



The use of Strategic Communication Management in black-owned female businesses in Gauteng, South Africa

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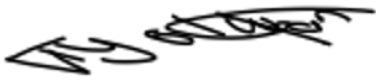
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Cape Town

8 December 2023

Declaration

I, Viwe Tyolwana, 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.

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Acronyms

SCM	Strategic Communication Management
SMME/SME	The small, medium and micro enterprise
S.A	South Africa
PR	Public Relations
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration.
NDP	National Development Plan

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore the use of Strategic Communication Management (SCM) within black-owned female businesses in South Africa, specifically in the Gauteng region. Employing a qualitative research approach, which included semi-structured interviews and an exploratory thematic analysis, the study aimed to understand how these business owners integrated SCM into their corporate strategies to align business objectives and goals for enhanced communication efficiency. Interviews with nine black-owned female business owners provided insights into their use, approach and best practice of SCM techniques within this under explored context. The study was underpinned by the Excellence Theory and Systems Theory, highlighting the importance of strategic communication and holistic understanding in organisational settings. Findings revealed a spectrum of adherence to non-adherence to SCM principles, with participants demonstrating various levels of strategic communication practices. While some findings exhibited explicit adherence, others lacked structured communication approaches and understanding of SCM's role. However, empathetic communication practices emerge as a strength. Challenges included a lack of education, resources, and collaboration with PR specialists and significantly hinder the effective incorporation of SCM in its fullest capacity. Recommendations for future research included exploring SCM adoption in different provinces, industries, and demographic groups to address barriers and inform policies and support mechanisms for a larger group of black-owned female businesses, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable business landscape in South Africa. Further investigation was warranted to understand why SCM was not fully embraced despite substantial government investments in entrepreneurial training for black-owned female businesses. Identifying critical skills and workforce capabilities was crucial for sustained small business growth in South Africa.

Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

In 2021, the Competition Commission of South Africa launched the Women in Business project to investigate the challenges hindering female business owners in the South African economy (Competition Commission South Africa, 2023). The project recognised the importance of supporting female-led businesses for economic growth and job creation. However, it also highlighted how current policy interventions and programmes were falling short of this expected outcome (Competition Commission South Africa, 2023). According to the investigation, globally in Africa and specifically in South Africa, there is a lack of research on the strategic establishment and management aspects of women-owned business (Competition Commission South Africa, 2023). This gap is significant due to the neglect and marginalisation of female business owners in South Africa. It further highlighted that there were no empirical studies on women businesses and inclusive state lists of female-owned businesses were not accessible (Competition Commission South Africa, 2023).

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Report (2022), a more targeted approach to reinforcing and supporting female business owners could unlock South African economic growth. Improving female-led businesses and finding interventions aimed at increasing their development can contribute significantly to the South African economy (GEM, 2022). However, the unique experiences of black female business owners around the globe is often rooted in systemic patriarchy, inequality and racism (Zulu, 2021: 240). Black women in South Africa face even greater barriers to accessing resources because of the legacy of a repressive apartheid government and the cultural discrimination associated with it, notes Zulu (2021: 240). As Neumeyer, Santos, and Morris (2019:475) point out, white male entrepreneurs tend to belong to well-developed, well-resourced networks; which benefit their enterprises, whereas non-white entrepreneurs tend to be disconnected from these networks, to the detriment of their businesses.

Black female business owners frequently find themselves immersed in the intricacies of operating a business. While communication is recognised as an essential tool for business growth within these entities, it is often centred on the accumulation of clients or sales, delivery of products and services and the generation of a healthy profit and reputation (Berry, 2010:84). Moreover, communication is understood to be a much more traditional construct. It is seen as a conduit to convey ideas, resolve conflict or as a means of influence or persuasion towards internal and external stakeholders for businesses to continue operations (Welch & Jackson, 2007: 178). Communication is often overlooked as a strategic practice that thrives on feedback, practice and transparency (Berry, 2010:84). Unlike larger corporations, small businesses often confront pressing difficulties in managing communication effectively, these challenges include limited resources, lack of political support and deficient communication practices. When the strategic value of communication is hindered it can jeopardize the survival of these enterprises, as it impedes holistic stakeholder engagement (Chiloane-Tsoka & Boy, 2015:224). When communication skills are not nurtured or advanced, it may side-line smaller businesses, disempowering them from interactions with government, corporate and international networks and the media on matters of strategic importance and growth.

According to Chiloane-Tsoka & Boy (2015:224), there is a prevalent skills shortage in South Africa, particularly in communication and it stems from historical inadequacies in educational structures that have now intensified SME challenges. The global business environment necessitates that businesses, regardless of size or industry, develop strategic responses to adapt amid changing circumstances (Mashingaidze, Phiri & Bomani, 2021). Positioning firms strategically may provide businesses with a buffer against uncertain or unstructured operating environments (Mashingaidze, Phiri & Bomani, 2021). Lynch (2015) describes strategic management as the way an organisation aligns its plans and purpose with its business goals. Moreover, recognising the value of strategic management in communication tactics enhances long term performance, helping owners make deliberate choices regarding where they decide to compete and how they implement, monitor and adapt their engagement processes to achieve strategic objectives (Mattheusen & Spontak, 2018:12). For black-owned female businesses, employing Strategic Communication Management is particularly vital to thrive in a competitive business landscape. When employed effectively, communication can facilitate a clearer articulation of purpose, enhanced stakeholder engagement and ultimately improve the overall performance of this often overlooked group.

As mentioned prior, female business owners play a significant role in the global economy, constituting 25%-33% of businesses worldwide (Magd & McCoy, 2014:1635). In Africa, women are innovative and resilient in the SMME sector, even though they are said to occupy informal sectors mostly (Mudara & Mafini, 2022 :168). In South Africa,

women-led businesses contribute meaningfully to the economy, with up to 34% of start-ups owned by women (SME South Africa, 2017). According to Irene (2017), the success of small to medium-sized businesses, as compared to large businesses, hinges on the competencies and abilities of their owners (Irene, 2017: 20). To gain a competitive advantage, business owners must prioritise the development of their own skills and expertise (Irene, 2017: 20).

Turton and Herrington's study on business owners identifies two different types of owners (Turton and Herrington, 2012). Firstly, some owners get into business because of the opportunities and gaps they see in the market. Secondly, some owners get into business out of necessity, inspired by the need to feed themselves and create better lives for their families (Turton and Herrington, 2012). Additionally, Turton and Herrington's research reveals that men usually drive opportunistic businesses, while women predominantly lead those driven for survival (Turton and Herrington, 2012). If women entrepreneurs are driven by necessity, it may affect how they conduct their organisations. Historically, women are often under-resourced or lack important skills and knowledge when they begin their businesses (Global Entrepreneurship Report, 2014).

Furthermore, black women in South Africa begin their business at a disadvantage that is exacerbated by the lingering legacy of apartheid, which characterises their access to resources, knowledge and networks (Global Entrepreneurship Report, 2014). While socio-economic growth and gender equality have been proven an overall focus for the country's development, black female businesses often benefit the least from the government's interventions, notes the Global Entrepreneurship Report (2014). Women play a significant role in entrepreneurship globally, and face challenges and stereotypes that question their abilities. However, it is important that women-led businesses should not be solely perceived as vulnerable businesses; they actively contribute to large, innovative firms alongside men.

In 2019, Bushe discovered that in South Africa, 90% of organisations close within 10 years, with 40% failing in the first year, and 60% in the second year (Bushe, 2019: 2). This low success rate is also noted in the South Africa Entrepreneurship Strategy Review (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2023). The report indicates that most South African businesses struggle against global standards and regardless of the gender of their owners; they experience failure within their initial five years of operation (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2023). With 20% of female-owned enterprises failing annually, there lies a need to study which factors and systems could create a significant turnaround for these businesses, particularly in their communication

efforts (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2023). Furthermore, “The rise of the information age is now deeply entrenched in our daily lives, affecting how we receive information, purchase our goods, and the level at which we engage in business.” (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021). It is now more imperative than ever to acknowledge the profound shifts in communication theories stemming from the research and precise implementation of SCM for business success.

The researcher contends that absence of black female voices in the context of strategic communication formulation remains apparent and unchallenged. This is not to say these women are not strategic but it does leave room for their strategic competencies to be mis-represented or left out of important developments within the business landscape. For effective leadership business owners must be able to not only communicate their goals clearly, they must also work to strategically inspire trust, monitor progress and reinforce the correct process to successfully propel the business forward. This research explores the use of Strategic Communication Management within black female-led businesses in South Africa and aims to understand any SCM knowledge barriers and challenges hindering the communication success of black female-owned businesses in South Africa. Specifically, this research focuses on how black female business owners navigate these barriers using effective Strategic Communication Management practices in Gauteng. These practices include creating efficient organisational strategies and communication habits for all stakeholders, and the facilitation of comprehensive communication operations crucial for achieving business success (Jolović, 2019:57).

Strategic Communication Management is a process that empowers business owners to evaluate their organizations and the surrounding environment, thus facilitating the attainment of long-term goals and objectives (Jolović, 2019 :57). Gauteng is a province in South Africa known for its economic power (Mulaudzi & Schachtebeck, 2022:525). Although small, the province represents 18.5% of the country’s total population and subsequently contributes to one-third of South Africa’s GDP (Mulaudzi & Schachtebeck, 2022: 525). This indicates its substantial demographic weight, and highlights a significant economic relevance that makes it best suited for a study related to black business ownership.

According to Pflieger, Gerber, and Struck (2022), an expert panel at NASA (USA) noticed an over reliance on asymmetrical approaches and a lack of intellectual rigour in communication activities, especially when contrasted with the highly rigorous environment in which such communication occurs (Pflieger *et al.*, 2022 : 4). In this context,

business public relations communicators faced two boundaries when performing their strategic function. The first was to understand how they could improve business communication activities and the second was unpacking their sense of responsibility and their overall influential capacity within the business's communication practices (Pfleger *et. al.*, 2022:4).

As previously discussed, the extent to which communicators influence any kind of strategy is most often orchestrated by the organisation itself (Chirwa & Boikanyo,2022:3)Most organisations still see public relations simply as an early “warning system” that foresees how the public relates to the organisation (Dolphin and Fan, 2000: 99-106). This understanding provides a number of limitations that may affect how the business communicator chooses to incorporate their expertise within higher systems (Dolphin and Fan, 2000: 99-106). Ultimately, it influences how policies are formed and how businesses develop their communication tactics for growth (Radovic,Markovic & Salamzadeh, 2018:13).

Effective communication strategies emanate from the leaders' intellectual expertise; without it, decisions tend to rely on subjective or intuitive decision-making (Jain, 1997). Thus, black female business owners who understand the importance of integrating Strategic Communication Management into their businesses have a better chance of gaining a competitive advantage compared to those who do not (Jolović, 2019: 59). Communicating effectively influences various relationships within and beyond organisational boundaries. Effective communication serves as a cornerstone for successful transactions and collaborations in the marketplace (Tankosic, Dragovic, & Ivetic, 2017:20). Internally communication can foster an exchange of information that can facilitate efficient workflows and streamline operations among stakeholders at different levels of the business (Tankosic, Dragovic, & Ivetic, 2017:20). Externally, effective communication can promote informal spaces for information sharing between organisations and the external entities outside of its formal structures (Gomathy, 2017:127). When business owners include robust communication tactics within their operations, they not only drive operational efficiency but they are able to position their businesses strategically to compete within their environments.

Often described as the backbone of successful business operations, effective communication tactics can influence various aspects of organisational management (Gomathy, 2017:127). These aspects are pivotal in dynamic organisations and include planning, organising, directing, staffing and control (Hussaini, 2021:599). Its impact is often far-reaching, fostering increased productivity, lower turnovers, improved management , better decision

making and heightened customer satisfaction (Hussaini, 2021:599). Moreover, business owners who view effective communication as a crucial tool can improve their organisations in a number of valuable ways. They are able to aptly avoid costly inefficiencies by ensuring their employees understand business objectives and rules (Sreeja, 2021:5384). Effective and efficient communication is essential for seamless operations (Sreeja, 2021:5384). Strong communication skills are pivotal in today's complex workplace, due to flattened structures and increased teamwork and hybrid work (Sreeja, 2021:5384). Moreover, if black female owners want to enter the global economy, effective communication plays a crucial role in enhancing interactions on an international level (Purba, 2021:3). Establishing transparent and inclusive communication habits across the entire business is a fundamental responsibility for black female business owners that aim to create favourable environments that support innovation and creativity enabling them to distinguish their organisations in their respective fields.

A notable research gap exists in understanding the intersection of Strategic Communication Management and black-owned female businesses in South Africa. In the realm of economic growth, statistics show that these businesses are significant contributors to the economy, however, for long term business success, strategic communication management is acknowledged to hold greater advantages for successful outcomes. Considering the above, this research proposes that there is a need to explore the communication practices currently at play in these businesses in order to facilitate a future that supports the prioritisation of SCM implementation.

The next section of the study gives context to the research question at hand for this dissertation, exploring use of SCM among black female business owners in South Africa, with the intention of assessing the owners' perception of the communicator's role to unlock their business success and economic growth in Gauteng. It unpacks the selected research questions, the problem statement being addressed, and outlines the structure of the dissertation to clarify the objectives that are important to the research.

1.2 Statement of research problem

“The greatest challenge for scholars now is to learn how to institutionalise strategic public relations as an ongoing, accepted practice in most organisations” (Grunig, 2006, 151).

Strategic corporate communicators in the 21st century play a crucial role in managing complex business activities to uphold positive relationships and a favourable reputation for their organisations (Goodman, 2006 :96-213.). According to Van Ruler (2021:113-125), strategic communication involves the organisational integration of communication within strategy development, and implementation management structures. Strategic communication combines theory and practice to explore how culture impacts marketing communication (Botan, 2018 : 10). This is further highlighted in the findings of a research study conducted by Steyn and Puth (2000:20) with 103 chief executives in South Africa. The study highlighted business owners' dissatisfaction with the performance of their senior communication managers. In particular, these managers were perceived as lacking the necessary expertise, and experience needed to effectively manage the broader spectrum of communication functions within their organisations (Steyn and Puth, 2000: 20). However, it is also worth noting that some of these leaders openly acknowledged their limited understanding of the communication department, causing a challenging disconnect in leading the communication function towards excellence (Steyn and Puth, 2000: 20.)

The purpose and potential impact of strategic communication in optimising business growth is often overlooked in certain groups (Botan, 2018 :10). It remains uncommon for top management to integrate corporate communicators into higher strategic positions (Goodman, 2006:96-213). Both groups often work in isolation, despite possessing management capabilities and a functional knowledge of various industries such as advertising, marketing, law, research, finance, ethics, ICT, and public relations (Goodman, 2006). Strategic thinking is vital in any business because it drives the creative process forward, creativity is the cornerstone of most thriving businesses today (Botan, 2018:11). Moreover, SCM delves creatively into sectors such as globalisation, branding, highlighting consumer behaviour, marketing trends, and changes in global culture (Botan, 2018 :10). While corporate communication can and perhaps must operate on a strategic level, the extent to which it can affect real strategy is based on the owners' view of this role (Botan, 2018 :10). This study unpacks this role from the perspective of black female business owners in South Africa.

Until the early 1980s, entrepreneurship research mainly focused on male entrepreneurs, with limited to no attention given to their female counterparts (Moore and Butter,1997:19). It was only shortly after this time that academic discussions regarding businesses led by women began to gain support (Botha, 2006:12). Even so, there is still a noticeable gap in entrepreneurship research concerning the experiences of female business owners (Botha, 2006:11).

In South Africa, a woman-owned business is defined as a business where at least 51% of ownership lies with one or more women, or in the matter of publicly owned businesses, at least 51% of the stock must be owned by one or more women (McClelland *et al.*, 2005 :84-107). Furthermore, one or more women must run the management and handling of day-to-day operations (Botha, 2006 :16). As per Mastercard's latest Index of Women Entrepreneurs (MIWE, 2022), South Africa is one of 12 global economies that saw growth in women's entrepreneurial activity in the 2021 assessment (MIWE, 2022). This positive trend developed despite various systemic obstacles that have hindered the advancement of gender equality in the sphere of entrepreneurship (MIWE, 2022). Still, developed markets do rely on small and medium-sized businesses and emerging economies to help create favourable conditions for new business (Kaplan & Warren, 2010). Despite the apparent gender gap and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, women in South Africa showed progress as business owners, with a recorded increase in business activity rates during that period (MIWE, 2022).

While black female South African business owners engage in economic activities that can contribute to the social and economic well-being of their communities (Mandipaka ,2014 : 128). Gender inequality remains a challenge despite recognition from the Government (Mandipaka, 2014:128). Female entrepreneurs are comparatively easier to finance and pose less of a business risk, demonstrating relatively higher success rates in job creation when compared to their male equivalents (GEM, 2014). It is worth noting, however, that male business owners still exhibit higher participation rates in early-stage entrepreneurship and managerial positions (GEM, 2014). Furthermore, white male entrepreneurs benefit more from well-developed networks, while non-white entrepreneurs are not invited to these networks, negatively impacting their businesses (Neumeier, Santos, & Morris , 2019: 475).

To support women business owners efficiently, policymakers and programmers must understand women's diversity and customise their aid accordingly (GEM, 2022). Gender bias and family demands still play a significant role in setting up women's entrepreneurial choices (GEM, 2022). For mothers, the "motherhood penalty" impacts their work time, manoeuvrability, financial potency, and investment opportunities (GEM, 2022). Focusing on unbiased structural factors like Strategic Communication Management and certain market conditions can help women get rid of these negative stereotypes, so that they can focus on their overall operations (GEM, 2022).

As stated by Swartz, Amatucci, & Marks (2019 : 475) historical and cultural factors have resulted in South African black women being less informed about growing their business market share and more likely interested in simply dominating the informal sector. Despite the many challenges faced by men in keeping their businesses running,

women encounter additional challenges due to their disempowered status within the broader labour market (Loscocco & Robinson, 1991: 511- 532). The implication of this reality highlights the fact that black women often face prejudices, thus affecting their ability to understand Strategic Communication Management and its overall importance in the survival of their business (Swartz, Amatucci, & Marks, 2019 :476).

Examining the strategies implemented by black women business owners to traverse their business growth using Strategic Communication Management presents an opportunity to highlight their unique approaches within a larger framework. This research uncovers the use of SCM to understand how black female experiences might differ from other business owners. Given the limited research on black women's business ownership experiences and their elevated failure rates (Jackson & Sanyal, 2019 : 228) there is a critical need to investigate and propose a fresh understanding of how their communication tactics influence business success, addressing a significant gap in the literature.

This research focuses on factors that are fundamentally unique to this group's context, such as inexperience, limited access to resources, work-life balance, and the overall inequality (Jackson & Sanyal, 2019 :228). These obstacles have significant implications, restricting the types of businesses black women can own, limiting opportunities for profitability, and influencing the time they can devote to their businesses each week, ultimately affecting their ability to sustain their organisations (Jackson & Sanyal, 2019:229). To fully understand the current use of SCM, this study details the rich and layered experiences of black South African female business owners in an effort to promote their business success, future outcomes and survival. Data collection methods include questionnaires, structured interviews and more (Patton, 2002:339). This research uses nine interviews to ensure the collection of sufficient and credible data to support the research findings. The selection of interviewees was based on their ability to provide relevant experiences within the desired timeframe (Patton, 2002:339). It explores the potential impact of gender and racial bias on the dissemination of SCM knowledge, along with the influence of conventional notions black women business owners might encounter during their business endeavours and pursuits.

1.3 Research questions

- How do black female business owners use Strategic Communication Management for business growth?

Based on this research question, I intend to ask the following questions:

- In what ways do black female business owners approach SCM in their businesses?
- How do black female business owners include SCM in their business to affect their business growth positively?
- What aspects of SCM work best for these businesses?

1.4 Aims and objectives of the research

The aim of this research is to explore the use and access of SCM in achieving overall business success for black-owned female business owners in Gauteng.

1.4.1 Sub-objectives of the research:

- To understand how black female-led businesses interact with, access, and use SCM.
- To examine both common and less common SCM practices currently employed by black female-led businesses.
- To broaden the research scope regarding SCM's positive impact on these businesses within the context of South Africa.

1.5 Structure of the dissertation

The first chapter introduces the research statement and then dives into the background and significance of the overarching question at hand. It later outlines the questions, aims and objectives, which will be addressed. The second chapter unpacks the literature review, expanding the relevant literature on strategic communication management and the history of black female owned business in South Africa. This aims to identify gaps that may enhance the validity and significance of the research. The third chapter profiles the theoretical framework selected for the study. This framework includes The Excellence Theory and The Systems Theory. These theories are considered appropriate for the study as they align with Strategic Communication Management. The fourth chapter expands the research design chosen, the data collection used and the data collected through a qualitative approach. The fifth chapter discusses the findings of the research through thematic analysis and discourse analysis. The conclusion sums up a reasonable, well-researched response to the question being asked, in an effort to close the gaps that have been identified.

1.6 Limitations and delineation of the study

This dissertation uses The Excellence Theory and The Systems Theory as its primary theoretical methods because of their combined strength. While The Excellence Theory identifies the generic characteristics of excellent public relations at various levels, The Systems Theory helps create and analyse business systems in a way that still makes room for environmental guidance and adjustments. Consequently, using these theories gives way to a structured view of SCM as well as a fluid view of the concept, which will ultimately enrich the study. All findings will be tied to the data collected. The study's sample size might be considered small, making it a challenge to generalise the use of SCM in black owned female businesses in Gauteng. Moreover, interviewing participants from selected industries can be time-consuming and may involve difficulties in finding a suitable time. All of the above factors collectively limit the scope of the information this research aims to gather through the reliance of one form of data with no additional resources gathered from the businesses. Further than that, it only focuses on two theoretical perspectives and two qualitative approaches. These variables set visible boundaries for the study. However, these limitations serve a specific purpose that allows the researcher to remain aligned with the intended discoveries.

1.7 Chapter Summary

The first chapter of this study provided a holistic glimpse into the study's motive. It outlined research objectives and goals by expanding on the questions being explored. It also placed SCM within the context of black-owned female businesses and offers a concise overview of the importance of the management tool in South Africa. Furthermore, it outlined the research questions the study seeks to address while acknowledging its limitations and delineation within the study's structure. The second chapter unpacks the literature review, delving into the world of SCM, and the state of black female business owners to unveil insights shared by academics and researchers.

Chapter 2

Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The second chapter highlights the critical role played by Strategic Communication Management (SCM) in driving business growth. It examines how SCM aligns organisational goals to provide a more insightful strategic approach. It places an emphasis on thoughtful and analytical communication, harnessing a variety of communication methods to maintain favourable outcomes. This section explores the core elements of SCM, identifying pivotal literature that foregrounds how to examine the business environment, and identifies key stakeholders strategically. It also emphasises how businesses can engage in continuous processes to implement SCM, and evaluate its intended outcomes and perceptions.

Furthermore, this section stresses the importance of critical thinking in the realm of corporate communication and the implications of critical thinking on the state of black women enterprises in the South African landscape. This chapter essentially establishes the academic groundwork for the study, unpacking why it is important to incorporate SCM in black women-owned businesses. This further highlights SCM's relevance in academia and ultimately changes the realities that currently exist within black women-owned businesses.

2.2 What is Communication / PR management ?

Various scholars have developed multiple definitions for public relations (PR) but due to its ever-evolving nature it still lacks a universally agreed-upon definition (Thurlow et al., 2018:160). Hutton (2007:46) notes that several PR textbooks explore recent definitions of public relations in academic literature, revealing common themes without a definitive consensus. Defining public relations is complex , some scholars focus on more conceptual concepts and some emphasis practical aspects (Cernicova, 2016:3). As an applied professional and academic field public relations is often described as a communication-centred and research-based approach to comprehend, inform and intervene in relationships between ideas, individuals, organisations and societies (McKie & Sriramesh, 2017:2). It aims to understand an audience's opinions about these entities and aligns these opinions with the organization's goals and objectives, through a planned, wide dissemination of information, and by managing the organization's environment effectively (Fawkes, 2018:159). More recently, public relations has been described as a strategic

communication practice that is centred on constructing and preserving a favourable image for an entity (Vlajković, 2023:159). It employs diverse communication tactics such as media relations , social media management, crisis management and more to elevate public awareness, perception and reputation. (Vlajković, 2023:159). While many people still link PR with publicity, it encompasses a much broader scope particularly within the business sector. This scope includes, corporate communication, communication management, integrated management and strategic management. Corporate communication is strongly characterised by a vigorous businesses management function that offers organisations increased effectiveness through the upkeep and maintenance of their relationships with stakeholders, publics and the media (Steyn & Puth, 2000: 14). While it is evident that the addition of management can be beneficial in the communication function , it does not mean that there has been a seamless appreciation and recognition of its contribution (Steyn & Puth, 2000:14).

Communication management is the process that oversees the information flow within and between companies, employing diverse methods to engage targeted audiences (Ditlevsen & Johansen, 2019: 2). It is a crucial element of success, supporting organisational development through various modalities and actions (Ditlevsen & Johansen, 2019: 2). Effective communication management fosters cooperation, consensus, and facilitates implementation and monitoring through controlled communication processes (Ströh & Jaatinen, 2002:149). To sustain growth, organisations need a comprehensive communication plan for trustworthy relationships with all stakeholders (Hernández et al., 2019:3). Integrated Communication (IC) management has similar values to communication management , in that it focuses on communication planning and execution to enhance the organisation's visibility within the marketplace (Christensen, Firat, & Torp,2019:424). However , it differs in that it emphasises the establishment and alignment of procedures, symbols and the behaviours of these values in a consistent and continuous fashion (Christensen, Firat, & Torp,2019:424).When communication is managed in an integrated way, businesses are able to create distinct brands, contributing to their legitimacy within the global business landscape (Van Baalen & Mulder, 2016:90). This kind of clarity is considered fundamental, however some businesses fail to enact IC due to a lack of awareness of its potential impact (Van Baalen & Mulder,2016: 90).

It is evident that the inclusion of management to any communication practice, from integrated to corporate, can serve as a driving force behind an organisation's purpose and growth. However without the implementation of a solid strategy, accomplishing that purpose may be difficult (Kelvin-Iloafu, 2016: 95). According to Nwanzu and Babalola(2019:3) strategy acts as the management's roadmap for the organisation, outlining the organisation's approach to achieving their goals and ultimately guiding business conduct. Strategic management as defined by

Greene, Adams and Ebert (1985:536), is an ongoing process that involves thoughtful consideration of an organisation's current mission, environmental conditions and the integration of these elements to guide decision making and outcomes. The significance of a strategic dimension has increased due to the growing complexity of the modern business environment (Kelvin-Iloafu, 2016:95). A number of scholars have indicated how strategy has emerged as a central concept in the contemporary era, replacing traditional management activities like administration and planning (Fuertes et al., 2020:2). Strategic management has a lot to offer the communication department in organisations. The manager is able to identify the key strategic publics, stakeholders, media partners and the issues that may arise regarding them. They can develop strategic programmes that can feed into the organisation's strategy and the conceptualisation of the organisation's responses (Steyn & Puth, 2000:18). They are in a position to predict emerging turbulence in the environments that they operate in (Steyn & Puth, 2000: 18).

2.3 What makes communication management strategic?

Strategic communication, as defined by Zerfass, Verčič, Nothhaft, and Werder (2018 : 489), means purposefully employing communication to initiate meaningful discussions that are aligned with an organisation's goals. These discussions are regarded as strategic when they hold the power to impact the organisation's advancement, growth, standing, or even its very existence (Zerfass *et al.*, 2018: 489). According to Steyn (2009:521), public relations must go through a number of transformations to be considered strategic. The public's position must move from being manipulated to being understood (Steyn, 2009:521). The dissemination of information for publicity tactics in public relations must move to the development of mutual relationships within the business (Steyn, 2009:521).

In order for public relations to be strategic, communication must be reflective and analytical, and must benefit society through dialogue and accountability measures (Zerfass *et al.*, 2018:490). The corporate communicator is responsible for restructuring communication tactics on a macro level (Zerfass *et al.*, 2018:490). Macnamara (2018: 470) further argues that in order to elevate strategic communication, it is necessary to incorporate open, dynamic, and expanded approaches that facilitate two-way communication.

Communication management must assist the organisation to maintain and create socially acceptable objectives and adjust to the ever-changing environment to serve both the organisation and the public on a strategic level (Steyn & de Beer, 2018 : 31). Public relations must develop from its traditional technical role to its strategic role (Steyn & de beer, 2018:31). As a strategist, the practitioner is responsible for the formation of a communication strategy that

identifies the message and audience (Zerfass *et al.*, 2018:492). When communication is managed strategically, it serves a broader purpose beyond an organisation's marketing interests. It warrants organisations to productively handle their intangible assets, which include elements like image, reputation, brand, and corporate social responsibility (Carrillo, 2014: 86). To manage these resources efficiently, a business must adopt an integrated approach that incorporates diverse forms of communication, such as commercial, corporate, and internal (Carrillo, 2014: 87).

At this point, the communicator is ultimately interested in achieving organisational change through effective communication strategies that they have planned, enforced and monitored on behalf of the business (Steyn & de Beer, 2018 : 36). Furthermore, these communication tools must not be interpreted as standalone entities but rather as instruments that support the businesses' larger strategic objectives. This integration of communication within the strategic framework gives rise to Strategic Communication Management (Carrillo , 2014: 83).

Building from the abovementioned, this study takes the view that communication can only be strategic if business owners recognise the importance and the wider potential of the public relations function (Carrillo , 2014: 83). A PR professional should be given some level of influence and accountability that is measured through tangible values and objectives. Currently, the relevance of a communications practitioner is either absorbed into a marketing function or boxed into a technical role i.e. “social media specialist” or “content specialist”, which makes it difficult for owners to see the practitioner as a strategic force. When PR practitioners are not recognised for their strategic know-how, it can significantly affect their ability to think within this framework (Carrillo,2014: 83). This ultimately affects the way a business operates, and could affect how effectively the business realises its goals and objectives. As stated by Steyn (2004:170), a redefinition of the communications practitioner role is necessary.

2.4 The role of public relations and communicators in Strategic Communication Management.

The effectiveness and strategic competence of corporate communication has faced criticism due to its shortcomings in performing, thinking, and behaving at a strategic level (Steyn & Puth, 2000 :13). A number of sectors, including corporate, government, and non-profit public relations have emphasised that critical thinking is an essential skill that is infused at every level of the profession (Tallent & Barnes, 2015 : 437). A study conducted in 2008 among public relations practitioners noted that critical thinking was the second most sought-after skill, surpassed only by writing (McCleneghan, 2009 :17).

Macnamara and Gregory (2018:17) highlight the importance of evaluation in addressing crucial questions regarding the effectiveness of strategies, target audiences, working conditions, and employed methods. However, accurately assessing the actual impact of communication practices on business development, growth, identity, and objectives has consistently been a challenge (Macnamara & Gregory, 2018:17). Steyn and Puth (2000: 14) argue that this challenge comes from the lack of business skills, research expertise, and management knowledge required not only to align corporate strategy with corporate communication but also to critically evaluate the value of communication within the organisation (Steyn & Puth, 2000:14). If managers influence communication, they should make sure they use their resources wisely to achieve their goals. This means they need to be efficient and effective when formulating messages for their stakeholders (Bütschi & Steyn, 2006 : 250). Moreover, neglecting the PR function's importance minimises the professional's ability to acquire sizable budgets/ (Landsberg, 2020:89). This could lead to bigger challenges like strained resources, decreased credibility, independent thinking and decision making within organisations (Landsberg, 2020:89).

The combination of conducting communication at a micro-functional level, frequently outsourcing communication positions, along with a lack of knowledge by top leadership, has negatively affected the influential capability of communication practitioners (Steyn & Puth, 2000: 15). Strategic Communication Management offers valuable insights to communication managers, enabling them to identify key strategic publics, stakeholders, media partners, and anticipate potential challenges within these relationships (Steyn & Puth, 2000:15). They can develop strategic communication programmes that align with the business's strategy and conceptualise appropriate responses within their environments (Steyn & Puth, 2000:17). Strategic communication involves intervention and problem solving to achieve long-term objectives. If strategic communication is not applied correctly, businesses may miss using diverse communication tactics to action their plans (Hallahan *et al.*, 2007:19).

Currently, public relations professionals are increasingly turning to digital adverts to convey vital messages, spanning corporate reputation, social issues, and event sponsorships (Hallahan *et al.*, 2007:19). In the same breath, marketers are adopting cooperative and cause-related marketing initiatives, which were once solely in the public relations domain (Hallahan *et al.*, 2007:17). This change is driven by the need for organisations to stand out in a rigorous multifaceted landscape, where stakeholders judge them from multiple angles; products and services, expertise and thought leadership, quality commitment, and social responsibility (Steyn & Puth, 2000:20).

The rise of information technologies, such as the Internet and instant messaging, have also blurred the lines between advertising, publicity, sales promotion, and e-commerce (Steyn & Puth, 2000: 21). Technology is

integrating communication channels and igniting significant transformations in the sector (Hallahan *et al.*, 2007:17). Businesses employ a number of methods to shape their stakeholders' behaviours, influencing knowledge, actions and feelings related to the organisation (Hallahan *et al.*, 2007:A7). Consequently, people's experiences and perceptions of business result from complex communication forms, making it increasingly challenging to isolate the impact of individual communication activities from professional communicative actions (Musheke & Phiri, 2021:). For instance, advertising and publicity are sometimes indistinguishable (Musheke & Phiri, 2021:561). Therefore, it is valuable to scrutinise an organisation's communication methods from a strategic and cohesive stance (Musheke & Phiri, 2021:561). This is even more critical when evaluating the relationship between black businesses owners and their perspective on PR officers. This is especially significant when considering how they understand the formation of strategy for effective organisational communication.

2.5 Strategic Communication Management (SCM)

As stated by the Pretoria School of Thought, Strategic Communication Management, often abbreviated as SCM, is a scientific worldview or paradigm that views communication management in the strategic context of an organisation (De Beer, 2010). Communication management is defined as the management of communication between the organisation, its internal and external stakeholders, and other interest groups, and is implemented at the functional level of an organisation (De Beer, 2010). Within SCM, corporate communication is understood as a strategic management function that operates at macro, societal and environmental levels (Steyn, 2007: 137-172). The evolution of Strategic Communication Management is closely tied to the leadership of that particular institution (Steyn, 2007 :137-172). The involvement of purposeful communication that necessitates a deliberate plan, a distinct rationale, and clear-cut decision-making in the execution of strategic communication programmes can help serve executive projections (Hallahan *et al.*, 2017: 3-35). SCM is the 'full-participation' approach to corporate communication, and this participation is empowered before strategic decisions are made (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002 : 556).

One of the central concepts of SCM is environmental scanning with a view to identify and manage stakeholder issues that may arise. Environmental scanning is defined as collecting and using external information and projections to effectively plan for the future (Choo, 2001:1). Environmental scanning can help organisations avoid surprises, locate opportunities and threats, gain an edge on the market, and improve their planning abilities (Choo, 2001:1). Moreover, environmental changes tend to happen suddenly and progressively with or without prior notice

(Choo, 2001:1). Since an issue cannot be considered as one without a stakeholder or interest group being involved. Stakeholders and the public groups that develop around issues need to receive the organisation's attention (Steyn, 2007:137-172). According to Steyn as cited in Toth (2007: 137-172), the following are objectives associated with Strategic Communication Management:

1. It provides an organisation or institution with a societal perspective by feeding intelligence about strategic stakeholders' societal issues, and their relationship with publics
2. Encourages organisational leaders to take an interest in reputation risks and other strategic issues identified in the reflective process by aligning organisational goals and strategies to corporate communication.
3. Encourages leaders to be transparent and use two-way communication with external and internal stakeholders about issues of strategic importance.
4. Supports mutually beneficial relationships with the organisation's stakeholders and other interest groups in an effort to meet its strategic goals.
5. Helps the organisation become socially responsible, and builds legitimacy, garner trust, and build a good reputation.

Buhmann and Likely (2018: 654) also note that Strategic Communication Management is a continuous and vigorous process that consists of four key elements: situation analysis, planning, implementation, and evaluation. While the process may seem linear, it is often iterative, with strategy evolving rather than being strictly devised (Buhmann & Likely, 2018:654).

2.6 Context and Process in Strategic Communication Management

In the realm of SCM research, a fundamental distinction surfaces when scrutinising the development of strategies. This distinction, as mentioned by Lynch (1997:21), rotates around the interplay of three critical fields — context, content and process. Context means the environment in which the organisation engages and where strategy is formed (Lynch, 1997:21). Content identifies the specific issues that need to be addressed during strategy development. These issues pertain to how the business aims to achieve its functional goals (Lynch, 1997:10).

Process speaks to the methodological plans and steps used in determining and executing strategies, while bridging actions within the evolving environment (Lynch, 1997:21).

Steyn (2003:168-183) further categorises the formation of communication strategies into three more distinct groups, namely linear, adaptive and interpretive strategies. A linear strategy focuses on planning and integrating decisions to achieve business goals (Steyn, 2003: 168-183). An adaptive strategy aligns external opportunities and risks with internal capabilities and resources, recognising dynamic environments (Steyn, 2003: 168-183). Interpretive strategy looks at organisations as cooperative agreements influenced by individual will, emphasising relationship building, symbolic actions, and a wide range of stakeholder dynamics (Steyn, 2003: 168-183). Additionally, two primary approaches to these groups exist as described by Lynch (1997:6). These approaches are the prescriptive and emergent, with the former being linear and coherent, and the latter adapting to changing circumstances (Lynch, 1997:6). In the prescriptive approach, SCM follows a step-by-step pattern, which leads to strategy development and execution according to a predefined plan (James, 2018:1-10). The emergent approach masks the lines between these core areas. Here, strategy develops through experimentation and learning from oversights (James, 2018:1-10).

Certain communication disciplines may be rooted in providing information or only creating beneficial relationships (e.g. technical communication or public relations), but these focal points may be insufficient for organisations that want to activate holistic objectives (Van Ruler, 2018 :370). To remain relevant and current, organisations must go beyond traditional communication and management concepts (Van Ruler, 2018:370). From a theoretical standpoint, SCM must cover two key elements — understanding media logic and using the media to shape culture (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014:3-7). This standpoint urges practitioners to go beyond the typical boundaries of communication channels and passive audiences (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014:3-7). It requires them to examine how meaning is created through interactions involving stakeholders, media professionals, and how people interpret and share their media content. By comprehending this, communicators can truly realise how their work can make a difference in society and drive positive change through an organisation (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014:3-7).

2.7 Challenges in Strategic Communication Management

The word "strategic", when applied to communication, can strengthen the negative “war-like” perceptions associated with the word (Jamil *et al.*, 2015: 91). This perception becomes more established when businesses consider the strategic process as a strict top-down decision-making exercise (Hatch, 1997). According to (Pearce & Robinson,(2011), SCM involves familiar tools like SWOT analysis, goal setting, strategy development,

implementation, and evaluation which is often driven by top management's standard view of strategic communication to employees. However, there are a plethora of perspectives on strategy formulation that open up new avenues for examining communication's role in strategy (Jamil *et al.*, 2015:91). One such perspective associates strategy with power and decision-making, implying that communication only serves a managerial function when used in this context (Jamil *et al.*, 2015:92). It challenges the standard view of Strategic Communication Management that ensures a more functional entry into implementation (Jamil *et al.*, 2015:92).

Furthermore, some scholars have mentioned the challenge of accurately measuring Strategic Communication Management's impact on the bottom line (ROI) and organisational metrics. Holtzhausen & Zerfass (2014: 3-7) argue that SCM's value, especially in crisis prevention and stakeholder engagement, cannot easily be quantified financially. However, the rise of 'big data' and break through algorithms can certainly bridge this gap by aligning communication methods to stakeholder behaviour (Elgendy & Elragal, 2014: 216). Big data involves the handling of extensive and complex data sets, often characterised by their volume, velocity, and variety (Elgendy & Elragal, 2014:216). Despite its potential, many business owners and CEOs remain hesitant to embrace it due to exorbitant costs and a lack of expertise (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014:3-7).

Nonetheless, supporting the strengths and weaknesses of big data is the future for all strategic communication managers (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014:3-7). For black female-led businesses with limited resources, acquiring basic SCM skills and then embracing the role of big data may pose even greater challenges compared to established businesses currently using SCM. This research seeks to investigate the convergence of Strategic Communication Management with the day-to-day work of black female-owned businesses in Gauteng, focusing on their growth and success. Essentially, it aims to grasp how these businesses implement Strategic Communication Management and observe the current use of this framework within these organisations. This exploration provides a clearer picture of the real world implications of SCM within these businesses.

In light of how this field has developed, this study argues that the integration of Strategic Communication Management in business is highly beneficial. However, this integration depends on how businesses and PR practitioners view strategy in general. If there is no accountability or agreement on the definition or expectations, both parties cannot perform their functions effectively. For this thesis, it is important to highlight this gap because it is often the reason why SCM is not implemented or understood.

Strategic Communication Management can only effectively satisfy its function in an open organisational system. This openness creates a space where connection and communication can occur appropriately between various parts of the system and its stakeholders. This openness is important in aligning business objectives with its communication goals, which can positively impact business growth. SCM also has its challenges from ROI evaluation to access to big data sets for accurate projections. SCM has also rarely been discussed in the context of black female led businesses. This study looks at the challenges and limitations women may encounter when they navigate SCM to build successful businesses. South African Black women still face unique experiences and hardships that can make growing businesses challenging. This is important because it is progressive from an academic standpoint and creates more opportunities for black women business owners in Gauteng to create solutions that enhance their business success.

2.8 The state of women-owned business in South Africa

South African black women often face unique systemic disadvantages that may limit their access to SCM, which is crucial for business growth (Swartz, Amatucci, & Marks, 2019: 478). Despite the progress stated above, black female business owners continue to struggle due to socialisation, education, family roles, and a lack of business networks (Chance, 2022: 46). Therefore, it is crucial to explore attainable research solutions that can contribute to their business growth (Chance, 2022: 46). The success of a business hinges on its ability to effectively manage the internal and external circumstances that shape its operational ability. (Jolović, 2019). To reach its objectives, business ventures must quickly point out any obstacles that may impede the progression of effective strategies to mitigate adverse effects (Jolović, 2019).

Studying female entrepreneurship in South Africa shines a necessary light on how women face exclusion from resources (Swartz, Amatucci, & Marks, 2019:478). Women, who make up 52% of the population, still encounter historical and cultural biases that limit their access to opportunities, as discussed in this study (Swartz, Amatucci, & Marks, 2019: 478). Black women are a noteworthy self-employed group, but current industry targets do not truly reflect this reality (Swartz, Amatucci, & Marks, 2019 :479). It is imperative to provide aspiring female business owners with the knowledge and skills required to recognise communication opportunities within their target markets. Research has shown that businesses led by individuals who can identify opportunities, rather than those who enter entrepreneurship out of necessity or survival, tend to showcase better management skills, increased profitability, and have a lower likelihood of failure (Calderon *et al.*, 2015 :14).

In fact, according to Ladzani and Van Vuuren (2002:154-161), the absence of business education has been identified as a pivotal contributor to business failures. The government's primary means of encouraging the development and expansion of Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs), while decreasing their high failure rates, is ensured when there are accessible business programmes (Malefane, 2019: 674). Consequently, education plays a pivotal role in establishing a culture of entrepreneurship in South Africa (Chimucheka, 2014: 160-168). Previous studies have shown the persistent gender inequality that hampers women entrepreneurs' growth and development (Chimucheka, 2014:160-168). These challenges often impede the effectiveness of women entrepreneurs' strategies, forcing them to address both gender equality and strategy development simultaneously (Halkias *et al.*, 2011 : 221-235.) However, limited research has examined the implementation and understanding of Strategic Communications Management.

2.9 Communication practices for organisational strategic effectiveness

Marketing and communication plays a crucial role in SME success by providing information about the businesses, its products, quality and benefits within the marketplace. However, research does indicate a lack of communication skills , expertise and financial resources within smaller businesses in South Africa (Kallier, 2017:142).

Communication decisions as mentioned prior, are often influenced by the business environment, owners skills and resources and the owners characteristics, leading to informal and reactive communication activities (Kallier, 2017:142). According to research, for businesses to be successful, it requires improving the business processes and methods that provide information for and about organizations (Scheming & Mason, 2013: 400). Enhancing the efficiency of interpersonal communication tactics that build relationships, increase online presence, infusing client-centred communication, and tailoring communication so that businesses adapt to changes in the environment or community, while maintaining consistency and adaptability, is paramount (Scheming & Mason, 2013: 400).

2.9.1 Building relationships and trust

Transparency has been highlighted as one of the most fundamental ways of building relationships within organisations. The importance of incorporating straight talk or Informal communication practices can be defined as the unofficial exchange of business information in all directions. Also known as grapevine communication , it is

effective when information needs to be shared quickly with casual opinions on formal work being done (Henrith, 2018:14). Informal communication can be a catalyst to establishing connections and building relationships as well as adapting to changes. Building trust in communication is defined as the attitudes and behaviours that enable individuals to make decisions involving risks (Henrith, 2018, 14). It is concerned with the owner's ability to take steps even when potential harm outweighs the predicted benefits (Hasanaj and Manxhari, 2017). Emphasising the importance of communication in trust building is integral to fostering connections within businesses and their stakeholders (Men, Qin, & Jin, 2022:147). Forming connections both internally and externally should not be an impromptu addition to effective communication practices, they must be deliberate, planned, integrated and implemented as part of the strategic approach (Men, Qin, & Jin, 2022:147). It is critical to examine the level of intentionality black owned female businesses possess when they engage in decision making processes and communication practices with stakeholders. Adapting to changes is crucial for organisations, it is a necessary component in the enhancement of the overall stakeholder experience (Shaikh, 2020:41).

According to Wariach and Bhardwaj (2007:269- 290) change can be defined as the ongoing adjustments organisations and individuals take on to address alterations in various environments. The business landscape has changed significantly since South Africa reached its democracy with factors such as globalisation, technological advancements (social media etc), BEE enhancing customer expectations making the management of changes like these essential to business growth (Van de Rheede, 2022:85). Embracing and recognising these changes as a continuous changing process can produce various benefits such as creating a more effective communication environment where information is shared quickly and efficiently (Shaikh, 2020:41). However, informal communication can also create spaces for rumours and gossip to travel which can impact effective communication (Michelson & Mouly, 2000:341). Organisational communication scholars have noted how various business studies view rumours and gossip as a detrimental activity within the organisation, associating it with reduced productivity and diminished employee morale (Michelson & Mouly, 2000:341).

2.9.2 Online presence and social media

With the evolution of technology and increased accessibility, traditional information channels are undergoing transformation (Van den Berg & Struwig, 2016: 532). Organisations are increasingly recognising the value of social media tools, seeing them as platforms for fostering relationships, facilitating open communication, brand development and navigating resource limitations (Van den Berg & Struwig, 2016: 532). This advancement of digital technologies has opened up new avenues for public relations practitioners to rapidly reach larger audiences (Badea, 2014:17). According to Badea(2014:17) using social media for organisational communication, allows public opinion to express itself and reach notable target audiences. Furthermore, social media use is integral to internal communication, with employees contributing to the company's image through regular feedback which is crucial for reputation building (Badea,2014:17). Social media in this study refers to the use of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp ,Tik Tok and Twitter.

However the successful implementation of online techniques in businesses requires certain key factors and the barriers to its adoption vary among organisations (Constantinides et al., 2015: 43). Small businesses in developing countries tend to lag behind their counterparts globally due to insufficient resources, communication expertise, lack of training and development, and challenges in measuring social media results (Moyo, 2018:25). Managerial characteristics and perceptions also play a vital role in the adoption and use of social media platforms (Moyo, 2018:25). Owners and managers play a vital role in deciding how their organisations use social media, given their responsibilities for daily operations. In fact, according to Aspasia and Ourania (2014:61-73) an owner's age, gender and educational level will impact effective social media integration. In addition, scholars argue that the organisation's adoption of social media hinges on its perceived usefulness and ease of use within that organisation (Aspasia & Ourama, 2014: 61-73).

2.9.3 Client-centred communication

Business settings are often riddled with social connections formed by employees and stakeholders that are upheld through mutual support and real knowledge sharing (Wang et al.,2014). The extent to which stakeholders and clients believe their organisations care about their well-being and value their contributions can improve relationships and interactions(Wang et al.,2014). This perception, if positive, creates an atmosphere that supports

employees' willingness to participate in decision making practices and support for the importance of empathetic and inclusive communication is abundant. In fact, De Jong and Lentz (2007:1095) found that ineffective communication often results from a lack of empathy, as evidenced by reader feedback on professional documents. Johnson-Eilola and Selber (2013) also argued that modern communicators should position themselves as advocates for clients, which hinges on their ability to seek products from the clients' perspectives. When businesses listen they provide a space that is essential for task accomplishment including professional advice, expertise, equipment and political access and client centred communication efforts(Choi, Goo and Choi, 2022). Emotional support involves expressions such as approval, praise and emotional intimacy associated with communication objectives(Choi, Goo and Choi, 2022). The trade of these resources fosters relationship building, social interactions and builds trust which contributes to the development of effective communication habits(Choi, Goo and Choi, 2022).

2.9.4 Adaptability and consistency

In business contexts, a communication process that highlights the establishment of a sequence for the exchange of information is beneficial (Marshall et al.,2008:860). It gives communication a standard format that can help the audience and the communicator meet organisational targets without any information being overlooked (Marshall et al.,2008: 860). In a business structure it can look like a brief with crucial details included or a form that can help stakeholders get information to get some kind of strategic outcome (Marshall et al.,2008:860). The role of the communicator in business is to be responsible for restructuring communication habits as environments change (Zerfass et al.,2018:488). When businesses exhibit adaptability and consistency through relevant routines in communication they are able to navigate limitations and use expertise, advice that can help deal with change (Hodgson, Herman, & Dollimore, 2017:5). If communication is something that managers or owners influence, they should make sure they use their resources wisely to achieve their goals (Bütschi & Steyn,2006). Owners need to be efficient and effective when formulating messages for their stakeholders (Bütschi & Steyn,2006). As discussed prior, the word 'strategic' may carry specific negative perceptions when applied to communication(Jamil et al., 2015:97). These perceptions are fundamentally formed by the business owners' standard view of what they consider strategic and structured (Jamil et al., 2015:97).

2.9.5 PR branding and reputation

Positioning a business or a brand in the market involves meeting stakeholder expectations to build organisational trust and expands reputational action (Pakura & Rudeloff, 2023:160). Reputation reflects collective judgements on services and products (Pakura & Rudeloff, 2023:160). To cultivate and manage brand reputation within a business, media and the public, specialised communication may be required (Mykkänen & Vos, 2015 :2). Specialists or experts represent the business to the public through publicity, social media, media platforms and many other tools to help relay the organisation's position effectively through their skill sets and networks (Mykkänen & Vos, 2015:.2) .In an era characterised by advanced information technologies, the boundaries between advertising, publicity and sales promotion are increasingly being blurred thus reshaping the strategic communication management process (Mykkänen & Vos, 2015: 2). Scrutinising the relationship between black female business owners and their perceptions of PR specialists for example can offer valuable insight on their application of SCM (Sriramesh, 2003) . As businesses strive to influence stakeholder behaviours and public perceptions their inclusion of PR specialists becomes a crucial focus area to analyse to help evaluate the true strategicness of their communication efforts(Sriramesh, 2003) .According to Plowman (2005),when specialised communication is used, the organisation is able to go beyond its traditional communication ideologies. This inclusion allows for the enhancement of effective communication states that ultimately contribute to all aspects of the business (Plowman, 2005). In small businesses this kind of awareness is not only the prerequisite to positive self-assessment, it ultimately influences perceptions among stakeholders about a company's identity, activity and values.

Effective communication must form the bedrock to any organisation committed to positive productive interactions for business growth (Buca & Rizescu, 2017:52). When communication is rooted in enhancing the appropriate use of knowledge or information sharing systems, better relationships or connections can be built and communication barriers can more or less be avoided(Buca & Rizescu, 2017:52). Foundational skills for communication can be defined as the basic ways in which organisations approach communication. While some communication notions focus on information provision or the cultivation of technical relationships in public relations, these singular

objectives fall short for organisations who aim to achieve holistic goals (Van Ruler, 2018). To remain relevant business owners must transcend from traditional communication and management concepts and embrace a more impactful approach from the beginning (Van Ruler, 2018). Theoretically, SCM asks practitioners to see audiences and stakeholders as active, encouraging them to explore the intricate dynamics of how meaning is crafted , interpreted and shared through the development of content (Holtzhausen & Zerfass 2014).

Showcasing how businesses recognise the above elements of communication as strategic necessities steering organisation towards business growth and success is at the heart of this dissertation. (Holtzhausen & Zerfass 2014). Establishing connections and building relationships, adapting to changes, including PR expertise to enhance brand development and reputation forms the necessary building block to ensure strategic thinking is effective. This study seeks to showcase how elements of SCM serve as a cohesive force that aligns communication efforts with overarching organisational roles. It seeks to see whether black owned female business owners use aspects of strategic communication management in their foundational thinking when orchestrating their communication process to propel the business towards organisational excellence .

2.10 SCM in South African black-owned female business

Implementing SCM marks a critical stage in strategic planning within business growth. Full implementation can be hindered by a number of factors including conflicting priorities, ineffective management styles, communication gaps, and insufficient skills and education guiding the strategic planning process (Jolović, 2019:64).The level of strategic implementation within black-owned female businesses often depends on their willingness to embrace business risks and adapt to the consequences of the strategic decisions which have already been made (Jolović, 2019:64). In South Africa, multiple researchers have found that most black female businesses use strategic tactics through a financial and non-financial lens. Financial indicators include turnover growth, ROI and market share, while non-financial indicators include customer satisfaction, employee retention, business reputation and positive working environments and relations (Irene, 2017: 4). Furthermore research also shows that there is a fundamental gap between strategy formulation and strategy implementation in South African SMEs. According to scholars the strategic implementation often fails because of poor implementation (Jooste & Fourie, 2009:66). While business owners agree that strategy is an important element to achieve organisational success, inadequate understanding of the role of strategy within the workforce and ineffective communication of that strategy is a significant barrier to implementation (Jooste & Fourie, 2009:66). The role of strategic leadership is also highlighted as a pivotal part of

enacting a strategy, if leaders are uncertain about the effectiveness of SCM it will most likely not be employed within their businesses. In fact, according to Goyal and Parkash (2011:199) businesses controlled by women, particularly black women, tend to be scarce due to challenges in assessing managerial skills, and essential information related to training, alternative markets, innovation and technologies. Financial constraints for black-owned female businesses are another reality that affect their access to strategic communication management tactics. Small businesses lacking financial records and collateral often face high rejection rates for loans, which can result in business prioritising essentials over marketing or communication resources (Ramasobana & Fatoki, 2018: 93). Financially constrained businesses often resort to substandard guerrilla marketing and communication efforts, while businesses who have financial assistance are more likely to allocate budgets for marketing and communication strategies (Ramasobana & Fatoki, 2018: 93). Despite limited resources, black-owned female businesses commonly prioritise cost effective strategies like social media marketing to communicate with their stakeholders (Urban & Maphathe, 2021:2). Leveraging social media platforms can expand their audience by connecting them with potential customers and can help them forge critical engagements for business opportunities (Urban & Maphathe, 2021:2). However, lack of time tends to take away from their employment of strategic online outcomes, and very few business owners know how to effectively use social media metrics for holistic business success (Jorgensen et al., 2022:). Many business owners opt to create and distribute content independently, which can significantly impact the dissemination of rich content that can attract and engage stakeholders (Jorgensen et al., 2022).

Strategic Communication Management plays a crucial role in propelling the growth of black-owned female business in South Africa. However, its significant impact on businesses is often overlooked in research, particularly within the context of black women (Chiloane-Tsoka & Boya, 2015: 227). Research indicates how the inclusion of SCM can help businesses gain a competitive advantage through a two-way communication structure and process, establishing consistent values, impactful stakeholder relationships, brand reputation and aligning the business with key decision making skills (Meintjes, 2012:370). There remains a notable lack of understanding of how its implementation and evaluation could elevate black-owned female businesses strategically (Meintjes, 2012:370). Ultimately, South Africa faces a general skills shortage, particularly within the field of communication, inherited from unequal education in previous regimes.

This study proposes that the success of organisations hinges on having efficient communication management and strategies. If businesses operate without them, they face the threat of having inaccurate information spreading, which could lead to poor business choices. Black women face this threat at even higher levels due to their exclusion

from resources, networks and information. Black female business owners occupy a unique space in the business environment. There is existing literature that underlines this space, however, more can be done to explore how black women in South Africa navigate established power dynamics to achieve success in their communication endeavours. This research uncovers the experiences of black-owned female businesses, focusing on their use of SCM to enhance business growth. It aims to analyse how this strategic approach could contribute to enhancing business performance in the long-term.

2.11. Chapter Summary

The second chapter looked at the significance of Strategic Communication Management (SCM) and its role in business success in South Africa. SCM is concerned with using purposeful communication that is aligned with the organisation's goals and the transformation of public relations from manipulation to understanding, and from technical to strategic. It emphasised reflective and analytical communication, fostering mutual relationships within the business, and integrates various communication forms for managing a reputation and brand. This section also discussed SCM's key elements, including environmental scanning, stakeholder identification, and continuous processes like situation analysis, planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Furthermore, it touched on the challenges in SCM, such as negative perceptions linked to the term "strategic" and the difficulty of measuring its ROI impact. It highlighted the importance of critical thinking in corporate communication and the consequences of diverse communication forms in today's digital landscape. Lastly, it explored the state of women-owned businesses in South Africa, emphasising the need to empower black female business owners by addressing issues related to gender inequality, historical imbalance, and limited access to resources. Overall, this chapter lays the literary foundation for a study looking at the use and impact of SCM on women-owned businesses in South Africa and its relevance in today's communication landscape.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

This study is based on two theoretical frameworks, namely the Excellence Theory and the Systems Theory. Firstly, it delves into the Excellence Theory to explicate the value of the theory, particularly to the field of SCM but also to the overall organisational efficiency. It unpacks the crucial role that public relations plays in sustaining positive relationships with all stakeholders and partners — outlining the importance of fostering shared values that can help mitigate negative public and private perceptions. The Excellence Theory, as described by certain scholars, considers the importance of empowering the communications sector as a critical management function that promotes a two-way symmetrical model for communication building. Secondly, the study explores Systems Theory, as discussed by different scholars, to illustrate how this approach facilitates a holistic understanding of SCM, enabling the development of effective strategies and their adaptation in this dynamic communication environment. It excavates open and closed systems, and studies how they affect the organisations' relationship with their individual environment and surroundings. At its core, the Systems Theory looks at how an input moves through a specific system to produce an output. Lastly, this section advocates for the use of both theories in fully understanding the complexities of South African black women in business.

3.2 Excellence Theory

In 1984, a group of researchers called the "Excellence Team" took on a project from the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Foundation (Hung-Baesecke *et al.*, 2021:313-334). They were tasked to study how communication impacts a company's goals and why it matters (Hung-Baesecke *et al.*, 2021: 313-334). The team eventually agreed that the general idea of the newly formed Excellence Theory was to guide an organisation's actions to create mutually advantageous relationships with the public and cultivate a favourable reputation (Hung-Baesecke *et al.*, 2021:313-334). To be more specific, the team concluded that public relations enhances organisational effectiveness by aligning stakeholders' objectives with the organisation's goals (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:558). They noted that the value of public relations is determined by its ability to assist the organisation in nurturing and sustaining strong relationships with strategic groups of people (Grunig *et al.*, 2002: 558). Over two

decades later, a number of scholars still consider the excellence project as the most comprehensive examination of public relations to date (Bowen, 2004: 271-296).

Excellence Theory is made up of a range of related theories within the communication sphere (Low, 2022). It incorporates PR evaluation, employee communication and different PR models that speak to gender, diversity, power dynamic, ethics, and strategic management (Low, 2022). Excellence Theory advocates for a committed public relations practitioner that engages in ethical interactions with a diverse number of cultural groups (Tyma, 2008: 197). In this context, the practitioner acts as both translator and advocate for these groups in every exchange from the beginning to the end (Tyma, 2008:197). According to the theory, for an organisation to be successful, it needs to act in a manner that addresses the concerns and fulfils the objectives of both its stakeholders and management (Grunig, 1992). Failure to do so may lead to stakeholders either pressuring the organisation to change or opposing it, which can result in added costs and risks to policies and decision-making (Grunig, 1992). Furthermore, the organisation must behave in a socially responsible manner by first assessing its environment to identify the groups of people who could be impacted by decisions or who may be urging the organisation to take action on issues that matter to them (Grunig, 1992). Flynn (2006 :191-201) stresses the dual role of a PR professional, calling them both practitioners and scholars. Both roles are crucial for organisational success and community service. Subsequently, organisations must engage in two-way communication with these groups and this means considering both the organisation's interests and the interests of these groups to cultivate strong, enduring relationships (Grunig, 1992). As Dozier and Ehling (1992:78) point out, "communication managers are more effective when they bring two parties closer together rather than trying to completely shift one party to the perspective of the other." In other words, Excellence Theory suggests that achieving, understanding, and facilitating dialogue produces much more favourable outcomes for the organisation than relying solely on persuasive strategies (Dozier and Ehling, 1992: 78).

Grunig (1992) developed a comprehensive theory with four key levels that encompass 14 characteristics: Programme, Departmental, Organisational, and Economic. At the programme level, the strategic management of public relations for effectiveness is emphasised (Schmitz, 2014). Public relations is managed as part of a bigger plan (Grunig *et al.*, 2002). The departmental level stresses the need for public relations to operate independently from marketing, focusing on two-way symmetric communication and suggesting a separate department with practitioners reporting to senior management (Schmitz, 2014). In addition to this, public relations is separate from marketing and a senior public relations leader manages the role (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:58–59). Public relations

professionals are well trained and professional. Lastly, equal opportunities are given to men and women in this field (Grunig *et al.*, 2002: 58–59). The organisational level promotes conditions fostering two-way communication, a participative culture, and an organic organizational structure (Schmitz, 2014). Here, the head of public relations has influence within the organisation's leadership. The organisational culture encourages participation rather than being authoritarian (Grunig *et al.*, 2002: 58–59). There is a balanced system of internal communication and the organisational structure is flexible and not rigid (Grunig *et al.*, 2002). The organisation operates in a complex, ever-changing environment with pressure from issue groups and more (Grunig *et al.*, 2002). Finally, the economic level highlights the tangible benefits of communication, such as reduced regulatory and litigation costs, along with improved employee job satisfaction (Schmitz, 2014).

For this study, this multifaceted theory provides a highly appropriate strategic framework for communication practitioners. According to this theory, the PR function must be responsible for conducting the research and maintenance of linkages needed with strategic publics operating in the organisation's environment (Zimanyi & Makamani, 2020:2). As the first grand theory of public relations, this theory brings together all factors that bring value to organisational efficiency, from organisational functions and structures, environments, culture, society, individual skills, knowledge, strategy and power (Grunig & Gruing, 2008). According to Grunig & Grunig (2008), ethics and ethical behaviour must be included in the public relations as a generic principle.

Dozier and Grunig (1992: 327–347) have noted that to excel in public relations, practitioners must operate under specific conditions that require approval from the organisation's dominant coalition. One of the most crucial conditions is the ability to have some level of autonomy (Dozier & Grunig, 1992: 327–347). In fact, PR practitioners should strive for more autonomy in their work, as decisions made by owners with limited PR knowledge can hinder effective PR practice (Browning, 2010:16). In the Excellence Theory, both autonomy and interdependence are essential for organisational success, as complete autonomy is nearly impossible to attain (Browning, 2010 :16).

Excellence Theory states that public relations practitioners must be involved in the strategic management of the organisation (Sriramesh, 2003:10). For public relations work to be excellent, it must be in direct connection to the leadership of the organisation (Sriramesh, 2003 : 10). This is valuable because they are able to provide an informed and ethical influence on matters that affect key relationships that enhance organisational efficiency (Sriramesh, 2003:10). In South Africa, the degree to which businesses presently recognise the power of incorporating public

relations practitioners into their executive management remains unclear (Engelbrecht & Ferreira, 2022: 50-64). Furthermore, this precarious position has not been researched well according to archives such as The National Research Foundation (NRF) (Engelbrecht & Ferreira, 2022 : 50-64).

3.2.1 Excellence Theory and Strategic Communication Management.

Researchers have made significant updates four years after the initial publication of the Excellence Study, highlighting the pivotal role of ethics and integrity as standalone pillars of excellence (Vercic, Grunig, & Grunig, 1996: 31-65; Browning, 2008:101). Bowen's research further echoes the emphasis on ethics in organisational decision-making, showing that organisations achieving high levels of success actively integrated ethics into their practices through planning, training, and fostering an ethical organisational culture (Bowen, 2004b). Introducing ethics as a characteristic of public relations emphasised the value of rational ethical analysis as a key driver of organisational effectiveness (Bowen, 2004b)

The Excellence Study has also vividly demonstrated the value of public relations in the quality of relationships it fosters between organisations and their stakeholders through active participation in strategic planning (Vercic, Grunig, & Grunig, 1996: 31-65) . By becoming an integral part of an organisation's dominant coalition, public relations ensures the incorporation of public concerns and voices in the decision-making process (Vercic, Grunig, & Grunig, 1996: 31-65). Consequently, it facilitates symmetrical communication with stakeholders, ultimately elevating the standard of relationship building. As Plowman (2005) argues, public relations transcends its role as a mere communication function when it aids organisations in relationship building.

The Excellence Theory has also expanded research on relationship management by highlighting how public relations plays a vital role in cultivating high-quality connections with different audiences (Hung-Baesecke *et al.*, 2021). The emphasis on relationship management was sparked by a research call for greater attention to public relationships, leading to significant research development (Hung-Baesecke *et al.*, 2021: 313-334). Notably, Huang and Zhang (2013:313-334) analysed 40 articles from major public relations journals published between 2000 and 2011, affirming the enduring value of public relations in building and maintaining these valuable relationships (Huang & Zhang, 2013:313-334).

The Excellence Theory provides a standard format for ethical public relations and collaboration to occur within broader social democratic structures (Gower, 2006 :178). Consequently, there can be a sufficient launching pad for public relations to move into its management posture, decision-making position, and it offers an open door to newer research that focuses on globalisation, integration, power and democracy (Gower, 2006:178). Therefore, this moves the theory of excellence forward, practically and academically towards the facilitation of SCM.

3.2.2 Critiques of the Excellence Theory

Researchers have critiqued the Excellence Theory, suggesting it oversimplifies human behaviour (Edwards & Hodges, 2001:7-30). Leitch and Neilson (2004:25) have also expressed concerns that the theory portrays "publics" as fixed entities, whereas they argue publics form dynamically through conversations that they engage in. Additionally, L'Etang and Pieczka (1996:14-34), in his book on systems theory and public relations, points out that the two-way symmetrical aspect of the Excellence Theory is overly idealized, criticizing its underlying research agenda. Moreover, the rise of social media has made it increasingly easy for people to connect and talk about organisations online. According to Philips and Young (2009:179), these online conversations among regular people have a big impact on how stakeholders and the public view organisations. In fact, called for a "new PR", stating that traditional communication models do not work well in the digital age because they don't account for how stakeholders influence each other's opinions about an organisation and its competitors (Philips & Young, 2009:179). However, Grunig J. (2009) disagreed with this view, arguing that organisations have limited time and resources and cannot communicate with everyone. Instead, he notes that organisations should participate in discussions among their existing groups of people who are interested in them (Grunig, 2009). This way, they can listen to what their stakeholders say and use that information to make decisions (Grunig, 2009). He concludes that digital technology actually makes it easier to apply the Excellence Theory, suggesting that this theory is still relevant today (Grunig, 2009).

Excellence Theory offers substantial insights into the field of Strategic Communication Management, regardless of its stated shortcomings. The measurement of excellence in organisations depends on factors like industry, size, environment, goals, and evaluation methods, whether through satisfying strategic constituencies or achieving specific objectives (Arcos, 2016:264). Communication plays a crucial role in an organisation's overall strategy, requiring analysis and insights to plan programmes and prevent conflict to protect the organisation and its stakeholders (Arcos, 2016:264). Excellence theory has generic principles that have been applied universally to

transcend organisation types, sizes, industries, and cultural contexts (Anani-Bossman, 2021:75). For the scope of this study, the Excellence Theory serves as a valuable framework to enhance our understanding of Strategic Communication Management in the context of black female-owned businesses.

3.3 Systems Theory

In the realm of public relations and communications, Systems Theory has played a significant role as a dominant theoretical framework. According to Jansen van Vuuren (2002:107), the Systems Theory emerged in the 1960s as an alternative to structural functionalism and stems from the physical sciences. Since then, a number of researchers have offered varying definitions of how the theory functions. Skyttner (1996:16) defines 'systems' in this context as sets of interacting elements forming an integrated whole designed to perform functions. This theory views society as a complex system comprising interdependent parts (Ritzer, 1992). The Systems Theory analysis entities not in isolation but in relation to a larger system, recognising their interconnectedness and the influence of external factors and environments (Turner, 1991). To comprehend a social system fully, one must examine its internal relationships, how it processes inputs, and the resulting outputs (Ritzer, 1992). This approach facilitates a holistic understanding of the subject matter, enabling the development of effective strategies and adaptation in dynamic communication processes, while further highlighting that mechanical, organic, and social systems, including organisations, are defined by their interactions with their environment (Gregory, 1999).

By adopting the Systems Theory, professionals should view their organisation as an integral component of a larger interconnected system, reliant on stakeholders and publics for success (Stewart & Paine, 2011). Through this approach, communication teams can align their strategies to effectively address the needs and desires of the organisation in which they operate. The Systems Theory suggests that it is important for practitioners to consider the complex and dynamic variables that co-exist in the organisation's environment that could affect its ethical inputs and outputs (Stewart & Paine, 2011). If the system is unbalanced within its environment, it must find ways to adjust to those challenges or find ways to control the environmental variables that cause the disequilibrium (Bivins, 1992). Public relations practitioners can use the Systems Theory to set up a feedback function for the people they are targeting (Schmitz, 2012:56). In turn, this helps the organisation stay in tune with their publics and stakeholders and helps the organisation create well-thought-out, consistent strategies (Schmitz, 2012:56).

The systems approach to SCM regards organisations as interconnected systems with sub-systems working together to achieve a common goal (Schmitz, 2012). This perspective emphasises a cohesive collection of resources, activities, and information within a business (Schmitz, 2012). This research employs the Systems Theory approach because black women who own businesses in South Africa operate within diverse and intricate systems. By developing and comprehending Strategic Communication Management, these businesses can effectively address some of the imbalances in these systems, ultimately fulfilling the organisations' goals and answering the call to create a better society and a business in general.

The Systems Theory tells us that in any system, like an organisation, components are arranged in a hierarchy (Musheke, & Phiri, 2021). These components rely on each other; if one part does not work, it affects the others. At a business level, organisations and stakeholders in the environment depend on each other too (Musheke, & Phiri, 2021). How an organisation communicates affects how well it performs (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). The population ecology model and the resource dependence model are the two common approaches of Systems Theory (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). They both agree that the environment is important for organisations' decisions and structures, but they differ on how they view the role of the environment (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). The population ecology model focuses on how organisations are chosen and shaped by their environment, like nature selecting its best fit (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). On the other hand, the resource dependence model looks at how organisations actively choose and adjust to their environment (Musheke, & Phiri, 2021). The key ideas highlighted here are selection and adaptation. Depending on the selected approach, a business is able to evaluate how the environment affects its performance.

3.3.1 System Theory and Strategic Communication Management

The Systems Theory offers a number of valuable perspectives on strategic communication, shedding light on the distinction between open and closed systems (Jones, 2005). Open systems, as noted by Pavlik (1987), are those capable of adapting to and interacting with their environment, while closed systems function in isolation without any external interaction (Jones *et al.*, 2005: 361). Embracing the open-system perspective requires a keen interest in understanding the properties of the environment itself, including its degree of turbulence or stability (Jones *et al.*, 2005:361). These environmental attributes dictate the nature of relationships an organisation can establish with external systems and the relationships essential for the organisation's survival (Jones *et al.*, 2005: 361).

Furthermore, Heath (1990) says that when information flows freely in and out of an organisational system, it enables systems to adapt to one another and attain their desired goals. Taking a systems perspective illuminates the vital role of strategic communication in creating collaboration between the organisation and its environment, as well as among the various functional components within the organisation, often referred to as subsystems (Kreps, 1990).

Spicer (1997) also supports the idea that organisational public relations practitioners should serve as boundary spanners, facilitating communication in the broader organisational environment. He asserts that this boundary-spanning concept drew inspiration from open systems theory (Spicer, 1997). From a public relations standpoint, Spicer shows the importance of understanding and considering the knowledge, perceptions, historical context, and expectations of various stakeholders in the environment when examining the communication process between the organisation and its external counterparts (Jones, 2005). Every system aims for survival and defines an ideal goal state (Schmitz, 2012). These goal states can vary, with feedback playing a crucial role (Schmitz, 2012). Feedback, whether negative (indicating deviation) or positive (indicating amplification), reflects an organisation's sensitivity to its environment (Cutlip *et al.*, 1994). This self-regulatory process is known as cybernetics, which involves five key elements: goal establishment, related outputs, feedback, comparing the system state to the goal, and determining corrective actions (Cutlip *et al.*, 1994). Simply put, the core function of public relations is to operate in an open system, facilitating organisations as they adapt to environmental changes. This involves the continuous monitoring and interpretation of various environmental factors, including public opinion, social dynamics, political shifts, economic conditions, cultural trends, technological advancements, and the natural environment (Schmitz, 2012). Public relations professionals must also collaborate with top management to develop strategic plans for organisational change and responsiveness (Cutlip *et al.*, 1994).

3.3.2 Critiques of the Systems Theory

As mentioned previously, Systems Theory often highlights the maintenance and importance of equilibrium and stability within social systems. However, it tends to overlook the critical notion that disruptions may actually serve as essential precursors to positive change (Hutchinson and Otedal, 2014). This means it focuses too much on the change itself rather than addressing people's real problems (Hutchinson and Otedal, 2014). Further than this, researchers have critiqued the theory stating that it tries to do too much to be everything for everyone (Hutchinson

and Otedal, 2014). The theory also falls short in clarifying how communication contributes to shifting perceptions or fostering a deeper understanding, which is a crucial role within the realm of public relations (Jones, 2005). Moreover, according to Spicer (1997), the ideal two-way symmetrical model endorsed by the Systems Theory overlooks issues of organisational power. By prioritising an organisation's needs over the entire system, it can maintain an organisation-centric approach (Spicer, 1997). Lastly, the Systems Theory has been noted to prioritise organisational homeostasis. This reflects an organisation-centred approach where the organisation's needs take precedence over the requirements of the entire systemic structure, which can be problematic when addressing issues of organisational power (Jones, 2005). According to Robbins, this approach ultimately focuses on the methods needed for the organisations to be effective, rather than the overall effectiveness of the business itself (Robbins, 1990).

3.4 Chapter Summary

In this study, the Excellence Theory emphasized the importance of Strategic Communication Management in the maintenance of good relationships to boost the organisation's reputation values and profitability. It also outlined the fundamentals of what makes public relations excellent, fundamentals that are important in evaluating how black female-owned businesses should operate to achieve this. The Systems Theory is explored because it values context, environment and feedback, which are important in this study. As mentioned before, black females have had a unique experience within the South African context and this is even more complex in the business realm.

The combination of these two theories is valuable because it touches holistically on the backgrounds of the participants, while highlighting the elements needed to achieve effective communication tactics for business success. However, there are limitations in using these theories. The Excellence Theory has been described as archaic, and unable to fully consider the dynamics of communication from a digital perspective. Systems Theory has an organisation-centred gaze that often tries to do everything at once, making its focus too broad and too interconnected to solidify a constant point of study. Another notable criticism of the Systems Theory and Excellence Theory is that they revolve around an apparent oversight of the business owner's agency in navigating life's complexities. These theories are often critiqued for their concentration on organisations as autonomous entities, detached from the individuals who actually occupy the space. Consequently, these theories are criticised

for not addressing competently how individuals within these systems can influence and shape the trajectories of elements within these systems, whether supporting or countering their development.

Taking into account the advantages and disadvantages of both these theories, this chapter showcased how they are still adequate and relevant in addressing the problem being explored. There is a lack of research concerning how black female-led businesses use SCM in South Africa and understanding this context using these concepts is beneficial because it elevates the level of exploration of how communication fully unfolds within their businesses.

To conclude, this chapter explored two key theoretical frameworks: the Excellence Theory and the Systems Theory. Both theories offer valuable insights but require an honest consideration of their limitations within the ever-evolving communication landscape. This research believes that these theories are well suited for the study at hand because they offer a valuable framework for the use of SCM in black female-owned businesses. This is particularly relevant since these theories align with the research questions. This chapter discussed SCM as a crucial tool for organisational effectiveness, while facilitating the study of the environment black female-business owners exist within in Gauteng.

Chapter 4

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methods used to gather and analyse the data collected for the study. As mentioned prior, this research aims to explore the use of Strategic Communication Management in black female-owned businesses in Gauteng. This section first describes the research design and methodology used in this dissertation. It later displays the sample size, unit of analysis, prevention of bias and overall approach of the study in order to highlight the variables at play during the data collection process. Furthermore, it highlights the coding efforts used to interpret data and delves into delineation and limitations of the study to help outline how the researcher has worked around these elements. The core aim of this section is to clarify how the study has been set for an adequate and accurate understanding of the outcomes, which are identified later.

4.2 Research design and methodology

4.2.1 Methodology

A qualitative research design has been selected for this research study because of its exploratory and analytic nature (Aspers Corte, 2019: 139). This philosophical paradigm is subjective and embraces the view that reality exists only as the individual experiences it, which is beneficial when evaluating the unique experience of each business owner in this study (Aspers & Corte 2019:139).

Qualitative research is often used to examine how societies understand the world and all the conventions at play during the investigative period (Gill, Stewart, Treasure *et al.*, 2008:292). Qualitative research is understood to be flexible and explorative because it allows the author to adapt and change the type of data being gathered progressively, offering room for a much deeper understanding of what is being explored and what can be achieved during the study (Gill, Stewart, Treasure *et al.*, 2008: 292). Historically, qualitative research, rooted in ethnographic research, has a long-standing presence within the realm of basic and applied research (Mohajan, 2018:24).

This design has been selected because it invites participants to express and articulate their own perspectives, facilitating an exploration of themes that is guided by the researcher's unique interpretive lenses (Sutton & Austin, 2015: 227). Choosing a qualitative research design for this study on the use of SCM in black female-owned business is beneficial because unlike quantitative research, this research aims to discover in-depth, underlying insights from participants (Sutton & Austin, 2015:227). A quantitative research design is centred around the idea that the phenomenon being explored can be measured (Watson, 2015:44). This kind of design is interested in measurable data usually done through experimentation, surveys, and statistics that are later quantified to describe certain patterns and frequencies (Watson, 2015:44). This would not be suitable for this research because the data collected is much more interested in the thoughts and perspectives of the participants involved.

Qualitative research dives into the nuances of how participants interact with SCM by prioritising a comprehensive understanding of the unique perspectives and experiences from this demographic (Sutton & Austin, 2015:228). The data is collected through 45-minute interviews and showcases a deep exploration of ideas and emotions tied to communication practices within this specific entrepreneurial environment. The researcher is often the principal instrument for data gathering, analysis, and interpretation in qualitative research (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2008:1-21). The familiarity the researcher had with the research question allowed for a first-party data gathering process that presented the highest potential to align the data with the generation of significant themes and insights (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2008:1-21). The researcher asked the questions, observed the responses, took notes, and analysed the transcripts, which makes them the most relied upon source for accurate representation of data in the study.

Furthermore, a qualitative approach is best suited for this dissertation because it lays a substantive foundation for future studies or potential qualitative enquiries regarding the subject matter (Rahman, 2016: 104). A qualitative research design aligns well with this study's objectives because it permits a complex exploration of the relationship between Strategic Communication Management and the experiences of black female business owners. Thus, this enhances our understanding of the elements or factors influencing their businesses in this context.

This study adopts an explanatory, interpretivist research approach. As Akhtar (2016:78) notes, explanatory research helps to explain the researcher's findings and ideas to efficiently expand a concept that has not had sufficient exploration and interpretation. The exploration of ideas in this study gives rise to an open and unbiased discovery of data without the influence of predetermined assumptions (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014:178). Using an exploratory approach creates an environment that favours the emergence of new concepts and one that encourages a certain

level of openness to original possibilities (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014:178). Enhancing research flexibility is one of the most valuable elements of this study and this is facilitated by the exploration of diverse communication factors to effectively identify optimal solutions for black female-owned businesses (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014:228). Given the limited research of Strategic Communication Management and its particular use in black female-owned businesses in South Africa, exploratory research assists the researcher in contributing valuable reflections that will build upon existing knowledge surrounding this topic and this group of participants (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014:228).

According to Wills (2007), interpretivism is engaged by those interested in ‘understanding a particular context’, which in this case is the use of SCM in black female-owned business in Gauteng, South Africa. Myers (2008) notes how interpretivism embraces the assertion that our perception of reality is influenced by social constructs such as language, shared semiotics and consciousness. Therefore, interpretivism is a notable approach in this study because it attempts to make “sense” of the reality of black female business owners through the perspective that their reality is considerably connected to their specific social contexts (Myers, 2008). This stops the study from reaching a rigid outcome, instead it opens it up to a much more intricate subjective conclusion, which in turn makes the study much more open to differing beliefs that could be found in the data (Myers, 2008).

The researcher chose a qualitative approach because it offers a platform for deeper probing of the participants' subjective experiences by truly stepping into their realities. This is a significant way to collect information that responds to the identified objectives (Sutton & Austin, 2015: 227).

4.2.2 Research Design

The research design for this study involves utilising a case study approach. A case study is often difficult to define because of its complex nature, however, one consolidated understanding notes that it involves an in-depth examination of a person, unit or group to draw a wide-ranging outcome (Thomas, 2011: 21-35). A case study focuses on a specific unit and uses various methods to conduct a comprehensive analysis (Thomas, 2011:21-35). It does not just analyse the given cases, the case study method assists in defining and exploring factors within that particular unit (Thomas, 2011:21-35). Moreover, the case study method investigates real-life systems, acquiring detailed data from distinct sources to illustrate depictions and themes (Creswell, 2013). The case study approach is

often used within qualitative research due to its usefulness in bringing forth a profound in-depth understanding of a specific issue, event or phenomenon in its most authentic context (Crowe *et al.*, 2011). This method has been selected for this study because it aligns with the research objectives of this qualitative study of black female business owners in Gauteng.

This research employs a case study because it is effective in generating a high-quality analysis, providing richer and more extensive insights (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991). A case study approach holds significant importance in this research because of its ability to focus on the examination of a unit (Rebolj, 2013:31). This can be an individual, organisation, community or a group. It offers researchers a chance to cultivate a holistic perspective which enables the description, understanding and explanation of a research problem (Rebolj, 2013:31). Compared to a multiple case study, a case study approach is beneficial when it comes to understanding the relationship between Strategic Communication Management and black female business owners. According to Siggelkow (2007), a multiple case study is often used when the research involves more than one case. The multiple case study approach aims to discover the similarities and differences between various cases across wide-ranging situations (Siggelkow, 2007). However, the case study approach aligns well with this research study because it assists the researcher unpack diverse perspectives to comprehend the intricacies and distinctiveness of a specific project, policy, institution or a system in a real life context. It provides the researcher with a more meticulous exploration because it is not a standalone method (Stake, 2005: 443). It is a design framework that can incorporate diverse research methods which can be analytical, holistic, hermeneutic, cultural or mixed methods (Stake, 2005: 443).

While the case study methodology offers flexibility in research, challenges in the approach include the lack of valid generalisability (Lucas, Fleming & Bhosale, 2018 :218). Critics of the approach state that the uniqueness of each case may go unnoticed, based on the researchers search for generalisations that aren't truly based on evidence (Lucas, Fleming & Bhosale, 2018 :218). This will be mitigated against this in the study using clear case boundaries, transparent delineations and reliable analytical techniques will be made apparent (Lucas, Fleming & Bhosale, 2018, :218).

Scholars such as Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2009) advocate for the use of both qualitative methods and case study approaches to build new information from specific cases. A case study approach has been selected for this study because it aids the alignment of the research questions with the objectives to fit the specific case being studied (Gustafsson, 2017). It also empowers the researcher to consider the theoretical relationships within the data,

while allowing an exploration into newer relationships (Gustafsson, 2017). The chosen research design concentrates on exploring the social, economic, political, and geographic phenomena relevant to this specific sub-group (Creswell *et.al.*, 2007). A case study approach is the best-suited research method for this dissertation because it helps the researcher add new information to a largely under researched sector through its compelling insights (Lucas, Fleming & Bhosale, 2018:219). It created a space for the researcher to remain responsive to any emerging areas of exploration in the study, adding another layer of the robustness of the research (Lucas, Fleming & Bhosale, 2018 :219). The establishment of a well-researched link between theory (SCM) and the communication practices of black female business owners is essential to creating improved business tactics for this group. The aim is to gain insight into the communicative activities of black female business owners to help them achieve business growth. As mentioned prior, black female entrepreneurs may hold the keys to unlocking the South African economy.

4.3 Data Collection

4.3.1 Interviews

One of the tools used in qualitative research is the interview (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). The researcher has used interviews because they work well as an adequate framework to document, challenge, scrutinise and reinforce practices and standards within qualitative research (Jamshed, 2014).

As a tool, an interview aims to uncover and discover the experience, perspectives, opinions and motivations of participants (Jamshed, 2014). The usefulness of using interviews in qualitative research lies heavily on the dynamic between the interviewer and the participant (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). It is also important to establish a foundation of trust before the interviewer navigates a questionnaire to facilitate an in-depth discussion or conversation with an interviewee (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The researcher used interviews as a tool within the study based on the research question, which is to understand the use of theory (SCM) within a community of black female business owners. The researcher wanted to acquire comprehensive data that offers relevant, first-hand insights into the intricacies of the aforementioned phenomena to contribute to the development of literature for future studies (Babbie, 2008).

The researcher chose the interviewees based on criteria related to the research question to gain thorough understanding of their specific perspectives. Qualitative research interviews vary in their degree of structure, ranging from unstructured, semi-structured to structured (Babbie, 2008:338). Unstructured interviews are usually applied to extensive fieldwork, participants can speak freely without any influence on their feedback (Babbie, 2008:338). When interviews are defined as semi-structured they must strike a balance, using a combination of questions and topics that can be asked to enhance flexibility while maintaining the interview's objective (Frances, Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2009). Structured interviews are centred around a predetermined set of questions, within a specific sequence to provide data credibility but by limiting the responsiveness of participants (Frances, Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2009).

In this study, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews. The use of semi-structured questions within this dissertation is valuable because it suits the one-to-one interactions with participants (Mashuri *et al.*, 2022). Questions were open ended to allow participants the chance to use their own language and ideas when responding. It fostered a purposeful but informal conversation between the researcher and the interviewee, allowing dynamic and less scripted interactions to occur (Mashuri *et al.*, 2022). This semi-structured fluid approach was significant in exploring the research question holistically. This is evident in the discovery of both predictable and unpredictable outcomes within the study; these outcomes are unpacked during analysis. To provide an in-text citation for this book, you would typically cite the authors and the year of publication (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003: 38). Some questions were asked in third person to enable participants to project their feelings onto others, promoting more truthful and representative answers (Panucci & Wilkins, 2010). Some questions were direct to adequately assess the current state of SCM in the owner's daily lives. The wording of the questions was semi-structured but carefully crafted to ensure engagement and obtain the most natural results. The interview questions were ordered appropriately, progressing from specific to general as the interview proceeded. Questions that could influence participants toward expected outcomes were avoided throughout the interview process. Interview questions have been included in the appendix for context.

Interviews can occur through different platforms, including telephone, in-person or video conferencing (Creswell and Creswell, 2018 :169). The rise of the digital age has made online tools such as Zoom efficient tools for research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:169). Platforms such as Zoom offer a less expensive alternative to face-to-face interviews, and provide the researcher with much needed flexibility during the data collection process to ensure effective data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:169). The interviewer recorded the video sessions and

informed the interviewees of this practice prior to the interview, assuring them of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses both in written format and throughout the interview itself .

The interviews for this study were conducted in a single interview occasion on different dates, with an intentional focus on discussing the usage of SCM in the participants' businesses and operations. Initial communication with the interviewees occurred through email and WhatsApp. After securing confirmation from the interviewees and ensuring ethical clearance, the interviews were scheduled through the Calendly app and were scheduled to last between 45 minutes to 1 hour. All the interviews in the study were all conducted and recorded online using the Zoom video calling platform.

The interview method offers several advantages and disadvantages. Firstly, it is a simple method to conduct and provides quick and reliable results for the study. Secondly, it allows the researcher to obtain original and specific data tailored to the study's focus (Mashuri *et al.*, 2022). Semi- structured interview styles typically provide flexible and adaptable environments that can embrace non-verbal cues and enhance detailed data effortlessly (Mashuri *et al.*, 2022). Conversely, an interview has its disadvantages. Participants may vary in their delivery or perceptiveness, which may impact securing consistent responses. It is important that interview questions are carefully worded to minimise any response bias. The transcription process can be labour intensive and time consuming.

To ensure these disadvantages were alleviated, the researcher used a variety of techniques. To start, the researcher posed open-ended questions to mitigate against yes or no answers (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). All questions had a neutral tone, the researcher removed misleading language that could influence responses (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The researcher also addressed one question at a time, this was to ensure all questions were asked, and clarified the interviewer's question when needed (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The researcher was also mindful of questions that asked “why” to reduce or limit any responses that come across as defensive, as noted “why” questions may prompt unwarranted responses from respondents (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

Semi-structured interviews are a popular data collection method within qualitative research. This is largely because of their flexibility in collecting open-ended data, allowing participants to express themselves efficiently during the interview process. The researcher finds this method beneficial to studying the use of SCM in black-owned female business contexts. It helps the researcher dive deeply into the personal thoughts and feelings towards the issue being

explored. This adaptable interview protocol complements the research aims and objectives by identifying and describing significant views to the facilitation of a reasonable outcome for this study.

4.3.2 Theoretical implications within the interview/questionnaire guide

In his work, Maxwell (2013) describes the theoretical framework as a tentative theory that guides the study's design. It aids the researcher to refine goals, formulate research questions and make methodological decisions (Maxwell, 2013). In this dissertation, the researcher uses the Excellence Theory and Systems Theory to formulate interview questions in an effort to enhance the research process. The Excellence Team, as mentioned in the first paragraph of Chapter 3 have been hailed for conducting an extensive literature review on the traits of an outstanding public relations function. The team subsequently crafted a number of questionnaires pertaining to the variables relevant to the Excellence theory. The team developed two significant questions related to this research: First, "How does public relations enhance organisational effectiveness and what is its economic value? Second, "What characteristics of a public relations function are most likely to contribute to organisational effectiveness? (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002 : 4-5)" Questions with a similar structure have been included to connect and organise data in a way that responds to the research questions outlined in Chapter 1. In a similar vein this research explores how black female owners approach and include SCM to positively affect business growth. On the other hand, Systems theory shapes the interview questions by encouraging an understanding of businesses as dynamic entities that adapt continuously to environmental conditions (Lai & Lin, 2017:6). This theory influences the questionnaire through its emphasis of open systems, that help in providing insights into complex organisational operations and subsystems (Lai & Lin, 2017:6). The interview questionnaire includes questions that address adaptability and focus on the intricate nature of black-owned female businesses. Identifying the aspects of SCM that work best requires an examination of the interplay of organisational elements, external influences and the adaptability of the chosen communication strategies.

The dynamic nature of these interactions adds depth to the research question, "What aspects of SCM works best for these businesses?" outlined in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. The combination of these theories enriched the research, offering a comprehensive framework to not only guide the questionnaire used during interviews but to further explore the SCM practices of black owned businesses in Gauteng (see Appendix B). Furthermore, the piloting of the questionnaire was not done during this study and can be noted as a shortcoming. However, while

there are a number of advantages to piloting a questionnaire which include guiding the planning of larger efficacy studies and examining the feasibility of proposed approaches, the researcher does not think this shortcoming invalidates the study (Leon et al., 2011:626). The researcher does not consider this a large scale study, which is a typical trait of piloting, as it involves only 7 participants. Pilot studies often lack the precision for estimating effect sizes due to the inherent imprecision of smaller sample data (Leon et al., 2011:626).

4.4 Participant Sourcing

4.4.1 Population

The selected population for this sample are black female business owners in Gauteng, South Africa. For the purpose of this study, it is imperative to first define a female business owner, and the crucial role they play within the entrepreneurial landscape. According to Iyiola and Azuh (2014:2327), female business owners can be characterised as women who are actively participating and pursuing financial return through business enterprises to support themselves or their communities. These women initiate, organise, own and take risks on building and managing organisations and their operations (Iyiola and Azuh, 2014:2327). Chinomona and Maziriri (2015:839) elaborate further on this definition, stating that a woman business owner is a female leader that initiates a new venture, while grasping all the associated risks and managing the day-to-day activities of the organisation.

Academics like Davidson and Burke (2011) stress the scarcity of research on female owned businesses, and the challenges that they face. This is even more pertinent for black female business owners operating within the South African landscape. However, Mustapha and Punitha (2016:225) have recorded the consistent challenges this demographic faces, such as a lack of resources, financial and networks, lack of business education, maintenance of the work-life balance and the constraints of operating within a male dominated sector. Nkwabi *et al.* (2020:86) further stress how female business owners also grapple with gender and race discrimination when it comes to getting access to government or corporate support. Overall, the researcher defines the black female business owner as a woman who demonstrates a tenacity for hard work and resilience in managing a business while overcoming the stated challenges for her success (Nkwabi *et al.*, 2020:86).

According to Nxopo (2014), black female business owners play a pivotal role in alleviating poverty and unemployment in South Africa, emphasising the importance of studying their contributions and developments across all sectors of the economy. Black female business owners are increasingly appreciated for this role, however, more can be done to cement their role in socioeconomic development in South Africa (Meyer, 2009). The selection of participants for this study was based on the above-mentioned definitions. The researcher's study is guided by the need to significantly enhance the representation of diverse and vibrant business ownership within the Gauteng economic landscape (Meyer, 2009).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the selected area of research is Gauteng, which is ironically the smallest province in South Africa (Mulaudzi & Schachtebeck, 2022). Even so, Gauteng is dubbed as the country's economic hub, leading in sectors such as finance, manufacturing, transportation, technology and telecommunications (Kgagara, 2011). Choosing Gauteng as a location for the study of black businesses owned by women is compelling because of its economic relevance and the variety of business sectors that exist in the province. While there is limited interest in researching female entrepreneurship in South Africa, a deep exploration of black female business owners and their relationship with Strategic Communication Management is significantly crucial because it brings a new perspective to an often underexplored group operating in "the city of gold" (Mulaudzi & Schachtebeck, 2022). Determining the sample size for research remains a heavily debated topic with no clear guidelines for researchers, creating challenges for less experienced researchers (Bekele & Ago, 2022: 48). Scholars seek numerical guidelines but no universal rule exists (Bekele & Ago, 2022:48). Despite this, a number of researchers have agreed on a suitable sample size within qualitative studies, particularly those exploring through a phenomenological lens. Creswell (1998:187) recommends using 6-25 interviews and Guest et al (2006:78) suggest 6-12 interviews are adequate for a qualitative project. Morse (1994 : 147-149) further cements this by noting that a minimum of 6 participants would suffice within phenomenological studies. The decision on determining a sample size in qualitative research is also dependent on factors like homogeneity, study scope, topic nature, data quality, research design, research question data, time constraints , available resources and the researcher's experience (Subedi, 2021:3). The researcher chose 9 participants for this study based on this theoretical evidence to achieve substantial variations based on the experiences of black-owned owned businesses in Gauteng.

This study selected business owners in the following industries: beauty and cosmetology, carpentry, interior design, fashion, hair, HR, PR, and personal care. Exploring a wide range of black female businesses helps the researcher illuminate how different sectors value and use SCM, thus prompting new ways of thinking about these businesses.

It provides the data with a healthy variety of backgrounds and experiences, which aids its quest for an in-depth exploration of rich data insights. Selecting a broader range of business sectors increases the likelihood of capturing the rich experiences of black female business owners in Gauteng. The study was conducted with this thinking in mind as it better aligns with the research objectives of this dissertation.

4.4.2 Sampling Strategy ; Purposive Sampling

Sampling is a valuable part of qualitative research design because it is concerned with the selection of a segment of a defined population under a specific study (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013). A typical sampling unit involves individuals, groups, events, places and time (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013). Determining a sample unit demands careful consideration because it significantly impacts the representativeness and generalisability of the selected population of study (Borodovsky, 2022:5). Careful sampling has been used in this study to increase the reliability and credibility of the qualitative findings (Patton, 1990). These findings rely heavily on the information given by the selected participants, which in this case are nine black female business owners in South Africa. These participants were chosen purposefully to provide sufficient validity to the research objectives of this dissertation.

Purposive sampling often involves identifying and selecting individuals who possess a particularly profound understanding of the phenomenon of interest at hand, narrowing down the data to meet research objectives (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green *et al.*, 2013:2). It is a method where researchers intentionally select samples that are informative with a deep understanding of the unique phenomena (Shaheen *et al.*, 2016:28). Researchers select samples based on elements such as, age, gender, experience, role or an ideology (Shaheen *et al.*, 2016:28). Purposive sampling has a number of sampling strategies. For this study, the chosen strategy is typical case sampling as it best aligns with the research objectives. The objective is to describe whether the use of SCM is typical of the subgroup under investigation (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green *et al.*, 2013:3).

Purposive sampling includes various research designs. Typical case sampling is a type of purposive technique that illustrates the normality of units without supporting the generalizability of a population (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015:533). Typical case sampling is often employed when data is to be collected on general terms (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015:533). It is a method that includes choosing individuals who are regarded as typical for a particular community or circumstance. Its objective is to avoid the rejection of knowledge or research outcomes connected to potentially

deviant cases (Johnson & Christensen, 2004:247). This approach aims to avoid making generalised statements about the experiences of all participants, instead it focuses on providing a normal portrayal of the phenomenon being explored (Johnson & Christensen, 2004:247). The researcher uses this to construct a profile that determines what is the average or normal use of SCM in black owned female businesses.

Purposive sampling principles are essential in studying the use of Strategic Communication Management in black female-led businesses for a number of reasons. Firstly, the selection of the sample is reasonably connected to the conceptual framework suggested within the research objectives (Cash et al., 2022:12). Secondly, these principles enable the formation of comprehensive datasets relevant to the subject material (Elo *et al.*, 2014:4). Thirdly, the facilitation of credible and meaningful assumptions is demonstrated clearly through purposive sampling (Elo *et al.*, 2014:4). These principles speak to the credibility of this study because it seeks to uncover the rich experiences of the participants selected. Purposive sampling is most effective because the study includes the method, and there is meaningful background information that establishes a nuanced sample that aligns with the study's goals and objectives.

Even with all these advantages, one of the primary disadvantages of purposive sampling is its exposure to selection bias (Andrade, 2021:88-86). This is because researchers select participants based on their own criteria and judgements. The researcher of this study selected some of the participants in the study based on the researcher's existing networks. To mitigate against this bias, the researcher employed diverse question types that framed the questionnaire in a non-suggestive way to confirm open-ended participant engagement and consistent results. Further than that, the researcher maintained the anonymity of participants and avoided any pre-study of their businesses to prevent any influences that could form a biased interpretation of the responses.

Purposive sampling is used in this study because it is intentional and ensures that specific cases related to the research question are included in the final research sample (Campbel *et al.*, 2020). These participants have distinct or unique perspectives on the study's ideas, and align with the study's aims and objectives (Campbell *et. al.*, 2020). Furthermore, purposive sampling is the most practical and efficient when exploring smaller groups, and this best suits the study because it consists of a small group of nine participants. The primary benefit of this method is that it helps safeguard the quality of the analysis because the data is controllable and the sampling method is flexible and cost effective.

Choosing to use purposive sampling within this study has a number of advantages and disadvantages (Ames, Glenton & Lewin, 2019:3). It allowed the researcher to gather a wider geographical representation for the study and examine businesses that were closely aligned with the research questions while sticking to a manageable dataset (Ames, Glenton & Lewin, 2019:3). In this study, purposive sampling efficiently incorporates participants with rich experiences and aligns them with substantial and relevant theory to respond to the question being explored. However, there is still a chance that the researcher has missed out on samples that perhaps did not meet the given criteria but could have added overall value and depth of the exploration (Ames, Glenton & Lewin, 2019:3).

Gauteng boasts a much larger group of black female-led businesses for participant recruitment compared to other provinces, as highlighted in a number of studies (Jacobs & Du Plessis, 2016). With Gauteng dubbed as the primary and highly urbanised economic hub of South Africa, it is a significant location for the country's growth and development (Jacobs, David & Wyk, 2023). Recognising the pivotal role of economic development in the betterment of life and the reduction of poverty in developing nations, this research method aligns with the fundamental objectives needed to study SCM in this context. Through the exploration of the factors that foster business development through communication, the study contributes to enhancing livelihoods and economic well-being, particularly through the sustainability of black female-led businesses (Jacobs, David & Wyk, 2023).

In this study, the sample strategy only takes into consideration black female business owners operating in Gauteng, South Africa. It recognises the unique stories and growth paths of black female business owners in this context, and uses this approach to capture sufficiently the richness of their lived experiences in Gauteng (Henry & Foss, 2015).

4.4.2 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis is the predominant boundary under examination within a research project (Kumar, 2018). Unit types include people, newspapers, locations and groups (Kumar, 2018). The unit of analysis for this research was the communication practices within black-owned female-led businesses in Gauteng, South Africa. Nine (9) candidates were sourced through the researcher's own network and LinkedIn as mentioned in Chapter 1 of this study. According to studies, compared to other provinces, Gauteng has a much larger population of female-led businesses available for participant recruitment (Mudara and Mafini, 2022). The selection of Gauteng as the area of

study was motivated by the notable concentration and presence of black business owners in Gauteng (Mudara and Mafini, 2022). The unit of analysis was also motivated by the limited research and study of the communication tactics of black-owned female businesses in South Africa as a whole would be (Meyer & Klonaridis, 2020:1309). To move academia forward and understand black female-owned businesses, the unit of analysis was also determined to add new information to the research of black female business owners in Gauteng.

4.4.3 Sampling size

The sample size in qualitative research speaks to the adequateness of the chosen sample suitable for the studies goals. It is an essential step in determining the study's soundness and quality (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). This is even more pertinent if the attainment of valid in-depth outcomes is the key requirement for the research process (Mwita, 2022:417).

In order to adequately describe the phenomenon of interest and effectively address the research question, it is important for the sample size to be sufficient (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). The selection of interviewees in this dissertation was based on their ability to provide relevant information within the desired timeframe (Patton, 2002). This means that they were selected to provide a sample that showcases a complex and nuanced understanding of the diverse challenges and opportunities experienced by black female business owners in the business landscape (Vasileiou *et al.*, 2018:3). The importance of a sample size, particularly when focusing on black female-led businesses, is in its alignment with the depth that is required for case-oriented analysis (Vasileiou *et al.*, 2018:3). As mentioned before, qualitative samples are usually small and selected for their ability to relay textured data, which is important for the phenomena being studied (Daniela, Rusu Mocanasu, 2020:181). This approach ensures that the selected sample provides a complex understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities faced by black female entrepreneurs in the business landscape..

The sample size for this study explored nine black female business owners who were interviewed to gather a sufficient set of responses related to the aims and objectives stated in Chapter 1 of this research. Selecting nine participants for this study was motivated by the intention to maintain a useful context for analysis. While the researcher understands that there is no one-size-fits-all rule to choosing a certain number of participants, a moderately expansive unit of analysis such as this was determined to strike an adequate balance of responses

(Roller, 2019). The researcher's goal was to abstain from overly broad units that might provide unclear results or substantially smaller units that might limit capturing meaningful outcomes for the study.

The criteria also included owners who had operated a business for a minimum of three years in the Gauteng region. According to Robehmed (2013), start-ups outgrow their initial status after three years of operation. Businesses operating over the three-year mark are often aligned with various progress indicators, including workplace expansion, a growing workforce, and prolonged profitability (Robehmed, 2013). These businesses covered various industries as mentioned prior, from service providers to those manufacturing products. Moreover, participants in the study were within the age range of 25 to 65. This is so that the data reflects a diverse range of perspectives from a wide-ranging group, providing an adequately rich collection of data. To validate this information, a preliminary business introduction was recorded to assess and verify the aforementioned criteria before conducting the interview.

The sample size is centred on data gathered in Gauteng, an area known as the most highly urbanised economic hub in South Africa (Jacobs, David & Wyk, 2023). The reason for choosing Gauteng as the sample location is because a larger number of businesses and government-owned business workshops exist in Gauteng and the researcher is interested in using this study to enrich these workshops (Jacobs, David & Wyk, 2023).

4.4 Researcher positionality and mitigation of bias

Positionality is shaped by the identity dynamics that influence how researchers engage with participants (Secules *et al.*, 2021). It speaks to the way researchers emphasise their collection of data objectively (Secules *et al.*, 2021). Research on positionality indicates how notions such as environment, culture and power can obscure depictions of their subjects (Secules *et al.*, 2021). Positionality is a necessary operational task that involves identifying and scrutinising the researcher's own perspectives and biases during the research process. These concepts are paramount in enhancing and producing research integrity (Bolzalek & Zembylas, 2017). Scholars in this field have identified a number of practices to help researchers mitigate against any predetermined sentiments that could affect the quality of the research process (Bolzalek and Zembylas, 2017). Practices include bracketing and diffraction and may allow researchers to prompt ethical measures when engaging with participants and research material (Bolzalek & Zembylas, 2017).

Researchers must have a solid grasp of their positionality when engaging in a qualitative study (Holmes, 2020). The awareness of their own and others' positioning contributes to the rigour of their research process (Holmes, 2020). Reflexivity is one of the ways new researchers articulate their positions because it helps them pay attention to the fluid nature of their own advantages and disadvantages in data gathering and interpretation (Jamieson, Pownall, & Govaart, 2022). Moreover, this reflective stance is vital in the inclusion of rigour and carefulness in qualitative research.

4.4.1 Positionality Statement

Before the researcher presents the outcomes of this research and after some self-reflection, the researcher acknowledges her position as a learned black woman in South Africa, Gauteng. The researcher is not a businesswoman much like her participants but she is aware of her advocacy for more black female visibility in general, and in the case of business and ownership. As an educated black woman, the researcher is interested in the expressions used to bring to light the realities of the participants being explored. Moreover, the researcher is intrigued by the growth of black women in light of the history they have had to overcome in South Africa, having been affected by this history herself. The researcher is aware that her positionality may affect her research process and acknowledges her ethnic background as a factor that could have influenced this project to some extent. The researcher also recognises having prior knowledge of some of the participants involved in the study, having interacted with them through prior work engagements, this could impact the study because of the perceptions she may have formed during those interactions.

Through the incorporation of the above-mentioned positionality statement, the researcher mitigates against the bias by promoting and reflecting transparently on her personal context, identity and proximity to the participants. She actively avoids making any assumptions or relying on preconceived ideas about the participants. This has been done to emphasise a sense of accountability and objectivity within her qualitative research.

The researcher understands that bias can occur in the planning, data collection, analysis and publication phase of a large research group and will therefore conduct a thorough self-reflective process in the interpretation of results to help minimise saturation (Panucci & Wilkins, 2010).

4.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of systematically gleaning, describing, cleaning and interpreting data using analytical techniques (Lester, Cho, & Lochmiller, 2020). It works to educe valuable information and insights from datasets to help guide a researcher's objectives (Lester, Cho, & Lochmiller, 2020). Data can be gathered from a large number of sources, including interviews, observations, newspapers and focus groups (Lester, Cho, & Lochmiller, 2020). Once the data has been captured, it is then transcribed according to its relevance of the analysis (Wong, 2008). The next step includes coding the transcripts, which means connecting the data to theoretical notions (Wong, 2008).

The coding process facilitates the organisation of raw data, which enables the extraction and evaluation of all evidence related to the phenomenon being studied (Wong, 2008). Codes are then formed, grouped, summarised and categorised through the process of abstraction and synthesis. The results of this process describe and outline the patterns being explored (Anderson, 2010:2). Qualitative research delves into the values, meanings, beliefs and experiences in order to enhance the comprehension of the phenomenon that is being examined (Anderson, 2010:2). The analysis of data is an essential system to help researchers unearth what is essential from the raw data (Anderson, 2010:2).

Qualitative data analysis types included flexible approaches such as grounded theory, action research, narrative research, thematic analysis, ethnography and phenomenological research and narrative research and many more (Teherani *et al.*, 2015). Each of these methods help the researcher develop theories to recognise and understand contexts and cultures through rigorous engagement with human experiences (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio :2019). This study uses thematic analysis to analyse data gathered from nine participants to provide a nuanced comprehension of the use of SCM in black female-owned businesses. This process will be further explored in the following section.

4.5.1 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a particularly useful and accessible method for those starting out in the analysis of qualitative data and interview material as it involves coding data to develop and interpret themes in the data (Dawadi, 2020:63). Thematic analysis in research offers a dynamic method that allows the researcher to unpack new and fresh insights and themes from the data (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). It works as an accessible option for researchers

who are new to qualitative data analysis, making it a valuable and usable choice (Thomas & Harden, 2008). This study was centred on identifying and understanding important themes within the use of Strategic Communication Management and its relationship to the growth of black female-led businesses in South Africa. The intention is to provide a high-level analysis with a wide-angle view (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013:400).

Thematic analysis comes with a few drawbacks, one being that it can lead to a large number of conclusions and interpretations of the data, which can make it difficult to know which themes to highlight (Alhojailan, 2012:40). Furthermore, thematic analysis looks for patterns across interviews, therefore, it may disregard distinctive occurrences in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Researchers have also noted how this approach limits the incorporation of a theoretical framework, which could decrease the interpretive depth of the study (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

This study uses abduction in an effort to find a middle part between inductive and deductive (Thompson, 2022). Inductive reasoning involves the practice of developing a theory from unique observations to broad generalisations. Deductive reasoning aims to test an existing theory instead (Conaty, 2021:3). It is not uncommon to employ a combination of these approaches when exploring a case (Conaty, 2021:3). Abduction is different from deductive and inductive methods because it does not determine a theory beforehand and it does not rely on empirical data analysis (Mohammadian, 2021: 5). Abduction is involved with examining facts to indicate the probable validity of a new theory or the development of a functioning one (Douven, 2021). In qualitative research, abduction seeks to infer or magnify a theory by reflecting on the collected data to generate a hypothesis (Douven, 2021). It may be with or without a primary theoretical frame (Douven, 2021). The abduction approach essentially starts with empirical outcomes while recognising the role of theory established prior to the study (Pillai *et al.*, 2021).

This study sought to discover the most logical and practical use of SCM in black female-led businesses using empirical data and existing theoretical knowledge. When using abductive thematic analysis, themes are merged with multiple codes to deduce phenomena. This study organises codes that can ultimately tell the data's narrative (Thompson, 2022:1413). The study carried out semi-structured interviews using an abductive approach, which stimulated dialogue and insight in conjunction with SCM (Reichertz, 2004). The flexibility of the approach presented by an interview guide encouraged a natural flow of information, allowing the emergence of themes during the analysis (Reichertz, 2004). The theoretical framework employed in the questionnaire followed an incremental design, which began with asking the participants casually about their businesses and their current

understanding of the value communication and later became more detailed as the interview progressed in a way that spoke to SCM (Reichertz, 2004). To help mitigate against bias measures such as self-awareness and vigilance, an extensive interview selection was employed (Conaty, 2021:4). All the measures used supported a conversational abductive approach that prioritised exploring emergent themes while leveraging on the researcher's understanding of the sector and group being explored (Conaty, 2021:4).

In order to use the thematic abductive approach successfully, this study adopts an eight-step process as determined by Thompson (2022:1412). This step-by-step process goes against the "anything goes" critique of thematic analysis as it provides the researcher with a clear and structured analysis process. It guides the study as opposed to applying a universal method that often partners literature with raw data to find and explain patterns. The eight-step process will be used as follows:

4.5.2 Thematic abductive approach : 8 step process

Step 1: Transcription and Familiarisation

Interviews were conducted on Zoom between 15 September and 20 October 2023. The interviews were semi-structured. They were recorded and subsequently transcribed after the data was collected. Thorough note taking was employed during the interview and during the review interview sessions after. This was done to capture interviewees' tone, reflective pauses, and emotional emphasis and aided the researcher's quest for deep and analytical assessment. The tool used to transcribe was an AI tool called Descript. Descript was used because it produces AI transcriptions in a cost effective way with a quick turnaround, especially when it comes to large volumes of data. This tool minimised the time spent transcribing the data, which was crucial to finishing the study (Guest *et al.*, 2012). After that was done, the researcher read through the scripts a few times and familiarised herself with the accompanying audio. This step helped the researcher identify areas that have more depth, which later translated to a clearer collection of codes aligned with the research question (Guest *et al.*, 2012). AI transcriptions are not always correct and may inaccurately transcribe the data, changing the meaning of the text. To mitigate against this, the researcher reviewed the AI transcription alongside the audio and video recordings to enhance the accuracy of the scripts (McMullin, 2023:145).

Step 2: Coding

Coding is an important component within data collection, analysis and ultimately theory generation in qualitative research (Williams & Moser, 2019). It employs the continuous interaction between the researcher and data through clearly defined vigorous techniques to uphold a reliable standard for validity and accuracy (Williams & Moser, 2019). Coding underscores the interconnected nature of joint data collection, meticulous coding and analysis in the theory generation process (McMullin, 2023:145). Once the transcripts were ready and familiar to the researcher, the coding began and it started by colour coordinating codes based on the objectives and aims of the study (Saldaña, 2015:9). This was done by reading the transcripts and meticulously reviewing each interview, highlighting anything that was deemed relevant or important to the study's objective. Data was later gathered and grouped based on the selected codes to provide a consolidated reading, emphasising repetitive points and similar meanings within the data (Mackey & Gass, 2011:222). The coding process condenses the data by grouping and colour-coordinating sentences into codes based on similar characteristics (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017:94).

Practically, the researcher used open coding to identify key nodes. The researcher organised similar words and concept indicators from participant responses to initial thematic domains. Open coding is defined as a systematic consolidation of thematic fragments and concepts identified in data analysis (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017:335). Choosing what data should be captured and how it must be displayed is an important element of the research design. Open coding offers a flexible approach that frequently presents a format that aligns with the procedure employed within data collection (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019:7). The study did not employ pre-established codes, instead they were created and adjusted during the research process. Once preliminary ideas for codes were established, the researcher subsequently compared, discussed, and refined codes through a manual process (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017:335). While having data analytical software is beneficial, it is not mandatory for every study (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019:7).

The researcher focused on a few key areas related to the research question, which were about how black female business owners employ Strategic Communication Management. These areas included relationship building, online presence, client-centred communication, tailoring communication, personal branding, adapting to the environment and marketing techniques, experimentation with marketing channels to overcome challenges, community

engagement and maintaining consistency, and adaptability within their business communications tactics. These primary coding nodes emerged within the initial review of the interview data and complemented insights that were present in the literature selected for the study.

The coding nodes were later condensed in an effort to start creating a workable codebook analysis and theme formulation. A longer outline of the codes can be found in the appendix at the end of the study. The researcher employed an ongoing journey to identify themes that exist within and outside of these nodes, which led to iterative reviews and adjustments. The process was centred on securing dynamic movement between the theory and data with reflection, note-taking and code identification related to the objectives of the study (Saldaña, 2015 :9).

Step 3: Codebook

A codebook is a detailed instrument that provides the researcher with structured information about the contents of raw data (Roberts *et al.*, 2019). It is a self-explanatory way to identify each relevant element and variable located in data collection (Roberts *et al.*, 2019). A codebook structurally contains details such as the study's titles, code label, code definition, description, exclusions and example (quotes) (Roberts *et al.*, 2019). Codebook development, application and testing are rarely sufficiently detailed in qualitative research (Ritchie *et al.*, 2022:4). The use of a codebook in this research demonstrates rigour by providing a transparent trail of evidence for the study's accuracy and reliability (Ritchie *et al.*, 2022:4). The codebook is developed through an abductive approach, enabling a more efficient analysis of raw data in the reading of codes and outcomes (Vila-Henninger *et al.*, 2022:13).

Creating a codebook was helpful because it served as a reference for consistency during the study (Guest *et al.*, 2012). It offers viable and in-depth context for data post analysis review. The codebook process aided the research by enabling the creation of short and concise labels for each code while maintaining closeness to the data to minimise and prevent conceptual leaps (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011:141). The codebook was created manually and analysed using pen and paper, thus providing a tactile experience when coding the data further, and provided suitable groundwork for the researcher to begin developing themes (see Appendix C).

Step 4: Development of Themes

A theme is a fundamental element in reporting results within qualitative research. It is a condensation that imparts meaning and identity to a repeated experience and its diverse manifestations (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000:351). The development of themes within this research involves unpacking relationships within codes to better understand and explain the data's story (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000:351). Once the codes effectively showcase a phenomenon, they become a theme (Campbell *et al.*, 2021:2017). The researcher used themes that captured important sections of the data concerning the study's goal and purpose, emphasising patterns that occur within the dataset (Campbell *et al.*, 2021:2017). Furthermore, finding dissimilar and similar codes in the coding process helped to decrease redundancy, which strengthens the identification of themes (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020:2). Once the themes were listed by the researcher, a thorough reflection of their broader narratives and how they connect to theory began.

Identification of Themes

The themes identified were selected through the examination of recurring codes, patterns, sayings and concepts related to the objectives and goals of this study. They represent a mix of overarching ideas, challenges, practices and perspectives that helped to form a comprehensive picture of the use of SCM in black owned female businesses in Gauteng, South Africa. An abductive approach was used in synthesizing the participants' narratives to uncover underlying patterns and practices.

4.5.3 Table 2 : Themes

Column1	Column2	Column3	Column4
Theme	Codes	Example Quotes	Research Objectives
Informal communication	- Establishing Connections and Building Trust	Participant 1: "When I started my business I was just winging it when it came to communications, I was sending people emails for business and was relying on word of mouth..."	Sub-Objective 1: To understand how black female-led businesses interact with, access, and use SCM.

	- Adapting to Changes	Participant 4: "I quickly saw there was no 360 communication, everything was being communicated from one side. I could see how much it frustrated the staff members, but they adapted to it..."	
Top-down communication	- The use of Social Media	Participant 2: "How we deal with stakeholders for instance, employees or suppliers is through email and WhatsApp and when it comes to customers we have customer feedback forms..."	Sub-Objective 1: To understand how black female-led businesses interact with, access, and use SCM.
			Sub-Objective 2: To examine both common and less common SCM practices currently employed by black female-led businesses.
Empathetic communication	- Employee Engagement	Participant 5: "There's one thing in common between the supplier and the client. That is me. I am the middle girl. When I communicate with both of them, it is at the level of relationship building..."	Sub-Objective 3: To broaden the research scope regarding SCM's positive impact on these businesses within the context of South Africa.

Structured communication	- Practical hands-on experience	Participant 1: "I don't have a structured way of communication but I know there must be a plan in place... But right now there is no standard process."	Sub-Objective 1: To understand how black female-led businesses interact with, access, and use SCM.
			Sub-Objective 2: To examine both common and less common SCM practices currently employed by black female-led businesses.
	- Establishing Connections and Building Trust	Participant 6: "I am a guru of strategic communication... For me, communication is professionalism, I always want to make sure my story is clear and that there is a structure to that..."	Sub-Objective 1: To understand how black female-led businesses interact with, access, and use SCM.
	- Brand development and reputation	Participant 3: "You know, you just try hard to get your voice out there but it's like no one is listening... While I knew marketing was an important part of my business, communication is not a focus..."	
	- Adapting to Changes	Participant 4: "When I bought a business through this franchise, I quickly saw there was no 360 communication, everything was being communicated from one side. I could see how frustrating it was..."	

	- Practical hands-on experience	Participant 5: "You give briefs, that's how one should start the communication process. You brief the client, then you brief the supplier and then you keep tabs on it in the best way possible."	Sub-Objective 2: To examine both common and less common SCM practices currently employed by black female-led businesses.
	- Expertise and specialization	Participant 6: "In my PR business, we often talk about "poops and balloons"... Strategic Communication is beyond that, you need to look at the multifaceted state of the business and respond efficiently..."	
Foundational skills for communication	- Establishing Connections and Building Trust	Participant 9: "How people see your business, the image of your business and how you communicate with your client is key... I always want to make sure my story is clear and that there is a structure to that."	Sub-Objective 1: To understand how black female-led businesses interact with, access, and use SCM.
	- Brand development and reputation	Participant 2: "Now I am looking towards that because I believe we have to expand as a business. But for now a whole lot of things come from me, which is not really optimal..."	Sub-Objective 2: To examine both common and less common SCM practices currently employed by black female-led businesses.
	- Adapting to Changes	Participant 8: "I think the business itself has its own personality. As opposed to speaking to the business, I let the business speak to me, this means I listened to my clients..."	

	- Practical hands-on experience	Participant 7: "I don't have a communication plan. I have a general strategy for my business, where I think it should go and where I want to be... I don't even know how to have a grasp on communication..."	Sub-Objective 2: To examine both common and less common SCM practices currently employed by black female-led businesses.
	- Expertise and specialization	Participant 6: "In all of the PR facilitators I have hired I have seen that actually very few of them know what they are actually doing... PR people are often locked into an authoritative bias..."	
Specialist communication	- Client-centred communication	Participant 1: I do wish that my business could be in a position to afford those kinds of services.	Sub-Objective 2: To examine both common and less common SCM practices currently employed by black female-led businesses.
	- Expertise and specialization	Participant 6: "In all of the PR facilitators I have hired I have seen that actually very few of them know what they are actually doing... PR people are often locked into an authoritative bias..."	
	- Brand development and reputation	Participant 9: "In my business we literally do so many things. So at first I was just posting this and that and when someone would go to my social media page..."	

			Sub-Objective 2: To examine both common and less common SCM practices currently employed by black female-led businesses.
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Step 5: Theorising

Coding is a process of locating and unpacking data to create or relate to a general theory (Khokhar *et al.*, 2020). Theorisation within a thematic abductive analysis begins with a comprehensive reading of the data to help recognise terms and phrases that outline hidden meanings within the codes (Khokhar *et al.*, 2020). In this research, the formulation of the theory is based on the identified themes. This process was the next step used by the researcher to clearly generate a connection that confirms and incorporates how these key themes address research motives within the study (Atkinson *et al.*, 2003). The theorising element of the abductive thematic analysis describes the relationship between the themes and the entire dataset (Atkinson *et al.*, 2003). This is the point where the researcher saw where the evident theory required some refinement, change or adaptation with another abstract idea to better accommodate the data (Thompson, 2022). Ultimately, this step of the process advanced the study’s overall theoretical development (Thompson, 2022). The themes in Table 2 above and their relation to existing new theories will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

Step 6: Comparison of Data Sets

The sixth step includes a comparative analysis of participant groups, which will help provide more in-depth insights (Verdinelli & Scagnoli, 2013:360). While quantification is not mandatory in this kind of research, this step looks into comparing data to measure code frequencies and participant co-occurrence (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Once the research has been theorised, Guest *et al.* (2012:162-163) suggests the comparison of data sets by asking the following questions. Firstly, which themes are present in one dataset but not in another? Secondly, if there is a theme that is identified in both groups, is the expression of that theme nuanced (Guest *et al.*, 2012:162-163)? Once the code book was reviewed and the coded data examined, the researcher went on to assess if specific codes are

more common in a specific grouping (Guest *et al.*, 2012:162-163). Comparisons within this research were made based on age, business sector, and education.

Step 7: Data Display

Frequently, when an abductive data analysis is being employed, there are academic concerns about whether the researcher has expanded beyond the data and if the theoretical contributions legitimately reflect the raw data (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:8). Including a thematic data display distinguishes the connection between theoretical themes, empirical data, and codes (Herzog, Handke, & Hitters, 2019:154). This will be beneficial because it helps enhance transparency by visually bonding the data codes to themes (Herzog, Handke, & Hitters, 2019:154). Data displays explicitly present the data codes influencing each theme (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:8). Therefore, this expands the themes and highlights their existence within the participant responses, creating a link to the literature concerned with the study's objectives. In this way, the researcher hopes to enhance transparency in the research findings and showcase how outcomes were met and how the research questions have been addressed (Malički *et al.*, 2023).

Step 8: Writing Up

Writing up the findings featured a theoretical explanation that showed the connection between each theme and empirical data. Furthermore, this step was accompanied by quotations from the data sets collected, this helped to demonstrate a strong and compelling abstraction to support the themes (Lochmiller, 2021:2036). Once the researcher completed all the steps, the findings with headings for each theme were organised. With every theme, a theoretical explanation linking theory to empirical data is outlined. Quotations are included from the raw data to provide evidence for the theorisation. The usage of quotations was important to add in the research because it helped support themes that may have been unclear to the reviewer. Moreover, the addition of quotations particularly within this kind of research amplifies trustworthiness because the authentic nature of the raw data demonstrates a level of reflexivity through the participants' expression of feelings and opinions (Guest *et al.*, 2012). The write up included a detailed description of the context, participants and their social environments. Information like this was added to ensure that the fieldwork setting and participants mirror their own circumstances, situations and context. The researcher added this information to determine the likelihood of the recommendations being successful or effective in their situation.

Following the prescribed steps was crucial because it delved into the application of the Strategic Communication Management among black female-owned businesses. The thematic abductive approach shed light on how these businesses were influenced by their environment, gender, finances and education in accessing SCM for their businesses.

4.8 Ethical considerations

According to Dooly, Moore, and Vallejo (2017), ethical considerations frequently arise when conducting qualitative research with human subjects. Thus, the researcher must carefully assess any potential negative impacts the study may have on the participants' consent and their overall wellbeing during data collection. Ethical considerations serve as a guiding principle in qualitative research because they uphold the rights, well-being and dignity of the participants (Allmark *et al.*, 2009:50). Researchers are tasked with striking a balance between qualitative inquiry and ethical responsibility (Allmark *et al.*, 2009;50).

Informed consent was an important part of the interview process (Allmark *et al.*, 2009:49). Interviews could not be carried out if participants did not know the purpose, benefits, risks and funding behind the study before they agreed to take part in the interviews (Saunders *et al.*, 2015: 619). These were clearly communicated during the initial phase of finding participants. Participants were later selected based on their consent to the interview.

In this study, the researcher made sure all participants knew that they could freely opt in or opt out from the interview process (Sanjari *et al.*, 2014:3). This was cemented by an ethics agreement between the participant and interviewee, which signified the fact that voluntary consent was understood and agreed upon. Initially, ten participants were interviewed for the study but a week after interviews were halted one participant decided to opt out. The researcher respected this, removed all information pertaining to the interview, and deleted the recorded interview from the hard drive. Therefore, this reduced the study to 9 participants instead of 10.

In order to maintain an ethical research process, the researcher must also maintain the integrity of the research by safeguarding human rights and dignity of all participants, failure to do this could decrease the overall credibility of the research (Sanjari *et al.*, 2014;3). Human rights and the safeguarding of dignity was maintained during the study through the avoidance of any harmful questions or personal material during the interview process (Orb *et al.*,

2000:95). This includes any social, physical and psychological harm that could be inflicted during the pursuit of valuable insights (Orb et al., 2000:95). The researcher did not ask any questions that could infringe on the participants in any negative way. There were no questions that were deemed harmful by the participants. All interviews followed an open-ended structure that only addressed the research at hand.

The primary concern for participants in qualitative research revolves around the risk of identifiability, which can expose them to potential harm, particularly in terms of the views expressed during interviews affecting their businesses and personal lives negatively. Emphasizing this point is crucial as it underscores the need for meticulous consideration of participant protection measures. Subsequently, incorporating relevant literature on the broader risks faced by individuals participating in research interviews strengthens the argument. This sets the stage for the existing section addressing anonymization and other protective measures, illustrating a comprehensive approach to mitigate potential risks and uphold the well-being of research participants (Dooly, Moore, & Vallejo, 2017:351).

Confidentiality was paramount in this study because the interview dealt with the businesses of the participants involved (Dooly, Moore, & Vallejo, 2017:351). To safeguard the intellectual property, the businesses and maintain confidentiality, the researcher will employ relevant pseudonyms for participants and ensure their anonymisation in the best possible manner (Dooly, Moore, & Vallejo, 2017:352). No identifiable data will be included in the study explicitly pertaining to the names of these women and intricacies of their business practices. This is in line with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), which is a critical framework for ethical research (Adams *et al.*, 2021:1). It governs the collection, processing and storage of personal information, highlighting the need for Codes of Conduct in specific sectors (Adams *et al.*, 2021:1). This act ensures prior authorization for research activities, regulating the processing of personal information and data collection (Adams *et al.*, 2021: 1). The objective was to emphasise the safeguarding of the participants' business and personal interest.

The researcher made sure that there was no misconduct in the writing of the dissertation (Allmark *et al.*, 2009:52). The study is free of plagiarism and has been referenced adequately to ensure that no data has been falsified or manipulated to suit the research (Sinha *et al.*, 2009:485). The recordings of the interviews are accessible if needed and can be checked to verify validity. Furthermore, the researcher actively collaborated and discussed research plans with colleagues and supervisors. These discussions served to enhance the researcher's ethical sensibilities and aid in making informed decisions throughout the research process.

All relevant information, including the project purpose, data collection and processing methods, have been provided to reviewers and ethical consultants at the researcher's institution at CPUT. Contact details of the researcher, supervisors, and respective ethical consultants are readily available to address any ethical concerns that may arise. Informed consent procedures were meticulously followed, with participants being fully informed about risks, compensation, methodology, and data treatment. Individuals have the option to withdraw their consent, and their data may be excluded or anonymised to maintain confidentiality. Data processing methods, such as anonymization, face blurring, and removal of identifying information, have clearly been explained to participants (Bos, 2020:38) Access to processed data requires appropriate permission, ensuring data security and privacy. In the case of international research collaborations in the future, the researcher will adhere to the ethics protocols of all involved countries, with each country's researcher taking responsibility for compliance, if necessary. Moreover, the researcher has adhered to the ethical guidelines and practices maintained by CPUT. The researcher upholds the integrity of the qualitative research process, protecting the well-being of the participants, and ensuring the responsible and ethical use of the data.

4.9.Chapter Summary

The research methodology section outlined this study's approach. The study took on qualitative methods to explore the use of Strategic Communication Methods in black female-owned businesses. It employed an explanatory interpretivism approach and conducts multiple case studies with 10 participants selected through purposive sampling. Ethical considerations were cardinal in the gathering of data, which included in-depth interviews with women in Gauteng, South Africa. Thematic abductive analysis was used to help deduce relevant revelations. This process was further cemented through an eight-step process to ensure systematic and transparent results. This research will contribute valuable information on the use of SCM in black female-owned businesses, with the intention to benefit the overall PR and communications industry in South Africa and the growth of these business owners in general. The following section brings forward the research findings of the study and follows the objectives highlighted in Chapter 1. The purpose of the next section is to answer the identified research questions, looking at how SCM has been used as a communication tool that could help black female-led businesses conduct their businesses effectively.

Chapter 5

Findings

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher presents and showcases the findings that have been analysed from the interview transcripts. As stated in Chapter 1 the intention of the study was to answer a number of questions. These are : In what ways do black female business owners approach SCM in their businesses? How do back female business owners include SCM in their business to affect their business growth positively? What aspects of SCM work best for these businesses? The data was acquired through 45- 60 min interviews with 9 participants. This chapter will select quotes from the participants that speak to each research question, and will later relate each finding with the theme that they best represent. All references to data or quotes from individual participants' transcripts are indicated by listing the participant and the number. Table 3 provides an overview of which participants provided information regarding the various research themes, showing the degree of each theme's saturation in the data.

5.2 Table 3: Participant Map

Identification	Age range	Business sector	Geography	Year Business started	Citizenship	Education	Funding
Participant 1	40 – 45	HR Consulting	Gauteng	2016	South African	BA in Communication and Industrial Psychology	Self-Funded
Participant 2	30-40	Interior Design	Gauteng	2016	South African	BTech in Biomedical Technology	Self-Funded

Participant 3	50-55	Fashion Design	Gauteng	2016	South African	No Tertiary Education	Self-Funded
Participant 4	40-45	Beauty / massage	Gauteng	2019	South African	General BA	Self-Funded
Participant 5	45-50	Interior Design	Gauteng	2018	South African	No Tertiary Education	Self-Funded
Participant 6	50-55	PR Firm Consulting	Gauteng	2016	South African	MBA	Self-Funded
Participant 7	45-50	Carpentry	Gauteng	2017	South African	Engineering Degree	Self-Funded
Participant 8	30-35	Manufacturing and Beauty	Gauteng	2016	South African	BA in French and Psychology	Self-Funded
Participant 9	25-30	Beauty / Cosmetology	Gauteng	2019	South African	Beauty Technology Degree	CSI Funding

5.3 Theme identification and description

Valued for its flexibility and user- friendly nature, thematic analysis is considered a foundational approach (Nowell,*et al.*, 2017). It serves as a basis for a more rigorous qualitative research analysis procedure within this study. The themes that have been identified in this study include, informal communication practices, top down communication, empathetic communication , structured communication, relational communication, specialised

communication, foundational skills for communication. These themes have been identified based on the research objectives of this study and will be described and then linked to evidence found in the data.

5.2. In what ways do black female business owners approach SCM in their businesses?

During the interview process, questions were posed to determine how black female business owners approach (SCM) when implementing communication strategies and practices. The purpose of this inquiry, in light of the research topic, was to explore how business owners advance towards their goals using their current processes around communication both internally and externally. Some respondents said they had no approach to SCM, while others were of the view that SCM was important but did not know how to practically apply it to their businesses.

Participant 1 showcases a lack of a clear approach to strategic communication management in her business. She later acknowledged the necessity of having a plan but still maintains that she has no structure or strategy in place.

Participant 1

“I don’t have a structured way of communication but I know there must be a plan in place... But right now there is no standard process.”

This is a little different with a participant who understands the importance of strategy but does not apply it to her communication efforts. Participant 2 does highlight being attentive to new trends within her environment, which showcases her openness and adaptability to change but her approach doesn't seem to be structured or based on any concept or skill.

Participant 2:

“Obviously we have a strategy, you know, like a company strategy, operating strategy, marketing strategy. And, um, obviously it's about, okay, maybe can we do it this way? And, um, we've seen this, people are doing this. Can

we try to do it that way? Um, maybe there's new trends or, you know, new, new things that are happening. Obviously, I don't have my eyes everywhere”

Building relationships with the client is brought forward by Participant 6. This participant is the first to highlight a SCM approach that helps inform how she communicates with her stakeholders. She further highlights how the implementation of this approach helps her business in the long term.

Participant 6

“It firstly has to do with building relationships with the client. It's not just about making a profit. It's about ensuring that it becomes sustainable.”

Participants 3 and 4 have contradicting responses to how they approach SCM in their business with participant 3 speaking of having no strategy formulation because she does not work with professionals, equating strategy with a more “sophisticated” business. Participant 4 stands at the opposite of this spectrum noting that “ there is no business without strategic communication management , however she elaborates on this strategy as a “direction” for your business and does not articulate how this “direction “ is acted out practically.

The issue of the value and the importance of SCM is understood by the majority of participants, however the practical approach is often unsubstantiated, unstructured and misunderstood. Multiple participants highlight the role of building relationships as central in their business and attach this to their level of strategic thinking. Some participants do not know what SCM is and this presents a lack of knowledge and skill that affects how they would approach SCM practically in their businesses. One participant speaks to a strategic communication as a bartering system, stating that her approach is centred on “ serving your staff so they can serve your clients. So that is very important because it avoids things like stealing your products and your equipment.” This approach showcases a subversion to the term strategy as highlighted in Chapter 2. However, a number of participants do use strategic communication principles in their business, noting practices of this approach through strengths like relationship building, listening to their stakeholders, using social media to adapt to the digital age, navigating through limitations through feedback portals and two-way structure within their communication efforts.

Participants in this study showcase a general lack of a structured communication plan or have a vague understanding of the role of SCM in their businesses. This speaks to the criticism highlighted by Steyn and Puth (2000) regarding the deficiencies in strategic performance, thinking and behaviour in business communication. Participants' statements indicate a need for critical thinking skills within their communication efforts. Several participants exhibit a lack of clear comprehension of what strategic communication as a concept entails. The general perspective of the term "strategy" has been noted as a challenge especially in the realm of communication management as per (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014). The participants struggle with articulating how they approach, develop and implement communication strategies and this suggests a significant gap in effective communication practices. The lack of clear strategies may hinder their ability to engage with stakeholders and manage communication effectively. While there are indications of SCM principals that are used to improve general business operations as stated prior, these principles are often isolated and do not provide a holistic concept on how these principles work together for the best possible practice of SCM. This research question relates to the themes of informal communication, structured communication and relational communication. Overall there seems to be a lack of understanding, education and resources among black owned female businesses and this poses challenges in acquiring and implementing basic strategic communication management skills in these organisations. However core codes like navigating challenges through online systems, building strong relationships and having a client centred approach are noted as important to communication effectiveness. Ultimately these challenges emphasise potential areas for growth and improvement, and highlight the need for education and skill development in SCM for these businesses (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014). This data will be further elaborated on in Chapter 6.

5.3 How do black female business owners include SCM in their business to affect their business growth positively?

During the research interviews, inquiries aimed to uncover the strategies employed by black female business owners include SCM in their businesses to affect their business growth positively. The objective of this exploration, was to delve into how these owners align their communication goals with their business goals to create positive

impact. While some respondents expressed social media as a way of growing their businesses, others favoured top down approach that ensure that they are at the centre of the communication process.

Participant 4 highlights the power of social media as an instrument that affects her businesses growth positively. She notes that promoting her business across multiple social media platforms is crucial for her survival. She states that social media provides a space for her stakeholders to contact her organisations and stresses that without this feedback she would have no businesses. As mentioned in Chapter 2 using social media to adapt to changing environments is one of the ways organisations can include strategy to stay relevant and maintain a favourable reputation.

Participant 4 “Social media is very powerful these days and easily accessible and it's actually even cheaper. We are promoting our business across all the social networks: WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. I need to have a platform for everyone to know that they are welcome to come to me because I know that without them, I don't have a business and without me, they don't have a job. We need each other, and I had to make sure that everything that I used to communicate was very clear to everyone.”

Participant 5 echoes these statements and notes that because of the COVID pandemic, which changed the business environment considerably, she adapted using digital platforms and has been selling her products on a social media platform known as WhatsApp. Thus using these platforms to strategically impact her business positively. She also speaks to the importance of visuals when working within the creative environment alluding to her brand development work which has also impacted how she attracts her target audience.

Participant 5: “Thanks to COVID right now, um, this year I've been selling mostly on WhatsApp. That's fantastic. I promise you. Social media has, uh, worked in our favour as the creatives because you, as an admin person, cannot post your bloody paperwork. But we have visuals. Yes, for sure. You have to know what you put on there to attract people.”

Participant 4 also highlights the importance of SCM through her inclusion of two-way communication with her employees and staff . She alludes to having physical interaction with her staff and states that communication goes beyond just writing reports on a system, alluding to a core principle of SCM that sees communication going beyond from a technical concept into a strategic one, as mentioned in Chapter 2. This has impacted her business positively because it allows her to evaluate and understand the quality of services that her clients receive based on her face to face interactions with her staff.

Participant 4: “So every month I have two or three sessions with a therapist because I want to know what service they offer to my customers. So it's a physical thing. It's not about people writing reports or having to do this on a system or all of that. It's about a specific service or maybe ask them questions in terms of all the treatments that we do so that you can see if they know or they don't know. “

Participants 9,7 and 8 also noted their inclusion of social media as a strategic way to positively impact their businesses growth. Using tools that boost posts and promotions on Facebook, working with influencers to increase brand reputation and using WhatsApp to effectively communicate operations with employees and managers and communication practitioners to execute briefs and strategies. All of the participants use digital platforms to enhance their business objectives and this showcases how these businesses have adapted to new technology and environments to allow their organisations to grow and thrive. However, the data regarding this research question has also revealed that most of the key decisions that account for the use of social media platforms involve a top down approach. The process is almost always initiated by the business owner. Information on what needs to be communicated starts at the top and then disseminated down to individuals in the business based on the objective of that time. Furthermore very few businesses within this study have a public relations practitioner handling their social media work . As mentioned in Chapter 2 of this study, assessing and understanding the true impact of effective communication strategies on business growth ,identity and objectives can be challenging if management knowledge and skills are limited or are lacking. SCM emphasises the importance of managers who have significant influence in the realm of communication, collaborating with public relations practitioners to efficiently use resources and attain communication objectives (Macnamara & Gregory, 2018). The managers of most of the businesses in this study are the business owners themselves, furthermore they are at the forefront of communication efforts and very few participants have ever worked with PR professionals particularly within their social media outcomes.

Participant 2 speaks explicitly about her top- down approach, she personalised the departments of her business by stating that she is the HR department and she is the marketing department but further showcases her influence by stating that all communication trickles down from the top to anyone who needs to be communicated to. She operates this process of communication through the use of WhatsApp. Participant 8 says her main point of communication is WhatsApp as it relates to communication to her employees. She further showcases the application of the top down approach by stating that initial decisions begin with her and her husband and thereafter she seeks the guidance of her staff and later consults with her communications person for the execution of her decision.

Participant 6 changes this narrative and showcases some level of strategic thinking stating the importance of language in these contexts. This participant seems to be aware of why her organisation includes the selected platforms to positively impact her business growth but does not address key goals related to target audiences , branding or any inclusion of specialists when they engage on these platforms. Participant 1 is the only respondent who uses specialists within the social media landscape of her business. She notes that she doesn't know much about how to best use the platforms but deems them as crucial in getting her business more exposure.

The lack of PR specialists or experts that influence the inclusion of SCM in these businesses is also noted as a barrier to positive business growth. While business owners use strategic tools to help them navigate limitations, build brands and relationships and focus on more client centred communication tactics, these approaches are limited by their own lack of skill and knowledge.

Participant 3 notes the difficulty of doing things alone, and how this has negatively impacted the positive growth of her business. This highlights the importance of specialised communication as most small business owners have to often be responsible for business operations on their own.

Participant 3 : “Yeah. You can't do it alone because you must be online and then you're also manufacturing and then you're also trying to sell. It's just, no, you can't. Yes. It doesn't work. We are failing. We are failing. That's what I can say. We are failing.”

Participant 2 alludes to a lack of financial resources and simply cannot afford a social media team, but acknowledges its importance and strategic value.

Participant 2: "Right now I'm not in that space because I can't afford a social media team, which is imperative."

Participant 1 also reflects the financial limitations that many black female owners face. Affording PR expertise is a significant challenge, indicating a lack of resources. Participant 2's response also mentions financial constraints while stating the necessity of a social media team and expresses her inability to afford such services. A number of participants reference the overwhelming nature of managing various aspects of business all at the same time. The participants feel a sense of failure, having to do everything alone and not being able to get PR, to help them handle the workload, which can effectively lead to less positive growth in their businesses. Participant 6 however reveals a different response and expresses her perception regarding the expertise and effectiveness of PR professionals. The participant suggests that there is a lack of competence among PR professionals in her experience, pointing to the potential disappointment in the quality of services available. While the one participant expresses her own personal self-reliance and confidence in her communication capabilities, despite her pregnancy, she also highlights the tremendous pressure of multitasking which is a pressure that most black female business owners face according to the data. Participants collectively highlight financial constraints and lack of PR expertise as hindrances to achieving business growth and often allude to the overwhelming nature of managing various aspects of a business as a factor in applying strategic thinking to their communication efforts. These challenges contribute to the barriers that black female business owners face including SCM to grow their businesses positively.

Black-owned female businesses include SCM to contribute positively in a number of ways. Majority of participants have adapted to the digital landscape and have yielded returns for doing so, particularly within the realm of social media. They value two-way communication and transparency when communicating with clients and employees and are open to receiving feedback to ensure quality is maintained and their brands visible and reputations are maintained to appeal to their target audiences, ultimately converting that to sales. Their self-reliance does present a double edged sword, showcasing their independence and tenacity to complete certain communication objectives using their own knowledge and understanding but falling short in optimising those objectives strategically. This is often due to their lack of financial resources and PR inclusion within their businesses. Many participants approach social media tactics through top down communication structure which highlights that its usage is often limited to their own understanding of it, this can negatively affect business growth, because many lack the expertise needed to strategically optimize this space. However, there also seems to be lack of trust in some instances of the PR practitioner, where some business owners believe that most specialists cannot think strategically and often do

whatever the owners say. Other participants have opted to pay for some services and have seen the returns of this as it relates to their business reputation and visibility. Ultimately participants do use particular aspects of SCM as mentioned prior to affect their business growth positively, but barriers in education, finances, and lack of time have made it difficult for them to focus on SCM specifically which contributes to low or slower levels of business growth. Themes that are related to this finding include the top down approach, specialised communication and relational communication and these will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

5.4 What aspects of SCM work best for these businesses?

In the interviews, there was a focus on understanding what aspects of SCM work best for black female business owners. The aim was to explore strategies that they consider as the most effective to see which ones aligned the most with the principles of SCM and what new principles emerged that suggested something different. While some respondents mentioned digital tools others leaned towards two-way communication with their stakeholders.

Participants rally around various aspects of SCM that work best for their particular businesses. Participant 9 speaks to social media as an amazing strategic tool for boosting performance. She highlights how her Facebook posts always lead to clients going to her website and how this contributes to positive sales growth.

Participant 9 "On Facebook, there's this amazing tool of boosting posts. And I know on a specific day, like on the 10th, I'll be boosting a post for the 15th or for the 20th or for the 25th. Then we always lead people on all social media platforms to our website. At first, I didn't get it right. I was just marketing. We literally do so many things. So I was posting this and that and that... And that really helped a lot because now people can ask, 'Okay, so how much is this?'"

Participant 3 emphasises the importance of two-way communication and feedback as the best approach to the decision making process, which is a core element of SCM. She values communication with her team members, encouraging them to come up with fresh ideas so that they can add new perspectives within her business.

Participant 3 "If I have an idea, I must communicate with my team members. If you're not comfortable, pull that person in.... Is it worth it? Because sometimes ideas can be stupid. Actually, this idea, let's refine it, so I ask them

to come up with a perspective that's different so that we can work together ... you can have people (staff) that are helpful.”

This echoes sentiments made by participant 6, she speaks about her role of being a sounding board , someone that her stakeholders can talk to and depend on. She uses an empathetic communication approach as the best element in her business which as mentioned in Chapter 2 is not only client centred but builds trust and relationships.

Participant 6 "I play that role of a sounding board, someone that you can talk to, someone that is an interface of being a mentor and also the coach."

Participant 8 shares that her vision around communication has developed itself. As mentioned in the literature review, SCM asks practitioners to see audiences and stakeholders as active, encouraging them to explore the intricate dynamics of how meaning is crafted , interpreted and shared through the development of content. She highlights stakeholder activity as the best guide to how she views her communication process.

Participant 8 “ You know, my vision around communicating with either my clients or stakeholders has really been one of those things that has developed itself."

Participants also note how branding and image have best shaped the way they communicate with their audiences, participant 9 comments that “ how people see, you know, the image of your business to how you communicate with the client, that is key. So with me, as well, that is the reason I do everything” This is a common thread among responses particularly when using digital formats and meeting with their clients. Participants also speak to a sense of process and when communicating when dealing with a crisis for instance participant 4 notes “I've had bad reviews, but whether the review is good or bad, you can't use emotions. You have to sit down, analyse it, understand it, and then drive it [communication] in a step-by-step process. This is also a value for participant 5 who values the use of briefs to make sure communication is consistent until the job is done stating "You give briefs, that's how one should start the communication process. You brief the client, then you brief the supplier and then you keep tabs on it in the best way possible.”

Participants are aware of the processes that work well in their businesses and use them to shape how they best communicate with their stakeholders. However, many of them do speak to how they wish they could improve their

process, with PR expertise, more financial resources and increased knowledge. However, many found it difficult to articulate what the best suited elements were because of a lack of evaluation process, often changing what they seem based on what they are capable of doing and what they can afford. While this showcases a skill in navigating through their limitations, it also displayed some limitations to what they could do at their best. Some participants had to ask their friends to assist them because of a lack of specialised resources, some noted not having a strategy around communication at all highlighting a general lack of understanding of SCM importance and its principles in general.

Black female businesses owners without having formal understanding on how to use SCM as a tool in some instances, still exhibit nuanced strategic responses when recognising the best approach to their communication practices. They pull from their own networks, include their stakeholders in the decision making process and create open spaces online and personally for stakeholders and clients to respond to them in an effort to maintain beneficial relationships, manage reputational risks and contribute to transparent two-way communication. As per the participants' responses, the best advantages gained from the utilisation of social media activities include customer engagement and interaction, accessibility to business services, marketing objectives and overall communication with employees. Emphasis lies in business branding and reputation, with owners noting how important that has been within their industries. All participants noted that they would definitely improve their practices if they could afford PR intervention but also note affordability as a constraint. While practitioners are able to point at notable SCM tactics best suited for these businesses, they are also challenged because most practices are based on what they had to learn on their own. Many practitioners figure out what is best using practical hands-on learning, which not only relies on their own limited understanding of SCM but also can take years to comprehend and implement. Implementation serves as one of the biggest obstacles they face, often lacking the time to fully structure and plan these communication tactics in ways that give them the best return. Themes associated with this research question include specialised communication, structured communication and relational and informal communication and these will be further explored in the discussion in Chapter 6.

5.5 Chapter Summary

Chapter 5 presented the data findings based on the three research questions this dissertation aims to respond to which are: In what ways do black female business owners approach SCM in their businesses? How do black female

business owners include SCM in their business to affect their business growth positively? What aspects of SCM work best for these businesses? Quotes were selected from participant responses in an effort to showcase and discuss what the responses mean in light of the research questions that have been guiding the study. When assessing the overall use of strategic communication management (SCM) in black-owned female businesses, specific themes emerge. Informal communication highlighted trust building and adaptability, top-down communication emphasised the hierarchical flow of information particularly within the context of social media. Structured communication also emerged from the data, stressing the role of planning and strategy for efficient communication with empathetic communication underscoring the importance of transcending traditional notions for more holistic, relational and inclusive communication strategic tactics. Specialised communication was another theme that showcased the lack of inclusion of communication experts and PR specialists as a tool to navigate challenges that unique to black female business owners. Moreover, a general lack of resource, skill and education jumps out as the biggest finding to the use of SCM regardless of the communication practices identified in the data. All of the stated themes showcased the nuances and multifaceted communication practices deployed by these participants providing a data display that will be discussed and expanded in Chapter 6. Furthermore, in-depth theme expressions related to participant responses can be found in Appendix D of this dissertation.

Chapter 6

Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This research delved into the vast experiences black-owned female businesses, to showcase their extent of the use of SCM to enhance their business success, resilience and future endeavours. Employing a robust qualitative research methodology, which included semi structured interviews with rich insights from 9 participants in Gauteng, South Africa. The data collected is credible and relevant to the study. Throughout the exploration, the study aimed to answer fundamental questions about the integration of SCM or aspects of the business operations of black female business owners. The following discussion reveals intricate and explicit findings related to the themes identified in Chapter 5, which include informal communication, top-down communication , structured communication , empathetic communication ,foundational skills and communication and specialised communication, shedding light on the evidence of access , use and understanding of SCM. This discussion seeks to contribute to the extension of knowledge surrounding the communication practices of this particular group with the aim of expanding SCM knowledge in this context and encouraging effective communication measures such as SCM to foster positive business growth.

6.2 Discussion of Informal Communication

Strategic communication management entails purposefully initiating meaningful discussions to build connections aligned with organizational goals (Zerfass et al., 2018). It aims to assist organizations in maintaining socially acceptable objectives that adapt to evolving environments, benefiting both the business and stakeholders strategically (Steyn, 2018). Participants in the data have emphasized how informal communication practices facilitate relationship-building and adaptation to changes. The theme of informal communication practices within Strategic Communication Management (SCM) among black-owned female businesses is crucial for understanding how these businesses establish connections, build trust, and adapt to changes. Informal communication, often known as grapevine communication, involves the unofficial exchange of business information in all directions, facilitating rapid sharing of information along with informal opinions on formal work (Henrith, 2018:14). This communication form plays a vital role in establishing connections and fostering relationships within and outside the

business. Maintaining constant communication with employees, customers, and clients has been highlighted as a pivotal aspect of most of their strategic objectives. Participants emphasise their active engagement in networking and building relationships which highlights a more personal approach when creating meaningful connections with key players in their industry.

Findings show that they are able to target their communication approach towards businesses in their respective industries like builders, interior designers, suppliers with the intentional focus of connecting to professionals who could refer clients to them depending on their business services. Creating relationships with other professionals doesn't always yield financial returns but it involves trust-building and strong business partnerships. Trust is crucial when forming partnerships especially in industries where collaboration and referral play an important role. Building trust through communication is essential for black-owned female businesses, as it enables individuals to make decisions involving risks (Hasanaj and Manxhari, 2017). Trust-building communication fosters connections within businesses and with their stakeholders, enhancing overall communication effectiveness (Men, Qin, & Jin, 2022:147). However, it is important for these businesses to engage in deliberate, planned, and integrated communication practices as part of their strategic approach (Men, Qin, & Jin, 2022:147). Findings also highlight the need to build relationships for sustainability purposes versus profit purposes. This emphasises how fostering informal communication can be used to strengthen long term relationships with stakeholders within the business, sustainability is a major priority of Strategic Communication Management and its implementation. One of the major implications of SCM is that it must help the organisation become socially responsible, and build legitimacy, garner trust, and maintain a good reputation (Steyn, 2007: 137-172).

Participant findings also advocate for open, two-way communication when dealing with their staff or employees. With sentiments that indicate how they use informal communication methods to build trust. One participant says she “serves her employees, so they can serve her clients” and later notes that another reason for this is to make sure that her employees don't steal from her. She showcases an in-depth understanding of how strategic relationships are formed in her organisation and this expands on her perception of SCM. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the perception of the word "strategic" in communication can sometimes reinforce negative connotations associated with warfare (Jamil et al., 2015: 91). This perception is often heightened when businesses view strategic communication as a form of exchange or insurance. She emphasises the importance of serving her employees so they can, in turn, communicate to their clients effectively and hopefully minimises issues like theft. This approach can speak to

militaristic undertones of the term "strategy" fostering specific interactions with employees by influencing their behaviour with incentives to keep them happy within the organization. In 2012, Steyn emphasized the need for a shift in public relations, where communication values understanding and building mutual relationships beyond the previous manipulation of stakeholders to uphold a reputation. This finding showcases the gap in this kind of thinking and implies that black owned businesses owners still use communication within a manipulative lens, hoping to shape behaviours rather than deal with her mistrust in a transparent way.

Participants value feedback from stakeholders , many believe creating a space where they can communicate one-on-one or face-to-face helps illuminate what skills they know and don't know, what they may need and not need, to improve business operations and service quality. Acknowledging the employee feedback process is another way to foster relationship building. Having a weekly plan to help address issues reflects a commitment to employee satisfaction and trust building. Participant responses identified within this section relate well to the emergent approach in Strategic communication management (Lynch,1997). The emergent approach finds a natural connection to informal communication practices because it values adaptability to changes, learning from experiences through real time feedback (Lynch,1997). The synergy between the emergent approach in SCM and the informal communication practices presented in this data showcases the fluid , ever evolving nature of strategy development particularly within the enactment of communication practices in black female owned business.

A number of participants identify as the key decision maker, communicating with clients before anyone else does. While this showcases a high sense of self-reliance to build relationships with clients, there is evidence of mistrust within her organisation. Communicative actions are also led by the fact all key business decisions rely entirely on the business owner and no one else. Research into the effective facilitation of communication practices argues that a business must gather essential insights to formulate decisions guided by sound judgement (Kalogiannidis, 2021). Thus, decision making must be undertaken as a consultative process that promotes a level of consensus building (Kalogiannidis, 2021). Strategic communication management involves a proactive full- participation and problem solving approach to help businesses realise their objectives and goals (Hallahan et al.,2007). If these communication terms are not observed or employed businesses run the risk of not fully leveraging them to execute their plans effectively (Hallahan et al.,2007). When business owners limit the decision making process to themselves, it can create an atmosphere where diverse perspectives are excluded affecting the efficiency of the decisions being made.

Adapting to changes is another code highlighted in the data that was dealt with in multiple ways by participants. On one hand, participant 8 fully embraces her environment's influence on her organisation noting that her business had its own voice. She says that her vision around communicating with her stakeholders has been something that has developed itself, aligning with informal ways of constructing communication practices within her business. Adapting to change is considered critical with these businesses, considering the dynamic business landscape shaped by factors such as globalization, technological advancements, and evolving customer expectations (Wariach and Bhardwaj, 2007:269-290; Van de Rheede, 2022:85). Embracing change as a continuous process can lead to various benefits, including creating a more effective communication environment where information is shared quickly and efficiently (Shaikh, 2020:41). However, informal communication channels may also facilitate the spread of rumours and gossip, which can impact effective communication and impact reputational quality within these organisations (Michelson & Mouly, 2000:341).

A central concept of SCM involves scanning the environment to identify and manage potential stakeholder issues(Choo, 2001). Environmental scanning as defined prior in the literature section of this study is the collection of external communication to essentially plan for the future (Choo, 2001). This process aids organisations to avoid surprises and directs them to future opportunities and threats which can help them gain a certain level of competitive advantage in the market. Participants expressed a willingness and openness to learning from their environments, allowing communication to emerge naturally for business. However, there appears to be a lack of a structured understanding of how this learning process will unfold. The data does not clearly define or identify aspects pertaining to how businesses' communication patterns are practically influenced by their environments, recognizing what her business is effectively communicating or how they plan to strategically respond to those changes in communicative cues. Although participants acknowledge how environmental changes can influence their objectives, there is a gap in educational or skill awareness to practically scan the environment to identify what their businesses need and to evaluate and implement the validity of those messages. The recognition of opportunities and potential threats allows for formulation of strategies that align with environmental conditions (Cancellier et al., 2014). In small businesses the significance of scanning the environment is a crucial step in aligning an organisation with its surroundings (Cancellier et al., 2014). However small businesses also run the risk of not being well equipped to respond to these threats or opportunities (Cancellier et al., 2014).

As discussed in Chapter 3, enduring gender inequality in South Africa does affect the growth of women business owners(Chimucheka, 2014). Black female business owners are often faced with a double bias before they even

begin developing their strategies (Chimucheka, 2014). Their environments often present threats on multiple levels, from race to gender and this can affect the kind of strategic advances they can make , particularly in departments like communication (Chimucheka, 2014). While research has examined the connection between environmental scanning and organisational communication practices , the specific relationship between environmental scanning and black female business owners deserves more attention (Cancellier et al., 2014). In summary, informal communication practices within black-owned female businesses play a crucial role in establishing connections, building trust, and adapting to changes. While these practices can enhance communication effectiveness, it is essential for businesses to be mindful of the potential risks associated with informal communication, such as the spread of rumours and gossip and incorrect or unethical information being relayed. By understanding and learning the nuances of SCM and its role which is to facilitate planned, deliberate, organised communication tactics, informal communication and its challenging implications, can be better navigated and can provide opportunities for businesses to learn how to incorporate more strategic communication strategies within the SCM framework.

6.2.1 Findings of Informal Communication practices in relation to SCM

Explicit adherence to SCM:

Networking, building relationships and adapting to changes are informal communication practices that have been highlighted as essential elements of strategic communication management (SCM). The participants showcase a deliberate focus on creating connections , building trust and staying flexible when responding to changes in their environment. The emphasis on intentional , planned and integrated communication aligns with the strategic approach advocated in SCM literature.

Implicit adherence to SCM:

A number of participants implicitly adhere to SCM objectives by including soft skills in the communication process and by fostering an open communication environment for stakeholders. With some participants showcasing a commitment to building relationships through communication even if it's beyond the scope of what the business needs to make a profit. This aligns with the emergent approach in SCM which centres adaptability and real time feedback in strategy development.

Non Adherence to SCM:

Participants' lack of knowledge and skill stands out as one example of non-adherence to SCM. While participants recognised the importance of relationship building with clients, their centralisation of the decision making process and general lack of trust in others handling their communication process could obstruct the inclusion of diverse perspectives and collaboration, undermining the consultative nature suggested in SCM. Furthermore participants understand the importance of emerging communication strategies that come from listening and adapting to changing environments, however the formal implications of those changes on their business communication structures seem to be lacking. Indicating a gap in skills and education which hinders the use of SCM within these businesses.

Summary of findings:

The data reflects the dynamic and complex interplay between informal communication practices and the application of SCM. Participants showcase shifting degrees of alignment with SCM principles, suggesting the presence of a nuanced relationship between the two. While some participants coherently integrate informal communication practices into strategic objectives, others demonstrate significant gaps in general understanding, hindering the full potential of SCM. The explicit and implicit incorporation of informal communication practices align with SCM's emphasis on communication that is intentional and adaptive. In addition to this, to enhance SCM incorporation and effectiveness gaps in strategic understanding need to be addressed. Further research on these gaps may promote a more inclusive decision-making process, more robust acknowledgements of external challenges through environmental scanning to help black-owned female businesses refine their communication practices in ways that value strategy regardless of diverse and challenging contexts.

6.3 Discussion of Top-down Communication

The interrelationship between top-down communication and Strategic Communication Management (SCM) in black-owned businesses is crucial for understanding how communication practices shape organizational dynamics and effectiveness. Top-down communication, characterized by hierarchical dissemination of information, influences organisational culture and employee interactions, particularly in decision-making processes (Simsek, 2016). In the context of black-owned female businesses, the integration of new media forms such as social media is significant, as it offers avenues for rapid communication and stakeholder engagement (Badea, 2014).

The use of technology in communication strategies, including social media platforms, facilitates information dissemination and stakeholder engagement, ultimately influencing stakeholder behaviors and organisational outcomes (Hallahan *et al.*, 2007; Musheke & Phiri, 2021). Effective communication, both internally and externally, enhances organizational efficiency, fosters collaboration, and positions businesses strategically in competitive environments (Gomathy, 2017; Hussaini, 2021). Moreover, effective communication tactics can improve decision-making processes, reduce inefficiencies, and enhance customer satisfaction (Sreeja, 2021). Strategic communication management, as a paradigm, emphasizes the strategic context of communication within organizations, encompassing stakeholder engagement, societal perspectives, and corporate transparency (De Beer, 2010; Steyn, 2007). Environmental scanning, a key element of SCM, enables organizations to identify and manage stakeholder issues, anticipate opportunities and threats, and align strategies with societal trends (Choo, 2001).

The continuous and iterative nature of SCM, involving situation analysis, planning, implementation, and evaluation, underscores the importance of adaptability and responsiveness in communication strategies (Buhmann & Likely, 2018). Effective SCM practices, rooted in transparent communication, foster mutual relationships, social responsibility, and organizational legitimacy (Buhmann & Likely, 2018). It is therefore imperative that the integration of social media be examined when exploring SCM in black female owned businesses. This study takes this exploration further by examining the “why” and the “how” behind this use, which has been identified as a predominately top down communication approach in this study. Strategic communication management represents a coordinated approach to communication planning and execution (Hallahan *et al.*, 2007). This transformation underlines the increasing recognition of the interconnectedness of strategic and diverse communication disciplines and stakeholders to help business growth and increase business efficiency (Hallahan *et al.*, 2007).

Bhumann and Fraser (2018) highlight the complex nature of SCM, emphasising its continuous and rigorous process that encompasses situation analysis, planning, implementation and evaluation. This nature is inherently iterative with strategies evolving organically rather than adhering to rigid formulations (Bhumann and Fraser, 2018). Social media is a beneficial channel for SCM because much like the digital platforms it favours versatility and its quest for real-time engagement, feedback and adaptability (Bhumann and Fraser, 2018). Social media platforms facilitate ongoing communication tactics that allow for the effective refinement of strategies based on evolving environments and feedback methods (Bhumann and Fraser, 2018). While this iterative nature of

strategic communication management aligns well with the capabilities of social media, the approach to how it is used is informed by the organisation (Bhumann and Fraser,2018).

The data in this study has revealed that most of the key communication decisions that account for the use of social media platforms involve a top-down approach. The process is almost always initiated by the business owner. Information on what needs to be communicated starts at the top and then disseminated down to individuals in the business based on the objective of that time. Furthermore very few businesses within this study have a public relations practitioner handling their social media work . As Macnamara and Gregory (2018) note, assessing and understanding the true impact of effective communication strategies on business growth ,identity and objectives can be challenging if management knowledge and skills are limited or are lacking. SCM emphasises the importance of managers who have a significant influence in the realm of communication, collaborating with public relations practitioners to efficiently use resources and attain communication objectives (Macnamara & Gregory ,2018). The managers of most of the businesses in this study are the business owners themselves, furthermore they are at the forefront of communication efforts and very few participants have ever worked with PR professionals particularly within their social media outcomes .

Participants speaks explicitly about their top-down approach, one participant personalised the departments of her business by stating that she is the HR department and she is the marketing department but further showcases her influence by stating that all communication processes trickle down from her straight to anyone who needs to be communicated to. She operates this process of communication through the use of WhatsApp. Research indicates that effective top-down communication sets the tone for stakeholder and employee engagements, fostering trust and transparency within the organization (Colquitt & Salam, 2009). One can also argue this is significant and similar for ineffective communication too. Participant 5 showcases a similar pattern, after having to survive COVID she is now selling most of her products on her own WhatsApp, due to the rise in the reliance of ecommerce that emerged from the worldwide crisis. She describes social media as a favourable option for communication in her business. Even though the participants have not clearly defined social media strategic objectives they both consider the use of WhatsApp as a crucial element for communication in their business. This points to evidence of their ability to adapt and refine communication processes, using social media with ease and less cost. The application of a top-down approach is evident with many participants stating that initial decisions begin with at the top and thereafter they may seek or consider the guidance of staff or a communications person for the execution of a decision that has already been made.

Participant 7 states that she received advice to use TikTok but doesn't give reference to where that advice came from. She aligns to this social media platform because of its informative nature which allows her to showcase her manufacturing process. She also mentions her use of Instagram and Facebook noting that while they do well on the platforms they do not yield tangible results for her business. As mentioned in Chapter 2, more recently, the use of social media platforms has helped to create a flexible landscape, constantly adjusting to new developments that may affect strategic outcomes and progress (Lewis, 2010). Professionals and users of these platforms, particularly in the business landscape, find themselves consistently engaged in a never-ending process of learning, relying on a “learn by doing “ mentality to navigate their organisations communication tactics (Lewis, 2010). Learning by doing may offer cost effective strategies to deal with changes in the business landscape, but the use of social media will be guided by the owners capacity to learn about these platforms and the work they do to regularly increase social media knowledge that can practically impact business growth. Participants 4 and 6 are aware of the power and impact of social media platforms , highlighting their accessibility, affordability in promoting their business and communicating with their stakeholders. Participants showcase some level of strategic thinking stating the importance of language in these contexts. Both participants are aware of why they need the platforms but do not address key goals related to target audiences , branding or any inclusion of specialists when they engage on these platforms. Participants note the use of the boosting tools on Facebook to get people to engage with business. They also reflect on their own influence on the platforms, posting whatever content they need to get clients interested in her services. Participant 1 is the only respondent who uses specialists within the social media landscape of her business. She notes that she doesn't know much about how to best use the platforms but deems them as crucial in getting her business more exposure. This aligns with SCM principles, which emphasise the importance of transparent and two-way communication, formulating engaging content to retain customer attention, and adapting to new technology to effectively respond to stakeholders to ensure that businesses meet their strategic goals and build legitimacy (Buhmann & Likely, 2018). However, the quality of communication, particularly from leadership, significantly impacts trust-building and collaboration dynamics (Hills, 2015).

As per the participants' responses, the advantages gained from the utilisation of social media activities include customer engagement and interaction, accessibility to business services, marketing objectives and overall communication with employees. Emphasis lies in business visibility and the acceleration of top-down communication objectives particularly with employees and clients. A larger number of the participants use social media based on their own understanding with a much lower number including some kind of social media specialist when implementing a digital communication process. In the context of SCM the significance of influential

managers , particularly in communication, working with PR practitioners to optimise resources and achieve communication goals is imperative(Landsberg, 2020). Disregarding the involvement of PR practitioners undermines the businesses ability to ensure efficient resources use and goal achievement (Steyn & Puth, 2000). WhatsApp was one of the main platforms used by participants, businesses lacking experience in social media communication often concentrate on platforms they understand and have gained recent attention. Solely focusing on mainstream platforms may result in overlooking potential use of platforms that are suited for their services (Ernestad and Henriksson,2010). It is essential that businesses research and identify the platforms to effectively identify where their target audiences live (Ernestad and Henriksson,2010). Participants have essentially taken social media into their own hands, using it in various ways to communicate diverse objectives. The use of the top down approach indicates a reliance on their own knowledge of social media to communicate which speaks to shortcomings in performing , thinking and behaving at a strategic level (Steyn & Puth, 2000).

Participants emphasize the importance of informal communication in fostering relationships and adapting to changes. Key themes include active networking, building trust, and open communication with employees. While some exhibit a strong alignment with SCM principles, such as adaptability and real-time feedback, others showcase misalignment. Notably, participant 1's central decision-making approach and participant 8's openness to environmental influence lack structured strategic understanding. Participant 3 highlights the challenges of communication in a male-dominated environment and the impact of external factors like COVID-19, showcasing the intersectionality of race and gender affecting business strategies.

6.3.1 Findings of Top-down Communication

6.3.2 Top-down Communication and Social media use.

Explicit adherence to SCM:

Participants explicitly showcase an understanding of the importance of top-down communication particularly in the context of social media. They acknowledge the need to communicate strategically and intentionally using social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. This understanding emerges in participant 4's response, she emphasizes the need for clear communication on social networks to ensure everyone understands the business's vision and purpose. This is coherent with SCM principles that emphasise the need for clear , strategic communication to achieve business goals.

Implicit adherence to SCM:

Implicitly , some participants adhere to SCM principles by recognising the power and impact of social media platforms in their business strategies. They implicitly comprehend the need for strategic communication to engage stakeholders, business promotion and maintenance of employee communication. Participant 6 in particular, mentions the impact of language on social media , hinting at an understanding of tailoring communication for effectiveness and impact , which is a crucial instrument of SCM.

Non- adherence to SCM:

Instances of non- adherence to SCM do emerge from the data, specifically in the lack of involvement of public relations practitioners. Most participants operate without any collaboration with specialists in the field, neglecting the potential benefits of such partnerships in advancing communication goals as advocated by SCM. A non-collaborative approach may hinder the businesses' ability to strategically use social media platforms effectively and resourcefully.

Summary of findings:

The interactivity between top-down communication and social media use showcases a compounded relationship with SCM principles. Participants explicitly recognise the importance of intentional communication but many showcase a lack of engagement with PR practitioners. This presents a gap in their strategic understanding, where owners might not truly leverage on the expertise needed for effective communication , planning and execution. Furthermore, this top-down approach particularly in decision-making and communication processes may limit the diversity of perspectives needed to enact comprehensive SCM practices.

6.3.3 Social media as a top-down communication tool

Explicit adherence to SCM:

Participants also showcase an explicit use of social media platforms in a top-down manner, meaning decisions and communication originate from the business owner only. There is an element of focusing on boosting posts,

showcasing informational content and intentional expansion of their brands that aligns with SCM principles that highlight purposeful communication and adaptability to the ever changing digital landscape.

Implicit adherence to SCM:

Implicitly, some participants recognise the iterative nature of SCM especially in the context of social media. The use of social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram for showcasing the manufacturing procedure for a carpentry business implies an understanding of adapting communication strategies based on the characteristic of certain platforms and audience preferences which ultimately aligns with the iterative aspects brought forward by SCM

Non-adherence to SCM:

Participants showcase an over reliance on their own understanding of social media , which could hinder the potential benefits of using it effectively for business communication or publicity. None of the participants have a background in the study of social media for business communication. Furthermore, there is a large lack of inclusion of communication specialists in the social media strategies they employ , leaving them subject to ineffectiveness because of the absence of the level of knowledge needed to be successful on social media.

Summary of findings:

The relationship between social media use and top-down communication practices highlights the participants' dependence on their own, often limited, knowledge and understanding. Initiating social media communication or strategies in a top-down manner with a lack of understanding may increase instances of misinformation, misunderstanding, and ultimately limit the business's ability to fully leverage social media for strategic communication goals. Both perspectives on the theme emphasize the importance of communication through social media, particularly WhatsApp, within their businesses. However, the non-involvement of PR individuals indicates a gap in the full enactment of strategic communication management. To enhance alignment with SCM, businesses would benefit by addressing this gap, either by finding ways to include PR professionals or by upskilling themselves to refine their social media strategies better.

6.4 Empathetic Communication

The theme of empathetic communication within black-owned female businesses focuses on understanding stakeholders' thoughts, needs, and feelings to foster mutual support and real knowledge sharing (Caffrey, 2023; Wang et al., 2014). This approach creates an atmosphere that supports employees' willingness to participate in decision-making and fosters relationships based on trust and collaboration (Wang et al., 2014). Emotional support involves expressions such as approval, praise and emotional intimacy associated with communication objectives (Choi, Goo and Choi, 2022). The trade of these resources fosters relationship building, social interactions and builds trust which contributes to the development of effective communication habits (Choi, Goo and Choi, 2022).

In the context of strategic communication management (SCM), empathetic communication plays a crucial role in achieving organizational objectives and building legitimacy (Steyn, 2007). SCM emphasizes the importance of understanding stakeholder perspectives, addressing societal issues, and fostering transparent and two-way communication (Buhmann & Likely, 2018; Steyn, 2007). Effective SCM practices involve continuous situation analysis, planning, implementation, and evaluation, with strategy evolving iteratively (Buhmann & Likely, 2018).

To remain relevant and current, organizations must go beyond traditional communication and management concepts, understanding media logic and using media to shape culture (Van Ruler, 2018; Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014). This requires practitioners to examine how meaning is created through interactions involving stakeholders and media professionals, driving positive change through effective communication practices (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014). Empathetic communication within black-owned female businesses aligns with SCM principles by fostering understanding, collaboration, adaptability and trust among stakeholders. Effective SCM practices involve continuous analysis, planning, and implementation, adapting to changing environments and stakeholder dynamics.

Recognising the importance of empathetic communication challenges is valuable when establishing SCM in businesses for a number of reasons. As highlighted by Steyn, as cited in Toth (2007), the objectives of SCM are intricately connected to overcoming communication obstacles. Firstly in acquiring a societal perspective, it becomes crucial to ensure that communication channels are successful in providing accurate intelligence on strategic stakeholders and their relationships with the public (Steyn, in Toth, 2007). This highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach to communication that addresses the nuances of societal issues (Steyn, in Toth, 2007). Second to that, aligning business goals with communication strategies is imperative from a reflection

perspective. Empathetic communication showcases the importance of this alignment , through the management of emotional and instrumental contributions and their influence on reputational risks for the business (Steyn, in Toth, 2007).

Findings suggest that some black-owned female business owners operate with an inclusive approach where everyone in the team is considered to have an influence , indicating a supportive and collaborative environment. Some responses also emphasise resourcefulness and adaptability in the business, where the business navigates limitations by leveraging the skills and qualifications of certain employees to fulfil instrumental communication requirements. Empathetic communication involves acknowledging the uniqueness of different perspectives and embracing diverse ideologies and values (Caffrey, 2023). The inclusion of unique perspectives is a central concept of decision making within SCM, Finding highlights the pivotal role of empathetic communication in black female-owned business by promoting open communication thus valuing diverse perspectives within their internal teams. There is evidence of the importance of refining ideas through collaboration that align with the strategic communication principle of two-way communication and relationship building. This showcases the transformative power of supportive and inclusive employee communication for the overall success of the business. As noted in the literature review, SCM is interested in the extent to which stakeholders believe their organisations care about their well-being and value their contributions (Wang et al.,2014).

Findings also address the crucial role of employee knowledge sharing which challenges limitations by fostering a sense of shared responsibility, support and importance. There is a recognition of the significance of upskilling and empowering internal stakeholders by equipping them to perform optimally in their roles. As highlighted by Steyn, as cited in Toth (2007), the objectives of SCM are intricately connected to overcoming communication obstacles. Firstly in acquiring a societal perspective, it becomes crucial to ensure that communication channels are successful in providing accurate intelligence on strategic stakeholders and their relationships with the public (Steyn, in Toth, 2007). Participant 5 reflects on the loss of her employees during COVID-19 and having to rely on friends for communication support. SCM perspectives consider interpretive strategies as the processes of emphasising relationship building and symbolic actions, recognizing organizations as cooperative agreements influenced by individual will (Steyn, 2003). This reliance highlights participants' need for robust support systems but also showcases how external support from limited networks play an important role in sustaining businesses communication efforts amid a crisis. Findings further showcase how active client communication and education can prevent the communication of ineffective engagements reflecting an empathetic position that involves guiding

and informing stakeholders about services and products. Comments reinforce the idea that support and understanding in communication can involve a process of education. It has been shown that businesses led by individuals who can identify opportunities, rather than those who enter entrepreneurship for survival or necessity, tend to have better management skills, higher profits, and a lower risk of failure (Calderon *et al.*, 2015).

According to Ladzani and Van Vuuren (2002:154-161), a lack of business education is one of the major causes of strategic business failure. When black-owned female businesses express a proactive approach to supporting business interactions and strategic communication management. This response further indicates her recognition of the emotional impact of negative publicity or a reputation on this perceived empathetic support. Participants stress the importance of proactively keeping customers informed, emphasizing the instrumental dimension of empathetic communication through effective communication strategies. They expand on instrumental support through their experience with social media marketing, where there is noted strategic collaboration that has led to the attainment of tangible instrumental business results i.e. sales. SCM promotes 'full participation' in corporate communication, and this participation occurs before strategic decisions are made (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002 : 556).

Findings also acknowledge how participants acknowledge the idea that their business has its own personality and voice. This highlights the emotional dimension of empathetic communication, suggesting that they align their organisations with a sense of identity and purpose based on stakeholder perceptions and their own perceptions of their businesses. According to one comment about “listening to clients,” working to understand the needs of clients fosters a culture of care and consideration, which can contribute to a business's reputation and trust. Efforts to strengthen two-way communication at the top of the organisation foster trust and transparency (Colquitt & Salam, 2009), which fosters stakeholder and employee engagement.

The data sheds light on the complexities of empathetic communication in the communication efforts for black female business owners. The narratives showcase the indispensable role of SCM in overcoming understanding and using these complexities. Most of the participants, without having formal understanding on how to use SCM as a tool in some instances, still exhibit nuanced strategic responses when recognising the value of emotional support and understanding. They pull from their networks upskill their staff, include them in the communication process and educate stakeholders and clients in an effort to maintain beneficial relationships, manage reputational risks and contribute to transparent two-way communication. This collective understanding highlights the value of recognising empathetic communication to ultimately pave the way for resilient and successful communication strategies.

6.4.1 Findings of Empathetic Communication

Explicit adherence to SCM:

The data explicitly demonstrates an understanding of the importance of empathetic communication by the participants. Findings expresses a strong belief in the creation of employment opportunities and creating a work environment where employees don't feel like they are just employees, with no power or creativity. Emphasising this kind of empowerment aligns with SCM principles that highlight the need for socially responsible perspective and the need for an ethical and comprehensive approach to communication.

Implicit adherence to SCM:

Participants implicitly adhere to SCM through their recognition of inclusivity and collaboration. Participant 2 recognises that everyone in the team has the potential to be influential, reflects an inclusive approach, aligning with the need to provide a supportive and inclusive business environment to overcome communication obstacles, as required by SCM. Participant 3 depicts the transformative power of supportive and inclusive employee communication by showcasing an implicit understanding of significance of relationship -building in SCM.

Non-adherence to SCM:

Empathetic communication presents limited evidence of non-adherence to SCM within the data. Nevertheless, the reliance on limited networks as described in the findings , can be seen as potential hindrance. While external support from friends and family can be beneficial, business might leave the business owner at the whim of a friend as opposed to a professional. Further, businesses might benefit more from being more diverse in the recruitment of support networks to enhance resilience in strategic communication.

Summary of findings:

Empathetic communication practices play a crucial role in overcoming communication challenges. Participants exhibit a nuanced understanding of empathetic communication, recognising the instrumental and emotional dimensions to establishing strategic knowledge sharing and communication. The use of empathetic communication is apparent explicitly and implicitly in the data, and showcases the ways participants leverage internal and external

support networks, upskill employees and foster inclusive and transparent communication environments, and two-way communication. All of which are valued with the SCM full participation framework.

6.5 Discussion of Structured Communication

The alignment between structured communication and strategic communication management (SCM) in black-owned businesses is crucial for achieving efficient and effective communication practices. Structured communication involves establishing a sequence for the exchange of information, ensuring that crucial details are included and organizational targets are met (Marshall et al., 2008). Similarly, SCM focuses on the strategic planning and management of communication processes to achieve business growth and meet strategic goals (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014).

According to Steyn and Puth (2000) The strategic proficiency of business communication has been subject to criticism, primarily for deficiencies in strategic performance, thinking and behaviour. The inclusion of various sectors, spanning business, government, NGO, and education, underscore the importance of critical thinking as a significant skill integrated at all professional levels of communication (Tallent and Barnes, 2015). The insights based on this theme showcase the limitedness of strategic communication performance based on the participants' somewhat unclear comprehension of what a strategic communication management is. The general lack of understanding of the word strategy as it relates to the management of communication process as a step by step structure outlines the conduciveness for effective communication practices as a whole (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014). Supporting the strengths and weaknesses of the definitions surrounding SCM in the data will outline the current state and the future of this concept within these organisations (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014). For black female-led businesses with limited resources, understanding and education, acquiring basic SCM skills and then embracing the role it plays in business growth may be challenging compared to established businesses currently using SCM.

Findings highlight various aspects of structured communication and its implications for SCM within black-owned businesses. Participants admit to a lack of strategic communication management and process within their

organisations. While there is evidence that highlights how participants understood it to be important to have a communication plan, the findings still mention the absence of a standard structured process. Participants also mention having various strategies for the operational processes and marketing departments but not for communication management. Showcasing an understanding of strategy in different contexts but not considering it vital for communication. Studies indicate the role of the communicator in SCM is to be responsible for restructuring communication habits (Zerfass *et al.*, 2018, pp.488). Therefore uncovering the places where participants come short or excel in including structuring communication showcases how they adhere or don't adhere to SCM tactics.

Furthermore, findings explicitly note the lack of a communication department and strategy formulation in general within their businesses. Some participants, particularly those in more male dominated industries equate the lack of having a communication structure with the non-professional nature of their business. Participants interestingly associate strategy with sophistication which directly speaks to how the attitudes of businesses shaping the incorporation of SCM based on perceptions on what strategy is, limiting its effect on their businesses. As stated prior, if communication is something that managers or owners influence, they should make sure they use their resources wisely to achieve their goals (Bütschi & Steyn, 2006). Furthermore, some findings strongly assert that SCM is indispensable within their organisations. This response, however, is vague and implies a potential lack of understanding in those who may understand strategy but not Strategic Communication Management. Its indispensability is never fully articulated or elaborated as a day to day management activity. Participants also express that structure does always yield an immediate financial return. Indicating a potential lack of a broader vision of SCM beyond short term needs. Participants findings highlight a broader issue, that many people lack knowledge of what SCM is. This response also points to the problem starting at the educational level indicating the potential role of inadequate training at a university level contributing to the lack of SCM in businesses.

Most participants have degrees and as mentioned prior have been in business for over 3 years, yet majority of them have never heard of SCM nor have they ever really thought about communication as a strategic or structured entity. Participants explicitly admit to a lack of knowledge about developing a communication strategy. The response implies a gap in education or training regarding the importance of SCM. Research indicates a notable disparity between strategy formulation and implementation within South African SMEs. Scholars suggest that strategic

implementation often falters due to poor execution (Jooste & Fourie, 2009:66). Despite acknowledging the importance of strategy for organisational success, business owners often struggle with inadequate comprehension of its role among their workforce and ineffective communication of the strategy, hindering successful implementation (Jooste & Fourie, 2009:66). Moreover, the significance of strategic leadership is underscored as crucial for strategy enactment; if leaders are uncertain about the efficacy of SCM, it is unlikely to be explored within their businesses.

Several participants indicate either a lack of a structured communication plan or a vague understanding of the role of SCM in their businesses. This speaks to the criticism highlighted by Steyn and Puth (2000) regarding the deficiencies in strategic performance, thinking and behaviour in business communication. Participants' statements indicate a need for critical thinking skills within their communication efforts. Several participants exhibit a lack of clear comprehension of what strategic communication as a concept entails. The general perspective of the term "strategy" has been noted as a challenge especially in the realm of communication management as per (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014). The participants struggle with articulating how they develop and implement communication strategies suggest a gap in effective communication practices. The lack of clear strategies may hinder their ability to engage with stakeholders and manage communication effectively. Overall there seems to be a lack of resources, understanding and education among black female led businesses poses challenges in acquiring and implementing basic strategic communication management skills. Ultimately these challenges emphasise potential areas for growth and improvement, and highlights the need for education and skill development in SCM for these businesses (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014).

6.5.1 Findings on Structured Communication

Explicit Adherence to SCM:

Participants reveal a complex and varied understanding of structured communication, with some owners showcasing explicit adherence to SCM principles, while others demonstrate a visible lack of clarity. For example, participants stressed the indispensability of strategic communication management, strongly emphasising the importance of always reaching and targeting customers and defining her business communication direction and structure. Additionally, participants acknowledge the significance of having a strategy after a number of years of

her business operating, indicating a willingness to learn which aligns with SCM by way of adapting through a hands-on approach.

Implicit Adherence to SCM:

Implicit adherence to SCM through the structured communication theme is evident in the findings, where various strategies involving operations and marketing strategies are mentioned frequently. However, there is a general lack of clarity regarding how communication is managed within these strategic frameworks, suggesting a potential gap in understanding. Participants consider an immediate financial return gained through structured social media approach, and this suggests an implicit acknowledgment of the use of a strategic outline and process. The issue with this, however, may be in the limitation associated with focusing on short-term goals rather than a broader long-term strategy which aligns with SCM, particularly reputational excellence.

Non-Adherence to SCM:

A number of participants demonstrate non-adherence to SCM practices. Participants admit to not having a structured approach to communication, indicating a clear lack of a standard procedure or process when communicating. Findings highlight the absence of both a communication department and communication plan in their businesses with one participant actually associating having a communication strategy as an approach for more sophisticated organisations. This expression suggests a misunderstanding and lack of appreciation of the role structure plays in the communication process, especially for business growth. Participants further highlight a broader issue associated with the lack of SCM knowledge present in PR professionals that suggests an educational gap that might be present in the group. Findings highlight a broader issue of a lack of knowledge about strategic communication management, suggesting that educational gaps within stakeholders may also contribute to non-adherence.

Summary of findings:

The study reveals a range of adherence to strategic communication management (SCM) principles among participants. Some demonstrate explicit adherence by emphasising customer targeting and strategy development. Implicit adherence is seen in discussions of operational and marketing strategies, but with unclear communication management. Non-adherence is evident in participants lacking structured communication approaches and

understanding of SCM's role. Overall, addressing knowledge gaps is crucial for integrating SCM practices and enhancing communication effectiveness in black-owned female businesses.

6.6 Discussion of Foundational Skills for Communication

This theme underscores the fundamental role of effective communication as the cornerstone of any organization striving for positive and productive interactions to foster business growth (Buca & Rizescu, 2017:52). This aligns with the values of strategic communications, which emphasize the need for communication to enhance knowledge sharing systems, build relationships, and mitigate communication barriers (Buca & Rizescu, 2017:52). Strategic communication management (SCM) serves as a framework for achieving these objectives by guiding organizations to transcend traditional communication concepts and embrace more impactful approaches (Van Ruler, 2018). By viewing audiences and stakeholders as active participants in the communication process, practitioners can explore the dynamics of meaning creation, interpretation, and sharing through content development (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014).

In the context of black-owned female businesses, the implementation of SCM is crucial for orchestrating a communication process that fosters organizational excellence and drives business growth (Grunig *et al.*, 2002). The data highlights the use of SCM elements such as establishing connections, adapting to changes, building trust, developing expertise, managing branding and reputation, indicating the integration of SCM into communication strategies (Grunig *et al.*, 2002). The literature further supports the importance of SCM in shaping stakeholder perceptions, managing reputation, and influencing behaviours (Pakura & Rudeloff, 2023; Mykkänen & Vos, 2015).

Overall, the theme emphasizes the critical role of effective communication, aligned with SCM principles, in driving organizational success and growth for black-owned female businesses. It highlights the need for strategic thinking and implementation of communication practices to foster positive interactions, build trust, and enhance organizational reputation.

In the examined data, the strategic connection between public relations, organisational leadership and stakeholder engagement echoes the importance of SCM implementation (Grunig *et al.*, 2002). This aligns with the theme

exploring how black female business owners leverage SCM as a foundational element to orchestrate a unique communication process, fostering organisational communication excellence (Grunig *et al*,2002). The data indicates a focus on establishing connections, adapting to changes , building trust , developing expertise and managing branding and reputation , emphasising the occurrence of SCM in steering business growth through effective communication.

Findings identify the foundational skills of their communication strategy as skills based on the business needs and available resources. Participants acknowledge the challenge of working on the business rather than working in the business. This lack of time and attention poses a challenge in the development of their brand and reputation.

Participants acknowledge the value of their hands-on experience with the shared sentiment “a whole lot of things come from me”. This statement suggests a reliance on individual efforts. This highlights a gap in the foundational structure. For communication to be strategic and effective communication must form the bedrock to any organisation committed to positive productive interactions for business growth (Buca & Rizescu, 2017:52).

Strategic communication as a foundation often includes the establishment of inclusive structures that go beyond individual contribution ensuring a more sustainable communication framework (Buca & Rizescu, 2017:52).

Furthermore, Participants recognise the importance of marketing but don't prioritise broader communication strategies within the business. This hints at a gap in understanding or implementing communication practices that move beyond marketing efforts. In the context of the theme, participants highlight a context where communication might be perceived as less integrated into core strategies of the business. It showcases the need for a more holistic approach to internal and external communication , to successfully establish a strong foundation for business growth.

Participants observed that when she acquired the business franchise there was no “360 communication” in the business model indicating her awareness of a comprehensive communication strategy that covers all aspects and perspectives within the business. Further than that the participants acknowledgement of the frustration arising from this communication gap underscores her awareness of the need for multi-dimensional communication strategy. In relation to the theme, this quote highlights the participants' understanding of the significance of well-rounded communication practices and assumes that the business owner is then able to practice this when conducting her own

habits within her business. Through SCM, organisational leaders are encouraged to take an interest in reputation risks and other strategic issues identified during the reflective process by aligning corporate communication with organisational goals (Choo, 2001:1). Participants also mention “keeping tabs on things [communication process] in the best way possible” signifying a recognition of the importance of monitoring and control within the communication process. SCM involves continuous evaluations and adjustments which are present in the participants' response. By focusing attention on the briefing process and monitoring, the participants indirectly align with the theme highlighting communication as an essential element woven into the fabric of the business to drive growth and stakeholder engagement. A strong foundation in communication skills is crucial to creating strategic communication programmes that align with the company's business strategy and create appropriate responses to the environment (Steyn & Puth, 2000:17). Strategic communication involves intervention and problem solving to achieve long-term objectives (Steyn & Puth, 2000:17). Participants explicitly acknowledge how SCM involves a more comprehensive and multifaceted perspective with the quote “strategic communication is beyond that “cementing that idea. This statement resonates with principles of SCM which considers diverse elements of the business environment in the strategic process and avoids viewing communication elements in isolation. This foregrounds the participants' awareness of the multifaceted nature of SCM and the need for efficient responses from stakeholders.

Participants align with the theme by indicating the absence of a structured communication strategy in their businesses with some noting a struggle to comprehend the nuances of SCM showcasing the potential gap in recognising communication as a foundation element in shaping business success. Buhmann and Likely (2018: 654) have noted that Strategic Communication Management is a continuous and vigorous process that consists of four key elements: situation analysis, planning, implementation, and evaluation. The absence of a foundational element may slow this process down and fail to mitigate challenges through communication strategies. Participants also place an importance on perceptions and business image, indicating an awareness of the significance of external perspectives and brand reputation. Findings align with the theme by highlighting the significance of communication in shaping external perceptions, maintaining a positive image and engaging effectively with stakeholders.

Participants' responses within this theme highlight varying levels of understanding and integration of SCM as a foundational business skill, with some participants recognising its importance and others revealing potential gaps in understanding and practice.

6.6.1 Findings of Foundational Skills in Communication

Explicit adherence to SCM:

Foundational skills for communication emphasize the need for business owners to transcend traditional communication ideologies for more inclusive holistic goals. Participants explicitly acknowledge key elements of SCM, stating, "How people see your business, the image of your business, and how you communicate with your client is key. This highlights her focus on brand development, reputation management and the establishment of mutually beneficial connections which is evidence of an understanding of SCM principles to some extent.

Implicit Adherence to SCM:

Several participants implicitly adhere to SCM principles through their recognition of aspects such as building stakeholder trust, adapting to changing environments and developing a certain level of expertise. For instance, participant 5's emphasis on giving briefs, monitoring and evaluation by keeping tabs on the communication process demonstrates an implicit understanding of the value of structured communication. Participants go beyond the traditional PR approach highlighting the multifaceted nature of strategic communication, indicating an implicit awareness of SCM principles.

Non-adherence to SCM:

Participants showcase non-adherence to SCM, through varying levels of basic communication awareness.

Participants admit to winging it when it comes to communication indicating no structure or foundational skills at

all. Participants demonstrate their lack of structure by simply stating that communication is not a focus unless it is in the context of marketing. This reveals a significant gap not only in how these women understand these two departments but a general educational gap in understanding the broader role of SCM. Participant 7 grapples with grasping how communication should work and acknowledges her lack of knowledge which demonstrates potential non-adherence to SCM.

Summary of findings

Participant responses reveal a wide spectrum of adherence and non-adherence to SCM, regarding the theme of structured communication. Adherence is recognised in the participants who employ aspects like monitoring and adaptability when they initiate communication, while non-adherence is apparent in participants who struggle to comprehend what a structured communication process entails, who doubt its importance and participants who generally lack structured communication because they don't know about it. These findings highlight the need for a comprehensive education and general awareness regarding SCM and how to enhance the inclusion of more strategically structured methods of communication to enhance business growth in this context.

6.7 Discussion of Specialised communication

This theme underscores the critical role of specialised communication, rooted in the strategic use of knowledge sharing systems, fostering positive and productive interactions and engagements for business growth (Buca & Rizescu, 2017:52). It emphasizes the need for organisations, particularly black-owned female businesses, to transcend traditional communication practices and embrace more impactful approaches that value audiences and stakeholders as active participants in the communication process (Van Ruler, 2018). Strategic Communication Management (SCM) serves as a framework to achieve these objectives by guiding PR practitioners to explore the dynamics of meaning creation, interpretation, and sharing through content development (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014).

In the context of black-owned female businesses, the integration of SCM principles becomes crucial for steering communication efforts towards organizational growth and success. However, the data highlights various challenges and limitations faced by these businesses, particularly in integrating Public Relations (PR) expertise into their communication management practices (Spicer, 2015). While specialized communication, including PR, is essential for building relationships, managing brand reputation, and navigating the evolving communication landscape, the current understanding and integration of PR practitioners remains challenged among black female business owners (Mykkänen & Vos, 2015; Steyn & Puth, 2000).

The literature underscores the importance of evaluating communication practitioners to address crucial questions regarding their effectiveness in achieving organizational objectives (Macnamara & Gregory, 2018). However, challenges such as the lack of business skills, finance and research expertise hinder the strategic alignment of communication with organizational goals (Steyn & Puth, 2000). Additionally, neglecting the importance of PR function can lead to strained capabilities and decreased credibility, further impeding organizational growth (Landsberg, 2020).

Therefore, the integration of SCM, particularly a core element of theory, the inclusion of PR expertise, becomes essential for black-owned female businesses to overcome these challenges and drive strategic communication efforts. By establishing connections, building trust, adapting to changes, and managing branding and reputation effectively, these businesses can align communication strategies with overarching organisational goals, ultimately propelling the business towards excellence and growth.

For effective PR strategy implementation to occur a direct link to the business owners is crucial, as it ensures ethical influence on key relationships. This theme will explore attitudes, use and constraints in PR integration, providing insights into the evolving landscape of SCM and its effects on black female owned businesses . The provided data highlight the various challenges and limitations black female owners in this study face when considering the integration of a PR practitioner in their communication management.

Findings highlight the financial limitations that many black female business owners face, indicating a significant challenge in affording PR expertise due to a lack of resources. Participants also mention financial constraints while expressing the necessity of a social media team and their inability to afford such services. As stated in Chapter 2, South African black women often encounter systemic disadvantages that hinder their access to SCM, vital for

business growth (Swartz, Amatucci, & Marks, 2019: 478). Despite progress, they still struggle due to socialization, education, family roles, and limited business networks and resources (Chance, 2022: 46). These disadvantages impact the inclusion of PR practitioners which in turn impacts their strategic outcomes. Findings highlight the overwhelming nature of managing various aspects of business while simultaneously trying to communicate their products and offerings. Participants express a sense of failure in having to handle everything alone and being unable to afford PR services to help manage their workload. Business success relies on adeptly managing internal and external circumstances (Jolović, 2019). Identifying obstacles swiftly is essential for implementing effective strategies and minimizing adverse effects (Jolović, 2019). PR communicators particularly those who have strategic know-how, businesses are able to unload the strenuous workload from small business owners, allowing them to focus on other strategic objectives outside of reputation, brand building and the alignment of their businesses goals and communication objectives. Participant 6 shares her perception regarding the expertise and effectiveness of PR professionals, suggesting a lack of competence based on her experience and potential disappointment in the available services. However, some participants express self-reliance tactics and confidence in their communication capabilities, and also acknowledge the tremendous pressure of multitasking, which is a common hindrance among black female business owners as mentioned in the study. Consequently, education plays a pivotal role in establishing a culture of entrepreneurship in South Africa (Chimucheka, 2014: 160-168). Previous studies have shown the persistent gender inequality that hampers women entrepreneurs' growth and development (Chimucheka, 2014:160-168). These challenges often impede the effectiveness of women entrepreneurs' strategies, forcing them to address both gender equality and strategy development simultaneously (Halkias *et al.*, 2011 : 221-235). This pressure may impact their ability to focus on integrating a PR specialist. While it is evident that the addition of management can be beneficial in the communication function, it does not mean that there has been a seamless appreciation and recognition of its contribution (Steyn & Puth, 2000:14).

Collectively, participants highlight financial constraints, doubts about the expertise of PR professionals, and the overwhelming nature of self-managing various aspects of a business simultaneously. These challenges contribute to the difficulty that black female business owners face when integrating PR professionals to engage in strategic communication management for their business. PR integration remains a core part of SCM implementation. This is because PR inclusion aligns organisations with the most strategic elements of communication, however this is dependent on a number of underlying capacities. The first being the strategic know-how of PR professionals operating in South Africa currently and evaluating their level of strategic thinking in relation to how they view how public relations functions. The second is the black female owners view of the PR practitioner, how impactful they

believe them to not only implement SCM within their businesses but to implement in a way that is specific to the contexts these women find themselves in. As stated prior, the PR communicator's ability to be effective has been criticized for deficiencies in strategic performance, thinking, and behaviour (Steyn & Puth, 2000:13). Critical thinking is highlighted as a crucial skill at all levels of the profession across various sectors, including corporate, government, and non-profit public relations (Tallent & Barnes, 2015:437). Although the benefits of integrating PR practitioners into strategic decision making positions and into the overall communication function are apparent, there hasn't been a seamless recognition and appreciation of its contribution (Steyn & Puth, 2000:14) in black owned female businesses.

6.7.1 Findings of Specialised Communication in SCM

Explicit adherence to SCM:

This theme accentuates the importance of PR specialists in SCM emphasising the need to go beyond traditional communication ideologies. Communication specialists help cultivate relationships, manage media interactions, shape public perceptions and are key pillars when decisions that could impact the businesses reputation need to be made. An explicit adherence to SCM involves recognising the impact role of a PR specialist for effective communication. This means understanding their impact in relaying in business objectives and leveraging their large skill set and networks for seamless strategic communication. However, while participants would like to eventually include PR specialist in their organisations most seem to speak to their financial challenges and limited networks which make it impossible to make PR a focus in their businesses

Implicit Adherence to SCM:

Implicit adherence of this theme to SCM emerges in the participants' acknowledgement of the need for specialised communication services. The 3rd participant in the study implicitly stressed the overwhelming pressure of managing various aspects of the business alone, indicating a need for support. The implicit understanding within the data expression is that PR specialists could contribute to effective communication even though it is not explicitly stated by the participants.

Non-adherence of SCM:

Participants cite financial constraints, doubts about the expertise of PR specialists, and the overwhelming nature of self-management as contributing factors to non-adherence of specialised communication. Findings mention affordability concerns, indicating a significant barrier to integrating specialized communication practices within their organisations. Additionally, participants do question the competence of PR specialists in general. This presents a challenge in the implementation of SCM, as discussed in Chapter 2 of the study. The owners' mistrust of PR consultation and their inclination to dictate what they do rather than foster strategic thinking in their communication practices hinders the implementation of Somewhen PR practitioners prioritize pleasing management over strategic thinking, it affects their competency and capacity to enact SCM or be influential in the decision-making process. This perceived ineffectiveness leads to non-adherence to SCM inclusion within these business environments.

Summary of findings:

The connection between SCM literature and specialised communication depicted in participant responses highlights a vital yet intricate dynamic, particularly as it relates to PR integration . While there is clear recognition of the importance of specialised communication services, financial constraints and uncertainties about expertise pose obstacles to their involvement. Business owners, burdened with managing their businesses single-handedly, express a need for support, implicitly acknowledging that specialists like PR professionals could enhance successful SCM implementation. This intersection underscores the acknowledgment of PR practitioners' crucial role in effective communication, alongside the practical limitations and challenges in integrating them into the communication management process.

6.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided valuable insights into the communication practices of black-owned female businesses, with a particular focus on several identified themes: informal communication practices, top-down communication with an emphasis on social media, empathetic communication, structured communication, foundational communication skills, and specialised communications. These insights aimed to explore and discuss the opportunities and challenges related to how black-owned female business owners and use of strategic communication management

(SCM) in Gauteng. It explored this through the lens of the aforementioned themes, linking them to the SCM that can be found in the literature review basing it on the participant responses recorded during the interview stage of the study (See Appendix B).

Based on this discussion:

Informal communication practices demonstrate active networking, relationship-building, and adaptability, all of which align with the principles of SCM. The emergent approach in SCM is further emphasized in this theme as it values adaptability and real-time feedback, aligning well with the flexible nature of strategy development evident in participant responses. However, the data also highlights gaps in the dynamic activity of informal communication practices, including gaps in strategic understanding that need to be addressed for enhanced effectiveness of SCM within black owned female businesses.

Top-down communication highlights the role of social media within the black female SME landscape, with participants predominantly initiating and driving communication efforts. This theme aligns with SCM's emphasis on deliberate planning and execution, emphasising the interconnectedness of strategic communication disciplines. However, challenges also emerged, enabling non-adherence through the lack of collaboration with public relations practitioners, which limits the organization's ability to leverage expertise for effective communication on platforms most relevant to their industries. Participants also exhibited an over-reliance on their own understanding of social media, emphasizing non-adherence based on a potential gap in the strategic use of communication for their businesses. The absence of a communication specialist combined with a self-informed top-down social media practice may influence the effectiveness of these practices.

Empathetic communication in the study portrays a collective emphasis on the significance of networks, upskilling staff, and transparency in two-way communication. Despite lacking formal SCM knowledge, participants showed strategic responses in building socially responsible businesses, fostering inclusive, empowering environments, and managing reputational risks. Various levels of SCM were present in structured communication practices. A few participants explicitly used and embraced SCM principles associated with deliberate, purposeful management of communication, which speaks to the linear approach developed in SCM that values planning and efficiency. While SCM embraces flexibility and openness, it also acknowledges and appreciates the planned nature of executing a

robust strategy. However, this is not true for the majority of participants, who have no idea how to structure the communication process in a way that makes strategy functional within their businesses.

Participants displayed a wide-ranging understanding and integration of SCM as foundational business skills. Some participants acknowledged the significance of brand development, reputation management, and stakeholder engagement, aligning with SCM objectives. However, there was also evidence of educational gaps in foundational communication practices, indicating the need for business owners to know enough about their communication practices so that they are alert when stakeholders need clarity or awareness of business objectives.

Challenges in incorporating specialized communication emerged, involving financial constraints and doubts about external expertise. These barriers underline an overarching need for targeted support, educational advancements, which are later situated in places of influence, i.e., decision-making groups and resource allocation for effective PR integration, which is pivotal to SCM efficiency. The findings discussed in this chapter illuminate the complexities of SCM use in black-owned female businesses. Addressing these complexities in ways that support effective SCM application contributes to the resilience and success of these businesses through enhanced communication strategies.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

In response to Grunig's call to institutionalise strategic public relations and communication, this study explores the role of strategic communication management (SCM) among black-owned female business owners in Gauteng, South Africa - an underrepresented demographic in entrepreneurial and communication research. Inspired by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Report (2022), the study embraces the potential for targeted interventions that may emphasise the role of SCM in empowering black female business owners to communicate effectively. Using qualitative methods and conducting semi-structured interviews with 9 participants in Gauteng, South Africa, this research seeks to capture the rich experiences of these business owners. This study aims not only to fill a research gap but also to propose a new perspective on the relationship between business success and the current communication tactics present within this demographic.

As the study concludes, it hopes to pave the way for future studies to build upon the presented findings, offering a nuanced understanding of how black-owned female business owners navigate challenges, leverage SCM and foster business success. The ultimate goal is to inform policies, programmes and support mechanisms tailored to the unique context of these business owners. To foster a more inclusive and equitable business landscape in South Africa. The conclusion seeks to respond to main research questions highlighted in the Chapter 1, linking them to the themes found to provide clear response to the motive of this study which was to explore the use of SCM in of black-owned female businesses in Gauteng South Africa, focusing on their unique approaches, best practices and most effective communication practices.

7.1 In what ways do black female business owners approach SCM in their businesses?

Black female business owners approach SCM in a nuanced way. Firstly, the study revealed a general lack of structured communication plans or a clear understanding of SCM among participants. This aligns with criticisms highlighted by Steyn and Puth (2000) regarding deficiencies in strategic communication performance, thinking, and behaviour. Participants expressed a need for critical thinking skills in their communication efforts, indicating a gap

in understanding the concept of strategic communication. Additionally, there was difficulty articulating how communication strategies are developed and implemented, suggesting challenges in effective communication practices.

The themes of informal communication, structured communication, and foundational communication emerged, highlighting the nuanced approach black female business owners take towards SCM. While there are elements of SCM principles reflected in networking, relationship-building, and adaptability, gaps in strategic understanding were evident, hindering SCM's full potential. The use of social media revealed both explicit and implicit connections to SCM, but non-adherence with SCM values, such as the lack of collaboration with PR specialists, surfaced as well.

However, empathetic communication practices emerged as a strength, despite lacking formal SCM guidance, indicating potential for improvement through targeted support and educational advancement. Challenges in structured communication underscored the need for resource allocation to enhance SCM efficiency.

The study suggests that while black-owned female businesses demonstrate elements of SCM principles, there are significant gaps in understanding, education, and resources. Addressing these challenges through targeted support and education can lead to better integration and approach to SCM, ultimately enhancing communication effectiveness and contributing to business success. This underscores the importance of further research and investment in SCM education and skill development for black-owned female businesses.

7.1.1 Themes related to how black-owned business approach SCM in their businesses :

The findings suggest that black-owned approach SCM through networking, relationship-building, and adaptability align with intentional and integrated communication practices advocated in SCM literature. This study finds that participants showcase a deliberate focus on creating connections, building trust, and staying flexible in response to environmental changes. Furthermore, according to the study participants understand the importance of strategic communication on platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Emphasis on clear communication aligns with SCM principles, ensuring everyone understands the business's vision and purpose. Research also reveals that participants explicitly use social media platforms in a top-down manner, aligning with SCM principles that

emphasize purposeful communication and adaptability to the digital landscape. This study finds that participants recognise the iterative nature of SCM, adapting communication strategies based on platform characteristics and audience preferences. This study finds that participants explicitly understand the importance of empathetic communication as an approach, aligning with SCM principles that employs socially responsible perspectives and ethical communication. A recognition of inclusivity, collaboration, and building socially responsible businesses is evident reflecting strategic responses aligned with SCM. This study finds that participants explicitly adhere to SCM principles by emphasising the indispensability of strategic communication management and the importance of reaching and targeting customers. The emphasis on a transparent communication strategy aligns with SCM's planned and calculated approach. The findings also determine an acknowledgment of key SCM elements, such as brand development, reputation management, and stakeholder engagement, reflecting explicit adherence to SCM principles. The recognition of building stakeholder trust and adapting to changing environments showcases implicit adherence to foundational SCM principles. Implicit adherence emerges in participants' recognition of the need for specialised communication services, indicating a desire for PR support. This study finds that financial constraints and doubts about expertise, does affect how these business owners approach SCM within their businesses. Furthermore, there's an implicit understanding of the potential contribution of PR specialists to effective SCM practices within their businesses.

Black female business owners in Gauteng approach SCM usage in various ways, certain aspects within their businesses align with strategic , deliberate and the flexible nature of SCM. Explicit adherence reflects an informed , conscious effort to integrate SCM principles into communication practices , while the implicit adherence indicates a growing awareness of SCM value in this demographic. However, this alignment does not encompass the full value of SCM which could limit their approach based on what they know as opposed to a more holistic understanding of how strategy can be managed to communicate effectively within and beyond their businesses.

7.2 How do black-owned female businesses use Strategic Communication Management for business growth?

The findings of this study reveal a nuanced approach, with participants using various aspects of SCM to foster positive growth. Through a comprehensive exploration of various themes and findings, this summary encapsulates the intricate relationship between SCM principles and the strategies employed by these businesses. From informal communication practices to top-down communication via social media, and from empathetic communication to the incorporation of foundational skills, the findings shed light on the multifaceted nature of SCM application in this

demographic. By examining the challenges, barriers, and opportunities faced by black female business owners, this summary offers insights into how SCM can be leveraged to drive positive growth and navigate the complexities of today's business landscape.

7.2.1 Themes related to how black-owned business approach SCM for business growth:

The study finds that participants demonstrate alignment with SCM principles through relationship building, networking, and adaptability, crucial components of informal communication practices. However, gaps in strategic understanding may hinder SCM's full potential. Participants also exhibit a deliberate focus on creating connections, trust building, and staying flexible, aligning with SCM's adaptive nature. Clear and strategic communication is emphasized, though not always consistently present. A general understanding of SCM's importance on various social media platforms is evident, with an emphasis on making everyone in the business involved. However, non-adherence with SCM values, such as the lack of collaboration with PR specialists, poses challenges. The study finds that participants show an explicit understanding of empathetic communication and ethical considerations, aligning with SCM principles of inclusivity and collaboration. The study further finds that an acknowledgement of SCM elements such as brand development and stakeholder engagement reflects adherence to SCM principles. However, gaps in education and resources hinder full integration. Participants also desire communication support with their approach but face financial constraints and doubts about expertise. Lack of PR specialists or expertise is noted as a barrier to positive growth.

Overall, black-owned female businesses in Gauteng, South Africa, demonstrate both explicit and implicit adherence to SCM principles, contributing to positive business growth. However, barriers such as lack of resources, education, and time hinder full integration and optimization of SCM practices. Addressing these challenges is essential for enhancing communication effectiveness and achieving sustainable business growth. The dissertation highlights the importance of further research and investment in SCM education and skill development for this demographic. Themes related to these findings include top-down approach, specialised communication, and relational communication, which warrant further exploration in future studies.

7.3 What aspects of SCM work best for these businesses?

Strategic Communication Management (SCM) stands at the forefront of modern business practices, serving as a cornerstone for organizations seeking to navigate the complexities of today's dynamic marketplace. In the context of black-owned businesses, particularly those led by female entrepreneurs in South Africa, the efficacy of SCM takes on added significance. As these businesses strive to carve out their niche in the competitive landscape, understanding the aspects of SCM that work best becomes paramount for their success. This section of the conclusion responds to the research question concerning the aspects of Strategic Communication Management (SCM) that work best for black female-owned businesses. Through interviews with participants, several key themes emerged, shedding light on the nuanced approaches these businesses take towards communication practices.

7.3.1 Themes related to what aspects of SCM work best in black-owned female business businesses

This study finds that black female business owners emphasise the significance of informal communication strategies such as networking, relationship-building, and adaptability. These practices align with the intentional and integrated communication advocated in SCM literature, showcasing a deliberate focus on creating connections, building trust, and staying flexible in response to changes. Research reveals that participants understand the importance of top-down communication, particularly through social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. By using these platforms strategically for their own purposes, participants ensured that everyone understood the business's vision and purpose, aligning with SCM principles of purposeful communication and adaptability to the digital landscape. Empathetic communication emerged as a crucial aspect for best practice, highlighting inclusivity, collaboration, and building socially responsible businesses. Participants recognised the importance of empathizing with stakeholders, aligning with SCM principles emphasizing ethical communication and socially responsible perspectives. Structured communication was also noted as a favoured aspect of communication, with participants recognizing the indispensability of SCM and the importance of reaching and targeting customers effectively. Clear and concise communication strategies were highlighted as imperative, reflecting SCM's deliberate and purposeful approach. Additionally, this study found that participants acknowledged the need for foundational skills in communication, such as brand development, reputation management, and stakeholder engagement. This recognition showcased explicit adherence to SCM principles, as well as implicit adherence through the acknowledgment of building stakeholder trust and adapting to changing environments. Lastly, while participants expressed financial constraints and doubts about expertise, there was an implicit

understanding of the potential contribution of specialised communication services, indicating a desire for support in this area.

Overall, these findings indicate that black female-owned businesses exhibit strategic and deliberate approaches to communication practices, aligning with the flexible nature of SCM. Explicit and implicit adherence to SCM principles reflects an informed effort to integrate SCM into business operations, showcasing the value of strategic communication in this demographic. Therefore, these identified aspects serve as best practices for black-owned businesses, contributing to their growth, sustainability, and success in the dynamic business landscape

7.4 Contribution to future research

This research offers valuable insights into Strategic Communication Management (SCM) within black-owned female business, particularly in South Africa. It identifies effective SCM principles tailored to this demographic, acknowledging the intersectionality of challenges linked to gender, race and a general lack of access to education that aligns them with the value of simply being strategic. It points to the typical use of SCM practices through contextualised findings within black-owned female business in South Africa. Advancing their contributions to effective communication practices specifically within this demographic.

The outcome of this study offers beneficial insights that can enhance the business prospects of black women engaged in business ownership. These outcomes shed light on the potential communication opportunities and challenges that black-owned female businesses may encounter and need to navigate for their economic success. It is noteworthy that there was evidence of common experiences and less common experiences because it highlights that understanding of SCM is not rigid or uniform. It is dynamic and informed by the individuality of the businesses and the owners. This study enhances knowledge around SCM effectiveness in addressing gaps in strategic understanding, promoting inclusivity in decision making, mitigating external challenges which can provide rich insights for further research on the US SCM in black-owned female business.

7.5 Recommendations

The aim of this research was to explore the use of SCM in black owned female businesses in Gauteng. While recognising the limitations of this exploration, the researcher believes that there have been substantial strides made

in studies involving Strategic Communication Management and its use within this context. As the study concludes, it hopes to pave the way for future studies to build upon the presented findings, offering a nuanced understanding of how black-owned female business owners navigate challenges, leverage SCM and foster business success. The ultimate goal is to inform policies, programmes and support mechanisms tailored to the unique context of these business owners. To foster a more inclusive and equitable business landscape in South Africa. The study is has also added a new variable to the SCM Theory , particularly as it relates to black women within business, PR and communication studies

However there is room for more substantial research within the South African landscape which could determine more nuanced findings. Scholars are invited to add to this new variable buy testing the theory in different contexts. Future research of black-owned female business in different provinces in South Africa should be looked into to provide more depth to the conclusions that have been found. Businesses in different geographies like Western Cape or Eastern Cape could exhibit a much deeper understanding of the barriers these owners face particularly within their access and understanding of SCM. Future researchers should examine business owners in different fields , different age gaps and educational backgrounds and delve into any other underlying factors contributing to the reluctance of South African black owned female businesses embracing SCM in their business endeavours. Employing a qualitative methodology could also yield deeper insights from black owned businesses, enhancing the richness and meaningfulness of the data collected. This research looked at Excellence Theory and Systems Theory as a theoretical framework but other frameworks could also provide a lens that has not yet been explored. Given the substantial investments made by the South African government in entrepreneurial training and funding for black-owned female businesses, further investigation is warranted to understand why or how SCM can be incorporated as an important skill given its relevance and importance in the current business landscape. There still remains a glaring gap in research and data which has held back the potential of these businesses (South African Government, 2015). One way to address this is to ramp up research of these SMEs throughout the country so that there is more interest in the opportunities that SCM can provide. Ultimately, identifying critical skills and workforce capabilities for sustained small business growth.

8. References

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Appendix A : Consent form



FID/REC/ICv0.1

FACULTY OF INFORMATICS AND DESIGN

Individual Consent for Research Participation

Title of the study:

The use of Strategic Communication Management in black-owned female businesses in Gauteng, South Africa.

Name of researcher: Viwe Tyolwana

Contact details

Email: veetyolwana@gmail.com / 222852895@cput.ac.za

Phone: 0765926562

Purpose of the Study:

This research is interested in how black female-led South African businesses in the Gauteng region use Strategic Communication Management (SCM) to drive business growth. The primary objective is to explore how these women access and implement SCM strategies to foster long-term survival. In-depth semi-structured interviews will be conducted with business owners aged 25-55, recruited via professional networks. Confidentiality and protection of data will be ensured, and all questions will be tailored for relevant research information.

Participation: My participation will consist essentially of:

- Participating in a semi-structured interview that will be recorded.

Confidentiality:

I have been assured by the researcher that any information I share will be kept strictly confidential, unless indicated otherwise. I understand that the data will solely be used for the specified study, and its outcomes will be presented in conferences, journal articles, and book chapters. To protect my confidentiality, general descriptors like my current occupation, age, and gender will be used.

Anonymity will be protected in the following manner:

The engagement / interview recordings will be transcribed, and at the researcher's request, any identifying information of the creator will be excluded from the transcript. The transcripts will be saved with generic file names that prevent any linkage to the original videos. The analysis of the study will be conducted based on these anonymised transcripts.

Conservation of data: All data will be securely stored on a password-protected external drive in a locked home office and transcripts will be saved as password-protected files on a secured laptop.

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

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

	Yes	No
I would like my reflections to include my full name and surname		
I would like to be a part of the recordings to be made of the engagement.		
My exact words may be used in publications:		

Acceptance: I, (print name) _____

agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Viwe Tyolwana, a student of the Faculty of Informatics and Design Media Department at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

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

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B : Interview Questionnaire

Questionnaire

1. How should the communication division be structured within a business?
2. What values do you consider important when initiating communication with stakeholders?
3. Could you please provide an overview of how a typical communication process is conducted within your organization?
4. How would you describe the role of strategy in the communication process?
5. Who are the key decision-makers in the businesses, and how many of them would you require to specialize in PR or communication?
6. How would the interviewee describe the direct role of a communication/PR coordinator in an organisation?
7. How frequently do you consult or engage with PR and communications officers when seeking strategic thinking or top-level decision-making for the business?
8. How do you perceive the efficiency of your communication department / process in building the relationships with stakeholders or employees?
9. In what ways do you think a business should structure strategies in its communication tactics and how do you do this in your business?
10. Do you know about Strategic Communication Management?

11. Have you ever incorporated Strategic Communication Management into your business? If not, what are your challenges in doing so?
12. In what ways do you think strategy-focused communication can support long-term business goals and objectives?
13. Do you feel that your understanding of strategic communication differs from those of other business owners? If so, in what ways?
14. Are there specific tools, platforms, networks or techniques you utilize for strategic communication with stakeholders employees Which ones do you use and why?
15. In your experience, what strategic communication practices show a positive impact on your business growth?
16. Have there been any communication practices that did not yield the expected results or were considered less effective in driving business growth?
17. How do you measure the effectiveness of your communication in terms of achieving business growth objectives? Are there specific metrics or indicators you use to evaluate their impact?
18. Can you share any instances where effective communication played a crucial role in upkeep your reputation?
19. Would you like to know more about how strategy focused communication can help grow your business?
20. Which business in South Africa do you think has a strategic focus in their communication? What aspects make you think that?

Appendix C: Table 1 : Codebook

Study Title	Code Label	Code Definition	Description	Exclusions
The use of SCM in Black Female-Owned	Establishing Connections and Building Trust	Signifying the importance of building and maintaining strong relationships with stakeholders.	The role of trust and relationship-building in fostering authenticity	N/A

Businesses in Gauteng, SA		Emphasizes trust, authenticity, and meaningful connections in strategic communication.	and meaningful connections.	
The use of SCM in Black Female-Owned Businesses in Gauteng, SA	The Use of Social Media	Highlighting the use of social media as a primary communication tactic for business growth and efficiency. Focuses on strategic use of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok to boost sales, drive engagement, and direct customers.	Strategic utilization of social media tools for enhancing business visibility and engagement.	N/A
The use of SCM in Black Female-Owned Businesses in Gauteng, SA	Brand Development and Reputation	Showcasing the recognition of branding and storytelling in communication strategies. Participants share experiences of building brand identity and differentiation on an emotional and strategic level.	The role of brand development and storytelling in shaping brand identity and differentiation.	N/A
The use of SCM in Black Female-Owned Businesses in Gauteng, SA	Adapting to Changes	Acknowledging the dynamic nature of business and the significance of adapting communication tactics to changes in the industry environment. Speaks to flexibility and a willingness to educate for sustained business growth.	Adapting communication strategies to navigate changes in the industry environment.	N/A
The use of SCM in Black Female-Owned	Navigating Limitations	Participants addressing challenges in investing and committing to communication efforts, including	Overcoming challenges in communication efforts due to limited resources	N/A

Businesses in Gauteng, SA		limited resources, education, and finances. Signalling an approach to finding solutions through personal trial and error.	and finding practical solutions.	
The use of SCM in Black Female-Owned Businesses in Gauteng, SA	Practical Hands-on Experience	Participants highlighting the value of hands-on experience in formulating communication strategies. Emphasizes learning through practical situations and adjusting communication tactics accordingly.	The role of first-hand experience in shaping communication strategies and adapting tactics based on practical learning.	
The use of Black Female-Owned Businesses in Gauteng, SA	Expertise and Specialization	Emphasizing the significance of segmenting communication tactics based on services offered, leading to the creation of distinct communication channels for specific business outcomes.	Segmenting communication strategies based on expertise and specialization to achieve specific business objectives.	N/A
The use of SCM in Black Female-Owned Businesses in Gauteng, SA	Employee Engagement	Focusing on effective communication within the organization to empower and engage employees, creating a positive work environment.	Strategies employed to enhance communication and engagement among employees	
The use of SCM in Black Female-Owned Businesses in Gauteng, SA	Customer-Centric Communication	Prioritizing communication that revolves around understanding and meeting the needs of customers.	Focus on customer satisfaction, needs, and preferences in business communication.	

The use of SCM in Black Female-Owned Businesses in Gauteng, SA	Strategic Networking	Building intentional connections with influential individuals or organizations to contribute to business growth.	Techniques and efforts directed towards strategic networking for business advancement	
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Appendix D : Theme expression in participant responses

Table 4 : Theme expression in participant responses - Informal Communication

Participant 1 : “ I am the key decision maker , and I deal with all the clients first before anyone does. I typically start with what they have in place. And it also depends on what their pressure points are.”

Participant 2 : “I have a really competent team that I work with and so like to bounce ideas and yeah, a whole lot of things, their ideas. I just have to okay them, make sure that everything falls within the vision.”

Participant 3 : "Communicating in this industry is hard because it's male-dominated, especially in manufacturing. It's like no one is listening. You try hard to make your voice out there, but it's like no one is listening.

Participant 3 : The business went down to zero because of load shedding, then COVID happened, and riots burned down the factory.

Participant 4 : "So every month I have two or three sessions with a therapist because I want to know what service they offer to my customers. So it's a physical thing. It's not about people writing reports or having to do this on a system or all of that. It's about a specific service or maybe ask them questions in terms of all the treatments that we do so that you can see if they know or they don't know. "

Participant 5 : "You cannot go there looking like a thug because then they're (clients) going to have a problem with you. Those are the things that made me realize that I'm actually running my own business".

Participant 6 : "It firstly has to do with building relationships with the client. "It's not just about making a profit. It's about ensuring that it becomes sustainable."

Participant 6 : "I play that role of a sounding board, someone that you can talk to, someone that is an interface of being a mentor and also the coach."

Participant 7 : "One of the ways that I get my clients is that I go out there and I build relationships with builders and interior designers."

Participant 8 : "What ended up happening is I said to myself, because the business is registered as an entity. Separate from you with the state, then it means that the business in and of itself has a personality. It means that your business has got a voice. And so if this thing is going to grow, you're going to have to let the business speak to you."

Participant 8 : " You know, my vision around communicating with either my clients or stakeholders has really been one of those things that has developed itself."

Participant 9 : "So you serve your staff so they can serve your clients. So that is very important because it avoids things like stealing your products and your equipment."

Table 5 : Theme expression in participant data: Top-Down Communication

Participant 1 : "Recently I have reached out to a team of social media experts. I think you've seen some of my postings." "So it's a guy who's an expert in social media. The other one is, is, is an expert in marketing. And leveraging that opportunity to spread the word and to communicate. I wasn't really sure what to do or how to do it, but I think it's critical." "But I know that I've spread the word a lot more intentionally this year than I've ever done since I started the business."

Participant 2 : " I mean, I don't have a huge business, right? I'm in the I'm the HR department. I'm in the marketing department. Communication trickles down, I suppose, from the top to, like, everyone who needs who needs, like, to be communicated to. Um, if I do something, I'll save it in the cloud. They'll get it in the cloud. They take it out and put it in. So that's how information is transferred in the organization"

Participant 3: "The management team had six WhatsApp groups because each supervisor will have each production floor where they will change. I will be in all these groups, but as a silent person. I even used a different phone number so that they don't realize that it's me, to allow them to be free. They didn't know that it was me. Even my supervisors didn't know."

Participant 4: Social media is very powerful these days and easily accessible and it's actually even cheaper. We are promoting our business across all the social networks: WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram." I need to have a platform for everyone to know that they are welcome to come to me because I know that without them, I don't have a business and without me, they don't have a job. We need each other, and I had to make sure that everything that I used to communicate was very clear to everyone."

Participant 5: "Thanks to COVID right now, um, this year I've been selling mostly on WhatsApp. That's fantastic. I promise you. Social media has, uh, worked in our favour as the creatives because you, as an admin person, cannot post your bloody paperwork. But we have visuals. Yes, for sure. You have to know what you put on there to attract people."

Participant 6: [Social media] has an impact. Uh, the only thing that I can also say, uh, I just need to get the right language.”

Participant 7 : "So yeah, I've gotten advice actually to go into TikTok. Um, you know, we really should go into TikTok. And, you know, they were saying with TikTok we must actually show more of the manufacturing process. Instagram is a big one because for our business also, it's very visual. Um, so we've done well on Instagram and we do post on Facebook, but it's never really been fruitful for us."

Participant 8 : "Okay, so our main point of communication right now is definitely WhatsApp, but as it relates to employees, that's contact, that's face to face. So the structures are as follows. So once I okayed the vision with my husband , I then okay the vision with the managers and they agree, we then consult our communications person and, and, and kind of see how it's going to work or what she says.""

Participant 9 : "On Facebook, there's this amazing tool of boosting posts. And I know on a specific day, like on the 10th, I'll be boosting a post for the 15th or for the 20th or for the 25th. Then we always lead people on all social media platforms to our website. At first, I didn't get it right. I was just marketing. We literally do so many things. So I was posting this and that and that... And that really helped a lot because now people can ask, 'Okay, so how much is this?'"

Table 6 : Theme expression in the participant data : Empathetic Communication

Participant 1 : "I believe that we all have the opportunity to not just be self-employed but to create employment for other people. And when you do that, you'll never have to work a day in your life... I truly, truly feel like I have not worked a day in my life."

Participant 2: " Yeah, I think everyone that works here has some influence. I have an intern and he only started working recently for me. He has an HR degree, um, with yeah, marketing in, in et cetera, et cetera. He's not that experienced, but he does have some sort of qualification that says he understands communication."

Participant 3: "If I have an idea, I must communicate with my team members. If you're not comfortable, pull that person in. Is it worth it? Because sometimes ideas can be stupid. Actually, this idea, let's refine it , so I ask them to come up with a perspective that's different so that we can work together ... you can have people (staff) that are helpful.

Participant 4 : "I've had bad reviews, but whether the review is good or bad, you can't use emotions. You have to sit down, analyse it, understand it, and then drive it in a step-by-step process. If I don't include them (Employees) ,I don't have a business. I don't do massages. They do the massages. So with myself, it is usually a situation of upskilling and letting the people perform their duties to the best of their abilities."

Participant 5: "Right now I'm the one man band because of COVID I lost people. I mean, I used to have intense people and it was fine. I do have friends that assist me with communication. Okay. Um, one is a consultant for this one venture I'm busy with."

Participant 6 : "It takes a journey of also educating the client. Because if you don't educate the client, you are bound to be forced to do things that you know are not going to work."

Participant 7 : "The importance of keeping the customer in the loop... I make sure that we come to you first, I always tell you [The customer] what is going on." "I've worked with two influencers... I get like real sales clients."

Participant 8 : "So what I started doing is listening to my clients."

Participant 9 : "I was posting it literally, you know, taking a picture, posting it, and the owner of Inviso, a very renowned, uh, lady... she was like, okay, Gugu, I follow your page, but I'm going to unfollow you now. What is this?"

Table 7 : Theme expression in participant data: Structured Communication

Participant 1: "I don't have a structured way of communication but I know there must be a plan in place... But right now there is no standard process."

Participant 2: "Obviously we have a strategy, you know, like a company strategy, operating strategy, marketing strategy. And, um, obviously it's about, okay, maybe can we do it this way? And, um, we've seen this, people are doing this. Can we try to do it that way? Um, maybe there's new trends or, you know, new, new things that are happening. Obviously, I don't have my eyes everywhere"

Participant 3: "There is no communication department, no strategy formulation for it... We are not talking about professionals here. You cannot be sophisticated with your communication..."

Participant 4: "There's no business without strategic management communication, how you reach your customers because it's basically your direction. I don't know how people operate if they don't have strategic management."

Participant 5: "I enjoy strategizing, I like to be observant, and I just put myself on the other side of the fence. I was like, nah, I'm not, I'm, I'm looking at the gap here, there is no fabric house owned by a black, let alone a female, so I'm going for that. "I want to get money to feed my family. That's it. I don't have a vision beyond that."

Participant 6: "At the core, the problem that we are currently confronted with is that a lot of people don't know what strategic communication is. It begins with the universities where qualifications are issued. If the university, the curriculum, it's not really speaking into strategic communication, the PR function is always doomed because you can't say you are training strategic communicators, and the content is not responsive to that."

Participant 7: "So the reason is that I didn't even know you could develop a communication strategy. I didn't know if it's important to do so. Usually, there is a masterclass on strategy, but like I said, it will be very high level and very generic, you know"

Participant 8: "I do have a strategy now, though because after seven years, I do understand my clients and I also do understand the kind of stakeholder that I need to work with. We do things to be successful, not just to look successful."

Participant 9: "So it's communication for marketing your business, how people see, you know, the image of your business to how you communicate with the client, that is key. So with me, as well, that is the reason I do everything. This is literally, there's no other plan B. It's not a side hustle."

Table 8: Theme expression in the participant data: Foundational skills in Communication

Participant 1: "I was really just winging it when it comes to communications... My biggest challenge is that I work for the business... my time working on the business is very limited because I'm the one who puts out everything."

Participant 2: "Now I am looking towards that because I believe we have to expand as a business. But for now a whole lot of things come from me, which is not really optimal..."

Participant 3: "While I knew marketing was an important part of my business, communication is not a focus..."

Participant 4: "When I bought a business through this franchise, I quickly saw there was no 360 communication, everything was being communicated from one side. I could see how frustrating it was..."

Participant 5: "You give briefs, that's how one should start the communication process. You brief the client, then you brief the supplier and then you keep tabs on it in the best way possible."

Participant 6: "In my business, we often talk about "poops and balloons"... Strategic Communication is beyond that, you need to look at the multifaceted state of the business and respond efficiently..."

Participant 6: "In all of the PR facilitators I have hired I have seen that actually very few of them know what they are actually doing... PR people are often locked into an authoritative bias..."

Participant 9: "How people see your business, the image of your business and how you communicate with your client is key... I always want to make sure my story is clear and that there is a structure to that."

Table 9 : Theme expression in participant responses : Specialised Communication

Participant 1: I do wish that my business could be in a position to afford those kinds of services.

Participant 2: "Right now I'm not in that space because I can't afford a social media team, which is imperative."

Participant 6: In all of the PR facilitators I have hired I have seen that actually very few of them know what they are actually doing... business. It's not even the business name because I'm not. I cannot be the person doing that."

Participant 3 : Yeah. You can't do it alone because you must be online and then you're also manufacturing and then you're also trying to sell. It's just, no, you can't. Yes. It doesn't work. We are failing. We are failing. That's what I can say. We are failing.

Participant 8 : "I feel as a woman, I think I'm very competent to lead my own communication, I'm very learned, I'm very smart, I'm very capable. I'm doing so many things and I'm pregnant with my third child right now."

Participant 9 : "The only thing I have in my business is an HR. That was really needed. You can't be good at one thing. I'm a small business; I can't give so much to get very much."

List of Codes Found in Data	Description of Themes in Relation to Communication
Relaxation, Casual conversation	Informal communication styles that focus on building rapport and creating a comfortable atmosphere.
Gratitude	Expressing thanks or appreciation, emphasizing positive communication and fostering positive relationships.
Research interest, Strategic communication, Black...	Communication related to research, strategic planning, and addressing issues specific to the Black experience, entrepreneurship, and gender inequalities.
Career transition, Entrepreneurship	Communication about career changes, transitions, and entrepreneurial ventures.
Autonomy, Independence, Self-management	Themes related to self-directed communication, independence, and personal management.
Identity, Gender, Race, Occupation, Challenges, Di...	Communication addressing personal and social identity, challenges, and discrimination in the context of business.
Migration, Cultural diversity	Communication surrounding the experiences and challenges of migration and cultural diversity in various contexts.
Work experience, Design, Family background	Communication about work experience, design, and the influence of family background on one's professional journey.

Learning, Personal experience, Family influence	Themes related to learning, personal experiences, and the influence of family in communication and decision-making.
Job satisfaction, Career advancement	Communication about job satisfaction, career progression, and factors contributing to professional growth.
Pioneering, Diversity, Inequality	Communication focusing on pioneering efforts, diversity, and addressing issues of inequality.
Inappropriate language, Discrimination, Stereotyping	Communication challenges related to inappropriate language, discrimination, and stereotypes in various contexts.
Work-life balance, Productivity, Self-empowerment: ...	Communication addressing work-life balance, productivity, and the belief in personal effort for self-empowerment.
Consumer choice, Privacy	Communication related to consumer choices and privacy concerns.
Stereotyping, Judgment	Addressing communication challenges related to stereotyping and judgment.
Uncertainty	Communication around dealing with uncertainty in various aspects of life and business.

Pride, Authority, Expertise	Communication expressing pride, authority, and expertise in a particular field or role.
Business, Government, Consumer services: Industry d...	Communication focusing on the dominance of industries, interactions with government, and consumer services.
Entrepreneurship, Financial constraints, Family bus...	Communication related to entrepreneurship, financial challenges, and family-owned businesses.
Business partnership, Stereotyping	Communication in the context of business partnerships and challenges related to stereotyping.
Diversity, Self-promotion	Communication involving diversity and the role of self-promotion in various contexts.
Lack of interest, Discouragement	Communication addressing lack of interest and discouragement in different areas.
Grief, Loss, Cancer	Communication related to grief, loss, and experiences with cancer.
Friendship, Collaboration, Career advancement	Communication involving friendship, collaboration, and their impact on career advancement.
Responsibility, Endurance	Communication emphasizing responsibility and endurance in various aspects of life.

Logistical challenges, Consumer services: Global I'm...	Communication challenges related to logistical issues, global impact of COVID-19, and international collaboration.
Business operations, Planning	Communication about business operations and planning strategies.
Travel, Business, Decision	Communication related to travel, business decisions, and decision-making processes.
Disappointment, Disruption, Uncertainty	Communication around experiences of disappointment, disruption, and dealing with uncertainty.
Loss, Uncertainty, Adversity	Communication addressing loss, uncertainty, and adversities in personal and professional life.
Determination, Persistence	Communication reflecting determination and persistence in pursuing goals.
Diversity, Race, Entrepreneurship, Inequality	Communication addressing diversity, race, entrepreneurship, and issues of inequality.
Admiration, Encouragement	Communication expressing admiration and encouragement.
Gender roles, Stereotypes, Financial motivation	Communication related to gender roles, stereotypes, and financial motivation.

Ambition, Perseverance, Gender equality	Communication related to ambition, perseverance, gender equality, and entrepreneurship.
Racial dynamics, Inequality	Communication addressing racial dynamics and issues of inequality.
Societal expectations, Gender roles,	Communication related to societal expectations, gender roles, and cultural assimilation.
Deception, Dishonesty, Betrayal	Communication challenges related to deception, dishonesty, and betrayal.
Excitement, Positive emotion, Language diversity	Communication expressing excitement, positive emotions, and celebrating language diversity.
Confusion, Argument, Hidden agenda	Communication challenges involving confusion, arguments, and hidden agendas.
Racism, Stereotyping, Discrimination	Communication addressing racism, stereotyping, and discrimination.
Rejection, Bias, Perceived discrimination	Communication addressing experiences of rejection, bias, and perceived discrimination.
Appreciation, Admiration, Gratitude	Communication expressing appreciation, admiration, and gratitude.
Appreciation, Encouragement, Praise	Communication involving appreciation, encouragement, and praise.

Understanding, Strategy	Communication emphasizing the importance of understanding and strategic planning.
Confusion, Surprise	Communication reflecting confusion and surprise.
Gratitude	Communication expressing gratitude.
Technical difficulties	Communication challenges related to technical issues.
Communication challenges: Communication problem, Tech...	Communication challenges involving communication problems and technical difficulties.
Uncertainty, Stress, Fatigue, Confusion	Communication addressing uncertainty, stress, fatigue, and confusion in various situations.
Gratitude, Busy schedule, Respect, Helpfulness	Communication expressing gratitude, acknowledging a busy schedule, emphasizing respect, and recognizing helpfulness.
Gratitude, Guidelines	Communication expressing gratitude and adherence to guidelines.
Communication challenges: Strategic communication man...	Communication challenges related to strategic communication management, assessment, and business strategies.

