



**ETHICAL COMMUNICATION IN THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE OF PUBLIC
RELATIONS IN CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA**

by

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates ethical communication practice in the professional practice of Public Relations in South Africa. Using Public Relations professional bodies (PRISA and IABC) and Public Relations firms based in Cape Town, the study sought to understand how ethical communication is conceptualised and practised by public relations practitioners. Literature reveals that ethical communication in Public Relations has been shaped by two dominant views. The early, simplistic paradigm conceptualised ethical communication as dialogic and symmetrical communication. It views ethical communication as counter-argument. This paradigm has been critiqued in favour of a more contemporary paradigm that regards ethical communication in terms of dialogic values such as honesty, openness, loyalty, fair-mindedness, respect, integrity and forthright communication. Using dialogic, symmetrical communication and a reflective paradigm of public relations as its theoretical framework, this study analyses how Public Relations practitioners and professional bodies conceptualise ethical communication. Results from the study reveal that ethical communication as a phenomenon is still subject to various interpretations. The study reveals that fostering ethical communication by professional bodies is often hampered by the existence of untrained Public Relations personnel. This study seeks to make a theoretical contribution towards the understanding of ethical communication amongst Public Relations and professional bodies. It shows that there is need for Public Relations professionals to develop a more holistic understanding of ethical communication in order to raise the quality of Public Relations practitioners' ethical behaviour and increase the legitimacy and value of public relations studies to society.

KEYWORDS: Ethics, ethical communication, public relations practitioners, professional bodies, PRISA and IABC.

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DEDICATION

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ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS: DEFINITION

- **CPUT:** Cape Peninsula University of Technology, a university in Cape Town, South Africa, which is the only university of Technology in the Western Cape province and is the largest university in the province, with over 32, 000 students.
- **IABC:** International Association of Business Communicators. This organisation is based in San Francisco, USA with overseas chapters in many countries, including South Africa. They hold accreditation examinations, presents awards and currently publish *Communication World* monthly. The study includes a focus on local IABC leadership opinions: their opinions are representative of the state of corporate communicators in South Arica.
- **PRISA:** Public Relations Institute of South Africa. This body represents the interests of PR practitioners throughout the Southern Africa region and has registered practitioners in Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland and South Africa. For the purpose of exploration, this study focused on the views of PRISA leader in Cape Town, South Africa. PRISA currently has an estimated membership of 3 500.
- **Public Relations:** Skinner *et al.*, (2004:4) define PR as the management, through communication, of the perceptions and strategic relations between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholders.

Heath & Coombs (2006:7) call PR 'the management function that entails planning, research, publicity, promotion, and collaborative decision-making to help any organisation's ability to listen to, appreciate, and respond appropriately to those persons and groups whose mutually beneficial relationships the organisation needs to foster as it strives to achieve its mission and vision'.

A modern definition for the new era of PR adopted by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) states that 'PR is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics' (PRISA, 2012).

It is important to note that some authors use terminology such as 'corporate communication' to refer to PR. In this study, PR and corporate communication will be used interchangeably. The reason for this is that, these two terms are the most commonly used in Cape Town today. It is the researcher's view that they are used without there being a significant difference between them.

1 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Ethics and ethical communication have become so strategically important to public relations that public relations scholars and practitioners can no longer afford to ignore it (Rossouw, 2004:33).

1.1 Introduction

The public relations (PR) profession has been dogged by several corporate scandals since its inception. Consequently, ethical practice has become a major concern to many PR scholars, as well as practitioners (Pratt, 1993; Lieber, 2003; Harrison & Galloway, 2005; Bowen, 2007; Doorley & Garcia, 2007; Fawkes, 2012; Culbertson & Ni Chen, 2013). Although scholars such as Doorley & Garcia (2007:30) claim 'Ethical scandals such as Enron and the Citizens for a Free Kuwait debacle, are largely aberrations', these debacles have not only degraded the credibility, value and image of the profession, but have discredited the profession in society (White & Park, 2010:319). These scandals have sparked debate on the role of PR in society and tasked PR scholars and practitioners to answer questions concerning their professional ethics (Lieber, 2003:2).

The debate around PR professional ethics has resulted in two further, conflicting debates: on one side of the debate are PR scholars who tend to ignore the criticism directed at PR, concentrating instead on the positive role that PR makes to society (White & Dozier, 1992; Grunig, 2001; Gregory, 2004; Fawkes, 2007; leRoux, 2014). On the other side of the debate are critics who argue that PR practice is synonymous with distorting arguments or debates about issues vital to the public interest (Stauber & Rampton, 1995; Chomsky, 2002; Miller, 2004). The negative phrases used by these critics include 'propaganda', 'persuasion', 'spin' and 'damage control'. The above-mentioned phrases suggest that scholars and the general public view PR practice as a profession that seeks to mislead the audience or hide the truth while advancing a company's agenda (Doorley & Garcia, 2007; White & Park, 2010).

The debate on professional ethics in PR is not just a global one. Within Africa, the profession is largely viewed in the same light. Niemann-Struwega & Meintjes (2008:224) note that the views proffered in the literature on ethics in PR in Africa, combined with opinion pieces and the few empirical studies in the academic literature, suggest instances of public manipulation and unethical practice among PR practitioners. This statement is supported by Rensburg (2002:18) who argues that PR in Africa is characterised by 'manipulating the audience' to agree with the views of an organisation. Studies conducted in South Africa have shown that PR practitioners experience the same frustration that their counterparts in other countries experience (Venter, 2010: 281-284).

In light of the negative perceptions of the profession, PR practitioners have been trying to change this negative image by introducing a code of ethics to foster ethical behaviour and a new moral image (Stevens, 1999:113; leRoux, 2014:194). PR professional bodies such as the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA), the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), and the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) have made efforts to introduce ethical standards and guidelines by establishing codes of ethics among their members. PR professional bodies stress the importance of ethics codes and have mandated that official codes of ethics serve as guidelines for PR practice (Ki & Kim, 2009:223).

Despite the introduction of ethical codes in PR practice, criticism directed at the profession has not abated. Scholars such as Ki & Kim (2010) and Wright (1993) have questioned the usefulness of the codes of ethics. These scholars argue that ethical codes are created with the intention of promoting an ethical appearance rather than actually preventing unethical behaviour. This view is supported by Fawkes (2007:319) who asserts that ethical codes provide nothing of real help to the novice PR practitioner, who prefers to rely on codes of ethics for guidance. On the other hand, some scholars argue that the greatest weakness of ethical codes is that they are not enforceable. Given that the majority of PR practitioners are not members of professional bodies and that membership of professional bodies is not mandatory for one to practise as a PR practitioner, a code of ethics has been ineffective (Ki & Kim, 2010:365).

In view of the arguments raised above, it is clear that interventions proposed by professional bodies to foster ethical behaviour through codes of ethics, have not been a panacea to ethical practice. Consequently, PR and communication scholars have begun to argue that more is needed to create an ethical profession (Stevens, 1999:113). One of the key areas scholars and practitioners have singled out is the need to revise ethical codes to enable them to engage more fully with communication practice. The need for communication that is sensitive to cultural values and beliefs and engages in truthful, accurate, and fair communication has been identified (Doorley & Garcia, 2007:36). Some PR scholars suggest the need for ethical communication to foster healthy PR practice (Anderson, 1992; Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Huang, 2004).

Despite consensus on the need for more ethical communication in PR practice, ethical communication is conceptualised differently by PR scholars at different moments in history and possibly in practice too. Kent & Taylor (2002:23) note that PR theories and concepts have emerged to try and conceptualise ethical communication. In the early conceptualisation of ethical communication, it was seen to be synonymous with dialogic and symmetrical

communication; that is ethical communication was viewed as counter-argument in bilateral communication (Pearson, 1989; Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Dozier *et al.*, 1995; Leeper, 1996; Hung, 2001; Edgett, 2002; Huang, 2004). However, contemporary scholarly debate on ethical communication criticises this early paradigm, and loosely refers to ethical communication as engaging in communication that is truthful, accurate, and fair and behaviors that are intrinsic to the process of shaping public opinion by means of communication (Makau, 1991; Kent & Taylor, 2002; Bowen, 2007; Doorley & Garcia, 2007; Parsons, 2008). Ethical communication in contemporary paradigms is, therefore, viewed through the principles informing practice. According to Bowen (2007:1), ethical communication should be based on values such as honesty, openness, loyalty, fair-mindedness, respect, integrity, and forthright communication. The general understanding in this paradigm is that ethical communication shifts from counter-arguing to a broader conceptualisation underpinned by principles informing the practice.

In as much as ethical communication is deemed critical, it has been criticised by scholars such as Rensburg & Cant (2009:261) for going too far in requiring PR practitioners to meet the needs of the public. They argue that ethical communication is not completely altruistic because apologists seek to defend the interests of their employers. They argue that organisations most often set the rules and hold the power to establish the operating principles. Another criticism levelled against ethical communication is that it only prescribes what organisations and PR practitioners ought to do without representing how it will be practised. Some critics argue that this approach raises the problem of connecting practitioner's personal values to those for whom he/she works. Likewise, critics have pointed out that there are few possibilities for PR practitioners to practise ethical communication given their role as organisation advocates (Huang, 2004:334).

However, despite extensive debate on ethics and ethical communication, the fields of ethics, dialogue, ethical communication, symmetrical and asymmetrical communication in PR have all been extensively researched and studied but usually without providing a coherent or holistic conceptualisation of ethical communication or the principles informing practice. What has been missing from discussions of ethical communication in PR, and communication literature until now has been how ethical communication is conceptualised and practised by PR practitioners and professional bodies: and, additionally, how ethical communication principles are applied in practice as well as the challenges practitioners face in their day-to-day work in attempting to communicate ethically. In this light, this study of ethical communication in the professional practice of PR in Cape Town seeks to fill this gap and ensure that professions all understand the clear meaning and principles of ethical communication.

1.2 Problem statement

Ethical communication in PR has developed into a topic that can no longer be ignored because of its impact on the profession's legitimacy and credibility. A survey of literature on ethical communication in PR shows that two schools of thought have emerged: each attempts to conceptualise ethical communication. The first school, which signifies an early break from discredited one-way publicity communication in PR, conceptualises ethical communication as dialogic and symmetrical (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Anderson, 1992; Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Huang, 1994; Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002; Huang, 2004; Bowen, 2005; Porter, 2010; Brannigan, 2012). It views ethical communication as characterised by counter-argument. However, contemporary scholarly debate on ethical communication criticises this early school for presenting an inadequate concept of ethical communication. The emerging critique of ethical communication re-moors dialogic/ethical communication to a broader conceptualisation underpinned by principles such as honesty, openness, loyalty, fair-mindedness, truthfulness, accuracy, integrity, respect and fair communication (Makau, 1991; Feiedman, 2001; Edgett, 2002; Kent & Taylor, 2002; Bowen, 2007; Doorley & Garcia, 2007; Parsons, 2008; Makau, 2009; Chepkemei, *et al.*2012; Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012). These two conceptualisations of ethical communication reflect the lack of consensus within both PR scholarship and practice. Therefore, PR practitioners seem to be torn between these two approaches to ethical communication. As Gordon (1997:57) observed, 'definitions play crucial roles both in societal processes and in the minds of those who study and practice PR'. In light of this dichotomy, this study seeks to understand how PR practitioners and professional bodies conceive of ethical communication in South Africa, particularly in Cape Town. It investigates how PR practitioners and professional bodies conceptualise ethical communication from the 'early simplistic' paradigm to the contemporary paradigm premised on honesty, openness, loyalty, fair-mindedness, respect and fair communication.

In view of this context and debate, the research objectives are as follows:

1.3 Research objectives

1.3.1 Primary objective

The study sought to investigate how ethical communication is conceptualised and practised by PR practitioners and professional bodies in Cape Town.

1.3.2 Secondary objective

This study sought to investigate PR practitioners and professional bodies in Cape Town in order to understand the challenges practitioners face in their attempts to communicate ethically.

1.4 Research questions

The researcher seeks to reach the objectives by answering these questions:

- What is ethical communication?
- How do PR practitioners and professional bodies conceptualise ethical communication?
- How do professional bodies foster ethical communication?
- Do PR practitioners in Cape Town communicate ethically with their publics?
- What challenges do PR practitioners face in their effort to communicate ethically?

1.5 Significance of the study

Ethical communication is fundamental to PR practice: particularly at a time when the PR profession is re-examining its codes of practice in order to improve its reputation and re-assert the legitimacy of the profession. Some professional bodies, such as PRISA, have made this upgrading a priority and state that their number one mission is to build the PR profession. Thus, the issue of ethical communication needs to be extensively researched and studied since it is relevant to the nature of ethical problems that PR practitioners face in their day-to-day practice. This study is a timely one: it seeks to analyse ethical communication in the professional practice of PR in Cape Town. From the literature, it is estimated that there are currently about 300 PR and related consultancies in South Africa. The majority of them are situated in Cape Town (Niemann-Struwega & Meintjes, 2008:225). The outcome of this study will contribute both to PR scholarship and practice.

This research contributes to ethical values and allows practitioners an understanding of ethical communication and how it might actually be applied in day-to-day practice. Therefore, this study seeks to make the nature of ethical communication more transparent and accessible to practitioners interested in building relations with publics. It provides a critical evaluation of the concept and practice of mainstream PR.

Research on ethical communication in the South African context is almost non-existent. This study will greatly add to this field of knowledge by contributing to ongoing research into

ethical PR research, and it will increase scholars' and practitioners' understanding of the principles and practice of ethical communication in PR.

The results of this study make a theoretical contribution towards ethical communication in PR firms in South Africa. The study invokes critical self-reflection on the part of practitioners; something which could conceivably lead to changes in how they practise communication in their firms.

1.6 Delineation of the study

This study focuses on the conceptualisation and practice of ethical communication in the professional practice of PR in Cape Town. As such, the study will not deal extensively with organisations whose mandate is outside that of PR. The results of this study should be viewed with caution before considering them as a benchmark for the PR industry as a whole and/or a comparison to other vocations. It is expected, however, that the results of this research could lead to the implementation of the model in a variety of industries, and in a number of countries.

1.7 Definition of terms and concepts

The following words or acronyms may have different connotations in various disciplines. For the purposes of clarity the following concepts need to be defined.

- **Codes of Ethics:** A Code of ethics is a document or agreement that stipulates morally acceptable behaviour within an organisation. It defines the moral standards or guidelines that need to be respected by all members of an organisation in their decisions and actions (Rossouw & Vuuren 2004:216).
- **Ethics:** By dictionary definition, ethics are concerned with conduct that is right or wrong, according to accepted standards or principles. This definition is supported by Dellaportas *et al.*, (2005: 5), who state that ethics 'Is a concept that signifies how we act in order to make the right choice, and produce good behaviour'. They argue that ethics include rules and action; individuals and society. From this line of argument, it is clear that ethics by their nature involve society and the individual. Today, ethics have become hot topics for almost every organisation. In South Africa, the King Report (2006:2) stresses the importance of ethics: 'How the practitioners govern the various entities to which they are a party was brought to the highways of their minds in the last two decades of the twentieth century'.

- **King Report:** South Africa's principal corporate governance report formally introduced by the Institute of Directors in South Africa (IoDSA). The code and report were unveiled at the Sandton Convention Centre in Sandton, Johannesburg, in September 2009. The code consists of the three key elements of leadership, sustainability and good corporate citizenship. The report aspires to an 'inclusive' approach to corporate governance, in which companies are clearly advised to consider the interests of a variety of stakeholders (West, 2006:433).
- **Stockholm Accord:** The Global Alliance (GA) approved the Stockholm Accords at its 2010 Stockholm World PR forum. The Stockholm Accords reflect the importance of PR and Communication Management in contemporary society. The 'Accords' document provides practitioners with a framework that can be presented within their organisations and beyond, highlighting what they do, or what they should be empowered to do, as a significant contribution to organisational success (Skoogh, *et al.*, 2010:22).

1.8 Brief chapter overviews

The study adopts the following structure:

Chapter One: Introduction and background to the study

This chapter describes and discusses the background to the study, outlining the context of the study as well as the research problem, objectives, questions, significance and delimitations of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature review

This chapter provides an extensive review of relevant literature within the fields of ethics, ethical communication, dialogue and symmetrical communication in PR. It brings to the fore theoretical debates about the relations between ethics/ethical communication and dialogue/symmetrical communication, and highlights oscillations in the conceptualisation of ethical communication among PR and communication researchers. It explores debates on its historical perspective as well as debates on ethical communication on the African continent with particular focus on South Africa. This chapter presents the PR professional bodies' view of ethical communication in the three distinct conceptual aspects: teleology, disclosure, and social responsibility highlighted by Huang (2004). The chapter goes further to conceptualise the relations between PR practitioners and the public, followed by an overview of ethical communication principles in PR practice.

Chapter Three: Conceptual framework of the study

The chapter discusses the conceptual framework upon which this study grounded. The reflective paradigm of PR, its dialogic and symmetrical approach are foundational for PR practitioners and professional bodies and ethical communication. It deals with advocacy and asymmetrical theories on the practice of PR, which encompass both early and contemporary scholarly views of ethical communication. The excellence, narrative and codes, procedures and standards approach will be introduced to portray how PR practitioners in Cape Town communicate with their publics.

Chapter Four: Research methodology and methods

This chapter discusses the research methodology and methods used in the study. It elucidates the choice of qualitative research methodology and what influenced the study to adopt qualitative research, as opposed to a quantitative research. This chapter discusses the study's research method, sampling procedures, sample size, ethical considerations, data collection, editing, analysis and interpretation.

Chapter Five: Data presentation, analysis and discussion of findings

This chapter presents the discussion and analysis of data conducted among PR practitioners and professional bodies. The chapter relates the findings to the literature review and the conceptual framework in order to understand how ethical communication is conceptualised and practised by PR practitioners and professional bodies in Cape Town.

Chapter Six: Overall conclusions and recommendations

This chapter discusses the conclusions and recommendations of the study's findings and critically evaluates ethical communication in PR according to PR practitioners and professional bodies in Cape Town. This assessment is based on the themes of a qualitative research framework as well as the literature review findings. All crucial issues identified in the study will be integrated and discussed, highlighting points where more research is needed. This is followed by some recommendations as well as the future direction of ethical communication in PR.

2 CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Those who conduct research belong to a community of scholars, each of whom has journeyed into the unknown to bring back an insight, a truth, a point of light. What they have recorded of their journeys and findings will make it easier to explore the unknown: to help other researchers also discover an insight, a truth, or a point of light (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:64).

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to review the existing scholarship or available body of knowledge on ethics and ethical communication in PR. Relevant literature was obtained from a variety of disciplines: PR, communication ethics, business ethics, business media, psychology and management.

Literature was demarcated according to identified themes related to the research problem, which is to investigate PR practitioners and professional bodies' understanding of ethical communication in Cape Town. The aim is to provide insight into the research problem, and how this study can possibly achieve its research aims and objectives.

The review begins by examining the state of ethics in PR to lay the groundwork for the formal conceptualisation of ethical communication. The chapter defines ethical communication approaches by way of highlighting historical perspectives as well as concerns and debates on ethical communication in PR on the African continent, with specific reference to South Africa. Debates around oscillations in the conceptualisation of ethical communication are explored. An attempt is made to provide insight into elements of ethical communication and professional values in fostering ethical communication. The chapter ends by exploring criticism of ethical communication in PR.

2.2 The state of ethics in public relations

Most studies of PR practice state clearly: 'Unethical behaviour of PR practitioners degrades the credibility, value and image of the profession' (Lieber, 2003; Harrison & Galloway, 2005; Bowen, 2007; Bowen, 2009; Lee, 2011). Parsons (2008: xiii) notes, 'If there is one question that haunts the PR image, it is the question of its practitioners' unethical behaviour'. Although ethics encompass good as well as bad and right as well as wrong, much of what comes under the rubric of PR professional ethics emphasises only the negative: the bad and the wrong (Ferre, 1993). However, certain practitioners' unethical behaviour has attracted

considerable criticism in the professional practice of PR with some critics describing it as 'deceptive communication' (Harrison & Galloway, 2005:1).

Critics of PR professional ethics stress that the entire area of PR is unethical, and use phrases such as 'lying', 'spin-doctoring', 'espionage' and 'propaganda' to suggest that the profession is misleading and deceptive (Doorley & Garcia, 2007:38-39). This statement concurs with the view of Stauber & Rampton (1995:1-2) that John Hill and other pre-World War 1 practitioners were successful in the field of PR because of their misleading and deceptive communication. Some critics use an even starker image for the area of PR professional ethics. Parsons (2008:4) quotes Nelson (1989) who states, that PR function with a 'grey eminence'. Thus Nelson claims 'The power of a PR firm is demonstrated by its... remarkable ability to function as a virtually invisible 'grey eminence' behind the scenes, gliding in and out of troubled situations'.

It is clear that these authors are not alone in their criticism of the PR profession. A number of PR scholars and practitioners acknowledge the profession's unethical behaviour. Steyn & Puth (2000:3) state: 'the PR profession has developed a bad name for itself', while Davies, *et al.*, (2003:33) agree that 'the traditional image of PR itself could do with some improvement'. Bowen (2007:2) mentions that the actions of some PR firms themselves have diminished the credibility of the profession in society (White & Park, 2010:319). Bowen (2007) claims, 'Unethical behaviour of PR practitioners contributes to the identity and ethical communication crises the profession is facing'.

The themes that consistently arise in the critique of PR professional ethics are 'propaganda' and 'persuasion'. Fawkes (2007:16) points out that PR critics Stauber & Rampton (1994), for example, believe that PR activities such as propaganda and persuasion are inherently corrupt; used to 'spin' the news and mislead the general public while advancing a company's agenda. Doorley & Garcia (2007:41) concur that the PR tools used to communicate, especially propaganda and persuasion, are somewhat sinister and misleading. Fawkes (2007) concludes that the critics are not interested in the development of PR professional ethics: they want to expose rather than reform. As such, one can draw the conclusion that much of the criticism seems to blend critique of the PR professional ethics with criticism of PR's reliance on its work activities (Doorley & Garcia, 2007:40) as described by these critics (Stauber & Rampton, 1995) in particular integration of voice, spin, and slants to the packaging of information (Bowen, 2009:403). Therefore, the next review concentrates on the evolution of PR ethics and its involvement in creation of ethical communication in PR.

2.3 Evolution of ethics in public relations

Early PR practice presented many ethical concerns because of its roots in the press agency approach. According to Gitter (1981:35) for more than half a century, the general public seems to have answered that the activities of PR are synonymous with those of a 'press agent'. However, during the period of the press agent, PR was regarded as a profession that lacked truth; the press agent aimed solely at attaining favorable publicity for an organisation in the mass media, often in a misleading way (Grunig, 1993:143). Bowen (2007: 2) supports Grunig (1993) by arguing that press agents were concerned with generating publicity at almost any cost, and thus, engendered the unethical reputation of modern-day PR. Edward Bernays, the so-called 'father of PR', called this period 'the public be damned era' (Curlip, *et al.*, 2006). 'The-public-be-fooled' posture was maintained until the early 1900s when, because of public pressure on PR firms, 'the-public-be-informed' attitude evolved, which was characterised as an era of ethics or ethical accountability (Gitter, 1981:36).

Despite the blemishes that the history of 'press agents' imposed on the reputation of modern-day PR, it ushered in the era of publicity. During this period, Ivy Lee (1905) published '*A Declaration of Principles*' and promoted the proposition that PR is a 'two-way street', which Russell & Bishop (2009:91) called the 'starting point of modern PR ethics'. Gitter (1981:36) argues that 'Lee's publicity recognised the relationship between an organisation and the public'. He recognised that attitudes towards organisations depend on what organisations do, as well as what they say, and that publicity alone cannot change an organisation's 'negative image'. The role of the PR practitioners, Lee believed, was to advise organisations on policies to follow to gain public goodwill by telling the truth and communicating ethically (Bowen, 2007). During this stage, practitioners began to debate issues of ethics and professionalism, and argued for more prestige for the field.

Apart from Ivy Lee, John W. Hill is another early PR practitioner who saw PR as more than press agency, and felt that it had a critical role to play incorporating planning and decision-making. According to King (1994:103), Hill considered PR as having a strong ethical dimension. He further adds that Hill uses mass communication to influence opinions through publicity. Bowen (2007) argues that Hill's grasp of the interaction between ethics, issues management, and 'far-reaching effects of corporate policy' made him one of the most successful practitioners of his time (Hill, 1958:16). John W. Hill was a progenitor of what scholars of PR described as the 'corporate conscience' (Ryan & Martinson, 1983: 22 in Bowen, 2007).

The early 1960s perceived PR activities as a corruption of the public information system (Grunig, 1993:143). However, in this same period PR practitioners rose to a higher level of

accountability; their communication functions corresponded with the creation of more open, ethical communication and socially responsible forms of PR (Bowen, 2007:3). PR practitioners began to guide executives on ethical matters, helping ethics officers to develop ethics communication policies (Neimark, 1995:83; Brown, 2007). Ethical communication notions began to emerge through public information and symmetrical models. Symmetrical communication is one of the four conceptualised PR models: publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical. It began to incorporate the desires of PR practitioners to communicate more ethically with the publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; van Ruler, 2004; Bowen, 2007).

In essence, even though the history of PR ethics was not favourable to PR reputation, the context and debate shows that attention was given to PR professional ethics. It shows that the PR profession is restoring its credibility and legitimacy through public information, symmetrical and ethical communication. It is clear, however, from the above discussions, that PR professional ethics contributed both to development and models of ethical communication in PR (a view supported by Hunt & Grunig, 1994:8).

2.4 Ethical communication models

The theory of ethical communication is frequently described in terms of two apparently opposing PR models: the asymmetrical and symmetrical models. The differences between these two models can be traced back to the work of Plato, Aristotle and Socrates. According to Brannigan (2012:509), ethical communication has historic roots in rhetoric and argumentation analysis as developed by Aristotle, Plato and Socrates. Aristotle and Plato favoured asymmetrical rhetoric, whereas Socrates favoured a symmetrical rhetoric. The rhetorical approach developed by Aristotle reflects a communicative style that seeks to affect another's judgment and choice. Although Plato obviously never used the term 'PR' he had a deep awareness of the importance of public opinion, and of the methods and proper uses of persuasion (Rensburg & Cant, 2009:256). His communication strategy used for public opinion was based mainly on persuasion, whereas Socratic rhetoric is characterised by a quest for symmetry and the common good; incorporation of boundary spanning; a moral foundation; and ties to a comprehensive system of education (Marsh, 2003:351).

However, the Socratic critics of Aristotle and Plato's adversarial or advocacy rhetoric lead to devolvement of ethical communication models. As Marsh (2003) has noted, the rhetorical philosophy that Socrates poured into his essays was assuredly symmetrical. In his book, '*On the Peace*', he tells the Athenian elite, "You ought to be as much concerned about the business of the commonwealth as your own" (Marsh, 2008: 238). His focus was purely on symmetry, which aimed to build a mutual relationship, where both parties win. Rensburg &

Cant (2009:258) believed that Socrates created a moral, symmetrical rhetoric that proved to be more effective, now and throughout history, than its asymmetrical rivals in classical Greece.

The triumph of Socratic rhetoric over competing asymmetrical models in Athens of the fourth century B.C. supports modern studies that indicate the comparative effectiveness of the two-way symmetrical model of PR (Rensburg & Cant, 2009:258). A number of studies supported what Socrates demonstrated two millennia later by arguing that two-way symmetrical PR with its idealistic social role is the most effective approach of ethical communication in PR practice (Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Marsh, 2003; Brown, 2006; Doorley & Garcia, 2007; Marsh, 2008; Rensburg & Cant, 2009; Brannigan, 2012;).

Within the two-way symmetrical model, PR use research and communication to manage and improve understanding with strategic publics (Wilcox *et al.*, 2001:43; Culbertson & Ni Chen, 2013:4). Grunig & Grunig (1992) acknowledge the symmetrical model as a 'normative model of PR practice' and define it as 'a mechanism by which organisations and publics interact to manage interdependence for the benefit of all'. That is, both the organisation and the public listen to each other to come up with an agreement. Some scholars, however, regard the symmetrical mode as a total accommodation of public's interests which sacrifices the organisation's self-interest in the process (Rensburg & Cant, 2009:261). In opposing this criticism, Steyn (Uncompleted) quoted Grunig (1999), who noted, 'Organisations do not have to throw away their self-interest in practising this approach' because each side meets the other half way in order to come up with an amicable solution. Hence, giving in to the interests of the public would be as unbalanced as promoting the organisation's self-interest (Steyn, Uncompleted).

In contrast, the two-way asymmetrical model involves use of research to develop messages that are likely to persuade strategic publics to behave as the organisation wants (Wilcox *et al.*, 2001:43). This approach is not ethical because the organisation that uses it believes it is right and that any change needs to resolve an issue must come from the public and not from the organisation (Hunt & Grunig, 1994:10). As such, ethical communication scholars regard asymmetrical models not only as ethically weak but also as unable to recognise the interdependence between organisations and their publics (Podnar & Golob, 2009).

The asymmetrical model is synonymous with the press agentry and public information models. These two models consist of basic communication strategies derived from communication theory and rooted in ethical communication described in PR. These two approaches are unilateral models that treat PR as the dissemination of information and no more. Newson, *et al.*, (2000:18) state, 'the press agentry model shows the first historical

stage of ethics/ ethical communication in PR', although the aim is to publicise the organisation in any way possible. The information model is similar to the press agency, and describes the way an organisation uses PR practitioners to disseminate relatively objective information through the mass media (Newsom *et al.*, 2000:18). Both the press agency and public information are one-way models of communication in PR. They use communication programmes that are not based on research and strategic planning. These approaches are asymmetrical in nature; they use communication to change the behaviour of publics, but not of the organisation (Hunt & Grunig, 1994:8; Culbertson & Ni Chen, 2013:4).

Besides the asymmetrical and symmetrical ethical communication models, Maku (2009:1) outlined in her study '*Exploring the relationship of communication ethics*', scholars have identified other models for the conceptualisation of ethical communication. As Maku (2009) and Bracci & Christians (2002) point out, 'some scholars conceptualised ethical communication based on intentions, others on means, and still others on consequences'. Maku, in particular, argued that some scholars focus ethical communication primarily on duties, obligations, rights and responsibilities while others emphasize the importance of dispositional personalities and related abilities. Some scholars focus on narrative, while others feature reason and argument. Still others integrate both models with the conceptualisation of ethical communication (Maku, 2009:1).

2.5 Conceptualising ethical communication

Ethical communication as a concept has been conceptualised differently by scholars in a variety of disciplines: philosophy, communication ethics and PR. In the field of philosophy, scholars have long considered ethical communication to be part of ethical thinking which connects professional communicators (Arneson, 2007:xiii). Arneson believes that the concept of ethical thinking is central to the development of ethical communication among professional communicators. deBakker (2007:121) expands this definition to include communicating or discussing the contents of pronouncements. deBakker (2007) views ethical communication as an exchange of moral beliefs and convictions. The crucial assumption is to understand the perspective of the other person or party. More cynically, deBakker (2007:121) argues that ethical communication involves normative judgments, featured by appeals to general consent which in this regard differ from expressions of taste. That is, it evokes feelings of shame and pride, concerns both actions and attitudes, and involves issues where communicator's interests are at stake.

Arneson (2007:Xiii) believes that ethical communication is not only about one's right to free speech and the responsibility one holds toward others in communication, but rather that it is concerned more with one's character and one's conduct. Character reflects human vices and

virtues, whereas conduct addresses the basic ethical communication principles used to guide and evaluate behaviour (Arneson (2007:xiii). According to this view ethical communication is a rational guide when one is communicating with others. Implicit within this field of philosophy is a belief that the orientation that professional communicators hold towards publics in interactions influences the quality of communication, and ultimately, the development of ethical communication.

Ethical communication falls within study of communication ethics. According to Arnett, *et al.*, (2009:25), 'Ethical communication is positions that protect and promote a given good that one 'ought' to put into practice if one hopes to work within a given communication ethics'. Arnett, *et al.*, (2009) believe that when a professional communicator seeks to protect and promote a given good, the beginning ground for ethical communication takes shape. Practising communication out of the need to protect a given good places one within the ethical communication domain.

The field of communication ethics reflects the concept of ethical communication as a framework for telling the truth and fulfilling responsibility. Brannigan (2012:508), drawing on the numerous themes in communication ethics, identified three prominent characteristics of ethical communication: the quest for veracity, the tension between freedom and responsibility, and the relation between ends and means. Brannigan further argues that ethical communication habitually addresses the tension between rights and obligations, freedom and responsibility, and that the relation between ends and means is especially pertinent when communicating with organisations or publics. He further posits, 'for practitioners to communicate ethically with organisations or publics good judgment is required' (Brannigan, 2012:508).

In PR, ethical communication is a complex, contested concept and practice. It is conceptualised differently by PR scholars at different moments in history. Ethical communication in PR is conceptualised in the following time sequence: early scholars view conceptualising ethical communication within a dialogic and symmetrical communication (Bivins, 1987:195 – 200; Grunig & Grunig, 1992:40; Hung, 2001:267 Huang, 2004:333). Contemporary scholars view ethical communication underpinned by dialogic principles such as truthfulness, honesty, accuracy, propinquity, empathy, commitment (Bowen, 2007:1; Doorley & Garcia, 2007:38; Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012:10) and followed by Makau's (2009:2) elements of ethical communication: choice and responsibility.

2.5.1 Ethical communication and dialogue

Dialogue can perhaps best be understood by juxtaposing it with monologue. According to Kent & Taylor (2002: 24) some PR scholars have described dialogue as more moral than a monological 'manipulative', mode of communication. Brannigan (2012:513) holds that monologue suppresses ethical communications because the 'conversation' is fundamentally one-way: whereas dialogue encourages ethical communication because it focuses on relationships and strives for mutuality (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012:9). Dialogue short – cuts ethical communication: it has its roots in the work of Martin Buber (Kent & Taylor, 2002:22) who suggested that dialogue involves engaging in a mutual relationship, seeing others as partners in a process (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012; Paquette *et al.*,2014) and not just as a means to achieving a goal. This is referred to as the 'I-thou' relation, as opposed to the 'I-it' relation (Brannigan, 2012: 513).

The 'I-thou' relation, as opposed to the 'I-it' relation approach, is fully encapsulated in Brannigan's (2012:513) work:

Buber centers his philosophy of encounter around the need to develop an I-Thou relationship with the other rather than one of I-It, which is strictly monologic. I-It views the other as an object, and interaction with other is manipulative. The other is viewed as a thing; a means to my own end. Ethical communication cannot occur, and I cannot grow as a person in this self-centered way. As self-absorbing, the I-It relation tends to be manipulative, deceptive, artificial, opportunistic, and exploitative. Self-absorption leads to inauthenticity, or bad faith, and is evident when my encounter with the other only concerns me in terms of how I think other think of me (Brannigan2012:513).

Ethical communication can occur only through dialogue in the manner suggested above. However, early PR and communication scholars have emphasised dialogue as an avenue to ethical communication (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Arneson, 2007; Brannigan, 2012; Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012). Arneson (2007:144) expands on this view and posits that ethical communication becomes an effort of communication through dialogic engagement of the other, in this case publics. As Grunig & White (1992:57) and Kent & Taylor (2002: 22) suggest, PR might, 'For example, set up a dialogue between tobacco companies, smokers, and anti-smoking groups. Hence, described dialogue as communicating about issues with publics'. The fact that ethical communication can occur within dialogue exhibits full awareness and genuine recognition of the publics as a subject, not an object or a means.

The Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas is a major influential scholar in PR and communication ethics. His idea of engagement; that is, having accurate and open communication with the others, supports dialogue as ethical communication (Brannigan, 2012: 513). According to Christians (2004:241) Levinas's interaction between the self and the other makes peace normative. Christians & Merrill (2009: 201) concur that Levinas's project entails understanding of communicative life that suggests 'modern practitioners to fix understanding of what it means to be at home with others'. Christians & Merrill (2009) further add 'Levinas's view maintains that modern practitioners (in this case, PR) should commit to ethical communication through dialogic communication with the publics'.

In conclusion, Pearson provided a model for ethical communication in PR practice where the focal concept for ethical communication decision-making is based on dialogue and symmetrical communication (Sharpe, 2000:348). His model defined a process for ethical communication based on dialogue and pointed out the dangers of PR practice lapsing into monologue (Kent & Taylor, 2002:23) or not involving reciprocal engagement and mutual openness to other perspectives (Brannigan, 2012:513). His model supports Levinas and Buber's view that ethical communication cannot be achieved until the PR profession reaches a level of open, dialogic, reciprocal engagement and mutual openness with other perspectives. The dialogic lineage of Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas's and R. Pearson enable early PR and communicators to endorse dialogue together with symmetrical communication as the apex of ethical communication.

2.5.2 Ethical communication and symmetrical communication

While there is a contribution of dialogue and symmetrical communication in the field of PR (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:11; Anderson, 1992; Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Huang, 1994; Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002; Huang, 2004) scholars writing in that tradition have suggested that ethical communication and symmetrical communication often coexist (Grunig, & Dozier, 2002; Huang, 2004; Porter, 2010). Huang (2004:336), in particular, has argued that to attempt to distinguish symmetrical communication from ethical communication has proven to be unsuccessful. Porter (2010:128) has acknowledged the domination of symmetrical communication and explained how it has now become the 'heart' of ethical communication in the field of PR. Bowen (2005:198) believes that symmetrical communication is when practitioners communicate ethically to bring about symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes, and behaviours of both their organisations and publics.

The symmetrical - ethical communication view was developed by Grunig (1984) who identified four models of PR practice. These included the publicity model rooted in seeking favourable publicity for an organisation, the public information model persuading PR as the

dissemination of information, the asymmetrical model which attempts to presenting publics to behave as the organisation wants, and the symmetrical model featuring PR uses of communication to manage and improve understanding with strategic publics. Grunig & Dozier (2002) argued that symmetrical communication is inherently more ethical than other approaches because it is based on dialogue; that is, open, fair and honest communication, thereby supporting symmetrical communication as ethical communication.

Sharpe (2000:348) argues that the practice of PR has traditionally been guided by a single mindset: one-way communication. Such a mindset has defined PR as the use of communication to manipulate public for the benefits of organisations (Grunig & White, 1992; Sharpe, 2000). Symmetrical communication calls for a different set of presuppositions. Grunig & White (1992) state that, instead of persuasion or manipulation, the presupposition for the symmetrical model is that communication leads to 'understanding and mutual relationship between organisation and its publics' (Sharpe, 2000:348). Supporting the effort of symmetrical communication in relationship building, Wilson (1994b:138) concludes 'Now, more than ever, the emphasis in PR is on relationship building - ethical communication' (Mersham, Skinner & Rensburg, 1995:15). These scholars thus link symmetrical communication with ethical communication, a link that views ethical communication as characterised by counter-arguing communication.

Contemporary scholarly debate on ethical communication in PR literature criticised these early ethical communication paradigms as being too broad and failed to clarify principles that underpin ethical communication. Emerging criticisms of ethical communication move the discussion from counter-arguing to a broader conceptualisation underpinned by dialogic principles. New interpretations foreground and extend dialogue to include key principles such as integrity, openness, loyalty, fair-mindedness, respect and fair communication (Bowen, 2007:1; Doorley & Garcia, 2007:38).

2.5.3 Contemporary scholarly view of ethical communication

Contemporary scholarly debate on ethical communication raises the quality of PR practitioner's ethical behaviour by presenting a new moral image, increasing PR value to society and eradicating PR activities that mislead confuse or disrupt public debates (Doorley & Garcia, 2007:36). The role of ethical communication in contemporary PR provides a means through which practitioners engage in communication that is not only legal, but sensitive to cultural values and beliefs (Doorley & Garcia, 2007:36). It is clear that ethical communication requires truthfulness, fairness, responsibility, personal integrity, and respect for self and others. Thus, contemporary scholars describe and conceptualise ethical communication as

follows: truthfulness, honesty, accuracy, propinquity, empathy, commitment, and together with Makau, (2009:2) choice and responsibility.

2.5.3.1 Truthfulness

Truthfulness is a keystone of ethical communication in PR. As a dialogic principle, it is a beginning and constitutes one of the fundamental assumptions about behaving and communicating ethically (Parsons, 2008:19). Truthfulness is closely related to pursuits of truth (Makau, 2009:4). In the perspective of discourse ethics, Christians & Traber (1997:60) consider truthfulness to occur when PR practitioners not only communicate to publics the contents that are asserted to be true, but practitioners assume and communicate a posture toward themselves. Truthfulness in this context is not about the capacity to know or disseminate definitive truths. It is, rather, a reflection of one's integrity (Makau, 2009:4). PR practitioners are truthful when they do not deceive others about their own intentions, interests, and claims (Christians & Traber, 1997:59). For example, PR practitioners who make every effort possible to confirm the truth of their statements before sharing their insights remain open to the possibility that they are wrong, convey only information and insights they sincerely believe to be true at the time of their representations and can be said to be speaking truthfully (Makau, 2009:4).

The principle of truthfulness implies that PR practitioners have responsibilities that speak to the greater good: whether they personally like it or not (Parsons, 2008:14). Parsons further adds 'Publics are sceptical of the truth of what is communicated to them, and PR practitioners really do not have a right to present them with more untruths or half-truths'. Following the PR professional bodies' codes of ethics standpoint, truthfulness is already an accepted practice. For example, the PRISA Code of Conduct states: 'Members agree to conduct themselves professionally, with truth, accuracy, fairness and responsibility to the public and towards colleagues and to an informed society'. Telling the truth, according to codes of ethics, is an important aspect that underpins ethical communication in PR practice. However, given the frailty of PR practice, truthfulness by itself is not sufficient to practise ethical communication.

2.5.3.2 Honesty

Being truthful is not always enough. It may be a good starting point to judge the ethical communication practice of PR profession but it falls short of fulfilling ethical communication responsibility. Honesty is one of the central principles of ethical communication. As Chepkemei, *et al* (2012:943) put it, 'A good PR practitioner will definitely engage in meaningful, open and honest communication which is the basic principle of ethical

communication'. This view resonates with what Sharpe (2000:350) believes when he observes Spinoza's (1975:132) claims of 'honesty' to be an essential principle for ethical communication. Sharpe (2000) believes that honesty is a social bias that is invariably based on the self-interest of the defining individual or social group. Culbertson (1983:65), however, believes that honesty requires telling what one believes to be true on the basis of careful checking. These scholars believe that honesty is a key principle of ethical communication.

The importance of honesty in *Is Honesty an absolute PR value*, Newsom *et al.*, (2000:221) is quoted by El-Astal (Uncompleted): 'Dishonesty leads to lack of trust and cynicism - such as when media later discovers that a PR practitioner has told half-truths resulting in an inaccurate story; dishonesty is likely to be discovered, and no climate for credibility can be re-established; and dishonesty forces people to act differently from the way they would have behaved if given the truth'. In this, he is supported by Parsons (2008:16), who states 'Dishonesty among PR practitioners has reinforced the public image of PR as a less than ethical communication firm'. It is clear from their lines of argument that PR should by its very nature disengage from dishonesty.

Diverging from her previous argument, Parsons (2008:18) maintained that PR's true role is to develop mutually beneficial relations between organisations and their publics whose foundation is honesty – the only true principle for ethical communication practice. She further adds that PR practitioners need to be more vigilant than others; that ethical communication should not only be honest, but perceived to be honest as well. Friedman (2001) acknowledges honesty as a core principle of PR: success in PR demands strict intellectual honesty and honesty must be practised at all times in PR in order to maintain credibility (Kundu, Uncompleted:13). Taking this into consideration, it could be argued that honesty, as one of the pillars of ethical communication, is required by PR practitioners to maintain mutually beneficial relations between organisations and their publics.

2.5.3.3 Accuracy

Ethical communication means being truthful, honest and accurate: these qualities foster and maintain the integrity of ethical communication. Scholars investigating the overall accuracy in communication recognise accuracy as an essential principle for ethical communication. To Burgoon & White (2013, in Reis & Sprecher, 2009) accuracy encompasses how well communicators create verbal and nonverbal messages that are understood by others and how well messages are recognised, comprehended, recalled and interpreted. Edgett (2002:21) refers to accuracy: as when practitioners acknowledge each other's orientation. In acknowledging the importance of accuracy, Edgett (2002) quotes Susskind & Field (1996:38) who suggest a practical means for achieving high accuracy with six principles of 'mutual

gains communication’: acknowledge the concerns of the other side; encourage joint fact finding; offer contingent commitments to minimize ill-effects if they do occur (compensate knowable, unintended damage); accept responsibility, admit mistakes, and share power; act in a trustworthy fashion at all times and focus on building long-term relations. Such authors believe that these principles are aimed at building trust between communicating parties and involving all parties as equals in a debate (Edgett, 2002:22). These conceptualisations of accuracy describe ethical communication as a mutual gains communication that respects the unique needs and characteristics of individuals.

Ethical communication accuracy in public relations leads to highly beneficially mutual relations between organisations and their public. The PRISA’s code of ethics embodies this view when addressing relations between practitioner’s organisations and publics. PRISA call on its members to protect and advance the free flow of accurate and truthful information at all times.

2.5.3.4 Propinquity

Propinquity is one of the dialogic principles proposed to aid online dialogue; it advocates a type of ‘rhetorical exchange’ (Theunissen & Wan Noordini, 2011:10). At the most fundamental level, propinquity is a key to healthy relations. For PR, ethical communication propinquity means that organisations and publics are willing to consult each other in matters that affect them, and they are willing to do so in open, honest, loyal, fair-minded, respectful and forthright communication. The following are features of propinquity that underpin ethical communication: immediacy of presence, engagement and temporal flow (Kent & Taylor, 2002:26).

- **Immediacy of presence:** this feature suggests that communicating ethically is about the parties communicating issues which involve them in the present, not after decisions have been made. Immediacy of presence suggests that communication is undertaken in a shared place. In immediacy of presence, parties are communicating by being open to change within themselves (Kent & Taylor, 2002).
- **Engagement:** is essential: Without a shared understanding of how to be open, honest and fair, ethical communication is at best limited, and at worst impossible. To communicate ethically means to engage in open, truthful and fair communication. Kent & Taylor (2002) believe that parties involved must be willing to devote themselves entirely to the process of engagement.
- **Temporal flow:** ethical communication is relational. It includes an understanding of the past and present in order to shape future relations (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Communicating ethically is not only rooted in the present but involves parties

communicating to make decisions that will be shared in the future. Ethical communication is communication that seeks to create a future for parties that is both fair and open to both parties. The temporal flow is exemplified in the PRISA's code of ethics. In addressing practitioners' relations, PRISA (2004:2) noted, 'PR practitioners shall deal fairly and honest with past, present and future clients and publics.

2.5.3.5 Empathy

This is an important principle that conceptualises ethical communication in PR. Empathy is understanding or appreciating how someone else feels. Vreeke & der Mark (2003:178) in their writing on 'empathy as integrative model', argue that empathy is knowing what another person feels, with emotional congruence, feeling with another person, and with sympathetic concern, caring and responding to what another person feels. They further state 'Empathy is not conceived as an individual quality only, but as a feature of particular relationships as well'. This implies that empathy creates a climate of encouragement and confidence that must exist in relations if ethical communication is to succeed. Empathetic communication is important in PR because practitioners can communicate ethically by understanding each other (Kent & Taylor, 2002:27).

2.5.3.6 Commitment

Commitment is the last principle that underpins ethical communication: it is not new to PR and communication scholars. The repeated appearance of the term 'commitment' in both professional bodies' codes of ethics and within the body of knowledge shows that PR and communication scholars value its inherent good. Commitment can exist as an idea, an issue of concern, or within organisations and publics. The ethical communication aspect of commitment affords value and importance within PR managing organisations, publics and their issues. Practising ethical communication in PR in a manner of commitment means that publics are respected for their moral autonomy, rather than being viewed as uninformed people to be persuaded of the organisation's point of view (Bowen, Uncompleted). Therefore, considered as a core set of assumption, the previous five principles underpin ethical communication: truthfulness, honesty, accuracy, propinquity and empathy. Together they create the basis for the final contemporary scholarly views that conceptualise ethical communication. The chief elements of ethical communication are choice and responsibility.

2.5.4 *The elements of ethical communication*

Makau (2009:2) identifies three key elements of ethical communication: choice, moral agency and responsibility, which underpin ethical communication. She indicates that ethical

communication is, first and foremost, about choice. PR practitioners have options available in any given situation so moral agency applies. Moral agency involves the freedom and the responsibility of choosing one's pathway in any given situation come responsibility.

2.5.4.1 Choice

Choice is the power or right to choose between two or more possibilities. In the field of communications ethics and psychology, scholars' agree that ethical communication centers around the one major metaphor of action which is choice (Arneson, 2007; Portmore, 2008; Arnett, Fritz & Bell, 2009; Makau, 2009). PR is increasingly recognised as essential across a vast variety of organisational objectives (Cameron *et al.*, 1996:43). Wright (1989:3) points out that most of the time, PR practitioners have the choice of whether to be ethical or not (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001:201). This argument captures the philosophical implications of choice in ethical communication decision-making in PR.

Makau (2009:2), elaborates choice in professional communication settings. She argues that each PR practitioner's approach to ethical communication is shaped by goals, values and perceptions. What does each party hope to achieve? How does each one perceive the other? What are their perceptions of stakeholders' interests? How thoroughly has each considered the likely consequences of the interaction to the self, to others, and to the relationship? The responses to these questions all involve elements of choice and reflection of ethical communication values, which significantly influence each participant's overall state of heart and mind. Choice contains another aspect as communication ethics scholar Ronald. C. Arnett explains: 'I would suggest that the notion of choice begins with a given 'good' we want to protect and promote' (Arneson, 2007:56). In the typical instance of PR ethical practice of choice, Portmore (2008:372) agrees that PR practitioners have the choice to act either self-interestedly or altruistically. That is, they have the choice either to promote their own self-interest or to sacrifice their self-interest for the sake of doing more to promote the interests of others through communicating ethically (Arneson, 2007:56).

2.5.4.2 Responsibility

Having noted earlier on that ethical communication revolves around choice, it therefore follows that PR practitioners must be responsible for their actions in the course of everyday ethical communication practice. Moore, (1999:330) commenting on Velasquez, (1985) on the meaning of responsibility, points out that 'responsibility is often used in relation to decision making, where we may say that an individual is a responsible person if they are trustworthy and reliable'. Moore further argues that this implies both rationality (lack of impulsiveness, care in mapping out alternatives and consequences and so forth) and respect (treating

others as valuable in themselves) on the part of the practitioners. For example, when a PR practitioner acts ethically and responsibly, it follows that PR provides a vital communication function for organisations as well as publics, hence, it develops an understanding among them and eventually attract respect for both self and their organisations.

Ethical communication requires responsibility. A PR practitioner who wants to communicate ethically needs to be ethically responsible and respect others before evaluating and responding to their messages. Ethical communication entails a process by which responsibility is seen from the side of the practitioner with the intention to change both organisation and public behaviour. In other words, ethical communication requires understanding and awareness of responsibility. Makau (2009:2) notes 'the consequences of one's choices/ responsibility matter deeply when communicating ethically. Thus far, what one hopes to achieve through the communication (the ends), how one chooses to communicate (the means), and the 'real-world' outcomes (the consequences) of communication are particularly important elements of ethical communication'. That involvement with, and discussion of means, and ends conceptualise responsibility as important principles that underpin ethical communication (Makau, 2009).

2.6 Ethical Communication: The South African context

African writers such as Mersham *et al*, (1995:1) argue that most of the scholarly body of knowledge of PR and ethical communication in Africa built up over the last three decades has been undertaken in the United States and Western European countries. Likewise, Christine (2006: 29) holds that in several other regions of the world including Africa, PR practice is treated predominantly from a Western perspective. Niemann-Struwega & Meintjes (2008:224), believe that Western-style PR has been practised in Africa for more than 50 years. If these statements are interpreted correctly, PR and ethical communication practice in South Africa clearly fits into the Western tradition, as is the case in other ex-British colonial and English-speaking countries.

The Dutch and later British colonised South Africa until the country declared itself a republic following a referendum in 1961; leaving the Commonwealth in the same year. Unsurprisingly, PR practices in South Africa were primarily influenced by the country's connections with Britain (Holtzhausen *et al.*, 2003:311). The impact of this on South African PR was that the practice continued to develop with practitioners using British PR principles. Ethical communication in South Africa PR is conceptualised as Western dialogic communication alongside African dialogic PR models: ubuntu and communitarianism (Shor & Freire, 1987; Mbigi, 2000; Eze, 2008). Holtzhausen *et al.*, (2003:315) concur with this statement when they

argue that Western dialogic communication is one of the viable models of PR practice in South Africa.

Dialogic communication, according to Shor & Freire (1987:98) is rooted in the very historical nature of human beings. It is part of historical progress in becoming human beings. That is, 'dialogue is a kind of necessary posture to the extent that humans have become more and more critical communicative beings'. Shor & Freire further believe that dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it. Looking at the concept from a human relational perspective, dialogue seals the 'relationship between the cognitive subjects, the subjects who know, and who try to know'. A dialogical relation is a sign of the cognitive act, in which the knowing object, mediating the knowable subjects, gives itself over to a critical revelation (Freire, 1985:167; Shor & Freire, 1987:99). Martin Buber concurs with these beliefs when he makes a distinction between two basic relations, viz.: 'I-Thou' and 'I-It'. I-Thou is a relation of reciprocity and mutuality involving two subjects while the I-It is a relation between subject and a passive object (Eze, 2008:397). Given these assumptions, dialogue emphasises the virtues of understanding the perspective of the other party through engagement with the other (Arneson, 2007:144; deBakker, 2007:121' Paquette *et.al*, 2014:2). In like manner, ethical communication constitutes being truthful, honest and open with others (Doorley & Garcia, 2007:38).

The virtue of reciprocity or mutuality involves others in ethical communication and correlates with ubuntu, which emphasises the virtues of mutuality, inclusiveness and acceptance. In ubuntu, there is a relation, which neither assimilates nor possesses the other from whence the identity of the subject is constituted (Eze, 2008:397). Accordingly, Eze concurs with Louw (2001:26) that Ubuntu is best 'understood as advocating that we incorporate dialogue through a relationship and distance'. It preserves the other in his or her otherness or uniqueness without letting him or her fade into the distance. An Ubuntu perception of the other is 'never fixed or rigidly closed, but adjustable or open-ended. It allows the other to be, to become. It acknowledges the irreducibility of the other, i.e. it does not reduce the other to any specific characteristic, conduct or function' (Louw 1999). Ubuntu respects the dynamic nature of the 'other' characterised as it were by mutual exposure. The subject and the other do not dissolve into one; rather, there is constant contact and interaction such that the other's uniqueness enriches me (Eze, 2008:397).

The word 'Ubuntu' comes from the Zulu and Xhosa languages; it is a traditional African concept that is typically translated as 'humanity toward others' (Christians, 2004:241). Chikanda (quoted in Christians, 2004:241) sees it as African humanism, involving 'almsgiving, sympathy, care, sensitivity to the needs of others, respect, consideration,

patience, and kindness'. Holtzhausen *et al.*, (2003: 316) sees it as a collective personhood and morality. Metz (2007:323) believes it means humanness, and often incorporates it into the maxim that 'a person is a person through other persons'. It is a normative ethical communication theory of right action (Metz, 2007:323). Metz further argues that ubuntu is a moral judgment that underpins values such as acknowledging others, togetherness, harmony, solidarity, respect, dignity and trust. More specifically, ubuntu values equally hold dialogic principles that underpin ethical communication in PR. These values must be crafted into corporate organisations in South Africa (Mbigi, 2000:7).

The combination of Ubuntu and communitarianism has emphasised the importance of ethical communication in the field of the South African workplace. Cornell (2010:393) captures this relationship between ubuntu, communitarianism and ethical communication in the following passage:

We can understand, then, that our ethical relationship to others is inseparable from how we are both embedded in and supported by a community that is not outside of us, something over 'there', but is inscribed in us. The inscription of the other also calls the individual out of himself or herself. Ubuntu is in this sense a call for ethical morality. The individual is called back towards the community and further towards relations of mutual support for the potential of each one of us.

Mbigi (2000:7) believes 'it is the business of leaderships and PR practitioners to craft into organisations the ubuntu values'. As such, Holtzhausen *et al.*, (2003:316) points out that South African PR develops mutual understanding between organisations, and the publics they affect. They argue PR in South Africa provides mediation to help organisations managers and their publics to negotiate issues. An ethical communication view acknowledges, respects and promotes the well-being of others in organisations. According to Leeper (1996:165) communitarianism underpins PR responsibilities to the community. Ubuntu provides solidarity, independence, and love in the workplace (Mbigi, 2000:7), whereas ethical communication provides mutual relations and trust. PR should aim to help create a balance between individual rights, honesty, and community responsibilities.

In essence, Mersham *et al.*, (2011:199) suggest that the true role of PR is not to manipulate the public but rather to build authenticity, honesty, openness, loyalty, fair-mindedness, forthright communication, respectful bridges and healthy relations. They argue that African PR practitioners, for instance, should act as 'ethical communication agents' with paramount importance given to creating and maintaining effective relations with organisation and publics (Rensburg, 2007:37). Thus, professional bodies such as PRISA should exercise greater control in assuring that PR practitioners maintain such relations as well as ensuring

practitioners communicate ethically in their day-to-day practice

2.7 Public relations professional bodies and ethical communication

Having earlier on noted that ethical communication in PR revolved around two interrelated paradigms, symmetrical dialogue and dialogic principles, that underpin ethical communication (PR scholar's conceptualisation), it is therefore important to discuss professional bodies' view of ethical communication, which are consonant with the overall objectives of this study (emphasis in Chapter One, section 1.3).

In reference to Lieber (2008:244), professional bodies traditionally view ethical communication simultaneously satisfying three distinct duties: duty to self, client and public. Walle (2004:2) for example, observes that most professional bodies' codes include a paragraph stating: 'The member shall deal fairly and honestly with his or her members/self, clients, and the general public'. In a similar manner, Huang (2004:335) expanded upon these duties and referred to them as teleology, disclosure and social responsibility. Huang succinctly summaries ethical communication in terms of three concepts: teleology, disclosure and social responsibility. Based on how crucial these concepts are to PR professional bodies, this study will explain them in more detail to illustrate their relation to ethical communication.

2.7.1 Teleology

Debate on ethical theories is dominated by teleology and deontology. As Hadjistavropoulos & Malloy (2000:105) noted, teleology and deontology are the two dominant schools of thought that PR professional bodies use to conceptualise ethical communication in PR. They further hold that these theories represent ends-oriented and means-oriented approaches to ethical conducts, respectively. Huang (2004:335) quotes Grcic (1989:4) who observed the differences and notes that:

Teleological theories hold that the ultimate criterion of moral goodness is either the sum total of good over evil consequences that the action brings about or whether it promotes individual functioning and development. A teleologist holds that an action is moral if it is a means to the appropriate moral good. A deontological approach, however, holds that the morality of an action is not primarily determined by its consequences but by certain intrinsic features of the intention or mental aspect of the contemplated action'. A deontologist emphasizes doing one's duty and the nature of our motives and intentions, not the consequences that may result from our actions.

Holding the same view, Douglas (2009:8) refers to deontology from the point of view that actions are either ethical or unethical. Moral norms of behaviour exist. He describes teleology as the point of view that actions or behaviors are based on consequences. Based on the fact that ethical communication is the balance or the 'mean' between thinking and acting in ethical ways, professionals state that PR practitioners should apply teleological rules as suggested by Douglas (2009) when dealing with members, client and public as well as when considering their personal actions. Huang (2004:335) expands this view by urging PR practitioners to consider the consequences of their communication behaviours on their colleagues, clients and the larger society, and to do so by including deontological values such as honesty, truth, and sincerity when communicating with publics.

Key scholars in PR ethics such as Bowen (2007:11) argue that, unlike teleology that emphasises consequences, deontology is a valuable addition to the knowledge of a PR practitioner when communicating ethically with both clients and public because it yields more rational, defensible, and enduring decisions than less-rigorous analyses. Bowen demonstrated a high degree of association between teleology and deontology and asserts that to implement a deontological analysis of ethics and ethical communication one must attempt to be as honest, fair and neutral as possible. Potential decisions must be examined from all angles (Bowen, 2007).

2.7.2 Disclosure

The PR field has been concerned with disclosure of information to the public. Simmons (2007:31) believes that non-disclosure of sources of information deceives the public and is ethically objectionable. Simmons further points out that PR professional bodies acknowledge disclosure of source to the public, and that the public should be kept totally informed about the sources of information. For this reason, PR practitioners need to disclose information as a means to communicate ethically. This view is supported by Simmons (2007:35) who believes that disclosure of information will play an important part in ethical communication in PR practice.

Disclosure, like ethical communication, facilitates power symmetry which according to Huang (2004) will help PR professional bodies foster and inform PR of how to participate in ethical communication decision-making within organisations. Advocacy, on the other hand, limits disclosure of information to serve/ or protect the organisation's interests (Lieber, 2003:7). Bivins (1987:196) acknowledges advocacy as an effective tool in PR practice. Grunig & White (1992:40) believe that advocacy drives PR practitioners to act on behalf of organisations with the consequent opportunities for unethical activity. Advocacy presupposes that organisations know best and that publics benefit from 'cooperating' with them. Advocacy

practitioners act to manipulate publics for the benefit of the organisations (Grunig & White, 1986; 1992:40). This exposes numerous ethical disruptions and leads professional bodies to doubt advocacy as an effective framework for discussing ethical communication in PR.

Adopting a different perspective, Grunig (1993:146) suggests that asymmetrical communication can be practised ethically if practitioners disclose the motives (reasons) behind asymmetrical communication. Practitioners must be ready to confirm that the organisation knows what consequences are best for both the organisation and the public. In essence, if PR desire to succeed in maintaining both an organisation's and the public's interest, their ethical communication approach would be to disclose information beneficial to both organisations and public.

The obligation to preserve secrecy is repeatedly set forth, often with a 'ritualistic' tone, in professional codes of ethics (Bok, 1989; Huang, 2004:335). Bok offers an explanation for professional secrecy, stating that the premises are not usually separated and evaluated in the context of individual cases or practice. In contrast, Jaksa and Pritchard (1994:203) warn against 'blind acceptance' of professional codes and legal determinations, arguing that they should submit to ethical communication practice.

2.7.3 Social Responsibility

Scholars and professional bodies emphasize the importance of social responsibility in the field of PR (Grunig, 1993; Leeper, 1996; Lubbe & Puth, 2002; Huang, 2004; Walle, 2004; Doorley & Garcia, 2007; Rensburg & Cant, 2009; Steyn & Niemann, 2014). Rensburg & Cant (2009:236) in particular, reinforce that social responsibility has become important to professional bodies because it offers PR the opportunity to build goodwill by promoting the benefits of the organisation to its stakeholders. Walle (2004), for example, holds that PR professional bodies strongly commend social responsibility when it states that members 'shall respect the public interest and the dignity of the individual'. Additionally, social responsibility provided PR practitioners with ethical communication practice that enables them to perform their social roles and functions in a socially responsible manner.

Grunig (1993:146) asserts that social responsibility enters the PR field because of the relation between any organisation and its public, and that this relation occurs because an organisation's actions have consequences for publics who in turn affect the organisation. In this sense, PR practitioners perform their social duty in a socially responsible way (Steyn & Niemann, 2014:193). In the words of Huang (2004:335), PR practitioners 'spanning the boundaries between organisations and the outside world, would be the right actors to take

into account the impact (or consequences) of all PR activities on their publics and to discharge corporate social responsibility for an organisation’.

There are two schools of thought on ethical - social responsibility in PR practice. The first school holds that there is no such thing as corporate charity, because no shareholders of any organisation would tolerate non-profit-orientated activities for long (Lubbe & Puth, 2002:180). As Gruing & White (1986; 1992:46) put it:

No responsible manager completely rejects return on investment... corporate are not charitable organisations. Different from his previous argument, Grunig & White (1986:46) maintained that ‘people in organisations have ‘divided loyalties’ to the organisation and to public.

The second school of thought holds that the public believes organisations have a moral obligation to assist with social progress even at the expense of profitability (Wright, 1979:23). Wright maintained that ethical social responsibility should prevail to some extent over net profitability. Organisations should enhance the welfare of consumers and employees, respecting the rights of the members of society and minimizing harm through misuse of power as occur in depletion of natural resources (Huang, 2004:336). In a study on the issues of ethical communication and corporate responsibility, Grunig & White (1986; 1992:47) found that organisations realize that they can get more of what they want by giving publics some of what they want.

There is consensus among PR scholars and professional bodies that PR practitioners should act or communicate ethically at all times with the best interests of society in mind. Wright (1979:23) mentions this, as does Huang (2004:336) from the concepts of ‘minimal duty’ and ‘maximal duty’. Huang (2004), quoting Donaldson (1989), states that ‘PR practitioners and professional bodies should meet the bottom-line standards of ‘minimal duty’ for organisational stakeholders such as the community, employees, and consumers and then further endeavor to fulfill the ‘maximal duty’ as an act of good corporate citizenship. Donaldson’s approach to social responsibility reflects to the idea of ‘teleology’, and ‘public interests’. It seems to be a focal concept in scholar’s conceptualisation of social responsibility whereas ‘disclosure’ is another aspect of ethical communication (Huang, 2004:336). In conclusion, the three concepts used to view professional understanding of ethical communication are based on the extent to which PR seeks to respect the benefit of all stakeholders in a fair and open manner; thus ethical communication is a prerequisite towards ensuring and securing mutual relations. This equity however, can be achieved only if professional bodies can provide a means to foster ethical communication among practitioners.

2.8 Professional values: Emergent framework to foster ethical communication

Most professions prefer professional values to be set in codes of ethics. In PR literature, in reference to *the contribution of professional values in PR professional ethics*, Harrison & Galloway (2005:2) state that: 'PR ethics codes contain only a few general key values'. deKock's (PRISA, 2012) analysis of ethics and professionalism in PR and communication noticed PR professional values normally include ethical honesty, advocacy, honesty, loyalty, integrity and fairness. Harrison & Galloway (2005:2), however, warn against relying on the PR professional values to foster ethical communication: 'While codes of ethics contain key professional values, such values need to be understood and interpreted before they can be applied to specific situations'. The call for elevating professional values to foster ethical communication is given further status when professional bodies, such as PRISA (2004) recognise the importance of professional values and informs its members that they should act based on the values which facilitate respect and mutual understanding. Therefore the following professional values are discussed in the following subsection.

2.8.1 Advocacy

PR literature reveals that there is an argument to be made for advocacy as a legitimate function of PR practice, and that it may well be possible for practitioners to take on the advocate's role without sacrificing the moral good (Edgett, 2002:8). Based on scholars' recognition of advocacy's role, this argument is true and is seen as a starting point in developing a framework that can help practitioners to use ethical communication as a way to represent organisations and the public. Harrison & Galloway (2005:2) point out that, 'In promoting professional values, PR professional bodies whose ethical stance suggests that practitioners should commit to 'serving the client's interest' through principled advocacy, while simultaneously serving an undefined 'public interest', risk ignoring the potential for conflict between serving clients' and public's interest. The resulting outcomes may reflect practitioner confusion about which side to take.

Scholars such as Van Ruler (2004:135) argue that PR practitioners, as advocates of mutual understanding, relations, mutual appreciation, cooperation, and partnership between organisations and publics, can reach agreement through enlightened self-interest on the part of both parties. Ethical communication is sometimes described as mutual benefit. This definition states that PR helps an organisation and its publics to adapt mutually and communicate ethically to each other's advantage (Van Ruler, 2004). Grunig's (1992) two-way symmetrical communication that underpins this definition states that, 'Symmetrical communication provides a platform to exercise mutual relationship', thus fostering ethical communication. Advocacy addresses the personality of PR practitioners and helps them to

reflect on their own motives and behaviours when communicating ethically with strategic stakeholders. It concentrates on the communication itself. Whether the message is for promoting organisations' interest or public's interest, advocacy is seen as having at least the potential to foster ethical communication (Fawkes, 2007: 3).

2.8.2 Honesty

Since PR practitioners are in constant communication with various sectors of organisations and their publics, honesty must be practised at all times in PR in order to foster ethical communication. Honesty is one of the professional values identified and described in the PR codes of ethics to help to set a standard for the professional practice of PR in communication with the public (Wilcox *et al.*, 2003:60). In addition, honesty in professional values targets inappropriate conduct in PR practice. Today, with globalisation, what happens in one country may affect PR in other countries (Kent & Taylor, 2002:25). Thus, PR should adhere to the highest standards of honesty in advancing the interests of those they represent and in communicating with the public (deKock & PRISA, 2012).

2.8.3 Integrity

Integrity is the third professional values in fostering ethical communication. As Moreno (2010:8) pointed out, integrity is a manifestation of harmony between being and doing and fundamental for ethical communication. Moreno (2010) quoted Solomon (2000:38) who writes that integrity is not in itself a virtue, but rather a combination of virtues that act together to form a coherent whole. To ascribe integrity to organisations, means that they are admirable for their endeavours (Brown, 2006:14). Organisations that are fully engaged in taking advantage of the public will not be praised for integrity. deBakker (2006:129) considers practitioners who perpetrate such immoral actions should certainly be held responsible for their lack of integrity: the organisation as a whole cannot be held accountable for the immoral action.

The implications for PR are clear. As organisations that provide a platform for mutual relations between themselves and their stakeholders, integrity of practitioners is helpful in management of organisation – public relations. Brown (2006:15) argues that integrity, as wholeness, requires practitioners to consider that work relations are not limited to relations at work, but include the fact that workers are members of families and civil society. Consequently, PR practitioners must practise with integrity in such a way that their own reputation, that of the PR profession, other organisations and the publics in general is protected. Because ethical communication means communicating in a morally responsible

manner. The PR practitioners who work towards developing such moral beliefs and convictions would be leading with integrity and fairness (deBakker, 2006:121).

2.8.4 Fairness

Fairness has been scrutinized in a broad range of settings including PR management. As discussed by Schweitzer & Gibson (2007:287) fairness has been seen as fundamental to the development for both social and economic systems: it is the 'cornerstone' of long-term relations in organisations. For example, when employees perceive outcomes to be fair, they experience satisfaction and are likely to be supportive of both the outcome and the parties involved (Schweitzer & Gibson, 2007). In fact, organisations that are involved in fairness are more likely to attract better stakeholders for long-term relations, possibly even pay less for supplies and accrue other benefits that actually contribute to profits. Fairness adds value to the actual worth of an organisation and in many cases makes good business sense in the long term.

From a PR and ethical communication standpoint, fairness is an important concept. To be fair means to communicate without manipulation, domination, or control. Indeed, PR is largely about building mutual relations and communicating ethically with organisations and their publics. The desire to build mutual understanding and sound relations among a wide array of stakeholders has heightened interest in the role of fairness, as one of the professional values set in PR codes of ethics to help practitioners to communicate ethically in their day-to-day PR practice. According to Parsons (2008: 21) one pillar upon which PR codes of ethics are based is the concept of fairness. To her, trying to respect all individuals and society in PR and ethical communication decision-making is an attempt to be fair. This sentiment is echoed by PRISA (2004) when they state that, 'Its members should deal fairly with all PR stakeholders'. As a central concept in communicating ethically, fairness is not an easy outcome of communication or relations. It requires commitment on the part of PR practitioners, organisations and publics. It requires loyalty on the side of PR practitioners to improve PR ethical communication practice.

2.8.5 Loyalty

Loyalty, also called 'commitment' in literature, refers to the basic idea that a practitioner is committed or loyal to an organisation when he/she believes that what the organisation is doing is 'worth the while' and therefore, is willing to cooperate. In a similar vein, some scholars have noticed that loyalty is positive for organisations, practitioners and publics (Rosanas & Velilla, 2003:51). In PR, loyalty is defined as a constituent to which PR practitioners owe a duty and who, in return, place a trust in the practitioner. The interesting

point in this analysis is that loyalty is seen as encompassing an atmosphere of support and trust that must exist in ethical communication in PR. In PR professional values there are three overriding loyalties in the everyday practice of PR: loyalty to an 'organisation', to the 'profession' and to the 'publics'. As mentioned by Parsons (2008:27) a PR practitioner has duties to employer or client (organization), to the profession and to publics as a whole. As the 'cornerstone' of the profession, PR practitioners ought to be faithful to those they represent while honouring their obligations to the interests of society and supporting the right of free expression (deKock & PRISA, 2012).

As PRISA (2004) suggests, PR practitioners shall be loyal to organisations. Thus, PR practitioners ought to dedicate themselves to the goals of fair, accurate and better communication, mutual understanding and co-operation among organisations, professions and publics. Again, as ethical communication becomes strategically important to the organisations, it also, necessarily, makes all stakeholders important to organisations. PR loyalty to organisations, however, should not be viewed negatively. It is through their loyalty and commitment to the organisation that relations and willingness to engage in ethical communication are built with other stakeholders.

Additionally, as a profession that is moving forward in dispelling some of the negative opinions about the field, it is the duty of PR practitioners to ensure that the profession is practising in an ethical manner (Parsons, 2008:27). Loyalty emerges in the commitment of PR practitioners to conduct themselves professionally, with truth, accuracy, fairness and open communication to the organisation, towards colleagues and public. When professional bodies urge PR practitioners to be loyal and committed facilitate ethical communication. However, Parsons, (2008:27) further explains that being loyal to the profession alone does not make an ethical profession. Nevertheless loyalty to the profession and the public are entangled like the 'strands of a rope'.

Therefore, loyalty to the public is unconditional acceptance of the professional values of PR practice. PR loyalty to the public is not limited to ethical pronouncements but includes the socially responsibility to serve the interests of the publics. Parsons (2008:27) points out clearly that 'Publics need to be able to trust PR practitioners. Being certain that our organisation will do no harm is critical to that trust'. Being loyal to publics and other stakeholders and working towards common understandings is crucial to ethical communication practice. Parsons (2008) argues: 'PR practitioner's loyalty to organisations that pay his/her salary just might conflict with his/her loyalty to the publics'. Parsons further adds that finding that balance requires a close understanding of how he/she as a practitioner approaches thinking about ethical communication. Kent & Taylor (2002:27) conclude that loyalty, as defined by

professional codes of ethics, has shown that ethical communication practice is important; because PR practitioners can improve their communication by 'walking in the shoes' of their organisation and publics.

2.9 Ethical communication and professional bodies' code of ethics: Ethical communication in formal codes and guidelines

Walle (2004:1) emphasises that, in an effort to provide a clear ethical guideline, non-governmental PR organisations in several countries outlined ethics codes. Higgs-Kleyn & Kapelianis (1999:364) mention that PR codes of ethics are provided to assist PR practitioners in their ongoing relations with the public, to resolve the tension between practitioners' unethical behaviour and to enunciate visibly professional norms. They further assert that the code of ethics is a vehicle which assures the public, clients, and colleagues that practitioners are competent to have integrity, and that the profession intends to maintain and ensure ethical standards among PR practitioners. This view was clearly supported in a statement by Wright (1993:15) who posits 'The codes can be especially helpful to professional newcomers by educating them about moral guidelines and by sensitising them to ethical problems'. These recognised PR researchers find it essential to point out that PR code of ethics is in many ways foundational to PR ethical practice.

After numerous corporate scandals such as the Citizens for a Free Kuwait scandal, PR and its codes of ethics have come under harsh criticism. PR was criticised for not considering ethical communication practice in its codes, and for having a code that was difficult to follow not especially helpful to individual practitioners or out of date. Critics consider the code of ethics inadequate and 'too vague to apply to concrete cases'. They argue that codes of ethics are 'warm and fuzzy and make practitioners feel good about themselves, but they don't accomplish much' (Wright, 1993: 16). Rensburg & Cant (2009:255) agree that, although professional bodies across the world have done well in developing codes of ethics for their members, the codes stop short of providing a theoretical basis for ethical communication decision-making. Lieber (2008:244) mentions that the codes contain no formal means of enforcement (PRSA, 2008). This is supported by Grunig and Hunt (1984) who point out that 'many PR practitioners do not belong to professional bodies' and note the inability of such organisations to 'prohibit these non-member practitioners from violating these codes' such lack of coherence and discipline have debased the worth of codes of ethics ineffective. These critics led to recasting the codes to emphasise the standards that apply to the professional practice of PR.

Compounding the re-examination of codes of ethics is a growing need for ethical communication practice in PR. As indicated in Chapter One, one of the useful methods to

ensure ethical communication practice is the revisiting of codes of ethics (Wright, 1993; Higgs-Kleyn & Kapelianis, 1999; Doorley & Garcia, 2007, Sha, 2011). These respected authors in the field of PR agreed that PR is currently re-examining their code of practice in order to upgrade its ethics and ethical communication.

The revisionist code of ethics according to Sha (2011:122) adopted in October 2000 was not designed for enforcement by professional bodies; it relies instead on individual practitioners to hold themselves accountable to the ethical standards outlined in the code. Any attempt to address those shortcomings leads to inclusion of ethical communication in the code. New codes require each individual practitioner to daily reaffirm a commitment to ethical communication decision-making. Unlike the first codes, the new code demonstrates the kind of behaviour that is inappropriate, making it more likely that proper behaviour will be habituated and improper behaviour avoided (Doorley & Garcia, 2007:37). The code details, for example, improper behaviour like 'a member shall not deceive the public, a member shall refrain from subordinating the truth and circulating information which is not based on established and ascertainable fact'. The code, like tactics supporting strategies, provides ethical communications values that would guide practitioners in their day-to-day PR tasks and challenges. Among these are that practitioners should be honest, accurate, open, and act in the best interest of stakeholders. Doorley & Garcia (2007) support this view by adding that this new code encourages PR practitioners to engage in truthful, accurate and fair communication.

Therefore it could be argued that ethical communication is a code of ethics tool that will enable PR practitioners to achieve their objectives, and that in turn can help PR to regain its credibility and legitimacy. Interestingly, some PR authors such as Ki & Kim (2009:224) stress that codes of ethics have been currently referred to as codes of conduct, codes of practice, value statements, mission statements, corporate credos or credos of ethical communication (Andersen, 2000:139). In conclusion, Wright (1993:18) state, 'Codes of ethics in PR have some strength and can be valuable, but their inability to be enforced has attracted a lot of criticism to PR and its ethical communication problems.

2.10 Criticism of ethical communication

The most notable criticism against PR coalesced around the 1990's and emerged predominantly from executive director John Stauber, and Sheldon Rampton, research director of the Center for Media and Democracy, which publishes *PR Watch* (Doorley & Garcia, 2007:38). The criticism against PR and its lack of ethical communication resulted from a failure in practice by PR practitioners to communicate ethically with stakeholders (Bowen, 2007: 2). Bowen (2007) notes that the lack of honest and open communication

during ethical scandals such as Enron and the Citizens for a Free Kuwait debacle, and the ethical communication mistakes of some PR practitioners resulted in an ethical communication crisis faced by the PR profession. One of the most notable examples was the representation of 'Citizens for a Free Kuwait' by well-known PR practitioners Hill and Knowlton (1993), who created false testimony delivered to the Congressional Human Rights Caucus. News broke later that the Kuwait government had sponsored a front group in order to convince the US to enter the 1992 Gulf War. Critics including Stauber & Rampton (1995) charge that Hill & Knowlton were successful in this effort because of a disregard for ethical communication (Bowen, 2007:2).

In their discussion on revisiting the concept 'dialogue' in PR Theunissen & Wan Noordin (2012:11) quote Saunders (1999:84) who states that PR and its dialogic/ ethical communication practice attract criticism because of inherent unpredictability, and that the process carries risk. Saunders sternly states: 'Dialogue is dangerous; often involves risks and continues to outline that risk for individuals'. He suggests that, unlike other forms of communication, participants are required to share their deepest hopes, interests and fears. Ethical communication reveals the 'self', the individual and what shapes his or her identity. In the same manner, ethical communication has the potential to reveal the organisation, its 'true' self and not the manufactured image that many organisations present to shareholders. Organisations such as these who believe that PR's main purpose is to create and maintain an image, dialogic-ethical communication indeed holds great risk. It may expose its true, authentic identity, which may not be palatable to discerning stakeholders. Thus, the fear of exposure and loss of control over their image and reputation may prevent such practitioners from communicating ethically (Saunders, 1999:84).

Another criticism levelled against ethical communication is that it is a multifaceted, sustained process that does not guarantee a specific, desired outcome or result (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012:11). Those who practise ethical communication engage in it without surety regarding its end result. In other words, ethical communication prescribes only what organisations advocate PR practitioners should do, without actually representing how it will be practised (Huang, 2004:334). The weaknesses of ethical communication are fully encapsulated in Huang (2004: 334) and Murphy's (1991) intimations.

Equating the symmetrical communication model to a pure cooperation model in game theory held that ethical communication is difficult to find in the real world (Huang, 2004: 334).

Along the same lines, Grunig & White (1992:46) point out that some critics of symmetrical communication, both practitioners and scholars, claim that ethical communication is an

unattainable ideal. They argue that organisations hire PR as advocates to advance their interests and not as 'do-gooders' who 'give in' to outsiders with an agenda different from that of the organisation. When PR practitioners function as organisation advocates (Edgett, 2002: 1), these critics believe that organisations would not hire a PR practitioner who does not practise asymmetrically (Grunig & White, 1992).

It is important to note that ethical communication is about being truthful and upfront at all times; that is, PR practitioners are required to communicate all essential information honestly and openly with no intent to hide or downplay certain facts that might affect their practice. This definition is epitomised by the works of Bowen (2007), and is supported by Doorley & Garcia (2007:38). Needless to say, critics of ethical communication in PR seem to assume that it is impossible for PR practitioners to communicate ethically given their history of unethical communication practice. Thus, it is not surprising to find that these critics often equate ethical communication with risk or danger.

2.11 Summary

The Literature review set out to discover the state of scholarly and professional debate on the following themes as they relate to the problem statement discussed in Chapter One: the state of ethics in PR; ethical communication in PR; ethical communication and dialogic communication; ethical communication and symmetrical communication and professional bodies and ethical communication. The major findings of the literature review are that PR is guilty of unethical behaviour that degrades the credibility, value and image of the profession. PR is itself, in a number of ways, particularly as regards codes of ethics, focused on ethical communication practice. While ethical communication practice is largely unachieved, PR practitioners and professional bodies are still grappling with ways to conceptualise ethical communication. PR literature demonstrates that professional bodies set up frameworks to foster ethical communication. While codes of ethics contain the frameworks, little attention is paid to ethical communication in PR literature. Therefore, it still remains unclear how PR practitioners and professional bodies conceptualise ethical communication. The next chapter will discuss the relevant theories that link the PR practitioners and professional bodies' conceptualisation of ethical communication with the literature.

3 CHAPTER THREE: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The conceptual framework has been a key to research. It is the basic structure on which a study is built and, inter alia, it provides the grounds for research (Al-Eissa, 2009:86).

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has suggested that ethical communication in PR is a complex and contested concept and practice. It was argued that communicating ethically is critical to the reputation and legitimacy of the profession. Ethical codes are one of the interventions introduced by PR professional bodies to help PR practitioners to communicate responsibly and with ethical accountability.

This chapter provides the conceptual framework underpinning this study. It attempts to explicate the importance of PR approaches guiding the attainment of the objectives of this study. Guided by a dialogic communication approach and a reflective paradigm of PR as its core, the study seeks to understand how ethical communication is conceptualised and practised by PR practitioners and professional bodies in Cape Town.

In the following, the reflective paradigm of PR, dialogic communication ethics versus advocacy ethics and symmetrical versus asymmetrical communications approaches will be discussed. An excellence approach is also introduced, and discussed as the context within which symmetrical approaches are defined together with narrative and codes, procedures and a standards approach. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of whether or not these approaches are relevant to the study.

3.2 The reflective paradigm of public relations

The reflective paradigm links an organisation to society. According to Van Heerden & Rensburg (2005:71) the reflective paradigm is the socially responsible behaviour of the organisation used in order to increase its legitimacy in the eyes of society. The reflective role is concerned with organisational standards and values aimed at communication decision-making in the organisation. This role is responsible for the analysis of changing standards and values in society. This is essential for an organisation striving to be ethical, or seen as legitimate and accountable (Van Heerden & Rensburg, 2005:72). This enables the organisation to see itself as part of the larger societal context (Holmstrom, 2004:122), because being aware of what is happening in society helps the organisation to adjust in order to reach mutual understanding with its stakeholders. Accordingly, the reflective paradigm is

seen as part of society's current co-ordination, implying self-regulation of an organisation within a poly-contextual reference (Holmstrom, 2004:122),

The key characteristic of a reflective paradigm is the rise from a narrow, mono-contextual perspective in the organisation to a poly-contextual perspective (Holmstrom, 2004:122). Holmstrom (2004) argues that organisations find specific identities, acting independently, and learning how to develop restrictions and co-ordination mechanisms in their decision-making in recognition of the interdependence between society's differentiated rationalities. Mono-contextual perspectives lead to conflict, hostility and counter-action, exemplified, for example, in a practice identified with concepts such as manipulation, propaganda and asymmetrical communication. A poly-contextual perspective is recognised in concepts such as dialogue and symmetrical communication, and in semantics such as 'shared responsibility', 'partnerships', 'negotiations', and to 'build or engage in relationships'. Thus a reflective paradigm can be seen as the core demand of organisational legitimacy, and PR as a specific reflective structure (Holmstrom, 2004).

The reflective paradigm of PR, according to Holmstrom (2004:121), is the function of PR in relation to changing forms of societal co-ordination and social relations. Holmstrom (2005:497) further defines a reflective paradigm as a theoretical approach developed to understand the evolution and character of society's legitimating processes, and, in this context, the function of PR practice. Steyn (2003:8) regards the reflective paradigm of PR as 'Monitoring of relevant environment developments and the anticipation of their consequences for the organisation's policies, especially with regards to relationships with stakeholders and other interest groups in society' (Van Heerden & Rensburg, 2005:72; leRoux, 2014:195). PR's reflective function involves engaging in mutual relations with stakeholders. These mutual relations characterise ethical communication in PR and are aimed at increasing PR practitioners' ethical communication. The concept of a reflective paradigm for PR is a key to understanding ethical communication in PR. According to Holmstrom (2005:501), it is essential in opening up mutual understanding, which defines phenomena such as dialogue, symmetrical communication and ethical communication in PR.

Empirically, the reflective paradigm of PR is based on the observation dating back to the 1960's on the changing role, responsibility and practice of business in Western Europe. It expresses characteristic traits of European PR, in research and practice, respectively (Holmstrom, 2004:121). Earliest interpretations emphasised the importance of the reflective paradigm in PR, and, in terms of dialogue, symmetrical and ethical communication, as a means of building mutual relations, which help to 'establish and maintain mutual lines of communication between an organisation and its publics' (Clonan, 2004:1).

It is evident that, in healthy relations building, information sharing, dialogue and ethical communication there are key elements in the reflective paradigm. At the same time, it is noteworthy that PR practitioners are intermediaries between an organisation and the public. This theory has shown that PR makes relations between organisations and the public's active and effective: it allows dialogue and a flow of information between them, thus enabling organisations to know the expectations of stakeholders and able to adapt to the environment, while giving stakeholders a voice in the organisation (Holmstrom, 2005:501; leRoux, 2014:196). This shows that PR makes the organisation's boundary porous and allows the organisations to exist in mutual relations with the public.

According to Butschi & Steyn (Uncompleted in IPRRC, 2008:67) the reflective paradigm consists of two communication tasks for PR: the reflective task in inward communication and the expressive task in outward communication.

Butschi & Steyn affirm that reflective inward communication is to select information from public communication systems on what is considered ethical communication behaviour in the public sphere and transmit it to organisations, and to encourage organisational members to balance their behaviour in relation to the expectations of the public opinion. Whereas the expressive reflective in outward communication is to create and provide regular, widely distributed information (based on reflection) on behalf of the organisation, for use in the processes of public communication and to ensure that a public communication system operates with a socially responsible image of the organisation.

PR practice can be understood in this context as one of the auxiliary structures of communication, assisting systems between an organisation and its public, with reflection. In this way, PR reflects on where the organisation has set its boundaries and can assist its organisation to take account of the different boundaries of other interest groups in society (Holmstrom, 1996:97; Steyn & Niemann, 2014:196).

Because so little is known about ethical communication in PR in South Africa, the reflective paradigm of PR guides the researcher in employing the strategic component of ethical communication and the importance of effective organisational communication to achieve its objective. This approach aids the researcher in understanding ethical communication challenges affecting PR practitioners in Cape Town. It portrays an organisational and public setting and shows the involvement of PR to achieve both organisational or public goals and objectives through ethical communication. The approach emphasised in concepts such as dialogue and symmetrical communication guides the researcher in understanding the relation between dialogue/ symmetrical and ethical communication in PR. More specifically, in

understanding PR practitioners and professional bodies, conceptualisation of ethical communication shifts from the 'early simplistic' (symmetrical dialogue) paradigm to the contemporary paradigm premised on honesty, openness, loyalty, fair-mindedness, respect and fair communication.

3.3 Dialogic communication versus advocacy ethics approach

Dialogic communication and advocacy ethics constitute two major approaches to the study of ethical communication. The two dominant approaches to the study of ethics focus on the role PR practitioners should play when they face ethical communication challenges. Dialogic communication ethics and advocacy ethics approaches to the study of ethics perceive of ethical communication in PR with different interests and reference points despite efforts to combine them in practice. Edgett (2002:1-2) notes that, although PR practitioners are comfortable with the choice of one approach ahead of the other, principally because of literature and education on mass communication in general, and on PR in particular, moral superiority has been conferred on dialogue at the expense of advocacy. But each approach has rationality in relation to that particular moment it scrutinizes.

PR scholars are divided about which approach is a legitimate function of today's practitioners. Early scholars, such as Edward Bernary, clearly support the use of PR counsel to advance ideas and organisations; whereas contemporary scholars favour a more balanced process popularly termed dialogic communication (Bivins, 1987; Huang, 2004:333). Theunissen & Wan Noordini (2012:6) confirm this by stating that dialogue provides a platform to exercise ethical communication compared to its counterpart advocacy. They further add that dialogue in the form of two-way symmetrical communication is preferred to two-way asymmetrical communication (advocacy), implying that one is a progression of the other: more balanced and therefore more beneficial to all. Edgett (2002:2), however, compares the two approaches and notes:

Table 3.1: Dialogic communication versus advocacy ethics

| Dialogic ethics view | Advocacy ethics view |
|---|---|
| Characterised by counter-arguing two-way communication. | Characterised by one-way monologue communication. |
| PR practitioners seen as the mediators between organisations and their publics. | PR practitioners is seen as only promoting the wellbeing of organisation. |
| No party attempts to control the perceptions and | Use of persuasion to change perceptions or |

| | |
|---|---|
| ideas of the other. | behaviours. |
| Display openness, honesty, sincerity, and willingness to change course. | Display fair treatment and full physical programmatic access for clients. |

Source: Adapted from Edgett (2002:2)

According to **Table 3.1**, the advocacy ethics approach to ethical communication in PR is concerned with two distinct arguments. The first argument is that advocacy in PR is essentially persuasive. Persuasion is viewed as unethical due to the inequalities of interests between persuader and persuadee (Fawkes, 2007:7); and the second argument is that advocacy recognizes that PR often plays a more asymmetrical role (Fawkes, 2007). The asymmetrical approach denotes the organisational goal as that of environmental control: PR's contribution is through advocacy of the organisation's position. In an advocacy approach PR practitioners are seen as fostering only the well-being of organisation. According to Waldmann & Blackwell (2010:37) advocacy seeks fair treatment, full physical and programmatic access for clients, and the removal of any barriers or obstacles that inhibit access, growth or development of ethical communication. Contemporary scholars criticise the advocacy approach and argue that ethical communication is difficult to achieve by practitioners who practise advocacy PR.

Dialogic communication ethics, unlike advocacy ethics, focuses on three arguments. It explores the philosophical underpinnings of dialogue in ethical communication in PR practice and thinking; it focuses on moral rights to establish and maintain communication relations with an organisation and its publics. Another dimension of the dialogic ethics approach is based on the assumption that the more open organisations are in dealing with their publics, the more chance all parties have of 'win-win' situations (Kent & Taylor, 2002:21; Theunissen & Wan Noordini, 2012:5; Paquette *et al.*,2014:4). Dialogic communication ethics predominantly inform this study.

The purpose of this study is to understand PR practitioners' and professional bodies' understanding of ethical communication in the Cape Town. It seeks to ascertain whether PR practitioners and professional bodies conceptualise ethical communication in the 'early simplistic' paradigm (symmetrical dialogue) or the contemporary paradigm. The researcher locates the study within a dialogic communication ethics approach to the study of PR professional ethical communication because its aims are consistent with the study objectives described. Of the two approaches to ethical communication in PR, dialogic communication ethics is the strongest approach because it helped the researcher to investigate how PR practitioners in the Cape Town communicate with their publics and the criteria they believe

should underpin ethical communication in PR. Thus, it involves bilateral symmetrical communication that underpins ethical communication in PR (of which the object is a mutually beneficial discourse). In essence, a dialogic communication ethics approach justifies the early paradigm of ethical communication in PR.

3.4 Symmetrical versus asymmetrical communication approach

Grunig's symmetrical and asymmetrical communication approaches have presided over PR ethical communication practice for decades. These approaches have their roots in PR professional ethics: both involve the use of research in planning and execution (Barney & Black, 1994:235). These approaches have dominated communication for PR in the ethical communication practice largely because PR conceives of communication as a 'magic bullet' that will be used to bargain, negotiate and engage in order to bring about mutual changes in the attitudes and behaviours of both organisations and their publics (Van Ruler, 2004:126; leRoux, 2014:194).

Grunig and his co-researchers (Dozier and Ehling, 1992) contributed to assimilating the concept of ethical communication in mainstream PR scholarship by linking it to their symmetrical communication approach. A symmetrical communication approach is primarily concerned with the use of communication in PR to manage relations with strategic publics. It also means that each participant in the communication process is equally able to influence the other (Van Ruler, 2004; Culbertson & Ni Chen, 2013). Grunig's symmetrical communication approach highlighted a forum for discussion, dialogue and discourse, which are the key principles that underpin ethical communication in a mainstream PR paradigm. The symmetrical communication approach is incisive in so far as scholars such as Theunissen & Wan Noordini (2012:6) argue that it offers PR an opportunity to reaffirm the profession's legitimacy and credibility, and create conditions for ethical communication to thrive.

The symmetrical approach is discussed at length in the excellence approach. The main argument is that the excellence approach can only be achieved by a so-called symmetrical communication approach (Holmstrom, 1996:14). Excellence in PR describes the ideal state in which well-informed communicators seek symmetrical relations through management of communication with key stakeholders (Dozier, *et al.*, 1995:4). The excellence approach is aimed at providing an idealistic framework of how PR should be practised in order to serve public interest (Van Heerden, 2004:44). There is an unmistakable assumption running through excellence that lying behind the symmetry is strategic purposive rationality: wherever excellence recommends symmetrical communication the argument is that it pays. It is one of the most effective ways to win over the organisation's constituencies to the side of

the organisation (Holmstrom, 1996). Holmstrom (1996:14) believes that excellence is measured in relation to the criteria *how, why, and to what extent does communication influence the success of an organisation in meeting its goals?* Symmetrical communication is equated with communication that meets the goals of both organisation and public: ethical communication. In the long run, the symmetrical view is more effective: organisations get more of what they want when they give up some of what they want (Holmstrom, 1996).

An asymmetrical communication approach is a way of getting what an organisation wants without changing its behaviour or compromising (Holmstrom, 1996:44). The asymmetrical approach is chiefly concerned with use of communication to persuade strategic publics to behave as the organisation wants. According to Holmstrom (1996:45), an asymmetrical communication in public reasoning can be an abuse of the public sphere. This approach is an expression of the familiar press agency and public information theories: they attempt to change the behaviour of the public without changing the behaviour of the organisation (Barney & Black, 1994:235; Holmstrom, 1996:14; Culbertson & Ni Chen, 2013:4). According to Van Ruler (2004:126), asymmetry approach is defined as a ‘communication theory in which a one-way, linear causal effect is predicated and evaluated’. Holmstrom (1996:14) adds that the asymmetrical approach steers PR practitioners towards actions that are unethical, socially irresponsible, and ineffective.

Gurnig’s symmetrical communication approach is inconclusive regarding ethical communication in PR. According to Huang (2001:267), Grunig (2001) considers symmetrical communication and ethical communication as two different dimensions, and thus seems to perpetuate the divisive rift between PR scholars where PR in particular seeks to free itself from the constrictions of being seen as an unethical profession. Conversely, literature identifies a number of comparisons of two approaches that form part of ethical communication; these comparisons are discussed in **Table 3.2 below:**

Table 3.2: Symmetrical versus asymmetrical communication

| Symmetrical view | Asymmetrical view |
|--|---|
| Two-way communication or dialogic/ ethical communication exchanges information. | One-way communication or ‘monologue’ disseminates information. |
| The existence of feedback in the communication process is the key. | Asymmetrical communication unable to recognise the interdependence between organisations and their publics. |
| The symmetrical approach has moral strength derived from rejecting victimisation in the PR | Asymmetrical approach poses the very real |

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>process, and of producing win-win situations.</p> <p>PR will be inherently ethical if it follows the principles of the two-way symmetrical approach.</p> | <p>danger of victimising as the organisation strives to create a benevolent environment for itself.</p> <p>Asymmetrical worldview steers PR practitioners towards actions that are unethical, socially irresponsible, and ineffective</p> |
|---|---|

As a result, a symmetrical approach favours a relatively dialogic/ethical communication approach as opposed to the one-way asymmetrical/ monologue communication. It is the researcher's view that the symmetrical approach is most appropriate for this study; the central concern is to understand how PR practitioners and professional bodies in Cape Town conceptualise and practise ethical communication. The strength and appropriateness of a symmetrical communication approach to this study largely derives from the fact that it uses discourse and dialogue, which are the key principles that underpin ethical communication in PR. In direct opposition to an asymmetrical approach, symmetrical communication and ethical communication are seen as similar dimensions (Huang, 2001:267). That is, they are two factors that are effectively merged into single factors.

3.5 The codes, procedures, and standards approach

In this section, the review will be limited to how codes, procedures and standards approaches frame ethical communication conceptually and behaviourally according to guidelines defined by institutional groups. Although the understanding of professional codes, procedures and standards in its entirety is another facet in a discussion of ethical communication, here it will be limited to how ethical codes inform the way ethical communication is conceptualised and practised.

Standards and codes are important for professional groups in convincing publics of the integrity of the profession. Most professional groups develop written codes of ethics to ensure a common agreement on appropriate conduct (Arnett *et al.*, 2009:50). According to Higgs-Kleyn & Kapelians (1999:363), standards and codes act as a support system against improper demands and serve as a basis for adjudicating disputes.

Arnett *et al.*, (2009:44) refer to the codes, procedures and standards approach as ethical communication guidelines by which appropriate ethical codes are evaluated, protected to promote the good of corporately agreed-upon practice and regulations. This approach defines many codes of ethics in organisations. On the other hand, the codes, procedures, and standards approach reflects the behaviour of the organisation it represents. Within the

field of PR, PRISA is central to this ongoing effort to build an ethical profession. IABC was instrumental in the development of a code of ethics for professional communicators. PRSIA's code emphasizes responsible advocacy in the public sphere (Arnett *et al.*, 2009:50). Advocacy, honesty, expertise, independence, loyalty and fairness are the six values put forth by PRISA. The IABC code is based on three different yet interrelated principles of professional communication that apply throughout the world. These principles assume that just societies are governed by a profound respect for human rights and the rule of law; that ethics, the criteria for determining what is right and wrong, can be agreed upon by members of an organization; and, that understanding matters of taste requires sensitivity to cultural norms (William, 2002).

Ethical communication such as codes, procedures, and standards rest on the centrality of corporately sanctioned public proclamation of communicative action that regulates professional behaviour and required periodic revisiting (Arnett *et al.*, 2009:51).

3.6 The narrative approach

Arnett *et al.*, (2009:26) refer to the narrative approach as a story agreed upon by a group of people that provides limits within which they dwell as embedded communicative agents. The approach arose in response to the structures, practices and beliefs that define the narrative shape and guide the organization's action and practitioners' actions. This approach is premised on the notion of what groups of persons know and do that puts limits and sheds light on the knowledge and actions of their organisations. Scholars who share this view are Fisher (1987) and Arnett *et al.* (2009). The narrative can change the actions of an organisation's practitioners and shift it into historical moments. Arnett *et al.* (2009) echo this when they say that: '*narrative provides guidelines for human action*'.

The narrative approach concurs with the codes, procedures, and standards approach which advocates the use of rules and guidelines in evaluating, protecting and prompting the good of corporately agreed-upon frameworks. While it is acknowledged that standards and codes are important to most organisations in crisis, the narrative approach frames a specified desideration and holds implications for action and evaluation of the action. The proponents of a narrative approach believe that the behaviour of persons in the narrative should be consistent with the good articulated by the narrative (Arnett *et al.*, 2009:54).

The narrative approach is favoured by institutions that use codes of ethics to communicate and share information among their members, in this case the PR profession. As explained by Arnett *et al.* (2009:57), a narrative approach to an institution assumes that practitioner's lives are guided by ethical codes about the way the institution is and should be, protecting and

promoting the good of particular codes. Commenting on the nature of the practitioners and the role of their institution in this regard, Arnett *et al.* (2009) add that practitioners themselves are hosts to goods that underlie, constitute and shape them.

To foster ethical communication among PR practitioners, the narrative approach must be used appropriately. Higgs-Kleyn & Kapelianis (1999:364) believe that this should be in the form of ethical codes where PR practitioners are required to maintain standards of conduct called for by law. Similarly, Arnett *et al.* (2009:53) declare that *'the narrative structure offers guidelines for living and for evaluating one's own life and that of others'*. This code of ethics will usually be a guide and include proper behaviour that would guide practitioners in their day-to-day public relations tasks and challenges.

In the conceptualising of ethical communication in PR, the narrative approach will favour strategies used by professional bodies to foster ethical communication among PR practitioners as they are subsumed under the codes of ethics, hence it generally functions more as a code than a communication system.

3.7 Summary

This chapter addressed the theoretical grounding of ethical communication in PR with a detailed examination of whether or not these approaches are relevant to the study. The chapter reached the conclusion that the reflective paradigm in PR, dialogue communication ethics, symmetrical communication, narrative and codes, procedures and standards are relevant theories to link PR practitioners and professional bodies with ethical communication, as indicated in the literature. The reflective paradigm shows that an organisation and its public can communicate with each other. Here PR plays a significant role in encouraging organisational members to balance their behaviour to the expectation of public opinion and vice versa and help strengthen the public's trust in the organisation through ethical communication. The dialogic communication ethics approach, on the other hand, provides a basis which includes key dialogue principles that underpin ethical communication in PR. The symmetrical communication approach demonstrates that PR practitioners can achieve ethical communication practice through the use of communication to manage mutually beneficial relationships with organisations and publics. The narrative and codes, procedures and standards approach argues that ethical communication is guided by a code of ethics of any institutional group. All these approaches justify the need for PR ethical communication practice and hence its important contribution if utilized to its full potential. The next chapter concentrates on the research methodology.

4 CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

To answer some research questions, we cannot skim across the surface. We must dig deep to get a complete understanding of the phenomenon we are studying. In qualitative research, we do indeed dig deep. We collect numerous forms of data and examine them from various angles to construct a rich and meaningful picture of a complex, multifaceted situation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:133).

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to describe and discuss research methods, sampling procedures as well as methods of data analysis used to collect data for this study. In this chapter, the researcher discusses the choice of the qualitative research methodology as the larger framework within which PR practitioners and professional bodies conceptualise ethical communication. These procedures are discussed in connection with the objective of the research which is to investigate how ethical communication is conceptualised and practised by PR practitioners and professional bodies in Cape Town, as well as to reach an understanding of the challenges PR practitioners face in their attempt to communicate ethically. Consequently, the chapter proceeds by way of discussing what motivated the study to adopt a qualitative approach as opposed to a quantitative approach. This is achieved by differentiating the two approaches as they relate to this study.

4.2 Quantitative versus qualitative research

Quantitative and qualitative research methods are the two principal methodologies for research approaches to research. They are concerned with the scientific method of attaining knowledge of human behaviour in a variety of contexts (Welman *et al.*, 2005:6). Evidence of this is reflected in what Lindlof & Taylor (2011:6) observed, 'Both quantitative and qualitative research approaches are legitimate resources for conducting research'. Quantitative and qualitative researches differ predominantly according to the nature of reality. The distinction between the two approaches lies in what constitutes reality, which influences the research style used in the two approaches. Quantitative researchers (positivists) argue that there is only one truth: an objective reality that exists independent of human perception (Sale *et al.*, 2002). To positivists, the objective is to observe and measure contributory interactions between variables within a value-free method. The qualitative approach, known as interpretivist, argues that human experience, which is the object of behavioural research, cannot be separated from the person who is experiencing it (Welman *et al.*, 2005). Researchers and object of study are interactively linked so that the findings are mutually created within the context of the situation, which shapes the inquiry (Sale *et al.*, 2002). The

ultimate aim of research according to qualitative researchers is to describe social reality from the perspective of the subject, not that of the observer (Eldabi *et al.*, 2002).

According to Eldabi *et al.* (2002), a qualitative approach differentiates itself from quantitative research in terms of the following features: it is based on a commitment to viewing actions and values from the perspective of the people being studied. It is conducted in a detailed description of the social setting. The main concern is to understand events and their behaviour in their context. It focuses primarily on viewing social life as a process rather than an outcome. Research avoids the imposition of inappropriate 'frames of reference' on the subjects, and lastly, the qualitative researcher is seen as the main instrument in the research process. Welman *et al.* (2005:9) point out that both quantitative and qualitative research are distinctly different in two aspects: numbers and words. Quantitative research usually aims for larger numbers of cases and the analysis of results is usually based on the statistical significance. Qualitative research, involves small samples of people, studied by means of in-depth methods.

Qualitative research is characterised by inductive reasoning as opposed to deductive reasoning (Draper, 2004:643). A qualitative inductive approach involves analyzing data with little or no predetermined theory, structure or framework and uses the actual data itself to drive the structure of analysis. Deductive approaches involve using a structure or predetermined framework to analyse data (Burnard, *et al.*, 2008). Qualitative studies in communication research are primarily based on inductive reasoning with a flexibility research design (Du Plooy: 2009:33, 180). Qualitative research often favours a relatively open and unstructured research strategy as opposed to quantitative approach which dictates what ought to be investigated and how it ought to be investigated (Welman *et al.*, 2005:8).

It is the researcher's view that the qualitative approach is most suitable for this study because the main concern is to investigate how ethical communication is conceptualised and practised by PR practitioners and professional bodies in Cape Town. The study seeks to gain 'chunky data' from the sample participants, data that cannot be numerically quantified. The data gathered through a qualitative approach helps the researcher to draw conclusions about conceptualisation and practice of ethical communication in professional practice of PR in Cape Town. The strength and appropriateness of qualitative research in this study is largely derived from the fact that it uses phenomenology and interpretivism to capture an objective reality and secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomena in question (Bryman, 1992:50).

4.3 Philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research: Phenomenology and interpretivism

The importance of the qualitative research approach in answering the objectives and questions raised by this study can be linked to the philosophical underpinning of qualitative research, which is in agreement with the overall objectives of this study. Significantly, the qualitative research approach is grounded on phenomenology. According to Blanche *et al.*, (2006:463) phenomenology is probably the earliest qualitative method used in psychology. Phenomenologists believe that all human beings exist in a dialectical relation with their lived world of experience: there can be no clear separation of self and world, or subject and object. (Blanche *et al.*, (2006:463). In other words, phenomenologists are concerned with understanding of human behaviour from the perspectives of the people involved (Welman *et al.*, 2005). Qualitative research is underpinned by the knowledge that humans depict by interpretation. Consequently, the impact of phenomenological ideas on qualitative research is fully encapsulated by Bryman (1992:53) who quoted Bogdan & Taylor (1975:13-14). Bogdan & Taylor (1975) state:

The phenomenologist views human behavior as a product of how people interpret the world. The task of the phenomenologist, and for us, the qualitative methodologists, is to capture the process of interpretation. In order to grasp the meanings of a person's behavior, the phenomenologist attempts to see things from that person's point of view.

Qualitative research is rooted in an interpretivist tradition (Draper, 2004). The main aim of interpretivism is not to establish relations of cause and effect but to explore the ways that people make sense of their social worlds and how they express these understandings through social reality (Deacon *et al.*, 1999). Deacon *et.al* (1999) point out: 'Among qualitative interpretivist researchers there is belief that all social knowledge is co-produced out of multiple encounters and arguments with people they are studying'. Qualitative research uses different kinds of methods connected with phenomenology and interpretivism. That is, qualitative research makes use of a holistic approach; they collect a wide array of data subject matter is collected through records, photos, observations, interviews and case studies (Welman *et al.*, 2005:9). The goal of qualitative research is to access the 'insider's view' by talking to subjects or observing their behaviour in a subjective way; they believe that first-hand experience of the object under investigation produces the best data (Welman *et al.*, 2005). The aim of the qualitative researcher is to describe and explain social phenomena as they occur in their natural settings.

A qualitative research approach in this study involves analysis of 'practitioner's data' and 'content data' that employs in-depth interviews, documents and social media analysis techniques. The aim of these techniques is to gain better information about the views of the subject (Welman et al., 2005). The researcher is interested in knowing and understanding the problem from the point of view of the research participants. This deep information is used to examine PR practitioners and help professional bodies understand ethical communication in PR. On the other hand, qualitative research provides the researcher with more information than a quantitative approach: the data is in words rather than numbers. It helps in understanding the context of the study because the researcher goes to the setting in which he/she is based to collect data for the study. As a result, the researcher will have a feel for the environment: there is a belief that activities 'can be best understood in the actual settings in which they occur' (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993:381). Researchers are aware of the weaknesses of the qualitative research approach. In this context, a distinction is made to examine the criticisms, which are consonant with the overall objectives of this study.

4.4 Criticism of qualitative research

Qualitative research is a broad, descriptive term, which includes various approaches to answering research questions that require an understanding of a given phenomenon within its own context (Wicks & Whiteford, 2006:94). The central facet of a qualitative approach is derived from the ability of the researcher to learn to see through other people's eyes and to interpret events from their point of view (Bryman, 1992:72). This central premise of qualitative research constitutes an approach to the study of social reality that is distinctively different from quantitative approach. A qualitative approach is criticised by researchers, quantitative researchers in particular, who question its value.

Criticism is largely directed at the authenticity of a source or the accuracy and reliability of the contents of the sources. According to Welman *et al* (2005:189) the question to be answered by qualitative researchers is for example whether the supposed author of a document is really its author. Silverman (2000:10) adds that the issue of consistency arises because of shortage of space: many qualitative studies provide readers with little more than brief, persuasive, data extracts. Critics argue that when people's activities are tape-recorded and transcribed, the reliability of the interpretation of transcripts might be gravely weakened by a failure to record apparently trivial, crucial pauses or overlaps. In addition, it is argued that the research is so personal to the researchers that other researchers might use the same data to reach radically different conclusions (Gray, 2009).

Another criticism levelled against qualitative research is the problem of 'anecdotalism', which questions the validity of much qualitative research (Silverman, 2000: 10). Weaknesses of the qualitative approach are fully encapsulated in Bryman's (1988:77) suggestions:

There is a tendency towards an anecdotal approach in the use of data in relation to conclusions or explanations in qualitative research. Brief conversations, snippets from unstructured interviews... are used to provide evidence of a particular contention. There are grounds for disquiet in that the representativeness or generality of these fragments is rarely addressed (Bryman, 1992:77).

In light of these contentions, the point of the preceding discussion is not to imply a deficiency within qualitative research. What has proved to be disquieting to some researchers, according to Bryman (1992:75) is whether qualitative researchers can really provide counts from the perspective of those whom they study. Bryman points out there is a concern about how qualitative researchers evaluate the validity of their interpretations of those perspectives. Such contentions direct qualitative researchers to pay a great deal of attention to reliability and validity. It is therefore in this respect that some qualitative researchers such as Guba and Lincoln (1985) substitute reliability and validity for the parallel concept of 'trustworthiness', containing four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. They argue that these concepts were originally developed in a quantitative tradition and are rooted in a positivist paradigm (Morse *et al.*, 2002:2; Gray, 2009). The issue of reliability and validity in qualitative research has been subtly replaced by criteria and standards for evolution of overall significance, relevance, impact and utility of completed design (Morse *et al.*, 2002).

4.5 Qualitative research: Issues of validity

Qualitative researchers strive for understanding: that deep structure of knowledge that comes from visiting personally with participants, spending extensive time in the field, and probing to obtain detailed meanings. During or after study, qualitative researchers ask, 'Did we get it right?' or 'Did we publish a 'wrong' or inaccurate account?'. The answer to these questions is sited in the validity in qualitative approach (Creswell, 2013:243).

Research strategies and data collection procedures are not the only areas in which quantitative and qualitative researches differ. These two research methods differ in the use of, and importance given to issues of validity. Validity in qualitative research refers to an attempt to assess the 'accuracy' of the findings as best described by the researchers and the participants (Creswell, 2013:249). Validity is viewed as a distinct strength of qualitative

research: the account made through extensive time spent in the field, the detailed description, and closeness of the researcher to participants in the study all add to the value or accuracy of the study (Creswell, 2013:249).

Validity in qualitative research has also been cast within descriptive and interpretive validity. These two aspects of validity are important in qualitative research. Descriptive validity refers to researchers' commitment to not fabricating or distorting what they hear or see in the field whereas interpretive validity refers to the accuracy of the concepts used by the researcher in relation to the perspective of the individuals included in the account (Maxwell, 1992:288). The key debate regarding validity in qualitative research is whether or not the researcher is providing a valid or accurate description of what events, utterances and behaviours mean to the people engaged with them (Maxwell, 1992).

The researcher of this study employed the following strategies to document the 'accuracy' of research findings: triangulation of data and peer examination. According to Creswell (2013:250) in triangulation, researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators and theories to provide corroborating evidence. Content analysis, document analysis and in-depth interviews were used to provide validity to this study. As a peer examination, a fellow postgraduate student in the Public Relations Management Department served as a peer reviewer. Validity was ensured through a detailed account of the focus of this study, participant's position and basis for selection, and the context from which data was gathered (see research methodology and methods).

4.6 Reliability in qualitative research

Another key concept that informed qualitative research in research methodology is the issue of reliability. It is important to note that reliability does not carry the same connotations in qualitative research as it does in quantitative research. Reliability in quantitative research, according to Black (1999) and Gray (2009:158) is an indication of consistency between two measures of the same thing. Qualitative reliability indicates that a researcher's approach is consistent between different researchers and different projects (Creswell, 2009:109). The central issue regarding reliability in qualitative research is how qualitative researchers check to determine whether the research method is consistent or reliable vis-a-vis the data collected (Creswell, 2009).

Gibbs (2007) identifies several reliability strategies to check consistency in qualitative research: such procedures enhance the ability of researchers to assess the reliability of their findings. They include: checking transcripts; making sure that there is no drift in the definition of codes; cross-checking codes and triangulation (Creswell, 2014). The researcher used

various techniques of analysis such as cross-checking codes developed by different researchers and comparing results that were independently derived; checking transcripts to make sure that they do not contain obvious mistakes made during transcription. Participants served as a check throughout the analysis process. The researcher used triangulation to ensure consistency and dependability. It is therefore in this respect that the researcher adopted qualitative research as design structure to achieve the aim and objectives of this study.

4.7 Research design

According to Thyer (1993:94), 'a research design is a blueprint or detailed plan of how a research study is to be completed'. It is a plan, structure and strategy of investigation conceived in order to obtain answers to research questions. Research design includes an outline of what the investigator will do from the hypothesis and its operational implications to the final analysis of data (Kerlinger, 1986:279; Kumar, 2005: 84).

The qualitative researcher makes use of certain methods to gather data. The main focus in qualitative approach is to explore, discover, explain, understand and clarify situations, feelings, perceptions, attitudes, values, beliefs and experiences of a particular group of people (Kumar, 2005:104). Qualitative research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants (Creswell, 2009: 13). In other words, qualitative research seeks to understand the world from the participants' point of view (Gray, 2009:171). Qualitative paradigms are regarded as the most appropriate for this study because they help to comprehend ethical communication from the point of view of PR managers and practitioners, and leaders of PR professional bodies in Cape Town. The study is drawn from the experiences and perceptions of the two groups of PR practitioners to gain insight into the meaning of ethical communication in PR

The research design is three-pronged. First, in-depth interviews with PR practitioners and social media content analysis were used to understand ethical communication and PR practitioners communicating with their publics. Second, document analysis and in-depth interviews with PR practitioners were used to decide how PR professional bodies conceptualise and foster ethical communication. Third, in-depth interviews with PR practitioners were used to arrive at the challenges PR practitioners face in their effort to communicate ethically. These techniques aided the researcher to understand ethical communication in PR as well as the problem of ethical communication, and also gain insight into application of ethical communication principles in PR practice.

4.8 Methods of data collection

Using qualitative research designs as outlined above, methods of data collection were employed in the manner in which they were used. A literature study, social media content analysis, documents analysis and in-depth interviews were conducted as part of the study.

4.8.1 Literature study

Using the literature review described in Chapter Two as one of the chief methods of data collection, the method for selection of textbooks, publications, online resources and journal articles was selected according to thematic coding. The nature of thematic coding was focused on these major themes: PR Ethics; Conceptualisation of ethical communication; Dialogic communication (encompassing dialogue and ethical communication); Symmetrical communication (encompassing symmetrical and ethical communication); and Professional bodies and ethical communication.

The idea of using a literature review as a method in this study was to discover the relations between each of these themes as they relate to the problem statement and research questions stated in Chapter One. In order to investigate the current debate surrounding these themes, a search were carried out in journals and other online resources as well as textbooks. Using the CPUT library database, general online searches were made of the following subscribed academic databases: *Emerald, EbscoHost, IRSpace, Proquest, ScienceDirect and SpringerLink*. Given that most internet searches on ethical communication in PR yield no concrete results, literature was drawn from a variety of different disciplines outside PR literature: communication ethics, psychology, management, business ethics and business media.

4.8.2 Qualitative content analysis: Social media

The literature survey revealed several unanswered questions that had to be addressed using qualitative content analysis. Using these questions as a basis, a social media content analysis was drawn up in order to obtain answers from PR practitioners and their publics to gain bilateral communication that underpins ethical communication in PR. Investigation occurred in a different way from the ordinary method employed by practitioners when communicating with publics. Social media, according to Metavana (2013,1758) provides even richer content about user opinions on different subjects, real world objects, and places. For this reason, investigation was carried out on PR social media platforms to obtain answers to the following research question: *Do PR practitioners in Cape Town communicate ethically with their publics?* Social media content analysis aided the researcher to understand

the relation and bilateral communication between PR organisations and their publics. This is possible because PR organisations in Cape Town use social media to communicate with their publics.

Comments, quotations and statements made by PR practitioners and their publics on their social media platforms within the period of 2012 to 2014 were gathered and analysed (see Chapter 5, section 5.4).

4.8.2.1 Strengths and weaknesses of social media content analysis

This research method has unique strengths which makes it important to this study. It gives the researcher a key source of strength in investigating communication between PR and publics at a time and place suitable to the requirements of the study. Its simplicity enabled the researcher to investigate the two-way flow of communication that characterised ethical communication practice. That is, the researcher was able to investigate PR and public conversations without either one-being aware that such investigation was taking place; a potential key source for emulating errors and bias. The technique has a weakness. In a situation where the PR organisation's social media platform or the efforts of the researcher could not capture communication statements, the content cannot be coded, thus affecting the findings of the study.

4.8.2.2 Sampling of incidents for content social media analysis

It is important to note that social media analysis played a key role in this study: it was used to understand how PR practitioners in Cape Town communicate with their publics. Therefore, the sampling technique was thematic coding. This is an important technique in analysing information obtained from organisations and their publics. These social media platforms allow publics to produce and annotate content and more importantly, empower them to share information with their organisations (Java, 2008:1)

4.8.2.3 Sample profile

As was mentioned earlier, the sampling frame consisted of the social media platforms of selected organisations. The sampling frame included Twitter, Facebook, Google+, Website and blogs that would collectively have the capability to contribute relevant information on ethical communication in PR. These platforms were an excellent communication channel to investigate how PR practitioners in Cape Town communicate with their publics.

Table 4.1: Social media platform of the selected organisations

| Organisations/ Agencies | Social media networks |
|---|---|
| Corporate Image (Corporate and Commercial communication, Cape Town) | Weblog, Website |
| HWB Communications (Public relations and communications consultancy, Cape Town) | Twitter, Google+, Facebook (Jan. 2013 – Feb. 2014). |
| Marcus Brewster (Public relations consultancy, Cape Town) | Twitter (Jan. 2012 – Jan. 2014), Website. |

4.8.3 Document analysis

In attempting to understand how PR practitioners in Cape Town communicate with their publics, there is a need to go beyond social media content analysis. There is an urgent need to use other methods of investigation and analysis that enable the researcher to understand how PR practitioners communicate with their publics and how professional bodies conceptualise and foster ethical communication: hence the use of document analysis. Document analysis plays a key role in analysing personal documents, memos, monthly, quarterly and annual reports, mission statements, quotations, mass media material, open-ended questions as well as unstructured interviews (Welman *et al*, 2005:221). The researcher obtained and analysed documents from PR and corporate communication consultancies and professional bodies as well as ethical communication statements published by selected PR agencies or organisations in Cape Town. The documents were used to examine thematic issues surrounding PR and public relations that underpin ethical communication practice.

4.8.3.1 Strengths and weaknesses of documents analysis

Document analysis is a research method that is flexible in analysing and unifying unstructured material. Compared with other qualitative research techniques such as observation and interviewing, document analysis possesses a number of advantages. Documents are often a rich source of information; contextually relevant and grounded in the contexts they represent, always available and having ‘truth value’; they are seen as a reliable

and trustworthy source (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011:237). This is particularly *ad rem* in this study, which analyses PR practitioners and professional bodies and how they understand ethical communication. Notwithstanding these strengths, it is important to note that the method has some weaknesses. For example, where organisations refuse the researcher access to journals or organisation documents, the researcher may have difficulty obtaining data needed for the study. In the case of handwritten journals, the researcher might face difficulties reading the handwriting; the content cannot be coded and is thus excluded from overall analysis.

4.8.3.2 Sampling of incidents for documents analysis

PR practitioners of Corporate Image, HBW Communications and Marcus Brewster, Cape Town, and Professional bodies (PRISA and IABC, Cape Town) constitute the sampling frame required for this study. The sampling frame in turn is drawn from the documents of these agencies and professional bodies. During in-depth interviews, the researcher asked for access to obtain documentation from the organisations' websites, newsletters and magazines. The HBW Communications newsletters (*What does the situation look like in South Africa, I hear you ask, 2008, Keeping it straight, 2014 and Build your online community, 2014*) were obtained from their website. The documents contain information that aided the researcher to gain more detailed information into how the organisations communicate with their publics. The researcher obtained ethical communication statements (About Us) published by Corporate Image and Marcus Brewster, Cape Town on their website. The reason for this was to draw different ideas from the documents obtained from HBW Communications.

The leaders of PRISA and IABC respectively, were approached during the interview and the researcher asked for access to the organisation's documents. The documents collected are the PRISA and IABC code of ethics, the Stockholm Accords, the King's Report III and IABC magazines. These documents were purposively chosen to offer diverse views on the subject. The code of ethics was collected from PRISA and IABC websites, the Stockholm Accords and the Kings Report III were found online. These documents provide ethical communication values that guide practitioners in their day-to-day PR tasks and challenges. The codes, in particular, help practitioners communicate more ethically, enhance honesty and sustain true relations with their publics. The Stockholm Accords and the Kings Reports guide PR practitioners on how to practise truthful, fair and ethical communication. The IABC magazines (*Communication World – Inside Out, 2008*) and (*Communication World – The Value of God, 2009*) were found at the office of the IABC president. The magazines contain

information about truth-telling, dialogic and symmetrical communication that underpins ethical communication in PR. The documents were chosen because they offer a rich source of information, concerning reliability and trustworthiness. The documents were collected and analysed at the time and place suitable for this study. The thematic coding procedure was used to analyse the documents. A thematic sampling technique was useful as it helped the researcher to divide the data from both the in-depth interview and document analysis into a manageable and coherent sample which formed the unit of analysis.

4.8.4 In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews or semi-structured interviews have been described as focused, non-directive, opened-ended and active (Curtis & Curtis, 2011:29). In-depth interviews are an adaptation of the one-on-one interview approach. Curtis & Curtis (2011:30) posit that in-depth interviews hold most value in exploring an issue about which little is known, or to obtain a detailed picture of what people think. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with selected representatives of PR practitioners, corporate communicators and leaders of PR professional bodies who have the capacity to contribute relevant information on ethical communication in PR. The key participants were identified and helped the researcher to conceptualise, as well as identify ethical communication challenges PR practitioners face in their day-to-day practice. During interviews, the researcher also asked participants to explain their understanding of ethical communication principles.

4.8.4.1 Strengths and weaknesses of in-depth interviews

Compared to questionnaires, in-depth interviews were used to gather 'rich' data and follow up on interesting points during discussion that the researcher did not anticipate (Curtis & Curtis, 2011:32). This is of direct import to this study, as it enabled the researcher to obtain detailed and multiple responses for the set questions. This allows the participants to use their own words leading to them being key players in the study. Individual in-depth interviews, not group interviews, have the unique ability to produce accounts about action and accounts in action (Schroder *et al.*, 2003:151). The biggest advantage of in-depth interviews is that the researcher is in complete control of the interview situation. In spite of the above strengths, it is significant to note that the method has weaknesses. Creswell (2013:164) suggested that in a situation where the researcher faces a less articulate or shy interviewee, the researcher might run the risk of obtaining less than adequate data. In-depth interviews are time consuming. According to Welman, *et al.* (2005:164) they include not only the time taken by the interview itself, but that used to arrange suitable appointments. In this study, the research participants were not shy, but a great deal of time was consumed during interviews in terms

of apportionments, as the researcher returned to the selected organisations several times before the interviews actually took place.

4.8.4.2 Sampling of interview participants

Kumar (2005: 164) notes that sampling is 'a process of selecting a few samples from a bigger sampling population to become the basis for predicting the prevalence of an unknown piece of information, situation or outcome regarding the bigger group'. Sampling methods are useful in selecting participants for in-depth interviews, because the interview is connected to the decision about which persons to interview, and from which groups the interview should come. There are two different kinds of sampling methods, the probability and non-probability sampling methods (Dane, 2011:121). Probability sampling refers to any technique that ensures a random sample: any technique that ensures that every element of the population in the sampling frame has an equal chance of being included in the sample. Non-probability sampling refers to the procedure in which elements have unequal chances of being included (Dane, 2011:121).

In this study, the sampling method for an in-depth interview is non-probability. According to Kumar (2005:177), 'non-probability sampling designs are used when the number of elements in a population is either unknown or cannot be individually identified'. Thus this technique enabled the researcher to estimate sampling error. More important, its convenience and affordability aided the researcher considerably, because interviews were conducted within Cape Town. This saved transportation cost and ameliorated the disappointment of being asked to return to organisations when participants were not available. There are several different types of non-probability procedures: accidental, quota, representative, and purposive sampling. Following Welman *et al.*, (2005) and Dane's (2011) insights, the researcher used purposive sampling for the in-depth interviews.

According to Welman *et al.*, (2005:69) purposive sampling is the most important of non-probability sampling. Researchers rely on their experience, ingenuity and/or previous research findings deliberately to obtain elements or units of analysis in such a manner that the sample they obtain is suitable for their own specific needs. Hence, purposive sampling is chosen because the researcher used his previous research experience gained during his BTech degree (Fourth year) to gather information and understand participant's behaviour during the interviews. The sample participants are representatives of the population and composed of all elements that contain the most characteristics of the population.

4.8.4.3 Characteristics of purposive sampling

The purposive sampling approach in qualitative research is characterized by a specific approach. This entails the decision as to whom to select as participants, the specific type of sample strategy and the size of sampling to be studied (Creswell, 2013:155). Lincoln and Guba (in Struwing & Stead, 2001:122) add another dimension of qualitative purposive sampling by comparing it with each case in a quantitative approach. They explain: 'The total sample is not drawn in advance as is the case in quantitative approach and the sample size is not finalized before the study commences but may change as the study progresses; as additional information is required more specific sampling units are sought'.

The characteristics of purposive sampling in qualitative research so far provide the following insights:

| Characteristics | Insights |
|----------------------------|---|
| Participants in the sample | Understood sample participants as those who have experience of the phenomenon being studied. Criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon. |
| Types of sampling | Decisions lay with who or what should be sampled, what form the sample will take and how many participants need to be sampled. Sampling will be consistent with the information within one of the five approaches: narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study. |
| Sample size | Size question is an equally important decision for sampling strategy in the data collection process. Size sample not only to study participants but also to collect extensive detail. |

Table 4.2: Characteristics of Purposive Sampling

Source: Adapted from Creswell (2013:155).

Upon finalisation of an in-depth interview sample, the sample size was grounded on the objectives of the research. In a qualitative study, Creswell (2013:157) posits, 'a number of participants range from 1 to 325', while Dukes (1984; Creswell, 2013) recommends studying 3 to 10 subjects because they depend on in-depth interviews and information they possess. As such, interviewees consisted of 6 participants, who comprise the PR CEO/ managers and practitioners of the selected organisations, and the representatives of PR professional bodies.

4.8.4.4 Recruitment of interview organisations/ participants

Organisations and participants for in-depth interviews were purposively chosen to offer diverse and broad views on the subject. The following organisations, agencies and participants were interviewed:

- **Jennifer Crocker** – Accounts Director, Corporate Image (Reputation management and communications agency, Cape Town)
- **Evelyn John Holtzhausen** – CEO, HWB Communications (Public relations, media and communications consultancy, Cape Town)
- **Jo-Anne Smetherham** – Accounts Manager, HWB Communications (Public relations, media and communications consultancy, Cape Town)
- **Marcus Brewster** – Chairman, Marcus Brewster (Public relations company, Cape Town)
- **Solly Moeng** (President of Public Relations Institute of South Africa, Cape Town)
- **Nirvana Bechan** (President of International Association of Business Communicators, Cape Town)

HBW Communications and Marcus Brewster are well-known PR agencies in Cape Town which have won numerous PR awards in South Africa for excellent service to both their clients and publics. The agencies were chosen on the basis of knowledge of South African PR practice, and specifically Cape Town, long tenure in the PR field and wide range knowledge of ethical communication in PR practice. The CEO and Manager were interviewed because they have experience in applying and creating the organisation's core strategies and shed insights on their beliefs, experiences and expectations regarding ethics and ethical communication in PR.

Corporate Image is one of South Africa's leading communication and public affairs PR consultancies that has been in operation since 1987. It has been extensively involved over the years with the corporate FMCG, financial and industrial sectors. The reason for interviewing PR practitioners and communicators rather than the CEO was to draw different

ideas from other PR agencies involved in this study. Another reason was to gain more detailed insights into how they communicate with the public and enumerate the ethical communication challenges faced in day-to-day practice. One PR practitioner was selected because her views are important in this study: she engages more in PR ethical communication practice.

The PR Professional bodies in Cape Town were selected purposively and conveniently. PRISA and IABC are chosen because they coordinate and guide PR practitioners: they make decisions that influence the behaviour of PR practitioners. The leaders of PRISA and IABC in Cape Town were contacted and interviewed to provide insights into professional bodies and how they understand ethical communication, as well as their role in fostering ethical communication. PRISA was established in 1957: it is the professional body for PR practitioners in South Africa (Rensburg, 2014:127). PRISA is described as 'one of the leading PR professional bodies in the world' (Skinner *et al*, 2004: 22).

The IABC was established in 1970, with overseas chapters in many cities including Cape Town. The Cape Town chapter president, Nirvana Bechan, was approached and interviewed in order to understand how IABC conceptualised ethical communication, and how they seek to foster ethical communication among its members.

Interviews with participants were scheduled by appointment. Interviews were conducted in organisations to enable the researcher to gain access to the organisation's documents. The length of each interview varied according to each individual participant. The order of the questions was not always the same and depended on how participants answered. Sometimes the researcher posed additional questions to explore some of the topics even further. The researcher made use of an interview guide, which consists of ten questions centered on the research objectives (see Appendix E). According to Welman, *et al*, (2005:166), an interview guide is a list of topics and aspects of these topics that have a bearing on the given theme: the researcher should raise them during the course of the interview.

The researcher was able to obtain accurate information with the aid of a tape recorder. A tape recorder is 'an audio storage that records and plays sound, including spoken voices'. It gave the researcher the power to record audio with minimal loss in quality as well as store audio for more than 25 hours. This instrument was used with the permission of the participants, because the researcher was aware that some participants could be uncomfortable while their response was being recorded even though they were assured of confidentiality. In case of malfunction or failure of a tape recorder, the researcher took notes as a backup.

4.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical behaviour is important in research, as in any other field of human activity. In this study, participants were granted safeguards from being caused discomfort or physical harm. Confidentiality, fair treatment, privacy of an organisation's policies were respected.

The researcher recognised that undertaking in-depth interviews and document analysis as an occasion for research required ethical awareness. Therefore the researcher sought permission from the organisations before undertaking research. Informed consent was received from the CEO/ managers of PR organisations after they were made aware of the type of information needed, and for what purpose it would be used, how they were expected to participate in the study and the number of practitioners needed. All participants were made aware their participation was voluntary. All questions were in accordance with South African laws and university guidelines.

4.10 The role of the researcher

In qualitative studies, the researcher is the instrument. His/her presence in the lives of the participants invited to be part of the study is fundamental to the methodology (Marshall & Rossman, 2006:72) A qualitative research approach, according to Kumar (2005:104) involves exploring, explaining and clarifying situations and experiences, hence participants were asked by the researcher to explain ethical communication, as they experience it in their day-to-day practice, and speak freely to the communication content, as they would do with their clients. In conducting the interviews, the researcher followed Marshall & Rossman's (2006:73) advice to be 'truthful but vague' in portraying the research purpose to participants. As such, the researcher employed everyday conversation strategy by asking general questions before moving on to the questions involving ethical communication in PR practice. The researcher used the features of theoretical sensitivity, by being insightful and sensitive to the situation to differentiate between what is important and what is not.

The researcher's role was to comment about the experiences that provide background data through which participants understand the topic. He commented on connections between him, the participants and the organisations. He ensured that the conversations did not deviate from key questions and objectives of the research, which is the understanding of how ethical communication is conceptualised and practised by PR practitioners and professional bodies in Cape Town.

4.11 Data analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organising the data, text data as in transcripts, for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion (Creswell, 2013:180). In this study, the researcher summarized the data, cleaned and reduced them through the following steps:

4.11.1 Transcription

Creswell (2013:298) notes that, 'If data have been recorded using technical media, their transcription is a necessary step on the way to their interpretation'. In this study, data collected from in-depth interviews with the use of a tape recorder and field notes were transcribed. This process helped the researcher to move closer to understanding ethical communication implied by the data as it concerns the aims and objectives of the research. The tape was listened to repeatedly to ensure the accuracy of the transcription. All the interviews were transcribed word-for-word so that detail was not lost.

4.11.2 Data editing

According to Kumar (2005:220), data editing consists of examining the completed research instruments to identify and minimize, as far as possible, errors, incompleteness, misclassification or gaps in information obtained from the participants. He identifies three tasks in the editing process: completeness, accuracy and uniformity. In this study, the researcher cross-checked the contents and field notes collected by means of in-depth interviews for completeness. To ensure accuracy, the researcher sent back data to participants for confirmation and approval to ensure that no mistake was made during transcription. The last mechanism that was employed by the researcher is recalling participant's answers to ensure that data is clean; that is free from inconsistencies. These mechanisms helped to remove ambiguities in meanings and inferences drawn by the researcher.

4.11.3 Qualitative thematic content analysis

Having cleaned the data, the final step is coding it. The 'data cleaned', means when a substantial amount of data is reduced to manageable and understandable texts (Welman, *et al*, 2005:213) Qualitative content analysis means analysis of the contents of an interview or field notes in order to identify the main themes that emerge from the responses given by the researcher's participants (Kumar, 2005:240). The task of content analysis is to find out the

patterns, ideas, thoughts, expressions and conceptions and to classify them into codes. In this study, data generated by qualitative in-depth interviews, social media content and document analysis was classified according to a number of predetermined categories: in what is known as thematic content analysis. Qualitative thematic content analysis according to Neuman (1997:273) is an interpretative approach which involves exploring the meanings represented in the frequency of particular themes as a reflection of a phenomenon, which is a characteristic of quantitative content analysis. During this process, data is broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions were asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data (Seale, 2004).

Therefore, the collected data was grouped into thematic codes such as: ethical communication and PR profession, conceptualisation of ethical communication by PR practitioners and professional bodies, criteria for ethical communication in PR, how PR practitioners in Cape Town engage with their publics, the systems used by professional bodies to foster ethical communication among PR practitioners, challenges faced by professional bodies in fostering ethical communication among PR practitioners and ethical communication challenges affecting PR practitioners in Cape Town. In other words, the range and nature of the thematic codes depended entirely on the aims, objectives and theoretical framework of the research. Additionally, interpretations of results started at the same time as the data-collection process. Data was analysed manually.

4.12 Summary

This chapter detailed research methodology and methods within the realm of qualitative research, with strong emphasis on a literature survey, social media content and document analysis, and in-depth interviews. Creswell (2009:194) is of the opinion that the intent of a qualitative research approach is to understand particular social situations, events, roles, groups, or interaction. He argues that qualitative research is a process: the researcher gradually makes sense of a social phenomenon by contrasting, comparing, replicating and cataloguing the object of the study. This study covers some familiar ground in revisiting ethics and ethical communication in PR; it tried to break new ground by understanding how PR practitioners and professional bodies in Cape Town conceptualise and practise ethical communication, and understand the challenges PR practitioners face in their effort to communicate ethically. This chapter indicated some of the characteristics of qualitative research that distinguished it from quantitative methodology as Creswell (2009:195) outlines:

- Qualitative research occurs in natural settings, where human behaviour and events occur such as providing a picture of what is currently happening in PR industry in Cape Town).

- Investigate participants' perceptions and experiences, and the way they practise ethical communication in PR.
- The primary instrument is data collection rather than some inanimate mechanism.
- Data are reported in words: primarily in the participant's words.
- Meaning and interpretations are negotiated with participant's data sources.

It is important to note that this study structure characterises qualitative research approach. The study should be understood according to Creswell's characteristics of a qualitative approach since it describes what is currently happening in ethical communication in PR practice in Cape Town using literature study, social media content, document and in-depth interviews.

Did the research method achieve its aims? The next chapter will discuss the findings and analysis of the data of this study.

5 CHAPTER FIVE: DATA PRESENTATION, DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

... often qualitative researchers equate data analysis with approaches for analysing text and image data. The process of analysis is much more. It also involves organising the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organising themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them. These steps are interconnected and form a spiral of activities all related to the analysis and presentation of the data (Creswell, 2013:179).

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and analysis of the study. The data was collected through a literature review, document analysis, social media content analysis and in-depth interviews. The data collected was used to critically analyse PR practitioners and professional bodies' conceptualisation of ethical communication, which was the main objective of this study. The chapter comprises two sections: one section discusses the findings obtained from PR practitioners and another section discusses findings obtained from professional bodies. The chapter commences with the presentation and discussion of the oscillations in the conceptualisation of ethical communication in PR literature followed by the presentation and discussion of the conceptualisation of ethical communication by PR practitioners and professional bodies in Cape Town. The final section explores and details some of the challenges that PR practitioners in Cape Town face in their day-to-day PR practice.

5.2 Conceptualisation of ethical communication in public relations scholarship

A central issue identified in the literature review is that ethical communication in public relations is a complex, contested concept and practice. It is conceptualised differently by PR scholars and practitioners at different moments in time. Based on the data collected, the findings showed that two schools of thought have emerged which attempt to conceptualise ethical communication. The first school of thought, which signifies an early break from discredited unilateral publicity communication in PR conceptualises ethical communication as symmetrical dialogue (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Bivins, 1987; Pearson, 1989; Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Leeper, 1996; Hung, 2001; Edgett, 2002; Huang, 2004). It views ethical communication as characterised by counter-arguments. Contemporary scholarly debate on ethical communication argues that ethical communication has moved beyond dialogic and symmetrical communication, and that ethical communication should be underpinned by dialogic principles (Makau, 1991; Kent & Taylor, 2002; Bowen, 2007; Doorley & Garcia, 2007; Parsons, 2008). Although this school foregrounds dialogue, it extends the dialogue to

include key principles such as integrity, openness, loyalty, fair-mindedness, respect and fair communication.

Within the 'early simplistic' paradigm, Edgett (2002:3) contended that PR scholars eschew the monological 'manipulative', mode of communication in favour of a more balanced process popularly termed two-way symmetrical communication. In this type of communication, organisations may be as likely as indented publics to change perceptions or behaviours. This paradigm suggests that for ethical communication to occur, the publics are valued equally with the organisations; thus, according to Theunissen & Wan Noordin (2012:22) and Paquette *et al.*(2014:2), publics are regarded as a subject, not an object or a means toward ends. The result is a process that meets ethical communication standards: one-way communication, such as press agency, information dissemination and two-way asymmetrical communication, which uses communication to persuade strategic publics to exhibit the behaviour that the organisation wants have been discredited (Wilcox *et al.*, 2001: 43).

The bilateral symmetrical approach of communication pioneered by Grunig (1992) and his co-researchers (Dozier and Ehling, 1995) is bolstered in earlier work by Kruckeberg & Strack (1988) who conclude, that: 'PR practitioners are the mediators between organisations and their publics'. The outcome of this mediation is that all parties benefit and that no one party attempts to control the perceptions and ideas of the other. Grunig & Grunig (1992) comment thus on the process by which 'mutual gains' are established:

This process is one of mechanism by which organisations and the public's interact to manage interdependence for the benefit of all. That is, both the organisation and the public listen to each other to come up with an agreement.

The linking of mutual gains and symmetrical communication, implicit in this comment, and the notion of ethical communication, find several echoes in ethical communication literature in PR. Edgett (2002:4) quotes Kruckeberg & Starck (1988): '*mutual gains communication is the only means by which organisations can effectively secure and maintain the trust of their publics*'. These scholars maintain that, for PR to be effective in highly controversial environments, the best method of communication is a give-and-take situation in which organisations display dialogue, discourse and willingness to change course if necessary (Edgett, 2002:4).

The 'early simplistic' paradigm of ethical communication conceptualisation is one that oscillates between the two-way symmetrical communication and discourse ethics espoused by philosopher Jurgen Habermas. This conceptualisation views all moral action as communicative and implies that dialogue, not monologue, is essential for humans to

understand each other (Leeper, 1996, Edgett, 2002). This confirms Pearson's (1989a) suggestion that Habermas's distinction between monological and dialogical rationality mirrors what he calls 'the tension' between two PR approaches. Two-way asymmetrical communication denotes the object is to use information about audiences to manipulate them: two-way symmetrical communication means the object is mutually beneficial discourse.

Pearson (1989a) makes an important augmentation to Grunig & Grunig's (1992) and Dozier *et al.*'s (1995) approach of the most ethically desirable type of communication when he proposes a set of 'prescriptions' or 'rules' for ethical communication. These rules would apply equally to all participants in the communication process; that is, an organisation and its public. Fundamentally, Pearson advocates that all parties agree to conditions of communication to make the exchange mutually satisfactory. Then he suggests regular, independent audits to ensure that the rules are being followed, and that all parties remain satisfied throughout the process (Edgett, 2002:4). Moreover, Pearson (1989b:128) claims that corporate PR practitioners are, in effect, the moral keepers of their organisations inasmuch as they are practitioners who prescribe how dialogue with the organisation's public will be carried out. He concludes that communication systems should be managed between organisations and their public so that they are as close as possible to the highest ethical standards of dialogue: 'the core ethical responsibility of PR from which all other obligations follow' (Edgett, 2002).

This paradigm suggests that ethical communication can be achieved only through dialogue, which can be achieved only when there is equality in the give-and-take of a relation: the equilibrium achieved in the two-way symmetrical communication is the achievement of mutual understanding between organisation and publics (Sharpe, 2000:350).

By contrast, nothing in the literature has been more influential in suggesting that ethical communication should be defined in terms of a contemporary paradigm than Kent & Taylor's (2002) conceptualisation of a dialogic PR approach which implies that ethical communication does not concur until dialogic principles of mutuality, propinquity, empathy and commitment are achieved. This paradigm implies that ethical communication should be underpinned by dialogue orientation such as recognition of organisation-public relations. They should engage in temporality and spontaneity of interactions with publics, supportiveness and confirmation of public goals and interests, which involve a willingness to interact with individuals and publics on their own terms. Organisations need to commit themselves to dialogue, interpretation, and understanding in interaction with publics (Kent & Taylor, 2002:25).

Pearce, in Heath *et al.*, (2006), conceptualise links between ethical communication and contemporary paradigm. Pearce's definition suggests that all dialogue in its PR context has certain common features, such as the inclusion of as many stakeholders as possible,

engaging with publics as human beings and not just as representatives of interest groups, focusing on listening and speaking, and constructing situations that allow, encourage and invite publics to speak from the heart rather than utter catchphrases (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2011:10). This conceptualisation implies that ethical communication is necessary in the PR practice in that it must serve the public interest and earn public acceptance.

McAllister & Taylor (2006) suggest that ethical communication is a new level of PR communication in integrating relations inside as well as outside an organisation by using dialogic principles of genuineness, commitment to conversation and investment of both parties in the relationship. This conceptualisation, again, implies that organisations should foster public interaction: it has a procedural approach to dialogue by establishing practices that facilitate the organisation – public relations between the organisation and its specific public. The organisation cannot, and should not, control the outcome and process *per se*, but can control the environment in which dialogue takes place. This requires times, effort and resources which both parties need to invest, not just the organisation (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2011:10).

Parsons (2008) lists some of the dialogic principles for ethical decision-making in her five pillars of PR ethics relating to the practice of ethical communication. These include veracity (to tell the truth), non-maleficence (to do no harm), beneficence (to do good), confidentiality (to respect privacy) and fairness (to be fair and social responsibility). These principles evolved from analysis of ways in which long-held ethical communication principles might be applied to the field of PR practice. When contemporary scholars examined these principles and analyzed the extent to which they might be more widely useful, they concluded that as an ethical tool, they provide an important analytical tool, helping PR practitioners to communicate ethically (Parsons (2008:20).

As pointed out by contemporary paradigms, Parsons (2008) spelt out the requirements for ethical communication as: participants must have an equal chance to initiate and maintain mutual relations through commitment, genuineness, honesty, and fairness. Participants must have an equal chance and willingness to participate. Participants must be treated equally and with respect, support, trust: they should feel safe to engage and interact. Participants must be free of manipulation and control. These assumptions appear to support the conclusion reached by Grunig (1992) that ethical communication cannot be achieved until an organisation reaches a level of open, honest, truthful, two-way symmetrical communication and change adjustment.

5.3 Understandings of ethical communication by public relations practitioners in Cape Town

Ethical communication is central to PR practice. Having a good understanding of ethical communication strengthens the quality of the ethical behaviour of PR practitioners. In this study ethical communication is viewed as a means through which practitioners engage in a manner that is not only legal but sensitive to cultural values and beliefs (Doorley & Garcia, 2007:36).

The data in this study show that PR practitioners in Cape Town have a mixed understanding of ethical communication. Some PR practitioners within the same context conceptualised ethical communication differently. Ethical communication in public relations is conceptualised as symmetrical dialogue in some PR agencies, while in others, it is underpinned by dialogic principles such as honesty, openness, loyalty, fair-mindedness, respect, integrity and forthright communication.

Analysis of the data collected from PR practitioners in Cape Town revealed that practitioners are unclear about whether ethical communication is conceptualised as symmetrical dialogue or whether it is based on dialogic values informing the practice. This dichotomy is based on the 'early simplistic' paradigm that conceptualises ethical communication as dialogic and symmetrical communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Bivins, 1987; Pearson, 1989; Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Leeper, 1996; Hung, 2001; Edgett, 2002; Huang, 2004), and a contemporary paradigm that argued it should be underpinned by dialogic principles such as openness, honesty, loyalty, fair-mindedness, respect, integrity, and forthright communication (Makau, 1991; Kent & Taylor, 2002; Bowen, 2007; Doorley & Garcia, 2007; Parsons, 2008; Theunissen & Wan Noord, 2012).

5.3.1 Dominant perspective of ethical communication among public relations practitioners in Cape Town

Data provided by PR practitioners in Cape Town indicate the contemporary paradigm as the dominant perspective of ethical communication in PR practice. According to Jennifer Crocker, accounts director for reputation, management and communication agency Corporate Image, ethical communication should be underpinned by dialogic principles such as truthfulness and honesty.

Ethical communication is about telling the truth, to not lie, and be honest at all times. It means to be honest to your responses mostly when it involves the media and public. A PR practitioner must be truthful and honest when communicating with key

stakeholders especially the general public. And should be true to his/herself and the client (s).

Truthfulness and honesty are key principles that underpin ethical communication in PR literature. According to Christians & Traber (1997:60) truthfulness is established when PR practitioners communicate to publics not only the contents that are asserted to be true, but practitioners assume and communicate a posture toward themselves. In contrast, Culbertson (1983:65) argues that honesty requires telling what one believes, on the basis of careful checking, to be true. Friedman (2001) acknowledges that honesty and truthfulness are core principles of PR and that success in PR demands strict intellectual honesty which must be practised at all times in order to maintain credibility. Although existing PR literature discusses ethical communication in terms of dialogic principles of truthfulness and honesty, it falls short of fulfilling ethical communication understanding in PR. Referring to the contemporary paradigm, Parsons (2008:19), similarly argues that there are other dialogic principles to consider:

If telling the truth and being honest are cornerstones of ethical communication in PR, is it enough of a yardstick to understand ethical communication in PR? As dialogic principles, they start and constitute few of those fundamental assumptions about communicating ethically, but they are only few of several such principles that are necessary for the evaluation of ethical behaviour of PR practitioners.

If it were true that truthfulness and honesty are not enough to conceptualise ethical communication in PR, it may be concluded that PR practitioners need to go beyond truthfulness and honesty as dialogic principles to provide a coherent and holistic understanding of ethical communication in PR.

Explaining this aspect, Kent and Taylor (2002:24), state that dialogue is based on assumptions:

Although a dialogic communication to PR cannot be easily operationalized, or reduced to a series of steps, dialogue does consist of several coherent assumptions. An extensive literature review of the concept of dialogue in PR and communication reveals five overarching tenets of dialogue namely mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk and commitment. These tenets encompass the implicit and explicit assumptions that underlie the concept of ethical communication.

Kent and Taylor (2002) contend that when PR practitioners understand these principles, it helps practitioners elevate publics to the status of communication equal with the organisations. These quotations, however, elevate dialogic principles as a dominant view.

That is a view elaborated by the contemporary paradigm that ethical communication should be based on values such as honesty, openness, loyalty, fair-mindedness, respect, integrity and forthright communication (Bowen, 2007:1). In supporting this assertion, Doorley & Garcia (2007:38) suggest that ethical communication engages in communication that is truthful, accurate, and fair and behaviour that is intrinsic to the process of shaping public opinion by means of communication.

The nature and quality of ethical communication which PR practitioners in Cape Town share with their publics is based on the contemporary paradigm and is encapsulated by Evelyn Holitzhausen, CEO of HWB Communications who argues that PR practitioners would never communicate something that is not true, harmful, calculated to destroy or compromise the public's best interest:

Ethical communication requires honesty. Dishonesty, lies and cheating, however, are not accepted in PR practice. As PR practitioners, we are always obligated to be honest and speak with integrity.

Holitzhausen contends that honesty, truthfulness and integrity will provide a platform for a mutual relation between an organisation and its public. Communicating with integrity is beneficial to the management of organisation–public relations. Holitzhausen states the following:

Our motivation should not be the fear of not communicating ethically. We ought rather to depart from a point of integrity, and consistently deal in a manner that is ethical, open and honest. This is what HWB Communications strives for ... when dealing with its clients and publics and it is the quality we look for in our clients and service providers... Our drive will be to continue to communicate (work) with integrity. In this manner we hope to grow our business – and assist our clients to grow theirs – to new heights in 2014 and beyond.

This view is supported by another HWB Communication specialist who adds another dimension: that PR practitioners should not only communicate ethically but guide their clients to communicate with integrity. In general, she states thus:

If you were to be on a public stage and someone walked in to ask what you have done, would you be able to do it without shame? One should be careful not to work with unethical people, but it doesn't mean a client that has done badly in the past cannot do good. You would have to teach them to communicate ethically and with integrity.

The data above shows that PR practitioners feel that communicating with integrity, honesty and truthfulness enables them to communicate ethically and do their work well. The data, again, implies that PR practitioners have a responsibility to speak the truth, be honest and engage in open and fair communication whether they like it or not (Parsons, 2008:14). PR practitioners' codes of ethics provide chapter and verse on the need for truth, honesty, integrity, openness, loyalty, respect and fair communication. The practitioners' code of ethics states that ethical communication is a core value and inherent to the conduct of every practitioner.

PRISA (2004) states: *'Members agree to conduct themselves professionally, with truth, accuracy, fairness and responsibility to the public and towards colleagues and to an informed society.'*

The idea of dialogic values and ethical codes is based on the recognition of mutual relations between PR practitioners and publics. These values are the fundamental beliefs that guide behaviour and ethical communication-making processes. Martinson (1996:45) agrees that PR practitioners wishing to communicate ethically must adopt dialogic principles of truthfulness, fairness and responsibility as a norm. Makau (1991:115) emphasizes principles of veracity (truthfulness) which are based on a belief that *'... effective public communication depends at least in part upon an audience's trust in the speaker's sincerity and goodwill'*. She goes on to say that the principle of truthfulness is flexible because there are times when promises may rightly be broken and when deception is justifiable. Similarly, Crocker argues that, although ethical communication involves telling the truth, it similarly requires the practitioner not to compromise a client's interest.

Crocker: *'there is some place that a journalist or public spot something or question, you can say I'm not going to answer that not because you are trying to lie to somebody but because there is a reason for that. I am happy to ethically explain to a journalist why there is. For example, no retail companies who are going to expose what 'shoplifting' figures are e.g. Pick-n-Pick, Checkers etc. will not come up and say last year we lost so much money due to 'shoplifting'. The reason is business because; first, it has nothing to do with the public. It's actually lost to the company. Secondly, it poses a danger to the company in terms of security system of the company.'*

From an ethical communication standpoint, not being completely open for moral reasons is an ethical offence: whether the motives are positive or moral is not relevant. All that matters in such a case is that the lie is unethical. Bok (1978: 244) regards any form of deception as unacceptable, and argues that it is fundamentally damaging because untruth deprives the publics of the right to make informed choices. From the perspective of the public, non-

disclosure of information because of client's interest, are potentially harmful. In addition, PR practitioners who choose to compromise client's interest jeopardize their own personal integrity. Makau (1991:4) argues that such compromises are potentially devastating and that inherent risks are threats to the contemporary paradigm of ethical communication.

Within the contemporary paradigm of ethical communication, public interest is foremost because issues of the organisation's accountability to the public underpin ethical communication. But what emerged clearly from Crocker's comments is that PR practitioners in Cape Town have a divided loyalty: between public interest and client interest when attempting to communicate ethically. Loyalty plays an important part in ethical communication practice, and is equally important to PR practitioners who are faithful to those they represent while honouring their obligations to the interests of society. In Cape Town, the issue of PR loyalty has put ethical communication in PR in doubt. This in turn, raises concern about whether PR practitioners in Cape Town are more concerned about client's interest than their publics'.

This reveals an ethical dilemma in ethical communication among PR practitioners in Cape Town in their day-to-day practice. Crocker, for example, mentions that engaging in this kind of communication especially, with the media or the public, is not easy.

If journalists or the public spot or question something, you can say you are not going to answer, and the reason for that is to keep your client information confidentiality.

The fact that PR practitioners in Cape Town do keep their client information confidentiality when communicating with other stakeholders demonstrates their mixed, confused or even dubious understanding of ethical communication.

5.3.2 Symmetrical dialogue perspective of ethical communication in public relations

Apart from links to contemporary paradigms, ethical communication in PR practice in Cape Town is understood in accordance with an 'early simplistic' paradigm. Ethical communication, according to an early paradigm, denotes dialogic and symmetrical communication. It is characterised as counter-argument. Organisations and their publics are valued equally. According to Kent & Taylor (2002:33) dialogue is considered more ethical because it gives a voice to all. This view is supported by Arnett *et al.* (2009:82) who quote the theologian Martin Buber (1955): he argues that this type of communication is the only way to communicate with the public. This paradigm is reflected in the data provided by PR practitioners in Cape Town when they conceptualise ethical communication.

Symmetrical dialogue communication is emphasised by Marcus Brewster, the chairman of Marcus Brewster Publicity, who reveals that ethical communication is about 'dialogic' communication of issues with an organisation's shareholders. In general, he states: *'Ethical communication is when practitioners dialogic communicate publics on behalf of their clients'*.

Symmetrical dialogic communication is emphasised in the King Report on Governance for South Africa (cf. South African Institute of Chartered Accountants) chapter 8, principles 8.1.

The King III Reports states that practitioners should take account of the legitimate interest of stakeholders in its decisions. Dialogic engagements with stakeholders should be to the mutual benefit of all parties. Ethical communication with stakeholders is essential for building and maintaining their trust and confidence.

This conceptualisation has been explained in relation to mutual relations between publics and clients. Arneson (2007:144), for example, in a published interview with influential scholars in the PR field, refers to ethical communication as dialogic engagement of the public. A similar point is made by Brannigan (2012:513) who argues that ethical communication involves reciprocal dialogic engagement and mutual openness to other perspectives. This implies that the public must be valued equally with the client whom the PR practitioner represents. This means, in turn, that PR practitioners will play the mediatory roles between clients and public to ensure fairness.

It is evident that mediation by PR practitioners between a client and its publics is a key element in ethical communication practice. Brewster offers a similar argument when he suggests that:

PR practitioners are the bridge between the client, organisation and the other audiences through communication. Therefore it is a practitioner's duty to ethically manage and maintain the relationship between the client and other stakeholders.

This resonates with the discussion of the reflective paradigm of PR approach that links organisation to public, and PR as a specific reflective structure. The reflective paradigm approach, according to Holmstrom (2005:501) is essential in opening up mutual understanding which defines phenomena such as dialogue and symmetrical communication in PR. These mutual relations and PR mediation characterise ethical communication in PR and assists Cape Town PR practitioners in their ethical communication decision-making with different stakeholders. For Holmstrom (2004:121) the importance of the reflective paradigm in PR, and in particular in dialogue, symmetrical and ethical communication, is in the mutual relationships, which help PR practitioners establish and maintain mutual lines of communication between an organisation and its public. Therefore the analysis of the data

collected from the participant links understanding of ethical communication with the 'early simplistic paradigm'.

5.3.3 Mixed paradigm perspective of ethical communication

Data analysed here revealed a blueprint indicating the direction of both contemporary and early paradigms of ethical communication in PR practice. As noted in the discussion of dialogue and symmetrical communication, ethical communication is the inclusion of stakeholders, engaging with participants as human beings and not just as representatives of interest groups. In this mixed paradigm, participants remarked that ethical communication should be underpinned both by symmetrical dialogue and dialogic principles.

This mixed paradigm was corroborated by the communication specialist at HWB Communications, Jo-Anne Smetherham who argues that ethical communication in PR practice occurs when PR practitioners open up a debate with other stakeholders to establish interdependence to the benefit of all. In her words:

Ethical communication is about opening up a dialogue. It is about communicating what is going on, and then also advising your client on communication strategies as well as to communicate with integrity, honesty, fairness and truthfulness.

Although this practitioner's conceptualisation of ethical communication foregrounds two-way symmetrical communication, she includes key dialogic principles such as truthfulness, honesty, integrity and fair communication. Kent & Taylor (2002:33) argue similarly, when considering dialogue more ethical because it is based on principles of honesty, trust, fairness and positive regard for the other rather than simply a conception of the public as means to end. This suggests that, in a PR organisation where this exists, ethical communication can be described as a two-way process where feedback is accentuated between the organisation and its publics. Communicating with the public must be underpinned by dialogic principles. This conforms with the discussion of the reflective paradigm of PR discussed above, although the data collected does not totally corroborate the publics' participation, which strengthens the reflective paradigm of PR as a key approach to ethical communication in PR.

Further evidence of ethical communication as symmetrical dialogue is found when Smetherham argues that:

Ethical communication is when a PR practitioner acknowledges that whatever he/she have put out there is part of the debate. That is ethical and healthy, that is more important than your client's vested interests. For instance, if your client says something and someone argues it and it is the truth, then you and client need to learn from it. It is an ongoing process of communication.

The understanding here is that ethical communication is described as dialogic interaction between PR organisations and their clients but with the exclusion of public's interest as a key part of ethical communication. This casts doubt over her full knowledge of ethical communication.

Dialogically principled ethical communication is cited as a frequent occurrence in conceptualisation of ethical communication in PR. Instances supporting this can be found when Smetherham pointed out that '*Ethical communication is about communicating the truth. She goes on to say that honesty and integrity must be practiced at all times in order to communicate ethically with the clients*'. This response from Smetherham summarises the expected behaviour of PR practitioners whose ethical communication decision-making must be underpinned by dialogic principles informing practice. This links discussion of a dialogic communication ethics approach, which displays openness, honesty and sincerity as the key to establishing mutually satisfactory bilateral communication with publics.

From the above it is evident that ethical communication in PR practice in Cape Town is complex and contested both in concept and practice.

5.4 How public relations practitioners in Cape Town engage with their publics

PR practitioners in Cape Town exhibit a mixed or questionable understanding of ethical communication. Data in this section sheds more light on how practitioners communicate in real life. Participants in this case are PR practitioners and their publics. Data gathered regarding how PR practitioners engage with their publics were derived from comments made in the social media and show whether such information is based on the contemporary or 'early simplistic' paradigms or whether it is a mixture of both.

Analysis of data collected from the PR and publics on social media reveal that the way practitioners engage with their publics is predominantly underpinned by both the contemporary and 'early simplistic' paradigms. PR practitioners usually do not go to media to share their clients' stories with the public. They simply share the information directly with the public on their social media platforms.

Twitter and Facebook inter alia in PR agencies (see Table 4.1) revealed that PR practitioners in Cape Town communicate with their publics using a pattern similar to the data analysed in section 5.3.1 about ethical communication underpinned by principles informing practice. HWB Communications posts on Facebook, Twitter, and Google+ acknowledged that dialogic principles of honesty, truthfulness, fairness and transparency are important and fundamental aspects of ethical communication when engaging with their publics on social media.

Businesses that sweep honesty, transparency, truth and fairness under the carpet while they make a fast buck get short shrift from clients and publics in the long run. That has always been true, and social media has made it even more difficult for the smooth operators to flourish. It takes just an instant for a dissatisfied consumer to leap onto Twitter, Facebook or a blog and make their displeasure known.

The quotation of the HWB Communications specialist on ethical communication is, on this occasion, akin to a contemporary paradigm where both PR practitioners and publics attempt to understand and appreciate each other's values and interests. The dialogic principles noted, 'rests on a willingness to be open with each other– not for purposes of swaying the publics with the strength of practitioner's erudition, but as a means of understanding the publics and reaching mutually satisfying positions' (Kent & Taylor, 2002:30). From this perspective, publics have a greater say in PR organisational operations. It is logical to conclude that both PR practitioners and the publics are mindful of their communication, and are interested in building communication relations that require honesty, truthfulness, genuineness and engagement that will strengthen their mutual interests.

These values are expressed in a comment on HWB Communications Facebook page and Twitter feed by one of the communication managers in PR industry, Mr. Slabbert, who states that:

If you still have any doubts about the impact of social media in the communications industry - in fact, in every part of our daily lives. I invite you to just look at two most recent local examples: MacIntosh Polela and Lance Witten. Both gentlemen made comments on Twitter that were considered to be insensitive by people who read them. Polela has subsequently been suspended by the Hawks for his comments about JubJub needing Vaseline when he goes to prison and Witten is on suspension from eNCA for his tweet that people were dying to see Linkin Park. In conclusion, I come back to common sense. If you have any doubt about a post you want to make, do not make it. Are you willing to say those words to the affected person's face, if not, it is probably a sign that you shouldn't be making that statement. In social media, I believe it is always important to remember: The great thing about social media is, it gives everyone a voice. The bad thing about social media is, it gives everyone a voice.

The understanding here is that social media can expose unethical communication and that people should engage in open, honesty and truthful communication at all times. Slabbert's response also provided valid reasons why PR practitioners' communication needs to take place in an ethical manner, and unethical communication hampered the credibility of any profession in society. The acclaimed benefit of social media to PR practitioners, according to

Presslin (2014:1) improves not only PR organisations and their clients' image, but also provides an avenue for PR practitioners to engage their publics ethically (Valentini, 2014:1).

The discussion of how PR practitioners in Cape Town engage with their publics via social media accords with the view espoused in the 'early simplistic' paradigm. The paradigm indicates that ethical communication is a two-way communication tool used by PR practitioners to bargain, negotiate and engage to bring about mutual changes in attitudes and behaviours of both organisation and publics (Van Ruler, 2004:126). Evidence of this paradigm is found on HWB Communications Facebook page that uses ethical communication as a means to enhance their dialogic relationship with the publics. The quotation revealed a dialogic and symmetrical communication forum for discussion and discourse that underpins 'early simplistic' paradigm of ethical communication in PR.

Holtzhausen comments: *'Great piece in this morning's Business Report 'Case in Point' column by Ellis Mnyandu about the cost of corporate miscommunication. Even though we are now in the age of hash tags, trending and sound bites, the old habits that inhibit proper and effective communication or disclosure persists'*. Bronwen Mintoor responds to this comment and states: *'I especially liked the part where he goes on to say companies must try to communicate as much as possible in the best possible way & time frame. They should not create an information vacuum that makes out as though the business has something to hide.'*

The comments shared by a PR organisation and its publics imply that practitioners in Cape Town create connections with the public, listen to conversations and engage with them. This endorses Kent & Taylor (2002:31) who argue that organisations can reinforce their commitment to ethical communication and foster more interaction with their publics by using mass mediated channels to communicate with publics. Organisations that are making a commitment to dialogue must place their e-mail, telephone numbers, to mention but a few, on their social media networks. In order for these communication channels to facilitate ethical communication, PR practitioners must make themselves available to interact and engage with their publics in discussions about organisational and public issues (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

This was corroborated by the HWB Communications when they engaged the public in McDonalds's burger case against Chef Jamie Oliver.

Chef Jamie Oliver wins battle against McDonald's; after showing how their hamburgers are made. Bronwen Mintoor engages in the conversation by saying, *'Further into the article it actually says the fatty parts of beef are 'washed' in ammonium hydroxide and used in the filling of the burger. We don't realise what we eat. Think I'm over McDonalds for now.'*

What comes out clearly here is that PR practitioners are engaging their publics on the issues that matter to them and they do so through dialogue. The fact that PR practitioners in Cape Town understand the importance of social media and use it to engage their publics demonstrates their understanding of ethical communication in line with the 'early paradigm'.

Social media benefits to PR practitioners include its richer content for online users that allow practitioners to distribute their message to their publics. Many PR organisations in Cape Town use the opportunity provided by social media to bridge the gap in communication between media and the general public. Social media allow these organisations to circulate relevant information quickly and efficiently to their publics. This is possible because such PR organisations have websites that link their social media in order to convey the client's message to all their publics. Social media tools are regarded as two-way communication because they are a form of communication where users talk about their daily activities and seek or share information (Java, 2008:11; Valentini, 2014:4). Social media is a place to come together for debates. Through social media, organisations listen to publics (Kent & Taylor, 2002:31; Valentini, 2014:4). This is corroborated by quotes posted by Brewster (CEO of Marcus Brewster publicity) who debates with the public on the reasons for the removal of 'The Spear' picture from City Press website. In his words:

Honesty is the reason Ferial Haffajee removed 'The Spear' picture from City Press' website 'The Spear', which depicts South Africa President Jacob Zuma with his genitals exposed.

On the Corporate Image weblog evidence is found that they engage with publics in a two-way symmetrical communication manner:

Corporate Image has particular expertise in reputation research and management and corporate brand strategy, with a focus on corporate communications, media liaison, research, positioning strategies crisis communications and issues management. Chairman of the National Responsible Gambling Programme (NRGP) responded by highlighting the contribution of Corporate Image to his organisation. He contends: *Corporate Image's role on the National Responsible Gambling Programme (NRGP) was initially to strategically manage the communications programmes for the three main elements: research, treatment and public awareness, and this continues today, along with a focus on industry training.*

Kent & Taylor (2002:31) argue that *'the weblog can be used to communicate ethically with publics by offering real time discussions, feedback loops, places to post comments, sources for organisational information, and postings of organisational member biographies and contact information'*. They further added that, through the commitment of organisational

resources and training, the weblog can function dialogically rather than monologically. Through Facebook, Twitter and other social media tools, Cape Town PR practitioners are able to share information with their clients or publics, who, in turn, provide feedback to the information through the same medium for the benefit of all.

These analyses indicate how the question of PR practitioners engaging publics ethically is regarded in Cape Town: they show that PR and communication practitioners give priority to the content of their messages on social media.

5.5 Ethical communication challenges affecting public relations practitioners in Cape Town

The mixed understanding of ethical communication by PR practitioners in Cape Town as noticed in earlier sections reveals ethical communication challenges which will be discussed in terms of obstacles affecting dialogue, which is integral to ethical communication practice. This section highlights conflict of interest and non-disclosure of information as ethical communication challenges.

5.5.1 Conflict of interest

The focal point in the data analyses is that conflict of interest is a major challenge facing PR practitioners in their effort to communicate ethically. PR practitioners admit that they face enormous difficulties when attempting to balance client interest with that of the public. Perusing the literature on ethics and ethical communication in PR, it became evident that conflict of interest is one of the persistent ethical communication challenges faced by PR practitioners. Doorley & Garcia (2007:47) argue that sometimes ethical conflict is between the individual and his or her employer or client, for instance when a practitioner receives payment from an organisation whose interest may be opposed to the practitioner's employer or client.

This was corroborated by Marcus Brewster, CEO of Marcus Brewster publicity who argues that conflict of interest is an organisation's biggest PR challenge: usually the greatest problem of ethical communication.

The challenges come up from the responses from the particular audience (media); a media person might ask awkward questions about your company that you really don't want to address. Now not that there's anything wrong with it, but the timing is wrong to talk about it. For example, we discovered this with a lot of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) listed clients when they produce their annual reports or quarterly reports. There are blacked out periods where you cannot give out any information, it

may affect the share price during that period. So they become blackout periods, which cannot communicate with the media, so you cannot answer the particular 3 billion euro investment because it is going to affect the share price. So there are very real issues you can't get involved in and you can't be as responsive to a media person as you might want to because of the external factor which is part of what happens when you are listed on the stock exchange on any territory in the world. During this period you are not trying to lie to them, rather you are protecting your client and complying with the JSE requirement standard not to reveal any information during the blackout period.

Though Brewster's response provides valid reasons for practitioners protecting client interest, it is clear in his response that protecting client's interest can disrupt effective practice of ethical communication. This may negate public' interests, which are a focal priority in ethical communication practice.

In PR and communication literature, ethical communication is linked with issues of the organisation's responsibilities to the public. Huang (2004: 336) argues that organisations should enhance the welfare of consumers and employees, respecting the rights and justice of members of the society, by minimizing harm or other negative effects such as misuses of power or depletion of natural resources. While excellence theory argues that an organisation is accountable to society and all its stakeholders (Holmstrom, 1996:14), this theory argued that ethical communication is part and parcel of a movement towards making organisations accountable and stakeholders' part of the organisations. The PRISA code of ethics also has a provision on conflict of interest that includes guidelines on client and public's interest.

Saying that a member shall conduct themselves professionally, with truth, accuracy, fairness and responsibility to the public ...shall act in the best interests of a client and public, and avoid actions and circumstances that may appear to compromise good business judgment (Doorley & Garcia, 2007; PRISA, 2011).

From an ethical communication perspective, this implies that PRISA encourages members/practitioners to establish and maintain mutual lines of communications, understanding, acceptance, fairness and cooperation between an organisation and its public. Jennifer Crocker supports this notion when she argues that ethical communication should be underpinned by dialogic principles premised on transparency, fairness, truth and sincerity.

Crocker: When communicating I will ask these questions: Is it true? Is it fair? Is it in the public interest to be known? Could it hurt anyone? Does it put anyone at risk? Does it risk anyone's reputation? Does it balance client and public interest? You need to understand your client's job from an ethical point of view and the public interest.

The statement above reveals that public interest is a crucial component in ethical communication practice and that practitioners should always be truthful and honest when communicating with the public. This implies that practitioners consider publics as major stakeholders that need to know the truth. Although this is confirmed by Crocker and appears in PRISA's code of ethics, the findings of this study reveal that Cape Town PR are more concerned about client's interest than that of the public. They ignored public's interest which reveals the reason for the challenges practitioners face in terms of conflict of interest. In supporting this statement, Crocker argues:

When asked a question and you can't answer because you know it would compromise your client. If you don't want to lie and say you don't know when you know, what do you do?

5.5.2 Non-disclosure of information

Another ethical communication challenge raised by PR practitioners in Cape Town is the non-disclosure of information. Disclosure pertains to the timing, scope and manner of communication of material information. As a general rule, information must be made available to all stakeholders simultaneously (Doorley & Garcia, 2007:230). The overall goal of disclosure is to provide transparency, to anyone who may invest in the organisation's securities with more than sufficient, relevant information about the organisation's finances and operations so that nothing is hidden or distorted in meaning (Doorley & Garcia, 2007). Selective disclosure which reveals half the information or telling only some stakeholders about an organisation's news before others, is a violation of the rule and regulations of the King III Report on Governance for South Africa (see SAICA, chapter 1, principle 1.13).

In PR practice disclosure of information is essential. Respecting the relevance of disclosure of information in ethical communication, Huang (2004:335), remarks that disclosure facilitates power symmetry and ethical communication. As explained further by Lieber (2003:7), when information is withheld from the stakeholders, it limits disclosure of information to serve or protect the organisation's interests. Non-disclosure of information drives PR practitioners to act on behalf of organisations with the consequent opportunities for unethical activity. As noticed in conceptualisation of ethical communication by PR practitioners, stakeholders' interest shapes ethical communication, while not sharing and non-disclosure of information because of organisation policies hampers the effective flow of PR practice and relation-building that underpin ethical communication.

This statement touches on the view shared in the reflective paradigm of PR approach, which emphasised that ethical communication should be based on relation building and information sharing (Brannigan, 2012:508). The reflective paradigm approach is characterised by mutual

relations, sharing information, dialogue, symmetrical and ethical communication as stated by Holmstrom (2005:501) and Van Heerden & Rensburg (2005:72). Withholding or revealing only half of the information because of client's interest poses challenges to ethical communication practice among Cape Town PR practitioners. According to Jennifer Crocker, accounts director for reputation, management and communication agency Corporate Image, ethical communication is about telling the truth as far away as you can without compromise: bearing in mind that you are representing your client. She added that it is important to keep some company information confidential.

There is so much you are not going to expose because it would damage the ability to save their customers. For example, if a journalist says to you what security measures do you get in your business? You are not going to say we got CCTV etc. at the corners of the building. You are not going to expose the company and risk their capacity to save their customers. There will be times, this goes to ethical communication, there are things such as security, confidentiality etc. you would leave out. But you would not leave it out because you trying to lie to somebody. You leave it out because it could endanger the security system of your company.

From the professional ethics literature, practitioners are often in a position to know information prior to the general public: they sometimes know information that should never be revealed such as trade secrets, personal information about fellow employees or proprietary information (Doorley & Garcia, 2007:46). PRISA and IABC in their codes of ethics state that members/ practitioners:

Shall protect the privacy rights of clients, organisations, and individuals by safeguarding confidential information. The code further states that 'members shall safeguard the confidences of both present and former clients and employers. Shall not disclose or make use of information given or obtained in confidence from an employer or client, past or present, for personal gain or otherwise, or to the disadvantage or prejudice of such client or employer.

The understanding here is that PR practitioners are bound to keep certain information confidential. This poses considerable challenges to ethical communication. As Doorley & Garcia (2007:236) reveal, disclosing more information can provide a competitive advantage. Organisations which disclose more information more frequently than required often establish a competitive advantage for their securities and simultaneously ensure stakeholders are sufficiently comfortable to engage with them.

Apart from conflict of interest and non-disclosure of information as revealed by PR practitioners, there other challenges that affect ethical communication. Jo-Anne

Smetherham, the HWB Communications specialist points out that *'becoming too involved with your client's work that your perspective is blurred and not objective'* is a challenge. The concept here is that a PR practitioner who becomes too close to his/her client might affect his/her loyalty and support of other interest groups in the organisation. For a practitioner to communicate ethically, he/she must treat each other fairly in order to build and maintain mutual relations that underpin ethical communication in PR.

Meeting deadlines in ethical communication practice appears to be an easy task but is one of the challenges PR practitioners face in their efforts to communicate ethically. According to Crocker, PR information is needed quickly and getting it right is challenging.

Clients demand the information now and we have to respond. Supplying accurate and honest communication at a time like this can be challenging. On the other hand, to give misleading information to boost your quick response can hurt your organisations as well as your own reputation as a PR practitioner.

When PR practitioners communicate ethically they find it difficult and challenging due to the fear of exposure and loss of control over their image and reputation in an effort not to compromise their client(s).

5.6 Professional bodies understanding of ethical communication in public relations

In the previous section, the oscillations in the conceptualisation of ethical communication in PR scholarship were described, including understanding ethical communication by PR practitioners in Cape Town, how PR practitioners engage with their publics and ethical communication challenges PR practitioners face in their day-to-day practice. In these sections, conceptualisation of ethical communication falls within a contemporary paradigm and 'early simplistic' paradigms. In this section, how professional bodies understand ethical communication, strategies used to foster good relations among PR practitioners, and challenges faced when fostering ethical communication will be provided. It is noted that PR practitioners have a varied understanding of ethical communication but the data in this section show that professional bodies understand ethical communication with one accord.

Analysis of data collected from PRISA and IABC revolves around a contemporary paradigm which implies that ethical communication does not occur until dialogic principles of honesty, truthfulness, integrity, fairness, responsibility and respect for self and others are achieved (Makau, 1991; Edgett, 2002; Doorley & Garcia, 2007; Parsons, 2008). Without dialogic principles, ethical communication cannot occur. This is the focus of the data that will be analyzed and discussed in this section.

The findings run counter to the dialogic communication ethics approach (see Chapter 3, section 3.3), where dialogue is underpinned by openness, honesty, sincerity and willingness to change course and Grunig's symmetrical communication approach (see also section 3.4), which emphasises the need to engage with audience in order to establish open, honest and fair relations between an organisation and its public. Findings in this study are grounded on Arnett, Fritz & Bell communication ethics approach (see Chapter 3, section 3.5), which stressed that ethical communication is based on codes, procedures and standards by which appropriate ethical codes are evaluated, protected and promoted for the good of corporately agreed-upon practice and regulations.

Solly Moeng, president of PRISA, is adamant about always telling the truth and not cunning half-truth and 'spins' on behalf of organisations.

Ethical communication is not spinning. PR is not spinning. I have never called myself one and I don't think my colleagues call themselves spinners. There are people who are employed to tell lies instead of the truth. As a PR practitioner, you can't lie because when you lie it comes back to haunt you in one way or another; it is going to come out that you didn't tell the truth. Our job as PR practitioners is not to lie on behalf of organisations. For instance, if Woolworths does something that is wrong, our job is not to lie on behalf of Woolworths, instead it is to understand the context and explain. And if we are wrong (sometimes we are not always right) then we acknowledge it.

This conceptualisation implies that PR practitioners no longer conceptualise cunning half-truths and 'spins' on behalf of organisations as indicated in discredited two-way asymmetrical communication paradigms, which use intelligence about the publics to more effectively target persuasion (Edgett, 2002:3). This paradigm defines PR as the use of communication to manipulate publics for the benefits of organisations. This view is in contrast with Moeng who argues that in the past PR practitioners were associated with all things unethical – lying, spin doctoring and even espionage. But PRISA introduced a code of ethics and professional standards to help practitioners communicate ethically, enhance honesty and sustain true relations with their publics. He contends that instead of persuasion or manipulation, the presupposition for ethical communication is that communication leads to mutual understanding.

The role of PR is to communicate ethically, tell organisations stories, the soft side of things, to explain, to engage with different stakeholders depending on what the topic is. Our job as PR practitioners is to build and maintain a mutual relationship between an organisation and other stakeholders.

This indicates that PR practitioners are concerned with actions and behaviour of organisations and their publics in an attempt to eliminate unethical communication. The understanding here is that mutual relations are a crucial component of ethical communication. In PR and communication literature, ethical communication is sometimes described as a mutual relation. This definition states that PR helps an organisation and its public to adapt mutually and communicate ethically with each other (Van Ruler, 2004). Grunig's (1992) two-way symmetrical communication approach underpins this definition: 'Symmetrical communication provides a platform to exercise mutual relations'. This approach implies that the more open an organisation and its publics are in dealing with each other, the more chances there are for all parties to have a 'win-win' situation, and thus provide ethical communication (Kent & Taylor, 2002: 21; Theunissen & Wan Noordini, 2012: 5).

Moeng discussed ethical communication, underpinned by dialogic values, where beneficial and mutual relations with organisations and their publics are key to communicating ethically.

Ethical communication means being truthful, honest and communicating with integrity when dealing with organisations and their publics. As a PR practitioner, you have to be honest, truthful and forthright. Companies no longer entertain lies, they now trade on trust, customers on trust, and they are all well informed through digital media. Therefore one must engage them based on trust, honesty and truth.

The notion that ethical communication can and should be underpinned by dialogic principles, or any other values of PR ethics for that matter, has subjected PR professional bodies' codes of ethics to severe criticism. This criticism has led to the expression of sharply critical views on the idea of re-examining codes of ethics to provide '*theoretical basis for ethical communication decision-making*' (Rensburg & Cant, 2009:255). New codes, such as a supporting guide to communicate ethically, defines the kind of communication that is appropriate, making it more likely that ethical communication will be habituated, and improper communication will be avoided (Doorley & Garcia, 2007:37). The code states:

... members must conduct themselves professionally, with truth, honesty, accuracy, fairness and responsibility to the public and towards their colleagues and to an informed society, and goes on to instruct even further: a member shall not deceive the public, a member shall refrain from subordinating the truth and circulating information which is not based on established and ascertainable fact.

The code prescribes that being honest, respecting oneself and others and fulfilling responsibility is a prerequisite for ensuring mutual relations. The manner in which PRISA and its code of ethics conceptualise ethical communication is akin to the symmetrical communication approach (see chapter 4 section 3.4), which emphasises the need to engage

with audience in order to establish open, honest and fair relations between an organisation and its publics.

The same kind of deductive reasoning appears when IABC conceptualised ethical communication. Ethical communication in PR should be underpinned by dialogic values in order to manage and maintain mutually beneficial relations with an organisation's stakeholders, Ethical communication is a crucial component for building mutual relations or managing corporate reputations for organisations, especially for bringing publics and dominant coalitions closer together. IABC expressed such an understanding; supporting the point that ethical communication is conducted in a truthful, honest and candid communicative relation with stakeholders. According to IABC president, Nirvana Bechan, ethical communication signifies engaging in truthful and factual communication with all stakeholders. Although her response is brief, it corroborates Moeng's (PRISA) views about ethical communication requiring truthfulness which leads to beneficially mutual relations between organisations and public. Bechan's conceptualisation affirms that ethical communication is about PR practitioners telling the truth or giving factual information to the stakeholders: but it neglects to consider the fact that truthfulness is not enough of a yardstick to practise ethical communication. It is only one of several principles necessary for conceptualising ethical communication (Parsons, 2008:23).

Notwithstanding this conceptualisation's failure to explain ethical communication in PR in great detail, it clearly states that ethical communication is not only essential, but necessary. This view is fully encapsulated by Bechan, who states:

Our job is to communicate with stakeholders. We communicate importantly most with our customers who are our clients, we provide a good service, a service that they can trust and rely on, a service that is transparent and we can answer any questions. We report to our shareholders and we tell them what is actually going on in the organisation, how we are always hoping to improve our plans and we communicate with integrity and honesty.

Bechan adds another aspect: that ethical communication is compliant with regulations, principles and initiatives governing PR practitioners all over the world. Given that the activities of PR practitioners and communicators '*affect the lives of millions of people and this power carries with it significant social responsibilities*', these regulations help PR practitioners to practise '*honest, candid and timely communication and foster the free flow of essential information in accord with the public interest*'. She points out, for example, that in South African and globally, there are many new regulations because of global scandals in the corporate world, particularly those exposed in the new King Report III and the Stockholm Accord. This was corroborated by Doorley & Garcia (2007:231) who state that in over ten

years, a variety of initiatives have gone into effect designed to enhance transparency, level the informational playing field, speed up the availability of corporate data and improve corporate governance. For South Africa PR practitioners, the three key initiatives to understand and conceptualise ethical communication are IABC and PRISA codes of ethics, the Stockholm Accords and the Kings Report III.

These regulations call for fairness, accountability, responsibility, honesty and transparency towards the company's identified stakeholders. Bechan reveals that IABC members rely on these initiatives to communicate ethically with their organisation's stakeholders. In her own words:

These are all very important indicators that we should be looking at and we should be following to practice truthful, fair and ethical communication. When you look at the business world, when we report to our stakeholders we are supposed to report the facts as they appear and not propaganda. These new King Reports and Stockholm Accords guide us on how to report these kinds of things in the most effective and ethical manner possible.

This was emphasised in the Stockholm Accords (2010:3), where the PR and communication practitioners involve and engage key stakeholders in the organizations' sustainability policies and programmes, and ensure stakeholders' participation to identify information that should be regularly, transparently and authentically disseminated. A similar response appears in the King Report III, which emphasises the need to engage with stakeholders in order to establish mutual respect (Rensburg, 2014:128; leRoux, 2014:194). This regulation guides PR practitioners to inform and shape the organisation's overall two-way communication capabilities; communicate the value of the organisation's products/ services and relations with stakeholders thereby creating, consolidating and developing its financial, legal, relational and operational capital; participate in the solution of organisational issues, as well as lead those specifically focused on stakeholder's relations and assist all organisation functions in creating and delivering ethical communication (Rensburg, 2014:128; leRoux, 2014:195).

These initiatives may seem logical, when considered in line with codes, procedures, and a standards approach (see discussion section 3.7). They are embedded by the IABC's conceptualisation of ethical communication, which are characterised in codes, procedures, and a standards approach. Ethical communication rests on centrality of standards and codes in the form of duties, obligations, responsibilities, laws and regulations. Issues in question are explored in detail so that standards and codes that frame ethical communication are involved in order for mutual understanding to subsist as stated in IABC code of ethics. According to the IABC code:

Members must engage in communication that is not only legal but also ethical and sensitive to cultural values and beliefs; engage in truthful, accurate and fair communication that facilitates respect and mutual understanding.

5.7 The strategies professional bodies use to foster ethical communication among public relations practitioners

PR professional bodies in Cape Town have established communication strategies in an attempt to foster ethical communication among PR practitioners. This section explores these strategies on practical grounds and reviews inadequate strategies because they work only in respect of practitioners who are members. Findings reveal that strategies do foster ethical communication but are subsumed under the codes of ethics; hence they generally function more as codes than communication strategies.

Ethical codes are interventions introduced by PR professional bodies to assist practitioners to communicate more ethically. A code of ethics is provided to assist PR practitioners in their relations with the public, to resolve tensions between their ethical uncertainties and to enunciate their professional norms. Higgs-Kleyn Kapelianis (1999:364) refer to a code of ethics as a vehicle which reassures the public, clients and colleagues that PR practitioners are competent, have integrity and that the profession intends to maintain and enforce high standards. During ethical communication decision-making, there is often a section provided in the code of ethics to guide practitioners: so that practitioners have to manage the situation in line with professional values premised on advocacy, honesty, integrity, fairness and loyalty (see chapter 2, section 2.8).

Discussion of ethical codes as a strategy used by professional bodies to promote ethical communication meshes with the view supported in narrative approaches about how a code of ethics is a factor in the consideration of issues. Arnett *et al.*, (2009:26) refer to the narrative approach as ideas agreed upon by a group of people that provides limits within which they dwell as embedded communicative agents. The narrative approach arose in response to the structures, practices and beliefs that define the narrative shape and guide the organisation's action and practitioner's actions, shaping what groups of persons know, imposing limits and shedding light on the knowledge and activities of their organisations. The narrative approach favours PR professions that use codes of ethics to communicate and foster ethical communication among their members. As explained by Arnett *et al.* (2009:57) a narrative approach to an institution assumes that practitioners' lives are guided by ethical codes about how the institution is and should be, protecting and promoting the good of particular codes.

Data provided by the president of PRISA in charge of practitioners' issues in Cape Town conforms with the narrative approach and reveals that they use a code of ethics to guide and promote ethical communication among PR practitioners. Moeng stated that PRISA relies on a disciplinary code of conduct, a disciplinary committee, fines and sanctions to ensure ethical communication among PR practitioners. This was confirmed by the managers and the practitioners in PR agencies in Cape Town. The president added that the first step is to find a solution to tensions and expectations between client and agency. In his words:

PRISA has a disciplinary code of conduct and a disciplinary committee to guide practitioners. Obviously the first approach is always to try to find an amicable solution to mediate between the client and the agency... usually the outcome of a process like that would be to go correct your mistake... these are your customers. If your customer paid R50 000 and feel what they got was worth R20 000, I would imagine after that long discussion you would need to give them a refund of x amount so that everybody is happy. It all depends on the disciplinary committee; I've never sat on the disciplinary committee. I know what happened when I was a chairman: it would normally come to the board which decided on the necessary steps to be taken. So I am aware of the details more or less and then we give it to the disciplinary committee they will deal with it and come back to the board to say this is the decision they have taken which could be fines or sanctions.

Moeng's response underlines the fact that this strategy used to enforce ethical communication cannot be imposed on non-members or agencies that are not members of PRISA.

We do not have oversight on people who are not members; the moment a person or an agency becomes a member, they sign a membership form. A membership form has got all those regulations that they have to adhere to and terms and conditions of becoming a member. One of which is that if someone complains about how you do business, we have the right to sanction you depending on how bad it is.

This implies that PRISA strategy works for their members, but in the case of non-members, 'they will encourage the customer to go to the police'. This shows the enforcement weakness in ethical codes. According to Ki & Kim (2010:365) the greatest weakness of ethical codes is that they are not enforceable. Given that the majority of PR practitioners are not members of professional bodies and that professional membership is not mandatory for one to practise as a PR practitioner, the disciplinary code of conduct and disciplinary committee strategies can be rendered ineffective (Ki & Kim, 2010). While it may be argued that this type of strategy is beneficial to PRISA members, it should be revised for the benefit of every PR practitioner; just as Wright (1993:15) observes, the codes can be especially helpful to

practitioners by educating them about moral guidelines and by sensitising them to ethical communication problems.

The other professional body, IABC has various ways in which to foster ethical communication among their members. Nirvana Bechan's response confirms the information given by the president of PRISA responsible for PR practitioners in Cape Town; that their strategies to promote ethical communication work only in respect of practitioners who are members. She states that IABC foster ethical communication by means of a website, blogs, conference and workshops:

There is ongoing dialogue in various ways in which we communicate, we have various ways in which we communicate to our members online, our website, blogs, conferences, workshops and meetings, all sorts of ways so it's something we always consider on our agenda.

The website is a tool used by IABC to communicate and foster ethical communication among their members. Leeuwis (2006:203) refers to a website as a multi-channel because it has textual audio and visual contents that can be accessed. Although this is a one-way communication process, it does help IABC to provide important information to members about conferences and workshops. This was corroborated by IABC, Dallas chapter, who argue that their website serves as a strategy to engage their members.

We have a website! Go to the IABC Dallas websites at www.iabcdallas.com. The chapter is now using a new system for events, communications, and website management. The 'StarChapter' system allows us not only to manage our chapter more efficiently, but also to provide some new benefits to chapter members.

IABC's blog sites provide two-way communication, making this a more suitable medium to foster ethical communication. Blogs add functionality to comment and interact with members on any issue under discussion (Java, 2008:8). Kent & Taylor (2002:31) support this notion by arguing that blogs can function dialogically rather than monologically because they offer real time discussions, feedback loops and places to post comments. Blogs empower users with a channel to express themselves freely. This often leads to a wide variety of online content chat. Topics may range from popular themes such as ethics and ethical communication to niche interests such as obscure communication research papers (Java, 2008:8). This was corroborated when Dilenschneider & Salak (2003: 32) engaged IABC members on ethical issues. They argue that ethical communication has become a hot button. The swirl surrounding the topic has led to a number of professional organisations worldwide dedicating themselves to addressing related challenges. As a result of this online engagement, an online survey by IABC magazine (*Communication World*) found that almost

two-thirds of respondents report that their organisations do not have a formal written policy on ethical communication.

Other strategies used to foster ethical communication besides the website and blogs are magazines and seminars. The IABC periodical is released almost every year, and, at the time the data for this study was collected, only the issues for 2008 and 2009 were available at the office of the IABC president. The magazine contains information about activities of IABC such as awards, research and other topics of interest to IABC members. With regards to ethical communication, the magazine issues (*Communication World - Inside Out, 2008*) and (*Communication World - The Value of Gold, 2009*) contain information about truth-telling, creative communication, building online communities and Gold Quill awards winners as well as research development.

Truth Telling is a publication written by Natasha Nichol森, executive editor to address ethical communication in PR.

If you are being less than open, withholding key information or giving misleading information (that is lying), you are making a strategic error. Put aside the fact that it's bad to lie. Discussing whether one should be transparent, IABC truth telling provides another assumption. 'You are relying on your audience to be downright stupid. You assume that they lack both intelligence and resourcefulness. Life offers few guarantees, but there's a good chance that if there is more than a handful of people in your audience, one of them is going to check your facts and the truth will be revealed. New opinions will be formed and a picture will be painted – one that is likely unflattering to you.

IABC *Communication World* is involved in a similar effort through creative communication and building of online communities, which is supported by a range of corporate and PR agencies to develop specific guidelines for ethical communication. Ryan & Tudor (2008: 26) argue:

Communities are interdependent relationships that exist for a purpose. They flourish when they deal effectively with issues. Ethical communication was built on relationships and was achieved through two-way symmetrical communication. Today, online social networking offers new opportunities to build relationships, and these virtual communities are changing how we tackle chronic communication issues such as honesty and trust.

IABC organize seminars and workshops to educate their members on how to communicate ethically. According to Bechan, seminars and workshops made IABC members more aware

of different subjects including ethical communication practice. Through these mediums, communicators access information about how to engage in ethical communication with their clients as well as their publics. Bechan refers to these strategies as a medium that provides IABC members with information about ethical communication they would ordinarily not have known about. Although these strategies are prepared for the attention of the organisation's stakeholders such as media, clients and general publics, it is a medium through which IABC promotes ethical communication among its members.

The understanding here is that these strategies are not applied to non-members and non-agencies in Cape Town. In other words, websites, blogs and magazines are the exclusive preserve of IABC members in Cape Town. This indicates how bad service, unethical practice and poor perceptions of the PR profession in society come about: non-members and agencies could not be educated about ethical communication practice. It shows how unfit PR professional bodies are in handling the affairs of entire PR establishments in Cape Town.

5.8 Challenges faced by professional bodies in fostering ethical communication among PR practitioners

Leaders of professional bodies largely concur that promotion of ethical communication among PR practitioners is not free of challenges. Data analysed in the section above shows that it was difficult to prevent untrained persons from practising PR and is one of the major factors affecting professional bodies when fostering ethical communication among PR practitioners in Cape Town.

5.8.1 Untrained public relations practitioners

A constant factor in the data analysed is that untrained persons who practise PR are a major challenge which professional bodies face when fostering ethical communication among PR practitioners. This contention is supported in Gilsdorf & Vawter (1984, 26) who argue that among other ills that have been affecting the PR profession, the greatest is the impossibility of keeping unfit persons from calling themselves PR practitioners. They claim that the primary aim of most PR professional bodies is to improve the working environment and conditions of PR practitioners. But, with the majority of practitioners not being members these efforts are hampered. The PRISA president, Solly Moeng corroborated this:

PRISA does not have oversight on practitioners who are not members, hence they cannot educate them on ethical communication issues, and as such, has become a major challenge to us:

Compounding this challenge, he explains other aspects about untrained PR practitioners.

The problem with the PR and Communication profession is that you get a lot of wrong people wanting to start PR agencies so you get frustrated models or bored housewives with no training. You can't just wake up one day and say, I want to start an accounting firm or legal firm or architectural firm, you need to go to university to study and get the necessary qualification. The people who just one day wake up and start PR agencies, those are the people who give a bad service, unethical communication and give a bad name to the profession. PRISA has to play a role to root out things like that.

Nirvana Bechan supports this opinion and argues that unqualified PR practitioners constitute one of the most difficult challenges facing IABC when fostering ethical communication among PR practitioners in Cape Town.

There are many people operating in the name of PR practitioners, but what they are doing is very much like events planning and propaganda which is something IABC steer very far away from.

These statements reflect the fact that unfit persons who practise PR have been gradually tarnishing the image, reputation and professionalism of the field. Ethical communication scandals such as those of Enron and Andersen in 2001–3 have demonstrated that such practitioners can cause significant harm to reputation, operations, morale, and in some cases even a company's survival and the national economy (Doorley & Garcia, 2007:51). Doorley & Garcia argue that PR practitioners and professional bodies are seen as the conscience of organisations and play an important role in helping an organisation to behave ethically. Thus far the synergy required to stop this is found in professional bodies fostering ethical communication among PR practitioners. This statement was confirmed by Moeng who emphasizes the need for all PR practitioners in Cape Town to be members of PRISA so that they can comprehend ethical communication and its contributions to PR practice.

While the impossibility of keeping track with untrained persons has been a challenge to professional bodies when fostering ethical communication among Cape Town PR practitioners, this appeared not to be the situation when promoting ethical communication among members. Moeng and Bechan argue that ethical communication is practised by their members.

Moeng: I don't think there are insurmountable challenges, it's not like every week and every month we sit with a problem. I think most members of PRISA they understand why they become members because they familiarise themselves with those basic guidelines. I would say more than 98% of them seem to be doing a good job we don't have too many complaints. The minute you become a member you accept that

PRISA will be involved if you do something unethical and PRISA will come down hard on you if you are wrong. I don't recall any case where an agency stopped being a member because PRISA told them, they are wrong. There is a level of authority that comes with it, but there's no obligation. Nobody is obliged to become a member of PRISA, it is a voluntary membership.

Bechan: I don't think we are having a challenge in terms of that. I think the members know what is ethical and unethical, it is quite simple. So that is not a problem talking about this topic (ethical communication) to people.

The understanding here is that those who belong to professional bodies know the importance of ethical communication and play an important role in helping their organisations communicate ethically. PR practitioners are guided by ethical standards embodied in professional bodies' codes of ethics.

5.9 Summary

In this chapter, data gathered from PR practitioners and professional bodies have been presented and analysed. Discussion showed that ethical communication in PR remains contested, because both practitioners and professional bodies have differing conceptions. Data revealed that the majority of both PR practitioners and professional bodies conceptualise ethical communication as a contemporary approach premised on honesty, openness, loyalty, fair-mindedness, respect and fair communication, whereas the remainder viewed it according to an earlier approach characterized by simplicity, which maintains that ethical communication can only occur through dialogue and symmetrical communication.

Different social media platforms of PR organisations were reviewed to determine how PR practitioners in Cape Town communicate with their publics. These platforms include Twitter, Facebook, Google+, Weblogs, and so on. Some of the comments and quotations posted on these platforms were reviewed and analysed. It was noted that PR practitioners understand the importance of social media to the publics and what it means to engaged ethically with their publics. Several challenges affecting ethical communication practice in PR were discussed. It was stated that because of the extended scope of client interest and organisation's policies, communicating ethically has become difficult for many PR practitioners in Cape Town.

When the strategies employed by professional bodies to foster ethical communication among PR practitioners were discussed, it was noted that the professional bodies could only promote ethical communication among its members. It was a concern that they are unable to

keep untrained persons from practising PR: this constraint poses a major challenge both to the profession and professional bodies.

Lastly, what are the implications of these findings? How will these findings help PR industry reclaim its own fragile reputation, and how will they incorporate ethical communication into day-to-day practice? The final Chapter will address these questions as well as the future direction of ethical communication in PR.

6 CHAPTER SIX: OVERALL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This is the place for looking backward, for distilling into a few paragraphs precisely what has been accomplished in each phase of the research activity (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:287).

6.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the study's key findings. It discusses the limitations of the study and makes recommendations for the future ethical communication in PR. The main focus of this qualitative study was the conceptualisation of ethical communication in PR in Cape Town. The study investigated how ethical communication is conceptualised and practised by PR practitioners and professional bodies in Cape Town. Understanding ethical communication and the principles informing practice will help the PR profession raise the quality of PR practitioners' ethical behaviour as well increase PR's legitimacy and value to society. To achieve this purpose, the specific objectives of the study were as follows:

- To understand ethical communication in PR.
- To understand how PR practitioners and professional bodies operating in Cape Town conceptualise ethical communication.
- To reveal how professional bodies foster ethical communication.
- To investigate how PR practitioners in Cape Town communicate with their publics.
- To ascertain the challenges PR practitioners face in their effort to communicate ethically.

The specific conclusions linked with these research objectives are detailed in this following section.

6.2 Summary of the study findings

6.2.1 *Different understandings of ethical communication in public relations literature*

The presentation of the analysis started with the findings regarding conceptualisation of ethical communication in PR scholarship. An exploration of PR literature shows that there are two different understandings of ethical communication. The definitions are suggested by two schools of thought which attempt to conceptualise ethical communication in PR. The first school is the 'early simplistic' paradigm which contends that ethical communication should be conceptualised as dialogue and symmetrical communication. This implies that for ethical communication to occur, the publics are valued equally with the organisations. Publics are regarded as ends-in-themselves rather than as a means toward an end. The result is a

process that many early scholars believe meets ethical communication better than the traditional forms of one-way communication, such as press agency and information dissemination; or two-way asymmetrical communication, which uses communication to persuade publics to behave as organisations want.

The second understanding is a contemporary paradigm which views ethical communication as incorporating dialogic principles. This definition implies that ethical communication does not occur until dialogic principles of openness, honesty, loyalty, fair-mindedness, respect, integrity and forthright communication are achieved. This means that participants in ethical communication must have an equal chance to initiate and maintain mutual relations through commitment, genuineness, honesty, and fairness, respect, support and trust.

6.2.2 *Conceptualisation of ethical communication by public relations practitioners*

Conceptualisation of ethical communication by PR practitioners reveals the same mixed reflection in literature regarding ethical communication. Some PR practitioners locate ethical communication in the 'early simplistic' paradigm; others within the contemporary paradigm; while others integrate both paradigms in understanding and decision-making. Within the 'early simplistic' paradigm, PR practitioners contend that ethical communication is about dialogic communication of issues with an organisation's shareholders notably the publics. While others link ethical communication with contemporary paradigms, it should in fact be underpinned by dialogic principles such as truthfulness, honesty, integrity, respect and fairness. These practitioners argue that without dialogic principles, ethical communication cannot function. One PR practitioner emphasised the importance of symmetrical communication and dialogic principles, referred to ethical communication as opening up a debate with other stakeholders to manage interdependence for the benefit of all as well as communicating with integrity, honesty, fairness and truthfulness.

6.2.3 *Professional bodies conceptualisation of ethical communication in public relations*

Analysis revealed that PRISA understands ethical communication ideally as being open, honest, loyal, truthful, fair-minded, respecting self and others, and forthright in communication. IABC, on the other hand, viewed ethical communication as being engaged in a truthful communicative relation with stakeholders as well as compliant with laws and regulations. On the basis of the responses, it may be argued that ethical communication, in this capacity, is linked to contemporary paradigms.

This study (see Chapter One, section 1.2) sought to investigate whether PR practitioners and professional bodies' conceptualisation of ethical communication has shifted from 'early simplistic' paradigms to contemporary paradigms and towards ethical communication premised on honesty, openness, loyalty, fair-mindedness, respect and fair communication. It may be stated that ethical communication in PR in Cape Town is conceptualised according to three paradigms. Although the analysis revealed that the paradigm preferred by PR practitioners and professional bodies in Cape Town is the 'early simplistic' and contemporary paradigm, mixed paradigms with symmetrical dialogue and dialogic principles are reportedly crucial in maintaining open and true relations with organisations and publics. In this case, PR practitioners and professional bodies in Cape Town use these paradigms for every ethical communication decision-making phase of their in their day-to-day PR practice.

Data analysed showed that different conceptualisations of ethical communication demonstrate a lack of consensus within both PR scholarship and practice. These are all issues with which both PR practitioners and professional bodies have been contending, unable as yet to establish a clear and holistic conceptualisation of ethical communication.

6.2.4 Ethical communication practice: PR practitioners engage with their publics.

It was shown in the analysis that PR practitioners in Cape Town have a mixed (early simplistic, contemporary and mixed paradigm) understanding of ethical communication. These paradigms are used to understand ethical communication, but analysis revealed that practitioners are communicating ethically with their publics using 'early simplistic' and contemporary paradigms, especially when they communicate through social media. The mixed paradigm is reportedly not used to communicate with PR practitioners.

In the early paradigm, it was evident that PR practitioners on social media engage in a two-way symmetrical communication that provides a forum for discussion, dialogue and discourse with their publics. They create connections with the public, listen to conversations and engage with them. Ethical communication practice in Cape Town is akin to a contemporary paradigm. In this paradigm, it was revealed that PR practitioners are mindful of dialogic principles of truthfulness, honesty, transparency and fairness that underpin ethical communication. These principles rest on their willingness to be open with their publics in order to reach an understanding and building mutually satisfying relations with publics.

In the analysis, it was revealed that PR practitioners rely on social media as a two-way communication medium or effective method to share their client's message with the public. HWB Communications, Corporate Image and Marcus Brewster Facebook, Twitter and other blogs were cited in the analysis as a means of engaging the public ethically. It is understood

that PR industries have to engage in ethical communication with publics if they are to maintain other stakeholders. Social media were viewed as a bilateral communication medium by PR practitioners in Cape Town; that they can create a wide exposure to any issue and can help engage with organisations' stakeholders.

6.2.5 *Strategies used to foster ethical communication among PR practitioners by the professional bodies*

Regarding strategies, professional bodies in Cape Town felt that they have enough strategies to promote ethical communication among PR practitioners. They promote ethical communication through a disciplinary code of conduct and disciplinary committees, conferences, workshops and online communication such as blogs and websites. Professional bodies maintain a website and blogs through which all members are supposed to communicate with each other. A major strategy used to foster ethical communication is a magazine. The magazine is released almost every year, and publishes information about their organisations including topics such as ethical communication. Professional bodies can only foster ethical communication among their members but this is not the case with non-members. In the case of non-members, professional bodies cannot foster ethical communication. Although these strategies have no effect on non-members, they definitely provide professional bodies with a means to address inappropriate conduct in PR practice.

Some of the challenges identified in the analysis affecting professional bodies when fostering ethical communication are the impossibility of preventing untrained persons from practising PR, and the inability to manage non-members. While participants feel that unqualified people are the ones who give PR practitioners a bad name by failing to communicate ethically in the profession, they did agree that failing to convince them to become members has become one of the persistent challenges in fostering ethical communication.

6.2.6 *Ethical communication challenges facing PR practitioners in Cape Town*

Ethical communication challenges that affect PR practitioners in Cape Town were conflict of interest and non-disclosure of information. PR practitioners felt that the advocacy role of PR practices used to advance clients' interest and failure to disclose information, regardless of the motivation, put a question mark on their ethical communication practice. They note that finding a balance that requires openness, honesty and understanding has been a challenge to their ethical communication decision-making. According to data analysed, public interest is a crucial component in ethical communication practice. Practitioners should be truthful and honest when communicating with the publics.

Lastly, in the analysis, PR practitioners reveal that, despite ethical communication involving fear of compromising client's interest, communicating personal values, being exposed or too involved with the client, practitioners still preferred to engage actively and communicate ethically with all stakeholders.

6.3 Problems and limitations of the study

There were few problems encountered during this study. The aim of this study was to understand how PR practitioners and professional bodies operating in Cape Town conceptualise and practise ethical communication. It was found that there is relatively limited literature on ethical communication PR and particularly in South Africa. As a result, the researcher had to obtain literature from other disciplines such as communication ethics, business ethics, business media, psychology and management. It was one of the study objectives to make the concept of ethical communication more accessible both to PR scholars and practitioners.

Another limitation occurred during data collection. Document analysis was one of the research methods used in this study. Some organisations did not allow access to confidential documents to be shared during in-depth interviews. As an alternative, the researcher obtained documentation from the organisations' websites, newsletters and magazines.

6.4 Implications and recommendations

6.4.1 Developing a more holistic understanding of ethical communication

It has been observed in ethics and ethical communication literature in PR that ethical PR practice is often based on fair and open communication. It has been noted that PR is itself a profession that creates mutually beneficial relations between organisations and their publics through open communication. For ethical communication to be effective, it requires PR practitioners' commitment and acceptance of the value of relation building. Values that are necessary include: truthfulness, fairness, honesty, integrity and responsibility. These interpersonal values can be extended into PR contexts. Since PR is grounded in maintaining organisation-publics relations, these values in building mutually beneficial and lasting relations. Adopting a contemporary paradigm that views ethical communication based on values such as honesty, openness, loyalty, fair-mindedness, respect, integrity and forthright communication could improve PR professional ethics and resolve the complex and contested areas of ethical communication.

6.4.2 Ethical communication education and training

Second, PR is heavily criticised for some actions of its practitioners that affect the perceived credibility and image of the profession. Consideration should be given to PR practitioners being educated and trained in ethical communication in order to enhance their interpersonal values required to communicate ethically. This will no doubt fortify PR professional ethics and ethical communication practice. Just as many organisations offer training in crisis management, conflict management, and public speaking, PR practitioners must be trained in ethical communication. Professional bodies and PR organisations should exercise greater control in ensuring that practitioners are trained properly.

6.4.3 Professionalism

Still the role of PR is viewed frequently with suspicion, if not total ignorance. Many view today's PR practitioners as nothing better than yesterday's publicity agent who is responsible for glossing over mistakes and errors, for concealing the negative and displaying only the positive (Wright, 1979: 20-33). Professional bodies that have been called to help PR practitioners communicate ethically are operating on a voluntary basis. The voluntary nature of professional bodies' codes of ethics makes them unenforceable. This has become a major challenge for professional bodies to foster ethical communication among PR practitioners. The researcher recommends PR practitioners should establish a professional model similar to that of certified public accountants or lawyers, so that all practitioners can be held accountable and that much of what they do professionally cannot be exclusionary. Wright (1993: 15) believes that professionalism would protect both the profession and the public from charlatans who do not have the knowledge, talent, or probity required.

6.4.4 Communication technologies

Social media have become one of the most recent communication technologies that PR organisations use to engage with their publics. PR practitioners strengthen their commitment to ethical communication and mutually beneficial relations with organisations and publics by using social media tools to communicate ethically. It becomes clear that today's practice of PR is using social media. As 'Professional Bond' report in 2006: *the Anecdotal reports* issued in support of PR education tells PR, '*The contemporary practice of PR requires practitioners to immediately respond to emerging issues and crisis situations via new media*'. Social media is a space where PR practitioners, publics and organisations can engage fully in discussions about issues affecting them. The research therefore recommends that the latest communication technology used in PR ethical communication practice be used as one of its strategies by professional bodies to foster ethical communication among PR practitioners.

Practitioners support social media: that become a priority among virtually all organisations and associations, not only in South Africa, but worldwide. PR practitioners have generally been forthcoming in their recognition of the importance of social media and its support in engaging with their publics. Professional bodies must ensure that practitioners are prepared not only to be proficient in the use of social media, but understand and appreciate the legal ramifications of its use.

6.5 Suggestions for further studies

It is important to note that this study has offered an existential approach to ethics and ethical communication in PR. It has been noted that a major challenge is developing a holistic understanding of ethical communication in PR. The study has offered some corrective possibilities, as indicated in the recommendations above. It remains important to outline briefly some possibilities for further research.

As Chapter Four stated, the research for this study was mainly qualitative in nature. It would be interesting if a quantitative research could be carried out on ethical communication in the professional practice of PR in Cape Town, South Africa for data comparison.

The purpose of qualitative study is to understand ethical communication within a particular context, and the researcher acknowledges that challenges would differ as it moves from one context to another. So it would be useful to understand what challenges PR practitioners in Johannesburg, other parts of South Africa or Africa.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LETTER TO PUBLIC RELATIONS ORGANISATIONS/ AGENCIES



04 October 2013

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This letter serves to confirm that

MR SUNDAY CHUKWUNONYE IGBOANUGO
STUDENT NUMBER: 210005556

is an M-Tech student in Public Relations Management in the Faculty of Informatics and Design at **Cape Peninsula University of Technology at Cape Town campus.**

He is doing a **FULL THESIS** in the fulfillment of his M-Tech requirements with the topic;

Ethical Communication in the Professional Practice of Public Relations in Cape Town, South Africa.

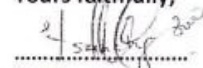
Mr. Igboanugo is focusing his primary research for his master's thesis on investigating the state of public relations practice in the Cape Town in order to determine how ethical communication is conceptualised and practiced by public relations in Cape Town and how professional bodies operating within Cape Town conceptualise ethical communication and how they seek to foster ethical communication among public relations practitioners in the Cape Town. His research will be executed by means of in-depth interviews, documents and content analysis study of public relations organisations, public relations practitioners, and professional bodies. Should the need arise, we will appreciate the possibility of Mr. Igboanugo getting access to interview your public relations practitioners and view your organisation's documents. This letter serves to address the issue of ethical concerns, and a commitment from Mr. Igboanugo and CPUT to respect any information gathered from your organisation.

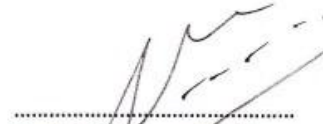
We will also appreciate it if this letter can serve as a means of introducing Mr. Igboanugo Sunday and his study subject to your organisation.


We are confident that this study is in the interest of all Public Relations/ Corporate Communication in various organisations and companies, and that the findings will be constructive in providing a coherent and holistic conceptualisation of ethical communication and the principles informing practice.

With appreciation.

Yours faithfully,


.....
Sunday Igboanugo


.....
Prof. Johann van der Merwe
Head of Department
Public Relations Management


.....
Mr. Blessing Makwambeni
Supervisor



APPENDIX B:

LETTER OF AUTHORITY



CORPORATE IMAGE

14 October 2013

To whom it may concern

LETTER OF CLEARANCE

MR SUNDAY CHUKWUNONYE IGBOANUGO

STUDENT NUMBER: 210005556

Corporate Image herewith acknowledges the request of Mr Sunday Igboanugo (student number 210005556) for assistance in gathering information for his Master's Thesis.

Please note that all information provided may only be used for academic purposes, and that we reserve the right to limit access to confidential client documents.

Kind regards,

Jennifer Crocker
Account Director
Corporate Image



marcus brewster

CAPE TOWN | JOHANNESBURG

P | 021 424 0470 F | 021 423 1594
info@marcusbrewster.com | www.marcusbrewster.com

Date: 14 October 2013

Enquiries: Marcus Brewster (021 424 0470)

To Whom It May Concern

LETTER OF CLEARANCE

MR SUNDAY CHUKWUNONYE IGBOANUGO

STUDENT NUMBER: 210005556

marcusbrewster hereby acknowledges the request of Mr Sunday Igboanugo, 210005556 in his Master's programme.

Mr Igboanugo met with marcusbrewster Chairman – Mr Marcus Brewster, on Wednesday, 09 October 2013. marcusbrewster will assist Mr Igboanugo with his thesis as far possible

Kindly note, the information to be provided will be within the mandate of marcusbrewster.

Yours Faithfully,

Marcus Brewster

Chairman

marcusbrewster

77 HOUT STREET CAPE TOWN SOUTH AFRICA
P.O. BOX 51070 WATERFRONT 8002

APPENDIX C:

INDIVIDUAL CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS



Cape Peninsula
University of Technology

FID/REC/ICv0.1

FACULTY OF INFORMATICS AND DESIGN

Individual Consent for Research Participation

Title of the study: Ethical Communication in the Professional Practice of Public Relations in Cape Town, South Africa

Name of researcher: Mr. Sunday Igboanugo
Contact details: email: igboanugosunday@yahoo.com phone: 078 616 5882

Name of supervisor: Mr. Blessing Makwambeni
Contact details: email: makwambenib@cput.ac.za phone: 021 469 1174

Purpose of the Study: To explore the state of public relations practice in Cape Town in order to determine how ethical communication is conceptualised and practised by public relations in Cape Town and how professional bodies (PRSA, IABC) operating within the Cape Town conceptualise ethical communication and how they seek to foster ethical communication among public relations practitioners in Cape Town.

Participation: My participation will consist essentially of an in-depth interview and providing access to document.

Confidentiality: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for M Tech thesis and journal articles and that my confidentiality will be protected by the ethical conduct of this study. Use of pseudonyms to ensure privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of sources will be ensured.

Anonymity, the right to privacy and protection from physical and emotional harm will be guaranteed. The researcher will not use unethical tactics and techniques of interviewing and the researcher will not publish any unethical statement found in any of documents obtained from organisations or individuals, unless the issue is fully discussed by all the parties involved.

Conservation of data: The data collected will be kept in a secure CPUT postgraduate individual hard drive which only the researcher has access to. The digitally recorded interviews will be encrypted and kept in the researcher's hard drive and documents obtained from organisations or individuals will also be kept in secure environment which only the researcher have access to. Original data or copy of the data will be kept for audit purposes.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be handed back me.

Additional consent: I make the following stipulations (please tick as appropriate):

| | In thesis | In research publications | Both | Neither |
|-----------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|------|---------|
| My image may be used: | | | | |
| My name may be used: | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| My exact words may be used: | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Any other (stipulate): | | | | |

Acceptance: I, (print name) JO-ANNE SMETHERMAN

agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Mr. Sunday Igboanugo of the Faculty of Informatics and Design, department of Public Relations Management at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, which research is under the supervision of Mr. Blessing Makwambeni.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or the supervisor. If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the secretary of the Faculty Research Ethics Committee at 021 469 1012, or email naidoo@cput.ac.za.

Participant's signature: 

Date: 4 Oct 2013

Researcher's signature: 

Date: 4 Oct. 2013

APPENDIX D:

INDIVIDUAL CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONAL BODIES



Cape Peninsula
University of Technology

FID/REC/ICv0.1

FACULTY OF INFORMATICS AND DESIGN

Individual Consent for Research Participation

Title of the study: Ethical Communication in the Professional Practice of Public Relations in Cape Town, South Africa

Name of researcher: Mr. Sunday Igboanugo
Contact details: email: igboanugosunday@yahoo.com phone: 078 616 5882

Name of supervisor: Mr. Blessing Makwambeni
Contact details: email: makwambenib@cput.ac.za phone: 021 469 1174

Purpose of the Study: To explore the state of public relations practice in Cape Town in order to determine how ethical communication is conceptualised and practised by public relations in Cape Town and how professional bodies (PRSIA, IABC) operating within the Cape Town conceptualise ethical communication and how they seek to foster ethical communication among public relations practitioners in Cape Town.

Participation: My participation will consist essentially of an in-depth interview and providing access to document.

Confidentiality: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for M Tech thesis and journal articles and that my confidentiality will be protected by the ethical conduct of this study. Use of pseudonyms to ensure privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of sources will be ensured.

Anonymity, the right to privacy and protection from physical and emotional harm will be guaranteed. The researcher will not use unethical tactics and techniques of interviewing and the researcher will not publish any unethical statement found in any of documents obtained from organisations or individuals, unless the issue is fully discussed by all the parties involved.

Conservation of data: The data collected will be kept in a secure CPUT postgraduate individual hard drive which only the researcher has access to. The digitally recorded interviews will be encrypted and kept in the researcher's hard drive and documents obtained from organisations or individuals will also be kept in secure environment which only the researcher have access to. Original data or copy of the data will be keep for audit purposes.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be handed back me.


Additional consent: I make the following stipulations (please tick as appropriate):

| | In thesis | In research publications | Both | Neither |
|-----------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|------|---------|
| My image may be used: | | | | ✓ |
| My name may be used: | | | ✓ | |
| My exact words may be used: | | | ✓ | |
| Any other (stipulate): | <hr/> | | | |


Acceptance: I, (print name) Solly Moeng (President of PRISA)

agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Mr. Sunday Igboanugo of the Faculty of Informatics and Design, department of Public Relations Management at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, which research is under the supervision of Mr. Blessing Makwambeni.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or the supervisor. If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the secretary of the Faculty Research Ethics Committee at 021 469 1012, or email naidoo@cput.ac.za.

Participant's signature: 

Date: 21 November 2013

Researcher's signature: 

Date: 21/11/2013



FACULTY OF INFORMATICS AND DESIGN

Individual Consent for Research Participation

Title of the study: Ethical Communication in the Professional Practice of Public Relations in Cape Town, South Africa

Name of researcher: Mr. Sunday Igboanugo
Contact details: email: igboanugosunday@yahoo.com phone: 078 616 5882

Name of supervisor: Mr. Blessing Makwambeni
Contact details: email: makwambenib@cput.ac.za phone: 021 469 1174

Purpose of the Study: To explore the state of public relations practice in Cape Town in order to determine how ethical communication is conceptualised and practised by public relations in Cape Town and how professional bodies (PRSA, IABC) operating within the Cape Town conceptualise ethical communication and how they seek to foster ethical communication among public relations practitioners in Cape Town.

Participation: My participation will consist essentially of an in-depth interview and providing access to document.

Confidentiality: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for M Tech thesis and journal articles and that my confidentiality will be protected by the ethical conduct of this study. Use of pseudonyms to ensure privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of sources will be ensured.

Anonymity, the right to privacy and protection from physical and emotional harm will be guaranteed. The researcher will not use unethical tactics and techniques of interviewing and the researcher will not publish any unethical statement found in any of documents obtained from organisations or individuals, unless the issue is fully discussed by all the parties involved.

Conservation of data: The data collected will be kept in a secure CPUT postgraduate individual hard drive which only the researcher has access to. The digitally recorded interviews will be encrypted and kept in the researcher's hard drive and documents obtained from organisations or individuals will also be kept in secure environment which only the researcher have access to. Original data or copy of the data will be keep for audit purposes.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be handed back me.

Additional consent: I make the following stipulations (please tick as appropriate):

| | In thesis | In research publications | Both | Neither |
|-----------------------------|---|--------------------------|------|---------|
| My image may be used: | | | | ✓ |
| My name may be used: | ✓ but not IABC | | | |
| My exact words may be used: | ✓ | | | |
| Any other (stipulate): | I do not speak on behalf of entire IABC membership. | | | |

Acceptance: I, (print name) N. Becham (Resident IABC Cape Town)

agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Mr. Sunday Igboanugo of the Faculty of Informatics and Design, department of Public Relations Management at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, which research is under the supervision of Mr. Blessing Makwambeni.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or the supervisor. If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the secretary of the Faculty Research Ethics Committee at 021 469 1012, or email naidoo@cput.ac.za.

Participant's signature: M. Bell

Date: 07/10/13

Researcher's signature: Sunday Igboanugo

Date: 07/10/13

APPENDIX E:

QUESTIONS ASKED IN THE INTERVIEWS

SECTION FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS (PR practitioners interview questions)

1. How long are you practicing PR?
2. Do you belong to any PR professional association in Cape Town?
3. What do you understand by communicating ethically?
4. In your everyday PR practice how do you examine/ test your communication is ethical? What are the practical steps?
5. Can you describe each stakeholder's involvement, the roles that they played and their interest in ethical communication?
6. What ethical communication principles/ values underpin your everyday communication practice?
7. Which principles/ values do you think all PR practitioners should adopt in their everyday communication practice?
8. What challenges did you face in your efforts to communicate ethically in your PR practice?
9. How have you attempted to remedy these challenges both individually and collectively?
10. How your organisation measure/ evaluate whether employee communication is ethical?

SECTION FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONAL BODIES

PRISA INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. As a PR professional what does ethical communication entail?
2. How does your organisation (PRISA) conceptualise ethical communication?
3. Can you explain the similarities and differences between your organisations and your own view of ethical communication?
4. In your view, what are the key principles/ values that underpin ethical communication?
5. What principles/ values does the PRISA consider to be the bedrock of ethical communication practice?
6. Does the PRISA have a system in place for fostering/ promoting ethical communication among its members? If yes, please elaborate?
7. Does your organisation (PRISA) have an ethical code? If yes, do you think it's adequate. And what are the grey areas?
8. What challenges does the PRISA face in its efforts to foster ethical communication among PR practitioners in Cape Town?
9. Are there any specific contextual issues impacting on ethical communication that PRISA members in the Cape Town face?
10. How does the association deal with member who contravenes their ethical code of conduct?

IABC INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. As a communication professional what does ethical communication entail?
2. How does your organisation (IABC) conceptualise ethical communication?
3. Can you explain the similarities and differences between your organisations and your own view of ethical communication?
4. In your view, what are the key principles/ values that underpin ethical communication?
5. What principles/ values does the IABC consider to be the bedrock of ethical communication practice?
6. Does the IABC have a system in place for fostering/ promoting ethical communication among its members? If yes, please elaborate?
7. Does your organisation (IABC) have an ethical code? If yes, do you think it's adequate? And what are the grey areas?

8. What challenges does the IABC face in its efforts to foster ethical communication among professional communicators in Cape Town?
9. Are there any specific contextual issues impacting on ethical communication that IABC members in the Cape Town face?
10. How does the association deal with member who contravenes their ethical code of conduct?