Cape Peninsula
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PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOLS TO IMPROVE COMMUTER PERCEPTION OF THE PASSENGER RAIL AGENCY OF SOUTH AFRICA IN GAUTENG

By

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DECLARATION

I, **Bongeka Mnukwa**, declare that the contents of this dissertation represent my own unaided work, and that the dissertation has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Bmnukwa　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　November 2020

Signed　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　**Date**

ABSTRACT

This research looks at the public relations tools that are most appropriate for the commuter engagement challenges faced by Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) in the Gauteng province. It provides answers to the following questions: “What are the standards and perceptions of PRASA or Metrorail for commuters? What are the communication needs of the commuter? What interaction platforms are used by PRASA to connect with its commuters? How does PRASA report or disclose train delays, cancellations or new offers?”

This study relies on the theoretical framework that is based on Grunig’s public relations models of communication. This work considers the role that the public relations tools might play in the communications mix, how PRASA should consider how they interact with rail commuters, and what communication method(s) are sufficient to meet the rail commuter’s needs. The research findings include the rail commuter's perceptions of PRASA or Metrorail, the state of communication between PRASA and their rail commuters, as well as the communication platform(s) preferred by rail commuters.

The study offers the following recommendations: PRASA should create a public relations department within its organisation; the Metrorail should have a Facebook and a Twitter page, where they will post information about train movements; cancelled trains, train delays, how long to wait until the next train is available; installing WIFI at train stations, as well as inside the trains is ideal, for those commuters who do not have data; and lastly PRASA's PR personnel should take time in tracking what is being said about the organisation.

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- My academic supervisors, Prof Nic Theo and Dr Adelina Mbinjama-Gamatham. I could not have done it without you. I will forever be grateful for your guidance.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to every individual who was once diagnosed with a brain disorder. I am testament that God is real and is alive. Choose to believe what the word of God says over what the medical doctors say. Faith in God is a game changer; it most certainly changed my life.

“Where there is hope, there is faith. Where there is faith, miracles happen”, Unknown.

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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Research

Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) is a South African state-owned company responsible for the country's passenger rail services. PRASA's primary mandate, as set out in the South African Transport Services Legal Succession Act of 1989, is to provide rail transport services to, from and in the Republic of South Africa in the public interest of all South Africans dependent on public transport by rail. According to the corporate plan of the South African Passenger Rail Agency (2016), the business carries more than 2 million passenger journeys on weekdays through Metrorail in the following regions: Gauteng, Western Cape, Kwa-Zulu Natal and Eastern Cape.

This study explores the public relations tools that are most appropriate for the commuter engagement challenges faced by PRASA in the Gauteng province. It looks at the ways PRASA/ Metrorail communicate with its rail commuters, as well as how rail commuters perceive it. This research investigates rail commuters' communication needs, rail commuters' expectations, and the engagement platforms PRASA applies to communicate with its commuters. According to the 2017/2018 financial year annual report of the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa, its vision is to be the leader in the solution for passenger transport (PRASA, 2018). This is backed by its mission to strive through service excellence, innovation and modal integration for high quality and sustainable passenger services. Moreover, it is stipulated in the annual report (PRASA, 2018) that PRASA is committed to delivering a secure, reliable and affordable superior output.

The board chairperson of South Africa's Passenger Rail Agency, Ms. Khanyisile Kweyama, acknowledged that commuter services are at their lowest performance levels with an average of 13 percent of scheduled trains cancelled and a massive 68 percent of trains running late on a given day (Kruger, 2019). Kweyama also said the average train delay was 30 minutes (Kruger, 2019). Metrorail transported less than 700,000 passengers per weekday in the 2017/2018 financial year, while the system is capable of transporting around 3 million passengers per day (PRASA, 2018). In an effort to address this decline in operational passenger services, including declining revenues, PRASA has implemented a turnaround strategy to improve customer satisfaction levels to as high as 80% over the next five years (PRASA, 2018).

According to South Africa's Railway Safety Regulator (2018), the South African Passenger Rail Agency acknowledges that there is a general perception among rail commuters that the quality of service provided by PRASA is unacceptably low and that it fails to fulfil its own primary mandate to provide safe, reliable and reliable railway services. This has had a negative impact on the customer travel experience. The complaints are that the trains are regularly late or cancelled with no communication to passengers, as per the news reports (Railway Safety Regulator of South Africa, 2018). The overview of the background of the study raised issues that this study has managed to address by highlighting the research problem.

The purpose of this research is to explore the communication between PRASA and its rail commuters by evaluating the commuter perceptions of the South African Passenger Rail Agency in Gauteng. **Figure 1.1** represents PRASA Group's stakeholder map, for a better understanding of where Metrorail fits.

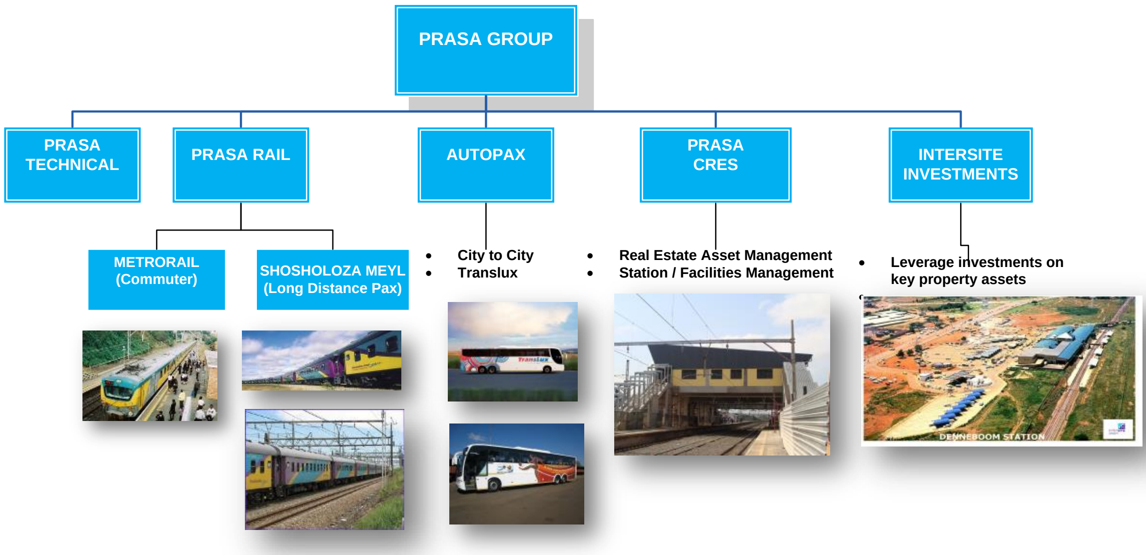

Figure 1.1: PRASA Group's Stakeholder Map

1.2 Articles from popular media

According to an article from News24 (2002), Metrorail acknowledged that poor communication on its part played a role in the attacks at various Tshwane train stations by enraged commuters in the past week. It further notes that "to some extent people have a case, our communication, especially at small stations, is inadequate. At big stations sound systems are there, but not perfect," chief executive Honey Mateya told reporters in Pretoria. "It is true that as a company and as a business we have to jack up our services". He said the company would do an audit of all stations to check the quality of the sound systems and whether officials were making announcements in time.

Information officers and announcers would undergo a training course, he said. Commuters interviewed after the riots complained that they were not informed of changes to train schedules. Another article that was published on 13 April 2002 by an unnamed News24 reporter. In the article, Honey Mateya, one of PRASA's Chief executives acknowledges that there are communication issues at their train stations. He goes on to say, there are sound systems at the big stations but in the same breath acknowledges that the said sound systems are not perfect. In the article Mr Mateya promises to "jack up the train services. A commuter stated that Metrorail makes changes to the train schedules and fail to notify commuters." This article paints a picture of a frustrated rail commuter who just wants to know what is going on when issues arise pertaining to the movement of trains.

Kruger (2019) indicated that "a quick calculation using these figures shows that Passenger Rail Association of South Africa is indeed not close to doing what it should". If PRASA schedules 1 000 trains, 130 will be cancelled. Of the 870 trains that run, 594 will be running late. That leaves 267 trains arriving at their destination on time – less than 27% of the original schedule. Only 50% of these will be complete sets with the required number of passenger coaches. Thus, on average during the year to March 2018, only 138 trains out of every 1 000 achieved their objective. This performance makes a joke of what PRASA states is its "commitment to deliver public value to the poorest of the poor".

Kruger (2019) highlighted in the article the reasons the train Mr Cyril Ramaphosa was on got stuck while he was out on a Presidential campaign. He insinuates that the train Mr Ramaphosa was on was not stuck by mistake or accident and that this is a common practice for Metrorail train. It was a matter of wrong place, wrong time for Mr Ramaphosa. According to Kruger (2019), for every 1000 scheduled trains, 130 trains will be cancelled, and of the 870 trains that run, 594 will be delayed. This means 267 trains arrive on time at their destinations, which is less than 27% of the initial timetable. News24 also published the same story in 2002, and it seems as though in 2019 PRASA was possibly having the same issues.

Dlamini (2019) published a story titled, "Late and unsafe trains a daily nightmare for commuters". He gives an account of his experience of when she boarded a train from Park Station to Pretoria via Germiston. It seems as though there were no information boards indicated which train to board hence, she had to follow someone she overheard saying they were going to Germiston. Another issue she picked up was that the train left the station 15 min later than the scheduled time and no communication was issued to commuters regarding the delay.

1.3 Communication Methods at PRASA

According to Rothmann and Cooper (2013: 79), communication methods refer to written, oral, downward, upward, horizontal and formal communication. The environmental analysis of the current communication situation of Passenger Rail Association of South Africa demonstrates how Metrorail communicates with its commuters (see **Table 1.1**). It briefly outlines the overall intent of the message, and the method used to relay the message.

Table 1.1: PRASA's Environmental Analysis of the Current Communication Method

The message	Communication channel
Train delays	Sound system- speaker and information screen
Train cancellations	Sound system- speaker and information screen
Route additions and cancellations	Newspapers, Radio, Website and Posters
Train breakdown	None
Fare increase	Newspapers, Radio, Website and Posters

1.4 Problem Statement

The Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa does not seem to have a positive public perception, even more so now that President Cyril Ramaphosa was stuck in a train for three hours, on route to the Bosman station on 18 March 2019. After President Ramaphosa arrived at his destination three hours later, he said: "And once we were on the train, it was moving slow and stopping abruptly without any explanation. It is unacceptable that a trip of 50km can take us three hours and it must come to an end. We are going to talk to PRASA to get things right or otherwise heads must roll" (Mvumvu, 2019).

As presented in the audited financial report of 2017/18, PRASA (2018) reported that commuter rail services are at the lowest at 52 percent. While countless research on the delivery of PRASA services has been undertaken, there appears to be no major research on how best to use public relations and communication platforms to enhance the manner PRASA deals with its commuters. Currently, Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa appears to be failing to engage honestly and openly with its commuters.

According to an article published in 2018 by Moneyweb, the board chairperson of PRASA, Ms. Khanyisile Kweyama, acknowledged that commuter services are at their lowest performance levels with an average of 13 percent of scheduled trains cancelled and a massive 68 percent of trains running late on a given day. Kweyama also said the average train delay was 30 minutes.

Furthermore, an article published in 2018 by the South Africa's Railway Safety Regulator states that, PRASA acknowledges that there is a general perception among rail commuters that its quality of service is unacceptably low and that it fails to fulfil its own primary mandate, which is to provide safe and reliable railway services. The complaints are that the trains are regularly late or cancelled with no communication to passengers.

1.5 Aim and Objectives of the Research

The aim of this research was to explore the communication between PRASA and its rail commuters by evaluating the commuter perceptions of the South African Passenger Rail Agency in Gauteng. The purpose of this study is to remedy this lacuna in knowledge by exploring ways in which service delivery is communicated to rail commuters, and to identify appropriate public relations tools that could potentially increase public perceptions of the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa within the Gauteng province. This aim was achieved through the objectives that follow:

1.5.1 Research Objectives

- To assess how PRASA communicates with its rail commuters.
- To assess commuter's engagement needs.
- To compare PRASA's current stated Public Relations (PR) framework in relation to consumer engagement, with best PR practices.

1.6 Research Questions

Alvesson and Sandberg (2013:2) describe research questions as a core ingredient in developing interesting and productive theories. This study aims to answer the following main research question; Which PR tools are most appropriate for the commuter engagement challenges faced by PRASA in the Gauteng province? To address the main research question, the following sub-questions should be resolved:

- RQ1: What are commuters' expectations and perceptions of PRASA/ Metrorail?
- RQ2: What are the commuters' communication needs?
- RQ3: What engagement platform does PRASA apply to communicate with its commuters?
- RQ4: How does PRASA announce/ communicate train delays, cancellations or new offerings?

1.7 Rationale for the Study

Previous research has shown that the role and place of public relations within organisations have not been defined or identified by most organisations. This result was confirmed by Cutlip *et al*. (2000:60), who argued that in different types of organisations, even practitioners disagree about what is the best structure and position for their functions. Public relations is a complicated profession, an emerging sector at the center of all communication. This study, therefore, sets out to explore the communication between PRASA and its rail commuters by evaluating the commuter perceptions of the South African Passenger Rail Agency in Gauteng.

The researcher will also compare PRASA's current PR framework as regards to consumer engagement with the most appropriate PR practices. This is necessary because it will highlight the relationship that PRASA has with its commuters, and how their expectations are met. The PR practices in PRASA will indicate the manner in which they address issues of communication with its commuters

1.8 Significance of the Research

This research is significant because it discusses the importance of engagement between organisations and their stakeholders. In determining the public relations methods to be used to communicate with stakeholders, companies should use this study as a guideline. This study provides insight into the experiences of those commuters affected by Metrorail, which, if made available in a professional context, might inform the development of strategies in organisations like PRASA around the management of public relations tools.

The aim of this study is to provide information as well as, contribute to developing knowledge in a field of public relations and public administration. Upon completion, the information presented will be a valuable contribution to public relations practitioners, consultants and strategists whose aim it is to influence the practices and processes of PRASA and other rail services organisations, as well as the public transportation sector at large.

The researcher could not find any research on this topic that relates to the Gauteng province. The data found was research about Cape Town as well as South Africa as a whole, and so due to the limited literature available on this particular topic, the study also presented a contribution to the current literature gap on a local level. In addition, the study will further benefit PRASA management and public relations managers in general by suggesting communication strategies which they can use to maximise their service offering and establish effective stakeholder-relationships with their rail commuters.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

Although this study contributes to public relations practitioners, consultants and strategists whose aim it is to influence the practices and processes of PRASA and other rail services organisations, as well as the public transportation sector at large the research design contains inherent limitations. The first limitation was that, in conducting interviews, the researcher could not interview all Gauteng train commuters, and only certain parts of Gauteng were reached, which means that the study is necessarily only a partial snapshot of the issues at hand.

The second limitation was how participants retained the ability to restrict knowledge during their interviews or react in a guarded manner. The respondents were assured that the researcher does not work for PRASA and that the study was merely there to assist and guide PRASA in ensuring the commuters are considered, but nevertheless may not have shared their full sense of the issues in question with the researcher.

The third limitation was the time frame in that some of the potential respondents could not complete their interviews due to the arrival of their trains, and therefore may not have shared the full extent of their experiences and opinions. Although this limitation is evident, the study goal was, however, not materially affected.

1.10 Research Design and Methodology

This section focuses on this study's research methodology. It describes the required study measures, the tools used to collect information, and the processes followed in the study instrument's administration and coordination. Leedy (2007: 106) states that the nature of the data to be sampled determines the methodology to be used when conducting research. The qualitative approach is utilised when the researcher wishes to obtain intense human stories with the aim to describe and understand the culture (Court, 2016:7).

In this study the research paradigm adopted is the form of qualitative analysis. Qualitative methods allow researchers to gain new perspectives on existing knowledge and gain more in-depth information that can often be difficult to communicate (Hoepfl, 1997:2). The qualitative approach assisted in gaining an in-depth understanding of rail commuter perceptions about PRASA or Metrorail. This will be explained more in detail in chapter three.

1.11 Definition of terms and concepts

Across different fields, the following terms can have different significations. For clarification purposes the following concepts must be explained.

1.11.1 Public Relations

The Institute for Public Relations and Communication Management of Southern Africa (PRISA) defines public relations as, the management of perceptions and strategic relationships (Skinner, Essen, Mersham and Motau, 2010:4) that builds mutually beneficial relations between organisations and its audiences (PRSA, 2009-2014). The Southern African Institute for Public Relations and Communication Management (PRISA) defines public relations as the management of perceptions and strategic relationships (Skinner, Essen, Mersham and Motau, 2010:4) that builds mutually beneficial relations between organisations and their audiences that are mutually beneficial (PRSA, 2009-2014).

Moreover, Heath (2006:101) suggests that public relations should be structured in a way that strategic publics can be defined as part of the strategic management process, in that way long-term relationships can be formed through symmetrical communication.

1.11.2 Communications

Communication is the basis of all management and workforce development (Schwartz, 2006:1) that is referred to as a process through which information is shared between persons via a common symbol, sign or behavioural system (merriam-webster.com, 2020). In addition, Van Riel and Fombrun (2004:3) announce that communication is an integrated communication mechanism that links stakeholders with the organisation as “the center of organisational performance and organisational communication”.

1.11.3 Corporate Ethics

Corporate ethics is a systematic study of natural principle or wrongness. It focuses on the behavioural values applicable to company practices, organisations and behaviours (Fernando, 2009:1).

1.11.4 Corporate Governance

Corporate governance is the ethical framework through which business decisions are made (Fernando, 2009:31). It suggests involving stakeholders in the organisation's strategic decision-making process (Rensburg and De Beer, 2011:152) to create sustainable strategies for corporate social responsibility that meet corporate priorities and desires of shareholders, as well as the world in which the company operates (Jenkins and Yakovleva, 2006:272).

1.11.5 Stakeholder Engagement

Belluci and Manetti (2019:78) describes stakeholder engagement as the mechanism that a company uses to involve specific stakeholders with a clear purpose for achieving agreed results. Additionally, Taylor and Kent (2014) cited in Doerfel and Gibbs (2020:67) refer to stakeholder engagement as a form of communication mechanism involving the organisation’s stakeholders in the decision-making process.

1.11.6 Reputation Management

Reputation refers to how its stakeholders perceive the organisation to be positive or negative – the community of individuals or publics on which success or failure an entity depends (Gaines-Ross, 2008:6). Moreover, reputation management has changed the way organisations approach communication management, especially with regard to sustainable growth and the three-pronged financial, social and environmental accountability (Carvalho, 2004).

1.11.7 Customer Satisfaction

Juneja (2008) explains customer satisfaction as, measuring how the needs and responses are worked together and met to quality customer standards. Similarly, MacDougall (2017:9) defines customer satisfaction as a measure of how the overall output of the companies performs with respect to a collection of customer requirements.

1.11.8 Customer Relationship Management

Customer relationship management is a multifaceted mechanism driven by a collection of information technology that focuses on establishing two-way interactions with consumers so that businesses have an intimate knowledge of their wants, desire and purchase trends (Jha, 2008:1). Furthermore, CRM helps businesses consider existing and future customer’s desires as well as predict them. Keller (2012:86) notes that Customer Relationship Management is the practice of carefully handling accurate customer details to improve loyalty.

1.12 Clarification of Acronyms Used

In various fields, the following terms can have distinct meanings. For the purpose of clarification, as shown in **Table 1.2**, the following abbreviations need to be specified.

Table 1.2: Clarification of Abbreviations

CIPR	Chartered Institute of Public Relations
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
HRA	Human Rights Act
ISAMS	Integrated Security Access Management System
MLPS	Mainline Passenger Services
NRS Standard	National Rail System Standard
PR	Public Relations
PRASA	Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa
PRSA	Public Relations Society of America
PRISA	Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa
RCAG	Rail Commuters Action Group
SoCs	State Owned Companies
SoEs	State Owned Enterprises

1.13 Outline of the Research

Chapter One: Introduction

The study explores the communication that exists between PRASA and its rail commuters including examples of public announcements made in stations or on trains and information given by Metrorail staff. The declaration of the issue is indicated, and the study's significance is clarified.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The literature review and theoretical framework explores the scholarly literature to identify the overall material available. Focus is on in-depth analysis of the most important parts relevant to the study. The researcher looks at the theoretical concepts that underpin public relations as a discipline with reference to reputation management, communication channels, integrated communications, customer relationship management, PR models of communication, corporate ethics, corporate governance, stakeholder management, customer experiences, customer satisfaction, and the value of communicating with customers.

Chapter Three: Research Design

This chapter details the overall approach taken by the study to gather the information to address the research question. The researcher discusses the methodology for the study, from a qualitative research perspective, as well as the methods of study through semi-structured interviews with the target population that were performed in and outside various train stations in the province of Gauteng. The chapter further details the process of interviews of individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, so as to assess if there is a difference in the communications put out by PRASA in each of these areas.

Chapter Four: Research Findings

This chapter is a presentation of primary data findings. The findings attempt to address the following questions:

- What are commuters' expectations and perceptions of PRASA/ Metrorail?
- What are the commuters' communication needs?
- What engagement platform does PRASA apply to communicate with its commuters, platforms commuters are aware of?
- How does PRASA announce/ communicate train delays, cancellations or a new offerings?

Chapter Five: Analysis and discussion of the results

The chapter explains the results of the analysis of the information collected from the interviews and interpretations thereof, as well as the comparison of the study findings to the academic literature.

Chapter Six: Conclusion and Recommendations

In this chapter the researcher gives a summary of the key findings of the research questions and drawing logical conclusions from the data for interpretation. In addition to this, the study constraints are observed, and suggestions are made for future studies.

1.14 Summary

The introductory chapter presented the context and justification for the study, which was undertaken to indicate the lack of research on stakeholder engagement approaches, strategies and roles, and argued that stakeholders are active in the strategic decision-making phase of the company. In addition, the study problem, goals and the structure of the thesis were outlined.

The next chapter discusses current public relations literature as a discipline with clear reference to relationship management and management of reputation; corporate governance, corporate ethics, management and involvement with stakeholders; and corporate social responsibility.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the literature associated with the research. It provides a synthesis of literature and research studies, including the theoretical rationale. The literature contained in this chapter, is on different aspects of public relations, particularly communications in a public service context. Focus is on in-depth analysis of the important parts relevant to the study. This includes discussions of the definitions of public relations and its roles, and communication mechanisms that add value to customer services. In this study the research paradigm adopted is the form of qualitative analysis that allows researchers to gain new perspectives on existing knowledge and gain more in-depth information that can often be difficult to communicate (Hoepfl, 1997:2).

Further relevance to this research is the literature on ethics, corporate governance, stakeholder and communication theory, reputation management, integrated communications and customer relationship management, aimed towards encouraging positive customer experiences and the realisation of customer satisfaction. The biggest support or theoretical framework for this study are the PR models of communications, particularly the symmetrical two-way communication which is known for creating and sustaining beneficial interactions for organisations and its main stakeholders.

2.2 Public Relations

A topic that is familiar, but sometimes misunderstood, is public relations. Just a few can describe it and even the dictionaries disagree considerably with its definition. The Institute for Public Relations and Information Management of Southern Africa (PRISA) describes public relations as “the management, through communication, of the expectations and strategic relationships between an entity and its internal and external stakeholders,” according to Skinner, Essen, Mersham and Motau (2010:4).

Moloney (2000:6) argues that public relations is too multifaceted to be distilled into a single concept, but that, regardless of its impact on society, it deserves thorough research. He argues that it is possible to describe public relations differently as a philosophy (management of information by an organization with its audiences); as a tool (mainly communicating with the media) and in terms of its influence on society (a form of persuasive communication by mass media or private group lobbying to advance their material or political interests).

Grunig and Dozier (2002:2) suggest that public relations is the communication management between organisations and its stakeholders. In addition, Grunig *et al*. (2002) further states that, for public relations to be exceptional, it must be viewed as symmetrical, idealistic, critical and managerial. This essentially means PR practitioners serve the interest of both sides of the relationship. However, Botan and Hazleton (2010:133) have a different perception of public relations. They define PR as a function that helps manipulate publics to the advantage of organisations. The Chartered Public Relations Institute defines public relations as the discipline that looks after reputation with the goal of gaining understanding, supporting and influencing opinion and behaviour. However, Seitel (2004:3) describes public relations as a structured process based on mutually satisfactory two-way communication to influence public opinion, through sound character and proper results.

Furthermore, Botha, Chaka, du Plessis, Krause, Rawjee, Porthen, Veerasamy and Wright (2007:6) suggest that public relations is the function that focuses on managing the communication put out by the organisation for the people on whom its activities have an effect. McKee and Lamb (2009:1) describe public relations as the organisation's communication and action that supports the development, as well as the maintenance of beneficial relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders. It can be noted that there are a number of different meanings of public relations. Therefore, organisations should research these concepts carefully and be able to identify one that will embody the vision, purpose, priorities and core values as applied by their organisation.

2.2.1 The Purpose of Public Relations

Public relations is a process that involves subtle and far-reaching facets, including research and analysis, policy development, programming, communication and input from a wide range of audiences as per Wilcox and Cameron's suggestions (2009:5). Furthermore, public relations is a distinctive management role that helps to establish and maintain ties, awareness, acceptance and collaboration between an entity and its audience. Davis (2004:202) is of the opinion; many organisations do not recognise public relations' functions.

Wilcox and Cameron (2009:5) suggest that PR practitioners operate as an intermediary between the corporation and all the organisation's publics. Grunig et al., believes its purpose is aimed at influencing the public's attitudes and opinions, as well as help organisations build relationships with their stakeholders by facilitating communication between the organisation and its audience. According to Botha *et al*., (2007:53) PR is there for managing perceptions and strategic interactions between an organisation and its stakeholders. It provides a path for organisations to successfully monitor, engage and act with key stakeholders in the organisational environment (McKee *et al*., 2009:1).

Bernays (2013:1) indicates that public relations should be looked at in a threefold way: information given to the public, persuasion that is directed at the public with the aim to reshape perspectives and actions, and lastly as efforts to amalgamate perspectives and actions of an institution with its publics. Furthermore, Wideman (2001) suggests that public relations was created to improve the environment in which an organisation functions, with the aim to improve the organisation's performance. In addition, public relations can be an essential and a powerful tool in improving motivation at the operative level, which essentially means, if handled properly improved productivity is bound to follow (Wideman, 2001).

2.3 Public Relations Methods and Tactics

Tench and Yeomans (2006:197) claim that a method, or strategy, is a technique, or a structured way to do something to reach goals. Moreover, the goals, the method and the strategies should be clearly connected. In addition to this suggestion, Tench and Yeomans indicate that the aim of planning public relations is to obtain a program that reaches the right people in appropriate numbers and has the right degree of impact to do the job needed. This is to be achieved within reasonable timeframes and costs. Public relations professionals use the most appropriate approaches for the established stakeholder in an attempt to engage in two-way communication with internal and external stakeholders. According to Wilcox and Cameron (2009:162) the nuts-and-bolts of the strategy are tactics that define the specific activities that enforce each strategy and help to achieve the specified objectives.

Cutlip, Center and Broom (2001:378) refer to tactics as the stage of the operations, including the specific incidents, media and methods used to execute the strategy. The use of tactics varies according to the complexity of a system, and the practitioner may need to draw from a palette of acceptable tactics. When planning the tactical elements of a campaign, practitioners will ask themselves questions such as the suitability of a strategy and the ability to execute the tactics (Tench and Yeomans, 2006:197).

Public relations tactics outlined by Wilcox and Cameron (2009:162) are as follows:

- News releases are sent to journalists and editors for use in news columns.
- Publicity images often accompany press releases to add credibility to a story.
- Mat releases are a type of press release that have a product angle rather than hard news. They provide objective information and tips for consumers
- News advisories and fact sheets are alerts, warnings, press conferences or interviews with journalists.
- Media kit is a press kit that includes photos, fact sheets and details of an organisation's latest product or newsworthy event.

- Pitch letters are story lines about a client or employer.
- Radio news releases are often sound bites that play out for 60 seconds or less.
- Public service announcements are like adverts, but they are not charged by stations.
- Broadcast media tours occur when journalists from across the country interview the organisation's spokesperson from a central location.
- Video news releases are produced in a format that can be easily used or edited by television stations based on their needs.
- News feeds occurs when an organisation arranges to cover a particular event and television stations can watch it throughout the country.
- Public appearances arise when spokespersons appear on radio and TV talk shows on behalf of the company.
- Product placements occur when producers make deals with companies to showcase their products on TV shows.
- Websites and online media are useful for conveying news conferences and communicating with journalists.

Skinner *et al*. (2007:5) suggest that the complex and rapidly evolving nature of the public relations profession and the effects of the Internet have led the profession to embrace the use of the World Wide Web, e-mail and newsgroups. Newsgroups are email-driven discussion fora, but with comments called posts rather than messages or letters. Company websites are considered valuable resources for public relations (Park and Reber, 2008:409), as they help to increase public knowledge and appreciation of the goods and services of the organisation. That being said, the use of technology itself does not help create and maintain good ties between organisations and their audiences. Instead, it is more important to consider how the system is used for dialogue.

Park and Reber (2008:411) believe it is critical that public relations scholars analyse and re-examine the emerging strategies for applicable and theoretical insights. This act of holding the fingers of practitioners on the pulse would give them the ability to test the most effective methods of communication with stakeholders and assess how such methods would help them achieve their communication and organisational goals. Practitioners who are in the professional position conduct most of the methods of public relations. This position does not always offer the practitioner the authority to instantly change such practices, particularly if the company is highly bureaucratic and there is no clear concept of relationships with stakeholders.

2.4 Public Relations Models of Communication

The four public relations models recognised progress from a basic public relations technique to a more advanced practice. These models include:

2.4.1 Press Agentry or Publicity

Press agentry focuses on publicity to gain attention for the organisation (Grunig et al., 1984: 125). Wilcox and Cameron (2006:63) emphasize that this is simply one-way contact, beaming messages from source to receiver with the specific intention of convincing the receiver into action. Such an approach is often synonymous with “propaganda”, the distribution of messages to gain public support without receiving input for positions or acts. Also, Lubbe and Puth (2002:8) say that this model defines public relations as a little more than a feature of advertising that seeks attention in mass media. This model has the sole purpose of promoting an individual, an organisation, or a product, thus encouraging a one-way flow of information to the public.

Grunig and Hunt (1984) state that, apart from tracking the media in which they tried to position favourable articles about their customers, the press agents did little research. In the press agent model, companies thus keep the public aware of the projects of corporate social responsibility undertaken within their societies.

2.4.2 Public Information

Public information utilises media relations methods to position data about public relations into news stories (Grunig *et al*., 1984:125). This is another one-way contact paradigm designed not only for convincing but also for informing. Under this model, the public relations agent conveys factual facts intended to educate the public. Seitel (2004:56) states that the focus of this model is on the role of public relations professionals.

2.4.3 Asymmetrical Two-Way Communication

Grunig *et al*. (1984:125) suggest that asymmetrical two-way communication promotes persuasive two-way communication. Wilcox and Cameron (2006:63) the model’s primary purpose is to help the communicator understand the audience better and know how to convince them. Tench and Yeomans (2006:147) argue that this is a two-way communication intended to persuade research, objective setting, conversing and then assessing the functions of classic public relations. This will allow parties to see if the communication has changed attitudes and opinions as desired. Grunig *et al*. (2002), however, indicated that this persuasion required contact without public interest.

Dozier and Ehling (1992) stress that asymmetry is a model of communication in which it predicts and tests a one-way, linear causal effect. In critique, van Ruler (2004) argues that mediated one-way contact is the two-way asymmetrical model and disregards the argument by Botan and Hazelton (2006) that research offers input that is used to exploit in favour of the interests of the organisation. Two-way asymmetric communicators utilise what they have learnt to convince audiences to accept the position of the organisation.

2.4.4 Symmetrical Two-Way Communication

The symmetrical two- way communication is known for creating and sustaining beneficial interactions for organisations and its main stakeholders (Grunig *et al*., 1984:125). The two-way symmetrical model defines public relations activities in terms of its research-based definition, according to Lattimore *et al*. (2004:58), as using communication to increase understanding with strategic publics. Seitel (2004:56) asserts that the two-way symmetric model is different from the two-way asymmetric model, because it is the purpose of mutual understanding rather than persuasion.

Grunig and White (1992) define the symmetrical two-way communication characters as interdependence, an open structure, symmetry, equality, autonomy, creativity, obligation and conflict resolution, as well as dialogue as a form of harmony. The symmetrical two-way model puts considerable focus on the notions of openness, ethical and shared profit (Grunig and White, 1992; Grunig *et al*., 2002). An entity that adopts this method of communication establishes a collaborative partnership that retains at the forefront the interests of all parties involved in a relationship (Grunig *et al*., 2002; Le Roux, 2014:309). Moreover, Grunig (2004) suggests that organisations and stakeholders share their influence in implementing the two-way symmetrical approach and may change their views to establish a symbiotic partnership. Consequently, the impact and outcomes of engagement are not dictated solely by the channels used, but by the behaviours of those participating in the communication process.

The motivation for communication really should be transparency, so that the parties involved in the communication process can positively influence one another (Le Roux, 2014:309). Given the fact that all four models are used in public relations practice, Wilcox and Cameron (2006:63) note that it is obviously more desirable to pursue two-way contact, whether attempting to convince or educate. In other words, feedback is key to a true understanding. Rensburg and Cant (2009:28) note that historically, a focus on interacting with stakeholders is the role of public relations in an organisation. In today’s world, public relations take on a greater role. The profession is designed to create and nurture a positive image of an organisation in the eyes of its audiences.

According to Yuang (2004:334), organisations with a symmetrical philosophy of communication view communication as a tool for building cohesion, through interpersonal actions that seek to understand others' attitude. Yuang (2004:334), however, believes that having a real two-way symmetrical discussion in the business world is difficult. Grunig (2001:18) recognises that symmetrical public relations does not exist in an ideal situation in which opposing interests align with good will to overcome their differences as they share an objective of mutual equilibrium and peace. Instead, it arises in cases where groups come together to preserve and improve their own interests. The two-way symmetrical communication has the advantage of being able to create stability. When parties have a consistent communication plan that incorporates the principles and desires of their partners, competing problems can be avoided. This is only possible when parties have mutual respect for one another (Mutch and Aitken, 2009:96).

Freeman (1984:2) and Rawlins (2006:2) suggest that stakeholders should have a good understanding of the communication methods that better represent their interests and the general public. Grunig (2008) notes that the Ubuntu approach promotes similar principles in the South African context and focuses on building a harmonious society based on respect and sensitivity, integrity, solidarity, compassion and caring for individuals or groups within the society (Le Roux, 2014:308). The philosophy of Ubuntu here is based on the notion that organisations exist throughout the entire web of relationships because of other partners that support their activities from immediate relationships (Kamoche, 2011). Frequently in the context, the symmetrical two-way model offers a forum for stakeholders to analyse and assess the consequences of corporate decisions and behavior and to contribute to a common result (Fitzpatrick and Gauthier, 2001). L'Etang (2009) argues however, that the symmetrical model does not take into account the power element that influences practice because organisations are not prepared to give up their own interests in favour of embracing the interest of the public (Cheney and Christensen, 2001).

Instead, they would take advantage of their powers to accelerate their own aspirations (Stauber and Rampton, 1995) which is why stakeholders and institutions are rarely equal. In addition, Fitzpatrick and Gauthier (2001) argue that the fact that the organisation most frequently sets the rules poses questions about the ethics of a mechanism in which the power to lay down the operating principles rests with one entity. Laskin (2009) suggests, while interactions seem symmetrical, the end result is still likely to be asymmetrical, favouring the organisation's most dominant side. For the purpose of this study, therefore, two-way symmetrical contact promotes reciprocal understanding and respect, and acts as a mediator between the entity and local communities by fostering interaction between them in order to reach common ground between their different and often opposing self-interests.

Each model reflects a particular ethical orientation: axiology, deontology, teleology and situational ethics which, when jointly regarded, demonstrates the ethical growth of public relations (Grunig *et al*., 1984:125).Hartman, Ellis and Edwards (2002:232) refer to axiology as the theory of values that focus on the researchers' value on all phases of the research process. Deontology is the duty-based ethics that addresses the rationale behind right or wrong actions, rather than whether the outcome of the action is right or wrong (White, 2004:73). Teleology is a result-oriented ethic that examines previous experiences to predict the outcomes of current actions (White, 2004:73). He further indicates that in situational theory there are no rules, nor set rules, each situation is considered unique.

Of all the models, the symmetrical two-way communication is the most ethical method because it promotes reciprocal understanding and respect, and acts as a mediator between the entity and local communities by fostering interaction between them in order to reach common ground. The goal of this model is not a monologues communication. Used to improve organisational processes is the input the company receives. The desired results of this model are dialogue, conflict resolution, mutual understanding and mutual respect between the organisation and its publics. This model seeks to find a mutually beneficial solution to a problem and is often used by organisations that might find themselves in a situation of dispute.

2.4.5 The Mixed-Motive Model

Murphy (1991:127) uses the game theory to create a firm and enhanced conceptualisation of the two-way symmetrical model of public relations (Grunig, Grunig and Dozier, 2002). A game theory is a two-way research-centred or a 'mixed-motive model' from the sender to the receiver, and vice versa. This is in an attempt to introduce power balance between an entity and stakeholders. Furthermore, the public relations mixed-motive model retains the central value of one's own interests, but acknowledges the influence of opposing opinions (Murphy, 1991:127). Murphy (1991) suggests that public relations is a mixed-motive game in which the views and interests of the company are often justifiably sought, rather than 100 percent cooperation or compromise (symmetry) or 100 percent persuasion (asymmetry), while the views and interests of stakeholders need to be accommodated on other occasions.

Likewise, the theory of contingency uses game theory (the process of modelling the strategic interaction between two or more players in a situation containing set rules and outcomes) and argues that in many cases, two-way symmetrical coordination is complex and difficult to practice (Cancel et al., 1999; Reber and Cameron, 2003).

The contingency theory emphasizes the continuum between advocacy and compromise on how a public relations professional promotes contact between the company and its external audiences, according to Cancel *et al*. (1997). Reber (2013) suggests that the theory of contingency is an alternative to the fifteen-year analysis of best practice in effective communication excellence since it is formed as a means of exploring the normative role of symmetrical two-way communication.

The theory of excellence assumes that the practice of normative public relations is symmetrical (Dozier *et al*., 1995; Grunig, 2001) and implies the importance of dialogue. While Grunig and Hunt (1984) claim that the basis for outstanding public relations practice is two-way symmetrical communication, Holtzhausen *et al*. (2003) argue that a country's cultural realities challenge the presumption that two-way symmetrical communication is the best way to practice PR. In addition, an Asian analysis by Taylor and Kent (1999) challenges the global superiority of the Western-focused excellence analysis of Grunig, which is unrealistic in countries where reverence for authority is a cultural value.

Furthermore, Reber (2013) claims that on one end of the spectrum, the contingency theory advocacy assumes a position of persuasion or consensus building (asymmetrical); moreover, it presents a negative picture synonymous with coercion and distrust between an entity and its stakeholders. The capacity of the company to cultivate and maintain a good relationship with the stakeholders is therefore threatened.

Dialogue, negotiation and consensus are necessary to meet the organisation's needs and those of its stakeholders. Consequently, the win-win approach or appropriate situation in which the company and its public are positioned is the core of the spectrum (Dozier *et al*., 1995). In addition, the contingency theory incorporates two-way symmetrical and two-way asymmetrical viewpoints (Grunig *et al*., 2002:472) into one mixed-motive model that is used to achieve understanding, precision and co-operation, highlighting the need for harmony between the parties involved (Tindall, 2007:202).

The mixed-motive model suggests that the central emphasis in the theory of contingency should be on public characteristics (Hallahan, 2001). This meant that both their allegiance to their organization and the public influenced by the organization's actions inspired the phenomenon of PR practitioners. Grunig *et al*. (2002) also argue that the versatility of accommodation levels enables the company and its audiences to benefit from this model because they both follow their own goals (Grunig and Grunig, 1996).

2.5 Communication Channels

Downs and Hazen (1977) describe communication channels as a path or movement in an organisation. Furthermore, these paths are the direction in which, for example, one-way or two-way contact messages fly. Such paths are critical because they help create a supportive environment that generates trust in management and enhances internal stakeholder interpersonal relationships (Jo and Shim, 2005). Similarly, Cameron and McCollum agree that communication channels are mechanisms by which a message is transmitted within an organisation and are important for building a sense of community and belonging within an organisation. Practitioners in public relations rely on a variety of written, spoken, pictures, regulated, and unregulated media to connect with diverse stakeholders. Nevertheless, the advent of technology has changed the conceptions of traditional media, especially in relation to the mass media. The exponential development in digital technology and social media platforms has revolutionised the way information is exchanged and shared between people and organisations.

In addition, Grunig (2009:6) argue that the new digital media have dialogical, interactive, relational and global properties that make them perfectly suited to a strategic public relations management model. In respect to PRASA, the rail commuters could benefit immensely from the usage of digital technology and social media platforms. This would ensure that rail commuters have consistent access to information regarding train movements at all times.

Begin and Charbonneau (2012) suggest that the role of public relations is to build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between an entity and its various stakeholders by managing symmetrical two-way communication, intranets, blogs and social media. Gursoy and McClearly (2004) agree that consumers are likely to gain information through reading guidebooks, advertising and write-ups in newspapers and magazines, television and radio adverts ads, or chatting about travel experiences with family and friends. Litvin *et al*. (2008:458) further adds that when a customer makes a purchase decision, interpersonal support and word-of-mouth are considered the most significant source of information. Bieger and Laesser (2000) claim that reliable sources of information should not only be provided by private connections, but also by travel agency staff, commuter information and organisations.

Public relations practitioners depend a lot on controlled and uncontrolled media to communicate with various stakeholders. According to Bregman (2012:39), most government agencies use social media to remain involved with their public, public data and teaching and growth of employees. Furthermore, transportation officials mostly make use of Twitter (www.twitter.com) and Facebook (www.facebook.com) to post service updates and announcements (Bregman, 2012:39). Thilenius, Pahlberg and Havila (2016:80) suggest that the internet-enabled communication platforms have become a popular choice for managers to use when communicating with the public. Furthermore, it is essential for these organisations to adopt a ‘communicate with’ approach, as opposed to the ‘communicate to’ approach. Marketing communication dictates that the right products or services are to be presented to the customer at the right time and place (Horner and Swarbrooke. 2016:102). Moreover, organisations should always make use of the new communication channels as these can help reach a wider audience. These channels include the internet, social networking platforms and mobile technologies (Horner and Swarbrooke, 2016:102).

2.6 The Value of Communicating with Customers

Gibson (2012:151) states that the sender, receiver, message, channel, shared knowledge and feedback are the main components in the communication model. Customer communication is essential to any business’s long-term success (Bloomsbury, 2009:255). According to Bloomsbury (2009:255) effective customer communication is essential from the early phases of the relationship as it guarantees that the product or service meets the instant requirements of the customer. Bloomsbury (2009:255) adds that regular customer communication allows the company to adapt and develop so that it can continue to satisfy its needs. Similarly, Berkovi (2014: 9) reiterates that effective communication to exceed the expectations of clients is critical to the achievement and reputation of businesses and their staff.

Parmell (2017) states that businesses must interact with present and prospective clients and should not leave to chance what they interact. Communication is a key component in the attempts of a company to create lucrative client relationships. All communication attempts must be combined into a coherent and coordinated program of communication (Parmell, 2017).

2.7 Corporate Governance

The previous section addressed the possibility of integrating communication public relations models to explain the nature of strategic communication processes in public relations, while the management role stressed public relations as an autonomous organisational feature that alerts the organisation to obligation issues. Therefore, both the management role and the strategic communication mechanism should be structured with particular regard to the corporate governance phenomenon as a framework that regulates the conduct of the company towards its stakeholders in order to achieve a threefold balance.

This segment sets out the corporate governance outlines. Corporate governance is a legal obligation to include stakeholders in the strategic decision-making process of the corporation

(Rensburg and De Beer, 2011:152) to create effective corporate social responsibility initiatives that serve corporate objectives and shareholder interests as well as the sector in which the company operates (Jenkins and Yakovleva, 2006:272). The implementation of corporate governance is affected by stakeholder corporate views, in particular the shareholder versus stakeholder debate; and the value given to each stakeholder group by the organisation. The narrow shareholder viewpoint, on the one hand, argues that the organisation is a legitimate mechanism for shareholders to increase their own benefit because they supply the organisation with money (Rezaee, 2008:19); therefore, their capital contributions supply ownership rights (Mintz and Weichenrieder, 2010:14).

Boje, Burnes and Hassard (2012:463) suggest that shareholders do not own the company, and that their decisions regarding the organisation's future cannot be absolute. Rezaee (2008:19) claim shareholders have legitimate claims, and thus directors have a moral and legal obligation to be responsible and accountable for making good business decisions that maximize shareholder wealth. Phillips, Freeman, and Wicks (2003:498) stress that, at its worst, maximising shareholder interest means using shareholder arguments prima facie to justify violations of other’s rights. According to Fernando (2009:31), in corporate governance, the instrumental perspective gives voice to stakeholders while the normative perspective respects moral rights of stakeholders, thus dialogue is open and deliberate and applies a procedural understanding of responsibility and a discursive understanding of responsibility (Scherer and Palazzo, 2008:416). In fact, the rights of shareholders are far from absolute irrespective of how often economists perceive the company as a private property for shareholders. Stakeholders are vital to the organisation's survival (Letza *et al*., 2004) cited in Brink (2011:299), and they need to be included in the framework that governs and guides organisations.

The inclusive approach of stakeholders was first promoted in the King Report (2002) chapter on Managing Stakeholder Relationships, which notes that the inclusive stakeholder approach is based on governance, sustainability and strategy concepts (De Beer and Rensburg, 2011). It highlights the importance of stakeholder inclusion in the future organisational decision-making process. Through this context an organisation and its stakeholders are expected to follow a conventional two-way symmetrical approach. Steyn and De Beer (2012:42) further agree that a stakeholder-inclusive approach to corporate governance ensures the cooperation and support of stakeholders by recognizing, assessing and supporting their interests.

It builds trust between the company and the stakeholders on whom business performance depends (King Report, 2009), thus obtaining and retaining the operating social license.

Transparent corporate governance is a precondition for making rational and transparent business decisions that represent the interests of all stakeholders.

2.8 Corporate Ethics: The Role of Ethics in Business

Ethics is thought to be a collection of moral convictions and actions that discourages self-gain and promotes truthful and modest ways of generating business income (Ghosh, Ghosh and Zaher, 2011). Sometimes ethics is not about morality, but about good business sense: looking good makes customers trust you and then buy more of your product or service. Ethics play an important role in developing a strategic plan for a company, as it serves as the backbone of the principles of the company. The company's aim is to provide services and goods, and to earn profit through sales and operations (Ethics Resource Centre, 2009).

Despite the aim of the company to acquire profit and return on investment, it is critical that the strategies employed in operations are bound by its stakeholder’s moral and ethical standards (Lewis, 2002:11). These measures apply not only to their customers but also to their employees, the community in which they operate, the government and the media (Johnson, 2004). Standard business practice, however, determines ethics and corporate social obligations that can be ignored because of the company's desire to boost profits and revenues (Ghosh *et al*., 2011). The introduction of marketing campaigns and promotional adverts as a means of selling goods and services must be guided by ethical standards that would ensure the stakeholder’s health, without sacrificing the effectiveness of the operations of the business (Lewis, 2002:6).

Since companies are a form of human operation, apart from assessing them economically, moral obligations must also be taken into account (Georgescu, 2012). Understanding and defining shared values and goals for the workforce is a determinant of the organisation's present culture (Koonmee, 2010). With this assumption, businesses tend to concentrate on providing workers with a company norm of work ethics to adapt gradually to the climate of the organisation (Arnaudov and Koseska, 2012). According to Ghosh *et al*. (2011) profitability motivates companies. Crea (2002) states that a firm's key responsibility is to maximise the profits of the business. Furthermore, he explains that all the challenges from the surrounding environment should be resolved in doing so. To achieve these results, the strategy adopted by most corporations is to make the company's workers work longer hours, demand a high market price or even neglect the value of environmental protection (Boddy, 2011).

In today's business world, changes take place quickly, both in an organisation's internal and external operations (Maignan, Gonzalez-Padron, Hult and Ferrell, 2011). Crea (2002) suggests that if a corporation wants to function effectively in a given climate, it must bear responsibility not only for its own self but also for society. In addition, the company must be accountable to its clients, intermediaries, staff and goods or market products to ensure environmentally sustainable practices and consumer friendliness (Maignan *et al*., 2011). Moreover, Maignan *et al*. (2011) believe this would result in the improvement of the economy by maximising the profits of the business, as the latter would be dependent on the former for long-term success. The maximisation of corporate profits should be clear for open completion and should not lead to any kind of profit-making fraud (Maignan *et al*., 2011).

Unfortunately, new companies and organisations in the present business sector continue to breach moral and ethical principles in their pursuit of business financial benefits (Harris, Sapienza, and Bowie, 2009). One potential explanation for this unethical business approach is the widespread belief in the industry that adhering to social responsibility will result in a loss of income for the company and a reduction in the competitive advantage of the company (Ethisphere, 2010). Enterprises must be responsible for the full disclosure of the results of their goods (Mish and Scammon, 2010). The idea of incorporating the concept of ethics into the company's mission statement is not new (Boddy, 2011) Philosophers like Aristotle, Mill and Hobbes have concluded that the purpose of ethics is to provide an atmosphere that allows people to lead a more organised, happier life compared to an atmosphere without ethics (Maignan *et al*., 2011).

2.9 Stakeholder Engagement

Belluci and Manetti (2019:78) describe stakeholder engagement as the mechanism that a company uses to involve specific stakeholders with a clear purpose for achieving agreed results. It is also now known as a fundamental accountability process, as it allows a company to include stakeholders in recognising, understanding and reacting to sustainability issues and concerns, and documenting, explaining and responding to stakeholders for decisions, actions and results. Organisations do not automatically interact or pass on random knowledge.

Grunig (1992:4) places management of public relations as the oldest term used to characterise organisation’s communication practices, and defines the overall planning, execution and assessment of an organisation's interactions with internal and external stakeholders. Communication is the transmission of knowledge from one person to another, according to Halavais *et al*. (2006:4).

Gibson (2000:245), Freeman (2001) and Cooper (2003:232) all use Donaldson and Preston’s three stakeholder approaches (descriptive, instrumental, and normative) (1995:70-71) to develop problem-solving strategies for managing stakeholder communication. If organisations want to have stable relationships with their stakeholders, then there is a need for honesty, based on dedication (Covey, 2006:22), and loyalty. Grunig and Grunig (2010:1) encourage organisations to seek ways to listen and connect with their stakeholders in the modern digital age. Stakeholder engagement guides organisation's strategic directions and organisational excellence and leads to sustainable development in a way that supports organisations, its stakeholders and broader society (Unerman *et al*., 2007).

Zollinger (2009) suggests that stakeholder participation may help organisations better recognise stakeholder groups' needs and concerns so that they may make rational decisions about managing the needs of all groups to which they might have some responsibility. As a result of participation in project decision-making processes, a sense of ownership of a project is also established (Mathur, Price and Austin, 2008). For the long-term success of a project, integrating ownership as one of the metrics for project success is critical.

Innes and Booher (2004) suggest that initiatives have detrimental effects on people removed from the decision-making process. Therefore, it is critical that people who will ultimately bear the effects make decisions (Meppem and Gill, 1998). In the South African perspective, however, Rensburg and Cant (2009) state that the participation of stakeholders has developed a tradition of inclusive and consultative democracy due to the experience of apartheid, where ordinary people are conditioned to being engaged on matters of significance. Institutions that are ready to collaborate proactively, ready to listen as well as open to being questioned are somewhat more likely to gain dramatically. Effective participation of stakeholders therefore includes a willingness to engage actively with stakeholders, listen, build relationships, and respond in a mutually beneficial way to their needs and interests.

In order to better recognise and understand the needs and desires of those impacted by a project, stakeholder engagement is necessary, so that they are involved in the design phases up to the executing phase to make sure that the project addresses social expectations and needs (Mathur *et al*., 2008).

2.10 A Stakeholder Approach to Managing Issues

For better understanding of the stakeholder strategy, it is essential to clarify the stakeholder concept. According to Wasieleski and Weber (2017:5), stakeholder relates to a group or people that may or may not be influenced by an organisation's intent.
Similarly, Khosa (2013:100) defines stakeholder as anyone who has an interest in the happenings of a change project during the implementation stage. Furthermore, stakeholders

are organisations who earn money from a business or individuals who have an interest in the running of the business (Gough and Duncan, 2008:136).

McKee *et al*. (2009:3) indicates that effective public relations practitioners lead their internal and external stakeholders to engage in issues management. They further explain issues management as a systematic environmental analysis that assists with identifying potential problems, as well as possible ways in which to respond to these problems or ways to avoid them. Furthermore, organisations that communicate honestly and clearly with its stakeholders often find the relationships endure beyond the crisis (McKee *et al*., 2009:3).

Boutilier (2011:1) suggests that, a stakeholder approach to managing issues is more effective when organised groups are in support of the issues. “The public opinion approach to issues management consists of communications aimed at changing the perceptions of masses of individuals. Changing mass opinion requires a combination of analysis and creativity, analytic tools such as focus groups are the mainstay of this approach” (Boutilier, 2011:31).

Organisations are flooded with stakeholder’s requirements as a consequence, they are gradually dependent on someone who has the experience to interact and assist create relationships with these stakeholder organisations (Grunig, 2002:1). Cutlip *et al*. (1994:6) claims public relations dominates stakeholder management, since it is a leadership feature that creates and retains mutually beneficial interactions between organisations and their audiences that depend on achievement or failure. Boutilier (2011:28) further suggests that it is essential that the access controlling stakeholders see the organisation’s resource access as incontestable.

2.11 Customer Relationship Management

Customer relationship management is a multifaceted mechanism driven by a collection of information technology that focuses on establishing two-way interactions with consumers so that businesses have an intimate knowledge of their wants, desire and purchase trends (Jha, 2008:1). Ledingham (1999) states that relationship management changes the focus and practice of public relations away from manipulation of public opinion and towards the idea of creating, improving and sustaining organisational-public relations, a shift that Ehling (1992:622) saw as a significant change in the conceptualisation of the primary public relations mission.

Nonetheless, Hutton (2007) indicates that the first step in making relationship management part of public relations would be a sound theoretical basis and although there is no current established theory; public relations scholars have seen interpersonal communication as a potential area for understanding how to build relationships between organisations and their audiences. Morgan and Hunt (1994:23) say relationships are based on confidence that occurs when one party has faith in the competence and honesty of an exchange partner. The morale building is often seen as an important part of public-organisational interaction (Aula, 2011:30).

In addition, Grunig and Grunig (2011) points out that four qualities are required in order to develop a good relationship with stakeholders:

- Trust between the two parties is needed;
- A sense of commitment and loyalty to the relationships is also required;
- The partnership must be fulfilled; and
- An important quality of the relationship requires regulated mutuality with the likelihood that both parties to the relationship may have an effect on the relationships.

Keller (2012:86) states, “Customer relationship management is the process of carefully managing detailed information about individual customers and all customer touch points to maximise loyalty”. Keller further describes that CRM enables companies to provide excellent real-time customer service through the effective use of individual account information. This feeds into communication strategies in instances where there is individual account information, and this information can be useful in cases of train delays and cancellations. Parmell (2017) argues that capitalising on CRM has bottom-line benefits and reputation enhancement potential for organisations.

Browne and Nuttall (2013), cited in Parmell (2017), suggest in an article published by McKinsey in March of 2013 that companies may be failing to deliver on their CRM efforts due to poorly integrated external engagement. Solomon *et al*. (2012:228) claim that CRM is a systematic monitoring of consumer preferences and behaviors over time to tailor the value proposition as carefully as possible to the distinctive requirements and desires of each individual. CRM is about interacting with clients and interacting with a business (Solomon *et al*., 2012:228).

2.12 Building A Good Experience for Customers

Creating a great customer experience is an integral part of any business. Shaw and Ivens (2001:21) describe customer experience as a combination of the results of a company that is measured against client expectations at all times of the agreement. Furthermore, Brown (2014: 4) suggests that the prerequisite for consistently good customer experience is a strong customer culture. Krishnamurthy (2017: page) suggests that, “Maintaining good commuter relations involves being responsive to genuine commuter demands”. Krishnamurthy (2017) adds on to say, government agencies are obliged to be receptive to the demands of citizenry that happen through good community relations.

Chowdhury, Alam and Ahmed (2015:16) express that customer’s expectations of what is likely to happen during a particular transaction are considered as predictions in the satisfaction literature. Similarly, Balaji (2002:51) believes expectations are predictions made by the consumers about what they think could potentially occur during an impending transaction. In order to reach or exceed customer expectations, it is crucial to understand who your customers are and what they want to get from the provided service. However, in the literature on service quality, expectations are seen as consumer wishes or wishes that imply the focus is on what clients believe a service provider should offer rather than would offer (Chowdhury *et al*., 2015:16). Furthermore, Dagger and Sweeney (2006:12) suggest that high levels of service quality have economic benefits, as well as a positive social outcome, thus improve the quality of life in communities.

2.13 Conclusion

The literature provides a foundation of knowledge for the important elements of the research. Theories on public relations, stakeholder relations, communications, and the discussions on the topic of ethics and corporate governance provided preliminary information that helped the researcher draw questions for the data collection phase. This data will either affirm the conclusions of this literature review or contradict them. The investigation of these questions will also provide responses to the research question, which would provide further insight into the PR tools that are most appropriate for the commuter engagement challenges faced by PRASA in the Gauteng province.

CHAPTER THREE:
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research techniques used in order to address the main issue of PRASA's challenges. In the context of exploratory-oriented study, the research is structured to address the research questions and objectives. The chapter on the literature review partly offered insight into the type of questions that should be asked during the data collection stage. In this chapter the researcher discusses how the next chapter 's results were collected.

3.2 Research Paradigms in Qualitative Research

Maxwell (2005:36) makes mention that the word paradigm stems from the late 15th century, via late Latin from Greek word 'paradeigma', from paradeiknunai 'show side by side', from para- 'beside' + deiknunai 'to show'. It refers to a collection of general philosophical ideas on the world's nature (ontology) and how one can explain it (epistemology). Johnson and Chritensen (2010:31) suggest that a research paradigm is a research viewpoint developed by a research community based on a set of common beliefs, principles, values, and practices. Generally, paradigms also include particular analytical approaches correlated with these theories and identify specific experiments that are seen as examples of these assumptions and methods.

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) identified a paradigmatic phrasing for methodology as a loose connection between logically held premises, concepts and propositions that direct the thought and the study. This is important in the context of this analysis because it will help guide the reader in interpreting the viewpoint that the researcher has taken in this study from an interpretative perspective. In this study the research paradigm adopted is the form of qualitative analysis. Qualitative methods allow researchers to gain new perspectives on existing knowledge and gain more in-depth information that can often be difficult to communicate (Hoepfl, 1997:2).

This study explores ways in which service delivery is communicated to rail commuters, and to identify appropriate public relations tools that could potentially increase public perceptions of PRASA within the Gauteng province. The use of the qualitative research model was appropriate. The next section presents an overview of the qualitative approach to research used in this dissertation.

3.3 Research Methodology

The research approach specifies how data will be obtained, the participants in the analysis, the sampling framework and the data collection and fieldwork research tools. The methodology is composed of the underlying sets of beliefs that guide a researcher to choose one set of study methods over another. Research methodology is an overview of the concepts of the processes, rules and postulates used in a study area. This encompasses the systematic study of methods which are useful in a study area. It includes a specified procedure or series of procedures (Srivastava and Rego, 2011:32)

3.3.1 Qualitative Research

In the 1960s, the term qualitative research was commonly used to distinguish variations from the then dominant quantitative types of study (Schulze, 2003). These include experimental work in social psychology and some fields of application; survey study in sociology, political science and other fields; use of official statistics, especially in demographics, economics and health study; content analysis of media material; and systematic evaluation, particularly in education and criminology (Hammersley, 2013:10). Moreover, Hammersley (2013:12) defines qualitative research as a form of social exploration that tends to follow a versatile and data-driven research design, use unstructured data to emphasize the important role of subjectivity in the research process, analyse in detail a small number of naturally occurring events, and to use verbal rather than statistical analytical methods.

Qualitative work is concerned with the phenomenon of quality, that is, phenomena related to quality or involving it (Flick, 2011:28), for example, when we want to investigate the rationale for human behaviour (why people think and do certain things). This type of research attempts to uncover the underlying motives and interests, to use for the objective in-depth interviews (Kothari, 2004:3). Srivastava and Rego (2011:25) suggest that the quality of any research study is well appreciated depending on the quality of researchers. Furthermore, Srivastava and Rego (2011:25) recommend that researchers have the following qualitative requirements traits:

- Inquisitivity: Having a curious mind and a desire to look beyond what is apparent.
- Identity: The internal desire to create one's own identity.
- Perseverance: Ambition to overcome obstacles that incidentally form part of any pursuit.
- Failure tolerance: Failures at various stages are an integral part of what is happening now and then in most projects. One should understand that each failure is a source of learning and that a failure should be taken as a step towards the venture and followed with renewed commitment and vigour.

This study used a qualitative research approach to gather and evaluate data to understand PRASA's stakeholder commitments because with qualitative data, one can preserve chronological flow, see precisely which events lead to which consequences, and derive fruitful explanations. Qualitative methods are concerned with how human behaviour can be explained within the framework of the social structures in which t behaviour takes place.

In the context of this study, the researcher explored how rail commuters feel about the challenges they face at the hands of PRASA. This approach was appropriate for the study as it accepts several truths through the review of a small number of cases; hence, the researcher relied on words and language to develop an understanding of the communication process. Silverman (2011:6) suggests that if the research is to get questions about concepts, perceptions and experiences or to discover something that cannot be numerically defined, qualitative approach is the best method to apply.

3.4 Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following research question: Which public relations tools are most appropriate for the commuter engagement challenges faced by PRASA in the Gauteng province?

3.4.1 Secondary Questions

The secondary questions include the following:

- What are commuters' expectations and perceptions of PRASA or Metrorail?
- What are the commuters' communication needs?
- What engagement platform does PRASA apply to communicate with its commuters?
- How does PRASA announce or communicate train delays, cancellations or new offerings?

3.5 Research Approach

Yin (2003:20) describes research approach as the logical sequence that links empirical data to the initial research questions of a study and eventually to its conclusions. According to Creswell (2007:249) the research approach refers to the whole process, from conceptualising the problem to writing the narrative, not just methods such as collecting data, analysing and writing reports. Kumar (2014:20) suggests that when research is conducted to test a research hypothesis or research question, data from the research subjects should be collected to solve the problem.

The results obtained must therefore shed light on the tenability of the hypothesis and provide an indicator as to whether or not the hypothesis should be accepted or rejected. In addition, an important element in this connection is the research instrument that one wants to use (Welman, Kruger and Mitchell, 2005:52). The researcher takes a qualitative approach with an emphasis on analysing the condition of PRASA's commuter engagement. Thematic analysis was used, as it helped the researcher get to the very heart of the phenomenon. Furthermore, thematic analysis is a method of coding the data without attempting to incorporate it into a pre-existing coding context or theoretical prejudices of the researcher (Boyatzis, 1998:44).

Roller and Lavrakas (2015:2) suggests that qualitative approach is about recognising that good human research cannot be anything but complicated, and that it is a required technique to go beyond the obvious or expedient and understand how one aspect or something gives meaning to another facet, both of which lead the researcher to understand this complexity. The objective of qualitative research is to understand in detail the full meaning of a phenomenon, with dense explanations and accounts of the event under investigation (Leininger, 1992). According to Skinner *et al*. (2004:35) qualitative research includes in-depth historical and legal research, focus groups and panels. Skinner *et al*. (2004:35) further motivates that it is descriptive and informative but not measurable.

Furthermore, Johnson and Chritensen (2010:31) suggest that qualitative research is based on qualitative data collection, i.e., non-numerical data such as words and pictures, which follows certain aspects of the qualitative research model. Consequently, qualitative research enables communication relations to be analysed in the social and systemic context in which they exist. In addition, PRASA operates in a social space and so it is important that its communication channels and the messages the organisation issues to its commuters are clear and systematic.

This study makes use of the methodology of qualitative research for the reason that it is the best model for this particular set of circumstance and the uncertainty surrounding qualitative research demands robust and systematic methods to produce useful results. The qualitative research method is based on versatile and exploratory approaches, as it encourages the researcher to gradually modify the type of data being collected so that a deeper understanding of what is being studied can be obtained. The research instrument will take the form of interview schedules based on this understanding.

3.6 Research Design

Research is a mechanism through which scientific knowledge is gained using a variety of objective methods and procedures (Welman *et al*., 2005). Collins (2010:21) suggests that the research design's overall objective is to build an open, comprehensive knowledge base that improves our understanding of design processes, implementations, methods and context. This expertise also helps to define best practices and workable approaches when dealing with problems related to technology and development. Therefore, it has considerable potential to improve our use and management of technology (Main, Sullivan and Watson. 2008:123).

Creswell (2014:184) refers to the research design as having three main aims or forms of research results: exploratory, informative and explanatory. Creswell (2014:184) further suggests that exploratory studies are observational studies in relatively unknown research areas; descriptive studies explain a phenomenon; and explanatory studies provide a casual description of the essence of the relationships studied. The researcher presented a compilation of trends of knowledge that came from direct quotes and paraphrased popular ideas. The researcher then categorised all data related to the patterns previously described and grouped those patterns into sub-themes. The key themes are discussed in chapter four.

3.7 Population

Welman (2005:52) points out that "population is the subject of study consisting of individuals, groups, organisations, human products and events or the conditions to which they are exposed". According to News24 (Postman, 2019) in Gauteng, Metrorail transports about 1.4-million passengers a day. As much as the researcher would have liked to interview every Gauteng Metrorail commuter, this was not attainable. Therefore, in a more pragmatic approach, a maximum of twelve Metrorail commuters within the Gauteng province were interviewed so as to obtain a representative sample and to accommodate the argument of Small (2009), cited in Tracy (2017:175), that case logic and sequential interviewing may lead to saturation in 10-12 interviews.

3.8 Sampling

Thompson (2012:1) describes sampling as a means to choosing a portion of a population to be studied, so that something about the entire population can be inferred. Furthermore, the sampling method is the population selection process for obtaining information on the phenomenon comprising the population of interest.

According to Goodyear-Smith and Mash (2019:198) sampling techniques are special and typically purposeful in that individuals are deliberately selected and not randomly chosen on the premise of their willingness to shed some light on the phenomenon. Furthermore, the types of sampling researchers typically choose from are as follows:

- **Criterion sampling:** Specific criteria for choosing individuals are determined. Often, in a matrix, criteria can be coupled with a number of people to be chosen who meet different criteria.
- **Snowball sampling:** For example, when participants are hard to identify, the current respondent may pinpoint other people they know who fulfils the necessary requirements.
- **Extreme case sampling:** Respondents are selected at the extreme ends of the equation, such as those attending all diabetes community education sessions and those attending none.
- **Purposeful random sampling:** For instance, if there is a group of individuals of equal interest in understanding the phenomenon, they could be selected randomly.

Tardy (1988:125) defines snowball sampling as the method used to study the communication process by which specific problems arise within a social system. Tardy (1988:125) further says that it is possible to use snowball sampling to provide data on how people affect and are affected by others. In this research, snowball sampling is used. Snowball sampling was selected based on the reality that it is an optimal sampling method for hard-to-find populations. Travelling by train already seems like a stressful experience, and so getting willing participants is a challenge.

The researcher stood a better chance of getting participants to co-operate when using snowball sampling, as willing participants tend to lead the researcher to other willing participants. A sample of twelve rail commuters was drawn from the target population; this was to ensure that the researcher acquires sufficient information about the phenomenon of interest. Likewise, Guest *et al*. (2006), cited in Tracy (2017:175) conclude that if the purpose is to explain a common understanding, belief or action among a relatively homogeneous group, a sample of twelve is likely to be adequate. The researcher intentionally chose individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds, different genders and races, as shown in **Table 3.1**. Due to ethics approval, the names of respondents were replaced with numbers of interviewees to protect their privacy.

The participants for this study are individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds, male and female who regularly use the train. It was important the researcher reach a diverse group of people who fully understand the dynamics faced by people who travel by train on a regular basis. Targeting individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds, male and female who regularly use the train made sense.

Table 3.1: Overview of Participants Attributes

Participant No.	Racial Orientation	Gender	Area of Departure
R1	Black	Female	Oakmoor Station
R2	Black	Male	Oakmoor Station
R3	Black	Male	Orlando Station
R4	Black	Male	Oakmoor Station
R5	White	Female	Krugersdorp Station
R6	White	Female	Krugersdorp Station
R7	Indian	Male	Park Station
R8	Indian	Female	Park Station
R9	White	Male	Park Station
R10	Coloured	Male	Krugersdorp Station
R11	Coloured	Female	Orlando Station
R12	Coloured	Female	Orlando Station

3.9 Pilot Study

Pilot testing is a mini version of a full-scale project or a sample performed in preparation of the full study. The latter is often dubbed a test of feasibility. It can also be a basic pre-test of testing instruments like questionnaires or schedules for interviews (Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001:1). According to Kim, In, Lee and Kang (2017:601-605) a pilot study determines if it can be done, if the researchers should go ahead with the study and if so, how. However, it has a specific design feature and is performed on a smaller scale than the study at the main or full scale. In other words, the pilot study is critical for the improvement of the main study's quality and effectiveness.

Additionally, it is also performed to evaluate the efficacy of treatment or procedures and recruiting ability, analyse the randomisation and blinding process, increase the familiarity of the participants with the study methods and provide estimates for measuring the sample size. Moreover, Welman *et al*. (2005:143) suggests, this represents all the main study procedures and validates the viability of the analysis by determining participant’s inclusion and exclusion criteria, planning operation, storing and checking the instruments used for the study measurements, as well as educating researchers.

A pilot study provides the necessary knowledge not only for determining the sample size but also for assessing all other aspects of the main project, reducing unnecessary efforts on the part of researchers and respondents and dissipating study resources (Sommer and Sommer, 2007:8). The variables included in the text must be clearly defined before continuing with the pilot study and show a high level of completion in order for the pilot study to perform its part. In fact, a pilot study provides valuable knowledge not only for the main thesis of the researcher but also for other similar studies; thus, complete information on the viability of the project is important to include. Welman *et al*. (2005:148) posit that it is beneficial to test out a new measurement instrument before applying it to the actual sample. This testing process is carried out through a pilot study, which entails the administration of the tool to a minimal number of subjects from the same population as the one for which the actual study is planned. The researcher compiled a pilot study then applied it to a group of individuals, who use public transportation, more specifically trains. The researcher tested a short interview guide.

The test results showed some concerns; respondents felt that some words should be clear to prevent confusion, and they also felt that some questions were ambiguous and needed further clarity. The participants thought that close-ended questions were leading them to answer in a certain way. The researcher ensured all feedback was considered when formulating the final interview guide.

3.10 Data Collection

The word data is a verb that derives from Latin, which means known facts (Thesaurus, 1995). Thus, data are the pieces of information provided to an observer by any particular situation. Silverman (2013:11) describes research as a technique of data collection. The most commonly used data collection methods for qualitative research are interviews, focus groups discussions and observational methods.

Table 3.2 gives a clear detail of the definitions of the different data collection methods.

Table 3.2: Data Collection Methods in Qualitative Research

Data collection methods	Descriptions
Interviews	Josselson (2013:1) explains interviews as a joint expression of what two people talk about, one being the interviewer, the other the interviewer. Furthermore, Interviews are dialogue reconstruction on the basis of the interviewer's notes (Roulson, 2019:5).
Focus groups	Focus groups are community discussions that focus on a particular situation or theme and make it possible for researchers to see how people communicate and interact in a group setting with various facets of life (Davis, 2017:1).
Observational methods	This refers to a systematic observation and is based on categoric measurements. The researcher gets close enough to his or her research subject to observe with the purpose to gain tacit knowledge of the subject. (Bakeman and Quera, 2011:3)

Data collection for this study is through semi-structured interviews. This is the most suitable approach to this particular study, as the researcher had a clear direction of what needs to be understood in advance and could then formulate logical questions in order to obtain the required details. Semi-structured interviews are selected because they make for more intuitive and natural interactions between researchers and participants.

Whiting (2008:36) suggests that semi-structured interviewing is often a significant part of the qualitative data needed to understand the phenomenon being studied and it allows the interviewer to keep control over the interview. Semi-structured interviews increase the intensity and wealth of knowledge and explain the participant's point of view (Qu and Dumay, 2013). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are unique in the sense that they are structured to address specific aspects of the research issue and also leave room for study participants to give new definitions to the study subject (Galletta and Cross, 2013:2). The use of semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher flexibility to ask as many questions as possible to ensure that in-depth understanding to the phenomenon is acquired.

3.10.1 Permission to Conduct the Study

Ethics approval was granted by Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) for research activities related to the MTech: Public Relations Management in the Faculty of Informatics and Design (**Appendix B**).

The organisation, Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA), was sent a letter requesting permission to conduct the study. The assistant manager of PRASA CRES issued a written consent. Full permission to publish findings was requested from PRASA and participants, and no names will be published. See **Appendix B**.

3.10.2 Informed Consent

The Institution of Medicine (2015:1) suggests that informed consent is an ethical method of interaction between the object of study and the researcher. Furthermore, it is based on the fundamental assumption that all research subjects must understand and agree on the possible implications of the study (Institution of Medicine, 2015:1).

According to Welman *et al*. (2005:69) participation should always be voluntary and no one should be compelled to participate in a research study. Furthermore, the research respondents must have a complete understanding of the nature of the study and collected data should not be traceable back to the respondents, thereby protecting their privacy rights. In conducting this study, participants were informed (prior and during) of their rights and that if they felt uncomfortable and decided to withdraw at any point of the interview, they could have. Refer to **Appendix G** for the participant informed.

3.10.3 Interviewing Participants

The train stations, where interviews took place, were situated at Krugersdorp in the West Rand, Orlando Station in South of Johannesburg, Oakmoor in the East Rand and Park Station in Central Johannesburg. The reasoning behind choosing the said train stations was to ensure the researcher gets input from diverse groups of individuals who come from different socio-economic backgrounds. While conducting interviews with the research participants, the researcher had an interview schedule to ensure that all important questions were attended to, as well as to make sure that the participants were not distracted from the topic of conversation. Apart from the train commuters, the researcher had conversations with two of PRASA's employees. This was to get an understanding of PRASA's current PR framework.

Galletta *et al*. (2013:2) explain that semi-structured interviews provide the researcher with some flexibility in changing the schedule and phasing the questions during the interviews. Interviews were held in and outside of the train stations, some inside the trains. Each interview took at least 45 minutes to conclude. In total, twelve face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted . Responses were recorded using a recorder and later transcribed by the researcher. The researcher introduced the topic to the participants for each interview and informed them that due to their knowledge on the topic they were specifically chosen. Interviews were conducted in the languages suitable for participants. The languages used were English, isiXhosa and isiZulu. The researcher ensured that permission to record the interviews was granted by the respondents. The interviews were aimed at generating rich and complex data, promoting explorative and concise research (Cavana, Delahaye and Sekaran, 2001). In particular, semi-structured interview processes provide structure and enable versatility to be explored beyond standardised responses (Berg, 2004).

This allows for consideration of critical elements of the research questions, especially in the areas of communication preferences and exchange content. As stated earlier, semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate method to obtain a good understanding of the phenomenon through a contrast of the three analytical units selected. These units include the role of ethics played by Metrorail in communicating with commuters, customer or commuter care that is experienced from PRASA and stakeholder engagements that PRASA hold in order to fully communicate with all stakeholders involved. The interviews took place in and outside of the train stations within the Gauteng region. An important point to mention is that no commuter was coerced into the interviews, each and every participant was given an opportunity to withdraw from being interviewed.

3.10.4 Recording Raw Data

Qualitative data collection strategies involve taking notes, documenting the proceedings and relying on observations to obtain data to assist the researcher in obtaining relevant responses to the questions for the research (Bourgeault, Dingwall and de Vries, 2010:614). Furthermore, qualitative investigators are interested not only in what people say, but also in how they say it and may need to document the interviews and take time to analyse it later. In conducting the interviews, the researcher used a voice recorder to collect and store raw data. Interviewees were tape recorded with their permission. Recording was sufficient as it allowed the researcher to get all the information needed. Instead of feeling pressured to get the words of the participants captured in the journal, this route helped the researcher focus fully on interactions.

3.10.5 Transcribing and Analysing the Data

The Oxford English Dictionary (Soanes and Stevenson, 2005:1872) describes a transcript as a "written or printed version of material originally presented in another medium". According to Jenks (2011:2) the analytical structure for interpreting data records is often used to decide what to transcribe and how to transcribe it. Furthermore, it could therefore be said that there is no widely accepted way to transcribe information from contact. As a result, the context of the dialog and communication transcripts for a concise overview of the history of transcripts in the humanities will always differ (Jenks, 2011:2).

Josselson (2013:2) suggests that during the interview process, care should be taken to prevent noise pollution that could interfere with the recording and make transcription difficult. In this study, the researcher transcribed the twelve interviews into a question-and-answer style. The interviews conducted in isiXhosa and Zulu languages were translated into English language.

The interpretation preceded the analysis of the interview, which in some cases did not follow the series of questions the researcher had prepared. Moreover, the researcher listened to the recordings several times before analysing the content, as making assumptions were not an option. It was important for the researcher to double check the accuracy of the transcripts. David and Sutton (2011) put emphasis on the fact that listening to the recordings requires a degree of analysis and choice, and thus includes an analytical component.

3.11 Data Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (1982:145) defines qualitative data analysis as working with data, arranging it, dividing it into manageable units, synthesising it, finding trends, figuring out what is important and what to know and then deciding what to tell others. The qualitative methods to data analysis include processes that are both inductive and deductive. This study uses an inductive thematic analysis. Guest *at al*. (2013:13) claim that inductive thematic analysis involves reading through textual data, recognising themes in the data, coding them and analysing the theme's structure and content.

The first step of the research process was listening and transcribing the semi-structured interviews. Upon the conclusion of the first interview the recording and listening stage began and continued through the data collection stage.

The second stage is coding. Richards (2009:35) suggests that the second step of coding should encompass labelling expressions, sentences and paragraphs. The researcher organised the data and highlighted sections of phrases that where picked up in the interviews. During this process, the researcher split the data into separate fragments that were closely investigated and compared for commonalities. The categories were merged, and transcripts added as the researcher started to label the different categories. The data was compiled to define categories, consolidate patterns and coordinate potential collection of data.

In the third stage, the researcher looked over the generated codes, identified similarities within them, and began to come up with themes.

The fourth step that the researcher took in the analysis process was to review themes. It was crucial that the researcher ensures that the themes were usable and accurate depictions of the data. The data set was contrasted against the themes to verify if the researcher was missing anything. The researcher checked on what can be done to improve the themes.

In the fifth stage, the researcher defined and gave themes names. The defining of themes process involved devising precisely what each theme means and finding out how that allows the researcher to understand the data. The researcher proceeded with creating concise names for each theme.

In the final step, the researcher wrote a report detailing the analysis of the data.

The data analysis proceeded iteratively with the researcher continually reviewing the data with newfound questions and ideas until a narrative arose, one that represented the meaning of the study participants' experience, and this was further presented as a core story. de Vos et al. (2011:415) refers to this method as "inquiry-guided because it is an iterative process" of constantly and repetitively comparing information events and categories with each other during the data analysis phases that are concurrently in operation throughout the study.

Consequently, a theoretical structure was created based on the interrelationship between the core themes, their sub-categories and each category's property. The six phases of thematic analysis as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) are shown in **Table 3.3**.

Table 3.3: Thematic Analysis Process

Thematic analysis phases	Data analysis process
Organising data	Transcribe data, read and re-read the data, and note initial ideas.
Creating codes and themes	Systematically coding interesting data features across the entire data set and collecting data specific to each code.
Looking for patterns	Gathering codes into potential themes and collecting all relevant data for each potential theme.
Study data emerging comprehensions	Checking whether the themes are working in relation to the coded excerpts and the whole set of data, creating a thematic chart.
Describe and look for different interpretations of themes	This refers to a continuous analysis to refine the details of each topic and the overall story that the analysis tells, providing clear definitions and names for each subject.
Report production	The final step for research is to generate the analysis. A selection of colourful, persuasive examples of extracts, final analysis of chosen extracts, linked back to the analysis of the research question and literature, generating a report of the study.

(Source: Braun and Clarke, 2006)

3.12 Research Quality

Qualitative research seeks to produce accurate awareness of assumptions regarding processes and understandings in organisations and their management, with a greater emphasis on uniqueness and contexts (Wahyuni, 2012).
Furthermore, Lincoln and Guba (1985) introduced four trustworthiness research standards to assess the quality of qualitative research, namely: internal validity parallel integrity, external validity-like transferability, reliability parallel to reliability, and objectivity-like conformity.

3.12.1 Validity of the Research Instrument

A number of steps have been taken to ensure the analysis methodology has been comprehensive. Through qualitative research four types of validity metrics have been established including: integrity, transferability, reliability, and conformity (Shenton, 2004).

These four types of validity metrics were widely used within the interpretive research model to determine the consistency of observational social research. Credibility in qualitative research is characterised as congruent issues between a qualitative study's findings and reality (Shenton, 2004). Qualitative research's credibility is about how well the phenomena is registered, understood, and documented.

According to Wachs and Sheehan (2013:46), content validity relates to the degree to which the tool carefully evaluates or measures the interest structure. The researcher ensured that questions posed at respondents are relevant to the subject matter, and that the respondents are knowledgeable about the subject of the research problem. Swetnam (2000:30) indicates that validity requires carefully identifying ideas, theories or suggestions so that they can be explicitly and reliably converted into comprehensive operating processes, up to the level of specific questions and observations. It is about maintaining clear straightforward relationships between the conceptual parts of the research, the phenomenon defined for analysis and the process that the researcher intends to use to gain access to that phenomenon. On this basis, this research used face-to-face interviews as a legitimate method for data collection.

Unlike with telephone interviews, the researcher was able to communicate with the respondents without any difficulties, where facts and signals could be vague or confused which could lead to the capturing of wrong information. As a result, there was little confusion in this, because during the interviews, both the researcher and the participants were able to communicate effectively and deal with issues or misunderstandings. Content validity has also been tested; this relates to the degree to which the test items represent the area that the test claims to cover. The instrument i.e., the interview guide was formulated after the researcher studied both the literature and the conceptualisation that came from an extensive knowledge of the researcher. The researcher asks relevant questions that are aligned to the research problem.

Shenton (2004:36) describes transferability as the ability to apply the qualitative research results to other circumstances. A variety of procedures were used to improve the transferability of the study findings for future research projects. Furthermore, the work transmitted detailed information on the setting, parameters, timing and procedures of the process to ensure future researchers are able to reproduce the study accurately in another environment.

Detailed information on the selected entity was gathered during the data collection interaction process with the stakeholders to support the methodology. Confirmability is characterized as the measures taken to ensure that the study findings represent participants' experiences, thus reducing preconceived notions imposed by the research team (Shenton, 2004). This study gained confirmability by including rich comments and viewpoints of various participants throughout the section on results to explicitly support the research goals (Daymon and Holloway, 2002). During the data collection process, findings of all participants were documented to ensure that connections to original sources were established.

3.13 Ethical Considerations

Most ethical problems fall within one of the four categories: protection from damage, voluntary and informed involvement, privacy and honesty with professional peers (Leedy and Ormrod, 2014). The research reported in this study was granted ethics approval by the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) in line with the standard ethical guidelines on ethical conduct in human research. Consideration was given to obtaining informed consent from the organisation and participants in performing this study and ensuring that voluntary participation was maintained.

A complete explanation of the nature of the research and the value of the participation of stakeholders was given. A risk assessment performed prior to starting this work classified the study as low risk, and there was no risk associated with participating in the project beyond normal daily living.

Confidentiality of respondents was maintained throughout the research process by upholding the participant's right to privacy with regards to the disclosure of findings and results, as well as keeping confidential information. Respondents were promised that the level of analysis undertaken, and the recording of results would not permit the identification of individuals. The interviewees were informed that participation was voluntary, and they were free at any point to withdraw from the study.

3.14 Assumptions of the Study

Assumptions refer to issues or circumstances beyond the scope of a researcher (Simon, 2011). The study's assumption was that all rail commuters take part would respond to the questions honestly related to the complexities of PRASA's commuter engagement in the Gauteng province. Participants tend to hold back information during interview sessions when they lose confidence in a service no longer perceived as reliable. There may also be reluctance on the part of commuters as they express their feelings because they believe that could put them at risk.

3.15 Limitations of the Study

Marshall and Rossman (2011:77) suggest that a summary of the limitations of the study shows that the researcher acknowledges this reality — that he is not going to make contradictory statements about generalisability or conclusiveness about what he has found. The study focused only on the Gauteng province. The rest of PRASA trains from other provinces were not considered, limiting the research results. In conducting interviews, the researcher did not cover the whole of Gauteng, only certain parts of Gauteng were reached. This study depended on public voluntary participation, and so some of the respondents were reluctant to share their views, in this case an alternative train station was visited for interviews. Simon (2011) explains that a limitation is a potential weakness present in the analysis by a researcher.

The first drawback of this was that the protection of Metrorail, initially refusing to grant permission to the researcher to talk with the commuters. This was no longer an issue once the signed permission to conduct research form was shown to the head of security. The second limitation was how participants retained the ability to restrict knowledge during their interviews or react in a guarded manner. The respondents were assured that the researcher does not work for PRASA and that the study was merely there to assist and guide PRASA in ensuring the commuters are considered. The third limitation was the time frame, some of the potential respondents could not complete their interviews due to the arrival of their trains.

3.16 Summary

This study is an exploratory study which takes on the qualitative research approach. The researcher performed data collection to answer the following problem of research: Which PR best tools are most appropriate for the commuter engagement challenges faced by PRASA in the Gauteng province? Snowball sampling was used to identify participants, and this was to ensure that the researcher interviews people who know and have experienced the challenges facing PRASA.

For data collection, semi-structured interviews were used. The participants for this study are rail commuters, male and female who regularly use the trains. The research was conducted within the Gauteng province. The train stations were interviews took place are; Krugersdorp in the West Rand, Orlando Station in South of Johannesburg, Oakmoor in the East Rand and Park Station in Central Johannesburg.

Data collection and interpretation was executed in the following manner: first respondents were interviewed and captured on tape using a tape recorder, then the text was transcribed for analysis. Raw data was analysed using thematic analysis to produce theory from the collected data. The next chapter introduces the research results based on the concepts arising from the raw data and further explores the findings in relationship with existing literature.

CHAPTER FOUR:
RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This study aims to explore ways in which service delivery is communicated to rail commuters, and to identify appropriate public relations tools that could potentially increase public perceptions of the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa within the Gauteng province. As explained in detail in Chapter Three, the researcher used a qualitative approach to the collection of data for this project. This approach provided the researcher an opportunity to perform in-depth interviews with twelve participants, consisting of Gauteng rail commuters.

Through ongoing semi-structured one-on-one interviews with the selected participants, the researcher was able to collect rich descriptive information on the nature of the research problem; the researcher now looks to the data and gives an analysis of the voices of the respondents, as well as providing a meaningful discussion of key findings that emerged from the data. The discussions in this chapter are matched with the main objectives in order to make sure that they do not deviate from the study's central focus. The researcher interlaced her 12 discussions with rich descriptions from interviews, incorporated relevant literature, and the key principles of the theories to form meanings of the empirical data.

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2013), the first step in data analysis is the process of data reduction. The data collection in the study produced large amount of raw data. Thematic analysis was used in the data analysis stage. Coding and categorisation have been used to group data into emerging themes. Findings of the three main themes (**Table 4.1**) that arose from the data are discussed next.

Table 4.1: Themes and Sub-themes

Role of ethics	Customer (commuter) care	PRASA/ Metrorail's stakeholder engagement
Sub-themes - Public perception of PRASA/ Metrorail - The uncertainties of travelling by train	Sub-themes - Actual service - Expected service	Sub-themes - Absence of communication - Methods of communication - Commuter needs

4.2 Theme One: Role of Ethics

Ethics are guidelines established by organisations to which individuals belong, as they serve as moral principles. Such principles provide guidelines for employees on conduct and action to ensure that the company stays focused on improving the general well-being of those who depend on public transport. The introductory questions sought to understand the commuter perceptions as to whether they think PRASA or Metrorail practices good business ethics.

Respondent 5: *"I need Metrorail to be honest in its communication; don't tell us the next train will arrive in 10 minutes if it is estimated to arrive in an hour".*

Respondent 7: *"They cancel trains without any notice and are happy to just take our money. At times, I have to resort to travelling by bus and yet I have a monthly train ticket. What's most frustrating is the fact that they don't pay your money back on the days when trains are cancelled".*

Respondents 5 and 7 echo Ghosh, Ghosh and Zaher's (2011) sentiments where they state that ethics is a collection of moral convictions and actions that discourages self-gain and promotes truthful and modest ways of generating business income. It does not seem like PRASA or Metrorail provide rail commuters honest and truthful information concerning the train schedule. The researcher met respondent 5 at Krugersdorp station and respondent 7 at Park station. These stations are in different parts of Gauteng, one is in the West Rand and the other in Johannesburg CBD, and yet both seem to experience the same issues, i.e. lack of communication from PRASA. Both respondents were grieved with the fact that PRASA does not practice ethical standards in regard to its stakeholder communication strategy.

4.2.1 Public perception of PRASA or Metrorail

The participants were asked to speak about what they thought about Metrorail, this was to get an understanding of the perception rail commuters have concerning Metrorail. The responses the researcher got for this question are as follows;

Responded 3: *"I think they are doing their best to get us to work on time, but somewhat failing".*

The response by responded 3 somewhat sounds positive. It is as though the respondent truly believes that PRASA or Metrorail is doing everything in their power to operate efficiently. The other respondents were not as understanding; they were quite vocal about what they thought of PRASA.

Respondent 1: *“There’s nothing special, I use the train because it’s all I can afford”.*

The researcher met this respondent 1 at Oakmoor station at around 07:30am, with her she had an 8-year-old boy (her son) whom she was going to drop to school in Johannesburg on her way to work. She told the researcher that she had been waiting for a 06:45am train since 06:30am and an hour later the train had not yet arrived. She explained to the researcher that the train delays and cancellations without any communication to commuters was a daily occurrence.

Respondent 2: *“I find their service pathetic, it’s not reliable. This organisation does not care about us”.*

Respondent 4: *“I’m not happy with the trains; they are always delayed without any communication to commuters”.*

Respondent 7: *“They do not care about the poor; their trains are a mode of transport designed for the poor. Look at how well the Gautrain is functioning vs Metrorail. The Gautrain is for middle to high-class citizens. If I could afford to use an alternative, I would but I can’t afford to”.*

Respondent 8: *“It is cheaper way to travel to and from work. The service is poor. Trains are delayed and cancelled all the time and no reason is given to commuters”.*

Respondent 9: *“Their service is very bad. The trains are not running according to their time tables”.*

Respondent 10: *“I’m not happy with their service”.*

Respondent 11: *“Cheap, but so unreliable”.*

Respondent 12: *“Unreliable, but it is the only means of transport I can afford”.*

The above responses are evidence that PRASA does not have a good public perception among rail commuters. Majority of the respondents share the same thoughts and frustrations that their needs are not being fully met by Metrorail. The complaints are that the quality of the rail service is poor and unsatisfactory.

Some commuters raised issues of lack of communication and that the only reason they use the train is that it is affordable compared to other modes of public transport. Respondent 7 went on to say that Metrorail is for the poor making comparisons to Gautrain, basically insinuating that the service would be far better than what it is now had the rich made use of it.

4.2.2 The Uncertainties that Come with Travelling by Train

According to the National Household Travel Survey (2014:18), when using the available means of transport, commuters consider the timeliness of service, the level of crowding, the distance from the station and train safety. Often trains are overcrowded and under policed. The big problem stems from train schedules, which are flawed by the constant lack of structure as some trains are from an old fleet, which often breaks down, leading to commuters with late arrival of trains, consequently reaching their destinations late. Although a timetable is provided on PRASA's website, National Household Travel Survey's (2014) findings reveal that the trains do not show up and 37.8% of train users claim that the train was not available.

Respondent 2: *"Metrorail is like renting a sinking boat. I sometimes wait up to 2 hours for a train".*

The researcher met responded 2 at Oakmoor train station. To paint a picture of what Oakmoor station looks like; It is like a deserted stadium, it is massive, the building is quite open and the walls are full of cracks, some parts are broken. There is no sales person at ticket sales counter and no visibility of security guards. The public announcement speakers are non-existent. Respondent 2 further stated, *"I'm constantly worried that I may not get to work today or the next day because of the no-show trains".*

Respondent 11: *Many times the train do not show up, in which case I end up not going to work. I'm a brick layer, If I don't show up for work I don't get paid for that day, and that puts me at risk of losing my job- but what can I do?*

The researcher met respondent 11 at Orlando station. The issue of cancelled trains and Metrorail not communicating that to commuters seems to be an all-round issue for most train stations, which is a worry considering these commuters commit to a monthly ticket. The respondent painted a picture of his experience (trains often not showing up/ cancelled) and the fears of possibly losing his job due to transport issues. The pain and frustration was written all over his face.

4.3 Theme Two: Customer or Commuter Care

This section highlights what rail commuters experience on a daily basis, and we look at the actual service Metrorail provides vs the kind of service commuters expect to see/ get.

4.3.1 The Actual Service

The following are a reflection of the actual service by Metrorail:

Respondent 2: *"Trains are never on time".*

Respondent 3: *"Trains are often running late or cancelled".*

Respondent 4: *"I'm not happy with the trains; they are always delayed without any communication to commuters. You can wait for hours at this station", refers to the Oakmoor station. Moreover, "trains have broken windows, there's no security and no communication to commuters".*

Respondent 8: *"There is always something with these trains. If they are on time they stop in the middle of nowhere with no communication to commuters, and the stop is never less than 30 minutes".*

The above responses summarises what most participants experience on a weekly basis. The respondent's frustrations are that PRASA/ Metrorail do not deliver the service they promise to deliver. According to the 2017/2018 financial year annual report of the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa, its mission is to strive through service excellence, innovation and modal integration for high quality and sustainable passenger services. Moreover, it is stipulated in the annual report (PRASA, 2018) that PRASA is committed to delivering a secure, reliable and affordable superior output.

Based on the rail commuter's responses PRASA does not seem to be practicing what they committed to when they signed on their financial annual report. Furthermore, whenever PRASA has press conferences they make multiple promises and share plans that give the impression that they are working on improving their services- but seemingly, nothing changes.

4.3.2 Expected Service

External communication gaps in the differences between service delivery and what the organisation promises through external communication or lack of information on service delivery aspects may affect customer perceptions of service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985:46). The responses that follow indicate the commuter's service expectations.

Respondent 2: *"Let us know when trains are running late and let us know when to expect the next train. Bring back the announcement speaker".*

Respondent 3: *"Provide train timetable with accurate times".*

Respondent 4: *"Let us know when trains are running late".*

Respondent 8: *"I would like to see trains running on time. Have clean trains and have a good security presence".*

Respondent 9: *"Punctuality and safety".*

Respondent 10: *"Communicate if trains are late, fix trains if they are broken".*

Respondent 11: *"I expect to get what I pay for. I need good service and be transported to my destinations safely and in good time".*

Furthermore, respondent 11 alluded:

Respondent 11: *"I need to know in advance when trains are cancelled or delayed so I can make other arrangements. I have been using the train for my travels to work for 6 years now things are still the same; I would like to see change."*

Respondent 12: *"If trains can be on time and stations more secure- that would be great".*

Based on the above responses, all that the commuters want is to be kept informed at all times. They want the trains to be on time. If the train is scheduled to leave the station at 15:00pm, it must leave at 15:00pm and if it is scheduled to reach its destination at 15:30pm, it must reach the destination at the set time. If the train encounters technical issues while on route, communication should go out to commuters to keep them updated on what is happening.

The commuters want to feel safe while inside the train and get to their destination on time and safely. These expectations are not unreasonable but should be common practice- it is after all what PRASA commits to, as stated in their annual reports.

4.4 Theme Three: PRASA or Metrorail's Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholders represent a larger audience for corporate responsibility. The concept of stakeholder theory implies that it is unwise or imprudent and ethically unjustified to neglect stakeholders of an organisation. Metrorail has many stakeholders but in this instance the researcher will only focus on rail commuters. Based on the previous responses, it is evident that there is a stakeholder communication breakdown somewhere somehow.

In the following sections, the researcher investigates PRASA's stakeholder engagement with its stakeholder, the rail commuters.

4.4.1 Absence of Communication

Communication is a key component in the attempts of a company to create lucrative client relationships. According to Parmell (2017), all communication attempts must be combined into a coherent and coordinated program of communication.

The respondents were asked to describe and explain the way in which PRASA, or Metrorail communicates with them. The following are responses that emerged from the discussions.

Respondent 1: *No, they don't. The train just stops without any notice. Trains are often delayed or cancelled with no communication to commuters".*

Respondent 2: *"No updates whatsoever".*

Respondent 4: *"No communication. You can wait for hours at this station. It is so frustrating".*

Respondent 5: *"They don't communicate if the trains are going to be late. We always get surprised by the long waits which often last for hours".*

Respondent 8: *"They don't make announcements".*

Respondent 12: *"No communication".*

The researcher met the above respondents at the following stations; Oakmoor station (R1, R2 and R4), Krugersdorp station (R5), Park station (R8) and Orlando station (R12). They all agree on the same thing, that they receive no communication from PRASA/ Metrorail. Respondents 4 and 5 they even went into lengths of explaining that the wait for the train can take hours.

Respondent 6: *"Finding out the details of re-scheduled and cancelled trains is the most frustrating thing. They don't inform us, we get surprised that the train is not coming".*

Respondent 6 told the researcher that the rail service is not always guaranteed. On some days you can wait the whole day and the train won't show up and getting information of what is going on or when to expect the train is a challenge.

This particular participant was met at the Krugersdorp station. The set up at the Krugersdorp station looks decent, there are announcement speakers. What the researcher noticed while she was there was that the announcement speakers gets used occasionally and not all the time. For cancelled trains they announce +- 30 minutes later and only if commuters start enquiring. If no one asks what is going on, no announcements are shared. Additionally, the Metrorail employees at the ticket sales desk often do not know the cause of the train delays, as well as train cancellations.

Respondent 9: *"Their service is very bad. Sometimes they don't communicate with us when trains are running late".*

Respondent 10: *"Sometimes they announce, sometimes they don't. Sometimes we wait for up to 2 hours not knowing what is happening".*

Respondents 9 and 10 stated that Metrorail sometimes shares information of train delays and cancellations, and sometimes does not. The researcher met respondent 9 at Park station and respondent 10 at Krugersdorp. Based on what the commuters had to say about the state of stakeholder engagement by PRASA, the responses are indicative of the lack of engagement that exists between PRASA and its rail commuter. The commuters are frustrated with the fact that PRASA does not seem to prioritise their communication needs.

4.4.2 Methods of Communication

The researcher needed to find out the communication tools or platforms that PRASA/ Metrorail make use of at the train stations, as well as inside the trains. The respondents had similar responses at almost half of the stations the researcher visited. The following are the responses.

Respondent 3: *"As you can see and hear, there are announcement speakers here- Metrorail communicates with us via announcement speakers. I've also heard there is a WhatsApp group, but I don't know the number and I'm not sure how to get connected".*

Respondent 3 whom the researcher met at the Orlando station stated that Metrorail communicates with its commuters via the announcement speakers. Moreover, R3 has heard that there is a WhatsApp group that sends out important information for the commuters but in the same breath told the researcher that he does not know how to get connected to the number.

Respondent 1: *"Communication is non-existent. As you can see, the speakers do not work".*

According to respondent 1, Metrorail does not communicate at all. The speakers are there, but they do not work.

Respondent 2: *"They sometimes make announcements via the speaker. They hardly tell us when to expect the next train".*

Respondent 5: *"They don't always tell us but when they do it's always via public announcement speaker and ticket sales".*

Respondents 12: *"Public announcement speaker".*

Respondents 2, 5 and 12 all stated that the communication methods that Metrorail uses to communicate with them is through announcement speakers. The respondents maintain that as much as, this is the method that Metrorail uses to communicate with them, they do not always put it to good use in the sense that they sometimes neglect to use it.

Respondent 8: *"When they do communicate (I say when because they don't always do) they do so through announcement speakers and electronic notification boards".*

Respondent 7: *"They sometimes make announcements on SABC radio stations. Also, the public announcement speaker and electronic notification boards inside the train station".*

Respondent 7 is the only participant that brought up the South African Broadcasting Networks radio stations. He explained that it is not all SABC radio stations that Metrorail uses to share information with commuters, but just the ones that broadcasts in vernacular languages. He also mentioned the electronic notification boards, as well as the announcement speakers.

Respondent 9: *"The ticket salespeople tell us or people who are on WhatsApp group of Metrorail. Through communication boards, and WhatsApp. Also, through public announcement system".*

The researcher met respondent 9 at Park station. Although not perfect, Park Station seems to be the better train station out of all the stations the researcher visited. It is undoubtedly the biggest and the busiest. There, Metrorail make use of electronic notification boards, announcement speaker, and WhatsApp to communicate with commuters.

Respondent 11: *"There's a WhatsApp group for the Mamelodi- Bosman route".*

Respondent 11 is a commuter from Orlando station. She told the researcher that she is not aware of any methods of communication by Metrorail either than the notification speakers; however, she is aware that there is a WhatsApp group for the Mamelodi- Bosman route. She alluded that she has never heard of a WhatsApp group for her route.

4.4.3 Commuter Needs

In order to be able to come up with the best PR tools to help with engagements challenges that face PRASA it is important for the researcher to understand what rail commuters need.

Respondent 1: *"I need Metrorail to take us seriously. They need to enable the announcement speakers, I need them to communicate with us and be consistent in their communication".*

This particular commuter looked and sounded so defeated as she was chatting with the researcher. She just wants Metrorail to enable tools that aids stakeholder communication, in this instance that refers to announcement speakers. She told the researcher that all she needs is to be kept informed and would like Metrorail to be consistent in their communication with commuters, because in so doing commuters are able to make an informed decision.

Respondent 3: *"I need constant and consistent communication, especially when there is cancellation of trains. It is not fair waiting for a train and it does not show up. They must always make use of announcement speakers and not just sometimes or when they feel like it. Metrorail needs to realise that there are deaf impaired commuters too, and so they need to accommodate them by introducing the use of big screens".*

Respondent 3 brought fourth valid points. He does not think it is fair that Metrorail let commuters wait for a train that is not coming. He suggests that Metrorail should always make use announcement speaks. Respondent 3's other issue is that Metrorail does not seem to consider the deaf impaired individuals as there are no visuals like electronic information screens at Orlando station.

Respondent 4: *"Let us know when trains are running late".*

All respondent 4 needs is for Metrorail to communicate with commuters when trains are running late.

Respondent 12: *"Public announcement speaker. Problem is that all announcements are in venac and never in English".*

Respondent 12 is a coloured lady (only speaks and understands Afrikaans and English) who catches a train from Orlando station en route to her work place. Her need is for Metrorail to consider that not all commuters understand vernacular languages. She would rather Metrorail communicates in English for everyone to understand when issuing announcements via the announcement speaker.

Respondent 6: *"We also need digital screen that display information about any changes that could potentially occur".*

The researcher met respondent 6 at Krugersdorp station. She told the researcher about her need for digital information screens. She explained that the announcements are not always clear, and so having digital information screen could help commuters in ensuring they fully understand what is being communicated.

Respondent 7: *"I need more interaction from Metrorail. Let us know when trains are delayed or cancelled".*

Respondent 8: *"Communicate if trains are delayed or cancelled".*

Respondent 9: *"They must announce on time if trains are running late so that we can use other transportation".*

Respondents 7, 8 and 9 share the same needs. They would like Metrorail to communicate more with commuters. They feel like Metrorail should let the commuters know when trains are delayed or cancelled and not allow commuters to just wait and not know what is going on. Respondent 9 goes on to say that Metrorail should make announcements concerning delayed trains so that commuters can make other alternatives, those who can.

Respondent 12: *"Metrorail should have a system whereby commuter information is registered on the system so that they are able to communicate with us when trains are delayed or cancelled".*

The researcher met respondent 12 at Orlando station. What this particular respondent would like to see is for Metrorail to register the commuter contact details as they make their purchases for their train tickets. Respondent 12 believes that if Metrorail can do that it would be easier for the organisation to inform commuters of train delays and cancellations.

One of the requests that kept coming up is that PRASA needs to maintain consistent communication with its commuters. Metrorail also needs to fix their current communication channels like announcement speakers and electronic information boards, especially at stations where these tools are there but are currently out of service. Another means of communication that commuters require is for the Metrorail employees, especially the ones at ticket sales desk to be informed about train movements.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter explored the role of ethics played by PRASA and how these are viewed in the eyes of the public as well as the uncertainties that come with trains. The results showed that most of the participant's perceptions of ethics at PRASA are very poor and not convincing at all. The customer or commuter care was further explained and how the actual versus expected service from PRASA officials was viewed. The results show that the respondents' frustrations are that PRASA Metrorail do not deliver the service they promise to deliver, and most trains are late, if not cancelled.

Lastly, the chapter elaborated on the absence of stakeholder engagement, methods of communication used at PRASA to convey messages to commuters and how PRASA cater for commuter needs as they arise. The results indicated that when trains are delayed or cancelled and not allow commuters to just wait and not know what is going on. Respondents noted that they receive no communication from PRASA/ Metrorail.

The next chapter will discuss all the results gathered in this chapter and align it to the theoretical framework that was discussed earlier in chapter three. This will highlight the research gap that still exist in the Public Relations space.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the research findings, based on results from the participants, as well as the study objectives that were set out in the first chapter. In doing so, the chapter will refer to previous literature to illustrate the value of public relations and communication between PRASA and its rail commuters by analysing the perceptions of the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa in Gauteng.

Discussed in the previous chapter are the findings of the data obtained and the themes that emerged. However, this chapter sets out a discussion of the results related to the study objectives and its research questions. The key contributions include a description of the research background will be addressed, followed by the contributions to the study, the research gap and the practical implications for PRASA to enhance communications processes for rail commuters.

5.2 Discussion Based on Theoretical Framework (Themes)

This segment provides a discussion about each research question's results and discusses the main implications of this study. Research found that an understanding of public perception towards PRASA, communication processes, public relations methods and stakeholder management are essential to answering the questions. The intention for the themes was to provide answers or clarity to the research questions.

5.2.1 Role of Ethics

As stated in the previous chapter, ethics are guidelines established by organisations to which individuals belong, as they serve as moral principles. Moreover, these principles provide guidelines for employees on conduct and action to ensure that the company stays focused on improving the general well-being of those who depend on public transportation. RQ1 sought to understand the commuter perceptions and expectations as to whether they think PRASA practices good business ethics. The revelation that came with the responses was unanimous; the respondents all have a similar perception of PRASA. There is damning evidence that rail commuters do not have a good perception of PRASA. The most common responses the researcher received concerning RQ1 is that PRASA does not care about the commuters, they only care about the bottom line, which is to make money.

Commuter’s reasoning is based on the evidence that the trains are often delayed or cancelled without any explanations to the commuters. According to the Ethics Resource Center (2009), the company's aim is to provide services and goods, and to earn profits through sales and operations. Moreover, despite the aim of the company to acquire profit and return on investment, it is critical that the strategies employed in operations are bound by its stakeholder’s moral and ethical standards (Lewis. 2002:11). These measures apply not only to their customers but also to their employees, the community in which they operate, the government and the media (Johnson. 2004). In this instance, there is evidence to back up the claims that PRASA does not care, as this particular organisation does not always apply moral and ethical standards in regard to the way they run the organisation.

One of the commuters stated that what is most frustrating for him is the fact that when PRASA cancels a train, they do not reimburse the commuters. Most of the time, when the trains are cancelled or delayed, for those commuters who can afford to take alternative transport, i.e. a bus or a taxi do so, and surely in this case PRASA should indeed reimburse the commuters. Maignan *et al*. (2011) state that companies should be accountable to their clients, intermediaries, staff and goods or market products to ensure environmentally sustainable practices and consumer friendliness.

Unfortunately, new companies and organisations continue to breach moral and ethical principles in their pursuit of business financial benefits, suggests (Harris *et al*., 2009). One potential explanation for this unethical business approach is the widespread belief in the industry that adhering to social responsibility will result in a loss of income for the company and a reduction in the competitive advantage of the company (Ethisphere, 2010). Nonetheless, PRASA must be responsible for their full business operations, as well as try their very best to improve how they are perceived by the public by fulfilling their obligations to their rail commuters. An idea would be to incorporate the concept of ethics into their company’s mission statement, as suggested by Boddy (2011).

The uncertainties of travelling by train are a constant frustration for the commuters. Rail commuters cite events whereby they sometimes have to wait for up to two hours for a train that was supposed to have arrived one or two hours earlier. As per the National Household Travel Survey that was conducted and published in 2014, the timetable is provided on PRASA's website, but somehow trains still do not show up and 37.8% of train users claim that the train was not available to begin with. As suggested by Parasuraman *et al*. (1985:46) external communication gaps in the differences between service delivery and what the organisation promises through external communication or lack of information on service delivery aspects may affect customer perceptions of service quality.

This is precisely what we are seeing with the way rail commuters perceive PRASA. In PRASA's Corporate Plan (2020/22:4) under "Statement of purpose" (See **Appendix C**), It is stated that PRASA is a pioneer in passenger transport solutions and continues to provide high-quality passenger services as a progressive public body in a safe and secure environment underpinned by its dedication to providing public value. Deliver on the public transport mandate by delivering secure, efficient, clean, accessible and sustainable services resulting in over 80 percent customer satisfaction in five years. The rail commuters however are not in agreement with what PRASA says they are and do as stated in the above paragraphs.

According to PRASA Corporate Plan (2020/22:67), PRASA acknowledges that commuter and stakeholder confidence is at its lowest level. It is stated in the corporate plan that the drop in the stakeholder confidence is a consequence of issues and events that continue to plague PRASA over the last few years, including the following issues:

1. Service that has become unreliable, inaccessible, volatile and dangerous, a decrease in public trust, passenger patronage, and revenue;
2. Loss of importance in the ability of PRASA to offer public benefit as a supplier of public transport solutions;
3. Claims of corruption derived from the Public Protector, the Auditor General and the National Treasury's reports;
4. Perceptions of failure in management as a consequence of continued financial and organizational results as well as leadership instability; and
5. Numerous inquiries and litigation resulting from tendering violations and ineffective and unsustainable costs.

Furthermore, PRASA Corporate Plan (2020/22: 67) details the following, which PRASA thinks needs to be done in order to restore its stakeholder engagement:

1. Giving customers confidence that PRASA is committed to bringing back operational stability, as well as recovering the company from its decline.
2. Offer practical strategies and timelines on the resolutions on how the organization aims to get back on track, focusing on public benefit delivery.
3. Raise the organisation's morale and organise workers and labour to concentrate on fulfilling the mandate.

PRASA knows what the problem is and what needs to be done but what is missing in their plan is the HOW.

It is not clear and most certainly not stated anywhere in the Corporate Plan how PRASA plans to fix the issues it faces. In addition, there is no mention of public relations strategies. That begs the question of whether or not PRASA is aware of public relations and the incredible benefits (when used properly) it can bring for the organisation. McKee *et al*. (2009:1) states that PR is there for managing perceptions and strategic interactions between an organisation and its stakeholders. It provides a path for organisations to successfully monitor, engage and act with key stakeholders in the organisational environment.

5.2.2 The Influence of Public Relations Tools

Currently PRASA does not use the public relations tools available to them effectively. Findings indicate that the only PR tool PRASA makes use of is SABC radio stations and this is limited only to radio stations that broadcast in vernacular languages. PRASA should work on fostering positive attitudes and behaviours towards its company by using validated public relations techniques and activities. Public relations tools are cost-effective and are known to give a higher level of control than promotional campaigns. According to Wilcox and Cameron (2009:162) the following are PR tools that appropriate for stakeholder engagements:

Table 5.1: PR Tools Appropriate for Stakeholder Engagement

Public Relations Tool	Descriptions
News release	This is a formal, written statement by an agency dealing with the topic to the press on a matter of public interest.
Publicity images	These often accompany press releases to add credibility to a story.
Observational methods	This refers to a systematic observation and is based on categoric measurements. The researcher gets close enough to his or her research subject to observe with the purpose to gain tacit knowledge of the subject. (Bakeman and Quera, 2011:3)
Mat release	This is a short, feature story intended to serve as a newspaper article but containing compelling communication in the promotion of a product or concept.
News advisories and fact sheets	These are alerts, warnings, press conferences or interviews with journalists.
Media kit	This is a press kit that includes photos, fact sheets and details of an organisation's latest product or newsworthy event
Pitch letters	Pitch letters are stories written to journalists and producers, requesting them to interview an individual. Such letters are intended to spark the producers/ journalist's curiosity enough to ask for more information.
Radio news releases	This refers to sound bites that play out for 60 seconds or less.
Public service announcements	This is a message disseminated without charge in the public interest, aimed at increasing awareness of a social problem and improving public perceptions and actions towards it.
Broadcast media tours	This occurs when journalists from across the country interview the organisation's spokesperson from a central location.

Public Relations Tool	Descriptions
Video news release	This refers to a video segment designed to look like a news story, but is produced by a PR company, advertising agency, marketing company, organization, or government agency instead.
News feeds	This is a service by which news is delivered for on-going dissemination or broadcasting on a daily or continuous basis.
Public appearances	These arise when spokespersons appear on radio and TV talk shows on behalf of the company.
Product placements	Product placement is a marketing strategy where references to particular brands or goods are inserted into another work, such as a film or television show, for a specific promotional intention.
Websites and online media	These are useful for conveying news conferences and communicating with journalists.
Media campaigns	These concentrate on generating messages across media outlets to control how the business is represented in the media. Media resources can include issuing media statements and fact sheets, as well as providing on-site media tours. Using such a platform could force PRASA into improving their communication as well as the service they offer to commuters. No organisation wants to look bad, and so with PRASA on the spotlight (in the media space) stakeholder engagement could make a complete turnaround.
Social media	Social media has a potential to assist rail commuters gain easy access to the train schedules. Applying social networking platforms such as Facebook and Twitter can help PRASA handle problems by reacting quickly to criticism or negative views and increase brand visibility.
Newsletters	Print or emailed newsletters are an excellent way of promoting a brand, engaging with commuters and keeping them updated about new products and services. Regular newsletters have the potential to help reinforce personal relationships of the company with clients and represent the brand and personality of the corporation. A well-written newsletter delivers value information to consumers.
Sponsorships or partnerships	It is good for businesses to have alliances and sponsorships. Supporting a non-profit cause can help generate sentiments of goodwill and allegiance to PRASA. Community collaborations can include an exchange of funds in exchange for benefits that enhance PRASA's reputation in order to grow a local community organisation.
Community relations	Creating strong relationships with the community can help create customer loyalty. Interacting with local stakeholders could help develop PRASA's reputation and level of influence.

5.2.3 Customer or Commuter Care

This section will discuss the actual service as well as the service commuters expect from PRASA. As per the findings in chapter four, most participants experience unacceptable service on a daily basis. The respondent's frustrations are that PRASA does not deliver the service they promised to deliver. The respondents cited that trains are always delayed or cancelled without any warnings from PRASA employees.

What some rail commuters find concerning is that, PRASA's workers at the ticket sales desk often do not know that the train is delayed, if they do know they never know when to expect the next train. To answer the question which forms part of RQ1; What are commuter's expectations? Based on the findings, the respondents expect a good, reliable service from PRASA.

The way they feel right now is that PRASA does not consider them and their reasoning is based on the evidence that PRASA does not always communicate with them regarding train delays, as well as train cancellations. "There is always something with these trains. If they are on time they stop in the middle of nowhere with no communication to commuters, and the stop is never less than 30 minutes", said one of the respondents. This is such a disturbing statement by a commuter, due to the fact that all these commuters board the train hoping that they will get to their destinations on time and safely, but sadly that is not the case. One of the respondents informed of how he is scared to lose his job due to late arrivals at work.

Krishnamurthy (2017) suggests that, maintaining good ties with commuters means reacting to genuine commuter demands. Moreover, government agencies are obliged to be receptive to the demands of citizenry that happen through good community relations. According to the 2017/2018 financial year annual report (See **Appendix D**) of the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa, its mission is to strive through service excellence, innovation and modal integration for high quality and sustainable passenger services. Moreover, it is stipulated in the annual report (PRASA, 2018) that PRASA is committed to delivering a secure, reliable and affordable superior output. Unfortunately, PRASA continues to offer poor service to their rail commuters.

The findings indicate that commuters expect constant communication and to be kept informed concerning cancelled and delayed trains so that they can have the option to make other arrangements (for those who can afford). Commuters want the trains to be on time. If the train is scheduled to leave the station at 15:00pm, it must leave at 15:00pm and if it is scheduled to reach its destination at 15:30pm, it must reach the destination at the set time. If the train encounters technical issues while on route, communication should go out to commuters to keep them updated on what is happening.

5.2.4 PRASA or Metrorail's Stakeholder Engagement

In order to better recognise and understand the needs and desires of those impacted by a project, stakeholder engagement is necessary, thus involving them in the design phases up to the implementation phases to ensure that the project meets social needs and expectations (Mathur *et al*., 2008).

Communication is a key component in the attempts of a company to create lucrative client relationships. All communication attempts must be combined into a coherent and coordinated program of communication (Parmell, 2017). Looking at the stakeholder engagement, it was important for the researcher to look at the way in which PRASA communicates with the rail commuters. The findings indicate that PRASA does not communicate effectively and efficiently with its rail commuters. Evidence points to absence of communication that exists between PRASA and its rail commuters.

Rail commuter's biggest issue is that PRASA does not communicate train delays nor communicate train cancellations. This causes a concern or perception amongst commuters that PRASA does not care about them. The commuters are frustrated with the fact that PRASA does not prioritise their communication needs. Research question two (RQ2) sought to understand the commuter's communication needs. The feedback that came up from that question was that, commuters want to feel valued. All they need from PRASA is for PRASA to deliver the service they (commuters) pay for.

Rail commuters need PRASA to keep them informed concerning train movements. If the train is delayed, cancelled or just stops in the middle of nowhere, PRASA should notify the commuters as well as give an estimate time of when to expect the next train or the cause of the train coming to an abrupt stop and when it is estimated to start moving again. The biggest frustration for the rail commuters is the waiting period, waiting for the unknown- and with no one issuing any communication. With that in mind, we have to consider the two-way symmetrical communication that is known for creating and sustaining beneficial interactions for organisations and its main stakeholders (Grunig *et al*., 1984:125).

Literature as stipulated in chapter two tells us that when parties have a consistent communication plan that incorporates the principles and desires of their partners, competing problems can be avoided. This is only possible when parties have mutual respect for one another (Mutch and Aitken, 2009:96). It is important to note that a large number of respondents expressed their perception of two-way symmetrical contact as non-existent. The findings showed no clear evidence that external contact behaviour was indeed two-way symmetrical. Furthermore, the two-way symmetrical communication has the advantage of being able to create stability. Meaning if PRASA were to implement the two-way symmetrical communication, rail commuter experience could improve and ultimately improve commuter perceptions.

PRASA needs to communicate more with its rail commuters and try to do so in ways that are effective by adapting a symmetrical two-way communication due to the reason that it promotes reciprocal understanding and respect, and acts as a mediator between the entity and local communities by fostering interaction between them in order to reach common ground. One of PRASA's values as stated in the PRASA Corporate Plan (2019:6) is, "Sharing information with our stakeholders in an open and honest way" (see **Appendix E**). Evidently this value has been at the forefront since 2011, refer to **Appendix F**. Seemingly the intent to communicate with commuters is there, what is missing is the mechanisms to carry the communication out. It is therefore, noted that the two-way symmetrical communication practice would have a positive effect on the way PRASA interacts with rail commuters and thus enhance the way PRASA is viewed by commuters.

RQ3, sought to understand the engagement platforms or tools PRASA apply to communicate with its commuters. While RQ4 focused on how PRASA announce/ communicate train delays, cancellations, or new offerings. These two research questions are so similar buy yet so different. The one looks at the engagement tools used, while the other looks at how the messages are relayed to rail commuters. The responses indicated that PRASA uses in-station announcement speakers, WhatsApp groups, digital notification boards, and SABC radio. With that said, it was evident that as much as PRASA does do some form of communication, the information they communicate to rail commuters is not always accurate. For example, when trains are running late or cancelled, they still show on the schedule and so that creates an impression that the train is still coming.

Oakmoor is the only train station that the researcher visited whereby communication is non-existent. The announcement speakers are mounted on the wall but are not in use. Additionally, on the day the researcher was there, the ticket sales desk was closed and there were no PRASA employees on-site, not even security guards. When the researcher queried this with the commuters she was told, that is how things are always are at that particular station (Oakmoor train station).

It is essential for PRASA to adopt a 'communicate with' approach, as opposed to the 'communicate to' approach. Horner and Swarbrooke (2016:102) suggest that organisations should always make use of the new communication channels as these can help reach a wider audience. These channels include the internet, social networking platforms and mobile technologies (Horner and Swarbrooke, 2016:102). Evidently, we see with PRASA that, their use of communication channels is quite limited as they are still stuck on the old ways of communication. The only new or modern channel they have implemented is WhatsApp and even with that, it is not every commuter that has access to it.

Some commuters are aware of it but do not have the details to access the WhatsApp groups for their respective locations or routes. The following indicates the communication methods or channels PRASA uses, specifically at the train stations the researcher visited:

In-station announcement speakers

Majority of the respondents stated that PRASA makes use of announcement speakers to communicate with the commuters. The train stations that make use of announcement speakers are as follows:

- Park station
- Orlando station
- Krugersdorp station

With announcement speakers in place, the commuters maintain that PRASA does not always inform them of train delays, cancellations or re-schedules.

- WhatsApp
- Park station
- Mamelodi
- Bosman

The researcher got the information concerning the Mamelodi and Bosman WhatsApp groups from one of the participants whom she met at the Orlando station. Apparently, the WhatsApp group is quite active and train cancellations and delays are often posted to the group for commuter's awareness.

Digital notification boards

Park station

Park station is the only station within Gauteng that seems to have working digital notification boards. The Pretoria station also has but for some reason they are always off, and it is not clear whether they are off because they are broken or because PRASA has not put measures in place to ensure they are operational.

SABC radio

A responded a researcher met at Park station alluded that PRASA sometimes announces issues that potentially affect train movements on SABC radio. He explained that it is not all SABC radio stations that PRASA uses to share information with commuters, but just the ones that broadcasts in vernacular languages. These include, Lesedi, Umhlobo Wenene and Ukhozi FM. As suggested by Wilcox and Cameron (2009:162), PR tools include news releases, publicity images, mat releases, news advisories and fact sheets, media kit, pitch letters, radio news releases, public service announcements, broadcast media tours, video news releases, news feeds, public appearances, product placements, and websites and online media.

Freeman (1984:2) and Rawlins (2006:2) suggest that stakeholders should have a good understanding of the communication methods that better represent their interests and the general public. In this instance, rail commuters have a good understanding of the communication methods used by PRASA, the problem is that PRASA does not use their selected communication methods effectively and efficiently. One of the points that kept coming up is that PRASA needs to maintain a consistent communication with its commuters. PRASA also needs to fix their current communication channels like announcement speakers and electronic information boards, especially at stations where these tools are there but are currently out of service.

Another means of communication that commuters require is for PRASA employees, especially the ones at ticket sales desk to be informed about train movements. According to the King III Report (2009), transparent corporate governance is a precondition for making rational and transparent business decisions that represent the interests of all stakeholders. Something PRASA is lacking.

5.3 Discussion Based on the Research Objectives

5.3.1 How PRASA Communicates with its Rail Commuters

The researcher has established that PRASA communicates with the rail commuters using a variety of channels. These include, in-station announcement speakers, digital notification boards, SABC radio stations and WhatsApp. Findings indicate that even though there are measures put in place to ensure communication goes out to commuters, relevant information is not always accessible. Meaning, PRASA does not always inform commuters of train delays and cancelations. Evidence show that in some train stations information relating to train movements is not accessible at all.

In train stations like Oakmoor, announcement speakers are visible- mounted on the walls but they are not being used at all. PRASA employees, including security and employees at ticket sales desk are out of side. The ticket sales office was closed on the day the researcher was there for interviews. The commuters made it a point to inform the researcher that the office is always closed. What usually happens is the commuters would get on the train without a ticket but would have to make a purchase at their destination station. At Oakmoor train station you can wait for a very long time for a train and the frustrating part is that there is no way of finding out if the train is still coming or when to expect the next train. The rest of the other stations that the researcher conducted interviews at, the most common way PRASA communicates by is through the in-station announcement speakers. Evidence reveals a communication breakdown, even with the communication system in place.

PRASA does not communicate relevant information with the commuters. They make an announcement about a train arriving at 07:00am (for example) but then when the train does not arrive, no communication is issued to say the train is no longer coming, the reasons for the delay and when to expect the next train. According to Bregman (2012:39), most government agencies use social media to remain involved with their public, public data and teaching and growth of employees. Furthermore, transportation officials mostly make use of Twitter (www.twitter.com) and Facebook (www.facebook.com) to post service updates and announcements (Bregman, 2012:39). This is perhaps an option PRASA should consider. This option will be discussed further in the next chapter, under recommendations.

5.3.2 Rail Commuter's Engagement Needs

Evidence suggests that every commuter needs to be kept updated at all times. Commuters want the trains to be on time. If the train is scheduled to depart the station at 15:00 p.m., it must depart at 15:00 pm and if it is scheduled to arrive at 15:30 pm, it must arrive at the destination at the set time. Contact should go out to passengers to keep them updated about what is happening if the train experiences technical problems while on the way. Bloomsbury (2009:255) suggests that regular customer communication allows the company to adapt and develop so that it can continue to satisfy its needs. Similarly, Berkovi (2014:9) reiterates that effective communication to exceed the expectations of clients is critical to the achievement and reputation of businesses and their staff.

The commuters want to feel safe while in the train and get to their destinations on time and in safety. These expectations are not unrealistic but should be standard practice-after all; this is what PRASA undertakes to do, as reported in its annual reports. The stakeholder theory clearly implies that it is unwise or imprudent and ethically unjustified to neglect stakeholders of an organisation (Moore, 2005:1).

Furthermore, if organisations want to have stable relationships with their stakeholders, then there is a need for honesty, based on dedication (Covey, 2006:22), and loyalty. Grunig and Grunig (2010:1) encourage organisations to seek ways to listen and connect with their stakeholders in the modern digital age. PRASA has to keep a consistent interaction with its commuters. PRASA must also set up its current communication networks, such as announcement speakers and electronic information boards, especially at stations where these resources are located but are currently out of operation. Another means of communication expected by commuters is for PRASA employees, in particular those at the ticket sales desk, to be aware of train movements.

5.3.3 PRASA's Current PR Framework vs PR Best Practices

The researcher consulted with two of PRASA employees who are in Management positions, in different departments. This was to find out what is stated in PRASA's PR plan. Both employees gave feedback that PRASA does not have a documented public relations framework. It was also revealed that PRASA does not have a department that focuses on PR activities. PRASA does not have a PR body they consult with for ideas to help improve the public's perception of the organisation. Whenever the organisation finds itself in crisis, the Executives decide what measures or steps to take to reach a solution, which they then relay to the Communication Manager to share with the public. In some cases, they outsource the service to an external PR agency.

In regard to PR best practices, it is important to note that public relations define the different approaches that a business uses to disseminate messages about its goods, services or general reputation to its clients, staff, shareholders, contractors or any other concerned community members (Wilcox and Cameron, 2009: 5). The idea of public relations is to give the public a favourable opinion on the organisation and its offerings. Public relations tools widely used include news releases, press conferences, talking engagements, and services for community service.

The impact of good public relations is to reduce the difference between the way an entity sees itself and the way it is viewed by those outside the entity. Public relations require a two-way conversation between the company and the public. It involves listening to the stakeholders in which the company relies, as well as observing and recognising the perceptions and actions of those audiences. Only then will a company undertake a successful public relations strategy. As previously stated, PRASA Executives handle their own public relations activities for PRASA, and on occasion, they contract the PR work to an external public relations agency with the aim to enhance their corporate image.

The South African Public Relations Association (PRISA) calls for adherence to ethical practices, the protection of public trust and the promotion of excellence in communication with high standards of efficiency, professionalism and ethical behaviour. Public relations best practices as per PRISA's standards entail the following:

- Consistency and truthfulness with the organisation's message is key. Double standards, inconsistencies and misleading comments can easily be found by customers.
- Public relations practitioner's work involves supplying information, issuing press releases and deciding on media requests, and managing an organisation's social media and/or ads.
- A public relations professional also deals with most of the role players, target audiences, customers, vendors and the media within a company and has a duty to help create a good reputation for a company. However, building and preserving a good image can be challenging if you really want to serve the facts.
- Fighting in public against rivals is never an option. Holding criticisms and conflicts out of the spotlight with rivals and suppliers demonstrates good character and maintains professionalism.
- PR practitioners should never justify unethical behaviour.
- Public relations professionals should strive to behave ethically at all times, try to maintain public confidence, respect and not shame the industry, and act correctly and with honesty.
- Never pay for publicity in the media. Paying for good press violations PR practice guidelines.

With that in mind, it is important to ensure that PRASA's PR represents the ethics of the company and that the PR values are clear. Constant/ consistent commuter engagement is key and choosing not to make derogatory remarks about commuters, rivals or suppliers, for example, would improve PRASA's integrity and reduce the possibility of harm to the organisation's reputation.

5.4 Summary

This research explored the communication between PRASA and its rail commuters by evaluating the commuter perceptions of the South African Passenger Rail Agency in Gauteng. This study also contributes to the understanding of public relations and the importance of stakeholder engagement as a whole. The absence of public relations tools across all communication channels is a key finding in this dissertation. Findings suggest that rail commuters do not have a good perception of PRASA.

The commuters are of the opinion that PRASA does not care about commuters; all they care about is the bottom line which is to make money. Concerning the service PRASA provides and the kind of service commuters expect, the findings indicate a consistent commuter hindrance whereby rail commuters find it difficult and less rewarding to use PRASA's trains. All commuters want is constant communication and to be kept informed concerning cancelled and delayed trains so that they can have the option to make other arrangements. Rail commuter's biggest issue is that PRASA does not communicate train delays nor communicate train cancellations. This causes a concern / perception amongst commuters that PRASA does not care about them. The commuters are frustrated with the fact that PRASA does not prioritise their communication needs. Feedback is that commuters want to feel valued. All they need from PRASA is for PRASA to deliver the service they (commuters) pay for.

The researcher established that PRASA communicates with the rail commuters using a variety of channels. These include in-station announcement speakers, digital notification boards, SABC radio stations and WhatsApp. Evidence reveals a communication breakdown, even with the communication system in place. Findings indicate that even though there are measures put in place to ensure communication goes out to commuters, relevant information seldom accessible. Meaning, PRASA does not always inform commuters of train delays and cancelations. For example, when trains are running late or cancelled, they still show on the schedule and so that creates an impression that the train is still coming.

Evidence show that in some train stations information relating to train movements is not accessible at all. In train stations like Oakmoor, announcement speakers are visibly mounted on the walls but they are not being used at all. PRASA employees, including security and employees at ticket sales desk are out of sight. Where other train stations are concerned (stations that the researcher conducted interviews at), the most common way PRASA communicates to commuters is through the in-station announcement speakers.

PRASA does not have a documented public relations framework. It was also revealed that PRASA does not have a department that focuses on PR activities. PRASA does not have a PR body they consult with for ideas to help improve the public's perception of the organisation. Whenever the organisation finds itself in crisis, the Executives decide what measures or steps to take to reach a solution, which they then relay to the Communication Manager to share with the public. In some cases, they outsource the service to an external PR agency. Finally, the chapter discussed the PR best practices as prescribed the Public Relations Institute of South Africa.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the purpose of the researcher is to highlight the data gathered during the primary and secondary stages of data collection and to expand on the suggestions suggested to improve the communication methods used by PRASA. In line with the improvement of stakeholder communication within public transportation entities, further research for future purposes is suggested. Finally, the chapter will detail the limitations the research faced.

6.2 Stakeholder Engagement

The commuters revealed that stakeholder engagement is non-existent in most of the train stations, and the stations that experience some kind of communication; the communication is limited. Commuters told of instances where they would wait for the train and the train ends up being cancelled and Metrorail chooses not to communicate the cancellations nor delays. Stakeholder literature has shown that all stakeholders need to be regarded, just as with the emerging change in dialogue, it is essential to understand the factors that meet the needs of all stakeholders. On a public transportation level, PRASA needs to find a neutral platform to best get its messages across. PRASA need to maintain constant dialogue with its commuters and never leave commuters to guess why the train has not arrived or when to expect the next one.

Daily contact with stakeholders is a theory which is popular in public relations theories. The two-way symmetric public relations model allows organisations to interact with their stakeholders, and vice versa, thus reinforcing the boundary-spanning role of public relations as defined in the reflective framework discussed in Chapter Two. This also stresses that without contact there can be no progress and it needs to be addressed in a two-way approach (Mersham, Rensburg and Skinner, 1995:78).

6.3 Communication Methods

The literature reveals that Communication looks at transmitting information from one person to another. In other words, who says what to whom and to what effect. It is the central point of managing and developing an organisation. If commuters are not communicated to then the flow of information between Metrorail and commuters will be lost.

Grunig (1992:4) places management of public relations as the oldest term used to characterise organisation’s communication practices, and defines the overall planning, execution and assessment of an organisation's interactions with internal and external stakeholders. Parmell (2017) suggests that all communication attempts must be combined into a coherent and coordinated program of communication. In today's business world, organisations have developed a communication system that is relevant to the society within which they operate. PRASA or Metrorail needs to establish the best way to communicate to or with rail commuters.

Feedback from commuters revealed that communication from Metrorail to mass audiences is not effective, as commuters do not have access to the information. The communication methods used by Metrorail are announcement speakers, WhatsApp, SABC radio and electronic information screens. Commuters however, revealed that not all train stations have proper/ working communication channels and so that creates a communication breakdown, which is why commuters never know what is going on with the trains.

6.4 Actual Service vs Expected Service

The findings revealed that the trains are never on time and that they are often delayed or cancelled. What the respondents find more frustrating is that PRASA or Metrorail does not deliver the service they promise to deliver. According to the 2017/2018 financial year annual report of the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa, its mission is to strive through service excellence, innovation and modal integration for high quality and sustainable passenger services. Moreover, it is stipulated in the annual report (PRASA, 2018) that PRASA is committed to delivering a secure, reliable and affordable superior output.

Based on the rail commuter’s responses PRASA does not seem to be practicing what they committed to when they signed on their financial annual report. Furthermore, whenever PRASA has press conferences they make multiple promises and share plans that give the impression that they are working on improving their services- but seemingly, nothing changes. Dagger and Sweeney (2006:12) suggest that high levels of service quality have economic benefits, as well as a positive social outcome and thus improve the quality of life in communities. The expectations range from commuter engagement, safety, security, need for additional trains, information notifications to on-time service. All that the commuters want is to be kept informed at all times. They want the trains to be on time. If the train is scheduled to leave the station at 13:00 pm, it must leave at 13:00 pm and if it is scheduled to reach its destination at 13:30 pm, it must reach the destination at the set time.

If the train encounters technical issues while on route, communication should go out to commuters to keep them updated on what is happening. The commuters want to feel safe while inside the train and get to their destination on time and safely. These expectations are not unreasonable but should be common practice- it is after all what PRASA committed to, as stated in their annual reports.

6.5 Public Perception of PRASA

The findings revealed that commuters do not think highly of PRASA. The perception amongst the commuters is that PRASA does not care about them. The commuters revealed that Metrorail is consistently not satisfying their transportation needs, and the lack of information regarding train movements adds on to the bad perception. One of the commuters compared Metrorail to a sinking ship. Some commuters are of the opinion that the service is as is because of Metrorail's target audience, which he believes is the poor people. The commuters perceive Metrorail as an organisation that does not take the poor people seriously.

6.6 Recommendations

After having reviewed all the literature available and analysed the data, it is my recommendation that PRASA creates a public relations department within its organisation. This department would then ensure that communication/ public relations tools are in place at all train stations. They must continue with the methods that are currently in use but ensure they are used effectively. These communication tools include announcement speakers, electronic information boards, SABC radio and WhatsApp. Additionally, Metrorail should implement public relations tools to engage with commuters. These PR tools include social media platforms.

It was clear from the results that not all rail commuters have access to information due to the lack of facilities and personnel at the train stations, but all the commuters that the researcher spoke with had smart phones and they are all either on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. In this instance, I recommend Metrorail to have a Facebook and a Twitter page, where they will post information about train movements; cancelled trains, train delays, how long to wait until the next train is available. Installing WIFI at train stations, as well as inside the trains is ideal, for those commuters who do not have data. It is my recommendation that Metrorail communicates consistently with its commuters, as this will help improve the relationship and most importantly how the public perceives the organisation.

PRASA should be clued up about all mediums of communication and understand how to utilise them effectively. As Grunig (1992) notes in his study, the management of public relations and communication describes the overall planning, execution and assessment of an organisation's contact with external as well as internal publics. This implies that present and potential communicators should be articulate through all channels of communication. This platform should therefore not only be understood by communicators, but also by all relevant disciplines, so that interaction within and outside the environment stays consistent. The recommendation is that PRASA's Public Relations personnel take time outwardly to track what is being said about their company. This could help them measure and monitor perceptions and the type of messages that is spread about the organisation.

6.7 Potential for Future Research

Future research may also consider researching PR tools that are most appropriate for the commuter engagement challenges faced by PRASA in the rest of South Africa, because what works in Gauteng won't necessarily work in the Eastern Cape, just to explore whether rail commuter communication is managed differently in other parts of South Africa. Finally, it is important to reiterate that due to the nature of this qualitative research, these findings may not be generalisable to other contexts. These findings are relevant to the specific context of the rail transportation system where research was collected. The findings therefore provide important additions to the current research in the areas of publics relations tools and how to best use them to create a good perception with stakeholders.

6.8 Conclusion

In summary, this dissertation has explored the communication between PRASA and its rail commuters by evaluating the commuter perceptions of the South African Passenger Rail Agency in Gauteng. The objectives were to assess how PRASA communicates with its rail commuters, to assess commuters' engagement needs, and to compare PRASA's current stated PR framework as regards to consumer engagement with PR best practices. This dissertation addressed these objectives by using a qualitative methodological approach to ensure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

The findings indicate that commuters have a negative perception of PRASA due to a lack of communication by the organisation and lack or poor service delivery. PRASA is found to use a number of channels to communicate with rail commuters. These include WhatsApp, in-station announcement speaker, digital notice boards, and SABC radio stations. Despite the wide range of communication channels identified in the data, evidence show that these channels are not utilised in a correct manner. In-station announcement speakers were found to be the preferred method of communication.

While the preferred method of communication is in-station announcement speakers, the importance of electronic and printed communication remained clear. Utilisation of electronic communication a vital tool for distributing information faster as it allows for instant exchange of feedback. Additionally, it would fill the gap for the deaf impaired commuters. This study further extends the understanding of the importance of utilising multiple channels when delivering messages. This research contributed to the theory and practice of public relations and stakeholder communication. The study's limitations suggest that the results of this study are not generalisable, presenting an opportunity for future research.

This study contributes to an overall understanding on the effects of non-communication and the influence public relations tools can have in creating good perceptions on commuters. This thesis contributes to practice by providing a framework for managers at PRASA to further understand how their communication can be used as a tool for building and maintaining positive travelling experiences for the rail commuters.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS GUIDE

This study aims to investigate:

Which PR best tools are most appropriate for the commuter engagement challenges that are faced by PRASA in the Gauteng province?

1. What do you think of Metro rail?

2. Why do you use Metrorail?

3. How often do you use Metrorail? Is it every day, Monday- Friday or is it occasionally?

4. Do you think Metrorail respects you commuters? Motivate?

5. What are your expectations in regard to Metrorail services?

6. When trains are running late, how do you find that information out? And do you get informed as to when to expect the next train?

7. In your opinion, is PRASA/ Metrorail effective in their communication with commuters?

8. What are your communication needs?

9. What engagement platforms does Metrorail apply to communicate with commuters?

10. How does Metrorail announce train delays, cancellations or new offerings?

11. What methods of communication would you like Metro rail to use in communicating with you?

12. What would you say are the positives where Metrorail is concerned?

APPENDIX B:

PERMISSION OF

CONDUCT STUDY

www.prasa.com/cres

prasa cres

CORPORATE REAL ESTATE SOLUTIONS

Umjantshi House
30 Wolmarans Str.
BRAAMFONTEIN
2001

Private Bag X101
Braamfontein, 2107
T +27 11 013 1700

I Keenen Whittaker, in my capacity as Assistant Manager at PRASA CRES give consent in principle to allow Bongeka Mnukwa, a student at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, to collect data in this company as part of her M Tech (IT) research. The student has explained to me the nature of her research and the nature of the data to be collected. This consent in no way commits any individual staff member to participate in the research, and it is expected that the student will get explicit consent from any participants. I reserve the right to withdraw this permission at some future time.

In addition, the company's name may be used as indicated below.

	Thesis	Conference paper	Journal article	Research poster
Yes	✓	✓	✓	✓
No				

Keenen Whittaker

25 September 2019

Cape Peninsula
University of Technology

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Office of the Research Ethics Committee	Faculty of Informatics and Design

Ethics approval was granted to MRS BONGEKA MNUKWA, student number 204125952, for research activities related to the MTech: Public Relations Management at the Faculty of Informatics and Design, Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT).

Title of thesis:	Public relations tools to improve commuter perception of the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa in Gauteng

Comments

Research activities are restricted to those details in the research proposal.

Signed: Faculty Research Ethics Committee	12/6/2019 Date

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
INFORMATICS AND DESIGN
ETHICS APPROVAL GRANTED
12 JUN 2019
Cape Peninsula
University of Technology

APPENDIX C: PRASA CORPORATE PLAN FOR 2020/22

LEGISLATIVE MANDATE

PRASA, as the implementation arm of the National Department of Transport, the sole shareholder, is primarily focused on the mandate contained in the Legal Succession Act of South African Transport Services ("SATS") Act of 1989 as amended.

The main objective and main business of PRASA is to:

Ensure that, at the request of the Department of Transport, rail commuter services are provided within, to and from the Republic in the public interest, and provide, in consultation with the Department of Transport, for a long haul passenger rail and bus services within, to and from the Republic in terms of the principles set out in section 4 of the National Land Transport Transition Act, 2000 (Act no 22 of 2000).

The second objective and secondary business of PRASA is that PRASA shall generate income from the exploitation of assets acquired by it.

A further requirement is that, in carrying out its objectives and business, PRASA shall have due regard for key Government, social, economic and transport policy objectives. As a public entity, Government initiatives remain the strategy driver for PRASA. This is manifested through legislation, government policies and strategies such as:

- National Transport Policy
- National Development Plan
- National Land Transport Act
- Public Finance Management Act
- Green Paper on Rail
- Public Transport Strategy
- Economic Strategy and Job creation initiatives

Legislative & Regulatory Environment

The crafting of the PRASA strategy and plan takes cognisance of the follwing legislative & regulatory environment:

- The National Land Transport Act (Act 5 of 2009) as government's transport
- Strategy and Green paper on Rail.
- National Railway Safety Regulator Act (No 16 of 2002)
- Labour Relations Act, Employment Equity Act and Conditions of Employment Act

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The launch of the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA), in March 2009 brought forth a new era in passenger transport that saw the former South African Rail Commuter Corporation (SARCC) transformed into PRASA. Metrorail, Shosholoza Meyl, Autopax (the subsidiary company operating Translux and City to City bus services), as well as Intersite Asset Investments (formerly under SARCC and Transnet) are now part of PRASA. The consolidation of entities followed a decision of the Cabinet of 1 December 2004. The consolidation of these entities was done to offer integrated passenger services that prioritise customer needs, provide better mobility and accessibility to transport by masses of the South African population in need of safe and affordable transport.

As a wholly owned Government public entity, reporting to the Minister of Transport, PRASA's main responsibility is to deliver commuter rail services in the Metropolitan areas of South Africa, long-distance (inter-city) rail and bus services within, to and from the borders of the Republic of South Africa. This mandate is implemented in consultation with and under the guidance of the Minister of Transport.

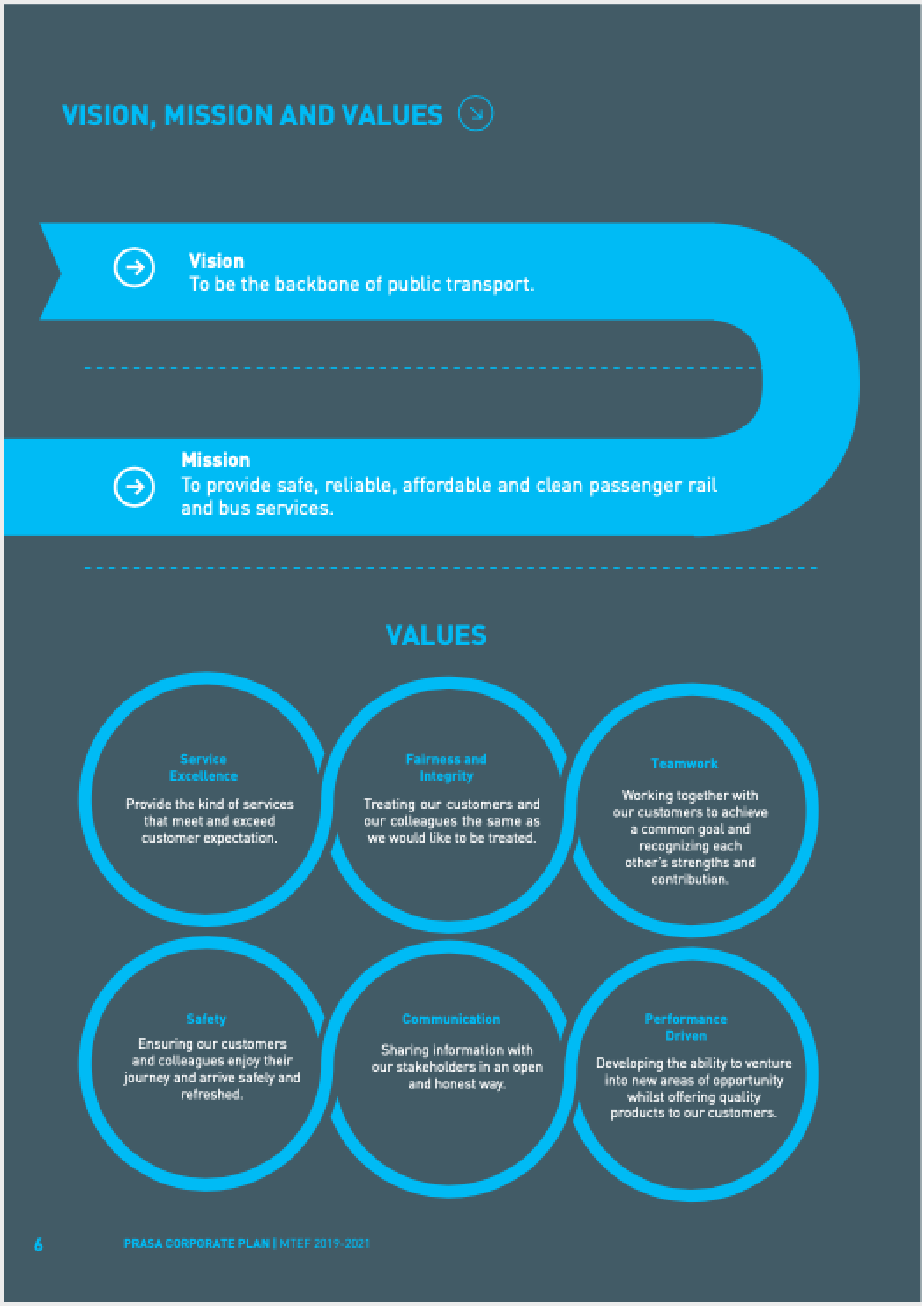
The focus of the Corporate Plan is to ensure that, in the medium to long term, PRASA remains a leader in passenger transport solutions and that, as a modern public entity, it continues to deliver high quality passenger services in a safe and secure environment which is underpinned by its commitment to delivering Public Value.

Deliver on the mandate of public transport by providing safe, reliable, clean, affordable and sustainable services resulting in customer satisfaction of more than 80% in five years.

Exploit PRASA's assets that increase the patronage of the public transport mandate by bringing communities to stations and increasing value from other assets to R1.071 billion by 2020.

APPENDIX D: PRASA ANNUAL REPORT

APPENDIX E: PRASA CORPORATE PLAN FOR 2019/21



VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

Vision
To be the backbone of public transport.

Mission
To provide safe, reliable, affordable and clean passenger rail and bus services.

VALUES

Service Excellence
Provide the kind of services that meet and exceed customer expectation.

Fairness and Integrity
Treating our customers and our colleagues the same as we would like to be treated.

Teamwork
Working together with our customers to achieve a common goal and recognizing each other's strengths and contribution.

Safety
Ensuring our customers and colleagues enjoy their journey and arrive safely and refreshed.

Communication
Sharing information with our stakeholders in an open and honest way.

Performance Driven
Developing the ability to venture into new areas of opportunity whilst offering quality products to our customers.

6 PRASA CORPORATE PLAN | MTEF 2019-2021

APPENDIX F: PRASA CORPORATE PLAN FOR 2011

CHAPTER 1 : VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

Vision

To be South Africa's Number One Public Transport Operator

Two fundamental principles underpin the vision:-

- *Integration* – PRASA should facilitate integrating individuals and communities, enabling a better quality of life through access to socio-economic opportunities.
- *Mobility Solutions* – PRASA should connect individuals and communities through the provision of public transport solutions that are founded on an integrated network of mobility routes.

Mission

To Strive for Service Excellence, Innovation and Modal Integration for

Sustainable Public Transport Solutions

The mission reflects three key intentions:-

- *Service excellence* – superior performance that is safe, reliable and affordable, provide a dignified travel experience that makes a lasting impression, and builds brand loyalty – both internally (employees) and externally (customers) – that adds benefit to the passenger.
- *Sustainability* - a focus on sustainable development in business that considers not just the financial 'bottom line' of prosperity and profit, but also environmental quality and social equity.
- *Modal Integration* – reframing the basis of business delivery, favouring innovation, seamless integration and partnerships

Values

The values that will guide PRASA, underpinning the performance ethos of the organization have been derived via Group wide workshops involving all units and all levels of staff. The premise of the values is to deliver service excellence, productive staff and business growth. The values are -

- Fairness and Integrity
  - Treating our customers and our colleagues the same as we would like to be treated.
- Service Excellence
  - Provide the kind of service that ensures that our customer leaves with a smile.
- Performance Driven
  - Developing the ability to venture into new breakthrough areas of opportunity whilst offering quality products to our customers.
- Safety
  - Ensuring our customers and colleagues enjoy their journey and arrive safely and refreshed.
- Communication
  - Sharing information with our customers and colleagues in an open and honest way.

APPENDIX G: INFORMED CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN RESEARCH

Thank you for your participation in this study please read the following information and sign the document to indicate you fully understand what you are consenting to.

- I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.
- I understand that I may withdraw or refuse to answer any question at any time without any repercussions of any sort.
- I understand that I may withhold permission to use data from my interview within two weeks of the interview, in which case the content will be removed.
- I had the purpose and scope of the research explained to me in writing and I had the chance to ask questions about the research.
- I agree that participation requires me to answer all questions posed to me honestly and truthfully.
- I recognise that participating in this research will not directly benefit me.
- I agree to having my interview audio recorded.
- I understand that all data I provide for this research will be handled confidentially.
- I accept that my identity will remain anonymous in any report on the results of this study. This will be done by changing my name and disguising my interview information that could expose my identity or the identity of the individuals I talk about.
- I know that in an academic dissertation, veiled excerpts from my interview can be quoted.
- I accept that signed consent agreements as well as the original audio recordings will be kept in the hands of the researcher until the dissertation findings are verified by the exam board.
- To seek further clarification and knowledge, I understand that I am free to contact any of the individuals involved in the research.

Yours sincerely,

Bongeka Mnukwa, Public Relations | Signature of participant, Date

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