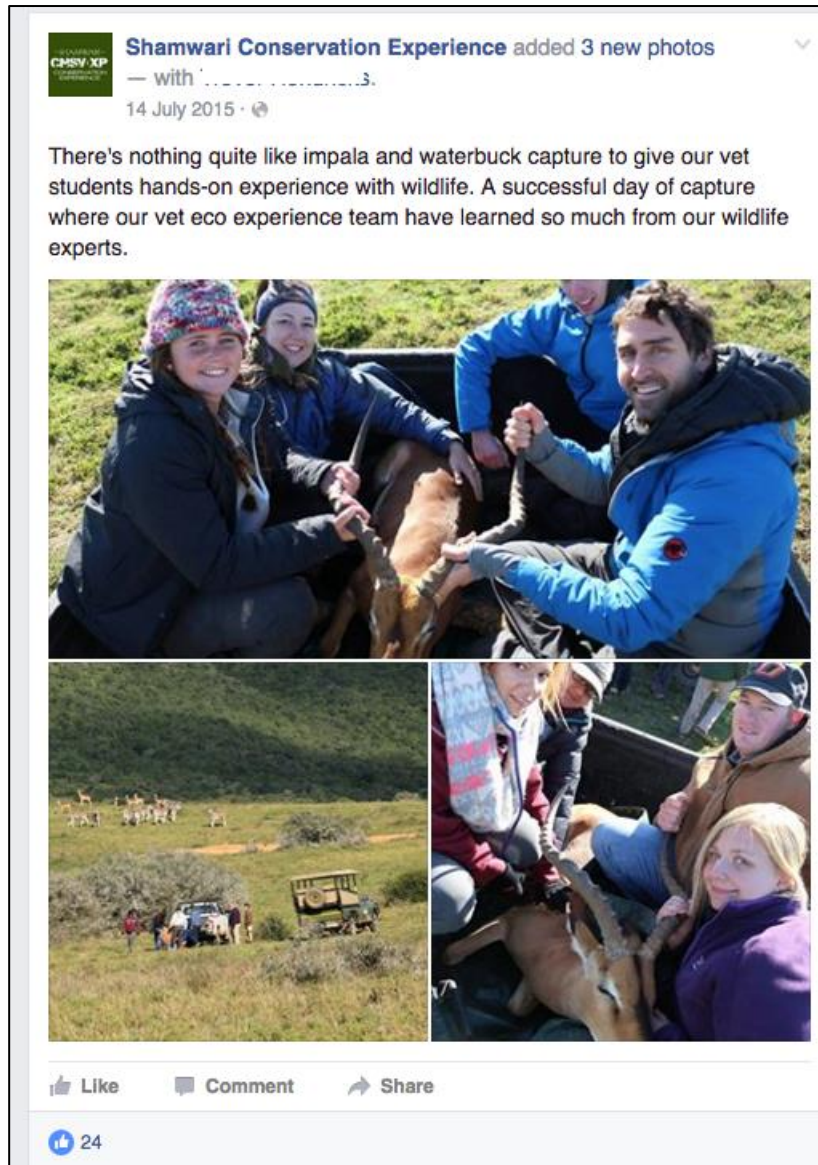
Image 4.13: Wishing the SCE team well (admiration)



According to Bortree and Waters (2010:4), **instrumental aid** refers to guidance and helping someone accomplish or achieve a goal. Volunteer interviewees described SCE's coordinators as a fundamental part of their experience. These interviewees had high praise for SCE's coordinators. Despite the interviewees placing such high premium on their interactions with the coordinators, findings show that the latter do not receive the type of credit on Facebook as they do in person. SCE's coordinators do appear in pictures and are tagged on occasion. However, by creating posts of a more personal nature, involving coordinators can encourage more engagement from followers. The coordinators do *like* and share SCE posts but if more content could involve them, their online engagement may increase. Followers (who participated at SCE)

built relationships with the staff and SCE's social media should revisit or reinforce those interpersonal relationships. Only one post related to guidance and was linked to SGR's wildlife team and not SCE's coordinators:

Image 4.14: Instrumental aid



Finally, relationship cultivations strategies also typically focus on **relationship outcomes** of control mutuality, satisfaction and commitment (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Hung, 2007). These aspects have already been established throughout the content analysis. It was found that the concept of user-generated content is associated with **control mutuality**. An analysis of SCE's Facebook content and follower's reaction to it, show that both parties are committed to the well-being of the other and that followers are **satisfied** with online information.

The relationship outcome of **trust** is more difficult to deduce from the Facebook posts. The reason is that SCE's practitioners showcase only daily activities, hence it is not clear whether SCE's staff did what they said they would do. For example, there is a post welcoming a group and describing activities they will get involved in during their stay. In the post saying goodbye, SCE only mentions that this group achieved several feats and that a blog will be posted to describe those achievements. Thus, an intermediary post is lacking showcasing the group's activities and thus what they did or did not achieve. Trust is an extremely important relationship outcome as it encompasses qualities such as integrity, dependability and competence. SCE has to ensure participants and followers know the enterprise can do what it set out to do, and has the ability to achieve its goals.

Overall, the content analysis of SCE's strategies for building relationships with participants and followers online, reflects a communal relationship. According to Grunig *et al.* (2002:553), communal relationships are important if an organisation aims to be socially responsible and build a reputation for being concerned about its stakeholders. The content analysis revealed that information exchange takes place between SCE and followers, that there is open and positive conversations, and that SCE builds relationships with followers through various strategies.

A definite strategy related to relationship cultivation is strategic communication on conservation matters. The following section examines the application of strategic conservation communication as can be observed on SCE's Facebook Page.

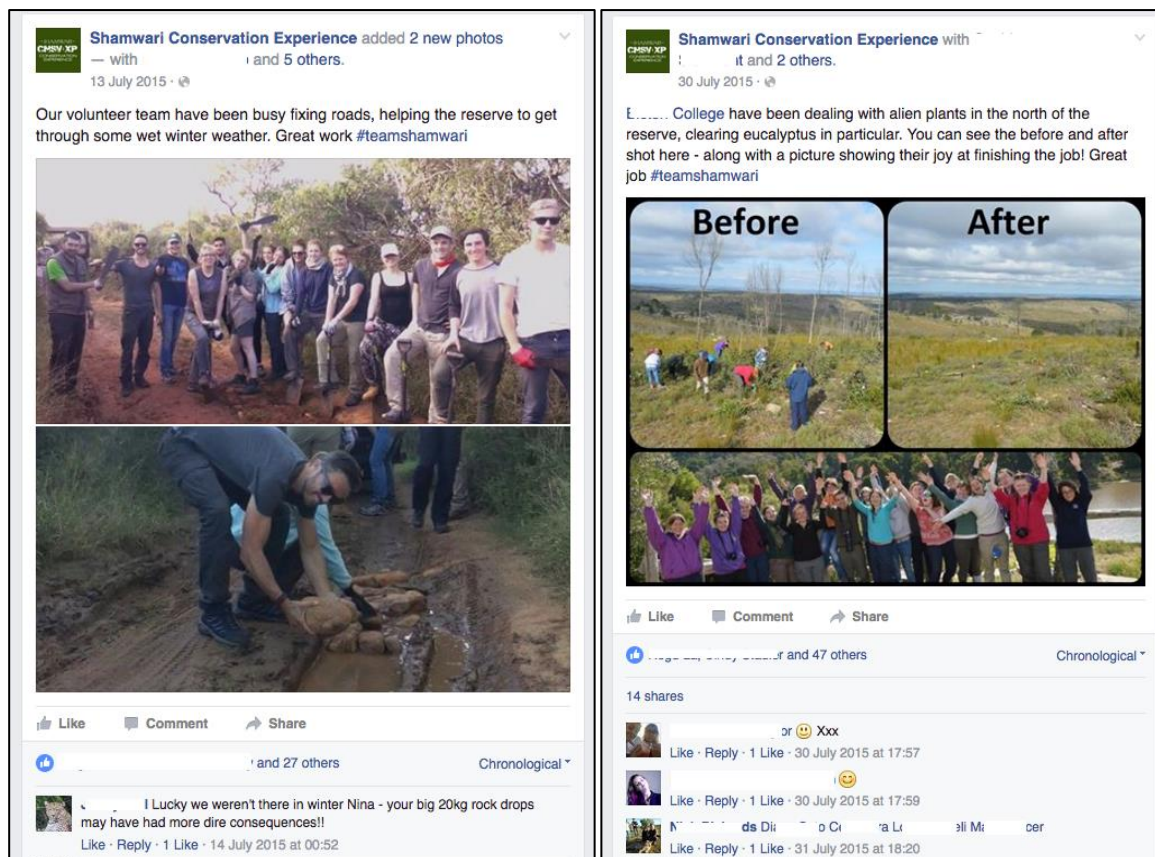
4.4.5 Strategic conservation communication as seen on SCE's Facebook Page

Goals relating to strategic conservation communication as SCE interviewees described it are conservation and environmental education. It is important that these goals are portrayed and communicated on Facebook. Several posts showcase what a specific group will be focussing on during their stay or what a group has done. Posts show pictures of a conservation activity with key words used such as 'alien vegetation control', 'road fixing' and 'animal monitoring'. However, these posts do not always show the outcome or impact of these activities. One volunteer interviewee suggested that SCE should purposefully call out their goals, which should also be communicated clearly on Facebook. During the interviews with SCE's coordinators they emphasised the importance that participants know the outcome of projects and why projects are undertaken. It should be communicated and explained to participants how their activity will impact the environment, and especially conservation. In this regard, a key communication strategy is forfeited, seeing that the participants may know the outcome of conservation efforts but followers of the Page, and external viewers may be uninformed.

Thus, particularly if a person joins SCE's Facebook Page to gain a sense of what they do before deciding where to volunteer, the problem is that key conservation and environmental messages are not portrayed. A person may see that certain activities support conservation efforts, but will not know the extent to which this assistance actually makes a difference. The following screenshots (Images 4.15-4.16) below help support the finding that posts depict the type of conservation activities but lack in information explaining why it is necessary or what the full impact is.

Image 4.15: Conservation work: road fixing &

Image 4.16: Conservation work: alien vegetation control



In response to these two screenshots above, further questions arise:

- Why is the road fixed and rocks used?
- What is alien plants and why are they clearing eucalyptus trees?
- What is the ecological effect of removing these trees?

An SCE interviewee mentioned how crucial it is that followers should not be bored with density in text and descriptions. This response was supported by a volunteer interviewee who preferred a

more pictorial-type of social network. SCE can thus avoid high text density by creating visual content instead of long descriptions on the importance and outcome of conservation work by the participants. In this regard, SCE can create content such as video clips where coordinators describe a certain aspect of the programme whilst enacting it.

Each coordinator has an own field of expertise. Thus, when for example, a snake has to be removed from a room, a coordinator can compile a short video clip describing the type of snake, its habitat and interesting facts. Inter-personal messages from coordinators that showcase different projects, activities or animals will help achieve other goals such as environmental education. A coordinator can describe why certain forms of vegetation are invasive and how it affects the growth of indigenous plants. Environmental education and conservation goals need not be interrupted when participants leave SCE but can continue online, which will keep followers engaged.

One volunteer interviewee stated specifically that she would like to learn more on their Page about conservation or conservation issues. SCE will benefit by creating online communication strategies around environmental education through the coordinators. It is true that many conservation outcomes will only be visible over an extended period. Nevertheless, the benefit that Facebook adds is that the platform is utilised to keep in touch with ex-participants. Therefore, SCE can employ its Facebook Page to show the result of projects that was undertaken a while back.

4.4.6 Conclusion on the content analysis of SCE's Facebook Page

The content analysis of SCE's Facebook posts showed a positive and interactive platform with user-generated content to help narrate SCE's story. From the findings, it is clear that SCE's Facebook Page shows the wide applications of their programme and the diverse people who join the conservation experience. Numerous posts focus on fun-filled experiences and enjoyment through the programme as well as the related animals and projects. This demonstrates online that SCE's programme is not all about work.

However, SCE can do more to encourage engagement. This means finding new ways to capitalise on followers' participation (in addition to the photo competition). Although posts about animal sightings receive several *likes* and comments, those figures can still increase. In this regard, the challenge is to gain more traction on posts that relate to actual conservation work. To increase followers' engagement and develop the Page, SCE can benefit by incorporating their social media plan within a strategic plan for conservation communication.

SCE's strategist can also help the Social Media Coordinator establish a strategic plan for output through communication on Facebook and across various media. This will ensure all messages and information are aligned with the strategic goals and relationship management strategy of the organisation. The implementation and success of communication strategies depend on whether the intended messages reached stakeholders effectively.

4.5 GENERAL CONCLUSION

Chapter 4 processed the findings of the semi-structured interviews with SCE managers, coordinators and volunteers as well as from a content analysis of SCE's Facebook Page. This was done to understand how SCE manages relationships with stakeholders (volunteers and online followers) through strategic communication on conservation matters.

The key insights that were established is that inter-personal relationships between SCE staff and volunteers are crucial for the success of the programme. The interaction on the ground during the programme and the communication messages the volunteers receive should influence their assessment of this enterprise's conservation experience. It should also impact volunteers' spreading of the word about SCE. Although SCE's Facebook Page does showcase the enterprise's conservation activities, key messages on conservation communication is lacking that could support the conservation goals.

The following chapter (ch 5) investigates the quantitative findings that were drawn from the self-administered questionnaires through various forms of statistical analysis.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH RESULTS: QUANTITATIVE DATA

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter reviewed the qualitative data that were gathered through semi-structured interviews with managers, coordinators and volunteers of Shamwari Conservation Experience (SCE), as well as the data from the content analysis of SCE's Facebook Page.

This chapter discusses the results of the quantitative data collected from the completed questionnaires by the SCE student groups and individual volunteers. The questionnaire findings helped answering *Specific research question 3*: "How do volunteers experience the extent to which SCE apply strategic conservation communication in managing relationships with them?"

The findings are organised according to the constructs identified in literature (see Table 3.2). Firstly, demographic information is presented, followed by a discussion of communication management and communication channels. Thereafter findings are presented on relationship cultivation strategies by SCE and relationship outcomes. The findings of the self-administered questionnaires are compared to findings from the semi-structured interviews and content analysis, where applicable. This is done to capitalise on the strengths of using both data gathering methods jointly.

5.2 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

This section provides background information on the respondents.

5.2.1 Group origin and motivation for volunteering

The following table (Table 5.1) represents the various groups who participated at SCE during the time of data collection.

Table 5.1: Layout of group origin

Group origin	%	n
Students	47.2	100
- College	17.0	36
- University	10.4	22
- Vet Eco Experience	9.9	21
- School	9.9	21
Individual volunteers	52.8	112
Total	100	212

Table 5.1 above shows that from the 212 questionnaires that were collected, 100 (47.2%) belonged to student volunteers and 112 (52.8%) to individual volunteers.

Establishing the main categories of reasons why people join SCE, can provide management direction when creating communication messages to reach a specific target group (per category). Table 5.2 below indicates the motivation for respondents to participate in volunteering.

Table 5.2: Motivation for volunteering

Motivation for volunteering	%	n
University/college course or group	40.6	86
Holiday	25.5	54
Other reasons	15.0	32
Gap year	13.2	28
Sabbatical	5.7	12
Total	100	212

From Table 5.2 above, it is clear that most volunteers join SCE as part of a university or college group. The third, highly rated option, “other reasons”, given by respondents for joining SCE relate to travel, adventure, conservation work, and personal experience.

When comparing the student contingent in Table 5.1 to the option “University/College course or group” in Table 5.2, the 6.6% difference can be explained by the fact that respondents see the SCE programme as a holiday, adventure, or travel experience although they may form part of a school, college or university group. From a conservation point of view, it is also encouraging to see the number of candidates who choose to do volunteering or help with conservation efforts, instead of following the traditional way of holidaying.

The type of group hosted by SCE will determine the programme to be followed and will guide coordinators on ways to build relationships. For example, a large number of students from a well-known international university affiliated to a South African counterpart, annually frequent SCE for hands-on research as part of their course work. This means that SCE acts as host providing the students access to the reserve, facilities, accommodation and food. Furthermore, these students do not participate in the usual programme offered to others. The lectures lead the group with the SCE's coordinators as game reserve guides, when they transport students to various research sites. This creates a positive perception of SCE within the mind of these students and influence their assessment of SCE when they leave. Differences between this group and other student groups are discussed in Sections 5.5 and 5.6 below.

Interestingly, one interviewee stated that they as students are flattered that a university of this stature have chosen Shamwari to do their research. He also emphasised that they can learn a lot from the lectures and their interactions with nature conservation academia. The respondents from SCE indicated that they also wish to strengthen the relationship with this university: "We can maybe adapt that program, [and] carry on the data collection, [to] keep the project running."

From the data, it is also clear that SCE needs to tailor its communication to a younger audience, and, in certain cases, to a lay audience as far as conservation is concerned. This communication can mean explaining animal or conservation issues in a more non-scientific manner, or explaining in lay-terms the impact of projects on nature conservation. This point was also made in reference to volunteers from diverse backgrounds with various levels of competence in English usage.

Encouragingly, responses from the interviews made it clear that the coordinators do assess their group to ascertain how to communicate to them clearly. From the content analysis of SCE's Facebook Page, it was evident that SCE practitioners do post different messages for particular groups. In addition, specific groups are tagged and mentioned on Facebook by outlining their daily activities.

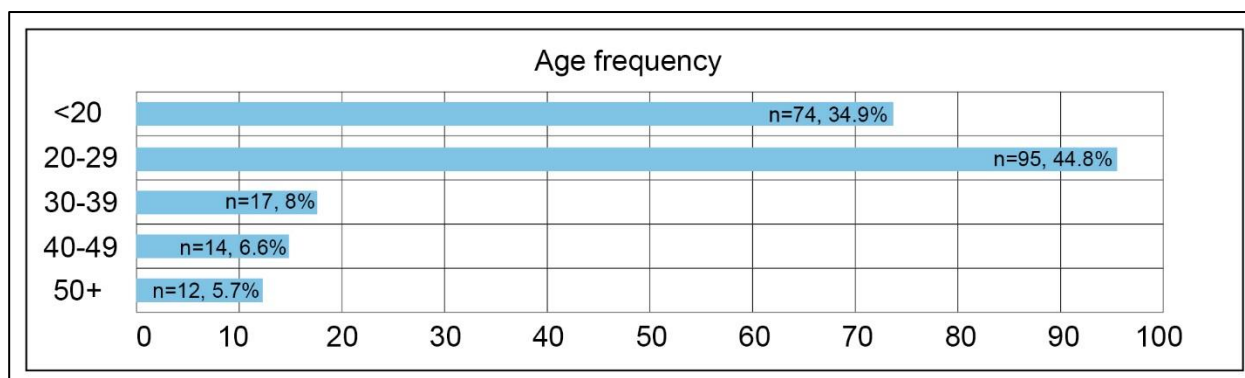
5.2.2 Gender

Regarding gender, the majority of respondents who joined the programme were female (64.2%, n=136), while 35.8% (n=76) were male. This finding supports Cousins (2007) on the role of UK-based conservation tourism operators, which indicated that 60-70% of people who volunteer are female. This statistic is in line with one interviewee's remark that they, as SCE, have had more female participants than males at SCE throughout, although this participant provided a higher female projection of 75% to 80%.

5.2.3 Age

Figure 5.1 below gives a graphic depiction of the age frequency of the SCE respondents.

Figure 5.1: Age of SCE respondents



From the bar chart (Fig 5.1) above, it is clear that people between the ages of 20 and 29 are the largest group of volunteers (44.8%, n=95), followed by those under 20 (34.9%, n=74).

The two youngest age groups represent the individuals on whom SCE focuses the most, namely young people as part of a student group, those who still study, and youth taking a Gap year. A smaller group for whom SCE caters include older people who usually join volunteering as part of a sabbatical, holiday, or an extended travelling experience during retirement.

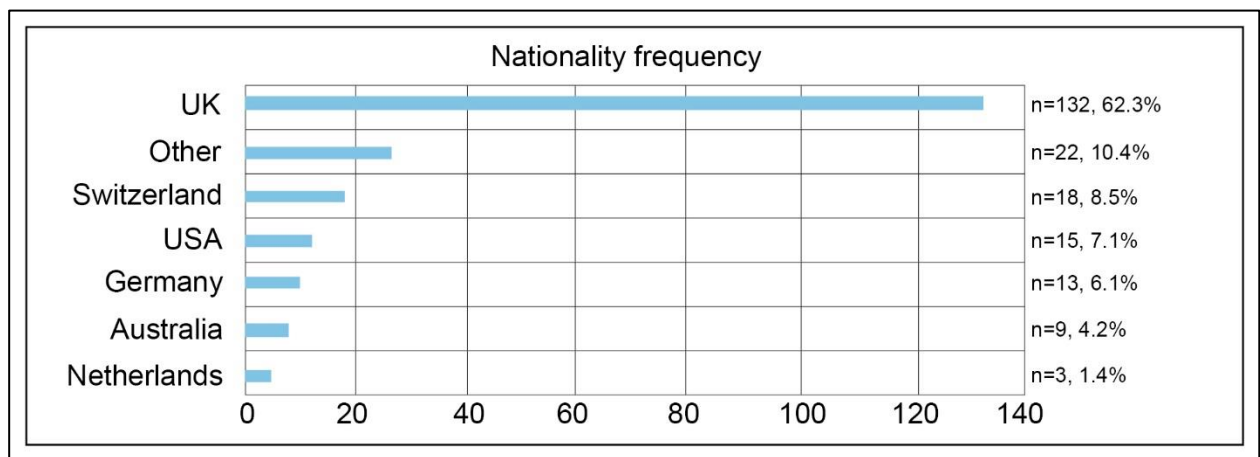
The findings are once again in line with Cousins' (2007:1029) who reports the age as 18-25 year. This implies that the main group participating in volunteer work as part of a Gap year or of a graduate course. According to the perspective of Cousins (2007), SCE attracts and mines the largest age group of volunteers.

5.2.4 Nationality

The different nationalities that are represented in SCE are depicted in Figure 5.2 below.

The bar chart (Fig 5.2) below indicates that the most respondents in the present study reside in the United Kingdom (62.3%, n=132), followed by "other" countries (10.4%, n=22). These "other" countries as respondents listed them are: Norway, Spain, South-Africa, Denmark, France, New Zealand, Ireland, Canada, Turkey and India.

Figure 5.2: Nationality of SCE respondents



The findings from Figure 5.2 above can be understood when taking into account the established relationships between SCE and UK-based schools, colleges, universities and tour operators. Interestingly, conservation tourism between the UK and South Africa is one of the largest and most developed tourism industries around the world (Cousins *et al.*, 2009:4). It is thus evident that a large number of UK-based tour operators are advertising and selling voluntourism opportunities in South Africa, and specialise in conservation placement in Africa. Moreover, South Africa is a popular, affordable and easily accessible voluntourism destination, and ecologically hosts some of the most popular animal species that attract volunteers (Cousins, 2007:1022, 1024, 1027-1029).

The data above stresses how it important it is that SCE practitioners understand people from diverse nationalities and communicate effectively to them (Cutlip *et al.*, 2002:2).

5.2.5 Summary of demographic data

The profile of volunteers for SCE varies throughout the year, in terms of timeframes when students are available. Nevertheless, the gathered data do represent SCE's general volunteer corps. The timeframe for data collection was selected especially, to provide an overall view of volunteers and student groups.

The demographic information was analysed against strategies and outcomes of relationship cultivation, and these findings are reported in Section 5.4 below.

Subsequently, the volunteers' perception of communication is discussed, with a focus on communication channels and management.

5.3 COMMUNICATION

Regarding findings on communication, firstly, general information communication is shared, followed by information on which channel respondents had initial contact with SCE. Thereafter, the study discusses respondents' information on the various communication channels used by SCE. Finally, the focus will be on whether respondents would share the experience they had at SCE; thereby acting as a communication channel for SCE themselves.

5.3.1 Communication in general

Respondents rated the communication channels they use daily. The scale used was 1 to 5 to indicate "least important" to "most important", and 6 "not applicable" if a respondent did not use or has no profile on a specific channel.

From Table 5.3 below it is evident that respondents consider email, websites, and Facebook as the communication channels they use the most. The channels that volunteers utilise the least, seem to be Google+, radio, Twitter, blogs, newspapers and magazines.

This data also reveals the need for SCE to ensure that they have an overall strategy on how to reach stakeholders through the specific channels which their volunteers also frequent. This recalls a remark by one interviewee that she would appreciate it if SCE sent her an email to confirm her booking at the venue, even if she booked through a tour agency. This may be one way of ensuring that SCE's messages reach all participants before their arrival.

Table 5.3⁴: Communication channel: personal usage

Communication channel	%						n	Mean	Std. deviation
	Least important		Most important			N/A			
	1	2	3	4	5	6			
Email	3.4	6.4	13.3	22.2	50.3	4.4	203	4.14	1.115
Telephone	20.3	13.9	14.9	16.8	23.8	10.3	202	3.11	1.520
Website	2.5	1.0	12.7	23.5	57.8	2.5	204	4.37	0.927
Facebook	1.5	5.3	7.3	17.0	65.0	3.9	206	4.44	0.958
Twitter	23.1	7.0	9.6	8.5	10.6	41.2	199	2.60	1.554
Instagram	14.8	6.9	12.3	10.8	28.1	27.1	203	3.42	1.561
Google+	31.2	4.5	7.0	3.5	3.0	50.8	199	1.84	1.266
YouTube	8.0	11.9	18.9	25.4	17.9	17.9	201	3.41	1.249
Blogs	22.3	11.2	12.7	11.7	7.1	35.0	197	2.54	1.402
Television	13.4	8.9	19.8	17.8	19.8	20.3	202	3.27	1.392
Newspaper	23.0	14.5	18.5	8.0	7.5	28.5	200	2.48	1.326
Magazine	21.6	18.1	17.1	10.6	4.0	28.6	199	2.40	1.221
Brochure	18.2	10.6	23.2	13.6	9.6	24.8	198	2.81	1.332
Tour operator	10.2	4.5	13.7	25.9	27.9	17.8	197	3.69	1.325
University/ college	8.8	5.1	9.7	19.0	24.6	32.8	195	3.68	1.377
Word of mouth	6.0	5.5	13.1	20.6	39.7	15.1	199	3.97	1.236
Radio	28.3	16.7	15.2	6.0	5.0	28.8	198	2.20	1.249

These findings support the fact of social media's worldwide popularity and usage. It was found that Facebook with 1.5 billion active users is the most popular social network, and Instagram has 400 million active users (Chaffey, 2016) and continues to grow in popularity. Facebook and Instagram lead the pack of social platforms on engagement in terms of time spent on these networks measured against its reach among 18-34 year olds (Chaffey, 2016). This means that stakeholder engagement is most likely to succeed on selected social media channels such as Facebook and Instagram, if well managed. Allagui and Breslow (2016:21) stress the importance to incorporate social media into a strategic communication plan to ensure that specific messages from an organisation reach its target audience.

⁴ The visual marker yellow is used to indicate a neutral to negative associations to statements, green is used to showcase positive associations and blue is used to indicate the highest mean.

The respondents were asked to indicate the channel through which they first heard of SCE. This was done to determine which communication channel(s) has the highest probability of reaching future participants. Table 5.4 below outlines the channels that informed the respondents about SCE first.

Table 5.4: First contact channels with SCE

Communication channel	%	n
University/college	39.7	84
Website	17.9	38
Tour operator	16.0	34
Word of mouth	10.8	23
Other	5.7	12
Television	4.2	9
Social media	2.8	6
Brochure	1.9	4
Newspaper	0.5	1
Magazine	0.5	1
Blog	0.0	0
Total	100	212

Table 5.1 above indicated that 47.2% of the respondents were students, compared to 39% who, according to Table 5.4, mentioned that they heard of SCE through their school/college/university. This can indicate that people who eventually formed part of one of the groups heard about SCE through another channel.

Noticeably, a number of respondents indicated that they learnt of SCE through television programmes (4.2%, n=9). A Shamwari series was created (2008) and currently enjoys reruns on various television networks. One of the senior coordinators indicated that these reruns at present could capture more attention than when the series was first aired. Viewers currently see the series and do research on what projects are available at Shamwari. A small number of respondents 5.7% (n=12) indicated that they heard about SCE though other avenues that are not listed in the questionnaire, with special mention of the animal sanctuary at Shamwari.

SCE interviewees stated that most participants got to know SCE through tour operators and that such agencies play an important role to create awareness for the programme. Interviewees emphasised the role of word-of-mouth (hereafter: WOM) from existing participants to encourage future volunteering. Table 5.4 above indicated that first contact for 23 respondents were WOM, which also supports interviewees' views in this regard. Volunteers from the interviews revealed

that their first contact was through a tour operator, SCE's website and through the animal sanctuary on Shamwari. This finding supports the questionnaire on the first contact channels with SCE.

The findings have shown that the majority of volunteers heard about SCE from their university or college, and from tour operators. Therefore, it is important that SCE ensures that their true image is being reflected by each entity. The quality relationship that SCE establishes with participants will influence the likelihood of WOM. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to manage stakeholder relationships effectively. Initial contact through social media has a low frequency. However, given the reach that social media can have, future research may indicate an increase in social media as channel of first contact.

Data analysis on initial contact indicates where and which communication channels can be targeted to spread the message of SCE. From the data, it is evident that SCE should keep focusing on a limited number of key communication channels. This will help ensure that their messages reach potential stakeholders and that those channels are managed effectively.

Table 5.5 below summarises the respondents' view on SCE's capabilities to manage communication as based on five statements. Respondents were asked to rate these statements about SCE's communication, on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree).

Table 5.5: View on SCE's communication management capabilities

Statement no.	%						n	Mean	Std. deviation
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	N/A			
1. SCE's communication to students and volunteers seems coordinated	0.0	1.9	10.5	35.9	51.2	0.5	208	4.37	0.750
2. I am satisfied with SCE's communication to me	0.0	0.5	9.5	31.3	57.8	0.9	209	4.48	0.687
3. Information from SCE is available when I need it	0.0	0.5	8.6	26.3	63.2	1.4	206	4.54	0.674
4. Messages from SCE contains information that I find useful	0.0	0.9	11.0	36.2	43.3	8.6	192	4.33	0.726
5. SCE can adequately adjust to daily or scheduling changes	0.0	0.5	2.9	24.5	68.8	3.3	201	4.67	0.558

Table 5.5 above presents respondents' opinion of SCE's communication management. They perceive it as coordinated, they are satisfied with the communication between themselves and SCE, feel that they receive information from SCE when they need it, and that SCE adjusts its information to daily scheduling changes.

Ways in which SCE's communication is coordinated entail how the practitioners structure and schedule the programme and are able to manage their media. The data show that respondents did find structure to the programme and experienced communication about the program. This may imply that respondents are satisfied with what they read about SCE on various online platforms, and are content with the interpersonal communication between SCE staff and themselves. Although rated still highly positive, the statement, "Messages from SCE contains information I find useful," was indicated the least positive of all (mean = 4.33). This would suggest that SCE could make their communication more useful and relevant.

Volunteer interviewees mentioned that the coordinators trained them well in aspects of wildlife and conservation and how to apply this knowledge in various ways to their lives. For example, one participant reported that he is on the education team at the London Zoo, and can use this knowledge when communicating about African animals. Another individual mentioned that she would like to learn more on SCE's Facebook Page – which underlines the potential of usefulness on such a Page (Waters *et al.*, 2009).

Considering the fluctuating nature of SCE's work, the statement, "SCE can adequately adjust to daily or scheduling changes," was posed specifically since it mirrors one of the main concerns of SCE management. The statement scored a mean of 4.67, which is the lowest percentage of the neutral option that was selected. This indicates that respondents felt SCE does manage changes to their schedule and fare well in this regard. According to Cutlip *et al.* (2002:3), it is important that organisations act proactively to changes in the environment. Although SCE management are unable to predict circumstances that will affect their schedule, they can ensure that all participants are informed of the changes in time. Volunteer interviewees confirmed this finding by mentioning that changes to their daily schedules were communicated clearly. Many interviewees did point out that flexibility is needed in a volunteer programme where schedule changes are almost a given, and therefore accepted. Communication management impacts stakeholder relationship management. Therefore the correlation between respondents' perception of SCE's communication management and the effect on relationships is discussed in Section 5.5.3.

5.3.2 Two-way symmetrical communication

The following statement: “How often do you use the following communication channels to send information to SCE?” This was scored on a scale where 1 = Never, 2 = Monthly, 3 = Weekly and 4 = Daily. The aim was to ascertain whether there is two-way communication between SCE and the respondents, a function that is key in strategic communication management (Fawkes, 2012:35) and stakeholder relationship management (Hon & Grunig, 1999:17). These findings are presented in Table 5.6 below.

Table 5.6: Sending information to SCE

Communication channel	%				n	Mean	Std. deviation
	1 Never	2 Monthly	3 Weekly	4 Daily			
Email	52.9	28.6	13.6	4.9	206	1.70	0.881
Telephone	83.8	6.9	4.9	4.4	204	1.30	0.758
Website	76.1	15.9	9.5	1.5	201	1.33	0.666
Facebook	53.4	21.4	16.5	8.7	206	1.81	1.008
Twitter	88.8	4.9	3.4	2.9	204	1.21	0.641
Instagram	72.4	9.9	10.8	6.9	203	1.52	0.940
Google+	96.5	0.5	1.5	1.5	202	1.08	0.439
YouTube	87.2	8.8	2.5	1.5	203	1.18	0.537
University/college	84.7	9.0	2.4	4.0	202	1.26	0.693
Tour operator	67.0	20.2	7.4	5.4	203	1.51	0.852

From Table 5.6 above, it is evident that respondents seldom send information directly to SCE. This finding is worrying since it may indicate that two-way symmetrical communication between SCE and its volunteers is limited.

Although limited, the channels that are used the most for conveying information to SCE, includes Facebook, email, and the tour operators. This communication also mostly occurs monthly. In general, daily and weekly communication that responds to SCE is extremely limited. Ideally SCE would prefer a higher average in the weekly and monthly column, which would indicate better interaction between SCE and volunteers.

When comparing the data on the usage of the Facebook Page to the content analysis, it is surprising that Table 5.6 does not indicate a higher frequency in the monthly and weekly column. The content analysis of SCE's Facebook Page (see 4.4) indicates a large number of likes and comments, which is not reflected in Table 5.6 above. Possible reasons for such seemingly contrasting findings are:

- People do not consider likes and comments on social media as a way of responding to SCE. In this regard, one volunteer interviewee stated that he prefers not to spoil his experience by being online constantly.
- Volunteers will only engage with SCE online after having returned home (as a number of interviewees pointed out).
- Individuals may not feel the need to share, tag or like SCE *tweets* or *posts* as they share their own experience on their personal social media accounts.

It also can be argued that two-way communication between SCE and the volunteers will only take place interpersonally during an individual's stay at the venue. The data thus shows that SCE should consider ways of improving two-way communication on all its channels. SCE could also investigate the use of the platform Snapchat for the younger volunteers, as Millennials make up the largest share of Snapchat's user base, with 150 million daily active users worldwide (Anon, 2016; Bell, 2016).

The results above do indicate low levels of volunteer engagement with SCE. Nevertheless, the data for this specific question should not be seen solely as an indicator of SCE's overall stakeholder engagement. When taking the interviews and content analysis into account, a different and more positive view of stakeholder engagement takes shape (see 4.2, 4.3 & 4.4).

The following section discusses whether respondents felt they received sufficient information from SCE through the various communication channels, and it identifies which channel they preferred using.

5.3.3 Information received about SCE

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they felt they received **sufficient information** about SCE through various communication channels. In addition, they were asked to rate each communication channel on a scale from 1 (I do not get enough information) to 5 (I get enough

information). Individuals were also given the opportunity to answer “not applicable” on the scale to specify if they do not use a specific channel. Table 5.7 below presents this information.

Table 5.7: Information received about SCE through various communication channels

Communication channel	%						n	Mean	Std. deviation
	I do not get enough information			I get enough information		N/A			
	1	2	3	4	5	6			
Email	6.0	3.5	6.5	13.9	30.3	39.8	201	3.98	1.323
Telephone	5.6	3.6	2.0	4.6	4.6	79.6	196	2.95	1.568
Website	0.5	2.4	9.8	24.4	44.9	18.0	205	4.35	0.849
Facebook	1.0	1.0	8.2	20.8	44.4	24.6	207	4.42	0.834
Twitter	2.5	0.0	3.0	7.0	8.5	79.0	200	3.90	1.284
Instagram	0.5	1.0	4.0	10.4	24.2	59.9	202	4.42	0.864
Google+	2.5	1.0	0.5	3.5	3.5	89.0	200	3.41	1.593
YouTube	2.5	2.5	4.5	16.0	15.0	59.5	200	3.95	1.139
Blogs	5.0	1.0	2.5	6.0	6.0	79.5	199	3.34	1.559
Television	6.9	4.9	3.4	3.0	4.4	77.3	203	2.70	1.518
Newspaper	8.5	2.0	1.0	1.0	0.5	87.0	201	1.69	1.158
Magazine	9.1	2.0	2.5	2.5	0.0	83.9	199	1.91	1.174
Brochure	5.9	4.0	4.0	9.9	8.4	67.8	202	3.34	1.461
Tour operator	2.5	3.0	10.0	15.0	31.5	38.0	200	4.13	1.104
University/ college	3.0	2.5	3.5	12.4	17.9	60.7	201	4.01	1.225
Word of mouth	3.0	3.0	7.5	11.1	24.1	51.3	199	4.03	1.212
The coordinators	2.5	1.5	3.5	13.9	53.7	24.9	201	4.53	0.930

According to Table 5.7 above, respondents received the most information about SCE from its coordinators. It is important to point out that “the coordinators” received a high rating, as all the respondents identified these staff as the face of SCE. It is evident that respondents felt they received from the coordinators the most information (mean = 4.53) about SCE, the programme, projects, et cetera. This statistic is highly positive for SCE since it shows that the coordinators are effective in spreading the conservation message.

The other channels through which respondents received information, include Facebook, the website, tour operators and email. Channels that offer the least amount of information about SCE to volunteers, included telephone, television, newspapers and magazines, which averages under three. Furthermore, it is interesting to note which channels volunteers indicated as “not applicable”

for receiving information from SCE. These channels are telephone, Twitter, Google+, blogs, television, newspapers, magazines and brochures.

The content analysis of SCE's Facebook Page (see 4.4) provided evidence that this channel is well managed and that posts are rich in information about the programme. If stakeholders were to view SCE from the Facebook platform there would be no misconceptions about who they are and the experience they offer. Table 5.7 above supports the content analysis by indicating that respondents felt they received sufficient information about SCE on Facebook.

From the findings above, it is evident that SCE could benefit from focusing on selected channels to send information to volunteers rather than cover too many channels at once.

In addition to respondents' opinions regarding SCE's communication management, two-way communication and information received about SCE. The following section analyses the possible usage of WOM communication as well as volunteers' personal use of social media to communicate their SCE experience.

5.3.4 Volunteers communicating about SCE

The respondents were asked to rate the following statement on a scale of 1 (not likely) to 5 (very likely): "Will you tell others about SCE?" Table 5.8 below presents the WOM-communication.

Table 5.8: Likelihood of word-of-mouth communication

Q no. & Statement	%					n	Mean	Std. deviation
	Not likely		Very likely					
9. Will you tell others about SCE?	1	2	3	4	5	210	4.87	0.412
	0.0	0.5	1.4	8.6	89.5			

The data in Table 5.8 above presents a highly positive tendency that respondents are likely to share their experience with others. The following table (Table 5.9) indicates whether respondents would share information about their experience at SCE through any or all of these channels. The scale presented was 1 (not likely) to 5 (very likely) as well as 6 (not applicable).

Table 5.9: Volunteers' use of communication channels to share their experience

Communication channel	%						n	Mean	Std. deviation
	Not likely			Very likely		N/A			
	1	2	3	4	5	6			
Email	38.7	15.2	15.2	8.3	17.7	4.9	204	2.48	1.538
Telephone	35.1	9.8	12.7	9.8	25.8	6.8	205	2.80	1.674
Website	42.5	16.0	10.0	9.0	8.0	14.5	200	2.11	1.370
Facebook	1.0	1.0	5.2	15.3	73.7	3.8	209	4.66	0.718
Twitter	30.4	3.4	5.4	6.4	16.2	38.2	204	2.59	1.740
Instagram	19.0	3.9	2.0	6.3	42.5	26.3	205	3.67	1.746
Google+	41.0	3.5	1.5	0.5	1.0	52.5	202	1.25	0.754
YouTube	39.3	12.9	6.0	5.0	3.0	33.8	201	1.78	1.163
Blog	33.8	7.0	8.0	2.0	8.0	41.2	201	2.03	1.444
Article in newspaper or magazine	46.5	5.4	3.0	2.5	3.0	39.6	202	1.51	1.093
Word of mouth	2.9	0.5	3.4	6.3	83.0	3.9	206	4.73	0.816

Table 5.9 above indicates the factual situation that respondents transfer the SCE's name and brand to other people through either WOM, or other communication channels. The data from Table 5.9 above indicate that volunteers are most likely to share their experiences through Facebook or WOM. This is encouraging news for SCE, as Facebook is a fast and cost-effective instrument to reach their stakeholders (Valentini, 2015:170). Another channel that communication practitioners should not underestimate is WOM. According to Valentini (2015:173), this form of communication is a widely used motivator by people who support an organisation or cause. Thus, WOM should be regarded as an important strategy to increase awareness for an organisation. Furthermore, it is noticeable that a limited number of channels actually are used to share information about SCE.

With such a high probability that SCE's name will reach people across the globe it is important that SCE's communication support their goals and values.

In the section analysed above, a general pattern emerges across all tables. This is namely, that the channels which respondents rated as most important, they will also use to share their experience.

The following two sections of the quantitative data analysis, report findings of stakeholder relationship management by SCE. In this regard, data is first presented on relationship cultivation strategies followed by relationship health.

5.4 RELATIONSHIP CULTIVATION STRATEGIES

If organisations wish to be successful they need to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:56). This is the focus of the section that investigates respondents' feelings about SCE's strategy of building relationships with them. Respondents were asked to rate 14 statements based on relationship cultivation strategies as set out by Hon and Grunig (1999), Grunig *et al.* (2002) and Hung (2007). Other strategies on relationship cultivation presented in the statements were derived from Bortree and Waters's (2010) stakeholder involvement theory.

To test the reliability of the constructs, Cronbach's alpha was calculated. All the statements determining relationship cultivation delivered Cronbach's alpha reliability score of 0.878. If statements 11, 14 and 15 each were to be omitted the Cronbach alpha would have increased to 0.884, 0.879 and 0.890 respectively. These increases are very small and therefore it was decided not to omit the statements. The Cronbach alpha score for relationship cultivation is considered very high and satisfactory.

For the sub-constructs, the reliability calculation for the symmetrical cultivation strategies (Statements 11-16 and 24) delivered a CA = 0.714, and for stakeholder involvement (Statements 17-24) a CA of 0.886. In the first, the omission of statement 15 would have marginally increased the Cronbach alpha to 0.728. In the latter, omission of statement 21 (stakeholder involvement) would have increased the Cronbach alpha to 0.895. In both cases the increase was considered very small and therefore the statements were kept as part of the construct.

The following table (Table 5.10) indicates the respondents' perceptions of the relationship cultivation strategies that SCE applies. The scale for the questionnaire is presented as "1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree".

Table 5.10: Rating of relationship cultivation strategies by SCE

Q no.	Statement	%					n	Mean	Std. deviation
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree			
		1	2	3	4	5			
11	I have access to SCE managers	1.5	4.4	14.1	22.4	57.6	205	4.30	0.968
12	I have access to SCE coordinators	1.0	2.8	2.4	13.7	80.1	211	4.69	0.740
13	SCE is positive in their communication with me	0.5	2.4	3.3	14.6	79.2	212	4.70	0.691
14	SCE discloses information about their thoughts with me	4.0	5.4	17.8	31.7	41.1	202	4.00	1.081
15	SCE is networking with groups (conservation organisations, my University or College etc.) that I support or am involved with	11.1	6.0	20.6	21.6	40.7	199	3.75	1.340
16	I help in completing tasks at SCE	1.0	4.4	5.8	15.0	73.8	206	4.56	0.863
17	I admire SCE	1.5	1.5	4.3	17.5	75.2	206	4.64	0.764
18	I value SCE	1.9	1.4	1.4	12.9	82.4	210	4.72	0.738
19	I feel nurtured (supported) by SCE in general	0.0	2.4	10.0	29.0	58.6	210	4.44	0.769
20	I feel nurtured (supported) by SCE coordinators	0.0	3.3	7.2	21.9	67.6	210	4.54	0.771
21	I feel my contribution is instrumental to achieving conservation tasks at SCE	2.4	9.1	18.2	33.0	37.3	209	3.94	1.066
22	I feel that the coordinators at SCE guide me in conservation tasks	0.5	1.9	3.3	24.4	69.9	209	4.61	0.692
23	I regard the coordinators at SCE as mentors	0.5	5.2	7.6	21.9	64.8	210	4.45	0.880
24	I feel that SCE wants to build a relationship with me	0.9	5.2	17.1	32.7	44.1	211	4.14	0.944

Each statement is discussed below according to the strategies it presents: symmetrical cultivation (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Hung, 2007) or stakeholder involvement strategies (Bortree & Waters, 2010). Symmetrical cultivation strategies consist of the following elements: access, positivity,

openness and disclosure, networking, sharing of tasks and assurances of legitimacy. Stakeholder involvement strategies entail three key aspects: admiration, nurturance and instrumental aid.

Although responding highly positive to both cases, evidently volunteers felt they have more **access** to SCE coordinators than managers (Statements 11 and 12). These findings concur with the views of volunteer interviewees who mentioned that they did not experience the same type of relationship with managers than they did with coordinators. Access in this case can be linked to the fact that the coordinators are more approachable and readily available.

When adding options 4 and 5 for Statement 13, it is calculated that 93.8% of the respondents felt that SCE is very **positive** in its communication to volunteers, with only one person disagreeing strongly that SCE's communication is positive. This statement also is the only question in Section 3 which all 212 respondents answered. This overall response can be seen as a reflection of the general feeling among the volunteer interviewees that SCE's communication is positive. According to Hon and Grunig (1999:14), positivity refers to steps an organisation takes to make the relationship with its stakeholders enjoyable. The overall impression from volunteer interviewees was that they enjoyed their SCE experience, which to a certain extent could also reflect in this statement.

Openness and disclosure refer to the level of transparency between an organisation and its stakeholders as represented in Statement 14, "SCE discloses information about their thoughts with me" (Hon & Grunig, 1999:14-15). Although 41.1% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement, this percentage is smaller than other statements rated in full agreement. Furthermore, a larger number of respondents than with other statements, indicated a neutral answer (17.8%). This correlates with an interview finding that SCE does not always live up to expectations since it cannot continually deliver on its communicated promises. Promises are not made directly to volunteers but messages and images that SCE uses to communicate across channels can imply that certain activities or animal sightings are a given.

Regarding promises, a number of SCE interviewees referred to the fact that individuals are likely to see activities on social media on which they are missing out while residing at SCE. Coordinators from SCE explained that not all activities can accommodate the number of people at the venue. Furthermore, location constraints (i.e. distance between a group's location and where a spur of the moment activity takes place) causes participants to miss out on exciting activities. SCE practitioners therefore, have to select the content they post on social media carefully. This is to avoid offending or disappointing those on the reserve at the cost of the future clientele that could be attracted by such posts. An interviewee also emphasised that the coordinators should tell

groups the truth about a situation and explain the reason why they are excluded from a particular activity.

Networking entails how an organisation connects with other groups and institutions that share the same stakeholder group (Hon & Grunig, 1999:15). This means building a web of connectedness. In responses to Statement 15, individuals were also fairly neutral (20.6%), with 17.1% disagreeing strongly and just disagreeing. SCE does uphold a main networking relationship, namely with the animal sanctuary on Shamwari. Volunteers assist with various projects at the sanctuary and at SCE, and regularly share content on social networks about their involvement. However, it also became clear that the volunteers support different groups than those with which SCE networks. This matter could perhaps be investigated further by SCE management.

Statement 16 on the **sharing of tasks** is highly important since SCE needs participants to help with conservation work in order to reach SCE's conservation goals. A large number of respondents (88.8%) stated that they agree strongly, and agree that they help completing tasks at SCE. It is thus evident that volunteers understand their value to SCE.

Statement 24, "I feel that SCE wants to build a relationship with me," relates to the construct of **assurances of legitimacy**. Such assurances describe how all the parties involved express its commitment to maintain the relationship (Hon & Grunig, 1999:15). Just more than three quarters of the respondents (76.8%) agreed strongly, and agreed that SCE wants to build a relationship with them. Although the response is highly positive, it is still worrying that 23.3% of the respondents scored neutral to negative on this question. All the interviewees from SCE management and the volunteers emphasised the importance of interaction, relationships and/or friendship as a key element in this experience.

Bortree and Waters (2010) proposed the stakeholder involvement scale, which includes statements 17 to 24. Of these, Statement 17 on **admiration** for SCE and Statement 18 on valuing SCE, both scored high positive values (75.2% and 82.4% respectively) with a related high mean score of 4.64 and 4.72. This shows that the respondents admire and value SCE. It may be argued that if volunteers are that positively inclined towards an organisation, they would be more likely to support it in future and communicate positively about the company.

Statements 19 and 20 tested the **nurturance** that volunteers experience from SCE in general and in particular, from the coordinators. The data shows respondents felt more nurtured by the coordinators than by SCE in general. In this regard, 58.6% of the respondents agreeing strongly

that they feel nurtured by SCE in general, whereas 67.6% agreed strongly that they felt nurtured by the coordinators. However, when considering both the strongly agree and agree options the findings show little difference between how respondents perceive the nurturing from SCE in general (87.6%) and that of the coordinators in particular (89.5%). The volunteers thus felt nurtured and were convinced (agreed fully) that the coordinators play this role. Previous qualitative data have shown that the relationship between participant and coordinator is key to the programme's success. Furthermore, since the respondents spend more time with the coordinators it can be expected that they would feel nurtured better by the coordinators than by SCE's managers or other staff. Statement 24, "I feel that SCE wants to build a relationship with me," test the construct of assurances of legitimacy as well as that of nurturance. Nurturing can indicate how SCE encourages and develop relationships with its volunteers.

Instrument aid was tested in Statements 21, 22 and 23. When considering the simple definition of instrumental aid as someone who helps another achieve something (Bortree & Waters, 2010:4), not only the coordinators but volunteers as well can be classified as 'instrumental aid'. Statement 21 reads, "I feel my contribution is instrumental to achieving conservation tasks at SCE." The aim was to determine whether respondents felt they made a difference. As many as 70% of the respondents marked agree to agree strongly that their efforts are key to achieving conservation tasks. However, this statement scored the second lowest mean (3.94) of all the statements testing relationship cultivation strategies. Respondents rated this statement more evenly between neutral to strongly agree. This statement had the lowest rating of strongly agree of all statements. Seeing that this statement connects with strategic communication on conservation matters, it is discussed in more detail in Section 5.6.

Statements 22 and 23 yielded positive responses: 69.9% of the respondents strongly agreed that their coordinator guided them in conservation tasks, and 64.8% of strongly agreed that they would regard this coordinator as a mentor. The importance of coordinators and the role they play in guiding volunteers through the programme is thus highlighted in this table and interviews with volunteers confirm this finding. This is a strong element on which SCE management can capitalise by providing more guidance to the coordinators to become more effective mentors.

Expanding the above-mentioned discussion of strategies to cultivate relationships, this theory was examined further by doing a factor analysis.

5.4.1 Factor analysis of relationship cultivation strategies

Although the calculated reliability for the relationship cultivation strategies scored very high, the statements constructed for the questionnaires synthesised the work of three research efforts, namely that of Hon and Grunig (1999), Hung (2007), and Bortree and Waters (2010). Therefore, the researcher decided to explore the constructs further by means of a factor analysis. Furthermore, a retest examined the constructs of relationship cultivation strategies by a factor analysis. This was done by applying Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's test, which yielded a measurement for a sampling adequacy of 0.869. This indicates adequate data and correlations for a factor analysis to take place. The factor analysis delivered three factors that explain a 62.67% of the total variance. This is presented in Table 5.11 below.

Table 5.11: Results of factor analysis for relationship cultivation strategies

Q no. & Statement	Construct	New factors/constructs		
		1	2	3
		Two-way stakeholder involvement	Access & positivity	Disclosure & networking
20. I feel nurtured (supported) by SCE coordinators	Nurture	0.792		
19. I feel nurtured (supported) by SCE in general	Nurture	0.790		
24. I feel that SCE wants to build a relationship with me	Assurance of legitimacy & Nurture	0.754		
22. I feel that the coordinators guide me in conservation tasks	Instrumental aid	0.751		
23. I regard the coordinators at SCE as mentors	Nurture & Instrumental aid	0.750		
16. I help in completing tasks at SCE	Sharing tasks	0.652		
21. I feel my contribution is instrumental to achieving conservation tasks at SCE	Instrumental aid	0.639		
17. I admire SCE	Admiration	0.604		
18. I value SCE	Admiration	0.488		
13. SCE is positive in their communication with me	Positivity		0.843	
12. I have access to SCE coordinators	Access		0.822	
11. I have access to SCE managers	Access		0.591	
15. SCE is networking with groups (conservation organisations, my University or College etc.) that I support or am involved with	Networking			0.713
14. SCE discloses information about their thoughts with me	Openness and disclosure			0.578

Factor 1 shows that the constructs of nurturance, assurances of legitimacy, instrumental aid, sharing tasks and admiration, can be grouped to form a single construct. Factor 2 indicates a high correlation between the symmetrical constructs of access and positivity, and factor 3 shows that the constructs of disclosure and networking can be grouped together.

This factor analysis further shows that symmetrical strategies of assurances of legitimacy and sharing of tasks have a higher association with stakeholder involvement constructs than the symmetrical constructs of relationship cultivation. When examining the descriptions/definitions of assurances of legitimacy and sharing of tasks presented by Hon and Grunig (1999), it strongly matches the characteristics or intentions of instrumental aid and nurturance as described by Bortree and Waters (2010).

This finding can be useful for future studies, however, for the purpose of the present study the constructs are reported on as identified in the literature, seeing that the reliability calculations were sufficient.

The following section focuses on relationship outcomes and provides findings on how respondents rate their relationship with SCE.

5.5 RELATIONSHIP HEALTH

To understand the SCE-volunteer relationship it is important to determine the type of interaction between SCE and the volunteers, as well as the quality of this relationship. Organisations will be unable to determine whether their strategies for relationship cultivation are successful if they do not evaluate their relationships with stakeholders.

This section describes findings that relate to relationship outcomes, as well as the type of relationship that exists between SCE and its volunteers. To test the reliability of the statements on relationship outcomes, Cronbach's alpha was calculated and the coefficients are displayed in Table 5.12 below.

Table 5.12: Reliability calculations for relationship outcomes

Q no.	Construct	Cronbach alpha	n	Mean	Std. deviation
25-43	Relationship outcomes (all)	0.876	212	4.32	0.523
25-30	Trust	0.866	212	4.51	0.599
31-33	Control mutuality	0.455	209	4.31	0.720
31&33	Control mutuality	0.786	209	4.31	0.720
34-36	Commitment	0.804	207	4.32	0.744
37-39	Satisfaction	0.796	212	4.51	0.667
40-43	Communal & Exchange	0.559	211	4.04	0.767

These scores prove that sufficient reliability levels were obtained for all the constructs as a whole, as well as the sub-constructs. As seen from Table 5.12 above, a high internal consistency was found for the relationship dimensions of trust, commitment and satisfaction. This implies that respondents answered statements on these constructs consistently.

The three statements testing the relationship outcomes construct of control mutuality scored a lower alpha coefficient due to a negative statement with a reverse response, although it could still be argued that the CA of 0.455 are sufficient for three statements. The construct was retested without Statement 32, and then delivered a CA of 0.786, which is considered very satisfactory.

The statements that test the type of relationship (communal and exchange) scored 0.559, which is still acceptable but do show that respondents did not answer these questions as consistently as other questions and related constructs.

5.5.1 Relationship outcomes

For the test on relationship outcomes, 19 statements were used based on Hon and Grunig's (1999:18) dimensions of trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction. The following table (Table 5.13) summarises the findings. The scale is presented as "1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree".

Table 5.13: Volunteers' rating of relationship outcomes

Q no.	Statement	%					n	Mean	Std. deviation
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree			
		1	2	3	4	5			
25	SCE treats me fairly and justly	0.0	2.8	1.4	14.3	81.5	211	4.74	0.626
26	Whenever SCE makes an important decision, I know they will be concerned how their decision will affect me	0.0	1.9	19.4	31.1	47.6	206	4.24	0.832
27	SCE can be relied on to keep its promises	0.0	2.9	13.7	29.3	54.1	205	4.35	0.824
28	I believe that SCE takes students or volunteers' opinions into account when making decisions	0.5	4.3	11.9	27.6	55.7	210	4.34	0.883
29	I feel confident about SCE's skills	0.5	2.8	1.0	12.4	83.3	210	4.75	0.660
30	SCE has the ability to accomplish what they say they will do.	0.5	1.0	4.8	20.0	73.7	209	4.66	0.662
31	SCE believes that my opinion is valuable (legitimate)	0.0	2.4	14.4	34.6	48.6	208	4.29	0.802
32	In dealing with me SCE has an overbearing tendency	42.0	21.8	14.9	13.4	7.9	202	2.23	1.331
33	SCE listens to what I have to say	0.0	1.9	12.0	34.9	51.2	209	4.35	0.765
34	I can see that SCE wants to maintain a relationship with me	1.0	4.9	19.0	34.1	41.0	205	4.09	0.937
35	I feel a sense of loyalty to SCE	1.5	3.4	10.2	30.7	54.2	205	4.33	0.900
36	I would rather work with SCE than not	0.5	2.0	8.8	18.7	70.0	203	4.56	0.777
37	Both SCE and I benefit from the relationship	0.0	3.4	11.5	28.8	56.3	208	4.38	0.819
38	I am happy with my interaction with SCE	0.5	1.9	4.8	18.8	74.0	208	4.64	0.709
39	SCE met my conservation expectations	1.0	1.9	6.3	20.9	69.9	206	4.57	0.779
40	SCE is helpful	1.4	1.5	1.9	14.8	80.4	209	4.71	0.710
41	I feel that SCE is taking advantage of me	70.0	12.1	2.9	8.2	6.8	207	1.62	1.258
42	Whenever SCE gives something to me, they generally expect something in return	49.8	21.7	17.9	5.3	5.3	207	1.94	1.171
43	If I reward SCE (by working harder, becoming an ambassador, contribute more fund, etc.) they will take care of me	23.0	9.3	31.9	19.6	16.2	204	3.03	1.366

From the above-mentioned test and the accompanying table, specific relationship outcomes can be outlined, which are expounded below.

Trust refers to both parties' willingness to open up mutually in the relationship. According to Hon and Grunig (1999:19), there are three dimensions involved in trust:

- Integrity – the belief that the organisation is fair and just.
- Dependability – accepting that an organisation is doing what it said it will do.
- Competence – an organisation's ability of to carry out what it said it would do.

Statements 25 and 26 address the dimension of **integrity**. Although both statements were perceived highly positively, it would seem that the respondents were more convinced that SCE treats them fairly (81.5% strongly agree), than knowing they would be considered when SCE makes an important decision (47.6 % strongly agree).

Interestingly, a volunteer interviewee mentioned that she wished to take part in a sleep-out (an activity that is part of the programme but only happens when possible or due to the weather) but that it never happened during both her visits to SCE. Perhaps clearer communication about the reasons for the decision would have aided the situation.

The second aspect of trust, namely **dependability**, was tested with Statements 27 and 28. Both these statements were rated highly positively and scoring 83.4% and 83.3% for agree and strongly agree. On the one hand, SCE has to deal with daily or scheduling changes and groups/individuals who are unable to join in all the best activities. However, on the other hand, evidently volunteers felt that SCE must be relied on to keep its promises. Nevertheless, since 54.1% fully agreed, SCE could improve on this aspect in future. The interview data supports these findings as interviewees felt that SCE, and especially the coordinators, paid attention to people's opinions. Most interviewees could give an example where a coordinator followed their advice. One respondent also referred to a lecture where the coordinator gave everyone a chance to speak and voice their opinions; nobody's viewpoint was ignored or disrespected.

Statements 29 and 30 tested respondents' views of SCE's **competence**. The volunteers seemingly have strong confidence in SCE's skills, with 83.3% strongly agreeing and 73.7% strongly agreeing that SCE has the ability to do what they say they will do. Statements 29 and 30 had high mean scores of 4.75 and 4.66, which indicates that volunteers have clear trust in SCE's capabilities.

From the three trust indicators, integrity and competence received very high average scores. However, when comparing the dimension of dependability with the other dimensions of trust, it scored the lowest. Overall there is thus a sense of trust in the relationship between SCE and their volunteers.

Control mutuality (Statements 31 to 33) is the degree to which parties agree who has some measure of control over the other (Hon & Grunig, 1999:19). On all three statements, approximately half of the respondents strongly agreed (48.6%, 42.0%, and 51.2%). On the question whether SCE has an overbearing tendency when dealing with participants, the majority strongly disagreed and disagreed (63.8%), albeit a smaller positive answer than with the other statements. This finding could perhaps also be explained by the fact that the question was asked negatively and required clearer interpretation from the respondents to answer.

From the interviews, it was clear that SCE staff endeavour to create an environment of inclusion where they promote communication and interaction between themselves and the volunteers. It is highly positive that SCE is open and willing to include respondents' requests within the programmes, which shows that they do not practice one-sided autonomy.

Statements 34 to 36 aim to determine how respondents felt about SCE's **commitment** to establish and maintain a relationship with them. From the three statements, number 36, "I would rather work with SCE than not," stood out with a score of 70% fully agree. The statement that was judged the least positively was, "I can see that SCE wants to maintain a relationship with me," with 41.0% of the respondents strongly agreeing. When comparing this finding to that of Statement 24, "I feel that SCE wants to build a relationship with me," (see 5.4) below 45% of the respondents fully agreed with these statements. This means that SCE management and coordinators can put in more effort to show volunteers they are committed to establishing and building relationships with them. Evidently the volunteers perceive the level of commitment from respondents to SCE as slightly higher than from SCE to respondents. Ideally the same level of commitment should flow from both SCE and its volunteers.

Satisfaction measures how favourably each party in the relationship feels towards the other (Hon & Grunig, 1999:20). This outcome is reflected in Statements 37, 38 and 39. People feel that both SCE and themselves benefit from the relationship as this statement scored a mean of 4.38; however only 56.3% strongly agreed. Over 92.8% of the respondents felt content with the interaction they enjoy with SCE (agree and strongly agree). A high positive 69.9% of respondents strongly agreed that SCE met their conservation expectations. This statistic is an extremely good indication that SCE delivers on what they set out to achieve. These findings support those from

the interviews with volunteers, where all the respondents felt highly positive about their interaction with SCE and believed that both parties gain from the relationship.

The data paints a positive picture of the relationship between SCE and the volunteers. However, the findings still indicate aspects that SCE could consider improving on. These include showing volunteers that they are considered when decisions are taken (integrity), and valuing the opinions of the volunteers (control mutuality). Such outcomes would also cause volunteers to feel that SCE possibly wants to maintain a relationship with them and show commitment. Although there is satisfactory commitment from both parties to the relationship, SCE should aim to maintain better relationships with respondents. These relationships can take on various forms. The relationship types are discussed subsequently.

5.5.2 Communal and exchange relationships

A **communal relationship** implies that both parties are concerned about the welfare of the other even when they believe they may not receive anything in return (Hon & Grunig, 1999:21). This relationship was tested with Statements 40 and 41. An **exchange relationship** as described by Hon and Grunig (1999:20), means that one party provides benefit to the other only because the other has provided or will provide benefits in the future, this was tested in Statements 42 and 43.

In Statement 40 the majority of respondents (80.4%) strongly agree that SCE is helpful. This statement received the third highest mean for Section 4 of the questionnaire, scoring 4.71. This statistic supports the qualitative findings where volunteer interviewees were truly content with how well SCE staff looked after them.

Volunteers also felt that SCE does not take advantage of them (70.0% strongly agree). However, it should be pointed out that 15% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that SCE do take advantage of them. The positive finding was echoed by a volunteer interviewee, describing how he worked 12 hours at another volunteer project and that it was a hard day's labour. He described the balance between all activities at SCE as good and added he specifically chose SCE due to the "down time" it provided, which once again indicates that SCE does not take advantage of volunteers.

Regarding the exchange relationship (Statements 42 and 43), approximately half of the respondents disagreed strongly (49.8%) that, "Whenever SCE gives something to me they generally expect something in return." The following statement was, "If I reward SCE (by working harder, becoming an ambassador, contribute more funds, etc.) they will take care of me." This

statement had a mixed response, with 32.3% strongly disagreeing and disagreeing; 31.9% being neutral; and 35.8% agreeing or strongly agreeing.

The results above all seem to indicate that the perception regarding the type of relationship between SCE and the volunteers is a communal one. From the interviews with SCE managers and coordinators, it was clear that they want to reward loyalty and seek improved relationships with those who have frequented SCE more than once. Thus, from SCE's perspective, the management and staff do reward people who show more support, or those who work harder. However, in the main, they still treat everyone as equals, a fact reflected by interviewed volunteers' responses.

5.5.3 Correlations and differences between relationships and other information

The differences will be discussed firstly followed by the correlations.

Various t-tests were done as well as an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine possible differences in the data. Effect sizes of 0.40 and higher were reported. There were no statistical or practical significant results of differences between gender or students/volunteers and cultivation and outcomes of relationships. Significant findings were drawn between the university group and other volunteers. The university group does not join the 'normal' SCE program.

Table 5.14: Differences between student groups and relationship management

	Training from SCE	n	Mean	Std. deviation	t-test p-value	Effect size
Relationship cultivation strategies (all)	Student groups	78	4.47	0.649	0.022	0.42
	University group	22	4.19	0.424		
Symmetrical strategies	Student groups	78	4.42	0.650	0.018	0.49
	University group	22	4.10	0.491		
Stakeholder involvement	Student groups	78	4.50	0.715	0.035	0.42
	University group	22	4.19	0.525		
Relationship outcome: Control mutuality	Student groups	78	4.42	0.756	0.048	0.50
	University group	22	4.04	0.740		

From Table 5.14 above, it is clear that the student groups who are guided by coordinators do experience relationship cultivation, symmetrical communication, stakeholder involvement and control mutuality more positively than the university group, which are not as closely involved with SCE's programme.

The reason for the difference lies in the nature of their participation: They have their own programme, which does not follow the SCE's conservation programme. Therefore, the students do not receive as much guidance and training by SCE's coordinators.

Further findings related to the different clusters of motivations for volunteering. These clusters entail: volunteering as part of a Gap year or for a university/college group, a holiday, sabbatical, and other reasons mentioned previously (see 5.2.1). These were compared to strategies and outcomes of relationship cultivation, by means of an ANOVA calculation. The following table (Table 5.15) presents the statistical significance between clusters and the relationship outcome of trust.

Table 5.15: Differences between motivational clusters (sabbatical) and trust

Relationship outcome	Group	n	Mean	Std. deviation	p-value	Effect size Sabbatical group compared to
Trust	1. University/college course or group	86	4.53	0.689	0.006	0.40
	2. Gap year	28	4.67	0.362		0.44
	3. Sabbatical	12	4.81	0.300		
	4. Holiday	54	4.49	0.479		0.66
	5. Other	32	4.18	0.665		0.94

The results showed that the cluster of people engaging in volunteering as part of a sabbatical, had a higher correlation to the relationship outcome of trust, than the other cluster groups who practice volunteering. The "other" option included the following reasons for joining SCE: related to travel, adventure, conservation work, and personal experience. This option was related to the group that correlated second highest to trust when compared with the other groups.

This result can point to the importance that SCE should deliver on the expectations on what they offer. This particularly applies to volunteers who do not arrive as part of an educational group. Expectation management thus becomes important in communication that SCE directs to possible future volunteers.

To determine whether there were strong relationships between communication management (Section 2, Statements 1-5) and relationship management (Section 3 and 4), the researcher used Spearman's correlation coefficient. Only results of more than 0.40 were reported. Table 5.16

below represents the relationship between communication management and stakeholder relationship management.

Table 5.16: Correlation between communication management and relationship management

Q no. & Statement	Relationship outcomes (all)	Trust	Control mutuality	Relationship cultivation (all)	Symmetrical cultivation strategies	Stakeholder involvement
1. SCE's communication to students and volunteers seems coordinated	0.404**			0.412**		
2. I am satisfied with SCE's communication to me	0.404**	0.436**	0.422**	0.421**		
4. Messages from SCE contains information I find useful	0.421**		0.453**	0.464**	0.422**	0.427**
5. SCE can adequately adjust to daily or scheduling changes			0.433**	0.460**	0.430**	0.421**

**Correlation is significant at $p=0.01$

As is evident from Table 5.16 above, there were no high ($r > 0.5$) correlations but mostly medium ones. Statement 1, "SCE's communication to students and volunteers seems coordinated," showed a medium correlation with relationship outcomes and relationship cultivation strategies. Satisfaction with SCE's communication (Statement 2) had a medium correlation with the relationship outcome of trust, and with strategies for relationship cultivation. Information from SCE being available when needed (Statement 3) had no medium correlations above $r = 0.4$ to report on.

Statement 4 on useful information from SCE showed a medium correlation with relationship outcomes, control mutuality and relationship cultivation (including symmetrical strategies and stakeholder involvement). Finally, Statement 5 on SCE's ability to adjust information to daily schedule changes, delivered a medium correlation to control mutuality, relationship cultivation, symmetrical cultivation strategies and stakeholder involvement.

Effective communication management that focus on building mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders, indicated a higher probability of stakeholder relationship satisfaction. When communication is managed according to the needs of the stakeholder, it can be argued that

stakeholders will experience their relationship with the organisation positively. The correlations above show that respondents who were satisfied with SCE's communication and regarded it as coordinated and useful, did experience SCE's relationship management favourably.

As previous discussions indicated, the most interactions and information exchange takes place between coordinator and volunteer when the latter is at SCE. This means the coordinator sets the tone of communication, shares knowledge and information, and manages changes to the programme. The coordinator, therefore, influences the ways in which a respondent perceives SCE's communication management.

The correlations between useful information (Statement 4) and relationship management can be explained as follows: If individuals find information useful (e.g. gaining knowledge about a specific animal or a topic close to their heart) they will be satisfied (symmetrical strategies) and can feel more involved. It can also be argued that respondents who are comfortable to ask questions about their interests or requests about a conservation topic, will likely find the relayed information useful. This in turn can influence (show correlation with) the way that SCE managed communication, and the respondents' take on strategies and outcomes of relationship cultivation (esp. control mutuality).

Table 5.16 above also shows the positive impact that adequate communication about adjustments to daily or scheduling changes has on relationship cultivation. For example, respondents who are well informed of changes to the programme will feel that SCE discloses information sufficiently. In addition, in many cases (as reported by volunteer interviewees) changes to the programme introduces excitement. The reason is that such changes often involve special or out-of-the-ordinary activities, such as working alongside the veterinarian. Such activities show that SCE is committed to providing the best possible experience to its stakeholders. Therefore, the practitioners include the volunteers in their programme, which influences how respondents rate SCE's relationship cultivation strategies.

To determine the correlation between strategies for relationship cultivation and relationship outcomes, Spearman's correlations coefficient was used. The following table (Table 5.17) below represents the relationships between constructs of relationship cultivation and relationship outcomes. Only values above 0.4 were reported in this case.

Table 5.17: Correlations between relationship cultivation and relationship outcomes

	Relationship outcomes (all)	Trust	Control mutuality	Commitment	Satisfaction	Communal & Exchange	Relationship cultivation strategies (all)	Symmetrical cultivation strategies	Stakeholder involvement
Relationship outcomes (all)		0.768**	0.738**	0.685**	0.636**	0.497**	0.666**	0.578**	0.663**
Trust			0.711**	0.604**	0.556**		0.653**	0.584**	0.638**
Control mutuality				0.571**	0.501**		0.689**	0.619**	0.643**
Commitment					0.610**		0.662**	0.517**	0.723**
Satisfaction							0.608**	0.493**	0.659**
Communal & Exchange									
Relationship cultivation strategies (all)								0.897**	0.886**
Symmetrical cultivation strategies									0.628**
Stakeholder involvement									

**Correlation is significant at $p=0.01$

The table above shows a high correlation between relationship cultivation strategies and relationship outcomes, and amongst the elements of each. This indicates that a higher rating of cultivation strategies by SCE will influence volunteers' relationship with the enterprise.

Stakeholder involvement indicated higher correlations with strategies for relationship cultivation. Therefore, the more admiration the respondents have for SCE, the more involved (instrumental aid) they become. Furthermore, if volunteers regard the coordinators as mentors, this affects their view of symmetrical cultivation strategies (i.e. access, sharing tasks, and assurances of legitimacy). Ultimately, respondents were satisfied with SCE and their experience if they felt they made an impact on conservation efforts with the guidance of the coordinators. Table 5.17 above also shows that several constructs correlate with control mutuality. These constructs include: access to coordinators and managers, positive and transparent communication from SCE, inclusion in activities, and showing respondents they want to build a relationship with them. This indicates that when SCE applies symmetrical cultivation strategies, it allows respondents to feel that their opinions matter and that they are listened to.

It is important for SCE to invest in relationship building with volunteers through well-planned strategies. This could include an open-door policy, being positive and transparent, building a networking base, allowing volunteers to influence conservation activities, and showing volunteers that SCE is committed to the relationship. Such a strategy of relationship building will enhance the overall quality of SCE's relationships with stakeholders. These strategies can have the following effect:

- Impact the level of trust (integrity, dependability, competence) that participants associate with SCE.
- Indicate how SCE treat the participants by for example, taking opinions into account, or allowing control mutuality.
- Show how committed SCE is to the relationship, which in turn affects the commitment of the volunteers.
- Influence participant satisfaction.

Taking all these factors into account is then an indicator of the type of relationship between SCE and volunteers. Such a relationship is cultivated and maintained through strategic communication on conservation matters. The following section discusses quantitative data findings about such forms of strategic communication.

5.6 STRATEGIC CONSERVATION COMMUNICATION

Nature and wildlife conservation is the driving force behind SCE's existence as well as for volunteers' participation in the programme. To evaluate SCE's management of the communication and relationships thoroughly, it is important to focus on conservation issues.

Section 1, Question 7 of the questionnaire asked respondents to explain why they decided to join SCE. A few main reasons for joining were related to animals (esp. wildlife) conservation and providing assistance. Volunteers regard wildlife and conservation as an interest or passion of which they want to be part, and be useful to conservation efforts. A number of respondents explained that they view the programme as a learning experience or "experience behind the scenes of a game reserve". Others mentioned that they joined the programme for a working experience or merely an adventure. A few volunteers gave reasons for joining that they "heard good things about SCE" or "seemed to be one of the best experiences available in SA". Others pointed out the animal sanctuary on SGR as a motivating factor to join the programme. One participant travelled to SCE to "see and get to know different kinds of jobs on gap-year".

The Vet Eco volunteers (university students) indicated specifically that they joined the programme for hands-on wildlife veterinary experience. In general, it was clear that most responses on a reason for joining SCE, relates to an agreeable experience in conservation. In this regard, it is evident from SCE's existing communication messages that the practitioners address these categories in one way or another. In the process, coordinators clearly communicate how the various tasks fit into the bigger picture, or show volunteers the impact and outcomes of their involvement.

Section 3, Statement 21 of the questionnaire reads, "I feel my contribution is instrumental to achieving conservation tasks at SCE." Only 37.3% of the respondents strongly agreed that they feel crucial to achieving conservation tasks at SCE. Overall, people feel they are helping, but when comparing the average of Statement 16, "I help in completing tasks at SCE" (73.8% strongly agree, mean = 4.56), to Statement 21 (mean = 3.94), a different picture emerges. Although the mean scores of these two questions do not show a huge difference, there is a significant difference between the percentages allocated to "strongly agree" on the scale. Thus, fewer people feel that what they do has a fundamental impact on conservation work at SCE. A reason why respondents may feel that they do not contribute that much is because they are unable to see the results of the work. During the interviews, SCE managers and coordinators confirmed that they would not be able to achieve certain conservation tasks without participants. SCE, therefore, could implement strategies focusing on communicating the importance of people and tasks and its impact on conservation.

To ensure positive communication from volunteers to their peers, it cannot be stressed enough how important it is to give participants tasks that actually matter and in which they can see the outcome of their efforts.

Lastly Section 4, Question 39 enquired whether SCE was able to meet conservation expectations. As many as 70% of the respondents agreed that SCE did meet their conservation expectations. It is clear that respondents were satisfied with what they learnt, saw and took part in. This is supported by findings from volunteer interviewee's responses.

For a further explication of strategic communication on conservation, the specific questions mentioned above in Sections 3 and 4 of the questionnaire, were analysed against different variables.

5.6.1 Correlations and differences between strategic conservation communication outcomes and other data

Once again, differences will be discussed first, followed by the correlations.

T-tests showed no statistical or practical significance between male/female and/or students/volunteers and conservation outcomes. Significant results were, however, found between Statement 21 and the student groups as reported in Table 5.18 below.

Table 5.18: Differences between student groups and conservation outcomes

Q no. & Statement	Group	n	Mean	Std. deviation	t-test p-value	Effect size
21. I feel my contribution is instrumental to achieving conservation tasks at SCE	Student groups	78	4.10	0.948	0.0003	0.95
	University group	22	3.00	1.155		

Noticeably, members from the university group felt their contribution to achieving conservation tasks was not as influential as that of the student groups. This finding is interesting when keeping in mind that the student groups (excluding the university group) experienced better relationship cultivation, symmetrical strategies, stakeholder involvement and control mutuality (See Table 5.14). It could therefore, be argued that the efforts of communication management listed above can help volunteers experience their work as a more substantial contribution to conservation efforts. In addition, this finding also supports the need for strategic communication management within efforts of conservation communication.

Spearman's correlation coefficient was used to determine correlations between relationship management and conservation experiences. Only values higher than 0.4 were reported. The mentioned correlation is presented in Table 5.19 below.

Table 5.19: Correlation between conservation outcomes and relationship management

Relationship management	Q no. & Statement: Conservation contributions	
	21. I feel my contribution is instrumental to achieving conservation tasks at SCE	39. SCE met my conservation expectations
Relationship outcomes (all)	0.453**	0.466**
Trust	0.440**	
Control mutuality	0.463**	
Commitment	0.460**	
Satisfaction	0.485**	0.706**
Relationship cultivation strategies (all)	0.672**	0.479**
Symmetrical cultivation strategies	0.466**	0.409**
Stakeholder involvement	0.755**	0.503**

**Correlation is significant at $p=0.01$

The majority of the correlations between aspects of relationship management and conservation contributions were found to be medium to high. The highest correlations were between stakeholder involvement and relationship cultivation, and volunteers believing that their contributions to conservation efforts are instrumental. On the other hand, relationship satisfaction correlated strongly with SCE meeting the volunteers' expectations of conservation. This implies an association between relationship satisfaction and whether SCE lives up to what it promised, and how participants envisaged the programme.

Once again, the findings above highlight the need for relationship management, through appropriate communication with volunteers. This will capitalise on the latter's experience and how they perceive their contribution to conservation.

5.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed quantitative data findings from the questionnaires completed by students and individual volunteers. Findings were analysed to gain an overall and detailed view of the demographics of SCE volunteers, communication channels, and respondents' experience of SCE's communication and its management of stakeholder relationships.

The findings reveal that respondents are generally quite satisfied with their experience of SCE's approach to manage communication and the coordinator's strategy of building relationships with stakeholders. Sound relationships between an organisation and its stakeholders should follow a two-way symmetrical pattern, which balances the interest and needs of the organisations with

those of its stakeholders. To understand how to achieve goals by accommodating stakeholders, two-way communication is crucial to facilitate conversation and collaboration for mutual understanding. The findings show an overall positive feeling towards SCE's coordinators, how they manage their communication, the likelihood of WOM, and stakeholder relationship management. These positive inclinations suggest that two-way communication and interaction feature strongly between SCE and respondents. Thus, the interpersonal, daily relationships between coordinators and volunteers is extremely important and should be based on two-way communication, inclusion and interdependence. Findings clearly indicate limited communication and interaction between SCE and volunteers (see 5.3.2) through the examined communication channels and social networks (excluding interpersonal communication). SCE practitioners need to focus on ways to improve two-way communication on its various channels and networks.

The findings ascertained key communication channels. Thus, SCE should focus on managing these channels effectively. This will help ensure that messages from the organisation as well as communication on conservation matters reach the intended stakeholders. Another focus area for SCE is the high prevalence of WOM. This makes SCE's programme and communication management crucial, and underlines the need to build strong, mutually beneficial relationships with its volunteers.

The following chapter (ch 6) will conclude the study by answering the specific and general research questions.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The main objective of the present study was to investigate how Shamwari Conservation Experience (SCE) can manage volunteer relationships through a strategic communication approach focusing on conservation. To attain this objective, the following structure and chapter outline was used.

- Chapter 1 set out the *General and Specific research questions*.
- Chapter 2 discussed the theoretical framework of the study.
- Chapter 3 expounded the various research methods that were employed.
- Chapter 4 reported the results of the semi-structured interviews and the content analysis.
- Chapter 5 discussed the questionnaires' findings.

This chapter concludes the study by processing the results obtained in the previous chapters. The chapter aims to answer each *Specific research question* and the *General research question*, make recommendations, and discuss the limitations of the study. Before answering the *Specific research questions* a brief overview follows of the theoretical framework for the study.

6.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following table (Table 6.1) provides the theoretical framework as basis to examine the *General and Specific research questions*.

Table 6.1: Conceptualisation of the study

Domains	Communication management, Environmental communication		
Paradigms	Systems theory, Two-way symmetrical communication		
Meta-theories	Corporate communication management, Conservation communication		
Theories	Strategic communication management	Stakeholder relationship management	Strategic conservation communication

The **systems theory** explains the structure and operation of organisations and their interaction with the environment (Mehta & Xavier, 2009:193), especially that organisations need to adjust and adapt to their environment for survival (Gregory, 2012:64). Cutlip *et al.* (2002:21) argue that no system is completely open or closed but rather relatively open or closed and that self-regulation and control of systems involve feedback (Barker *et al.*, 2001:22). The management of communication can follow a set of principles (a worldview) that is either asymmetrical or symmetrical. Such an approach is based on an organisation's view of its relationship with internal (staff) and external stakeholders (Deatherage & Hazleton, 1998:58).

Two key characteristics were identified of a symmetrical worldview, which is central to the systems perspective, and crucial for this study: open system and interdependence (Cutlip *et al.*, 2002:2; Gregory, 2012:64). Survival and growth of a system depends on the free and open exchange of inputs and outputs through penetrable boundaries while adjusting and adapting to external conditions. Interdependence implies that systems (organisations) cannot isolate themselves from their environment, seeing that they depend on internal and external entities for prosperity.

Interaction between an organisation and its stakeholder brings about change in ideas, attitudes and behaviour for both parties. In the process, not only the organisation benefits. Through mutual understanding both parties gain from the relationship (Deatherage & Hazleton, 1998:58). In order to reach such mutual understanding, organisations should promote **two-way symmetrical communication** with stakeholders. This form of communication takes place within the two-way symmetrical model of communication management. According to this design, research, conversation, transparency and ethical communication is used to understand both the organisation and stakeholders (Bruning & Lambe, 2008:142).

However, in practice, the two-way symmetrical model is considered unrealistic in practise and an idealistic approach to communication management (Grunig & White, 1992:45-46). As a result, the mixed-motive model was developed to provide a more practical application of communication management. According to the mixed-motive model, there is a win-win zone where the organisation and stakeholder can influence and accommodate each other to reach common ground or symmetry (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:356). Thus, the asymmetrical and symmetrical two-way models can still be used to communicate with stakeholders, but it should be oriented towards two-way symmetrical communication (Grunig & White, 1992:48).

The present study employed the two mentioned paradigms (systems theory and two-way symmetrical communication) as the foundation on which **corporate communication** and **stakeholder relationship management** is built. These paradigms, therefore, provide the

framework or backbone for the application of corporate communication, which coordinates all the internal and external interaction with stakeholders. The overall purpose is establishing and maintaining favourable reputations with stakeholder groups on which the organisation depends for its livelihood (Cornelissen, 2008:5).

Thus, the management of corporate communication also highlights the importance of building strong relationships with stakeholders. According to Grunig *et al.* (2002:91), this can enhance an organisation's performance when executed through two-way symmetrical communication. Slabbert and Barker (2014:72) point out that the concept of stakeholders and the management of stakeholder relations is central to corporate communication management.

The theoretical designs above can be applied within the field of conservation. Therefore, **conservation communication** refers to the communication that covers environmental and conservation issues. It is also an important tool to influence people and achieve conservation goals (Jacobson, 2009:6). Conservation communication creates a platform for cooperation between multiple disciplines (from the natural to social sciences) to find and implement solutions to environmental or conservation problems (Bogart *et al.*, 2008:444). Central to this interdisciplinary problem-solving approach is the role that communication plays. Conservation communication can be used in several ways: to engage stakeholders, communicate organisations' conservation goals, garner support (either through participation or activism), and relay complex scientific information to a lay public. Jacobson (2009:8) emphasises that conservation organisations should build and rely on sound relations with stakeholders because individuals and groups can influence the survival of conservation institutions. With regard to the present study, the argument is thus made that SCE will need to rely on strategic communication to reach its conservation goals.

In light of the theoretical framework discussed above, the *Specific research questions* are discussed and answered.

6.3 ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Using the above-mentioned paradigms and meta-theories as guidance, specific theories were used to conceptualise the study. These entail strategic communication management, stakeholder relationship management and strategic conservation communication. The theories are discussed below and help to answer the *Specific research question 1*.

6.3.1 A literature framework

Specific research question 1: How can relationships with volunteers be managed through a strategic approach to conservation communication, according to literature?

Chapter 2 conducted the literature study focusing on strategic communication management theory, stakeholder relationship management theory and strategic conservation communication. Subsequently, strategic conservation communication is discussed as understood in terms of the theoretical designs of strategic communication management and stakeholder relationship management. From the literature review, various constructs could be identified to guide the study (see Table 6.2 below).

The various aspects presented in Table 6.2 below are elaborated on, explaining conservation communication.

In order to understand what strategic communication about conservation issues entail, the concept of conservation communication must be examined first. According to Oepen *et al.* (1999:10), conservation communication entails a two-way social interaction and interdependent process whereby people become aware of environmental issues and where organisations and or individuals cooperate to address conservation problems and find solutions. Verma *et al.* (2015:648) state that conservation organisations should be conscious of their reliance on public support that help them reach conservation goals. Therefore, conservation organisations should apply various methods of reaching out to gain and maintain this support (e.g., through communication messages and campaigns). In this regard, conservation communication can be implemented as a functional strategy, empowered with a strategic mandate that provides the focus and direction for communication with stakeholders (Steyn, 2000:11). Such a strategy can outline themes that should be communicated to reach conservation communication goals and objectives, while adjusting to external changes.

Table 6.2: Literature framework

Theories	Strategic communication management	Stakeholder relationship management	Strategic conservation communication
Constructs	• Proactive planning • Strategic process: Environmental scanning (research), analysis, strategic planning, implementation, control and evaluation • Adjustment (emerging strategy) • Communication practitioner roles: Public relations strategist, manager, technician • Strategic mandate • Communication channels • Communication messages • Prioritising publics	• <i>Types of relationships:</i> Exchange and communal • <i>Relationship cultivation strategies:</i> Symmetrical; Access, positivity, openness, assurances, networking, sharing tasks, integrative, distributive • <i>Stakeholder involvement:</i> Admiration, nurturance, instrumental aid, • <i>Relationship outcomes:</i> Control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, commitment	• Communicating environmental issues • Conservation goals • Communication channels and messaging

According to Steyn (2000:11), a communication strategy is developed within the context of the organisation's vision, mission and culture according to which external and stakeholder environments are assessed. Strategic conservation communication involves the development, implementation and evaluation of conservation-specific plans that guide managers and employees to accept their responsibilities to implement it. Steyn (2003:172) mentions that communication strategy can be conceptualised at different levels of the organisation such as enterprise, corporate, business-unit, functional and operational. Within these levels, communication practitioners fulfil especially three tasks, namely strategist, manager and technician (Steyn, 2007:143-147). Although there is a difference between the three functions, all communication practitioners have an important role to play in promoting reciprocal communication

between the organisation and its stakeholders. Their aim would be to achieve mutual understanding by practising two-way symmetrical communication.

When a conservation organisation focuses on strategic conservation communication it develops an applicable approach. Such a strategic approach helps the organisation identify and prioritise key stakeholders and establish ways to manage communication and relationships with them (Steyn, 2000:12). Conservation organisations that offer volunteering opportunities should thus assess their internal environment, the voluntourism and conservation landscape as well as their strategic stakeholder groups. This will help them develop an applicable strategy for conservation-related communication. The organisation then assesses external groups through environmental scanning by employing informal and formal research methods (Gregory, 2012:66; Steyn & Puth, 2000:16). When conservation organisations understand key stakeholder groups and external environments, this provides strategic options. These organisations can utilise various channels and intended messages to achieve the following: showcase their conservation goals, communicate key conservation messages and outcomes, gain stakeholder support for their initiatives, and encourage people to participate in their programmes and projects.

The most important outcome of strategic conservation communication will, therefore, be strong relationships with stakeholders. Developing and maintaining long-term, sound, mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders can help such organisations reach their conservation goals. Organisations depend on stakeholders if they are to be successful. Therefore, management need to establish and maintain stakeholder relationships. In this process, the organisation will have to assess the various dimensions on which the relationship is built and the mutual impact of such interaction on both parties (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998:56). Relationship management as viewed from the systems perspective, implies interdependence between an organisation and its stakeholders due to the mutual impact. For this reason, stakeholder relationships should be managed strategically, which means it becomes extremely important to maintain mutually beneficial relationships (Bruning & Lambe, 2008:142).

Conservation organisations, and especially those who offer volunteer programmes, rely on volunteers to help them reach their goals, which often occurs through individual assistance. Volunteers do not only contribute to these goals in terms of financial gain and labour. They also are crucial to help spread conservation messages, educate others about environmental issues and problems, and act as communicators on behalf of the organisation. Conservation organisations should, therefore, assess the type of interaction (exchange or communal) it has with stakeholders and the ideal relationship they would need. This will help practitioners adjust the strategies for relationship cultivation accordingly. Hung (2007:459) argues that organisations

and stakeholders should put effort into relationships to make it worthwhile and enjoyable. Organisations should thus implement symmetrical relationship cultivation strategies such as access, positivity, openness, assurances of legitimacy, networking and sharing tasks (Hon & Grunig, 1999, Hung, 2007). This will help create an inclusive culture that can lead to sound and satisfactory relationships with stakeholders.

The nature of a volunteer's experience is based on his/her actual involvement (i.e. interdependence, systems theory) and is more intimate because of the interpersonal interaction between staff and volunteers. Regarding SCE, this leads to a more agreeable atmosphere where volunteers work daily alongside coordinators, which allows the implementation of two-way symmetrical communication. In this regard, the relationship cultivation strategies of admiration, nurturance and instrumental aid (Bortree & Waters, 2010) is crucial. It helps establish relationship quality and can determine the level (intensity, future association) of stakeholders' involvement in a conservation programme catering for volunteers. An important function of strategic conservation-related communication when managing stakeholder relationships, is to evaluate the interaction. Indicators of successful relationships are: control mutuality, trust, satisfaction and commitment.

From the literature review, it is clear that a strategic approach to communication on conservation matters can be used to manage relationships with volunteers in this context.

6.3.2 SCE management's view of communication for volunteer relationships

Specific research question 2: To what extent does Shamwari Conservation Experience manage volunteer relationships by applying strategic conservation communication management?

To determine how SCE manages volunteer relationships through strategic conservation communication, six semi-structured interviews were conducted with SCE managers and coordinators, and a content analysis was done of their Facebook Page.

From a **systems perspective**, SCE operates as a relatively open system based on interaction, information exchange and feedback with stakeholders. This conservation organisation understand its dependency on various stakeholders (volunteers, tour operators) and key partners (such as Shamwari game reserve) for the programmes' success and prosperity. SCE management and coordinators acknowledge the interdependence between them and volunteers.

They need volunteers to reach their goals, and volunteers expect to benefit from the experience. SCE also relies on volunteers to create an awareness for its conservation programme. Therefore, SCE is willing to adjust to the needs of other systems by accommodating special interests. The organisation encourages groups to construct their experience to suit their interests, by focusing on specific conservation objectives which they want to achieve.

It was found that SCE does not follow an outright communication model. This is due their different communication practises that were analysed according to various models. Nevertheless, findings show that SCE's communication management does incline towards the mixed-motive model according to which they practice **two-way communication**. This type of communication takes place between themselves and volunteers, on social media and in person with coordinators. The daily interaction between coordinators and volunteers allows the application of stronger two-way symmetrical communication. However, participants are unable to dictate daily activities and are required to comply with rules and prompted to alter their behaviour. In this sense, the symmetrical communication is not entirely two way.

SCE's Facebook Page is open to all visitors and thus facilitate communication because followers can engage with SCE, and the organisation returns the communication. This is done by either *liking* or commenting on followers' posts on SCE's Page or through feedback on enquiries. This organisation regularly tags participants in posts, utilises user-generated content and encourage followers' involvement. SCE's Facebook page, which allows volunteers to contribute content, adds to the openness between SCE and its volunteers.

SCE manages its communication at different levels of the organisation. Management understand their role within the voluntourism landscape, as well as their purpose, values and what they offer stakeholders (enterprise strategy). In this regard, they seek opportunities for growth and diversification (corporate strategy). However, there still is a need for SCE to align the organisation's and conservation goals within a deliberate communication strategy where they use conservation communication to build relationships with key stakeholders. By incorporating conservation communication within their existing strategies, they will be able to implement **strategic conservation communication** management and plans at the two different strategic levels of the organisation that were mentioned. A corporate strategy for conservation communication can function as a framework for operational conservation communication plans. In addition, their communication seems to be able and have the need to adjust to scheduling changes, also underscoring the importance of a deliberate and emerging communication strategy.

SCE does practice some form of environmental scanning by keeping up to date on the voluntourism market. However, it seems that the gathering of information on this industry is done from the point of view of marketing rather than communication. Therefore, it is possible that SCE overlooks information that is important for the management of strategic communication. It was evident from the findings that SCE's management has done limited research on their stakeholders. A number of participants mentioned how specific targeted messages will be difficult to compose due to the diverse stakeholder group they attract. The lack of environmental scanning particularly on stakeholders, can be because SCE does not know how to approach such a process or utilise the gathered information.

The findings show that SCE perceives their programme to be strong enough since it attracts people from different parts of the world, which relates to the theme of commonality. From the responses, it seems that for their success and survival some interviewees rely on the commonality of their stakeholders and by trusting in what they currently offer. In SCE's case, the diverse demographics share common themes such as a love for nature and wildlife. Nevertheless, there still is a need for SCE to research and understand its key stakeholders. Without research and environmental scanning SCE will have difficulty knowing how to adjust effectively to external changes if and when it arises (i.e. emergent communication strategy).

SCE utilises a feedback form from participants to evaluate its research and assess followers' reaction to the Facebook posts. Using Facebook as strategic research tool will help SCE understand its stakeholders' needs, as well as the external environments that may impact this enterprise's success. An assessment of their stakeholders will give SCE's management an indication of how their conservation communication strategies will be received, how volunteers may react, and on which stakeholder groups to focus.

Interviews revealed that a number of SCE's staff members juggle various tasks, which generally are the responsibility of either the PR strategist, manager or technician. This overlap of communication roles can have various causes:

- Limited guidance regarding each individual's exact responsibilities.
- SCE focusing on marketing management and conservation rather than communication management.
- Lack of strategic guidance on the contribution of each person's role to reach the goals for conservation communication.

There is thus a need for SCE managers and coordinators to understand their individual roles and responsibilities in communication management.

In this regard, Facebook is a key communication platform for SCE. Although there is planning and an overall strategy for SCE's Facebook page, the content is based mostly on the conservation programme, daily activities and the participants involved. The theoretical construct of disclosure (Waters *et al.*, 2009:103) emphasises that stakeholders expect openness and transparency from organisations. A way to ensure this is by disclosing who the organisation is and what it does. Thus, applied to SCE's communication strategy, it needs to address the fact that it lacks a detailed description of its vision, mission and goals on its Page. Such a description will provide openness and ensure new followers know exactly who SCE is and what this enterprise aims to achieve.

SCE's management do succeed in creating awareness for the programme on Facebook through the type of content they share. One theme that did stand out is that participants themselves form the content – most posts reflect the activities volunteers partake in. Participants also create material (user-generated content) such as videos and blogs, which are used in posts by SCE.

From the findings, it is clear that SCE views the relationships with volunteers as one of its strengths. SCE is focused on building sound relations with volunteers and seeks a **communal relationship**. Management and coordinators are confident in their ability to provide and care for participants; also that the interaction is more inclined to friendship than being a formal or rigid relationship. It is understandable that SCE seeks hard-working, enthusiastic volunteers for the organisation to reach the set conservation goals. However, SCE's management, coordinators and staff need to commit and put effort into the relationship first, if they wish to receive commitment in return.

This conservation organisation has various ways to cultivate relationships but what stood out was the strive to create a positive, fun-filled, and enjoyable experience for volunteers while pursuing its goals. SCE's interviewees assessed themselves very positively regarding relationship outcomes, for example the belief that their participants can trust them. The findings show that SCE has faith in its integrity, competence and dependability. The organisation also rewards returning volunteers, and the interviewees felt that the relationships grow stronger with time. SCE is well aware of the role its coordinators play in the successful outcome of the programme and the building of relationships with volunteers. Coordinators also assess the atmosphere of their own groups and take steps to ensure the group is satisfied.

Followers engage with SCE on Facebook through *likes*, comments and enquiries. In this regard, SCE's employees implement two-way symmetrical communication by responding to these *likes* and comments and providing feedback to followers. Evidently, there is continuous interaction between SCE and its followers. In addition, SCE seeks reaction from followers by tagging participants, hence increasing the opportunity for two-way communication. SCE regularly encourages participants and followers of its Page to engage with activities such as the photo competition. It is important that SCE ensures a positive growth of followers' engagement and interaction on the Page. Therefore, SCE's management should investigate new and creative strategies to attract and redirect followers to their Page.

User-generated content increases legitimacy and shows transparency since messages and information are derived from the source or the actual 'receiver' of the experience, which influences trust and truth. However, the content analysis of SCE's Facebook reveals that it does not focus on educational messages about environmental or key conservation issues. As a result, the existing messages do not help achieve the set goals. When SCE manages its environmental and conservation messages based on a strategic conservation communication framework, a few positive outcomes can be gained:

- Show the outcome of conservation projects to ex-participants and thereby open a channel to reconnect with those individuals, which also implies a strong outcome for relationship management.
- Showcase to interested individuals what SCE actually does and can achieve.
- Increase the usefulness of the Page by messages focusing on education about environmental issues or conservation initiatives. This can generate knowledge and provide a learning experience. Followers who feel they learn from SCE's Page will return to this platform when they actively seek interesting information.
- Diversify SCE's Facebook Page further. This will cater for those followers who had the opportunity to volunteer but could not join SCE again. They may gain more from SCE's Page if the focus was not only on current participants' activities.

On the other hand, if those followers (as outsiders) do not receive benefits from the Page, chances are they may leave the platform. It is thus important that SCE's Facebook Page reflects all its goals, and a strategy would help strengthen this possibility.

The content analysis of SCE's Facebook Page clearly indicated that certain strategies for relationship cultivation are used such as admiration, positivity, networking and sharing of tasks.

However, there was an obvious lack of incorporating SCE's coordinators on this Page. By creating content about the coordinators and using material they create, can increase interactivity from ex-participants. This also informs aspiring volunteers who they will be working with.

With regard to **strategic conservation communication**, SCE follows a blueprint. This basic plan entails showcasing operations on the ground and the various activities of the programme in which volunteers participate to reach conservation goals. Strategic planning by SCE is mostly based on the successful outcome of the programme (from an operational point of view). This, however, implies reactive communication because the programme regularly has to adjust to external conditions. The communicated messages are mostly about the programme, volunteers, and daily conservation activities. Key conservation messages, education and awareness are communicated to participants who are engaged in activities supporting conservation goals.

It seems that SCE is content with the idea that volunteers speak on its behalf. This can indicate that SCE's management trust their programme and coordinators to convey SCE's value system to participants, who would spread these messages further. A number of interviewees did suggest that the knowledge which participants take from the experience can be applied in various ways to spread the message of conservation (esp. those studying zoology). Therefore, SCE should acknowledge the potential of volunteers who facilitate environmental education and advocacy on this organisation's behalf. Evidently, SCE is in a position to influence peoples' perceptions on environmental issues, and to transfer those ideas to others. Thus, this organisation should understand its dependence on volunteers in light of the overall championing of the environment and conservation in various countries, not just for its specific programme.

It was found that SCE's goals have certain focal points: environmental education, awareness for the programme and conservation. To reach these goals, SCE's programme, communication and relationships should be managed strategically. However, it was found that this organisation does not manage its communication or stakeholder relationships by applying a specific approach for strategic communication about conservation matters, as set out in the literature. On the other hand, several aspects of SCE's organisational culture, programme, communication messages and relationship building tactics do reflect key aspects or constructs that form the basis of strategic conservation communication.

Furthermore, there is a strong connection between a lacking strategic plan for conservation communication, and the absence of someone to fulfil the role of communications strategist at SCE. There is thus a need for conservation communication management with a strategic mandate where a communication strategist can assist in the following functions:

- Align conservation, organisational and stakeholder goals, programmes, and messages.
- Use knowledge acquired in the process of stakeholder management to plan conservation communication strategically.
- Formulate, develop, implement and evaluate strategic conservation communication plans and how to develop strategies at different levels within SCE.
- Act as adviser to SCE's management and coordinators regarding their communication roles and responsibilities to help achieve conservation communication goals.
- Support SCE in its stakeholder relationship management. This would include guidance on tactics to build mutually beneficial relationship with volunteers.

To conclude the responses to *Specific research question 2*: The findings show that SCE is willing to improve its communication management, particularly since the competition for volunteers are increasing. SCE generally is satisfied with its management of communication on operational level. Management are, however, also aware that they need to explore ways to improve the strategic management of their communication on conservation matters.

6.3.3 **Volunteer's experience of SCE's communication for relationship management**

Specific research question 3: How do volunteers experience the extent to which Shamwari Conservation Experience apply strategic conservation communication in managing relationships with them?

The aim was to determine how volunteers experience stakeholder relationship management by SCE through the application of strategic conservation communication. For this aim, semi-structured interviews were conducted with volunteers. Students and volunteers also filled out self-administered questionnaires.

Throughout the process, the findings indicated that participants felt they did contribute to conservation and played a role in help reaching SCE's long-term conservation goals. It was clear that respondents view themselves as part of the **system** where SCE benefits from their participation and they gain from the experience either personally or professionally. Each individual's motivation for volunteering is different. However, SCE succeed in living up to expectations where volunteers reap benefits from the experience, be it knowledge, friendships, impacting conservation or exploring wildlife. Volunteers thus feel integrated and part of the team and emphasised that the more they invest in their experience the more they gain and take from it.

From the participants' perspective, there is **two-way symmetrical communication** between them and SCE, especially interpersonally and through Facebook. The findings emphasised the positive, two-way interactions between coordinators and volunteers; also that SCE is open to questions and eager to establish dialogue and connect with participants. From the volunteers' perspective their interpersonal relationships with the coordinators are viewed as an open system in which feedback and continual communication is encouraged. Volunteers described how they communicate with SCE on Facebook and other social networks and at times receive feedback from SCE on for example, comments on posts. The questionnaires' findings, however, revealed a more negative view on two-way symmetrical communication as it showed low levels of engagement on various channels. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate ways to improve two-way symmetrical communication, especially on key channels.

Volunteers were able to comment on SCE's communication management but only in terms of the operational aspects of the programme and on social media, not on the matter of **strategic communication**. Although volunteers were informed of SCE's goals they did not know the core values of the organisation, or its true objectives. Individuals mentioned how SCE's goals change according to necessary tasks at the reserve or when new activities arise, which indicates a reactive approach to management. Findings showed that SCE's communication is managed and coordinated to an extent. Information is regularly available, the content is useful and the organisation can adjust to changes. Participants explained that they were informed timeously if there were changes to the programme. However, most interviewees did mention how they handle change in general and are able to adapt easily. Volunteers communicated how SCE's management are willing to change their daily programme in case of out-of-the-ordinary activities. This implies that SCE will attempt to include participants in exciting projects when possible. The findings also show that SCE understands how such activities contribute to the overall experience and can influence satisfaction among volunteers.

Thus, from an operational point of view, participants did find structure and planning to the programme. They also found that information relayed on various platforms and in person is useful, interesting and rich. The key communication channels that participants used to input or receive information about SCE, were websites, Facebook, tour operators and university/college, and word-of-mouth (WOM) communication. Facebook and Instagram were found to be the most important social networks for participants. Participants felt that SCE's social media platforms, particularly Facebook and Instagram, are well managed and that these Pages reflect the true SCE programme. Interviewees described how several SCE staff members have an input in managing SCE's communication. However, since the Social Media Coordinator informs participants of her role, they associate communication management with this individual from SCE.

Volunteer interviewees did call for more informative, environmental, and conservation-related content on Facebook.

The coordinators were also listed as a crucial channel for learning and connecting with SCE in general. The main finding in this regard was that channels participants use personally, have a specific focus. These channels are used to gain information about SCE and return communication to this organisation, or to share their experience. In addition, participants were also more inclined to share their experience through WOM.

Volunteers experienced SCE's **relationship management** very positively. In this regard, respondents identified SCE's coordinators as individuals with whom they can connect and build a relationship, rather than with management. The respondents also felt SCE is positive in its communication, volunteers share in tasks and are genuinely taken care of. It is clear that volunteers bond with coordinators and these individual interactions also determine their relationship with SCE. With regard to relationship cultivation strategies, SCE can improve its transparency. This could be done by managing its communication, especially by explaining why volunteers may not be able to join in certain activities. SCE's management can also improve the way that their communication guarantee volunteers that SCE wishes to build relationships with them.

The findings show that volunteers feel they are treated fairly and that SCE listens to their opinions, but that they are not considered throughout when SCE makes important decisions. Volunteers feel that SCE is competent and dependable and that management and coordinators do not make promises they cannot keep, hence stakeholders can rely on SCE's promises. Respondents found that SCE is not domineering and does not function autonomously and unilaterally. Management and coordinators seek ways to accommodate requests from volunteers and thereby promote inclusivity. Findings also suggest that the interaction between participants and SCE is inclined more towards a communal relationship. Participants were satisfied with their experience and that their conservation expectations were fulfilled. However, a number of interviewees did highlight the need for clearer communication on the difference they make and how they contribute to conservation outcomes.

A key conclusion to findings on relationship cultivation is how importance the construct of stakeholder involvement proved to be for the present study. In this regard, strategies of stakeholder involvement (i.e. admiration, nurturance and instrumental aid) scored higher than strategies of symmetrical communication. This clearly shows that stakeholder involvement does have a role to play in relationship management with conservation volunteers. This finding also

indicates that volunteers in the present study had a different experience of symmetrical cultivation strategies and stakeholder involvement, as set out in the literature. Findings showed that the particular symmetrical strategies of sharing tasks and assurances of legitimacy have a higher association to stakeholder involvement strategies for this group of participants.

Furthermore, the findings show the importance that volunteers interact and work alongside the coordinators. The university group did not enjoy the same level of involvement with SCE's coordinators as other groups and individual volunteers. Therefore, the university group rated the relationship outcome of control mutuality differently. These responses show a perception among the students that their opinions are not as important to SCE. This underlines the significance of interpersonal relationships between volunteers and coordinators. Volunteers should feel comfortable with the coordinators and have frequent conversations with them. They need to experience a sound relationship with the coordinators. Such a relationship will determine their perception that SCE is listening to them and values their opinion.

Volunteers on a sabbatical indicated higher levels of trust in SCE. This may be because these participants beforehand knew what they were getting involved in and did their research to find the most suitable place to spend their time. This can point to the importance that SCE lives up to the expectations about the experience it offers, particularly for those who do not participate as part of a student group. Expectation management thus becomes important in SCE's communication to aspiring future volunteers.

Strong correlations were found between the application of strategies for relationship cultivation and volunteers' perception of SCE. These cultivation strategies entail: access, disclosure, inclusion, and assurance of relationship building. The volunteers' perceptions include trust that SCE is open to their thoughts and opinions, and confirmation that they do not experience SCE as overbearing. Regarding SCE, the strategies for relationship cultivation become important in the strategic management of conservation matters. Communication that is managed according to stakeholder needs, positively impacts stakeholders' perception of an organisation.

Volunteers mostly mentioned how they provide physical assistance and spread the word as ways to help SCE reach conservation goals. The messages that volunteers received through **conservation communication** related mostly to conservation activities. In this regard, certain volunteers indicated that they did receive adequate and consistent information on the tasks at hand, whereas others felt the coordinators could communicate the necessity and outcome of activities more clearly. Volunteers did understand that outcomes of conservation work may only

be visible after they left or in the future. Those who felt they make a difference in terms of conservation, also were more satisfied in their relationship with SCE.

Thus, it can be concluded that one of SCE's strengths is stakeholder relationship management. Participants rate SCE's efforts favourably and evidently have a sound relationship with SCE.

Participants' assessment of SCE's communication and relationship management indicates that there is a need for strategic conservation communication. The necessity, implementation and application of strategic conservation communication for conservation organisations such as SCE are based on the following conclusions:

- Conservation organisations compete for volunteers.
- These volunteers help the organisations survive and reach conservation objectives.
- Management should attract diverse stakeholder groups, therefore research is required on different demographics and how to reach them.
- People volunteer for different reasons, therefore, a conservation organisation need to provide an experience that can live up to expectations.
- The motivation for volunteering or an attraction to certain volunteering experiences may change. Therefore, such organisations should conduct environmental scanning to help them adjust.
- People rate their experience in terms of an organisation's ability to manage the programme and the communication about it. When the programme and communication are coordinated, structured, and purposeful, volunteers can learn (useful information) or gain from the experience in various ways.
- If an organisation achieves conservation goals and the volunteers see their efforts do impact conservation, it leads to higher satisfaction levels with the organisation.
- It is important to cultivate relationships through an approach of symmetrical stakeholder involvement. This will enhance the relationship's quality and positively influences volunteers' rating of the relationship.
- There is a bond between volunteers and coordinators, hence it becomes crucial to manage those relationships.
- Participants are likely to share their experience through WOM or social networks. Therefore, it is important to manage goals for conservation communication as well as messages and relationships with volunteers.

The information presented to answer the *Specific research questions* culminate in answering the *General research question*.

6.4 ANSWERING THE GENERAL RESEARCH QUESTION

By addressing the *Specific research questions* and accomplishing the corresponding goals, it is possible to answer the *General research question* and goal:

General research question: How can relationships with volunteers be managed at Shamwari Conservation Experience through a strategic conservation communication approach?

It is clear that SCE's success lies in its relationships with volunteers, as mentioned above as one of their strengths, and the diverse programme which delivers a unique conservation experience. The findings show that SCE can and does manage relationships with volunteers effectively. However, it should be noted that this conclusion is inferred mainly from the interactions between SCE managers, coordinators and volunteers during the experience. It is not based on a theoretical framework or strategic approach to conservation communication linked to stakeholder relationship management. This indicates that relationships can be cultivated and effective. Strong relationships can exist without following a specific communication plan.

Put differently, human nature is oriented towards building relationships and SCE aims to provide volunteers an unforgettable experience. As a result, the volunteers attest that they are satisfied with their relationship to SCE. Without being trained in communication management as well as strategies and outcomes of relationship cultivation, SCE still manages to build sound and sustainable relationships with volunteers. SCE accomplishes this outcome by positive attributes put into practice: their company culture, value system, the understanding that they depend on volunteers for survival, and facilitating two-way communication with stakeholders.

A strategic plan/strategy, both deliberate and emergent, for conservation communication can add to and enhance SCE's existing practices. Such a strategy can build on SCE's strong point (fostering relationships with volunteers). Furthermore, such a strategy can certainly help orientate SCE: from being purely focused on conservation and seeing marketing as their communication output, to conservation communication, its application in the volunteer context and the corresponding positive outcomes.

The present study clearly indicated that SCE can and does manage volunteer relationships effectively. This is because management implement and “follow” several key ideas and constructs derived from an approach for strategic conservation communication. However, their communication and relationship management is not based on a specific approach for strategic conservation communication.

The conclusion can be drawn that SCE’s employees do manage volunteer relationships successfully, but still need to explore ways to improve the management of this communication with a focus on conservation. Then they could capitalise fully on the possibilities that strategic communication offers conservations organisations.

The data indicated that a strategy for conservation-related communication would benefit SCE. The reason is that this organisation relies on volunteers to reach its conservation goals (from physical conservation work to environmental education) and to provide a sustainable experience. SCE competes for volunteers against other conservation organisations and therefore its management need to ensure their communication output on conservation reflects who they are and what they do. Volunteers will spread the word on behalf of SCE and can thus act as ambassadors for SCE. Therefore, SCE’s employees need to ensure they provide a sound conservation experience and build mutually beneficial relationships with participants.

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

When focusing on managing communication and relationships through a strategic approach to conservation, there still are several areas that could be improved. However, the findings show that volunteers generally are content with their experience and view their relationship with SCE positively. This makes it clear that the actual experience and interactions stands central: those between volunteers and SCE, and among volunteers themselves. In light of this understanding, certain recommendations can be made as proposed below.

Strategic conservation communication plan: Recommendations on how SCE manage volunteer relationships is based largely on efforts to construct a communication plan with strategies developed to reach conservation goals. Such a strategic conservation communication plan can be utilised for the following input:

- Help SCE operate as an open system and show ways to improve two-way symmetrical communication.

- Outline SCE's conservation communication goals and find ways to reach stakeholders through various strategies and methods.
- Guide communication output according to conservation goals and SCE's mission.
- Gather more information on volunteers to know through which channels they can be reached and which messages are best suited to attract them.
- Help SCE build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with volunteers.

Communication practitioner: A further recommendation is appointing a communication practitioner to help create and manage this above-mentioned strategy. In this regard, the practitioner can cooperate with SCE's management to direct them in the implementation of such a plan. This person can also help management and coordinators understand and enhance their roles in achieving conservation communication goals.

Role of the coordinator: One of the main themes of the present study was the role the coordinator plays in building relationships with volunteers and by facilitating activities to reach the conservation goals. Coordinators are mentors, hence professional, trained and skilled coordinators are needed. SCE should thus invest in the training of coordinators in the conservation activities they conduct and help them understand the importance of conservation communication and building relationships. In addition, coordinators can be encouraged to relay to management information that can be useful for managing strategic conservation communication. Ultimately, the coordinators are the best acquainted with SCE's volunteers, and understand their concerns and perceptions of conservation. This information can be used to improve stakeholder relations with volunteers.

Showing conservation outcomes: Another key issue to address is showing participants the outcomes of their efforts. This assures participants they are instrumental to conservation outcomes, which may not always be that apparent to student and volunteer participants. People who join the programme for an extended period may see the outcome of the projects, but those who stay only two weeks may not have any visual evidence of their work. As was indicated, interviewees have the perception that they help achieve goals but only in a long-term way. Therefore, SCE should make an effort and communicate more often how the participants' contributions make a difference.

Social media platforms: This channel provides the ideal communication channel. Practitioners can post content on the various platforms (e.g. photos or video clips) to showcase the outcome of projects. If participants get the impression they actually have made a difference, their level of

satisfaction will also increase. They will feel that SCE has lived up to expectations, especially in hands-on activities and on-the-ground conservation work. SCE can also gain more support from the reserve itself (SGR), when showcasing their efforts for conservation on behalf of the reserve. In this sense the practitioners can demonstrate to SGR that their volunteers act as ambassadors not only for SCE but for the larger SGR as well.

Enhanced volunteer relationships: SCE should improve the way it manages volunteer relations by the following actions:

- Increase access to managers.
- Grow a larger follower base by networking with for example, colleges and universities.
- Be more willing to disclose information to volunteers and act transparently.
- Ensure and demonstrate the commitment to building relationships with all participants.

Finally, SCE should focus on the future. This will give the organisation an indication of its direction forward, how to retain key stakeholders and help it plan ways to improve participants' conservation experience. To achieve this, SCE's practitioners could for example, incorporate more conservation research and citizen science into their programme by allowing zoologists and biologists to conduct research at SGR. This will help participants feel they contributed to conservation in a different way. It may also attract a stakeholder group that is more focused on conservation science. Ultimately, volunteers seek quality over quantity. Therefore, having activities with direction and a clear goal will make SCE's program exemplary for other conservation volunteer organisations, not only within the South African context, but globally.

To recap: The present study shows the importance and necessity of strategic communication management to build strong, mutually beneficial relationships with volunteers. Therefore, conservation organisations should seek ways of using strategic communication with a conservation focus to achieve quality relationships with their stakeholders, internally (e.g. coordinators) and externally (e.g. volunteers).

6.6 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Although the present study unlocked various possibilities as indicated above, certain limitations need to be factored in. The first limitation is that only one organisation that offered a conservation volunteer experience was used. This means that the findings of the present study cannot be generalised to other organisations that offer a similar experience, although the results are

important to SCE itself. Future studies could consider examining multiple conservation organisations, to deliver more generalisable results.

A second limitation is the lack of literature and research on strategic conservation communication management. Researchers tend to focus on communication management and conservation as two separate disciplines with scant information on the cross-disciplinary work of strategic communication on conservation. More research should be done to assess how organisations can build relationships with volunteers through strategic communication on conservation, and combining the two fields.

Future research can also indicate whether there is a focus on conservation or conservation communication. This information can be used to promote strategic communication management on conservation matters. Future studies and further research into strategic conservation communication management can hopefully solidify this field as a rightful study area in communication management. Then ultimately, a framework could be developed for organisations that wish to impact conservation efforts. Such a framework could be applied to other organisations that make use of volunteers, for example those providing humanitarian aid or recreational services.

6.7 TO CONCLUDE

Organisations that focus on addressing environmental problems or assisting in conservation efforts are in a fortunate position where they can help make a real difference in the preservation of ecosystems and animals. Conservation organisations can and should reinforce people's positive attitudes towards nature. In this regard, organisations such as SCE also provide a vital link to educate people on conservation and environmental issues, which may physically involve them in addressing problems. By involving participants, conservation organisations should encourage people to champion topical conservation issues and care for the environment. In addition, conservation volunteer organisations should not see participants to their programme as merely an enabling link in their environment that help them reach the organisation's goals. These organisations should envisage themselves in a role of providing the volunteers' a unique conservation experience and thereby developing advocates for conservation efforts in the country and globally.

Conservation organisations should invest in strategic communication to help convey their cause, to reach goals and garner more support from the public. One way to achieve this internally is by either appointing or consulting with a communication practitioner to oversee the process and

ensure that messages support on-the-ground conservation activities. Such a practitioner can assist scientists or biologists to relay messages to a lay public. This person can guide the organisation to be present on communication channels best suited to reach its target audience. The aim would also be to create strategies for the communication of all conservation projects and plans with a view to attract stakeholders and keep their support.

In conclusion, there is a need for strategic communication that help conservation and or environmental programmes and projects succeed, reach its goals and build mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders.

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ANNEXURES

Annexure A: Interview schedule SCE manager and coordinators

Annexure B: Interview schedule SCE volunteers

Annexure C: Questionnaire – SCE volunteers

Annexure D: SCE work report map 2015

Annexure E: Notice: Language editing

Annexure A

Interview questions: Management and coordinators of Shamwari Conservation Experience (SCE).

1. What are the goals and plans for SCE?
2. To what extent do volunteers and students contribute to SCE's organisational goals?
3. Do you think volunteers and students depend on SCE for personal or professional gains (interdependency)?
4. In your view, where do volunteers get information on volunteering at SCE? Please explain
5. Communication: Please describe the communication between SCE and the volunteers.
 - 5.1. Please describe the communication messages SCE uses when communicating with volunteers.
 - 5.2. Please describe the communication channels SCE uses when communicating with volunteers.
 - 5.3. Do you use different types of messages for communication with students and volunteers?
 - 5.4. What key words stand out in your communication with volunteers/students?
 - 5.5. How can volunteers communicate back to SCE? (symmetrical, two-way communication, channels, timing, messages)
 - 5.6. Do you view SCE coordinators as a communication channel? Please explain. If so, what impact do you think they have on the communication message of SCE? How effective do you think they portray that message?
6. Describing the planning of communication by SCE (strategic mandate).
 - 6.1. To what extent does communication assist in achieving SCE's goals and objectives?
 - 6.2. How is communication planned to support the mentioned goals?
 - 6.3. Do you think there are adequate feedback opportunities for volunteers/students?
 - 6.4. How does SCE's communication adjust to daily or scheduling changes?
 - 6.5. Who is responsible for communication at SCE?
 - 6.6. What is the role and tasks of the communication facilitator at SCE?
7. Describing SCE's management of stakeholder relationships: Do you think there is a relationship between SCE and volunteers? Please explain.
 - 7.1. Please describe the relationship.
 - 7.2. Is the relationship based on both parties' growth and future or are exchanges expected? (communal or exchange relationships)
 - 7.3. How does SCE build the relationships to ensure that it grows and stays healthy? Please explain. Are you satisfied with the relationship with volunteers?
 - 7.4. How does SCE listen to volunteer opinions? Can you provide some examples?
 - 7.5. When considering what volunteers opinions:
 - 7.5.1. Do you think volunteers think they are treated fairly? And their welfare taken into account?
 - 7.5.2. Do you think the volunteers think they can rely on SCE to keep its promises and to do what they said they would do?
 - 7.5.3. Do you think volunteers are confident that SCE has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do?
 - 7.5.4. Do you think volunteers admire the SCE program, and what is done at SCE? Why?
 - 7.6. Who is the main person on behalf of SCE, that builds a relationship with volunteers? Please explain.
8. Do you have anything else that you would like to add on SCE's communication?

Annexure B

Interview questions: Students and volunteers at Shamwari Conservation Experience (SCE).

1. Why did you decide to volunteer at SCE?
2. Where did you get information to make your decision about volunteering at SCE?
3. How important do you think students and volunteers are to SCE? (Assist to achieve goals?).
4. Do you expect your experience at SCE to benefit you personally or professionally? Please explain.
5. Communication: Please describe the communication between yourself and SCE.
 - 5.1. Please describe the communication messages SCE uses when communicating with you.
 - 5.2. Please describe the communication channels SCE uses when communicating with you.
 - 5.3. Do you think the type of message used by SCE differs when communicating with students and volunteers?
 - 5.4. What key words stood out to you in SCE's communication with you?
 - 5.5. How do you communicate to SCE? (symmetrical, two-way communication, channels, timing, messages)
 - 5.6. Do you view SCE coordinators as a communication channel? Please explain. If so, what impact do you think they have on the communication message of SCE you receive? How effective do you think they portray that message?
6. Describing the planning of communication by SCE (strategic mandate).
 - 6.1. Please describe how you view SCE's organisational goals and plans?
 - 6.2. Do you think you have a role to play in reaching those goals?
 - 6.3. Do you think SCE's communication is well planned to support these goals?
 - 6.4. Do you think there is adequate feedback on your or volunteer enquiries?
 - 6.5. Do you think SCE's communication can adjust to daily or scheduling changes?
 - 6.6. Who do you think is responsible for communication at SCE?
 - 6.7. What do you think is the role and tasks of the communication facilitator at SCE?
7. Describing SCE's management of stakeholder relationships: Do you think there is a relationship between SCE and yourself? Please explain.
 - 7.1. Please describe SCE's relationship with you.
 - 7.2. Is the relationship based on both parties' growth and future or are exchanges expected? (communal or exchange relationships)
 - 7.3. Do you feel SCE does enough to ensure the relationship they build with you grows and stays healthy? Please explain. Are you satisfied with the relationship?
 - 7.4. To what extent does SCE listen to your opinions? Can you provide some examples?
 - 7.5. Do you think you are treated fairly? Are your welfare taken into account?
 - 7.6. Can you rely on SCE to keep its promises and to do what they said they would do?
 - 7.7. How confident are you that SCE has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do?
 - 7.8. Do you admire the SCE program, and what they do? Why?
 - 7.9. Who is the main person on behalf of SCE, that builds a relationship with you? Please explain.
8. Do you have anything else that you would like to add on SCE's communication?

Relationship management with conservation volunteers: A strategic communication approach <u>Questionnaire:</u> Students and Volunteers at Shamwari Conservation Experience (SCE) Thank you for completing the questionnaire. Please note that this questionnaire is completely voluntary and that volunteers and students at SCE will have the opportunity to partake in the questionnaire without the researcher forcing them to do so. All questionnaires will be confidential to protect the volunteer or student's identity and the information they provide will not be disclosed to other participants or management of SCE. Volunteers and students will not receive financial or material compensations from the researcher for their participation in this study. This questionnaire serves as a data collecting method whereby the thoughts and feeling of students and volunteers can be expressed to determine how SCE is managing and building relationships with students and volunteers through the application of strategic communication. This questionnaire is part of a dissertation whereby the researcher hopes to obtain a Master of Arts in Communication. Section 1: Demographic information Instructions: Please mark the applicable box with an "x" to indicate your answer: 1. Please indicate your gender. Male ☐ 1 Female ☐ 2 Other ☐ 3 2. How old are you? <20 ☐ 1 20-29 ☐ 2 30-39 ☐ 3 40-49 ☐ 4 50 and older ☐ 5 3. Please indicate your nationality. UK ☐ 1 Switzerland ☐ 2 Germany ☐ 3 Australia ☐ 4 Netherlands ☐ 5 USA ☐ 6 Other ☐ 7 Please specify: _____	Group: _____ No. _____ 4. Indicate whether you are a student as part of a group or individual volunteer at Shamwari Conservation Experience. Student ☐ 1 Volunteer ☐ 2 5. You joined Shamwari Conservation Experience as part of / because you are: University / College course or group ☐ 1 On a Gap year ☐ 2 Sabbatical ☐ 3 On holiday ☐ 4 Other ☐ 5 Please specify: _____ 6. How did you initially find out about Shamwari Conservation Experience? Please select the single most appropriate answer. University / College ☐ 1 Tour operator ☐ 2 Website ☐ 3 Social media ☐ 4 Blog ☐ 5 Television ☐ 6 Newspaper ☐ 7 Magazine ☐ 8 Brochure ☐ 9 Word-of-mouth ☐ 10 Other ☐ 11 Please specify: _____ 7. Why did you decide to join Shamwari Conservation Experience? _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
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Section 2: Communication management and communication channels

Instructions: Please circle the one choice that indicates your opinion:

	Disagree					Agree	Not applicable
	1	2	3	4	5		
1. SCE's communication to students and volunteers seems coordinated.						5	
2. I am satisfied with SCE's communication to me.	1	2	3	4	5		
3. Information from SCE is available when I need it.	1	2	3	4	5		
4. Messages from SCE contains information that I find useful.	1	2	3	4	5		
5. SCE can adequately adjust to daily or scheduling changes.	1	2	3	4	5		6

6. How much information do you get about SCE from the following communication channels?

	I do not get enough information					I get enough information					Not applicable
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Email											6
Telephone	1	2	3	4	5						6
Website	1	2	3	4	5						6
Facebook	1	2	3	4	5						6
Twitter	1	2	3	4	5						6
Instagram	1	2	3	4	5						6
Google+	1	2	3	4	5						6
Youtube	1	2	3	4	5						6
Blogs	1	2	3	4	5						6
Television	1	2	3	4	5						6
Newspaper	1	2	3	4	5						6
Magazine	1	2	3	4	5						6
Brochure	1	2	3	4	5						6
Tour operator	1	2	3	4	5						6
University/College	1	2	3	4	5						6
Word-of-mouth	1	2	3	4	5						6
The coordinator(s)	1	2	3	4	5						6

7. Which communication channels are in general (and not only pertaining to your communication with SCE) most important to you? Please rate the channels that you use.

	Least important					Most important					Not applicable
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Email											6
Telephone	1	2	3	4	5						6
Website	1	2	3	4	5						6
Facebook	1	2	3	4	5						6
Twitter	1	2	3	4	5						6
Instagram	1	2	3	4	5						6
Google+	1	2	3	4	5						6
Youtube	1	2	3	4	5						6
Blogs	1	2	3	4	5						6
Television	1	2	3	4	5						6
Newspaper	1	2	3	4	5						6
Magazine	1	2	3	4	5						6
Brochure	1	2	3	4	5						6
Tour operator	1	2	3	4	5						6
University/College	1	2	3	4	5						6
Word-of-mouth	1	2	3	4	5						6
Radio	1	2	3	4	5						6

8. How often do you use the following communication channels to send information to SCE?

	Never			Monthly			Weekly			Daily		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Email												
Telephone	1	2	3									
Website	1	2	3									
Facebook	1	2	3									
Twitter	1	2	3									
Instagram	1	2	3									
Google+	1	2	3									
Youtube	1	2	3									
University/College	1	2	3									
Tour operator	1	2	3									

9. Will you tell others about SCE?

Not likely 1 2 3 4 5 Very likely

10. Will you be sharing and or posting information about your experience at SCE to or through the following communication channels you use?

	Not likely					Very likely					Not applicable
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Email											6
Telephone	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Website	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Facebook	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Twitter	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Instagram	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Google+	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Youtube	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Blog	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Article in newspaper or magazine	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Word-of-mouth	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6

Section 3: Relationship cultivation strategies by Shamwari Conservation Experience.

Instructions: Please rate the following statement by circling the one choice that indicates your opinion.

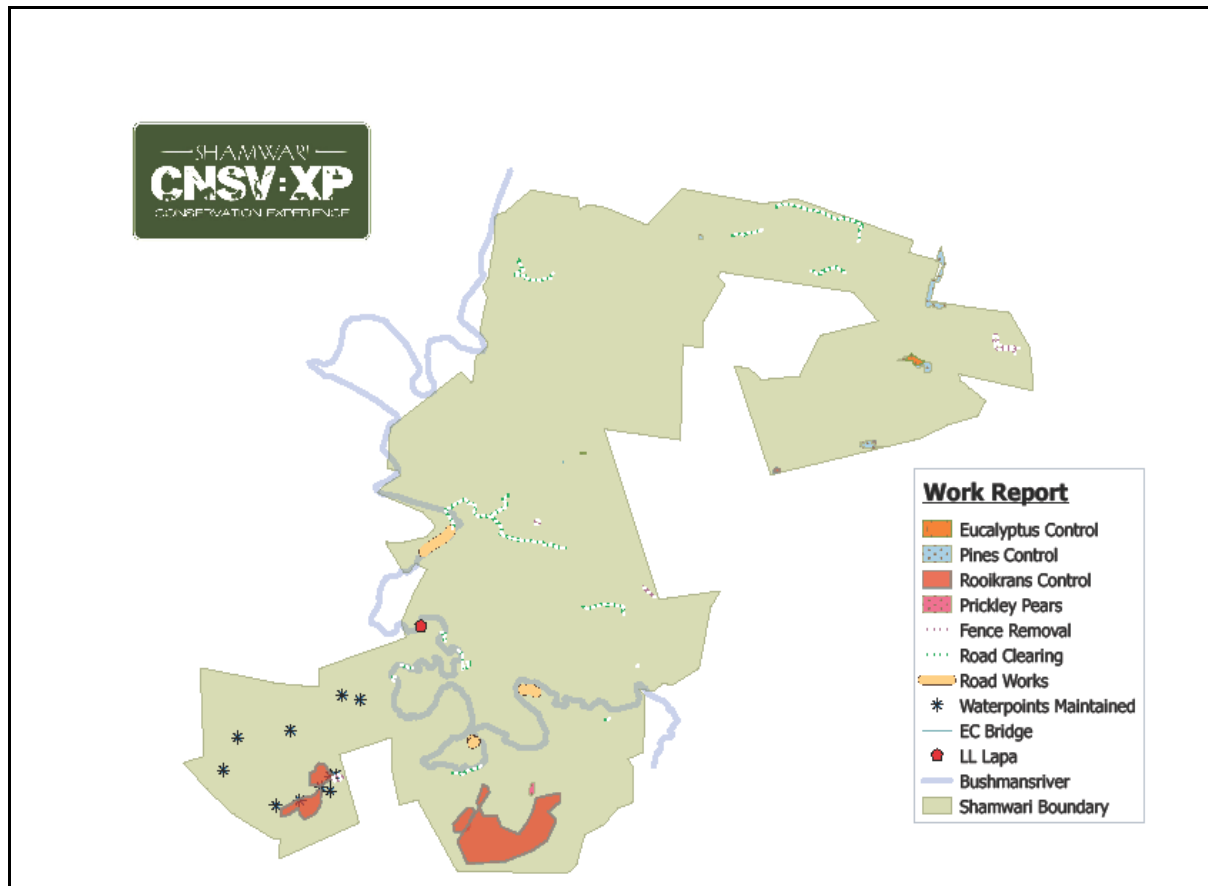
	Agree					Disagree				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
11. I have access to SCE managers.										
12. I have access to SCE coordinators.										
13. SCE is positive in their communication with me.										
14. SCE discloses information about their thoughts with me.										
15. SCE is networking with groups (conservation organisations, my university or college etc.) that I support or am involved with.										
16. I help in completing tasks at SCE.										
17. I admire SCE.										
18. I value SCE.										
19. I feel nurtured (supported) by SCE in general.										
20. I feel nurtured (supported) by SCE coordinators.										
21. I feel my contribution is instrumental to achieving conservation tasks at SCE.										
22. I feel that the coordinators at SCE guide me in conservation tasks.										
23. I regard the coordinators at SCE as mentors.										
24. I feel that SCE wants to build a relationship with me.										

Section 4: Relationship outcomes

Instructions: Please rate the following statement by circling the one choice that indicates your opinion.

	Agree					Disagree				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
25. SCE treats me fairly and justly.										
26. Whenever SCE makes an important decision, I know they will be concerned how their decision will affect me.										
27. SCE can be relied on to keep its promises.										
28. I believe that SCE takes students or volunteers' opinions into account when making decisions.										
29. I feel confident about SCE's skills										
30. SCE has the ability to accomplish what they say they will do.										
31. SCE believes that my opinion is valuable (legitimate).										
32. In dealing with me, SCE has an overbearing tendency.										
33. SCE listens to what I have to say										
34. I can see that SCE wants to maintain a relationship with me.										
35. I feel a sense of loyalty to SCE.										
36. I would rather work with SCE than not.										
37. Both SCE and I benefit from the relationship.										
38. I am happy with my interaction with SCE.										
39. SCE met my conservation expectations.										
40. SCE is helpful.										
41. I feel that SCE is taking advantage of me.										
42. Whenever SCE gives something to me, they generally expect something in return.										
43. If I reward SCE (by working harder, becoming an ambassador, contribute more funds, etc.), they will take care of me.										

Annexure D



WELLINGTON
7655
31 October 2016

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I hereby confirm that the Master's dissertation by Ms Ilda Cronjé was edited and groomed to the best of my ability. This included recommendations to improve the language and logical structure, guide the line of argument as well as to enhance the presentation.

Rev Claude Vosloo
Language and knowledge practitioner and consultant

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Don't think outside the box, reinvent the box