The Role of Social Media in Public Relations Practice – a New Zealand Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the trends in the use of social media in the practice of New Zealand public relations and sheds light on how New Zealand public relations professionals evaluate the role of social media in their profession.

It followed a triangulation approach by combining a document analysis of 148 award-winning communication campaigns and in-depth semi-structured interviews with ten New Zealand public relations practitioners.

The findings show that New Zealand public relations practitioners have not significantly changed the ways they have adopted and used social media over the last decade. Practitioners still seem to focus their efforts on established social media platforms and refrain from adopting new ones. Their adoption of new social media platforms appears to follow fashion trends; for example, applications like Instagram and Instagram Stories were adopted quicker than others. In-house practitioners also seem to generally lag when adopting social media platforms due to a control paradigm that is still prevalent within organisations.

Return on investment and resource restrictions are identified as important influencing factors on the practitioners' application of social media platforms. The practitioners appear to concentrate their social media efforts on a selected number of most popular platforms that offer more advantages, such as reach.

The results of this study suggest that practitioners are using social media more strategically than in the past. But the findings also show that practitioners use social media predominantly as a separate broadcasting channel for promotional communication and the dissemination of organisational information, rather than for two-way communication in the form of conversations with their publics. Encroachment between public relations and other disciplines such as marketing is identified as a potential reason for the prevailing dominance of promotional tactics.

This study demonstrates that social media has outgrown earned media as the most important media type in New Zealand public relations, followed by owned media. The findings further indicate that the introduction of algorithms has significantly increased the importance of paid tactics on social media.

Moreover, the results suggest that the commonly used PESO model, which categorises communication tactics into paid, earned, shared and owned media, might be flawed for the New Zealand public relations practice as it neglects the importance of interpersonal communication. Consequently, a PESOI model is developed to fill this gap.

In sum, this study demonstrates that although New Zealand public relations professionals have largely embraced social media, they still do not use them to their full potential.

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Thesis Background

Social media has fundamentally shaped the way individuals and organisations communicate. The birth of Web 2.0 and social media enabled organisations to change from simply disseminating their information to engaging with their publics by implementing two-way communication (Mersham et al., 2009). Since its emergence in the late 1990s, social media has been increasingly incorporated by public relations practitioners worldwide. However, not all organisations seem to have used this unique opportunity to directly engage with their publics.

As a German public relations professional and a Master's student of Communication Studies, I have witnessed organisations leading incredibly successful communication campaigns on social media, whereas others have appeared to completely ignore the 'social' nature of this medium by simply copying and pasting marketing content. Since New Zealand is often referred to as a technically savvy nation of early adopters of digital trends, I was interested in how my New Zealand colleagues adopted and used social media. Hence, the idea for this research.

This chapter begins by defining the term 'social media' and categorises the different contemporary social media platforms to provide a better understanding of what social media actually is. This is followed by a short description of the main Western social media platforms and social media use in New Zealand. The second part of this chapter presents the purpose and scope of this study, followed by an outline of how this thesis is structured.

Defining Social Media

One of the first definitions of the term 'social media' was provided by Kaplan and Haenlein in 2010:

> Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content. (p. 61)

According to them, Web 2.0 platforms such as blogs and wikis formed the base for social media by enabling all internet users to collaboratively and continuously modify content and applications. This new way of using the internet empowered the user to

create and then share their own content online with others, changing the communication from one-way publishing by single users to two-way conversations between multiple users.

A more recent definition described social media as "networked database platforms that combine public with personal communication" (Meikle, 2016, p. 6). Meikle (2016) called social media a convergence of the three key advancements in online communication during the 2000s: the user-generated content of Web 2.0, the connection of personal databases via networking services and the round-the-clock connectivity and communication through mobile devices. Or as Breakenridge (2008) put it simply, social media is "anything that uses the Internet to facilitate conversation between people" (p. xviii).

In sum, social media changed communication systems from one-way, one-to-many to two-way, many-to-many communications, transforming consumers from passive observers to active content creators (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014). Communication on social media was therefore considered a dialogue consisting of listening and engaging (Breakenridge, 2008).

Social Media Categorisation

Social media dates back to the launch of the first weblog, Open Diary, in 1998 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Martinviita, 2016). Since then, social media has continuously evolved into different types of platforms (Burns, 2017) such as blogs or social networking sites. For instance, the first social networking platform, Friendster, was created in 2002, followed by the business networking site LinkedIn during 2003.

However, social media did not become mainstream until the launch of the social networking site MySpace in 2003, which was the first site that enabled personalised profiles and continually offered new features based on user demand (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Facebook was launched one year later and became the most popular social networking site worldwide, overtaking MySpace in 2008 (Edosomwan et al., 2011).

The constantly changing and evolving social media landscape impedes a general categorisation of its existing platforms. The importance of some once-popular social media platforms such as MySpace decreased significantly over the years, while others such as Google+ or Vine have ceased altogether. In contrast, more recent platforms such as the short-form video application TikTok emerged, rapidly increasing in popularity and even changing the way that social media works (Herrman, 2019).

However, several scholars, journalists and bloggers have tried to categorise the different types of social media. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), for instance, were the first to develop six different social media categories:

- Collaborative projects such as Wikipedia,
- Blogs,
- Content communities like YouTube,
- Social networking sites such as Facebook,
- Virtual game worlds,
- Virtual social worlds like Second Life.

In the same year, Evans (2010) also identified the categories social news, social bookmarking, social events, microblogging, and forums in addition to blogs, Wikis, social sharing and social networking sites. Only two years later, Safko (2012) listed 15 different social media categories, of which he presented blogging, microblogging and social networks as the most important platforms.

In 2019, French social media expert Cavazza identified 27 different groups of social media services, which he condensed into six main categories: publishing, sharing, messaging, discussing, collaborating and networking. Figure 1 presents the complex social media landscape existing in 2019. It features 135 different social media services grouped according to those six different social media categories.

The contemporary landscape is clearly dominated by the Facebook corporation, which owns Facebook, Facebook Messenger, Instagram and WhatsApp. However, other platforms are still very popular in their specific niche (Cavazza, 2019).

Figure 1:

Social Media Landscape in 2019

Note: Retrieved from https://fredcavazza.net/2019/05/12/panorama-des-medias-sociaux-2019/. Used with the permission of FredCavazza.net.

Most Popular Social Media Platforms

The contemporary social media landscape consists of a large variety of platforms and mobile applications. Not all can be discussed here. This research focusses on the Western social media landscape, which is clearly dominated by only a few of these platforms and applications, such as YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. Because of their relevance to this thesis, they are briefly presented here.

However, the rankings concerning popularity and importance would change if Chinese platforms like the messaging application WeChat would be considered. WeChat alone has 1.15 billion monthly active users (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2020a), making it bigger than Instagram and almost as popular as Facebook Messenger.

Facebook

Social networking sites like Facebook enable users to connect via individual online profiles and to share content with each other (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Since its launch as a private niche networking site for Harvard students in 2004 (Kietzmann et al., 2011), Facebook has grown into the world's biggest social media platform with 1.657 billion daily and 2.498 billion monthly active users (Facebook, 2019a).

The social networking site allows its users to connect with Facebook friends and to post and share content such as photos and videos or updates with each other.

Facebook has constantly added new features such as the tagging of friends or the like button and copied the successful features of competitors (Press, 2018), such as the Live Feed similar to Twitter's stream, to attract new publics (Hall, n.d.).

Facebook is, by far, the social network that is used the most worldwide for reading news (Reuters Institute, 2019). The introduction of video-sharing and live video are other examples of features that fuelled Facebook's popularity, despite various privacy and data scandals over the past years.

YouTube

YouTube is the most popular video-sharing platform globally, with more than two billion monthly active users (Spangler, 2019), representing almost one-third of the internet (YouTube, n.d.). The platform is said to be the second most visited website after Google (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2020a).

Since its foundation in 2005, YouTube has transformed from a social networking site for exchanging user-generated videos into a mainstream media platform (Burgess & Green, 2018). Kim (2012) described the platform as a convergence between TV broadcasting and the internet as it follows traditional media rules combining content and commercials while offering short-form and easily accessible video content.

This has expanded to long-form formats, which are streamed on the platform or via 70 cable and broadcast channels bundled under YouTube TV, Google's US internet pay-tv service (Spangler, 2019). According to Spangler (2019), YouTube reaches more American adults between 18 and 49 years than all cable TV channels combined. The Google-owned platform is said to have significantly increased the time YouTube is watched on television globally by almost 40%. As of March 2019, users worldwide watched 250 million hours of YouTube per day on their televisions. However, almost two-thirds of the overall YouTube screen time was still from mobile devices.

Instagram

Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms worldwide, which has recently grown faster than other platforms like Facebook or Snapchat and has more than one billion monthly active users (Constine, 2018). The platform started as a mobile photo-sharing application in 2010 and quickly became popular as it combined instant photo-sharing with different filters (Riley-Smith, 2013).

The continuous introduction of new features like video uploads in 2013, Instagram Stories in 2016 or IGTV in 2018 (Instagram, 2016; Instagram 2018) successfully aimed at attracting new users. Instagram Stories, a feature that enables users to post photos and videos that disappear after 24 hours, has more than 500 million daily users worldwide (Facebook, 2019b).

Twitter

Twitter is a micro-blogging platform where users can publish short posts called tweets, allowing real-time communication between its users (Evans et al., 2011). These tweets started with a length of up to 140 characters but were extended to 280 characters in 2017 to make tweeting easier for users (Rosen, 2017).

The micro-blogging platform has shown constant growth since its start in 2006, reaching 153 million daily active users in 2019 globally (Lovejoy et al., 2012; Twitter, 2020). However, despite its role in delivering real-time news (Fiegerman, 2016), Twitter's growth has stagnated since 2017 (Clement, 2019a). Harassment on the platform and struggles with finding the right growth strategy might be reasons for Twitter's stagnating popularity (Fiegerman, 2016).

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is the largest business-oriented networking site worldwide, with more than 675 million members and profiles of executives from each Fortune 500 corporation (LinkedIn, n.d.-b). Launched in 2003 (Stec, 2018), it was initially used for recruiting purposes and business self-promotion (van Dijck, 2013).

The Microsoft-owned platform now appears to be positioning itself as a business platform for thought leadership (LinkedIn, n.d.-a). LinkedIn also offers a variety of marketing and sales solutions and a training platform (Pascual, 2018).

Other Platforms

In addition to these main social media platforms, there are various other applications that are still relevant. Snapchat, for instance, enables its users to share photos and videos that disappear after they have been viewed (Stec, 2018). Since its launch in 2011 (Neate, 2017), the platform has been particularly popular among younger publics (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). However, young users are since reported to have exchanged Snapchat for Instagram (Perrin & Anderson, 2019; Reuters Institute, 2019).

Pinterest is a photo-sharing platform where users post collections of pictures according to specific themes that are called 'boards' (Stec, 2018). Reddit is a social news site consisting of topic-oriented communities (Stec, 2018), and WhatsApp is a mobile messaging and calling application with two billion users worldwide (WhatsApp, n.d.).

Furthermore, the newer Chinese short-form video application TikTok is a rapidly growing platform that has increasingly garnered global attention since its launch in 2016 (Anderson, 2020; Cresci, 2019; El Qudsi, 2019). TikTok was one of the most installed applications in the first quarter of 2019 and had already more than 500 million monthly active users worldwide (El Qudsi, 2019).

According to Anderson (2020), creating and sharing short-form videos and live-streaming is a growing trend on social media. She stated that many platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok offer these services.

Social Media Use in New Zealand

The internet, in general, has become ubiquitous in contemporary New Zealand. According to Díaz Andrade et al. (2018), New Zealand has a very high connectivity rate of more than 90% and a high frequency of internet use. Social media is also widely used by New Zealanders, who are very active on social media platforms.

Hughes (2019b) found that the penetration rate of social media in the country has consistently increased along with growing digitalisation. He wrote that in 2018, almost three-quarters of the New Zealand population were active on social media, the majority accessing the platforms with a mobile device. The New Zealand internet user has 7.1 social media accounts on average and spends one hour and 45 minutes per day on social media (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2020b). Díaz Andrade et al. (2018) reported that almost three in four New Zealanders used chats and sent direct messages at least daily, and one third posted and re-posted content and shared links on social media at least daily.

A comparison between the United States and New Zealand shows that the use of Western social media platforms seemed to be similar in these countries and clearly dominated by YouTube and Facebook. According to Perrin and Anderson (2019), YouTube was the most used social media platform among American adults, closely

followed by Facebook. Hootsuite and We Are Social[1] (2020b) found the same situation in New Zealand, where YouTube and Facebook were also the most used social media platforms with 88% and 84% of internet users active on these platforms. Instagram ranked third in the United States and was used by every third user and ranked fourth in New Zealand, where every second user was active on this platform.

In New Zealand, Facebook Messenger ranked third with 72%. Pinterest, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Twitter and WhatsApp were all moderately used in both countries. However, Perrin and Anderson (2019) found that the use of LinkedIn had slightly increased, whereas the other platforms had reported a decrease. Most younger publics were more likely to use visually appealing platforms like YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat, while only half of them used Facebook (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). In contrast, Facebook was used commonly across all age groups (Perrin & Anderson, 2019).

New Zealand Practitioners and Social Media

According to the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (n.d.), the public relations practice aims to build sustainable relationships between organisations and their publics by establishing and maintaining excellent communications and mutual understanding.

As social media has become an integral part of the daily lives of most New Zealanders, it became an increasingly relevant communication channel for organisations to communicate and build relationships with their publics (see Chapter 2 for the use of social media in public relations).

Despite the growing popularity of social media as a field of research, studies on how New Zealand practitioners use the different social media platforms are surprisingly scarce. Other studies have examined the attitudes of New Zealand practitioners towards social media ethics (Toledano & Avidar, 2016) or how social media influenced the relationship between public relations and advertising (Toledano, 2010), for instance.

To date, only one research conducted by Bhargava in 2010 exclusively examined online media uses by public relations professionals in New Zealand. Macnamara et al. (2015; 2017) analysed only some aspects of social media use by New Zealand practitioners as part of their biannual Asia-Pacific Communication Monitor. However,

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[1] The New Zealand digital report published by Hootsuite and We Are Social was identified as the only accessible source with the most recent and comprehensive data on social media use in New Zealand. The provider of social media management software Hootsuite and the marketing agency We Are Social publish annual digital reports on global and country-specific digital trends.

no updated comprehensive research on the use of social media platforms by New Zealand public relations practitioners could be found. Thus, prompting this research to update the body of knowledge by investigating how social media is used in contemporary public relations practice.

Purpose and Scope of This Research

The purpose of this study is to fill the gap in current New Zealand public relations research by analysing the role social media plays in contemporary public relations and by updating knowledge of how public relations practitioners use social media. It is expected that the practitioners' approach to social media has changed significantly in the decade since Bhargava's (2010) research.

This study aimed to provide insights about trends in practitioners' social media use by analysing communication campaigns that have been honoured with a PRINZ (Public Relations Institute of New Zealand) Award for their excellence between 2011 and 2019. In-depth semi-structured interviews with New Zealand public relations professionals were intended to add depth to this research by exploring practitioners' opinions of social media use in the practice.

Therefore, the focus of this research was on the public relations practice in New Zealand and the social media platforms used by domestic practitioners. The quantitative content analysis focussed on award-winning communication campaigns as these were considered best-case examples for the industry. The scope of this study was further limited to interviews with senior public relations practitioners as these were expected to provide valuable insights into the development of social media in public relations.

This study aimed to investigate how New Zealand public relations professionals perceived the impact of social media on their practice. Furthermore, it explored which social media platforms they used and the areas of practice where these platforms were applied. Given the rapid development of social media, it was intended to analyse whether social media reached a ubiquitous level in New Zealand public relations practice analogous to anecdotal evidence that it outweighed traditional media types. Moreover, it examined whether New Zealand practitioners used social media strategically or in an ad hoc manner.

The potential benefits of this research for participants and the wider industry included the provision of updated research data on how New Zealand public relations

practitioners use various social media platforms. This could enable participants, the researcher, scholars and the New Zealand public relations industry to develop a deeper understanding of the field. Furthermore, public relations practitioners might use this research as a benchmark to evaluate their application of social media. This study also gives future researchers several opportunities to investigate this topic. For the researcher, this thesis will lead to partial fulfilment of her degree.

Structure of This Thesis

This chapter has introduced the reader to the topic of social media and has given an overview of this media type. Furthermore, it outlined the purpose of this research as well as the structure of this thesis.

A detailed literature review follows in Chapter 2, elaborating on how social media has impacted public relations and how it has created opportunities and challenges for the practice. It reviews international and New Zealand studies that evaluated how public relations practitioners have used social media. It also identifies existing gaps in the literature, leading to the formulation of research questions guiding this research.

Chapter 3 presents the research methodology that guides this study. It outlines the research design, discusses the chosen triangulation approach and explains the quantitative campaign analysis and the qualitative research component involving semi-structured in-depth interviews. The chapter outlines the sampling and analysing methods, as well as the ethics and limitations of this study.

Chapter 4 gives the findings from a content analysis of 148 New Zealand communication campaigns that received an award for excellence from PRINZ between 2011 and 2019. Chapter 5 presents a thematic analysis of the findings of ten interviews with New Zealand public relations practitioners. In Chapter 6, the findings of qualitative and quantitative methods are combined and discussed to answer the research questions.

The seventh and last chapter draws conclusions from the discussed findings, elaborates on the limitations of this research, and makes recommendations for practice and future researchers.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Since becoming mainstream in the 2000s, social media has been a research focus for many scholars from various fields of study (e.g. Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Edosomwan et al., 2011; Fuchs, 2013; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Wang & Yang, 2020). Several international studies have examined the role of social media in public relations and its application by practitioners (e.g. Gabriel & Koh, 2016; Macnamara et al., 2017; Moreno et al., 2015; Wright & Hinson, 2017).

First, this chapter elaborates on the impact of social media on public relations, including the potential opportunities and challenges for the practice. Second, it investigates how public relations practitioners make use of social media platforms. Last, a summary of the literature findings leads to the formulation of the research questions underlying the present research.

The Impact of Social Media on Public Relations

Research has shown that the emergence of social media platforms has dramatically changed the practice of public relations (DiStaso et al., 2011; Lipschultz, 2018; Motion et al., 2015; Wright & Hinson, 2013; Xie et al., 2018). Macnamara (2010a) even called the formation of Web 2.0 and social media as significant as the invention of the printing press. As a result, a large variety of international research has examined the impact of social media on the practice of public relations and how practitioners have perceived and applied different social media tools (e.g. Eyrich et al., 2008; Navarro et al., 2018; Zerfass et al., 2017).

Several scholars advocated for embracing this new type of media (e.g. Allagui & Breslow, 2016; Clampitt, 2017; Smith, 2017). Breakenridge (2008), for instance, claimed that social media or PR 2.0 gave public relations practitioners opportunities to address traditional media via a different channel and also engage directly with influencers and customers. Social media's conversational format even led Solis and Breakenridge (2009) to exclaim in their book title that social media was "putting the public back in public relations".

Edosomwan et al. (2011) considered conversation to be a key factor for the successful use of social media as a lack of conversation would lower the organisation's credibility and brand loyalty. Therefore, they advised organisations to assign enough resources to engage in conversations with their publics on social media.

The PESO model, presented in Figure 2, classifies communication tactics into paid, earned, shared and owned forms of media (Dietrich, 2018) and is commonly used in communication research as well as by practitioners (e.g. Luttrell, 2015; O'Neil & Eisenmann, 2017; Thabit, 2015). According to Macnamara et al. (2016), the paid media component of this model entails traditional advertising and other forms of purchased content. Earned media encompasses all editorial publications that an organisation gains through providing journalists with useful information such as in the form of media releases. Shared media are defined as all social media channels that are open for interactions of other users, such as in the form of comments. Owned media are publications that are developed and controlled by the organisation, such as corporate magazines or websites.

Figure 2:

The PESO Model
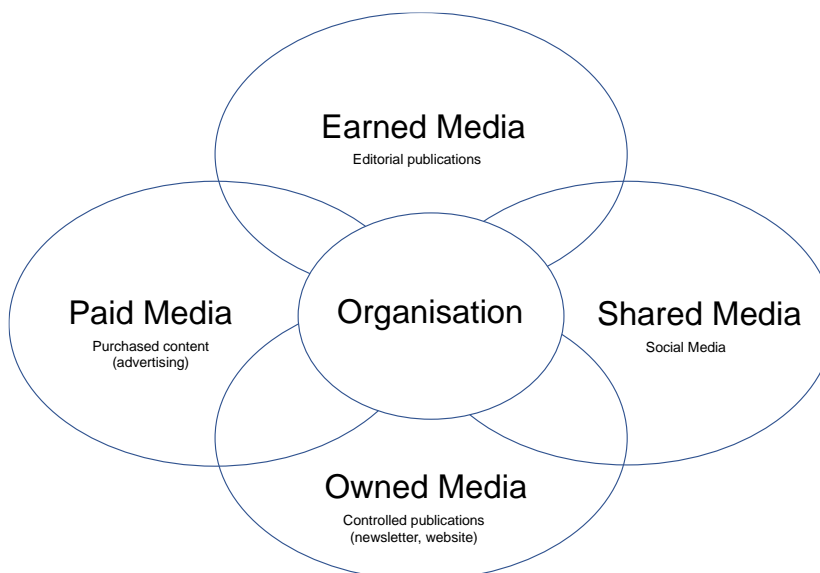
Note: Adapted from Dietrich (2018).

Edosomwan et al. (2011) argued that social media had increased the number of communication channels as well as their effectiveness within organisations. Consequently, Macnamara et al. (2016) predicted a shift in media use by organisations from the traditional PESO towards an emerging SOEP model (shared, owned, earned, paid), placing the focus on shared media, followed by owned media. They explained

this development by the shift in importance from traditional paid media and earned media towards shared media. For instance, Allagui and Breslow (2016) predicted that social media tactics would increasingly replace events to create publicity for public relations campaigns.

Public relations practitioners in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region believed that social and owned media would grow significantly in importance (Macnamara et al., 2016; Zerfass et al., 2015). This was confirmed by their Latin American colleagues who believed that the importance of social media would increase notably (Navarro et al., 2018). Earned media was perceived to remain important in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region, particularly regarding online recommendations or strategic partnerships, whereas traditional paid media notably declined in importance (Macnamara et al., 2016; Zerfass et al., 2015). In contrast, Latin American practitioners believed that the importance of earned media would decrease (Navarro et al., 2018).

Despite this alleged power shift between media types, organisations were advised to use all media types complementarily. For instance, Sutherland (2016) wrote that practitioners needed to adopt a 'propinquital' approach while using social media to strengthen relationships between an organisation and its publics. This concept sees social and traditional media as interconnected entities that encourage interactions in the online and offline environments. For example, the promotion of an event on social media and sharing photos of this event with tagged participants asking them for their comments afterwards would strengthen relationships with the publics.

Opportunities, Benefits and Challenges for Public Relations

Building Relationships via Conversations

As social media is based on multi-directional conversations, it allows public relations practitioners the opportunity to fulfil the two-way symmetrical communication model (Grunig, 2009; Macnamara 2010a). Grunig (1992) advocated for this as an important part of excellent public relations. Grunig (2009) stated that social media needs to be applied to its full potential as part of strategic public relations and criticised the organisations that simply used social media for disseminating information. A two-way symmetrical approach enables practitioners to apply effective communication and build relationships with various publics through direct engagement and listening to their conversations (Petrovici, 2014).

Scholars identified social media as facilitating relationship-building with publics. For instance, Motion et al. (2015) stated that social media enabled organisations to connect and converse with their publics. Due to the "interactive, participatory characteristics of social media" (Motion et al., 2015, p. 4), the publics become influential participants in social media communication rather than staying recipients of predetermined communication dominated by the organisation. Sutherland (2016) praised social media as a direct communication channel and tool to build these relationships with the organisation's publics by bypassing traditional media. The application of two-way symmetrical principles in leading conversations on social media was considered beneficial for organisations.

Reputation-Building With Transparency

According to Kietzmann et al. (2011), social media has a significant impact on the "reputation, sales, and even survival" (p. 241) of organisations. The inclusion of social media such as social networking sites like Facebook or micro-blogging services like Twitter into the public relations strategy is likely to enhance corporate transparency and authenticity by actively engaging publics online (Men & Tsai, 2014). Transparent communication by honestly answering publics' inquiries on social media adds to the organisation's reputation while authentic and 'personable' communication fosters sustainable relationships between the organisation and its publics. Therefore, social media may help organisations to build a positive reputation and stronger relationships with their publics (Briones et al., 2011; Edosomwan et al., 2011).

Reduced Control Over the Message

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media also reduced the control that organisations have over their messages. They wrote that before social media became mainstream, public relations practitioners could better control the organisation's message by press releases, for instance. Through the emergence of social media, conversations could take place outside the organisation's sphere of influence. As Grunig (2009) pointed out, this a challenge for public relations professionals, who believed that social media would hinder them from asserting control over the organisation's messages.

Bhargava's (2010) study showed that New Zealand public relations practitioners believed that they needed to control social media. Their greatest concern, besides the time pressure in the use of social media, was the loss of control. According to Bhargava (2010), agency practitioners used blogs more often than in-house

practitioners. She traced the lower adoption rate of social media by in-house practitioners to the prevalent control paradigm within organisations. She assumed that besides the practitioners' need to have control over the message, organisations imposed internal restrictions on employees, hindering practitioners from adopting social media.

International research found similar patterns. Aragón and Domingo (2014), for instance, found that some Spanish organisations did not want to overcome their control paradigm and therefore chose not to engage on social media, and organisations interested in engaging on social media lacked the know-how. In another study, US public relations practitioners perceived that the inappropriate behaviour of staff could damage the brand. Leaking propriety information or posting embarrassing content were the most common challenges next to external criticism, false information and activism (DiStaso et al., 2011). All these potential issues were likely to be beyond their control.

Macnamara (2010b) argued that organisations needed to abandon their common control paradigm to be successful on social media – a statement echoed by Ngai et al. (2015). They recommended that organisations balance the need to adopt and engage on social media platforms with the need to guarantee their business' security and integrity. Such a balance might be achieved by assigning specific employees with the management of the organisation's social media channels, as Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) proposed.

New Skills

Early research also found that public relations practitioners needed to acquire new skills to be successful on social media (Macnamara, 2010b). This was confirmed by US practitioners interviewed in 2011, who found it difficult to keep abreast of the constantly changing social media environment (DiStaso et al., 2011). They admitted that they still needed to acquire further knowledge of social media.

Macnamara et al. (2017) observed a similar trend among New Zealand public relations professionals. In 2017, these practitioners still considered their social media skills as moderate, although they believed they had improved their skills since 2015. Half of the questioned practitioners identified technical knowledge and technical skills as fields that needed professional development. Lower ranked practitioners identified a higher need for technical training than their colleagues in higher positions.

In contrast, Bhargava (2010) found that New Zealand senior practitioners considered the internet time-consuming with a tendency to foster misunderstandings and that social media was a sphere for younger generations. These findings were contradicted by the positive self-assessment of senior practitioners regarding their technical skills later reported by Macnamara et al. (2017).

Importance of Social Media Strategies

As social media became mainstream with increasing levels of public use as well as interactions between users and organisations on social media platforms, it also became more eminent in communication campaigns (Waters & Jones, 2011). Due to its strong popularity, organisations have viewed social media as mandatory to their communication strategy (Hanna et al., 2011).

According to Macnamara et al. (2017), almost half of New Zealand's communication practitioners perceived managing the digital evolution and social web as the most important strategic communications issue. Their biggest concern was approaching an increased number of publics and channels with limited resources. Every second practitioner mentioned this issue. Other major concerns were coping with digital evolution and social media and dealing with the speed and volume of information. New Zealand practitioners therefore strongly focussed on digital issues regarding strategic communication (see the section on strategic versus ad hoc use for further discussion).

The Use of Social Media by Public Relations Practitioners

Social Media - a Broadcasting Channel?

According to Grunig (2009), "two-way symmetrical public relations uses research, listening, and dialogue to manage conflict and to cultivate relationships with both internal and external strategic publics more than one-way and asymmetrical communication" (p. 2). Kent (2013) proposed that social media should not be used as a cost-effective way of pushing out the organisation's messages or as a substitute for the diminishing mass media, but as a two-way symmetrical tool to build relationships. He advised public relations practitioners to serve the interests of their publics, not only of the organisation itself. Practitioners were also encouraged to foster long-term approaches as well as transparency, inclusiveness and more input from their publics.

However, international research found that the practice disregarded the recommendation to use social media as a conversational tool. Grunig (2009) and

Valentini (2015) criticised organisations for using social media as a broadcasting channel for promotional and marketing purposes, neglecting the two-way symmetrical approach to build relationships with their publics. Their view was shared by other scholars, who found that non-profit organisations used social media for disseminating organisational information, which stimulated the publics' attention, but not their engagement (Cho et al., 2014; Lovejoy et al., 2012; Waters & Jamal, 2011). Gabriel and Koh (2016) observed a comparable dissemination approach among Malaysian public relations practitioners. This finding was confirmed by Kautz et al. (2020), who found that German sport clubs relied on reporting, promoting and informing when communicating on social media although dialogue with their publics generally resulted in a higher engagement rate.

Macnamara et al. (2017) described the same approach used by practitioners in the Asia-Pacific region, as these used social media more as a broadcasting channel than an engagement and social listening tool. Moreover, an analysis of the Fortune 400 corporations in the United States concluded that organisations did not apply blogs as a two-way symmetrical tool (Waters et al., 2014).

Theunissen and Sissons (2017) disagreed with this common perception among other scholars that social media "are not living up to their potential" (p. 63). They argued that scholars would rather impose "a dated framework on paradigmatically different sites of relational enactment" on social media and social networking sites (p. 63). This was confirmed by Watkins (2017), who stated that one-way communication on the right social media platforms could aide in building relationships if the information is considered useful.

A recent study on Twitter showed that while providing useful information was the focus of most US organisations, many Fortune 500 organisations also applied two-way symmetric principles by answering questions and comments to build relationships with their publics (Wang & Yang, 2020). However, Theunissen and Sissons (2017) argued that practitioners still used social media to control relationships and seek compliance rather than engaging with active and critical publics.

Practitioners' Preferred Platforms

Since social media became mainstream, the use of social media by organisations has significantly changed. Whereas in the beginning, the major focus lay on the use of blogs, the repertoire of social media has continued to expand over the years, including platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Barnes et al., 2020).

Although in the early 2000s, public relations practitioners perceived blogging to be a powerful tool in their field (Kent, 2008), corporate blogs were not used as standard public relations tactics (Porter et al., 2007). Macnamara (2010b) therefore concluded that organisations were not ready to adopt social media.

Evans et al. (2011) showed that public relations practitioners valued Twitter as an unprecedented and valuable communication channel, particularly to communicate effectively with journalists who used it to connect with public relations professionals. Waters et al. (2010) also observed that social media, in general, and particularly Twitter, had become an important communication channel with journalists. However, according to Evans et al. (2011), practitioners also mentioned that the constant monitoring and maintenance of Twitter would require enough time resources. They also predicted that Twitter would lose its mainstream popularity, which eventually occurred as described in Chapter 1.

Since its early days, social media has become a standard communication channel for organisations, and the focus has shifted from blogs to other platforms. Between 2005 and 2017, the use of social media platforms by public relations practitioners continued to increase (Wright & Hinson, 2017). Barnes et al. (2020) determined that except for one organisation, all Fortune 500 corporations had an active social media presence in 2019. LinkedIn was the most used social media platform by businesses with 99%, followed by Twitter with 96% and Facebook with 95%. YouTube was used by 90%, and 73% were active on Instagram. More than half of the organisations integrated a corporate blog on their websites. All these social media platforms recorded significant growth, particularly Instagram. According to Wright and Hinson (2017), Facebook was used the most by US public relations practitioners, followed by Twitter and LinkedIn, as well as distantly by Instagram and YouTube. Google+, Snapchat, Pinterest and Flickr were only marginally used.

Notably, Barnes et al. (2020) concluded that Fortune 500 corporations focused their activity on the bigger social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, whereas they pulled away from minor platforms like Snapchat and Pinterest. Instagram replaced Snapchat as a means of engaging with publics, reflecting companies' efforts to consolidate their social media activities by focussing on those platforms that offered the biggest advantages.

Barnes et al. (2020) argued that the use of visuals in the form of photos and videos had increased significantly in an attempt to cater to younger publics. They also noted a resurgence of corporate blogging after stagnation in 2014 and 2015. They explained this development with the fact that corporations adopt blogs as these enable companies to be personal while still having full control over the message.

In an exploratory study, Sommerfeldt et al. (2019) suggested that public relations practitioners used certain clusters or repertoires of social media channels. They derived these patterns via a cluster and principal component analysis of data that was gathered in 2014 using a survey among 691 public relations professionals from five countries.

Figure 3 presents the four identified repertoires of media channels, which the participants were most likely to use complementarily.

Figure 3:

Media Repertoires Used by Public Relations Professionals
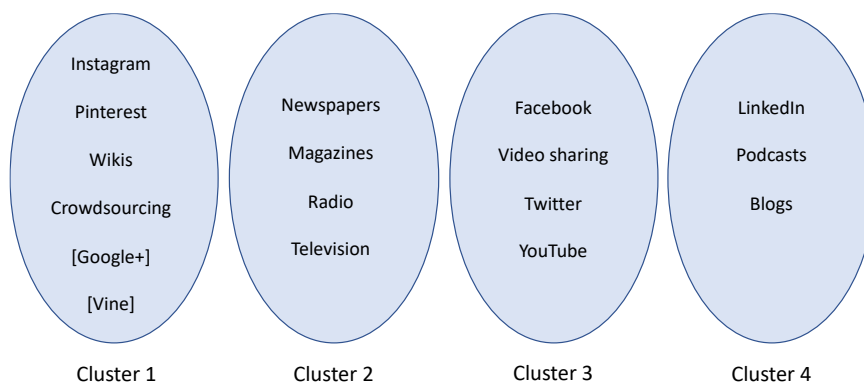
Note: Adapted from Sommerfeldt et al. (2019). Social media platforms in brackets do not exist anymore.

One cluster entailed earned media such as print publications, radio and television. Regarding social media, three more clusters were identified. The first social media repertoire consisted of Instagram, Pinterest, Wikis and crowdsourcing as well as the discontinued platforms Google+ and Vine. The second included Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and video sharing. Finally, the third cluster consisted of LinkedIn, podcasts and blogs.

Sommerfeldt et al. (2019) believed that the different affordances of the social media platforms led to certain repertoires, each serving different strategic motives. For instance, Facebook and Twitter would rather be used as relationship-building channels, whereas Instagram was more likely to serve as an image-building tool.

Communication Functions and Social Media Use

Several scholars argued that the communication function was likely to influence the practitioners' use of social media platforms (Jiang et al., 2016; Sommerfeldt et al., 2019). Bhargava (2010), for instance, discovered that the functions with the highest use of social media were media relations, internal communication, marketing and brand public relations. In contrast, fund-raising, investor relations and sponsorships were the public relations functions that used social media the least (Bhargava, 2010).

US-based researchers Jiang et al. (2016) found that publicity in the form of information dissemination, special events and product communication were the functions that used social media the most. Social media were also regularly used in community relations, media relations and reputation management. They reported a moderate use in the functions of monitoring, social marketing and government relations and limited use in internal communications and investor relations.

Sommerfeldt et al. (2019) showed that the communication function was even likely to influence the selection of a platform. For instance, LinkedIn and blogs were preferred for lobbying and marketing public relations. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were used for internal communications and customer relations. Instagram was adopted for advertising and measuring publics' reactions to organisational messages, for instance. Facebook and Twitter were also used for media relations.

Strategic Versus Ad Hoc Use

With the growing popularity of social media since its emergence in the early 2000s, some organisations chose social media platforms to set up their presence almost randomly while others ignored social media altogether (Lardi, 2013). This lack of a strategic approach poses challenges and risks to organisations such as communication crises and damage to the organisation's reputation (Lardi, 2013; Ott & Theunissen, 2015).

Lardi (2013) therefore advised practitioners to adopt a social media strategy by setting social media objectives, defining target publics, selecting appropriate platforms and monitoring the tactics. He recommended the social media strategy to be part of an organisation's business strategy. This approach was affirmed by Macnamara et al. (2017), who stated that communication strategies needed to align closely with an organisation's overall strategy.

Regardless of these findings, Bhargava's (2010) study showed that New Zealand public relations practitioners mostly used the internet in an ad hoc manner and only sometimes strategically. Macnamara et al. (2017) confirmed that New Zealand practitioners still spent most of their work time on operational communication tasks. They found that practitioners devoted the second-largest amount of their time to management tasks, whereas only one-fifth of their time was used for strategic activities. Younger practitioners were engaged more in operational and less in strategic tasks than older colleagues. Most organisations adopted mandatory platforms like Facebook, YouTube or Twitter as standalone platforms, rather than as part of an overall strategy (Hanna et al., 2011).

International scholars also affirmed that public relations practitioners used social media still more tactically than strategically (Plowman & Wilson, 2018; Zerfass et al., 2015). Although US practitioners, for instance, linked the social media strategy to overall organisational goals, they still neglected to employ a strategic approach to monitoring, specifying objectives, identifying key publics and creating messages (Plowman & Wilson, 2018). These findings were like Wright and Hinson's (2017), who found that only 48% of US public relations practitioners measured their social media efforts.

Lack of Integrated Approach

Scholars advised organisations to develop their social media strategy across all communication functions since they could not communicate consistently otherwise (Bhargava, 2010; Lardi, 2013).

However, according to Bhargava (2010), public relations practitioners controlled online communication (see the section on reduced control over the message) and therefore ignored an integrated approach to the different communication departments. In their US-based study, Wright and Hinson (2017) confirmed this claim, showing that two-thirds of public relations professionals reported that the public relations department was the organisational function responsible for managing social media. The marketing department was only mentioned by 15%.

Although most public relations practitioners believed that their department should be responsible for social media, the creation of independent social media departments has decreased this proportion from 85% in 2009 to 75% in 2017. That year, 15% believed that an independent social media department should manage social media. Only 4% considered that the responsibility lay with marketing departments.

New Zealand Practitioners – Slow Adopters of Social Media?

Research on how New Zealand public relations practitioners adopted social media is scarce. In 2010, Bhargava analysed how public relations practitioners made use of the internet and how it affected their practice. Although social media was analysed, the focus of the research was on the use of the internet in general, as social media was still nascent. She found that New Zealand practitioners were not early internet adopters and applied social media only moderately. Instead, they favoured traditional ways of communication, such as face-to-face interaction. This was backed by Macnamara et al. (2015), who found that New Zealand practitioners lagged in social media capabilities, with in-house practitioners showing fewer skills than those working for communication agencies.

According to Bhargava (2010), practitioners felt more comfortable with more established internet tools that involved writing, thereby explaining the lack of social media capabilities. For instance, practitioners focussed on blogs, rather than newer multimedia applications. Photo-sharing platforms and micro-blogging were used scarcely by in-house practitioners and moderately by consultancies, while multimedia platforms such as YouTube were completely ignored. Two years later, Msimangira (2012) still argued that New Zealand organisations showed a low social media adoption rate.

These findings mirrored those of Eyrich et al. (2008), who discovered that US public relations practitioners mainly used established tools such as email and the Intranet and felt more comfortable using blogs and podcasts. They were reluctant to adopt "more technologically complicated tools that cater to a niche audience" (p. 414), such as messaging applications and social networking sites.

Christ (2007) assumed that emerging new technologies such as social media required public relations practitioners to acquire not only knowledge of these tools and new trends but also attain a high level of comfort using these. Bhargava (2010) explained how the combination of adopting newer social media platforms with the dynamic nature of social media would hinder practitioners acquiring necessary knowledge of the channels before new platforms emerged and replaced them.

As reported by Bhargava (2010), New Zealand practitioners perceived new technologies to only impact on research and monitoring practices as well as internal communications and issues management. Although most of them used online monitoring to measure public opinion and communication campaigns, they did not see

the value of monitoring social media as the genre only reflected a minority of key publics.

Given the fast-paced social media landscape, these findings are likely to be outdated. Along with the rapid evolvement of social media during the last decade, recent studies reported a major shift towards using social media in public relations practice. According to Macnamara et al. (2018), over 90% of communication practitioners in the Asia-Pacific region considered social media the most important communication channel with their publics. The perceived importance of social media had notably grown from 75% two years before.

Therefore, it can be assumed that social media use by New Zealand public relations practitioners has significantly changed during the last ten years since Bhargava's (2010) study. As social media has become omnipresent, social networking sites such as Facebook and photo-sharing applications such as Instagram have become mainstream services. It is assumed that public relations practitioners have now acquired relevant social media skills, which may lead them to adopt different social media platforms.

PESO – a New Zealand Perspective

Macnamara et al. (2017) analysed which communication channels New Zealand communication practitioners considered the most important to address their publics. They found that almost nine in ten practitioners perceived social media as the most important channel for communicating with their publics. Websites were mentioned by 83% of the practitioners. Other owned media such as corporate magazines scored 67%. Regarding earned media, online newspapers and magazines were considered very important by 82%. Traditional media was considered least important, with 66% for broadcast and 64% for print media. Face-to-face communication was regarded as very important by 77.6% of New Zealand professionals. Paid media were not mentioned at all.

In sum, while social, owned and online media had grown in importance since 2015, the importance of print media has decreased. Broadcast media remained stable. However, most New Zealand public relations practitioners believed that strategic partnerships with mass media would grow in importance (Macnamara et al., 2015). On the other hand, US research with public relations practitioners has identified important emerging tactics such as paid social in the form of sponsored posts, tweets and paid influencers (Xie et al., 2018).

Research Questions

Various international studies concluded that social media has had a significant effect on public relations practice and have changed the way organisations communicate with their publics. According to Macnamara et al. (2017), managing the digital evolution and social web was the most important strategic communications issue for New Zealand communication practitioners.

Several studies identified cost-effectiveness as well as the possibility to communicate directly and engage with publics as opportunities. Lack of control, reaching more publics with limited resources and the need for technical training, were identified as challenges.

However, no recent detailed study could be found on how New Zealand practitioners perceived the impact of social media on their practice and how they evaluated the opportunities and challenges that accompany it. Thus, the first research question is formulated as follows:

RQ 1: How do New Zealand practitioners evaluate the impact of social media on public relations?

Since social media has become mainstream in the 2000s, the social media landscape has continued to evolve. While some once-popular platforms have become insignificant or vanished completely, others have emerged and quickly dominated the social media landscape. This fast-paced environment has led to the assumption that research on how public relations practitioners use social media quickly becomes outdated.

US-based scholars have regularly examined the adoption of specific platforms by public relations practitioners. However, no recent study could be found that analyses in detail the usage behaviour of New Zealand communication professionals. Macnamara et al. (2017), for example, did not specify the social media platforms used by New Zealand practitioners, and Bhargava's (2010) study was conducted ten years ago. This leads to the formulation of the second research question:

RQ 2: Which social media platforms do New Zealand public relations practitioners use?

The literature review showed that the adoption of social media and the choice of specific platforms were likely to depend on the communication functions they served.

It was also highlighted that social media was mainly used for promotional purposes, as organisations seemed to favour social media for the dissemination of information, rather than for engagement.

Some of the results were contradictory. For instance, social media was found to be regularly used for internal purposes by New Zealand in-house practitioners (Bhargava, 2010), whereas their US colleagues scarcely used social media in this way (Jiang et al., 2016). Also, US professionals used social media more often for low-budget purposes (Jiang et al., 2016) than their New Zealand colleagues (Bhargava, 2010). It is assumed, then, that the rapid development of social media may have also influenced how social media is used in the different communication categories. This gives rise to the third research question:

RQ 3: How is social media used in which communication categories?

Bhargava (2010) concluded her study by stating that New Zealand practitioners were "yet to come to grips with the highly interactive and ever-changing world of the Internet" (p. 113). A lack of knowledge about social media and relevant skills was likely to be a reason for the absence of strategic approaches, insufficient allocation of resources or the lack of a two-way symmetrical approach (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Macnamara et al., 2015).

A wide range of studies found that public relations practitioners used social media more tactically than strategically. Most practitioners acknowledged social media as a broadcast channel for communicating organisational information directly to the organisation's publics, rather than to converse with them.

It is suggested that the growing popularity of social media and their ubiquity might have changed the attitude of New Zealand public relations professionals towards social media and its use. Meanwhile, practitioners may have gained enough experience to use them strategically and two-way symmetrically. The increasing body of knowledge and experience with social media may have also loosened the prevalent control paradigm within organisations. No recent study could be found that updated the findings on how social media is applied strategically in the New Zealand public relations practice. This gives rise to the fourth research question:

RQ 4: Do public relations practitioners in New Zealand use social media strategically or in an ad hoc manner?

Many scholars have celebrated social media as two-way symmetric media that can be applied as a part of excellent public relations. Research on the adoption of social media shows that practitioners have increasingly jumped on the social media bandwagon. Macnamara et al. (2016) claimed that social and owned media would grow in importance while organisations would decrease their use of earned and paid media. This trend even led them to predict that the common PESO model would shift towards a SOEP model. However, the question arises whether the perceived value of social media is much higher than its actual value, as Bhargava argued in 2010 regarding the usefulness of corporate blogs. This leads to the last research question:

RQ 5: Does social media outweigh other media types in public relations practice?

Conclusion

It is concluded that despite a growing body of research on social media and its use in public relations, no recent study could be identified that examines the application of social media by New Zealand practitioners and their perceptions of its professional use. This motivated the researcher to conduct this research, which aims to present an updated and comprehensive picture of the role of social media in New Zealand public relations practice. The next chapter presents the research methodology underlying this study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study used a pragmatic approach to analyse the role social media plays in contemporary New Zealand public relations. Therefore, it employed triangulation by combining a quantitative campaign analysis of award-winning New Zealand communication campaigns with semi-structured in-depth interviews with New Zealand public relations practitioners. This combination aimed to deliver a comprehensive and updated picture of social media use in the practice of public relations.

The previous chapter reviewed the existing literature on social media and how the genre is applied in public relations. This chapter elaborates on the methodology used in the present research. The first section discusses the design and philosophical perspective of this research. This entails a description of the triangulation approach by combining quantitative and qualitative research methods, followed by an explanation of the sampling and data gathering procedures. The second part elaborates on the chosen methods of data analysis, including the coding processes involved. The findings of the quantitative and qualitative research components are presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, respectively.

Research Questions

The research methodology presented in this chapter was chosen to answer the defined research questions (see Chapter 2), which are again presented here:

- RQ 1: How do New Zealand practitioners evaluate the impact of social media on public relations?
- RQ 2: Which social media platforms do New Zealand public relations practitioners use?
- RQ 3: How is social media used in which communication categories?
- RQ 4: Do public relations practitioners in New Zealand use social media strategically or in an ad hoc manner?
- RQ 5: Does social media outweigh other media types in public relations practice?

The answers to these research questions are discussed in Chapter 6.

Research Design

Following a Pragmatic Paradigm

Researchers are said to be led by a certain paradigm, which is a "worldview" (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 19) or "basic set of beliefs that guide action" (Guba, 1990, p. 17). Daymon and Holloway (2010) proposed that the most prevalent paradigms in public relations and marketing communications studies were positivism and interpretivism. According to them, positivists believe in the existence of objective reality and aim to picture it objectively. For positivists, "data and its analysis are value-free and data do not change because they are being observed" (Krauss, 2005, p. 760). Positivism aims at measuring and describing an experienced phenomenon.

In contrast, interpretivism assumes that "there is no single, observable reality. Rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.9). Hennink et al. (2020) stated that researchers following an interpretive approach try to understand the experiences of people from the perspectives of those people. The researchers acknowledge that the perceived and experienced realities of people are subjectively determined.

As a result of their specific paradigms, positivists are more likely to use quantitative research methods such as surveys, whereas interpretivism tends to use qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews (Daymon & Holloway, 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

Johnson et al. (2007) have argued that these conflicting worldviews nurtured a so-called "paradigm war" between quantitative and qualitative scholars. This prevalent antagonism led to the emergence of the pragmatic paradigm, which aims at synthesising both qualitative and quantitative research methods. In this paradigm, neither of the earlier research paradigms are preferred. Instead, all research is believed to involve interpretation as well as intentions (i.e. subjective reality) but needs to be founded on empirical experience (Yardley & Bishop, 2008). Importantly, pragmatists believe that the choice of research methods depends on the underlying research questions and therefore the purpose of the research, rather than a specific worldview (Johnson et al., 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

This research follows the pragmatic paradigm to achieve a richer picture of the role of social media in the New Zealand public relations practice. In this context, the researcher "seeks the best method or methods for answering" the research questions

by illuminating "the subject of inquiry from all possible angles (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2015, p. xxxvi). For instance, quantitative data is considered the most suitable to answer research questions two, three and five. Qualitative data is more appropriate for answering research questions one and four. According to Plano Clark and Creswell (2008), qualitative data can also corroborate and may give further depth to quantitative data by drawing from personal experiences and observations. This triangulation approach is presented in the next section.

Triangulation

Stacks (2011) described quantitative research as the "objective, systematic, and controlled gathering of data" (p. 6). The researcher clearly defines the units to measure and follows particularly defined rules while collecting and analysing the data. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) saw the strength of quantitative research amongst others in the quick delivery of numerical, precise and objective data that can enable quantifiable predictions. However, they also stated that these abstract findings do not consider local subjective meanings. Furthermore, they might neglect interesting themes as they focus on examining existing hypotheses rather than generating new hypotheses.

In contrast, qualitative research aims at understanding the knowledge that people have constructed and how they make sense of the world and their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Braun and Clarke (2013) described the qualitative approach as seeing that reality and meaning is subjective. According to Stacks (2011), the approach illustrates a specific issue and delivers an in-depth understanding of that issue. Therefore, qualitative research can assist in comprehensively describing complex problems and discovering local and personal meanings and intentions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Stacks (2011) recommended qualitative research as suitable for a detailed analysis of how organisations react to a specific public relations issue. However, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) argued that these findings might not be generalisable and were impractical for predictions. They also stated that qualitative research methods were time-consuming and prone to researcher bias.

Idowu (2016) concluded that qualitative research provides detailed insight, whereas researchers can examine a larger sample size with the help of quantitative research. The use of multiple research methods, which is also called triangulation, is grounded in the pragmatic belief that qualitative and quantitative methods complement each other, as both have strengths and weaknesses (Jick, 1979). According to Brewer and Hunter (2006), the use of multiple research methods aims at answering the research questions "with an arsenal of methods that have nonoverlapping weaknesses in addition to their

complementary strengths" (p. 4). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) proposed that the findings of qualitative research might add meaning to quantitative data, while statistical data might add precision to qualitative findings.

Denzin (1978) defined triangulation as the "combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon" or problem (p. 297). Jick (1979) argued that this enables a researcher to validate findings by illuminating the issue studied from different perspectives. It enables the presentation of a comprehensive, holistic portrayal by identifying details that might be overlooked if only one method is used.

For this research, a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods was chosen as the most appropriate approach to explore the role of social media in contemporary public relations practice. Morse's (1991) simultaneous triangulation approach was followed whereby quantitative and qualitative data were collected independently from each other and analysed complementarily. This procedure aimed to produce "a richer and more insightful" analysis of the topic under study (Rossman & Wilson, 1985, p. 641).

To triangulate the data, a content analysis of New Zealand communication campaigns was conducted, followed by semi-structured in-depth interviews with New Zealand public relations practitioners. The quantitative method aimed at obtaining quantifiable data and discovering trends in the use of social media by public relations practitioners. The interviews were intended to shed light on the practitioners' perceptions and to add depth to the findings from quantitative data. Thus, they increased the credibility of findings and facilitated a deeper understanding of the context (Hesse-Biber, 2010; Liamputtong, 2012). The next sections will present the two applied research methods and elaborate on sampling and data gathering processes.

Campaign Analysis

The quantitative research component of this study aimed at collecting quantifiable data on social media use in contemporary New Zealand public relations. For this study, communication campaigns that had been acknowledged with a PRINZ Award were analysed using quantitative content analysis.

The Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ) publishes its annual "PRINZ Awards case studies" as an electronic document that presents the award-winning campaigns (PRINZ, n.d.-c). PRINZ is the official organisation for New Zealand's public relations and communication management profession with more than 1400

practitioners as members (PRINZ, n.d.-a). Therefore, the publication was considered a professional and objective source appropriate for this research, notwithstanding some limitations (see Chapter 7 for the limitations of this study).

The communication categories defined by PRINZ posed some challenges to the research as the categories "issues, crisis and emergency management" and "Paul Dryden tertiary award" have not been selected for the PRINZ Awards since 2017 and 2018 respectively. PRINZ introduced "communicating in diversity" as a new award category in 2017. These disruptions in continuity were highly likely to distort research findings and limit the study's validity. Therefore, these categories were analysed and visually demonstrated separately from the rest of the findings (see Chapter 4).

The following section describes the sampling and data collection procedures involved.

Sampling and Data Collection

A sample is a subset of a population, either individuals or objects, that represents the population (Smith, 2017). In the context of this research, the population consisted of PRINZ communication campaigns that had been conducted in New Zealand. The sample comprised of 148 award-winning communication campaigns produced between 2011 and 2019.

A purposive sampling method was used to select the communication campaigns under study. Researchers use this non-random sampling technique by selecting participants or messages due to characteristics such as knowledge, experience or availability (Etikan et al., 2016; Stacks, 2011). The campaigns under study were chosen as these were easily available on the PRINZ website. It was assumed that the organisations involved possessed appropriate knowledge and experience in the field of public relations as their campaigns had been recognised for excellence in public relations.

Although PRINZ has acknowledged communication campaigns with their PRINZ Awards since 1974 (PRINZ, n.d.-b), only campaigns since 2011 were selected for this study as social media either had not or had only been marginally applied in earlier campaigns. Thus, nine case study reports published between 2011 and 2019, presenting summaries of 148 awarded communication campaigns were selected for content analysis.

Reliability and Validity

Riffe et al. (2019) have claimed that the information gathering technique of quantitative content analysis is the only method that enables the researcher to "illuminate patterns in large sets of communication content with reliability and validity" (p. viii).

Stability, reproducibility and accuracy are needed to establish the reliability of content analysis (Krippendorff, 2019; Weber, 1990). According to Weber (1990), stability is achieved when one coder codes the data under study more than once. The researcher repeated coding two weeks after the first coding process to provide this intra-coder stability. The researcher did not find any deviations in coding and determined there was consistency across the dataset.

Reproducibility or intercoder reliability is achieved when several coders use the same coding rules for identical data and obtain the same results (Riffe et al., 2019; Weber, 1990). Consecutive meetings between the researcher and supervisor were aimed at generating a consistent and shared understanding of the coding rules. In this context, the study's focus on analysing manifest content facilitated the reliability of the research (Riffe et al., 2019).

A clear definition of the different media types as well as the rationale behind using an expanded PESO model[2] enhanced the reproducibility of findings. An independent person was briefed with the coding rules and was handed a small sample of the communication campaigns data to determine intercoder reliability. The coding of the sample came to the same results as the coding undertaken by the researcher, enhancing the reliability of the data.

Weber (1990) argued that accuracy could be achieved by following a standard coding procedure. However, he also stated that these were seldomly established for texts and could be therefore neglected. Hence, these procedures were disregarded in this research.

Researchers can draw on different techniques to measure the study's validity. Riffe et al. (2019) described face validity as the minimum requirement and the most common method to evaluate the validity of content analysis. Using this validity test, the researcher "assumes that the adequacy of a measure is obvious to all and requires

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[2] The expanded PESO model used in this research is based on the traditional PESO model that categorises the different media types into paid, earned, shared and owned media. It further acknowledges interpersonal communication as an additional type of communication (see Chapter 2 on details on the PESO model).

little additional explanation" (Riffe et al., 2019, p. 134). These objective standards are likely to exist 'on the face' of manifest content since the analysis of manifest content simply involves counting and does not expect difficult coding tasks from the coder (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). The interval measuring of communication tactics categorised by media types applied in this research was, therefore, considered an obviously adequate measure to answer some of the research questions.

As the applied categorisation differs from the commonly known PESO model (see Chapter 2 for a detailed description), further measures were necessary to enhance validity. Weber (1990) proposed that external validity, which involved contrasting the findings of the content analysis with external criteria, is a strong method to achieve validity. Concurrent validity, for instance, can be achieved when two different research methods yield the same results. This was confirmed by Jick (1979), who proposed that the use of multiple research methods would cross-validate the obtained data. This research used a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, and mutual validity was achieved as quantified interview data confirmed the content analysis data.

Potter and Levine-Donnerstein (1999) recommended that researchers develop faithful coding rules as guidance for other coders to gain validity. By conducting deductive content analysis, a pre-existing theory would guide the researcher to develop these coding rules. This research used the expanded PESO model as a coding frame for categorising the different communication tactics into clearly defined media types.

Semi-Structured, In-Depth Interviews

The qualitative research component of this study comprised face-to-face interviews with New Zealand public relations practitioners. Interviews were likely to provide valuable insights into the perceptions and perspectives of the interviewees and could help with understanding and explaining their experiences, opinions and motivations (Daymon & Holloway, 2010; Tracy, 2019). According to Tracy (2019), interviews enable the researcher to "ask interviewees to verify, refute, defend, or expand" specific observations (p. 133).

The intimacy of in-depth face-to-face interviews usually promotes a partnership between the interviewer and the interviewee, encouraging a deep conversation, participant commitment and disclosure (Bengtsson, 2016; Johnson, 2001; Liamputtong, 2012). In-depth interviews were therefore considered most encouraging

for participants to shed light on their perceptions and motivations behind the application of social media.

Following a semi-structured interview design, as discussed by Tracy (2019), the researcher flexibly guided individual interviews using an adjustable list of interview questions. This flexible set of open-ended questions might also include questions arising during the conversation (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Roulston & Choi, 2018). The semi-structured design encouraged participants to express their complex views and beliefs of what is meaningful with the interviewer ceding control over the conversation to them (Roulston & Choi, 2018; Tracy, 2019), while still considering the research questions.

Ethics approval for conducting the interviews (application number 19/326) was obtained from the AUT Ethics Committee on 11 September 2019 (See Appendix A).

Sampling Method

It was assumed that each practitioner's experience level, job position and personal experience with social media would affect their opinion of social media. Inclusion criteria for potential interview participants comprised membership of the public relations profession, their location in Auckland and their long-term experience in the field.

It was intended to get a balanced picture of the practitioners' varying opinions by including in-house practitioners, consultants working for public relations agencies and sole public relations practitioners into the sample. This variation of interviewee types was invaluable to bring a broad range of opinions to light, as recommended by Taylor et al. (2015). More experienced practitioners were chosen as they were likely to provide more valuable insights into the changes in the adoption and application of social media over time.

In a second step, participants based in Auckland, who could be easily accessed via the researcher's and supervisor's extended contact networks, were contacted through a convenience sampling method. According to Etikan et al. (2016), researchers use convenience sampling by choosing participants according to practical criteria such as accessibility, availability or local proximity. They believed this convenience sampling to be appropriate if the findings were not intended to be generalised and if a research project faces constrained resources. As qualitative research does not aim to provide generalisable data, and the scope of this study was limited to New Zealand public relations practitioners, generalisations for the entire population and other countries were not intended.

However, Boyce and Neale (2006) argued that conducting in-depth interviews and transcribing and analysing the findings were time-consuming, which posed a challenge for this research timeframe. Therefore, the sample size was limited to ten practitioners. This number was considered enough to validate and discover patterns across the data as proposed by Terry et al. (2017).

Interview Process

Potential interview candidates were contacted via an initial invitation email, asking them to contact the researcher if they were interested in participating. An information sheet (see Appendix B2) containing all relevant information concerning the purpose of the study and details of the interview process was attached to this email. Candidates who expressed their interest in participating were then contacted via email or phone to arrange a time and location for the interview.

The interviews were conducted throughout October and November 2019. They were held either in the participants' office or a café chosen by the interviewee. Each interview lasted about 45 to 60 minutes and began with a personal introduction and a short presentation of the study's purpose. The researcher offered to provide the final thesis after completion, which was accepted by all participants. With the participants' consent, each interview was recorded with the help of a dictation application called "Diktiergerät" to transcribe the answers at a later stage of the research.

The interview questions followed a semi-structured design and the sequence of interview questions was adapted to each individual conversation. Open questions, which guided the interviews, were intended to invite practitioners to present their viewpoints extensively. This allowed collecting complex and rich data to answer the research questions and to give further explanation to the findings of the campaign analysis. Terry et al. (2017) have argued that this data quality is essential for qualitative research as it enables profound insights. Further explanations of the questions were provided when needed, and interviewees were asked to clarify their answers if they were indistinct.

Eleven major questions and relevant sub-questions were formulated as a response to the literature review (see Appendix B1). Following Roulston and Choi's (2018) recommendation, these open-ended questions aimed to elicit answers to the research questions, starting with broad questions and changing to more specific questions.

First, participants were asked to state their qualification and years of experience in the field of public relations. This enabled the researcher to discover potential patterns concerning the participants' education, position or experience level. The interviewees were then asked to articulate their views on how social media has changed public relations, the advantages and disadvantages of the genre and which platforms had the biggest impact (RQ 1). These insights allowed a deeper understanding of the identified trends in the application of social media and the increased importance of this channel in New Zealand public relations practice.

Participants were then questioned on their use of social media, which platforms they applied and how often, and if their social media use had changed during their career. They were also asked in which communication category they used social media. Their answers were intended to validate and extend knowledge from the content analysis findings concerning the use of social media platforms and in which communication categories these are used (RQ 2 & 3).

The interviewees were also asked who within their organisation was responsible for social media and if they used social media strategically or in an ad hoc manner. This aimed to illuminate potential reasons for the increased importance of social media and investigate whether social media is used strategically or tactically (RQ4).

Last, participants were invited to shed light on their perceptions about which type of media was the most important for public relations and whether social media would increasingly outweigh other types of media (RQ 5). This insight was considered invaluable for understanding the role that social media plays in contemporary public relations.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Positivists consider that the interpretive disposition of qualitative research data lacks validity and reliability (Liamputtong, 2012). In contrast, Daymon and Holloway (2010) have argued that quantitative criteria such as reliability cannot be applied to qualitative research given its subjective nature. They introduced trustworthiness and authenticity as criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research, while they defined credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as criteria for assessing trustworthiness (Daymon & Holloway, 2010; Guba, 1981).

The researcher followed the advice of qualitative scholars like Daymon and Holloway (2010) and Shenton (2004) to enhance the credibility and quality of the qualitative

research component by intensely engaging herself with the setting of the research. Before conducting interviews, the researcher did a comprehensive literature review and concentrated on the campaign analysis, ensuring a long-term engagement and acquisition of deep knowledge about the adoption of social media in New Zealand public relations. To ensure honest answers, participants were offered the possibility of refusing to take part or to answer questions (Shenton, 2004).

Liamputtong (2012) recommended triangulation by using various data sources as "the most powerful means for strengthening credibility in qualitative research" (p. 30). This research used methodological and data triangulation by combining a campaign analysis with the thematic analysis of interview data to corroborate the findings. The provision of a "thick description" of the study's process (Shenton, 2004, p. 69), participants and the settings added to the study's trustworthiness (Daymon & Holloway, 2010).

As proposed by Shenton (2004), credibility was advanced by constant peer reviews in the form of regular meetings with the researcher's supervisor, who continuously provided feedback on the researcher's findings and analysis. The professional background and experience of the researcher also enhanced her credibility, as she has several years of experience in public relations.

The researcher intended to enhance transferability using theory as suggested by qualitative research scholars such as Daymon and Holloway (2010) and Kuper et al. (2008). For instance, the literature review on how public relations practitioners in New Zealand and other countries applied social media backed the rationale for the research conclusions. The detailed description of the research design and the research process also enabled future researchers to repeat this study, enhancing the dependability of the research, as proposed by Shenton (2004).

According to Daymon and Holloway (2010), confirmability is achieved through triangulation and the reflexivity of the researcher. Scholars consider reflexivity to be an integral means of ensuring a high quality of qualitative research as it might be influenced by the researchers' personal beliefs, experience and history (Daymon & Holloway, 2010; Liamputtong, 2012). Therefore, the researcher continuously reflected on her position and role as a researcher during this study. She positioned herself close to the interviewed public relations practitioners as she has ten years working experience in the field of public relations in Germany and has worked for a New Zealand public relations agency. She also understands the use of social media, both

professionally and theoretically, and considers herself to be highly interested in social media. This professional and personal interest might have influenced the interviews as well as the interpretation of the data. However, it is assumed that these circumstances added positively to the knowledge of this study rather than narrowing it.

Daymon and Holloway (2010) argued that fairness, the use of appropriate strategies and the facilitation of knowledge among participants and comparable groups make qualitative research authentic. This research promoted the understanding of participants and other public relations professionals on the role of social media in New Zealand public relations practice by providing a comprehensive description thereof. The research was fair as it obtained ethical approval by the AUT Ethics Committee.

Ethics

Daymon and Holloway (2010) contended that each research project needs to follow high ethical standards. This research adhered to their formulated ethical principles by guaranteeing the participants' voluntary consent to participate before the interviews and answering questions during the interviews. The researcher cared for the participants' wellbeing by ceding the choice of location and time to them and addressing them in a professional manner during the whole interview process. The participants' privacy was secured by anonymising their data as pseudonyms before this thesis was published as well as by respecting confidentiality.

Ethics approval from the AUT Ethics Committee for semi-structured interviews was attained on 11 September 2019 (See Appendix A; application number 19/326).

Methods of Analysis

As this study followed a pragmatic methodology, it combined quantitative (campaign analysis) and qualitative (in-depth interviews) research methods to answer the research questions.

This section presents the methods undertaken to analyse the data gathered via the two different research methods. First, a content analysis was applied to analyse the findings of the campaign analysis. Second, a thematic content analysis was chosen to investigate the interview data.

Analysis of Communication Campaigns

Content analysis is defined as the "objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson as cited in Neuendorf, 2017, p. 16). It was chosen as the preferred method of analysis for the purpose of this study as it could facilitate exploring patterns and trends in documents and allows for connecting replicable and valid conclusions from the documents under study to their wider context (Krippendorff, 2012; Stemler, 2000).

This method enabled the systematic transformation of qualitative content in the communication campaign documents to become countable units, which could then be classified into quantifiable categories (Stacks, 2011). For instance, the researcher counted the occurrences of units such as Facebook, the companies' website or meetings as communication tactics and subsequently categorised them into different media types according to the expanded version of the PESO model (paid, earned, shared and owned media and interpersonal communication). The content under study was manifest as its elements were "physically present and countable" (Gray & Densten, 1998, p. 420).

Data Coding and Analysis

Microsoft Excel was used to collate and analyse the data. Firstly, the nine documents containing the campaigns under study were examined. One approach to analysing the content of text documents counts the relevant content units or words, which are subsequently grouped into categories (Weber, 1990). A coding form was developed by creating a table of all campaigns, attributing each campaign with a distinctive code number to make them easily identifiable.

This process determined the 148 campaigns under study as the sampling units of the content analysis. Stacks (2011) defined a unit of analysis as the item under study that is counted. For each unit or communication campaign, the year the campaign had been awarded, was recorded, which was invaluable for illuminating trends. The communication category of each campaign, which had been defined by PRINZ, was noted to identify potential patterns. These different categories were as follows:

- Corporate public relations,
- Internal communications,
- Public sector public relations,
- Marketing communication – Integrated,
- Marketing communication – PR,

- Special project or short-term campaign,
- Limited budget or not-for-profit public relations,
- Issues, crisis and emergency management,
- Sustained public relations,
- Communicating in diversity,
- Paul Dryden tertiary award.

Terry et al. (2017) discussed two approaches to code data: the inductive and the deductive approach. According to Potter and Levine-Donnerstein (1999), the coding process in content analysis is commonly guided by a theory. This research applied a deductive approach by using the expanded PESO model developed from the literature review to categorise the communication tactics used by the campaigns. Weber (1990) defined a category as a word or group of words containing words or phrases with the same meaning. The original PESO model provided the categories paid, earned, social and owned media for the coding process.

The literature review showed that New Zealand public relations practitioners used face-to-face communication as an important additional communication channel. However, these did not fit into the original PESO model (See Chapter 2 for details on this model). Therefore, the researcher expanded the existing model with the category "interpersonal communication" for the purpose of this study.

Codes were developed later during this process, as various applied communication tactics were identified while examining the documents. Smith (2017) described communication tactics as the visible components of a strategic communication plan. For this research, these included each action the organisation under study undertook to communicate with its publics as part of the communication campaign. Examples were leaflets, print advertising, media releases or Facebook posts.

More than 200 content units in the form of visible communication tactics were identified during data collection. This manifest content was noted by "clerical recording" (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999, p. 265). Each communication tactic was identified, and its occurrence was marked in the Excel spreadsheet. Quantification, also called measurement, was conducted by counting content units with the same meaning as suggested by Weber (1990). The numeral counting of content units, also called "interval measures", allowed the researcher to apply advanced statistical calculations such as the calculation of means and trends as proposed by Riffe et al. (2019, p. 66). A binary attribute structure as mentioned by Riffe et al. (2019) was used to classify the

content units: Their occurrence was quantified by either "1" for when this tactic was applied or "0" if it was neglected.

The identified communication tactics were grouped into the media categories paid, earned, social and owned media and interpersonal communication to enable a comparison of the use of different types of media. For the content analysis, the tactics that were grouped under a specific category were subsequently condensed into quantifiable sub-categories, as Weber (1990) proposed. For instance, in the owned media category, all listed types of print materials such as flyers, posters, brochures, fact sheets and corporate magazines were grouped and counted under the sub-category 'print material'. In the category of paid media, all units of advertising, for example, billboards, banners or TV advertising, were coded as 'advertising'. Another example for this procedure in the interpersonal communication category is the code 'speech' under which all speech types such as presentations or announcements were grouped.

The whole dataset was subsequently structured to be filtered by year, the communication category in which the campaign was conducted, and by type of media used. The condensed data was assigned to separate tables containing the essential data that could be used to answer specific research questions. The data from these tables were lastly used to create graphs to demonstrate the findings visually. Trend lines and other descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequencies were included where appropriate to give a further understanding of the data.

Analysis of Interviews

For this research, a thematic analysis was applied to analyse the interview findings. Braun and Clarke (2006) defined thematic analysis as a method "for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79). It means that the researcher investigates the dataset - in this case of interviews – to detect repeated themes of meaning.

An account of the researcher's position and subjectivity is an important factor for reflexive thematic analysis. It aims to provide "a coherent and compelling interpretation of the data, grounded in the data" (Clarke et al., 2019, p. 848). As Clarke et al. (2019) wrote:

> The researcher is a storyteller, actively engaged in interpreting data through the lens of their own cultural membership and social positionings, their theoretical

assumptions and ideological commitments, as well as their scholarly knowledge. (p. 848)

This is in line with the [reflexivity of the researcher](), which is undertaken to increase the quality of research. Due to its flexibility, thematic analysis is proposed as a suitable method to analyse various data types, including the interviews findings (Terry et al., 2017). Thematic analysis is therefore considered invaluable for analysing the findings of the semi-structured in-depth interviews to develop a comprehensive understanding of the opinion of public relations practitioners concerning the role of social media in contemporary public relations.

Data Coding and Themes

The recorded data was manually transcribed into a Microsoft Word document after completing each interview. Next, the data was entered into a Microsoft Excel file to allow analysis. The transcribed data was subsequently coded according to the main recurring themes by means of thematic analysis, as recommended by Terry et al. (2017).

As mentioned earlier, the scholars presented the inductive and the deductive approach as two ways of data coding. This research used a mixture of inductive and deductive coding to discover recurring themes. Deductive codes were derived from prevalent themes in the reviewed literature and the previous content analysis, whereas inductive codes were developed during the analysis of the data. For instance, the observation that resource restrictions were a major influencing factor for adopting social media was discovered inductively, whereas the complementary use of all media types was developed deductively because of the literature review and content analysis.

Terry et al. (2017) described thematic analysis as an analytical process of five stages: familiarisation, generating codes, theme development and lastly reviewing and defining themes. Following this process, the researcher firstly familiarised herself with the data by reading the transcribed data of each interview several times, entering data into a Microsoft Excel file, making first notes and discovering first patterns.

Secondly, the researcher reduced and organised the dataset to codes. Data that was considered relevant for answering the research questions were identified and summarised. Different codes were highlighted in different colours, and notes were entered via the software's comment function. These codes were then listed and grouped according to the different research questions.

Recurring themes were subsequently identified by discovering central concepts underlying these codes as proposed by Terry et al. (2017). This step enabled insight into the practitioners' perceptions and experiences with social media. Provisional thematic maps were developed to enhance readability (Terry et al., 2017). The preliminary themes were later reviewed, and thematic maps adjusted according to the research questions, leading to the definition of final themes and thematic maps, which were incorporated into this thesis.

Two examples of key themes were the practitioners' perception that younger colleagues felt more comfortable using social media, as well as the influence of time and money resources on the adoption of social media platforms. During this last stage, the researcher followed Terry et al.'s (2017) suggestion to move from summarising themes to the interpretive approach, presenting the analytic narrative of the interview findings to provide a broader picture of why and how these practitioners used social media.

Summary

This chapter presented the methodology of this study. It explained the triangulation approach applied in this research as a pragmatic combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. The content analysis of award-winning communication campaigns enabled the researcher to gather quantitative findings and to develop a comprehensive understanding of the use of social media in New Zealand public relations practice. The thematic analysis of the findings of in-depth interviews with public relations professionals added depth to the study by exploring their attitudes and beliefs towards the use of social media in their profession.

The quantitative findings of the campaign analysis are presented in Chapter 4, followed by an analysis of the qualitative data collected from the interviews in Chapter 5. The findings are then combined and interpreted in Chapter 6 to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER 4:
OMNIPRESENT SOCIAL MEDIA?
AN ANALYSIS OF PRINZ AWARDS CAMPAIGNS

Introduction

The quantitative content analysis of this research intends to identify the role that social media plays in contemporary New Zealand communication campaigns. As presented in Chapter 3, 148 communication campaigns, earning a PRINZ Award for their excellence between 2011 and 2019, were analysed.

This chapter presents the results of the content analysis and uses figures, including percentages and trends, to illustrate the obtained numerical findings. The first section gives an overview of the used social media platforms as well as the trends in their application (RQ 2). In the second part, the different communication categories using social media are identified (RQ 3). This is followed by an analysis of the relevance of social media compared to other types of media used in the campaigns (RQ 5).

The next chapter (Chapter 5) gives the findings of the thematic analysis of the conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with public relations practitioners. Besides adding further depth to RQ 2, RQ 3 and RQ 5, it sheds light on the practitioners' perceptions on how social media has impacted on public relations (RQ 1). Furthermore, it investigates whether public relations practitioners use social media strategically or in an ad hoc manner (RQ 4). A comprehensive discussion of the combined findings of this content analysis and the conducted interviews is presented in Chapter 6.

Social Media Platforms Applied by New Zealand Practitioners

The second research question aimed at investigating which social media platforms were used by New Zealand public relations practitioners. When answering this question, the number of explicitly named social media platforms across all campaigns were noted and counted in a joint document (see Chapter 3 for details of the coding process). All tools that matched the definition and categorisation of shared media, according to the PESO model, were regarded as social media platforms.

Figure 4 presents the frequency of use of the different recorded social media platforms across all 148 analysed campaigns.

Figure 4:

Frequency of Social Media Platform Use between 2011 and 2019
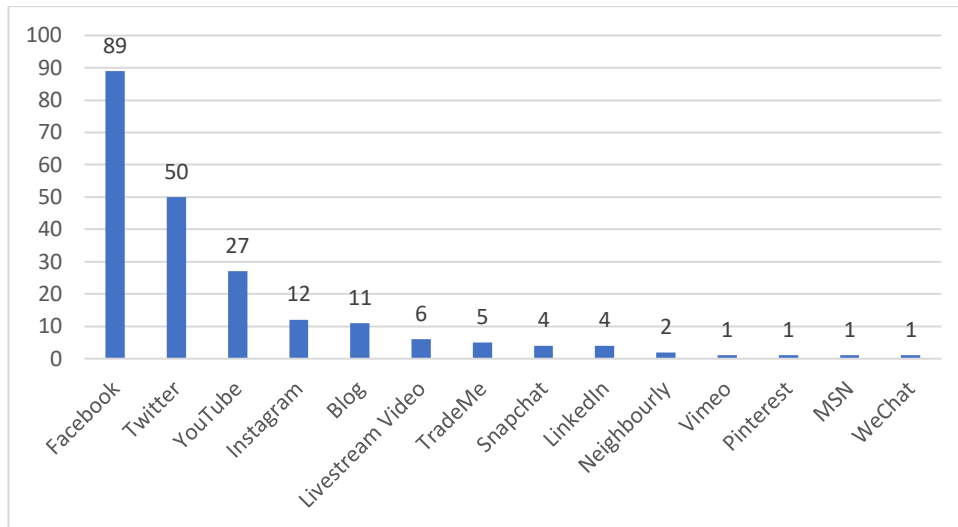
In total, social media platforms were used 214 times across all analysed campaigns. Facebook was by far the most used social media platform between 2011 and 2019. During this period, 89 communication campaigns used Facebook as a communication tool. Twitter was used by a third of the communication campaigns (50), and YouTube by almost every fifth communication programme (27). Twelve campaigns used Instagram and eleven campaigns used blogs.

In contrast, only a few campaigns made use of livestream video services of platforms such as Facebook or Instagram (6), Trade Me (5), Snapchat (4) or LinkedIn (4). Other applications like Neighbourly (2), Vimeo (1), Pinterest (1), MSN (1) and WeChat (1) were only marginally applied.

In light of the ever-changing nature of social media, Figure 5 presents the use of social media platforms per year as well as trends in their application.

Figure 5:

Percentage of Social Media Platform Use per Year
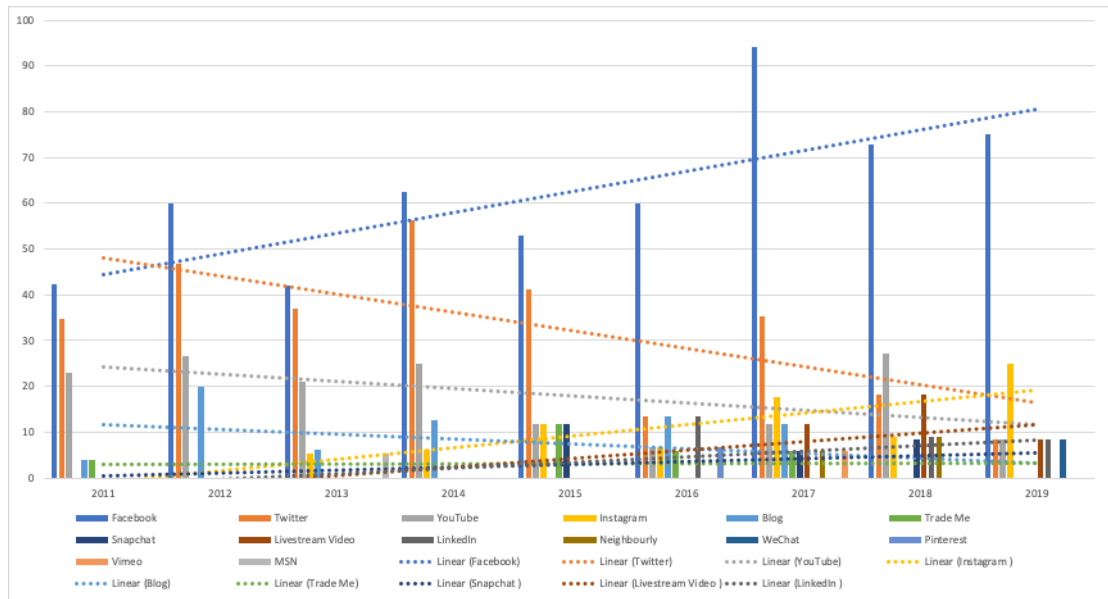
The findings show that Facebook was by far the most used social media platform each year and has significantly grown in importance over the analysed period from 42% in 2011 to 75% in 2019. Notably, 2017 recorded the highest Facebook use, when almost every award-winning campaign used this platform. Most of these campaigns conducted in 2017 included social media to reach larger publics and to raise awareness. At the same time, they used social media to communicate with more targeted publics. Given Facebook's omnipresence and its affordance to target specific parts of the population, it may have been perceived the most appropriate platform to fulfil that function.

In contrast, Twitter showed a drastically decreasing use from 35% in 2011 to 8% in 2019. In 2011, the platform was the second most used platform, whereas, in 2019, Twitter shared the bottom rank with many other platforms. The particularly heavy dip in the use of Twitter in 2016 might be explained by campaigns conducted in that year strongly focussing on interpersonal communication with journalists, instead of connecting with them via Twitter. Ten of the fifteen campaigns run in 2016 made use of interpersonal communication tactics such as interview meetings, whereas this was recorded for only half of all the analysed campaigns.

YouTube also showed a significant decline during the analysed period. The platform's popularity decreased from the third most frequently used platform by 23% of the analysed campaigns in 2011 to only 8% in 2019.

In contrast, the use of Instagram has steadily increased since its launch in 2013. Interestingly, the platform had already been adopted by some campaigns in the same year. The trendlines show that Instagram has strongly outgrown Twitter and YouTube in importance. In 2019, Instagram became the second most used social media platform across all analysed campaigns. Every fourth campaign used his platform.

Livestream video also showed an increase since its first use in 2017, one year after its introduction on Facebook and Instagram. The actual use of livestream video may have been even higher than indicated, as not all analysed campaigns made a clear distinction between the application of Facebook or Instagram and their livestream services.

Other platforms such as LinkedIn, Snapchat, Pinterest, Trade Me and Neighbourly were used only occasionally by some campaigns, whereas LinkedIn showed a slightly positive trend. After a steady decline, the analysed campaigns stopped using blogs altogether in 2018 and 2019.

In sum, Facebook was by far the most prominent social media platform across all analysed campaigns and still shows a positive trend. The campaigns quickly adopted Instagram and livestream video, making these strongly increasing social media tools. In contrast, the use of Twitter declined significantly during the analysed period. However, it remained the third most used social media platform in 2019, after Facebook and Instagram. The analysed campaigns also reduced their use of YouTube over the analysed period.

Overall, the campaigns focussed on two to three social media platforms. However, as Figure 6 demonstrates, the analysed communication campaigns appear to have adopted an increasing portfolio of social media platforms since 2011.

Figure 6:

Number of Different Social Media Platforms Used per Year
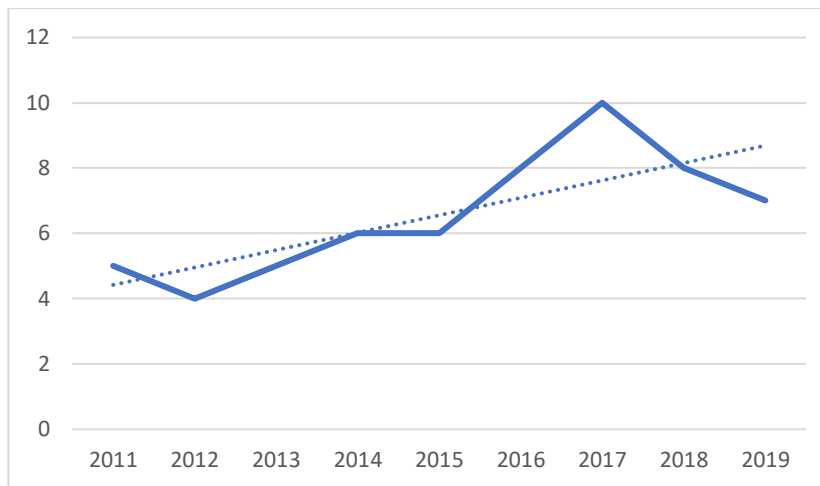
The trendline demonstrates that the number of different social media platforms used across all campaigns has steadily risen from five in 2011 to seven in 2019. The potential reasons for this development will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Application of Social Media per Communication Category

The third research question asked which communication categories used social media. The different communication categories of all analysed communication campaigns were noted, and all campaigns in those categories that used social media were quantified to answer this question. Each campaign was allocated to a specific category. These different categories, defined by PRINZ as categories for their awards, were as follows (number of campaigns in brackets):

- Corporate public relations (5),
- Internal communications (11),
- Public sector public relations (17),
- Marketing communication – Integrated (14),
- Marketing communication – PR (15),
- Special project or short-term campaign (25),
- Limited budget or not-for-profit public relations (27),
- Issues, crisis and emergency management (6),

As discussed in [Chapter 3](), the following temporary communication categories will be categorised as 'other categories' and analysed separately from the rest of the campaigns:

- Sustained public relations (16),
- Communicating in diversity (5),
- Paul Dryden tertiary award (7).

Figure 7 shows the difference in the use of social media in those communication categories. The percentage derives from the number of campaigns per category that used social media, in proportion to all campaigns of that category. For instance, 14 out of 14 and therefore 100% of the campaigns in the marketing communications – Integrated category used social media.

Figure 7:

Percentage of Social Media Use per Communication Category
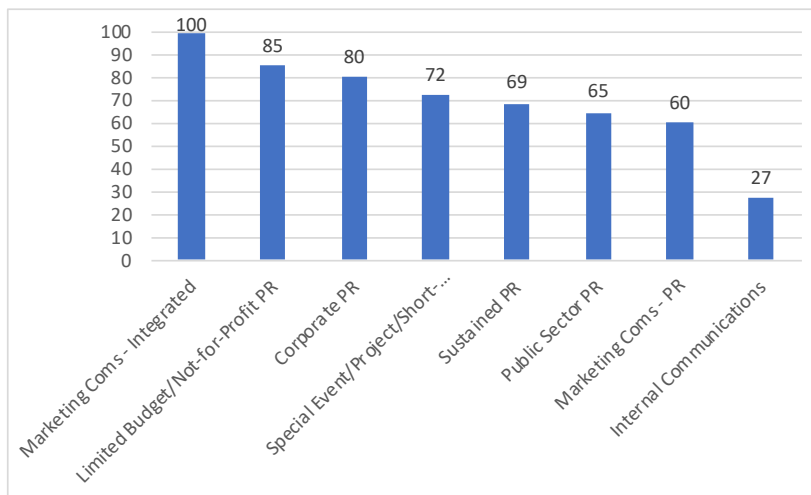
In general, most analysed campaigns across all communication categories made use of social media. However, some categories showed higher adoption of social media than others. For instance, all integrated marketing communications campaigns used social media. Campaigns with a limited budget, corporate communications and event marketing campaigns also showed a high adoption rate of social media.

In contrast, internal communications scarcely used social media, with only three in ten internal campaigns using social media tools. Sustained public relations campaigns and public sector campaigns applied social media often, but less than other categories. Interestingly, only 60%, i.e. nine out of the total of 15 campaigns in the marketing communications – PR category, made use of social media. The

intensity of social media use varied across the analysed years, but this analysis does not cover how many different social media platforms or other media types were used per campaign.

Each communication category will be discussed in detail. Figures 8 to 17 illustrate the development in each communication category over the analysed period.

Marketing Communication – Integrated

All 14 award-winning campaigns in the marketing communication – Integrated category used social media (see Figure 8). PRINZ (n.d.-d) defined campaigns as part of the marketing communication – Integrated category if they included public relations as part of the communication strategy, alongside other communication functions. The dips in 2012, 2015 and 2019 simply show that PRINZ did not award campaigns of this category in these years.

Figure 8:

Percentage of Marketing Communication – Integrated Campaigns Using Social Media
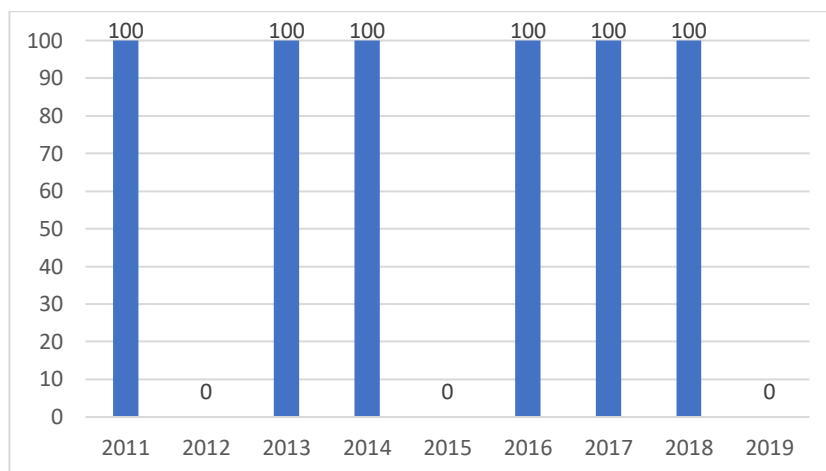
Limited Budget and Not-For-Profit Public Relations

In the limited budget and not-for-profit category, 23 of the 27 campaigns (85%) included social media activities. PRINZ (n.d.-d) assigned all campaigns run by not-for-profit organisations as well as campaigns with a budget of less than $10,000 to this category.

As shown in Figure 9, all of those 23 campaigns already started to use social media in 2011.

Figure 9:

Percentage of Limited Budget and Not-for-Profit Public Relations Campaigns Using Social Media
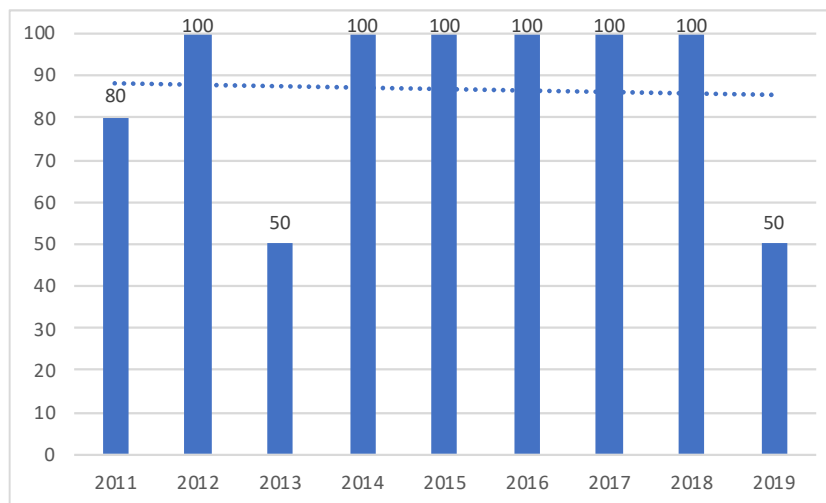
Except for 2013 and 2019, where only half of the campaigns applied social media, all other campaigns in this category used social media over this period. The trend line shows that the use of social media in this communication category holds steady. A detailed discussion of the potential reasons for this type of campaign signalling early adoption of social media is given in Chapter 6.

Corporate Public Relations

In the corporate public relations category, four of the five awarded campaigns (80%) integrated social media into their communications strategy. This category includes corporate reputation as well as customer, investor and community relations campaigns (PRINZ, n.d.-d).

Figure 10 shows that in 2014, 2015 and 2019, all analysed campaigns in this category used social media. As there were no awarded campaigns in the other years, the application of social media shows a positive trend in corporate public relations. Only one campaign that was conducted in 2012 did not use social media.

Figure 10:

Percentage of Corporate Public Relations Campaigns Using Social Media
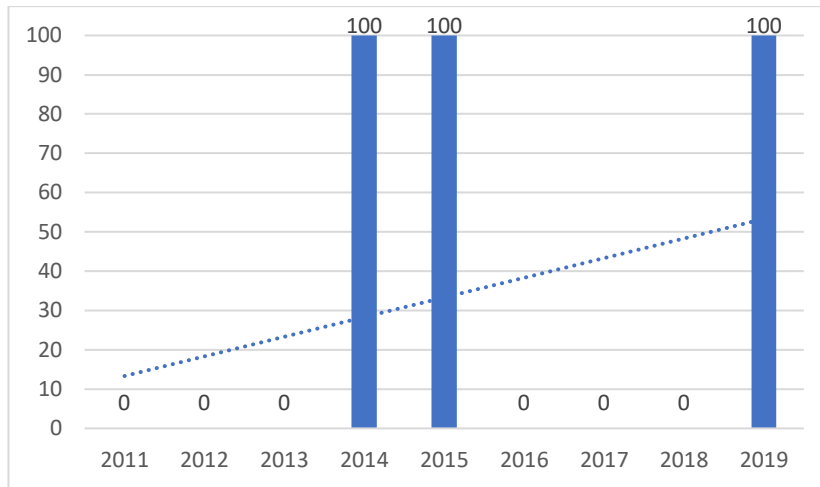
Special Events and Short-Term Projects

In the special event and short-term project category, 18 out of the 25 (72%) award-winning campaigns used social media. PRINZ (n.d.-d) allocated all campaigns that included either an event or a fundraising programme into this category. After 2016, issues and emergency campaigns were also assigned to this category.

Regardless, Figure 11 presents an unstable social media use in this category over the analysed period.

Figure 11:

Percentage of Special Event and Short-Term Project Campaigns Using Social Media
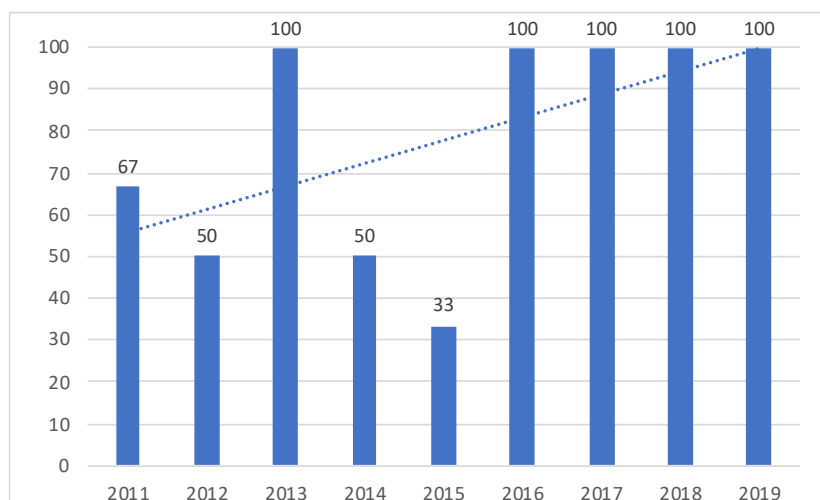
Seven campaigns did not include social media. Since 2016, social media was a part of all campaigns in this classification, resulting in a positive trend in this category.

Sustained Public Relations

Eleven out of the 16 (69%) sustained public relations campaigns made use of social media. PRINZ (n.d.-d) classified a communication campaign as sustained if it was conducted for longer than one year.

Figure 12 shows that all campaigns after 2013 applied social media, resulting in a positive trend in this category. The five campaigns that neglected social media were implemented before 2014. A possible explanation for this delayed adoption might be that social media did not start to become common in public relations campaigns before 2011. Before 2011, only a few award-winning campaigns had included social media (see Chapter 3 for more details on exclusion criteria for the sample).

Figure 12:

Percentage of Sustained Public Relations Campaigns Using Social Media
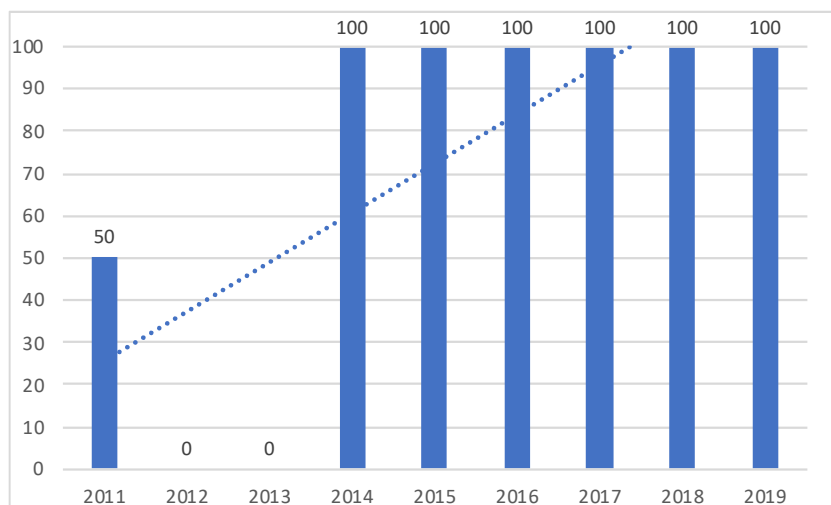
The positive trend and consistent use of social media in long-term campaigns might lead to the assumption that social media plays an important role not only in short-term but also in long-term communication.

Public Sector Public Relations

PRINZ (n.d.-d) allocated all campaigns into this category that were conducted for either the federal or local government, a tertiary institution or a health provider. The use of social media in the public sector was unpredictable, as seen in Figure 13.

Figure 13:

Percentage of Public Sector Public Relations Campaigns Using Social Media
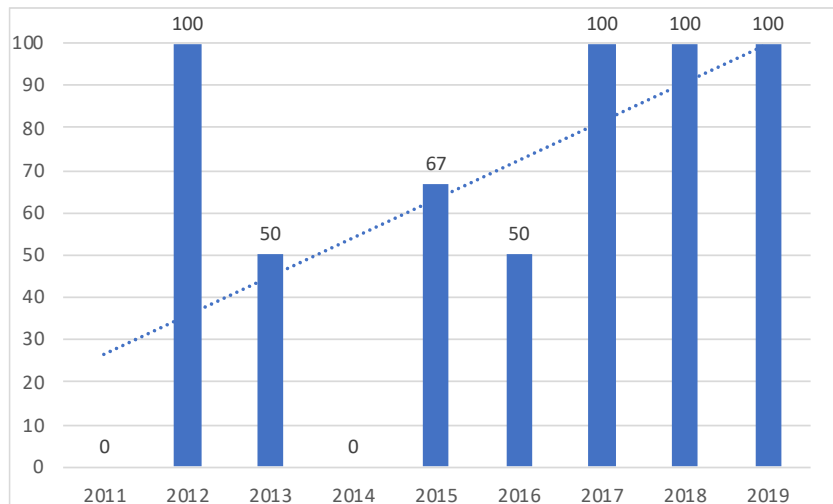
Six of the 17 campaigns (35%) did not use social media at all, of which most were conducted in 2011. Three of them focussed on media relations and interpersonal communication, two concentrated on owned media channels and one solely on media relations. Since 2017, all campaigns included social media into their communication programmes, resulting in a positive trend of social media use in this category.

Marketing Communication – PR

All campaigns, where public relations led strategy and planning, were grouped into this category (PRINZ, n.d.-d). Only nine out of 15 campaigns (60%) in the marketing communication – PR category made use of social media. Figure 14 might explain this relatively low proportion, as these campaigns lagged other campaigns when adopting social media. Four out of the five campaigns conducted before 2013 completely neglected social media and solely focussed on media relations and business to business communication.

Figure 14:

Percentage of Marketing Communication – PR Campaigns Using Social Media
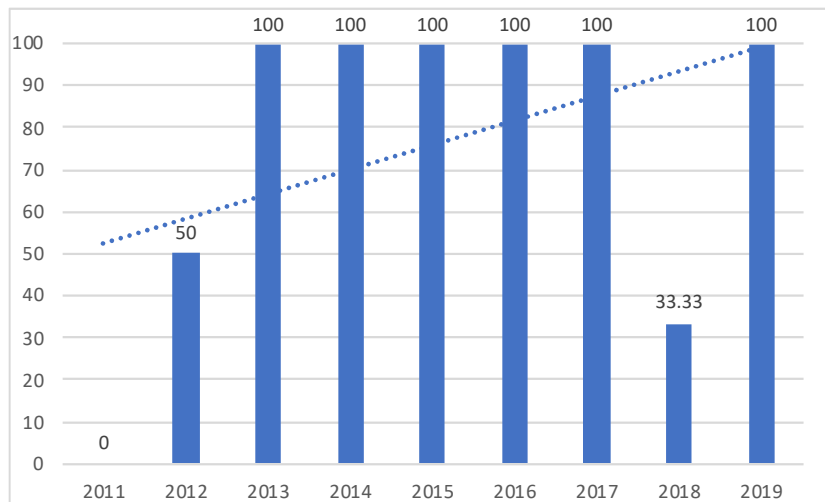
However, all campaigns run since 2014 used social media except for a dip in 2018, resulting in a positive trend in this communication category. The two campaigns that did not use social media in that year addressed local dairy farmers and school children, respectively. This might have led campaigners to choose interpersonal communication as well as owned media in the belief that these would address these publics more effectively.

Internal Communications

PRINZ (n.d.-d) classified all campaigns as internal communications campaigns if these addressed the organisation's internal publics, for instance, to support change or internal culture. The 11 award-winning campaigns in this category showed the lowest number of years (3) in which social media were applied (see Figure 15). In total, only three of the eleven campaigns (27%) included social media.

Figure 15:

Percentage of Internal Communications Campaigns Using Social Media
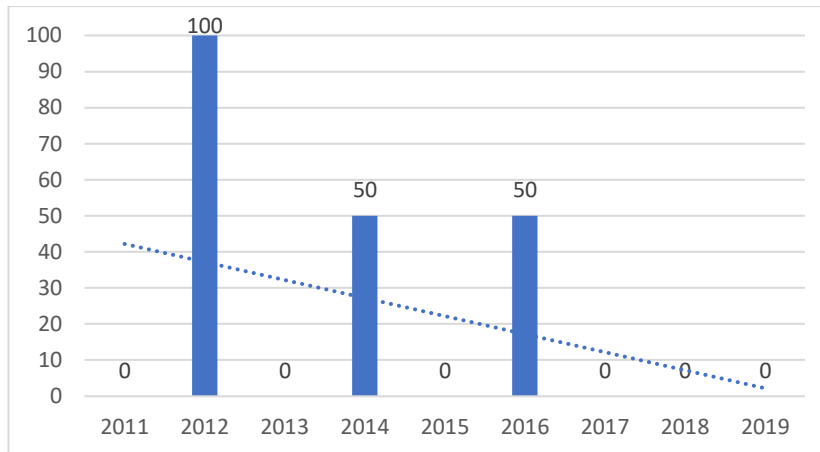
In 2017 and 2018, PRINZ did not award campaigns in this category. Four years of the analysed period observed no use of social media, while the application was inconsistent in the rest of the years. Therefore, this category shows a clear downward trend in social media use.

The low use of social media might be explained by the fact that internal communications tend to concentrate on other communication tools such as interpersonal communication or the intranet to interact with internal publics. All the analysed internal communications campaigns strongly focussed on interpersonal communication such as educational gatherings (6), meetings (5), internal events (4) and speeches (2). Almost all campaigns used email (6) and the intranet (5).

However, since 2014, four campaigns used internal forms of social media such as an internal newsfeed, staff forums and direct messaging applications. Large organisations with a high number of employees ran all of these. Therefore, it is suggested that organisations that might have higher communication budgets are more likely to use internal social media in the form of costly commercial solutions. In contrast, smaller businesses might refrain from the internal use of social media due to restricted budgets and security issues related to the use of free applications.

Other Communication Categories

Over the analysed period, PRINZ has renamed or changed some award categories or introduced new ones. For instance, the category "issues, crisis and emergency management" has not been used after 2016. Instead, issues management campaigns have been added to the category "special project or short-term campaign".

Since 2018, the "Paul Dryden tertiary award" has no longer been considered an award category. Moreover, "communicating in diversity" was introduced as a new award category in 2017. As these changes were likely to distort the research findings, these were categorised as 'other communication categories' and are presented separately in Figure 16.

Figure 16:

Percentage of Other Communication Categories Using Social Media
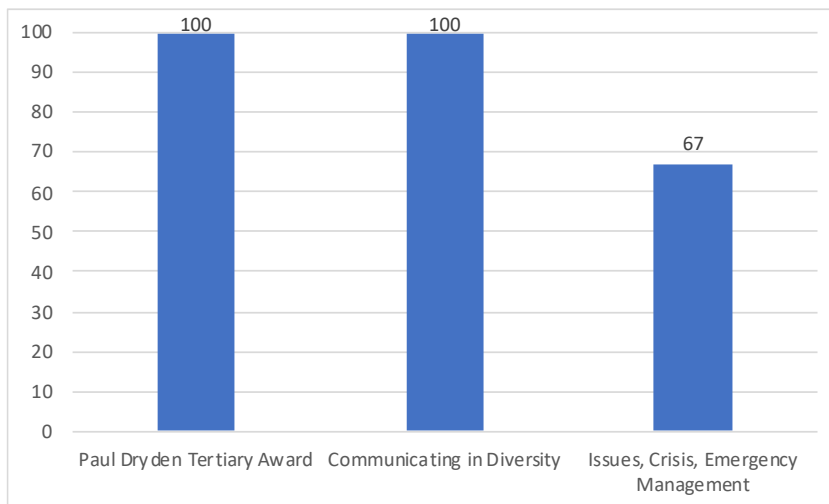
The high application of social media by all seven campaigns in the Paul Dryden Tertiary award category might be explained by the age, and recent education, of the campaigners as this category entailed campaigns handed in by PRINZ student members (PRINZ, n.d.-d).

All five communicating in diversity campaigns also showed a full use of social media. PRINZ (n.d.-d) allocated community as well as awareness campaigns with broad publics into this category. However, the recent introduction of this category impedes a comparison with the other categories.

Figure 17 separately illustrates the development of social media use in the category issues, crisis and emergency management until its discontinuation in 2017. Four of

the six campaigns in this category used social media. Two campaigns in 2013 and 2016 showed no use whereas all campaigns in 2011, 2014 and 2015 used social media. In 2012, no campaigns were awarded in this category. Overall, social media use in issues and crisis communication showed a marginal downward trend.

Figure 17:

Percentage of Issues, Crisis and Emergency Management Campaigns Using Social Media

Summary of Communication Categories

The findings showed that campaigns of all communication categories generally included social media in their communication mix. Integrated marketing, as well as not-for-profit campaigns, showed a stable trend due to their already high percentage of social media adoption. In contrast, the category of issues, crisis and emergency communication showed a slightly downward trend. The use in internal communications was below average and showed a negative trend.

Almost all other categories demonstrated an increasing trend in the application of social media. This might lead to the assumption that the proportion of campaigns using social media in categories with a comparably lower use such as special projects, sustained PR and marketing communications – PR, might increase further in the future.

Does Social Media Outweigh Other Media Types?

To answer RQ 5 "Does social media outweigh other media types in public relations practice?", this research identified and counted all different communication tools that were used in the analysed communication campaigns. These tools were then categorised according to the expanded PESO model, which classifies communication tools into paid, earned, social and owned media as well as interpersonal communication (see Chapter 3 on details for the rationale).

However, while conducting the analysis, a clear categorisation posed some challenges as many communication tools demonstrated that these categories are blurred. The nature of social media itself, for instance, already revealed the difficulties of the original PESO model (paid, earned, shared, owned). An organisations' social media accounts are owned rather than shared media as the organisation has full control over the content. Social media can also be defined as shared media when independent social media users such as bloggers, influencers or media outlets share the content that was initially published by the organisation. This form of social media communication could even be interpreted as earned media as the organisation does not influence whether third parties share or modify the content. A clear definition of the different media types was therefore needed to rule out ambiguity.

In this context, all social media channels run by the campaigners that were explicitly named in the analysed documents, for example, a Facebook or a Twitter account, were counted and categorised as social media.

Like press releases and opinion pieces, interpersonal interactions with journalists such as media interviews or media events were assigned to the earned media and not the interpersonal category as those tactics aimed at 'earning' the media. Boosting, advertising and influencer marketing on social media were all defined as paid media to delineate paid from "free" organic content.

Figure 18 lists and quantifies all identified communication tools, allocating them to the owned, earned, social and paid media categories and interpersonal communication. The figure presents these quantified tools in groups to facilitate readability. The shown social media platforms are the same as in Figure 4. However, here they are integrated again to present a comprehensive overview of all applied communication tools according to the expanded PESO model.

Figure 18:

Frequency of Applied Communication Tools According to Expanded PESO Model

Applied communication tools Expanded PESO model				
Paid (214)	**Earned (346)**	**Social (214)**	**Owned (367)**	**Interpersonal (260)**
Advertising (79)	Media release (85)	Facebook (89)	Website (85)	Event (96)
Promotion items (45)	Phone call (75)	Twitter (50)	Print material (71)	Meeting (40)
Direct mail (24)	Media interview (58)	YouTube (27)	Emails (44)	Competition (36)
Online advertising (19)	Media event (39)	Instagram (12)	Newsletter (38)	Educational gathering (27)
Social media advertising (19)	PR stunt (17)	Blog (11)	Letter (30)	Speech (25)
Advertorial (15)	Media kit (16)	Livestream video (6)	Micro website (26)	Phone call (13)
Online advertorial (13)	Media conference (13)	Trade Me (5)	Intranet (21)	Personal involvement (12)
	Media gifts (10)	Snapchat (4)	Web interactive (16)	Offline interactive (11)
	WOM (10)	LinkedIn (4)	Hotline (13)	
	Opinion piece (9)	Neighbourly (2)	Messaging (8)	
	Product sample (7)	Vimeo (1)	Internal social media (7)	
	SEO (5)	Pinterest (1)	App (5)	
	Letter to the media (2)	MSN (1)	Info board (3)	
		WeChat (1)		

Note: WOM = word of mouth; SEO = search engine optimisation.

Owned media tools were used the most across all analysed communication campaigns as these were used 367 times. Digital applications such as websites (85), emails (44), newsletters (38), and the intranet (21) formed most owned media tactics, with 85% of all owned media pieces.

Except for print material (71), which was the second most used tool, and letters (30), non-digital tools like hotlines (13) and information boards (3) played only a minor role in the analysed communication campaigns. The group 'print material' included all printed collateral that was used by organisations such as flyers, brochures, fact sheets, corporate magazines or handouts.

Overall, websites (127), including micro websites (26) and interactive webpages (16), were by far the most frequently used tools. More than every third owned media tool mentioned in the campaigns was a website. Micro websites were individually designed landing pages for specific communications campaigns. 'Web interactive' entailed interactive features such as online quizzes, games or voting, which were developed and embedded into the organisation's website for the campaign. Internal social media (7) were only marginally used and only by larger organisations (see the section on internal communications in this chapter).

Regarding the total number of used communication tools, earned media was the second most frequently applied media type in the communication campaigns under study. Practitioners made use of them 346 times in total. Personal interactions with

journalists, including phone calls (75), interviews (58) and events (39) accounted for 60% of the mentioned tools and were, therefore, the most important ways to communicate with media outlets. This reinforced the assumption that interpersonal communication is an integral and important part of communication strategies, including media liaison.

However, media releases (85) were the most frequently used tactic across all campaigns to reach out to journalists. In contrast, opinion pieces (9), product samples (7) and letters (2) were only marginally used.

The analysed campaigns concentrated their efforts to earn media coverage slightly more on print media (110), while TV (85), radio (83) and online media (83) showed a lower but balanced application, as shown in Figure 19. The group 'online media' included all earned media that solely published online, such as Stuff for instance, and online publications of traditional print media such as the NZ Herald.

Figure 19:

Frequency of Earned Media Types Used in Communication Campaigns
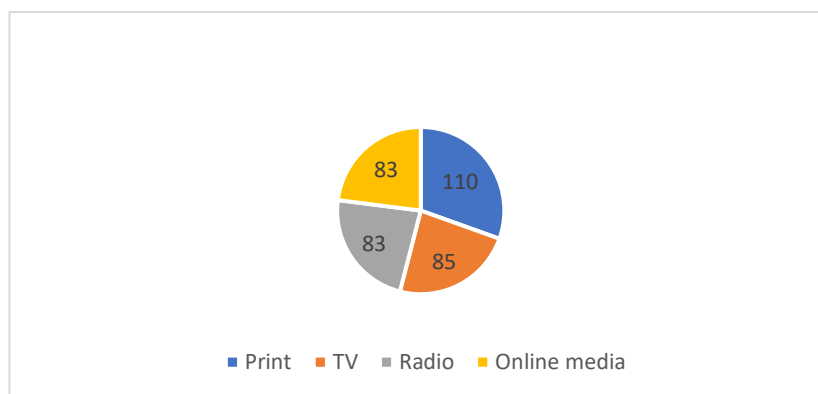
The high number of interpersonal communication tools (260) showed the importance of interpersonal communication in New Zealand public relations. Events (96) were, by far, the most used tool in this category. More than every third tool applied was an event. These were followed by meetings (40) and competitions (36). Educational gatherings (27) and speeches (25) were other forms of regularly applied interpersonal communication tactics.

Paid media tactics were the least used category along with social media tactics with 214 mentions. Traditional advertising was by far the most frequently used tool with 79 campaigns using them. The most popular forms in this group were advertising in print media, posters and billboards as well as radio advertising. Promotional items (45)

including giveaways, branded gear like T-Shirts or branded collateral such as stickers or postcards were also often applied.

In contrast, online advertising (19) such as banners, was used less frequently. Only 19 campaigns mentioned the use of social media advertising, e.g. the promotion of posts, indicating that paid social media played only a minor role in the communication campaigns compared to other paid media tools.

The social media tactics focussed on a small number of the main social media platforms such as Facebook (89), Twitter (50) and YouTube (27), whereas other platforms like Snapchat (4), LinkedIn (4) and Pinterest (1), were only scarcely used (See section on social media in this chapter for further details).

In conclusion, tactics from all media types were used across the analysed campaigns, with varying frequency. The highest number of communication tools was assigned to owned media, closely followed by earned media. On average, the analysed communication campaigns used a wider variety of tools in owned and earned media than in social and paid media as well as interpersonal communication.

Figure 20 shows that the analysed communication campaigns generally applied a balanced mix of the different media types, and most campaigns made use of all media types.

Figure 20:

Media Types Applied by Campaigns in Percent 2011 -2019
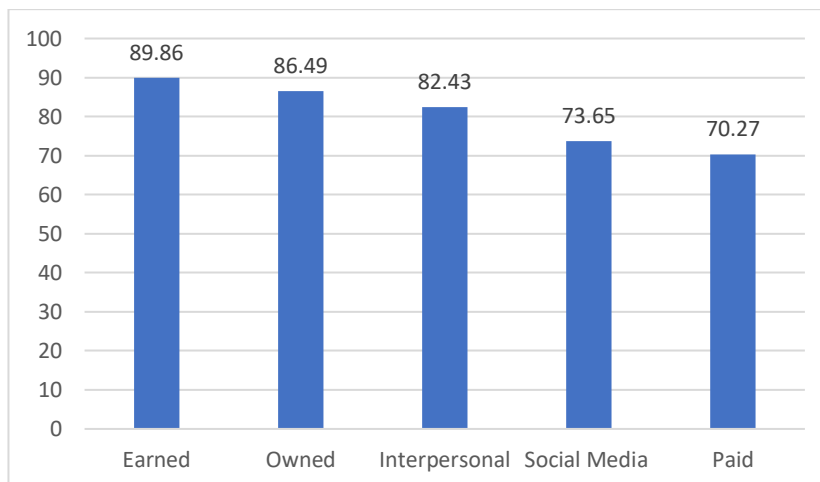
Earned media were used the most, as almost 90% of the campaigns applied them. Owned media and interpersonal communication were used by more than 80% of the

campaigns. Almost three in five campaigns (73.65%) used social media, while paid media were used by only 70.27% of the campaigns. This might lead to the conclusion that communication campaigns focused slightly more on earned and owned media than on the two other media types.

However, trends in the application of the various communication channels revealed that the importance of these channels as a part of communication campaigns had changed significantly over the years. Figure 21 presents these developments in the use of media types between 2011 and 2019.

Figure 21:

Percentage of Media Types Used by Communication Campaigns
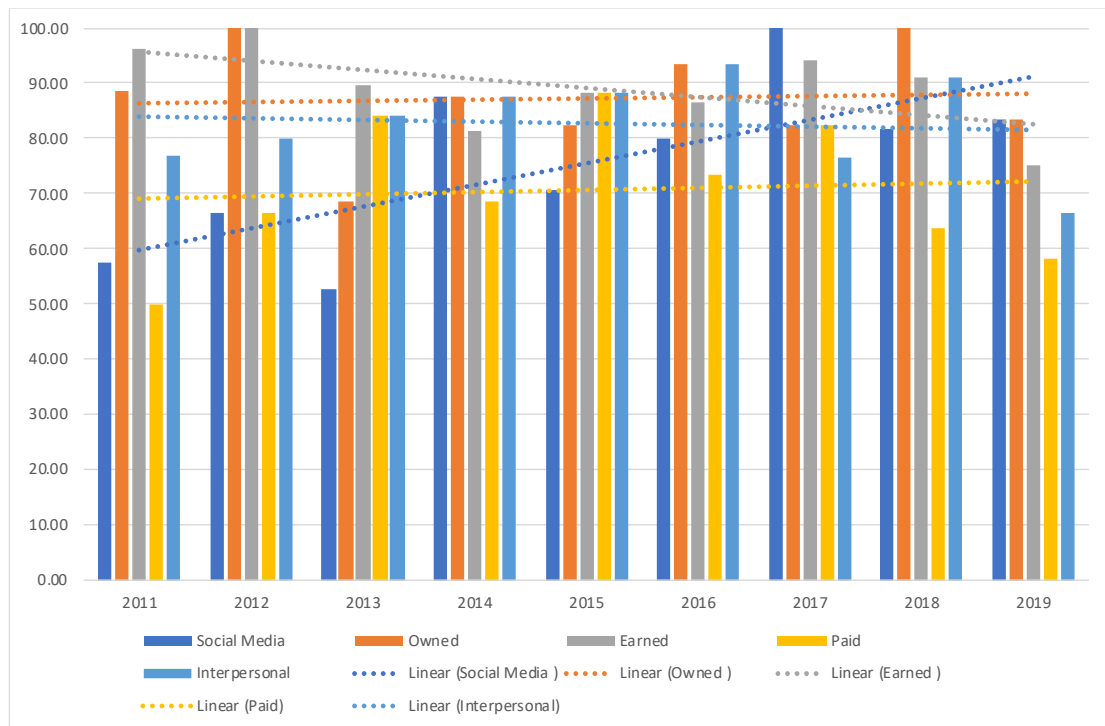
The trend lines illustrate that social media strongly gained in importance between 2011 and 2019. In 2019, social media even replaced earned media as the most important media type in communication campaigns, closely followed by owned media, whose use slightly increased over the same period.

Earned media showed a pronounced decline, while the other media types appeared to hold steady. Therefore, social media can be classified as an established media type that has become an integral part of the communication mix of contemporary communication campaigns. These trends even suggest that the application of social media might increase further in the future. Following the trendlines, owned media, as

well as interpersonal communication, might remain stable, while the use of earned media might decrease further.

The data shows that communication campaigns at first relied mostly on earned and owned media as communication channels. In 2011, for instance, earned media were used by 96% and owned media by 89% of the analysed campaigns. In contrast, only slightly more than half of the campaigns used social media that year. However, since a small dip in 2013, when only half of all campaigns used social media, this media type continuously gained in importance. From 2018, more than eight out of ten campaigns (80%) used some form of social media application.

Summary

This chapter presented the results of the content analysis of award-winning New Zealand communication campaigns. A more in-depth discussion of these results is provided in Chapter 6. The findings revealed that communication campaigns were more likely to use well-established social media platforms such as Facebook as compared to newer platforms like Snapchat or TikTok. Facebook seemed to be omnipresent in the campaigns as it was by far the most used platform and its use continued to grow over the analysed period.

Regardless, some social media applications, such as Instagram and livestream video, were found to be used immediately after their launch and with increasing frequency. Instagram became a very popular social media tool for communication campaigns. By 2019, the platform was the second most used after Facebook. In contrast, the application of YouTube and Twitter recorded a steady decrease.

Although social media was used across all communication categories, the rate of their application varied. For instance, marketing communications – Integrated and limited budget campaigns were the categories with the highest use of social media, whereas internal communication campaigns scarcely used social media.

The results also demonstrated that social media was increasingly integral to the communication campaigns, seemingly outgrowing other media types in importance. However, as this trend needs to be validated, results from thematic analysis of the interviews were used to examine this trend further.

The next chapter presents the findings of semi-structured in-depth interviews with New Zealand public relations professionals, thus providing further insights into the practitioner uses of social media.

CHAPTER 5:
ANALYSIS OF SEMI-STRUCTURED IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH NEW ZEALAND PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONALS

Introduction

The semi-structured, in-depth interviews in this study aimed to attain a better understanding of the role of social media in New Zealand public relations practice. This chapter presents the results of interviews with ten senior public relations practitioners based in Auckland, New Zealand (see Chapter 3 for details of the inclusion criteria and the interview process). In total, the participants were asked eleven semi-structured questions (Appendix B1) to answer the overall research questions. Interview results are presented in the order of interview questions.

The first section of this chapter elaborates on how the participants evaluated the impact of social media on public relations (RQ 1). The second part shows how the participants used different social media platforms (RQ 2). In the next section, the different communication categories, in which the practitioners applied social media, are presented (RQ 3). This is followed by an investigation of whether practitioners used social media strategically or in an ad hoc manner (RQ 4) and the importance of social media compared to other media types (RQ 5). The interview findings aimed to provide answers to RQ 1 and RQ 4, which could not be derived from the campaign analysis in Chapter 4. Furthermore, the results added further depth to the campaign analysis findings regarding RQ 2, RQ 3 and RQ 5.

A detailed discussion of the combined findings of the interviews and campaign analysis is presented in Chapter 6.

Overview of Participants

The first interview question aimed to identify the experience and qualifications of participants. Four of the participants worked as in-house practitioners, four as consultants in public relations agencies and two as sole practitioners. Most interview participants could be defined as experienced public relations professionals without a tertiary qualification in the field.

Half of the interviewees had more than 20 years' working experience in public relations. Three had worked in public relations for ten to fifteen years. Only two had

less than ten years of work experience in the industry. Most of the interviewees had no public relations or communications qualifications. Only 40% had a tertiary qualification in communications or public relations. Two interviewees held a Bachelor of Communication Studies; one held a Diploma in Journalism and one a Master of Communication Studies as well as a Diploma in Journalism.

The names of participants and the organisations they worked for were concealed to protect their privacy. This thesis adopted Bhargava's (2010) method of presenting interview participants by referring to them as P1C (participant one, consultant), P2S (participant two, sole practitioner), P3I (participant three, in-house practitioner) and so forth.

How Practitioners Evaluate the Impact of Social Media on Public Relations

How Social Media Influences Public Relations

The second interview question was how New Zealand public relations practitioners evaluate the impact of social media on public relations. Figure 22 presents the three main themes that emerged from participants' answers, namely influences on the public relations function, the way public relations practitioners communicate, and "everything". The frequency of answers is given in brackets.

Figure 22:

Impact of Social Media on Public Relations Practice – Thematic Analysis
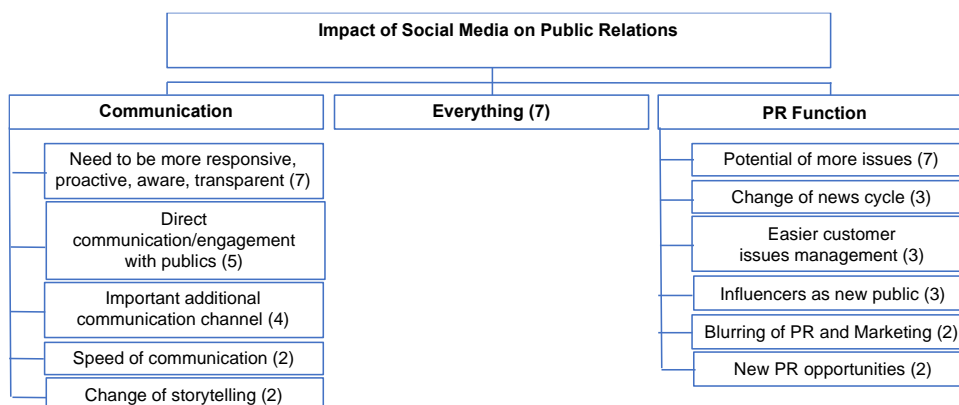
All interviewees believed that social media significantly impacted public relations. Seven even stated that social media affected everything.

> Hugely. It has really spun everything on its ear. It has changed the media landscape and the communication industry completely. (P8C)

Seven participants specified that using social media involved significant requirements of the organisations' communications in terms of transparency, responsiveness and proactivity.

> Social media had meant that companies have been forced to be more transparent. It just means that executives see the need to be more transparent, to actually talk more with customers. (P3I)

Social media was valued as a complementary (4) and direct (5) communication channel between the organisation and their publics, enabling organisations to better engage with their publics.

> It has changed completely the landscape for public relations because pre-social media you would engage with the public directly through mainstream media channels, through journalists. You might have had some advertorial. And then suddenly, social media was here, and it shortened the gap between the customers and the CEO from weeks if not months to minutes. Suddenly, they were very aware what the customers were saying on a case by case basis. And that was quite revolutionary. (P5S)

Three participants argued that the nature of social media facilitated the management of customer issues due to communicating directly and instantly with customers.

Regardless of these perceived benefits, seven practitioners were also aware of the risks of social media due to the increasing number of communication issues that could arise.

> It's horizontal communication, and it's open to anybody. Anybody can become a commentator. So, your company's position is debated very quickly, especially if you have got an issue going on. There is nowhere to hide. You have to have conversation. That's what it is. It's social. (P4C)

Three participants said that social media had changed how news was spread and consumed, impacting on the formats of traditional media that also now published via social media.

> It's where you find breaking news now, whereas people previously relied on journalists and the traditional news media. So now, they have got Twitter. (P6C)

Three participants identified influencers posing challenges to public relations practice. Two practitioners each stated that social media accelerated the speed of communication and changed the way of storytelling in public relations. According to two other participants, social media blurred the lines between public relations and marketing.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Social Media

The third interview question encouraged participants to talk about the perceived advantages and disadvantages of social media in the practice of public relations. This aimed to illuminate the practitioners' opinions of the value social media might have for their practice. Figure 23 presents the thematic analysis of these varied answers.

It emerged from the analysis that the answers were either related to the characteristics and affordances of social media as a communication channel, or to the nature of communication held on social media. Therefore, the answers were subdivided into the categories 'channel' and 'communication'. The number of mentions for each answer are placed in brackets.

Figure 23:

Advantages and Disadvantages of Social Media in Public Relations
– Thematic Analysis
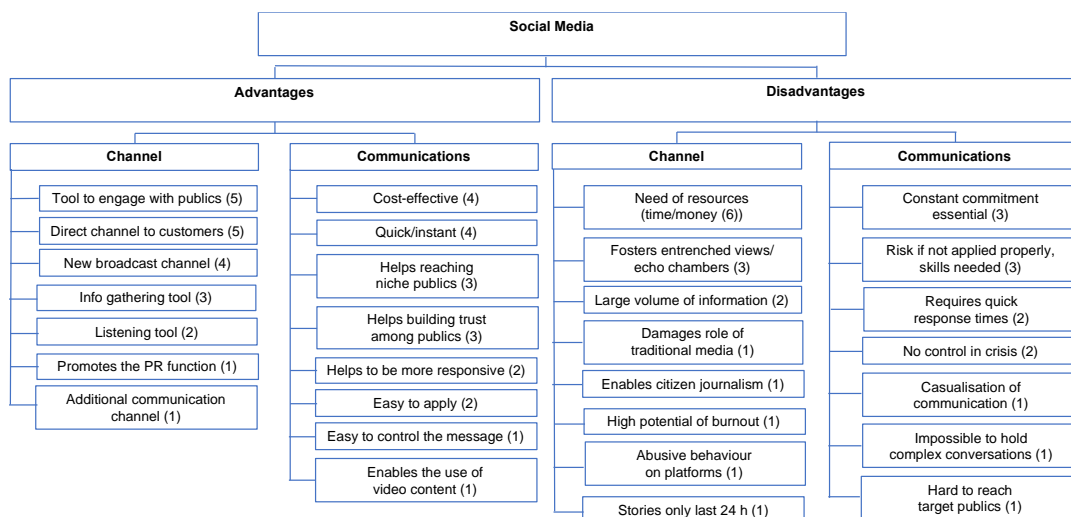
Practitioners valued social media as an "awesome way of spreading good news" (P3I). Half of them appreciated social media as a direct communication channel through which they could engage with their publics. However, a professional approach was said to be essential to apply them successfully.

> Overall, from a communications/PR[3] perspective, I think social media is great. It has a lot of benefits, but it's just the challenges of how you manage it, which is the key part. (P1I)

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[3] "PR" is colloquially used for the term "public relations". For accuracy, it is kept in the quotes of interview participants.

Almost half of the practitioners considered social media to be a cost-effective and quick communication tool.

> Definitely, the benefits are around that being able to spread your message quicker and louder. (P2I)

> Also, it's cheap. When did communications ever become so cheap! I think that's the benefit for small businesses. (P4C)

> You don't need to have a big budget to get really good results on social media, Facebook, for example. (P9S)

Four participants highlighted that organisations could use social media as a separate broadcast channel to reach wider publics, whereas three stated that social media enabled them to reach niche publics.

> The biggest advantage is that you can communicate to more people on behalf of a brand. You have more choice both in the people, who you can connect the brand to or connect the media to influencers, too, for the brand. (P8C)

> You are able to target particular audiences. So, you can get after young people, older people or whatever demographic you are after. (P10I)

Social media was used not only as a simple channel to disseminate but also to gather information. Some practitioners stated that they used social media as a listening and information gathering tool before communicating with their publics.

> You start by listening, so you can get a sense of where your audience and consumers are at. And then you can engage directly with your audience. (P7C)

Despite the positive attitude of most practitioners towards social media, they stressed a variety of disadvantages to consider when using this channel. According to six practitioners, using social media required significant time and money, which contradicted the statement that they were 'cheap'.

> The disadvantage is time, it's very time consuming to manage social media, particularly when things go wrong. (P2I)

A constant commitment, quick response times as well as social media skills were defined as necessities when communicating on social media. Only two practitioners described social media as easy to use.

> It is important that you don't start in a flurry and then stop. It needs to be something that is incremental that you commit to over a period of time. So, I

guess that is really a challenge for people just in terms of resource, coming up with content that is going to be engaging. (P7C)

Whereas you before had time to think about statements and be careful and probably get more information, now when you deal with issues, you have to be quite quick and often respond without the full information and maybe have a view on something that is incomplete. (P1I)

If a plane crashes, it is on Twitter, and everyone knows. There is no down-time for that area of PR. (P6C)

The casualisation of communication by using simpler, more colloquial language and the impossibility of holding complex conversations were other mentioned concerns.

Given the brevity of social media channels, you have to be very quick to the point and very simply explain something. That is often very hard to do. So, it takes a lot of skill to do that. (P10I)

Some participants stated that social media assisted them to be more responsive and transparent, which enabled them to build trust among publics. In contrast, three practitioners stressed that social media posed a significant risk to organisations that did not apply them properly.

The negative sides are that companies that aren't ready and do not want to tell their story are in a really bad position. Because they still get the same amount if not more attention than they used to get, but it's very public. So, if they don't interact, they are not seen as an authentic brand. They are seen as a faceless corporation. In the end, people put their money where their trust is. (P4C)

Three participants stated that social media fostered entrenched views and echo chambers, both of which might impede communications significantly. The large volume of information, as well as constant commitment, might lead to practitioner burnout, which was witnessed by one participant.

There is a ton of information, actually sorting out what's quality and what's not, and just the sheer volume of that can be quite difficult. But also, just with algorithms and the like, there is the dangers around the echo chamber. So, that is the huge concern. (P7C)

We hear this again and again that people lose confidence, they are having problems with their wellbeing, or they are becoming a little bit burned-out faster. That is because there is so much coming at us all the time. Sometimes, some people do say if you bring a platform in, you have got to take another platform out. Because we can only physically absorb, read, see so much. (P8C)

One participant stated that it was easy to control messages on social media by mediating the conversation as distinct from two other participants, who said that messages on social media were impossible to control in a crisis.

> I think it's a myth that people think they can be able to control a message. (P4C)

One practitioner also thought that abusive behaviour on social media platforms and citizen journalism complicated the organisations' communications.

> People are telling bad things, although they clearly have no clue. And that is social media. (P5S)

> I've seen a lot of actual experts being told they don't know what they are talking about by people who read things on the internet. So, if you have really complex topics, whether it is politics, science or about anything, people would pop up and know: "I read the other story on Buzzfeed, and now I know." That is the flipside of it. (P5S)

Platforms with the Biggest Impact

When asked which platform had the biggest impact on public relations, all practitioners mentioned one of the established platforms, Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, with Facebook noted most frequently. Three practitioners acknowledged Facebook as the first mainstream social media platform. P10S called Facebook a "game-changer". Its omnipresence was the most cited reason for using Facebook.

> I think Facebook has kind of hit a plateau and it is at a scale now where we can't ignore it. (P2I)

However, three participants considered that the importance of Facebook for younger publics has decreased. One of them predicted that Facebook would become even less relevant to younger publics.

> I think Facebook as a platform has just become really cluttered. There is a lot on there; it is noisy, confusing. It feels more branded and less personal. So, the Millennials we are trying to reach tend to gravitate towards Instagram because it feels more personal. (P6C)

Half of the practitioners considered Twitter to be a platform that has influenced public relations. Instagram was considered even more important than Facebook, taking together Instagram (six mentions) and Instagram Stories (three mentions), whereas Facebook had only eight mentions.

> In the modern age, say in the last five years, it has to be Instagram, absolutely. I think it has changed everything. (P8C)

Besides these established platforms, others such as LinkedIn (two mentions) or Snapchat (no mentions) were seldom mentioned, if at all.

The Positioning of Social Media Within Organisations

To illuminate the circumstances under which social media was applied within the organisation, the participants were asked which department in their organisation was responsible for using social media.

Figure 24 shows that responsibility for social media was handled differently across various organisations. The number of mentions is presented in brackets. Only one participant reported that social media was managed by a separate social media department.

Figure 24:

Departments Responsible for Social Media – Thematic Analysis
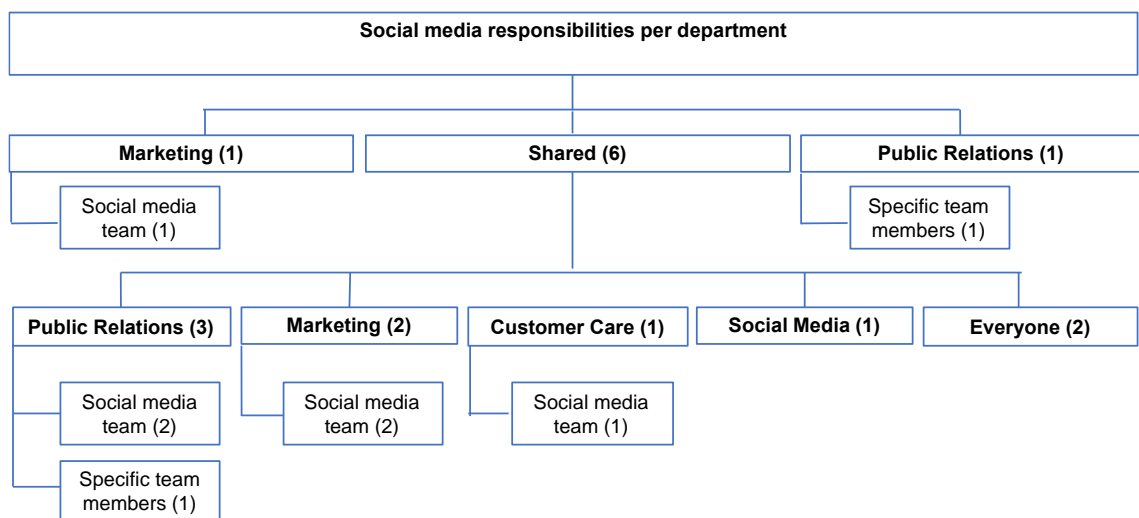
Most participants stated that social media team members in the marketing and public relations departments shared responsibilities and had access to social media. Only one inhouse practitioner mentioned that their organisation had established an independent social media department. Two agency consultants stated that everyone in their agency used social media, and only two participants reported that social media was managed solely either by the marketing department (in-house practitioner) or public relations team members (public relations agency practitioner) respectively. Another in-house practitioner of a larger organisation mentioned that their customer care department

also had access to the organisation's social media channels. The two sole practitioners used social media but were not included in this thematic analysis as their responsibility for social media was obvious.

Social Media Platforms Applied by New Zealand Practitioners

The next interview questions aimed to add validity to the results of the content analysis in Chapter 4 by asking participants which social media platforms they used, how often they used them, and how comfortable they felt using them.

Figure 25 presents the applied social media platforms categorised by practitioners' professional roles. The number of mentions of the different platforms is presented in brackets. As most participants stressed the strongly growing importance of Instagram Stories in public relations, it is listed separately although it is a feature of the social media platform Instagram.

Figure 25:

Social Media Platforms Used by Public Relations Practitioners per Profession – Thematic Analysis
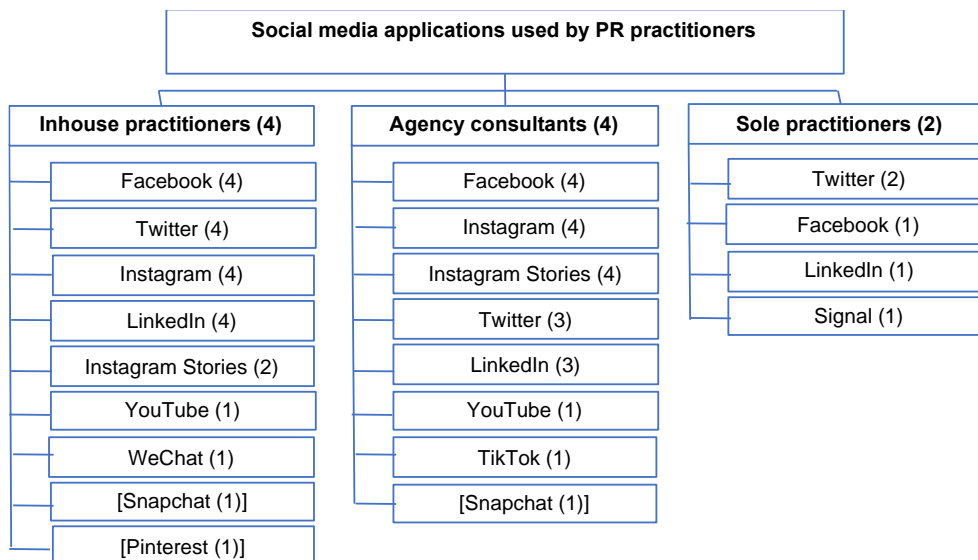
Note: Data in square brackets show platforms used in the past.

Most public relations practitioners used the well-established social media channels Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Except for one practitioner, who stated that they quit Facebook in the past, all practitioners used Facebook. Nine participants said that they used the platform on a regular basis. Four participants considered Facebook to be the "mainstream social media platform" (P7C) in New Zealand. And six practitioners

indicated that as all publics were active on Facebook, they would include the platform among their communication tactics.

> Facebook is the most important social media channel because that's the one everyone tends to use. And it has got a big reach. (P2I)

Nine of the participants reported that they still used Twitter. P1I explained it with the fact that their organisation would reach many media outlets via Twitter as these would use the platform as a source of information. In total, six practitioners stated that journalists would use this platform.

> Twitter is a great way, in New Zealand anyway, to stay in touch with the media, because the journalists are all on Twitter on a daily basis. (P5S)

The interviewees seemed aware that Twitter was not the platform to reach broader publics. However, they valued Twitter for reaching out to informed publics and key influencers.

> Twitter has less of a following in New Zealand, but it is a fairly informed audience, there are a lot of politicians and media on Twitter. (P7C)

Therefore, practitioners seemed to use Twitter for communicating with journalists and probably other informed publics rather than with customers, who were perhaps addressed via other social media platforms.

Answers also showed that Instagram had become very popular, as eight participants said that they used the application regularly.

> If you are active in a fast-moving consumer goods market, then Facebook and Instagram are where you should play because huge market, huge interest. Instagram is great for very visual things, so great for advertising. Weird and quirky and unusual, which is really good as well. (P5S)

Two participants defined Instagram as the fastest growing social media channel. It was said to be "more visually appealing" (P7C) than other platforms. According to four practitioners, younger publics were particularly active on Instagram.

Interview participants also reported high use of LinkedIn, and eight practitioners stated that they used the platform on a regular basis. P1I even described LinkedIn as the most important platform, alongside Facebook. Two in-house practitioners stated that they used LinkedIn the most frequently alongside Facebook. Six practitioners valued the platform as a tool for thought leadership and business-to-business communication.

According to P7C, for instance, LinkedIn "is now used more broadly as thought leadership and connecting with business audiences".

Two participants reported that they recently started with a presence on LinkedIn.

> In recent months, we have been pushing LinkedIn, trying to get more staff to join our group and also in sharing more stories. A lot of them don't even have photos on their LinkedIn profiles. (P3I)

Instagram Stories was used by six of the participants, some of them acknowledging its growing importance.

> And what we noticed is the rise and rise of Instagram, so the use of good photography, especially Instagram Stories. (P4C)

The increasing popularity of the platform among users and its live video feature seemed to have a strong influence on public relations practitioners and might explain their relatively instant adoption of the platform.

> We use Instagram Stories; it is quite cool. It is a relatively new project the team is doing. And the stories resonate. (P1I)

According to interviewees, Instagram and Instagram Stories were used more often than Facebook.

> Now, it has evolved into Instagram, particularly Instagram Stories, that tends to be where you get a lot of eyeballs. I think the reach you can get on Instagram Stories for the spend is a really good value. (P6C)

In contrast, Snapchat, which is also an instant video channel, was not used at all. Two participants said that they had used Snapchat in the past but that it had become insignificant due to the launch of Instagram Stories. Other social media platforms were only marginally used, or not at all. Only a minority used new channels: Two participants stated that they tried Snapchat when it became popular, and one agency consultant said that they recently started using the short-form video application, TikTok.

Although in-house practitioners, as well as agency consultants, seemed to mostly use the same platforms, agency consultants seemed more likely to adopt more recent platforms than in-house practitioners. For instance, only agency consultants stated that they would constantly monitor new channels. Instagram Stories, one of the newest of the mentioned applications, was used twice as often by consultancies. TikTok was also used by only one agency.

This proposition was confirmed by P2I, who assumed that "corporates are always a bit behind with using social media", as internal coordination and budgets would hinder adopting new social media channels. They also stated that corporations tended to use mainstream social media platforms. The interview data also showed that in-house practitioners used Twitter and LinkedIn more often than agency consultants, who focused more on Instagram Stories.

Figure 26 shows which of the social media platforms the interviewed practitioners used most frequently. For instance, all nine and seven practitioners, respectively, who reported that they used Facebook and LinkedIn, stated that they would use these platforms most often. In contrast, they used Instagram and Twitter less frequently. Only six practitioners answered that they used Instagram the most. Half of the participants stated that they used Instagram Stories and Twitter the most often.

Figure 26:

Most Frequently Used Social Media Platforms
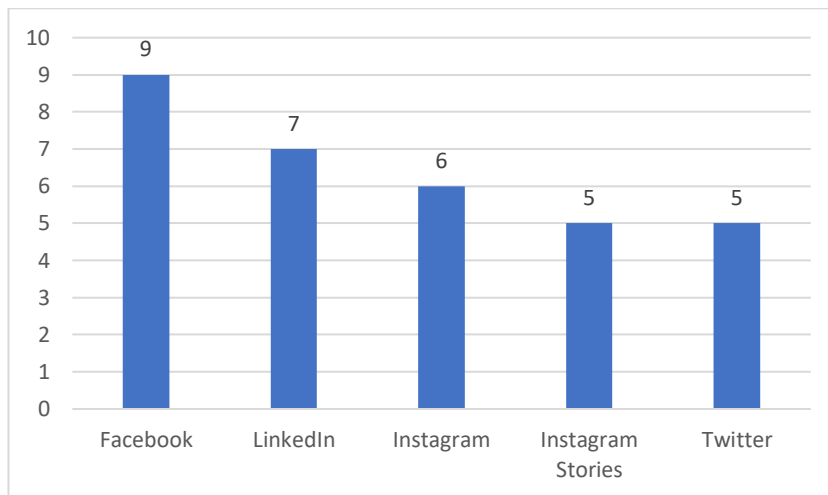
Personal Comfort Level of Practitioners

The interview participants were also asked to describe their personal level of comfort in using social media to disclose potential motives for adopting social media.

Figure 27 demonstrates that most participants felt very comfortable using social media, even though many of them still held reservations.

Figure 27:

Comfort Level and Reservations in Using Social Media – Thematic Analysis
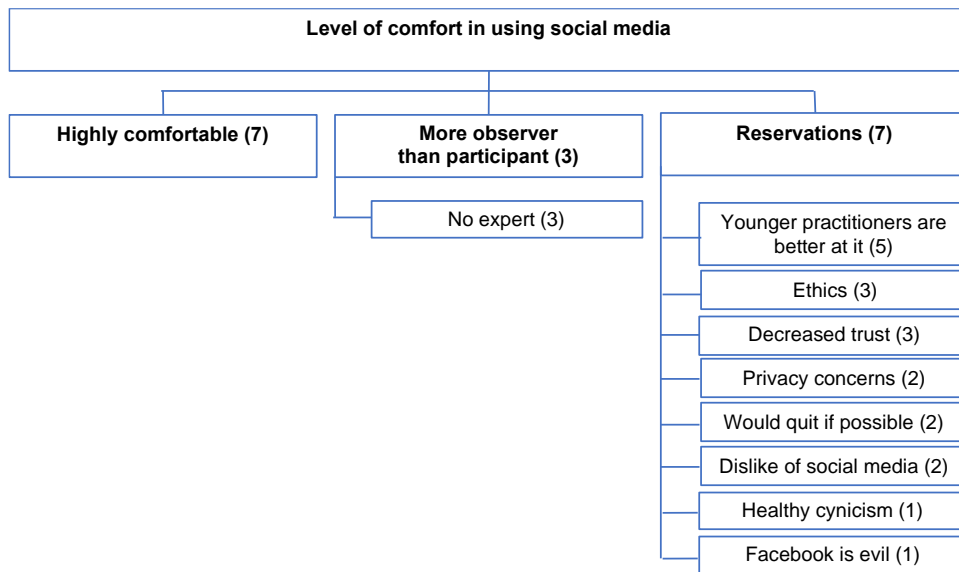
Seven practitioners called themselves "early adopters" (P1I), "very active" (P4C) or "totally comfortable" (P2I) using social media. Only three described themselves as "more an observer than a participant" (P6C) on social media and said that they were not experts.

> I wouldn't call myself an expert. I would call it generalist knowledge. And I am quite careful about what I do say online. (P7C)

Seven practitioners expressed various reservations against the use of social media, ranging from ethical concerns to the opinion that Facebook was evil.

> Our love affair with social media may be slightly on the wane. We just loved it. Now, we are seeing some of the associated problems around it. (P1I)

Five practitioners confessed that they considered their younger colleagues to be more capable of using social media. These five were all very experienced participants with more than 20 years of working experience. One practitioner, for instance, was reluctant to use social media channels like Snapchat because they regarded themselves too old. They also mentioned that the number of social media channels to choose from overwhelmed them at one stage.

> I never did Snapchat, clearly too old. But I think you need to be able to understand and use them and get across them. (P1I)

Three practitioners were convinced that Millennials would be more confident using social media.

> I am aware that I am not a Millennial. So, I think it is important that we know how to use it just as well as the kids. There are probably some things that I am not so confident … I mean, you have to get new skills. (P9S)

> I am generation X; I probably have a little bit more of the offline and online situation. So, I'll go online and then I'll make a conscious decision to be offline. But for the Millennial staff that we employ here, and we deal with from a media perspective, it's just one universe. (P6C)

Two of them identified catching up constantly with younger practitioners about how to use various social media tools.

> Especially at my age, it's again about ageism; you have to be thoughtful about being in an agile workforce. We have an agile workforce. And agile is about being on the tools. So, people of my age and stage, need to be thoughtful about how they are effective, and do they still understand how to do the work? Do they still understand what matters to younger people? (P4C)

However, P10I stated that social media was not the only skill needed in public relations and therefore advocated a balanced knowledge.

> I tend to watch and analyse and just use it as a channel for us … It is interesting, the younger people that are coming into the function are lot more comfortable with social but have very little understanding or experience with traditional media. So, I think it is important in our function to have that balance between people who know both. (P10I)

Regarding the blurring of paid and earned media and influencer promotion, three participants considered ethics an important topic for public relations practitioners. Another three participants mentioned the Christchurch terror attack[4] as a shift for social media concerning trust, privacy and expectations of social media platforms.

> I think there are huge issues with people feeling horrified by the fact that a massacre in Christchurch can be shared and it can't be shut down. So, it de-values the channel. Because people don't trust it. It was used to be seen as something highly democratic and a democratised way of telling things. And now, it's becoming a vehicle for hate speech or peoples' views … So, I think trust in the channel or in the channels is becoming an issue. (P4C)

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[4] On the afternoon of 15 March 2019, a white supremacist attacked two mosques in Christchurch, killing 50 and injuring 48 Muslim worshippers (Besley & Peters, 2020). The terrorist posted his 'manifesto' and a live-stream video of his attack on social media. Although both posts were banned in New Zealand, they were still available on global social media sites half a year later (Ensor, 2019).

Two practitioners stated that they would shut down their social media presence if they were not working in public relations.

> Regardless of my personal views of social media, I have no choice but to use it. To be honest with you if I wasn't working here, and if I wasn't in the industry that I am in, I would turn off my Twitter account. (P10I)

Two other participants mentioned "privacy concerns on a personal level" (P6C). P8C stated that they did not always like social media as the genre "can really burn you out". P10I even believed that social media has "made the world a worse place" as it fosters echo chambers. And P6E claimed that Facebook was evil and that "it should be shut down".

One participant added that the use of more communication channels generally imposes more requirements on the public relations practitioner.

> Nowadays, the role of PR practitioners is far more complex because we have to use multiple channels. It means we have to have a broader set of skills as professionals. And we have to understand our audiences really, really well. (P10I)

One practitioner stated that social media made it harder for the public relations profession to communicate as it accelerated the destruction of traditional media.

> I really am concerned about the destruction of news that is going on. Because I think it makes it much harder for PR people and coms people to communicate. (P6E)

P3I, therefore, suggested a healthy level of discomfort and cynicism to save public relations professionals from using social media carelessly.

> There is definitely a kind of discomfort I have with social media. But I think everyone has a level of discomfort. That's probably healthy discomfort. It's the same sort of thing I would say with media relations. Anything you get too comfortable with you can get blasé. So, you kind of let your guard down and something goes wrong. (P3I)

One practitioner believed that social media was a fast-paced communication channel that public relations professionals need to observe continuously to stay up to date.

> All these other channels haven't changed that much over the last ten years, whereas social has changed so much. It is just the rapid pace of technology, I suppose. So, it is something that you have to literally monitor daily. If there is any other platform or a platform change ... It's just far more dynamic than other communication channels. (P6C)

Social Media Use According to Communication Category

To answer the third research question, participants were asked in which communication categories they used social media. The list of communication categories defined by PRINZ was also used as a guideline for the interviews to corroborate the campaign analysis findings. Again, the different categories were as follows:

- Corporate public relations,
- Internal communications,
- Public sector public relations,
- Marketing communication – Integrated,
- Marketing communication – PR,
- Special project or short-term campaign,
- Limited budget or not-for-profit public relations,
- Issues, crisis and emergency management,
- Sustained public relations,
- Communicating in diversity,
- Paul Dryden tertiary award.

Communicating in diversity, the Paul Dryden tertiary award and sustained public relations were not used as communication categories in the interviews. Because these were categories specifically designed for the PRINZ Awards, they were unlikely transferable to the participants' situations.

Figure 28 presents the communication categories within which the participants usually used social media.

Figure 28:

Social Media Use per Communication Category – Thematic Analysis
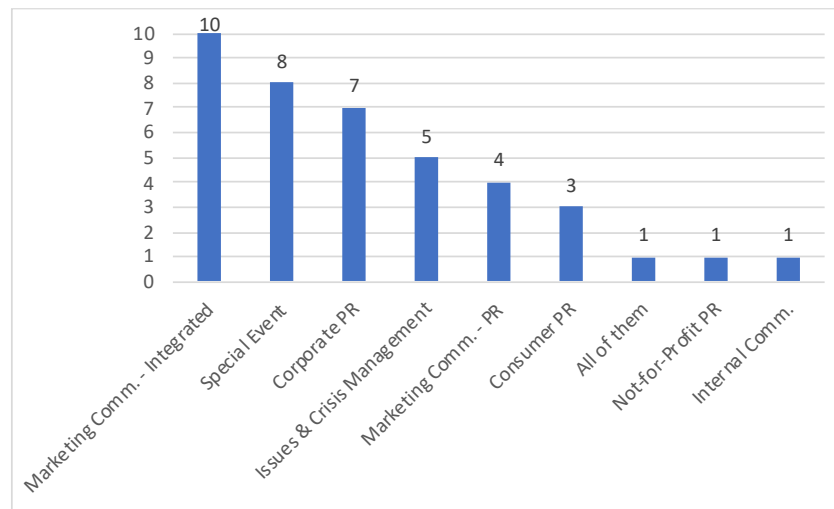
Practitioners reported using social media in a range of communication categories.

> Essentially, you have to have a communications team which is competent across corporate coms, marketing coms, stakeholder engagement, and they have to be able to utilise all the tools. You just can't be channel selective ... I would definitely advocate social media for being a multi-use tool. (P4C)

However, some categories were mentioned more often than others. The majority used social media for promotional purposes. P3I described the organisation's application of social media as "all promotional based". All participants stated that they used social media in integrated marketing communications. Eight practitioners used social media on a regular basis to promote events, while seven stated that they applied social media in corporate public relations.

Half of the participants used social media in issues and crisis management, whereas only four stated that they used social media in marketing communication – PR. Only one practitioner each explicitly stated that the organisation used social media for not-for-profit public relations and internal communications.

No participant applied social media for public sector public relations. Some stated that they would not address the public sector. And another specified that their organisation would rather communicate interpersonally with these publics.

> We will phone them and talk to them directly rather than push something out. Because as a general rule, and as a principle here, when we want to communicate with the regulators or politicians, we won't do it via the media or social media, we would do it directly with them. (P10I)

Influencing Factors for Adopting Social Media

When asked if social media platforms vary according to communication categories, interview participants explained that social media choices would depend on resources, the targeted publics and clients, rather than being predetermined by specific communication categories.

Six participants were convinced that an organisations' return on investment and resources influenced the choice and use of social media platforms. The monetisation of social media platforms and the limited money and time resources of communication departments were considered to significantly impact on the adoption of various social media channels.

> Social media takes a lot of resource. So, larger-scale companies are often better equipped to do that than smaller Kiwi companies. (P7C)

> Social media is not a thing you can half-do anymore and can't do it only every now and then. If you want to do it to get some value you have to do it consistently, so not everybody can afford it. (P1I)

A smaller number of social media platforms used by sole practitioners, with less money and time resources than organisations or agencies, seemed to confirm this.

Half of the practitioners pointed out that the publics' characteristics influenced the choice of social media channels.

> It really does depend on what you are trying to do. And that's probably the starting point for any kind of PR and social strategies: Who is it trying to reach and what are they using, what do they want to receive, what do we know about them? (P1I)

> It depends on the audience and on what we are trying to achieve. And I would say that our choice of channel would reflect the popularity of those channels among the audience. (P7C)

> You always got to remember who the audience is, what channels they prefer and how you can connect to them. And for some people, there is no point talking on social media, because they are not there. So, you still need the other channels. But it has given us more opportunities to talk to people in more different ways, which is tremendous. So, you have to mix it in. (P5S)

Seven practitioners reported that they used LinkedIn for communicating with business publics as it "is particularly good for business and industry partners" (P1I). Three

participants used Twitter for communicating with media outlets, and another three participants said that they used Instagram to reach younger publics.

In this context, the publics' demographics were suggested to influence the use of social media platforms. Two practitioners, for instance, referred to Facebook as a 'mainstream channel' that no longer interested younger publics. They believed that younger publics used other platforms like Instagram, instead. Another practitioner reported that they used WeChat as a channel to communicate with Chinese customers.

Strategic or Ad Hoc Use of Social Media?

The fourth research question asked whether practitioners used social media strategically or in an ad hoc manner. In this context, the term 'ad hoc communication' was used for the organisations' reactive responses to issues. It was also used for communication opportunities that may have occurred, as opposed to proactive communication as part of a communication strategy.

Figure 29 presents the thematic analysis of the answers. Again, the number of mentions of each answer is given in brackets.

Figure 29:

Strategic Social Media Use by Public Relations Practitioners - Thematic Analysis
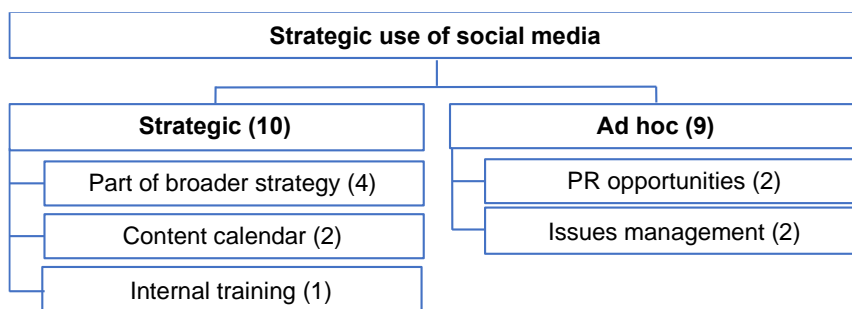
Most interview participants stated that they applied social media strategically, as well as in response to an issue or opportunity.

> Social media is always a part of our strategy. Every client that comes in the door has to have a strategy. We have to have a reason to do it. If we don't have a reason to do it, it's not going to work. But sometimes, an opportunity will present itself that wasn't planned. And we will run and grab it if we know it will be fit as part of the strategy. So that is pretty much ad hoc. (P8C)

All practitioners reported that they measured the outcomes of their social media activities against their objectives. However, these were quantitative, such as in the form of reach, the number of followers or comments and click-through rates. None mentioned a qualitative analysis of social media conversations.

Four practitioners stated that their organisations included the social media strategy into their broader communication strategy. However, two in-house practitioners acknowledged that they had used social media in the past without a defined strategy.

> Social media is integrated into our strategy. It didn't use to be. It used to be ad hoc. But as the years have going on, we have become more sophisticated about how we use it. (P10I)

Some mentioned having a content calendar and internal social media training for executives as integral parts of the organisations' social media strategy. Another participant reported that their organisation created a social media manager role to focus more on strategy than ad hoc communication. They stressed that strategy and structure were key factors for successful social media communication.

> It's the balance that you've got enough plan so you have got content in place, but you have got enough flexibility that you can change things around. I think actually having a structure is probably more important. As a business, it is quite easy just to get rid of structures and sort of do it and see how it goes. But having that structure is really important as that's how you keep the plan. (P3I)

Asymmetric Versus Symmetric Social Media Use

Practitioners were also asked if they used social media to disseminate organisational information or to engage with their publics in a two-way symmetrical manner. Figure 30 illustrates their answers (frequency of answers in brackets).

Figure 30:

How Practitioners Use Social Media to Engage With Their Publics

Disseminating or two-way symmetric use of social media

Both (8)	Two-way symmetric (2)

Both (8):
- Providing compelling content (6)
- Try to start a conversation (3)
- Competitions (3)
- Give-aways (2)
- Promoting user generated content (2)
- Votings (1)
- Being authentic (1)
- Being personal (1)
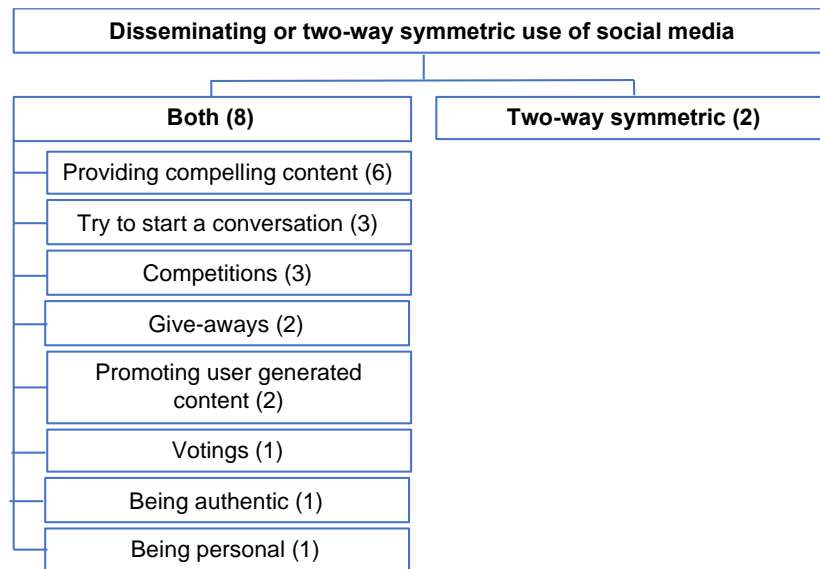
The vast majority reported that they used social media for both purposes.

> Sometimes it's more an advertising space; other times, we design tactics for two-way engagement and to build relationships over time. (P2I)

Only two of them stated that they solely used a two-way symmetrical approach, as social media was "about engagement and not 'spray and pray'" (P7C). However, six practitioners said that they tried to raise the interest of publics by providing compelling content of interest to them. Three added that they used this as a basis to start a conversation with publics.

> We aim to engage audiences by posting regular, relevant content and encourage participation, such as inviting audiences to comment, share or tag a friend. (P4C)

However, three participants acknowledged that it was difficult to engage on social media.

> In an ideal world, it's about a conversation, but the reality is you're lucky to get one started. A lot of people give feedback or make a comment, but few want to interact. (P10I)

One of them stated that publics would give feedback on social media content via interpersonal communication, rather than commenting on social media posts.

> Some people who follow us don't want to be seen to 'like' or comment. But when we engage with them over email or in person, they always comment that they saw something and have a question or comment. Many will say I love what you are doing, and I love that post, it was so interesting. It has shown us that for now our social media is read and viewed, but we will not always have the instant feedback onto our platforms, but we know it is digested a bit like someone on the radio wondering if anyone is listening. And it's not until you see them outside of the 'office' or on another platform that you find out they are viewing, reading and listening. (P8C)

In total, four participants advocated particularly for giveaways or competitions as "a great way to foster engagement". (P4C). No other examples of how participants facilitated engagement with publics were given.

Does Social Media Outweigh Other Media Types?

The fifth research question investigated whether social media outweighed other media types in public relations practice. To evaluate the importance of social media in the communication mix, interview participants were asked to speak about whether their social media use had changed and how they assessed its importance compared to the other media types.

Changes in Social Media Use

All participants agreed that they used social media more often than in the past. Three participants defined social media as a consistently used and common communication tool. P5S stated that nowadays, all organisations had a social media presence.

Figure 31 shows the thematic analysis of perceived changes in the use of social media by the interview participants. The number of mentions is again presented in brackets.

Figure 31:

Perceived Changes in Social Media Use – Thematic Analysis

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│    Changes in the application of social media │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
     │
     ├──────┤ Boosting needed/worse ROI (6)
     │
     ├──────┤ Everyone is on social media (3)
     │
     ├──────┤ Consistent use (3)
     │
     ├──────┤ Corporatised (2)
     │
     ├──────┤ Generation difference (2)
     │
     ├──────┤ Social media has plateaued (2)
     │
     ├──────┤ No online/offline (1)
     │
     ├──────┤ More selling
     │         than conversation (1)
     │
     ├──────┤ Creation of new
     │         social media roles (1)
     │
     ├──────┤ Influencer culture (1)
     │
     └──────┤ More important than website (1)
```
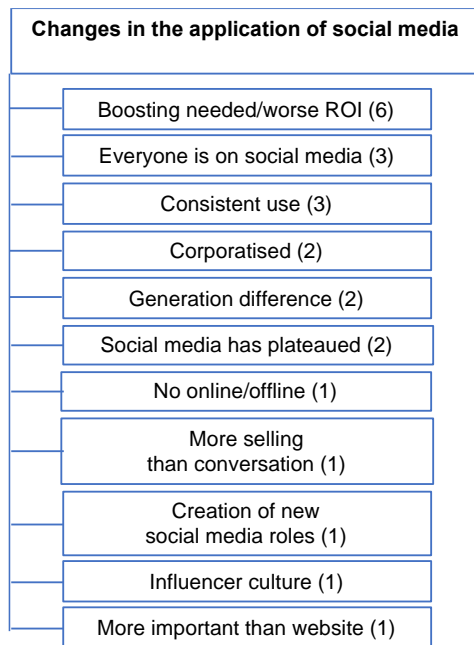
The most often recurring theme was practitioners' concerns about the decreasing return on investment (ROI) of social media and the necessity to boost posts to get reach.

> For a long time, before the Facebook algorithms have got put into place, it was a massively big reach so you could reach tens of thousands of people at effectively no cost. But of course, algorithms have taken these numbers right down now. So, unless you are putting money into boost, you are not going to reach it. The ROI is not as good as it used to be, because you now have to back it up with paid. (P1I)

Three practitioners stated that everyone was on social media. Therefore, social media was considered omnipresent as a communication channel and consistently used by practitioners.

> Social media is just common now. You wouldn't not use it. You would always think about "where is the social content?". (P4C)

However, two participants stated that social media had plateaued as distinct from another participant, who argued that social media had significantly increased in importance as a communication channel.

> Mostly because we are seeing a lot more devices now, whether the handheld, whether the pocket, whether it is a tablet. Everything is done more and more digitally, as well. (P8C)

Two participants argued that social media had become a set of corporatised broadcast channels.

> I think it is moving more into just selling to them rather than actually having conversations with them. (P9S)

Importance of Social Media Compared to Other Types of Media

Practitioners were asked to evaluate the importance of social media compared to other media types of the expanded PESO model (paid, earned, social, owned media and interpersonal communication) to validate the findings of campaign analysis. The original PESO model referred to social media as shared media. As this categorisation posed difficulties in the analysis stage of research, this study consistently used the term 'social media' (see Chapter 3 for details of this reasoning).

Figure 32 shows which media types the interview participants considered most important (number of mentions in brackets).

Figure 32:

Most Important Media According to Interviewed Public Relations Professionals - Thematic Analysis
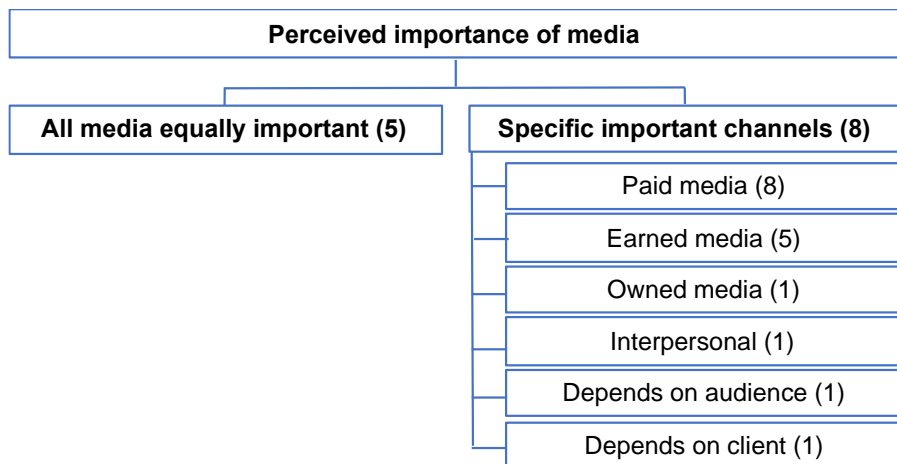
Participants, at times, contradicted themselves concerning the importance of different media types. On the one hand, half believed that all media types were equally important for running successful communication campaigns. On the other hand, eight considered one or more specific media types as more important than others. Interestingly, all eight named paid media as the most important media type, whereas social media was not mentioned at all. This strong preference for paid media resulted

from high use of paid social media, like boosting posts and influencer marketing. Seven of the eight practitioners explicitly named paid social media as distinct from one who stated that traditional paid media was most important.

Practitioners seemed to believe that organic content on social media was not enough to attain sufficient reach.

> To be honest, it is pay to play. So, if you want to get a decent reach, you should definitely always put paid spend behind your content. (P6C)

Five practitioners perceived earned media as an important, if not the most important, channel as it attained "perceived credibility". (P1I)

> Earned media will always be an important part of how you will tell a story. I think that people will always going to want different sources of information. (P2I)

> I still personally believe in the power of earned media – obviously, I would say this because I'm a PR practitioner. But you can probably now get a lot more reach with paid social. (P6C)

Three of the participants favouring earned media believed that broadcast media was still an important communication channel. One was convinced that broadcast media, particularly television, was still the most powerful media for organisations. Traditional paid and owned media and interpersonal communication were each cited once as the more important media compared to other channels.

The Use of Social Media in the Media Mix

Asked how they used social media as part of the media mix, the majority of interview participants (six) stated that they saw it as "another tool in the toolbox" (P2I), which was used complementarily alongside paid, owned and earned media (See Figure 33).

> Owned and paid is the voice of the brand speaking, whereas earned is the voice of a third party speaking on behalf of the brand. So, it actually, in my opinion, carries more weight. I would always pitch earned media with social, with owned. A combination is the best way to do it. Because then you can generate the earned media coverage, which can be amplified through the owned channel, and then boosted. So, social is a great tool for actually sending out earned media further. (P6C)

Figure 33:

Use of Social Media Compared to Other Media – Thematic Analysis

Use of social media versus other media	
Complementary (6)	**Partial Substitution (4)**
Another tool in the toolbox (6)	Depends on publics (3)
All media essential for success (5)	Shrinking traditional media (2)
Earned media still source for news on social (2)	Twitter for media releases (1)
Amplifies earned media (1)	LinkedIn for B2B (1)
Additional direct channel (1)	Paid social replaces advertising (1)
	When no interest of earned media (1)
	Recommendation channel (1)
	Depends on client (1)

Half of the interviewees believed that a combination of all media types was essential to achieve the best results.

> When owned, earned, shared and paid work together, it's the best outcome for the client. (P4C)

> I personally think a combination is always best. Because when you have like we call it a layered campaign with lots of touchpoints, then the consumer sees the same message on lots of channels. And I think the power of repetition is key. (P6C)

One practitioner stated that problems might occur if organisations did not apply a balanced mix of various communication channels.

> All of them have different purposes. If you talk to an audience, you have a different reason for using them. The most important thing is having balance between all of the elements. If one of them drops, then something goes wrong. (P3I)

However, four participants reported that they used some social media platforms as a substitute for other media. Two of them argued that social media gained in importance as it filled the gap left by diminishing traditional media.

> Because traditional media are shrinking back, I am putting more of my time into the digital platforms for my clients. (P9S)

For instance, one participant said they used Facebook successfully as a substitute for diminishing local newspapers. Another practitioner stated that their organisation had increasingly replaced traditional media releases by tweets on Twitter.

It was also argued that social media was a useful channel when earned media was not interested in the organisation's message.

> It does mean that you have got another option, another way to get your story out, if you don't get the mainstream media interest or if your target public is very particular. (P1I)

Three participants believed that younger people consumed news only on social media, which might force organisations to focus more on social media to reach this public. In contrast, two participants argued that earned media was still the source of news, while social media was simply another distribution channel.

> Lots of people get their news online now, and some of it will be through social. But it is just a different way of receiving it; the source is actually still a media or the organisation, and it is just delivered through those channels. (P1I)

Only one practitioner believed that social media generally outweighed other media in importance due to the changed research habits of publics.

> People want a quick answer. They are also looking for recommendation. And you don't have the time to always do your own research as well. So, we are working more and more often off the recommendation. And social media and influencers can really provide that recommendation faster than a print publication can, quite naturally. (P8C)

In contrast, one practitioner argued that social media still needs to be used alongside other media in the communication mix, despite its growing attention.

> We need to be careful not to be distracted purely by social media as well. It is all about one part of the mix. Face-to-face is important, and traditional is important. (P7C)

Summary

The results of the personal interviews with public relations practitioners added depth to the campaign analysis findings in Chapter 4. They also helped to reveal underlying issues that could not be derived from campaign analysis. A detailed discussion of interview results and campaign analysis findings is provided in Chapter 6.

It was evident that interviewed practitioners believed social media had significantly impacted public relations practice. They valued social media as an instant and cost-effective communication channel to directly engage with their publics. Regardless of these benefits, participants also expressed that social media posed potential challenges for public relations such as a need for sufficient time and money resources, which contradicted the argument that social media was cheap. It seemed, then, those resource restrictions were a major influencing factor for the adoption (or not) of social media platforms. Furthermore, organisations did not assign an independent social media department with responsibility for the channel. Rather, responsibility was shared between marketing and public relations departments.

Overall, participants seemed to favour established social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram, while reluctant to adopt evolving applications such as TikTok. YouTube was scarcely used, despite its popularity among New Zealand social media users. Furthermore, findings suggested that public relations agencies adopted new platforms earlier than in-house consultants.

Most practitioners seemed to use social media for promotional purposes. In contrast, they scarcely used social media in internal communications. Social media platforms were also chosen due to resources and the characteristics of the targeted publics.

Participants thought of social media as an omnipresent channel that could not be neglected by public relations. However, the interviewees were divided on the role of social media compared to other media types. Almost half of them considered social media an important channel that partially substituted other media. In contrast, the other half used social media complementarily and believed that paid, owned, earned and social media and interpersonal communication needed to be used as a mix to run successful communication campaigns. Half of the practitioners also considered earned media the most important communication channel, whereas most defined paid social media as the most important channel.

Though most practitioners felt comfortable using social media, results showed that senior practitioners believed their younger colleagues would be better at using social media. Ethics and decreasing trust in social media were identified as themes that worried interview participants.

Interview results showed that social media was generally applied both strategically and in an ad hoc manner. Some of the interviewed practitioners argued that they applied

social strategy as part of an overall communication strategy. However, this was likely a recent development, since some participants indicated they had historically used social media without a specific strategy.

In addition, most practitioners reported they used social media to disseminate organisational information as well as to engage with their publics. The provision of interesting content as well as competitions and giveaways appeared to be the only tactics used to engage with publics.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter discusses the combined findings of the campaign analysis and the interviews to answer the research questions underlying this study. The results were combined to investigate what social media platforms New Zealand public relations professionals applied (RQ 2), and in which communication categories social media was used (RQ 3). The combined findings also served to answer RQ 5, whether using social media outweighed using other media types in the practice. Moreover, the interview results were used to discuss practitioners' opinions of how social media impacted public relations (RQ 1) and whether practitioners used social media strategically or in an ad hoc manner (RQ 4).

This chapter will begin with answering RQ1 and then will follow the order of the research questions to answer each in turn. Major findings and themes will be discussed in separate sub-sections under each research question.

RQ 1: How Do New Zealand Practitioners Evaluate the Impact of Social Media on Public Relations?

The first research question aimed to examine how New Zealand public relations professionals perceived the impact of social media on the practice. The findings of the interviews showed that public relations practitioners believed that social media had a significant effect on the practice. All the interview participants confirmed this; the majority even stated that social media affected "everything". Their observation mirrored the findings of various scholars who found that social media significantly impacted public relations (DiStaso et al., 2011; Lipschultz, 2018; Motion et al., 2015; Wright & Hinson, 2013; Xie et al., 2018). This finding was not surprising given that social media revolutionised communication from one-to-one to many-to-many communication, as described by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010).

Despite the increased importance of social media in contemporary communication, public relations professionals remained ambivalent towards the application of social media as they recognised both the opportunities and challenges brought about by social media. In this respect, their attitude towards social media had not changed since Bhargava's (2010) study, which showed public relations practitioners had a mixed attitude towards using the internet. These findings might have significant implications

for the practice, as this ambivalence towards social media might hinder practitioners to fully adopt social media, which might lead to reputational damage to the organisation.

The interviewees believed that social media forced organisations to be more responsive, transparent and authentic. This is in line with Men and Tsai's (2014) finding that organisations can increase transparency and authenticity by including social media in their public relations strategy. In general, therefore, it seems that social media has a positive effect on the way organisations communicate with their publics, as it fosters transparency.

This study also highlighted the importance of social media skills and the importance of social media training for public relations professionals. The interviewed practitioners felt that insufficient competencies would endanger the organisations' reputation, which affirmed Ventola's (2014) observations that the improper use of social media, such as posting unprofessional content, would increase communication issues.

Divided on the Monetary Value of Social Media

The results of this study showed that participants were uncertain and clearly contradicted themselves regarding the monetary value of social media. On the one hand, most of them welcomed social media as a cost-effective communication channel as earlier studies had pointed out (e.g. DiStaso et al., 2011; Hanna et al., 2011; Petrovici, 2014). They argued that social media was a useful tool for small businesses with limited budgets. On the other hand, they noted that this media type was resource-driven, and sufficient monetary and time resources were required to apply social media effectively.

This result mirrored Macnamara et al.'s (2017) finding that New Zealand public relations practitioners' biggest concern was to approach more publics and channels with limited resources. This challenge became even more evident through the participants' argument that the monetisation of platforms was a consideration when choosing social media applications. It seems possible that the prevailing belief of social media as a cheap media type has become outdated due to the increasing need for paid tactics to attain reach (see RQ 2 for details on return on investment).

Time-Consuming Social Media

Interview participants also reported that sufficient time resources were needed to successfully use social media as this fast-paced communication channel involved

constant commitment. It appeared that practitioners' opinion of the time-consuming nature of social media has not changed since Bhargava's (2010) study. She concluded that practitioners thought of the internet as time-consuming and found it "difficult to manage the Internet activities along with their 'other responsibilities'" (p. 73).

The constantly evolving social media landscape might have made the task of communicating through social media even more time-consuming. The latter may also explain the hesitant adoption of new platforms. This finding raises a question about whether organisations assign insufficient resources to social media tasks due to the widespread opinion that social media is a "cheap" communication channel.

Still Prevalent Control Paradigm

A major finding of this study was that although the practitioners (and organisations) seemed to have partially loosened control by embracing social media, control remained an important theme for public relations practitioners. This result confirmed earlier studies that reported organisations struggling to let go of their control paradigm while applying social media (e.g. Aragón & Domingo, 2014; Bhargava, 2010). Two interviewees stated that social media hindered organisations' ability to "control the steam, the type of the news" (P6C). This is in line with Safko's (2012) finding that there had been "a fundamental shift in power" (p. 535) brought about by social media. He suggested that social media passed control over the brand and message from organisations to their customers. It appears that organisations still feel unease using social media amidst this power shift.

Another finding was that half of the interviewed agency consultants stated that everyone in their agency was entitled to use social media on behalf of the agency, whereas in-house practitioners reported that only specific employees had access to the organisation's social media. For instance, only one in-house practitioner stated that their organisation encouraged all staff to be present on LinkedIn. These findings were consistent with those of Bhargava (2010), who explained that in-house practitioners used social media less because of the existing control paradigm within organisations.

According to these results, it can be inferred that the control paradigm is still prevalent in organisations who seem to restrict access to the organisation's social media channels to reduce communication issues.

The Threat of Echo Chambers

Another insight evident in the interviews was that practitioners were concerned about the existence of echo chambers making it harder for organisations to communicate on social media as they fostered entrenched views. Colleoni et al. (2014) described echo chambers as homogeneous groups of individuals who shared the same political views. Practitioners' concerns might be explained by the recent public discussion on whether echo chambers manipulate online communities (e.g. Davies, 2019; Venuto, 2018).

However, Barbéra et al.'s (2015) findings do not support this assumption. They suggested that the occurrence of echo chambers depends on the nature of the underlying issue and that political discussions were more likely to be held in echo chambers than conversations on non-political issues. These findings indicate a need for further education on this matter in public relations practice.

Ethical Use a Major Concern

A major finding of the interviews was that half of the participants had concerns about ethical issues related to the use of social media. Three participants mentioned the [Christchurch terror attack](#) as changing the momentum for trust in social media. The platforms' failure to remove harmful content was said to "de-value the channel because people don't trust it" (P4C) anymore. Several interview participants mentioned that data scandals[5], privacy issues and fake news[6] also decreased trust in social media.

This is in line with previous research that reported a low level of trust in social media. Edelman (2020), for instance, identified social media as the at least trusted media type globally, with a decreasing trend. Zerfass et al. (2018) and Meng et al. (2019) came to similar conclusions as they found that most European and North American practitioners identified building and maintaining trust as the most important strategic communication issue for the future. Although those practitioners were concerned about fake news, they did not believe it affected their organisations.

Participants in the current study also considered the blurring of paid and organic content in the form of influencer marketing and monetisation by the platforms as ethical

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[5] In 2018, The Observer revealed the so-called Cambridge Analytica scandal. The private data of 50 million Facebook users was shared with political consultancy Cambridge Analytica, which used the information to address US voters with individualised political advertisements (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018).
[6] According to Bakir and McStay (2017), the modern fake news phenomenon firstly appeared during the 2016 US election campaign. Although fake news is not new, social media intensified this issue resulting in incorrectly informed citizens, echo chambers and the potential for emotional outrage.

problems for resolution. These results hint at a remaining uncertainty, particularly concerning the preferred covert endorsement of products or services by influencers, despite regulation introduced by the Advertising Standards Authority (2018) that influencers must disclose paid advertising (Martineau, 2019). These findings were contrary to Bhargava's (2010) results that practitioners identified insufficient transparency as the only ethical issue related to social media. It is assumed that practitioners are now far more aware of the ethical issues that social media can potentially create. Nonetheless, most participants still work with influencers despite their expressed concerns.

Users seem to stick with omnipresent platforms, despite various data scandals, and this study identified reach as an important factor for practitioners communicating via social media. It seemed that practitioners' expressed ethical concerns did not hinder them from using these platforms to reach their publics. However, if users changed their habits and abandoned these platforms, then practitioners would probably revise their platform strategies.

RQ 2: Which Social Media Platforms do New Zealand Public Relations Practitioners Use?

The second research question sought to determine the social media platforms that New Zealand public relations professionals used. The interview results confirmed some findings from the campaign analysis while contradicting others.

Use of Established Platforms

The data drawn from the campaign analysis and the interviews showed that New Zealand public relations practitioners still tended to use well-established social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Consequently, other platforms were only marginally used even though the publics were likely to be active on them. It appears that nothing has changed since Bhargava (2010) demonstrated that public relations practitioners were more likely to use more "'traditional' and established Internet tools" (p. 69).

On the surface, the increased number of social media platforms used in the analysed campaigns, five in 2011 to seven in 2019, seemed to contradict Bhargava's (2010) study. She assumed that the fast-paced nature of social media would hinder practitioners from adopting new platforms as the constant emergence of newer tools would make the formerly introduced platforms insignificant. It seems practitioners may

have used the last decade to acquaint themselves with social media and are now able to manage more social media platforms.

However, although practitioners appeared to have extended their repertoire of social media platforms, they mainly adopted established ones. For instance, the analysed campaigns and most interview participants did not test newer applications such as TikTok. One interview participant even confessed that they were overwhelmed by the number of social media platforms. Thus, it can be assumed that practitioners are more likely to adopt well-established platforms when they are looking for new platforms to communicate with their publics.

Omnipresent Facebook

Facebook was by far the social media platform most used by the analysed campaigns and interviewed practitioners. Eighty-nine campaigns and nine interviewed practitioners used this platform. Facebook's presence in communication campaigns clearly increased over the analysed period. These findings correlate with Facebook being the most popular social networking site globally, with 1,657 billion daily active users (Facebook, 2019a).

A possible explanation for its growing application in public relations may be that Facebook increased its number of users considerably during the analysed period. By constantly acquiring or copying competitors and introducing new features such as the incorporation of news into its News Feed, Facebook has successfully expanded its user base (Thompson & Vogelstein, 2018). This continued in 2020, as shown by the launch of Facebook's Messenger Rooms in April as an answer to group video calling services like Zoom, that were in high demand during the Covid-19 lockdown (BBC, 2020).

As one interviewed practitioner stated representatively, Facebook is a mainstream platform that "everyone tends to use" (P2I). This finding was consistent with that of Thomsen et al. (2016) that Facebook could be considered a mainstream social media platform due to its ubiquity. This was supported by news media, which often referred to Facebook as ubiquitous (e.g. Lee, 2017; Simons, 2020) and even as a monopoly (Hughes, 2019a; Laurent, 2019). Thus, practitioners appeared to believe that they do not have a choice but to use Facebook.

Two practitioners believed that Facebook was becoming less relevant for younger publics, although this view is not supported by the facts. Despite reports that American

teenagers were shifting from Facebook to other platforms such as Instagram (Gramlich, 2019), Facebook was still most often used by New Zealanders aged 25 to 34 years, followed by 18 to 24-year-olds (Hughes, 2019c). Facebook's popularity also applied to all other age groups. For instance, users older than 65 years were identified as the fastest-growing Facebook user age group (Vogels, 2019).

These findings might lead to the assumption that practitioners used the most popular platforms to increase awareness by reaching out to as many members of their publics as possible. Thus, social media reach, which is the number of users who actually see the organisation's message (York, 2020), plays an important role for organisations.

The Rise of Instagram and Instagram Stories

Campaign analysis and interview findings showed the significant rise of Instagram and live video. By 2019, Instagram had become the second most frequently used platform in communication campaigns. This finding was supported by the interview results as most of the interviewed practitioners stated that they used Instagram and Instagram Stories. They also reported that Instagram was one of the most important applications for them. These findings demonstrate that visual communication via photographs and videos "has emerged as the primary way to engage with today's audiences" (Jakus, 2018, p. 29). According to Leaver et al. (2020), the focus on visual communication was the reason for the platform's popularity, with the launch of Instagram Stories in 2017 being "the biggest driver for Instagram's overall success" (p. 30).

Two participants said that they had used Snapchat in the past but that it had become insignificant due to the launch of Instagram Stories. Following Facebook's growth strategy, Instagram launched its Stories format as a response to the popularity of Snapchat (Leaver et al., 2020), soon overtaking the competitor in user numbers (Hutchinson, 2018). Moreover, Snapchat is a platform for younger publics and the most important social media channel among teenagers (Clement, 2019b). These two facts might explain the scarce use of this channel in public relations campaigns as, presumably, teenagers were not practitioners' target publics.

The Decline of YouTube and Twitter

This research showed a strong discrepancy between the popularity of YouTube among New Zealand social media users and the actual use in public relations. The falling trend of the platform's already comparatively low use in the analysed communication campaigns was consistent with previous studies, which found that organisations used

YouTube far less than other platforms such as Facebook or Twitter (Bonsón et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2014). This was supported by only two interview participants stating that they would use YouTube.

These findings might be explained by the fact that YouTube changed its algorithms to recommend long-form videos (Smith et al. 2018) as part of its strategy to evolve from a vlogging platform into a broadcast network (Grey Ellis, 2018). The focus on longer videos, whose production is more costly than shorter videos (such as Instagram Stories), may explain why YouTube is not used as often. Practitioners are likely to turn to other social media platforms that feature shorter videos and livestream that are less costly because they can be filmed instantly using cheaper devices, such as smartphones. This assumption is supported by Bonsón et al.'s (2014) finding that larger organisations were more likely to embrace YouTube than smaller companies. Therefore, it can be suggested that practitioners with lower communication budgets might refrain from using YouTube.

Although Twitter was the second most used platform across all analysed communication campaigns, its use has markedly declined over the years with small user numbers in New Zealand as well as a decrease in popularity. According to Hootsuite and We Are Social (2020b), only 25% of New Zealand internet users actively used this platform in 2019. Twitter has shown a global decline since 2013, leading to reports that Twitter was fading (Leetaru, 2019). This trend became apparent in the campaigns researched, as use of the platform started to decline from 2014.

Thompson and Vogelstein (2018) explained this decreasing trend by the success story of its rival Facebook. According to them, Facebook successfully changed its News Feed so that users could receive their news via Facebook, fuelling its further growth and initiating Twitter's decline. These findings again indicate that reach is of major importance in social media campaigns.

Fashion Trends in Social Media?

The results of the campaign analysis showed a delay in the adoption of new social media platforms. For instance, communication campaigns did not use Snapchat until 2015 (see Figure 5), although the platform had launched in 2011. The same pattern occurred with Pinterest, which was first used in 2016, Neighbourly in 2017, and WeChat in 2019. All these platforms had been launched a couple of years earlier than their uptake for campaigns. These results support Bhargava's (2010) finding that practitioners generally lag in adopting social media.

However, the same pattern could not be identified with the introduction of Instagram and livestream video. Communication campaigns adopted Instagram right after its launch in 2013. Facebook and Instagram introduced live streaming in 2016 (Newton, 2016), and the tool started to be a part of communication campaigns one year later. Instagram Stories was not explicitly mentioned in the analysed campaigns, but the interviewed practitioners appeared to have quickly adopted this feature.

This fast adoption of Instagram and "cool" (P1I) Instagram Stories in contrast to the lagged adoption of other platforms raises the question whether the use of social media in public relations might be dictated by fashion trends. It seems likely that public relations professionals are still trend-following "everyday users" rather than "trendsetters", chasing where the masses are as Sweetser and Kelleher (2011) already found.

The initial popularity and later decline of Twitter in communication campaigns might support this assumption. The fact that various digital agencies and online media annually publish reports on the future trends in social media use (e.g. Hootsuite, 2020) might stimulate the practitioners' need to follow social media trends.

In-House Practitioners Lag Behind

The results of this study showed that agencies adopted new social media channels earlier than in-house practitioners. For instance, the most recent application, Instagram Stories, was used two times more often by agencies, and TikTok was only mentioned by one agency consultant. One interviewed in-house practitioner acknowledged that organisations were slower to adopt new social media platforms due to internal decision-making processes. These findings confirmed those of Bhargava (2010) that "in-house practitioners are lagging behind consultants" (p.101) in the adoption of newer applications.

In-house practitioners may still face internal scepticism towards the value of new social media platforms as DiStaso et al. (2011) already reported for the general use of social media. This might again indicate that the control paradigm is still prevalent within organisations and that hierarchy and processes of approval might delay the adoption of new social media platforms. However, it might also hint at workflow problems for in-house practitioners, who might also need to fulfil other roles than solely public relations.

ROI Influences Choice of Platforms

Another major finding from the interviews was that the participants considered that communication budgets and time resources restricted the use of various social media platforms. The results of the campaign analysis confirmed this finding as the campaigns focussed only on a small selection of social media platforms rather than using a broad range of platforms. Pinterest and Snapchat, for instance, played only a minor role in communication campaigns and for interviewed practitioners, although these platforms were used by one-third of New Zealand internet users (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2020b). These findings reflected the results of Barnes et al. (2020), who found that Fortune 500 companies withdrew from Snapchat and Pinterest and focussed on bigger platforms like Facebook. By doing so, the corporations aimed to consolidate their social media activities by concentrating on the platforms that offered the biggest advantages.

Three interview participants particularly mentioned the return on investment (ROI) as an important factor for social media use. This finding mirrors that of scholars like Gilfoil and Jobs (2012) or Van Looy (2016), who named the return on investment as an important factor in social media use. These results appeared to confirm Fisher's (2009) claim that the ROI was "the holy grail of social media" (p. 189).

The perceived importance of the ROI might be a possible explanation for practitioners adopting only a small number of platforms that offer the biggest advantages. These findings might also explain why the interviewees' organisations did not assign responsibility to independent social media departments, as an effort to reduce costs. Rather, responsibility was shared between members of the marketing and the public relations departments. These findings suggest that ROI is a significant influencing factor for the choice and use of social media platforms.

Influence of Publics' Characteristics on Choice of Platforms

In contrast to the decreased use of Twitter in analysed campaigns, most interview participants reported that they still used Twitter, although with a lower frequency than other platforms. Participants stated that they used the platform to communicate with journalists. This reflected the findings of several studies that Twitter was the most important social media platform for journalists (Evans et al., 2011; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2018). Therefore, it was likely that the 50 analysed campaigns using Twitter also did so to reach out to journalists. In general, it seems likely that public relations professionals mainly use Twitter for media liaison.

Another finding showed that most of the interviewed practitioners valued LinkedIn as a specific channel to communicate with business publics. This result reflected that of Burns (2017), who described LinkedIn as the largest professional social networking platform. The interviewees called LinkedIn one of the most important platforms they frequently used for business to business communication. This was in line with Barnes et al. (2020), who found that LinkedIn was the most used platform by almost all Fortune 500 corporations. In contrast, LinkedIn was only occasionally used by the analysed communication campaigns. This inconsistency may be due to the fact that almost none of the campaigns addressed a business public.

Organisations that conducted the campaigns might still have had a LinkedIn presence to promote their services or image, which could not be derived from the data. Therefore, it is assumed that LinkedIn is mostly used for professional networking and communicating with business publics independently from communication campaigns.

Three practitioners believed that particularly younger publics were active on Instagram. This result is supported by current statistics that showed that more than half of the global Instagram users were under 34 years old (Clement, 2020). Furthermore, one practitioner mentioned that their organisation used WeChat to communicate specifically with their Chinese customers. According to this data, it can be inferred that practitioners chose social media platforms also based on the target public's characteristics, fitting a strategic use of social media.

High Comfort Level of Practitioners, but Age Matters

A main finding of the interviews was that the practitioners have generally embraced social media. The participants' high use of Instagram, Instagram Stories and live video streaming showed that practitioners largely adopted social media platforms that involved multimedia content. The majority (seven out of ten participants) also felt very comfortable with using social media. These results appeared to contradict Bhargava's (2010) findings that practitioners felt more comfortable with social media tools like blogs that involved writing rather than multimedia content such as video and photo-sharing. It seems, then, that public relations practitioners had enough time to accustom themselves with multimedia sharing platforms, gain experience and have become more familiar with non-writing methods of communicating their message.

This study, however, could not demonstrate whether practitioners had acquired social media skills that might have led to their high comfort level. Macnamara et al. (2015)

suggested that New Zealand public relations practitioners lagged in social media capabilities, with in-house practitioners having fewer skills than consultants. Though inconclusive, the findings of the current study appeared to contradict these findings. It is also possible that there might be a discrepancy between the perceived and actual social media capabilities of public relations professionals.

Three participants admitted that they did not consider themselves as experts and were more observers than participants. Interestingly, all three had at least 20 years' experience and worked in a strategic position. This finding mirrored Bhargava's (2010) conclusion that "older practitioners were not as comfortable with technology as the younger ones" (p. 93). The participants' feeling of insecurity might be due to a lack of daily use. Most of the involved agencies and organisations had appointed social media managers who were responsible for using social media daily, while the three public relations practitioners interviewed appeared to oversee the general communication strategy. It is also possible that the constant new and emerging platforms prevented them from familiarising themselves with the latter.

This study also found that half of the interviewed practitioners believed their younger colleagues would be more confident using social media. This finding was consistent with that of Lee et al. (2015), who found that American public relations professionals thought younger practitioners had naturally more social media skills. Therefore, it is likely that the perception of age might still influence how comfortable public relations practitioners feel using social media tools, even if they stated that they felt comfortable.

RQ 3: How is Social Media Used in Which Communication Categories?

The objective of the third research question was to identify in which communication categories public relations professionals used social media.

The majority of interviewed practitioners argued that the adoption and use of social media would be influenced by certain factors such as resources and the characteristics of publics, rather than predetermined by certain communication categories (see the sections on ROI and publics' characteristics under RQ 2). Practitioners contradicted themselves as well as the findings of the campaign analysis on this issue: Both the campaign analysis and interview results identified patterns of social media use regarding different communication categories. These findings lead to the assumption that social media use is influenced by the communication category in which it is applied, the targeted publics and the organisation's resources.

This research showed that social media was used in all communication categories, although with varying frequency. These results corroborated those of Bhargava (2010) and Jiang et al. (2016) that the communication function was likely to influence social media use. For instance, social media was highly used in integrated marketing, whereas internal communications used social media only marginally.

Social Media as a Promotional Tool

This study found that most public relations practitioners used social media for promotional purposes. For instance, all integrated marketing campaigns used social media and all interview participants used social media for marketing communications. 80% of the campaigns in the corporate public relations category and almost three in four in the special events and short-term project category made use of social media. This was corroborated by the interview result that most participants also used social media to promote events. The interview participants valued social media as a separate and direct broadcasting channel that enabled them to reach and engage a larger and more targeted number of publics.

These results were consistent with those of Bhargava (2010) and Jiang et al. (2016), who found that public relations practitioners used social media mainly for publicity purposes. The high use of social media in integrated marketing might be explained by the fact that social media is commonly considered a component of integrated marketing communications (e.g. Blakeman, 2015; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Percy, 2014). A possible explanation for the high use in promoting events might be that practitioners believed social media were likely to be beneficial for event promotion, as earlier studies have suggested (Jackson & Angliss, 2018; Moise & Cruceru, 2014).

In general, these findings demonstrated that organisations had not changed their approach to social media since Grunig's (2009) and Valentini's (2015) reproach that organisations use social media as a promotional and marketing broadcasting channel.

Not-For-Profits – Early Adopters of Social Media

The findings also showed that limited-budget and not-for-profit campaigns also made extensive use of social media. Most campaigns in this category already adopted social media in 2011. This was line with earlier studies that showed not-for-profit organisations were early adopters and active users of social media (e.g. Briones et al., 2011; Cho et al., 2014; Curtis et al., 2010). Monetary restrictions might have caused campaigners to use social media at an early stage as they might have identified social

media platforms as a cost-efficient way to communicate with their publics. Cho and Schweickart (2015), for instance, found that restricted budgets led charities to adopt social media as a cost-effective communication channel. The question arises whether the high use of social media by campaigns with limited budgets might decrease in the future, given that paid tactics on social media are gaining in importance (see RQ 5).

However, the results of the interviews did not support this finding, as only one participant reported using social media for not-for-profit campaigns. This low use might be explained by the fact that none of the interviewed in-house practitioners worked for a not-for-profit organisation.

Low Use in Public Relations

This study also found that only 60% of communication campaigns in the marketing communications – PR category made use of social media. This was corroborated by interview participants, as only four of them stated they used social media for public relations communications. These results again support the assumption that public relations practitioners tend to use established communication tools and need time to adopt "new" tools.

The low use in this communication category also supports the finding that organisations still used social media for distributing organisational and product information, rather than engaging with publics. This has been corroborated by the research of various scholars such as Bhargava (2010), Cho et al. (2014), Lovejoy et al. (2012) and Waters and Jamal (2011) (see RQ 4 for details on the dissemination of information).

Low Use in Crisis and Internal Communications

Other findings were that social media demonstrated a low use in crisis and internal communications. Only 67% of all crisis communications campaigns used social media, and only half of the interview participants reported that they used social media in this category. In fact, the crisis management campaigns illustrated a downward trend between 2011 and 2016. These findings reinforced those of Roshan et al. (2016) that organisations did not use the full potential of social media for crisis communication. The researchers concluded that practitioners lacked an understanding of social media use during crises. It seems that practitioners might still need to improve their knowledge in this field.

Social media was least used in internal communications - only one-third of the campaigns, and only one interview participant used social media in this category. All the organisations based on the analysed campaigns and interviews that used social media internally were large businesses that used commercial social media solutions specifically tailored for their internal use. This finding was consistent with Ewing et al.'s (2019) study that showed large American organisations increasingly deployed various social media solutions to engage internal publics. Therefore, it is possible that organisations with higher communication budgets are more likely to use internal social media than smaller businesses.

RQ 4: Do Public Relations Practitioners in New Zealand Use Social Media Strategically or in an Ad Hoc Manner?

The fourth research question aimed to evaluate whether New Zealand public relations practitioners use social media strategically or in an ad hoc manner.

Strategic Use of Social Media

The findings of the interviews showed that almost all practitioners reported they used social media strategically as well as in an ad hoc manner. This result contradicts the finding of several earlier studies that organisations did not use social media strategically (Bhargava, 2010; Macnamara et al., 2017; Plowman & Wilson, 2018; Zerfass et al., 2015). Furthermore, Macnamara et al. (2017) found that New Zealand practitioners generally spent more work time on operational, rather than strategic communication tasks. This change to a more strategic approach might be explained by public relations practitioners gaining sufficient knowledge of social media platforms to use them strategically.

This study used the social strategy cone framework by Effing and Spil (2016), which was developed to facilitate an analysis of social media strategies maturing across three stages of initiation, diffusion and maturity (see Figure 34).

According to this framework, most of the interview participants appeared to use a mature and comprehensive social media strategy with constant monitoring and planning of content activities, such as content calendars.

Figure 34:

The Social Media Strategy Cone
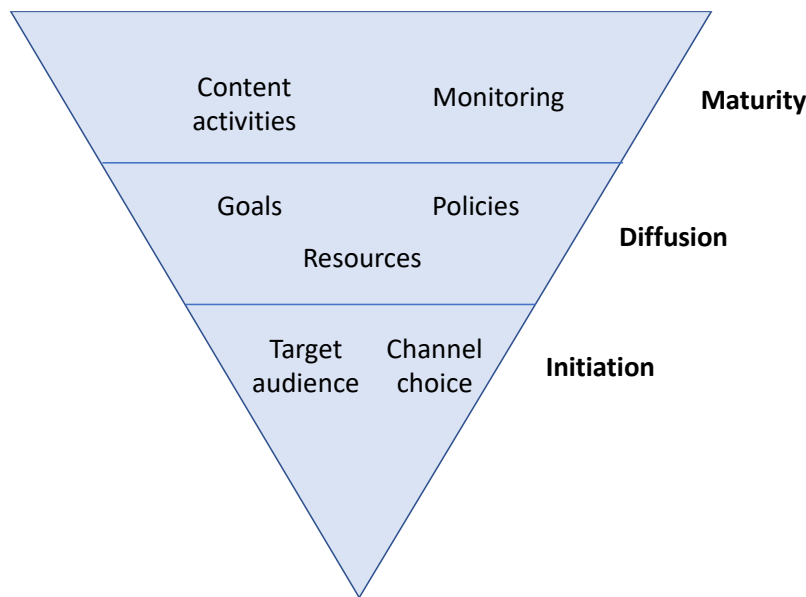
Note: Adapted from the social strategy cone by Effing and Spil (2016).

The remaining participants applied at least some strategic aspects of the diffusion stage, such as attributing resources to social media or setting social media goals. All participants measured social media outcomes against the objectives, although they focused on quantitative aspects such as reach or the number of followers, while completely neglecting qualitative aspects. The majority appeared to base their choice of social media on the characteristics of the target public, as described in the initiation stage of the strategy cone.

In sum, the participants appeared to apply social media strategies according to Lardi's (2013) advice by setting objectives, defining their target publics, choosing appropriate platforms and by monitoring their social media tactics. However, two participants admitted that they only recently focused on a strategic approach and had used social media previously in an ad hoc manner.

Integrated Social Media Strategies and Encroachment

The findings also showed that interview participants appeared to use an integrated approach to social media strategy. Almost half of them reported that their organisations included the social media strategy in their broader communication strategy. The majority also stated that specific team members or small teams within the marketing and public relations department shared responsibilities for social media and both had access to the organisation's social media channels. Only one practitioner of a large

organisation reported that social media was managed by a separate social media department, while public relations, marketing and customer care jointly elaborated the social media strategy.

These findings mirror those of Gesualdi (2019), who observed a blurring of lines between public relations and marketing in the use of social media channels. Hackley (2018) also identified a deep intertwining of public relations, marketing and advertising. Therefore, it can be assumed that the increased interconnectedness of public relations and other disciplines has raised the need for an integrated approach and shared responsibilities for social media.

This intertwining of different communication disciplines stands in contrast to Bhargava's (2010) study, which reported that New Zealand public relations practitioners controlled social media and therefore lacked an integrated use. Presumably, encroachment might have taken place over the years, where social media was no longer owned by public relations but taken over by other disciplines such as marketing. According to Lauzen (1991), encroachment takes place when members of other departments become responsible for, or take over, traditional public relations tasks.

The interview participants' strong focus on paid social media and the prevalent dissemination of content seem to confirm that the marketing function influences social media communication significantly. Lee (2013) argued that encroachment by other departments such as marketing reduced the impact public relations can have on the strategic and operational management of an organisation and marginalised the public relations profession. This has strong implications for public relations practitioners as protecting their discipline against encroachment is a "vital professional challenge" (Lee, 2013, p. 291).

Real Engagement or Just Dissemination of Information?

Most interview participants reported that they used social media for disseminating organisational information as well as for two-way communication. Two even stated that they used social media only in a two-way symmetric manner. This data must be interpreted with caution as the practitioners' perceptions of social media use might differ from the actual use, as Macnamara (2010b) has noted regarding Australian practitioners. He found that although practitioners claimed to use social media to engage publics, social media was actually used for promotional purposes.

Four interview participants listed giveaways or competitions as tools to engage social media publics. On the surface, these findings might lead to the assumption that practitioners have increasingly used social media in a two-way symmetrical manner. However, the fact that many practitioners stressed the importance of social media as a direct broadcasting channel might refute this assumption. Moreover, giveaways and competitions do not display the requirements for two-way symmetrical communication, which involves listening to diverse opinions or empowering the community.

All interview participants, as well as a majority of the campaigns, used social media for promotional purposes (see discussion on promotional use), which is suggested to be predominantly one-way, rather than conversational. One possible reason might be that the practitioners felt more at ease with controllable one-way communication, rather than multiple conversations. Several interview participants even stated that social media engagement was difficult to achieve.

Practitioners saw social media as an additional channel that offered an extra touchpoint with publics, believing that "the power of repetition is key" (P6C) for changing publics' attitudes or behaviours. One participant added that organisations could still send out their messages on social media, even when earned media was not interested. This supported Hallahan's (2000) argument that repetition was harder to achieve in public relations than advertising as public relations focused on earned media, which tended to use a story only once. Therefore, practitioners might have embraced social media as a new communication channel to disseminate and repeat their organisational messages, ignoring the specific affordances of this media type.

Therefore, it is assumed that although organisations increasingly used social media as a conversational tool, they did so primarily to serve the interests of the organisation, rather than those of the public as Kent (2013) proposed. The issue that emerges from these findings is that neglecting the conversational nature of social media might give rise to disappointment from publics who expect organisations to be conversational, instead of simply promoting their products or services.

Another possible reason for the still prevalent one-way dissemination may be that public relations practitioners still lack the skills to apply social media in a two-way symmetrical manner and choose to remain to disseminate interesting content one-way. This assumption is supported by Macnamara et al.'s (2017) finding that practitioners considered delivering messages as their strongest social media capability, whereas the initiation of online conversations ranked among their lowest social media skills.

However, most of the interview participants used interesting, compelling content to raise the publics' attention, and three practitioners used this content to start a conversation. This is in line with Watkins' (2017) finding that organisations could also build relationships with their publics by providing useful information on Twitter. An implication of this is the possibility that practitioners do not necessarily have to apply two-way symmetric communication to effectively communicate with their publics on social media.

Information Gathering, Not Social Listening

Interview results showed that the participants used social media as an information-gathering tool. Only two participants stated that they applied social media for social listening, whereas three participants focussed on gathering information such as on the demographic profiles of publics. According to Willis (2015), gathering information on the publics' opinion towards the organisation or its products is not social listening to build relationships, but is surveillance.

It is therefore questionable that the practitioners really followed the recommendation of scholars such as Macnamara (2013) who identified corporate listening as essential for organisations to engage with their publics. It seems more likely that the practitioners used social media as an information-gathering tool to adjust their messages along with an asymmetrical communication strategy, rather than to serve the publics' interests.

RQ 5: Does Social Media Outweigh Other Media Types in Public Relations Practice?

The fifth research question sought to investigate whether social media outweighed other media types in public relations practice. The combined findings showed that New Zealand public relations practitioners made good use of social media. Much has changed since Bhargava's (2010) and Msimangira's (2012) observations of a low adoption rate for social media.

But the reported data of interview participants did not correspond with the objective data drawn from campaign analysis, particularly regarding paid media.

The Rise of Paid Social

Interview participants appeared to contradict themselves regarding the importance of media types. Although half of the interview participants believed that all media types

were equally important, the majority stated that [paid social media](#) was the most important media type, followed by earned media. This finding mirrors that of Xie et al. (2018) who reported that US practitioners identified paid social as an important emerging genre of tactics.

Almost all participants reported that they boosted posts; three also mentioned paid influencer marketing. One practitioner stated that they spent more money on Facebook than on traditional media advertising because it was more efficient and cost-effective. To their mind, it was harder to reach their publics with organic content since the introduction of algorithms had forced them to use paid tactics on social media. These findings reflect the reported decline of organic reach due to the changing algorithms of platforms such as Facebook and Instagram (Lozano, 2019; Nafees et al., 2020). As a result, paid tactics such as content promotion became important factors for attaining reach on those platforms. This is in line with Champion (2018), who reflected on the importance of paid content promotion. These results indicate a growing importance of paid social media in public relations.

PESO, SOEP or Something New?

Despite the strong focus on paid social media, many participants still considered earned media to be the most important communication channel, which contradicts its decreasing use in the analysed campaigns. Most interview participants acknowledged that earned media still had an opinion-leading role, reflecting the findings of Tench et al. (2017) who came to the same conclusion.

In contrast, the campaign analysis results showed that between 2011 and 2019, social media replaced earned media as the most important media type in communication campaigns, followed by owned media, which also showed a steady increase ([See Chapter 4](#)). Meanwhile, earned media declined while paid media and interpersonal communication remained stable.

Three interview participants raised a potential reason for the decrease in earned media use. They believed that younger people consumed news only on social media, which might force organisations to focus more on social media to reach this public. Two participants even believed that social media would partially substitute earned media due to the diminishing newsroom in New Zealand. This was in line with the findings of Sissons (2015) as well as Theunissen and Sissons (2017) who reported on the shrinking number of journalists in the New Zealand newsroom. Safko (2012) even

stated that traditional media outlets like CNN or the New York Times were replaced by the internet and social media.

This study therefore appears to support Macnamara et al.'s (2016) prediction that organisations would shift their media use from the traditional PESO (paid, earned, shared, owned media) model towards a SOEP model (see Chapter 2), where social and owned media play an increasingly important role compared to earned and paid media.

However, it can also be argued that the positive results of social media in the analysed campaigns were a result of the fact that social media tactics could not be reliably categorised into paid and organic social media. Therefore, it is possible that a distinction between paid and unpaid social media tactics in the analysed campaigns could shift the importance back to paid media.

The results of the campaign analysis also confirmed that interpersonal communication was an important type of communication in New Zealand public relations. Overall, 82% of the analysed campaigns communicated with their publics via interpersonal communication such as events or meetings. This finding supports those of Bhargava (2010) and Macnamara et al. (2017) who identified the importance of this form of communication for New Zealand public relations.

One issue that emerged from these findings was that neither the PESO nor the SOEP model depicts all relevant communication tactics in the New Zealand public relations practice as these models neglect the importance of interpersonal communication. Although interpersonal communication is not a medium, the findings of this study suggest it to be an integral part of New Zealand public relations.

Smith (2017) has already named interpersonal communication as a relevant communication tactic next to owned, earned and paid media. Therefore, this study suggests an expansion of the traditional PESO into a PESOI model to include this relevant communication tactic (see Figure 35).

Figure 35:

The PESOI Model

The PESOI Model diagram showing five overlapping ellipses arranged around a central "Organisation" ellipse. The petals contain:
- **Owned Media** — Controlled publications (newsletter, website)
- **Social Media** — (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, blog)
- **Interpersonal** — (meetings, events, speeches)
- **Earned Media** — Editorial publications
- **Paid Media** — Purchased content (advertising)
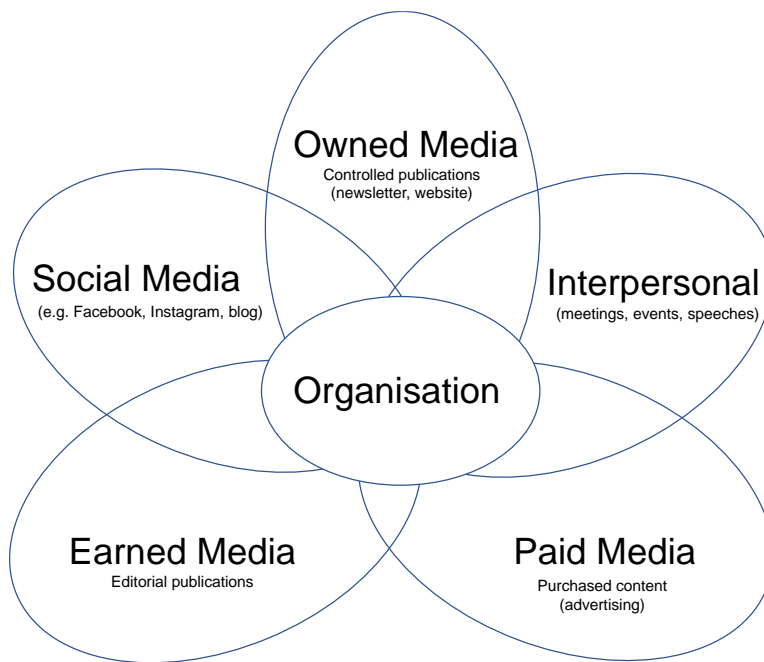
Integrated Use of Media

Another major finding of this study was that all media types were used complementarily. Most campaigns applied a balanced mix of all media types. This result was supported by the interviewed practitioners, who stated that they used social media more often than in the past but used it as a complementary "tool in the toolbox" (P2I). Evans et al. (2011) came to a similar conclusion as they found that public relations practitioners considered using Twitter only as part of an overall communication strategy.

The interview participants considered all media types essential for the success of communication activities. This confirms Sommerfeldt et al.'s (2019) argument that practitioners did not rely on one single media channel amidst the plethora of channels in the contemporary media environment. Instead, practitioners applied integrated communication strategies by using a mix of traditional and social media to reach publics via multiple touchpoints, "enabling a wide sphere of influence" (Hanna et al., 2011, p. 271). Thus, it can be assumed that despite their increasing popularity, social media has not yet replaced traditional media as a communication channel for organisations.

Summary

In sum, the findings of this research showed that since Bhargava's (2010) study, some aspects have changed, while others have not. This research confirmed the assumption that social media has strongly impacted and gained significant importance in New Zealand public relations practice. However, practitioners appeared to remain ambivalent about the use of social media. Interestingly, age still appeared to play an important role in the practitioners' level of confidence in applying social media, which might indicate generation gaps within public relations practices.

The findings further showed that practitioners still focussed their efforts on established social media platforms and refrained from adopting newer ones. Agency consultants still appeared to adopt new applications earlier than in-house practitioners, and the control paradigm continued to play an important role in New Zealand practice. Interestingly, practitioners' social media choices appeared to follow fashion trends, as some platforms were adopted quicker than others.

Return on investment and the characteristics of publics were identified as important influencing factors for social media adoption. Resource restrictions might explain why public relations practitioners focused on only a small selection of platforms and why organisations did not assign independent social media departments. The responsibility for managing social media was shared between members within the marketing and the public relations department. This integrated use of social media indicates that encroachment may have forced public relations departments to hand over social media responsibilities to other departments such as marketing.

New Zealand public relations professionals still seem to apply social media as a broadcasting channel for promoting organisational messages, rather than a two-way-symmetrical channel. The control paradigm or the need to 'get the message out there' instead of engaging with targeted publics may be reasons for the still prevalent focus on the promotional use of social media. Another finding showed that practitioners appeared to use social media more strategically than in the past.

At first sight, the results of this study appeared to verify Macnamara et al.'s (2016) prediction that organisations shift their media use from the traditional PESO model towards a SOEP model, where social and owned media play an increasingly important role compared to earned and paid media. However, both the quantitative and qualitative findings of the present study indicated that all media were used

complementarily. Therefore, the use of social media is presently not considered to significantly outweigh the use of other media types.

However, the focus of interview participants on paid activities on social media may lead to the assumption that paid media is likely to face a renaissance in the future. This research confirmed that internal communication is an integral part of the New Zealand practice of public relations. Therefore, an expanded PESOI model was developed to reflect the importance of this communication practice.

Although this study did not focus on social media ethics, it is worth mentioning that practitioners had major ethical concerns regarding fake news, data scandals and paid endorsements by social media influencers.

The next chapter will present a concluding summary of this research. It provides an overview of the limitations of this study and gives recommendations for the practice as well as future research.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This research aimed to evaluate the role that social media plays in contemporary New Zealand public relations. It applied analysis of communication campaigns that had been awarded a PRINZ Award for excellence between 2011 and 2019 to identify trends in the use of social media. Furthermore, a thematic analysis of in-depth semi-structured interviews with New Zealand public relations practitioners shed light on their perceptions and motivations behind the adoption and use of social media in their profession. The previous chapter presented the combined findings of these quantitative and qualitative research components.

This chapter summarises and draws conclusions from the major findings of this study regarding the research questions. It outlines the limitations of this study and offers recommendations for public relations practice and future research.

Answering the Research Questions and Conclusions

This study contributed to the body of knowledge by providing insights into trends in the social media application by public relations professionals. Furthermore, it delivered a valuable overview of how current practitioners perceive the impact and role of this media type in the practice of public relations and how social media is applied in campaigns.

The following research questions, set out in Chapter 2, were answered by combining the findings of the campaign analysis with those of the practitioner interviews:

- RQ 1: How do New Zealand practitioners evaluate the impact of social media on public relations?
- RQ 2: Which social media platforms do New Zealand public relations practitioners use?
- RQ 3: How is social media used in which communication categories?
- RQ 4: Do public relations practitioners in New Zealand use social media strategically or in an ad hoc manner?
- RQ 5: Does social media outweigh other media types in public relations practice?

Ambivalence Towards Omnipresent Social Media

The first research question invited interview practitioners to express their opinions about how social media has impacted public relations. The interview findings, as well as the results of the campaign analysis, confirm that social media have strongly impacted and significantly gained in importance in New Zealand public relations practice since Bhargava's study in 2010.

These public relations practitioners still showed an ambivalent attitude towards social media as they acknowledged both the involved opportunities and risks. They valued social media as an additional and cost-effective channel that enabled organisations to engage directly with their publics. At the same time, they were concerned with the time and budget demands of social media, echo chambers and potential issues that might arise due to a lack of social media skills.

Ethical concerns, such as fake news, data scandals and the practices of social media influencers, were another important topic for the practitioners. This reflected the persistent public debate about the unethical behaviour of increasingly powerful social media corporations and how this development has eroded trust in the medium.

Monetary Focus Impedes Relationship-Building With Publics

The second research question intended to identify which social media platforms were used in public relations and to discover trends in their use. New Zealand public relations practitioners appeared to still heavily focus on established social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and refrained from using newer applications such as TikTok. Facebook was by far the most used platform, mirroring its omnipresence in the social media sphere. Campaigners also seemed slow to adopt new social media platforms, with a delay of a few years. These results reflect Bhargava's (2010) findings that public relations professionals tended to use more established internet tools and lagged in adopting new social media applications.

Furthermore, agency consultants appeared to adopt new applications earlier than in-house practitioners, which may indicate a still prevalent control paradigm within organisations, as found by Bhargava (2010). It is therefore likely that the New Zealand public relations practice has not significantly changed within the last decade regarding social media adoption.

Interestingly, the delayed adoption was not observed for all platforms. There was quick uptake of Instagram, Instagram Stories and livestream video after their launch. These applications were hugely popular among users, leading to the assumption that fashion trends in general social media use may also have an influence on the use of social media applications in public relations.

Another major finding of this study was that the return on investment and characteristics of publics played a major role in the adoption and application of social media platforms. Due to resource restrictions, public relations practitioners appeared to concentrate on a small number of platforms that offered the biggest advantages, such as reach. This monetary focus on return on investment and reach appeared to strongly conflict with the conversational nature of social media, impeding relationship-building with the organisations' publics.

Promotion Instead of Conversation

The third research question was concerned with whether and how social media was used within different communication categories. The combined findings showed that New Zealand public relations practitioners still used social media mostly for one-way promotional activities, whereas it was only seldomly used for engaging internal publics by means of internal communication. Social media was also less likely to be used in marketing communications - PR.

These findings demonstrate that public relations practitioners still use social media predominantly as a one-way broadcasting channel, rather than engaging their publics via conversations. The identified encroachment between public relations and other disciplines such as marketing might explain this prevalent focus on promotional messages. The encroachment by personnel who are obviously less qualified or experienced in public relations might result in neglecting the public relations focus (Lee, 2013) on two-way symmetrical communication in favour of one-way promotion. Amidst this predominantly promotional one-way use of social media, the question arises whether public relations has lost the turf battle with marketing over social media use, as mentioned by Bhargava (2010).

Strategic Dissemination of Content

The fourth research question aimed to identify whether public relations practitioners use social media strategically or in an ad hoc manner. The interview results indicated

that the practitioners used social media in both ways. However, the participants reported using social media far more strategically than Bhargava (2010) had found.

It is assumed that within the last decade, public relations professionals have had enough time to accustom themselves to this media type, enabling them to adopt strategic principles in their social media use. The setting of social media goals, identification of target publics, development of content plans and use of social media monitoring all hint at a strategic use of social media. At the same time, practitioners seem to use social media in an ad hoc way to take advantage of arising opportunities or to respond to issues.

This research also showed that although practitioners reported they used social media as a two-way communication channel, their major focus still lay with disseminating organisational information, although the latter was mostly aimed at useful and compelling information for their publics. It is assumed that this compelling content strategy also aims to promote a positive image of the organisation rather than engage its publics. This might be explained by the prevalent resource restrictions, as disseminating organisational information might be less time-consuming for practitioners than leading a conversation with individuals representing their publics.

The research did not identify whether a lack of social media skills, indicated by the literature, was a major driver for the still prevalent disseminating approach, because it was beyond the scope of this research. Practitioners were more likely to use social media in a conversational manner to serve the interests of their organisations (and not their publics) as part of an asymmetrical communication strategy.

Age seemed to be another important theme for these practitioners. Although most of them felt comfortable using social media, some believed that their younger counterparts were more skilled with social media. Future research in the form of interviews with newly graduated public relations practitioners might investigate whether this assumption is the case.

PESOI – the New Zealand PESO Model

The fifth and last research question was intended to investigate whether social media has grown in importance to the extent it outweighs other media types. The findings suggested that social media has become the most important media type in New Zealand public relations, followed by owned media. In contrast, earned media

appeared to decline slightly, while paid media and interpersonal communication seemed stable.

These trends might indicate a shift from traditional media types towards social and owned media in accordance with the SOEP model (shared, owned, earned and paid media) developed by Macnamara et al. (2016). However, it is suggested that future research needs to confirm this trend as several findings from the interviews, and the campaign analysis show that all media types are presently used complementarily in public relations. Furthermore, the interviewed practitioners clearly expressed the importance of paid social media. The analysed campaigns did not make a clear distinction between paid and organic social content. However, a rebound of paid media's importance due to an increased focus on paid social media may be possible.

Moreover, the findings showed that interpersonal communication, which has been neglected by the PESO as well as the SOEP model, plays an important role in New Zealand public relations. Therefore, this study developed the PESOI model to consider the importance of interpersonal communication in New Zealand. It is likely that the traditional PESO model is flawed from a New Zealand perspective as it does not comprehensively reflect the communication channels prevalent in public relations practice. Furthermore, the partial blurring between these media types, as identified during the coding process, indicates that a clear categorisation of tactics according to the PESO model poses difficulties (see Chapter 4).

In conclusion, this study shows that although many aspects have changed in the application of social media by public relations professionals since Bhargava's (2010) study, others have not. Social media has become an integral part of contemporary New Zealand public relations and practitioners have largely embraced this media type.

However, practitioners generally still do not seem to use social media comprehensively with regard to adopting new applications and their unique conversational opportunities. It appears that several influencing factors such as the return on investment, the prevailing control paradigm within organisations and encroachment between public relations and other communication disciplines, still hinder public relations practitioners from using social media to its full potential.

Limitations of the Study and Findings

Despite using triangulation by combining quantitative and qualitative research methods, the present study has some limitations. For instance, Johnson and

Onwuegbuzie (2004) have stated that multiple research methods are more time-consuming and expensive than single method studies. As this study was part of a Master's programme, with a limited time frame and budget, the researcher focused the quantitative research component on cost-free document analysis and reduced the number of interviews conducted.

Other limitations might be that numerical and textual data may be difficult to integrate and that contradictions between the datasets might be challenging to interpret (Creswell et al., 2008). As the findings of this study were mainly complementary, there was no need to resolve such issues. However, the researcher followed Creswell et al.'s (2008) suggestion and quantified the interview findings to facilitate a comparison with quantitative data from the campaign analysis.

A researcher's bias might influence interpretation (Creswell et al., 2008; Smith, 2017). Following Potter and Levine-Donnerstein (1999), objectivity can be assumed for the content analysis as this research component solely focussed on the quantification of manifest content. The assignment of a second coder, who was not a public relations professional, aimed to minimise the researcher's bias in the coding process. Although the researcher intended to be objective during the interviews, her cultural background, professional experience and personal interest in social media might have influenced the interpretation of data. As already mentioned, this was taken into consideration by means of reflexivity (see the section on reflexivity in Chapter 3). Furthermore, the researcher's professional experience and depth of understanding could be considered to add value to this research.

The quantitative research component focussed on a document analysis of published communication campaigns submitted by the organisations that had implemented these campaigns, and that had won awards from the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ). Unsuccessful campaigns, campaigns from non-PRINZ members or those involving confidential information were not included in the published documents. Therefore, an absolute transferability of the interpreted data to other New Zealand communication campaigns cannot be guaranteed. However, as the campaigns were acknowledged for their excellence in communication, they may serve as best practice examples for the industry.

The communication categories for the analysed campaigns as defined by PRINZ posed certain challenges to the research as some categories were discontinued or newly introduced during the analysed period. For instance, PRINZ introduced

'communicating in diversity' as a new award category in 2017, which made it difficult to evaluate a comparable trend. Therefore, these temporary communication categories were analysed separately from the rest of the campaigns.

As the data derived from interviews was subjective and interpretive, this study's interview results cannot be statistically quantifiable and, therefore, are not generalisable. Generalisation of the research findings is further hindered by the application of non-probability sampling methods, as these only describe the studied issues (Stacks, 2011). However, the data gives interesting and valuable insights into the opinions and motivations of public relations practitioners, adding depth to the quantitative campaign analysis findings.

Another limitation of the interviews was that they were mostly conducted with experienced senior practitioners, all based in Auckland. This might affect transference of the obtained data to other cities or regions in New Zealand. Younger practitioners and public relations practitioners living in other parts of New Zealand may have other perceptions of social media and may use it differently, for example, regarding strategy or two-way communication.

Finally, the continuous and fast-paced evolution of social media might limit the longevity of this study's findings, particularly regarding social media platforms and the importance of different media types. However, this study does contribute to the body of knowledge by identifying of patterns and motivations behind the use of social media platforms in public relations. It also provides several opportunities for future research in this field.

Although the present study appears to confirm Macnamara et al.'s (2016) SOEP model, some data indicates that this shift of power balance between the different media types might change again in the future. However, this study makes a valuable contribution by expanding the original PESO model into a PESOI model to reflect the importance of interpersonal communication for New Zealand public relations.

Recommendations for Public Relations Practice and Future Research

Informing the Practice

This study has shown that social media has significantly increased in importance for public relations practice. However, it identified several themes that suggest there are gaps in knowledge about the use of social media across current public relations practice. A still prevalent focus on the one-way dissemination of information, for

instance, might lead to the conclusion that New Zealand public relations practitioners still lack sufficient social media skills to apply social media in a conversational manner. This reinforces Macnamara et al.'s (2018) advice that trainee education should focus on two-way communication to inform the practice. In addition to considering ways to include two-way communication learning at tertiary institutions to educate future public relations professionals, it is also advisable that PRINZ offers training on this topic for experienced public relations practitioners.

Furthermore, the reluctant self-assessment of senior practitioners concerning their social media skills might mean there is benefit to regular, technical social media training for senior professionals. For instance, PRINZ could organise regular in-depth courses on the application and affordances of new social media platforms next to the general social media training they already offer.

As many of the public relations practitioners interviewed appeared to struggle with resource restrictions and were very interested in the return on investment of social media, New Zealand public relations learning institutions and professional development courses could include a topic on how to apply the ROI to social media.

Recommendations for Practitioners

The results of this study show that New Zealand public relations practitioners still do not use the full potential of conversational opportunities that social media can offer to the practice. Therefore, this research supports the suggestion of earlier studies advocating for a two-way symmetrical use of social media. Practitioners are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the advantages of a conversational use of social media and to promote this approach within their organisations.

The developed PESOI model shows the importance of interpersonal communication in New Zealand public relations practice. It is recommended that public relations professionals consider implementing this newly developed model into their practices.

Moreover, public relations professionals are encouraged to test new social media platforms as well as developing strategies on established platforms. This might enable them to become trendsetters instead of trend followers who 'simply chase the social crowds'.

Opportunities for Future Research

In general, the fast-paced evolution of social media makes a constant update of research findings essential to deliver the latest and most relevant insights about the use of this now ubiquitous media type in public relations. However, New Zealand-specific research on social media use in public relations remains scarce. It is recommended that New Zealand researchers follow American public relations researchers Wright and Hinson, who have analysed the social media use among American public relations practitioners on an annual basis.

The results of the present study show that social media has currently outgrown other media types in importance. However, due to the ever-changing New Zealand media landscape, it is suggested that these developments be observed in the future to verify this trend. This study's interview findings indicate a significant increase in paid social media, and quantitative analysis of paid social media in communication campaigns might investigate this finding in more detail.

Future qualitative research might test the PESOI model to examine whether it applies to public relations practice and develop it further. International quantitative research might investigate if the developed PESOI model can be transferred to public relations practice in other countries.

The limitations of this study may create opportunities for further research. For instance, future researchers might analyse communication campaigns that were submitted to the PRINZ Awards, but unsuccessful; or those that were conducted by non-PRINZ members to widen the body of knowledge on this topic. Further investigation of the future use of social media in newly created PRINZ communication categories might also complement this present study's findings.

Interviews with practitioners outside Auckland to investigate whether there are regional influences on perceptions of social media use and user behaviour may also be a helpful means of understanding the uses of social media. Moreover, interviews with younger public relations practitioners may give valuable insights about the relevance of age and whether this cohort uses social media in a more conversational manner.

In conclusion, this present study has answered all research questions using methodologically sound approaches by combining quantitative and qualitative research methods to contribute to the existing body of public relations knowledge.

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APPENDIX A: ETHICS APPROVAL

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

Auckland University of Technology
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316
E: ethics@aut.ac.nz
www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

11 September 2019

Petra Theunissen
Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies

Dear Petra

Ethics Application:19/326 **The role of social media in public relations practice -- A New Zealand perspective**
I wish to advise you that a subcommittee of the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) has
approved your ethics application
This approval is for three years, expiring 10 September 2022.
Non-Standard Conditions of Approval
1.   Please ensure that the recruitment email mentions an attached Information Sheet;
2.   In the Information Sheet, please state that the recorded interviews will be transcribed, and explain whether or not participants will be invited to review and confirm their transcripts;
3.   On the Consent Form, please include an option for the interviews to be recorded (if this is optional).

Non-standard conditions must be completed before commencing your study. Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTEC before commencing your study.
Standard Conditions of Approval
1.   The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research and as approved by AUTEC in this application.
2.   A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3.   A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4.   Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5.   Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6.   Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7.   It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted. When the research is undertaken outside New Zealand, you need to meet all ethical, legal, and locality obligations or requirements for those jurisdictions.
Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.
For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz. The forms mentioned above are available online through
http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics
Yours sincerely,

Kate O'Connor
Executive Manager
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee
Cc: stefaniemartens80@gmail.com

APPENDIX B1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

RQ 1: How Do New Zealand Practitioners Evaluate the Impact of Social Media on Public Relations?

1. How many years of experience do you have in the field of public relations? Do you have a relevant qualification? If yes, which one?

2. In your opinion, how has social media impacted public relations practice in New Zealand?

3. What, do you think, are the advantages/disadvantages of using social media in public relations?

4. Which social media applications have had the biggest impact?

5. Who in your organisation is responsible for the social media strategy and application?
   (For in-house communication only): Is it an independent function or part of another department?

RQ 2: Which Social Media Platforms do New Zealand Public Relations Practitioners Use?

6. Which social media applications do you use? Which of these do you use more frequently? Why?

7. How comfortable are you with applying social media? Why/Why not?

RQ 3: How is Social Media Used in Which Communication Categories**?**

8. In which communication categories do you apply social media? Do the social media applications vary depending on the different communication categories?

RQ 4: Do Public Relations Practitioners in New Zealand Use Social Media Strategically or in an Ad Hoc Manner?

9. Do you use social media strategically in planning public relations campaigns or more ad hoc/reactively? If you use social media strategically, how exactly?

10. Do you use social media more to push out organisational information or in a two-way symmetrical way to engage with your publics? How do you try to engage with your publics?

RQ 5: Does Social Media Outweigh Other Media Types in Public Relations Practice?

11. Are you currently using social media more often than in the past? Why/ why not? What has changed over the years since you started practicing PR?

Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced:

2 September 2019

Project Title

The Role of Social Media in Public Relations Practice – A New Zealand Perspective

An Invitation

I am a student enrolled in the Master of Communication Studies Programme at AUT with majors in public relations and social media. I am researching the role of social media in the New Zealand public relations practice. This research is conducted as a partial fulfilment of my master's degree.

You are invited to participate in an interview to share your experience and perceptions on the application of social media in the public relations industry. The data will be used to get a better understanding on how social media are actually applied in the current public relations practice and how their role in public relations campaigns is valued by public relations professionals. The findings of this research will be used to inform the profession and educators, and your participation is very important to the outcome of this research.

If you choose to participate, you will receive an invitation to a personal interview, which will take approximately 60 minutes. The interview data will be collated, stored and published confidentially. Your participation is voluntary, and you have the right to refuse or withdraw at any time. During the interview, you may decide not to answer any or none of the posed questions.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to investigate the role of social media in the New Zealand public relations practice.

The internet has vastly shaped the way corporations communicate and scholars suggest that social media have a strong influence on the public relations practice. Ten years ago, research indicated that New Zealand public relations professionals did not apply social media to their full potential and tended to focus on established forms like blogs rather than newer multimedia applications such as photo- and video-sharing platforms. However, the increasing popularity of social media and the continuous introduction of new social media applications such as Instagram, is likely to have changed social media use. However, there is no recent New Zealand-based study that confirms practitioners' use of social media.

This research aims at filling this gap by analysing how the public relations practice in New Zealand has adopted social media over the past years. It will look at identifying the particular social media tools as well as the specific functions where these have been applied. Furthermore, it will investigate the importance of social media in public relations campaigns compared to traditional media.

This research is part of the partial fulfilment of my Master of Communication degree from AUT. The results will be analysed and incorporated into my master thesis. The findings may also be published in form of a scholarly article or academic presentation.

Your participation is important. By sharing your experience and perception, you will help informing the public relations industry as well as scholars about the real role social media play in today's public

relations and perhaps eliminate some of the prevalent assumptions. This research might therefore benefit you as well.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

For the purpose of this interview, New Zealand public relations professionals were selected by the use of a convenience and snowball sampling method. This means that you have been invited to participate in this research because you are a contact of either me or the educators of AUT. You were chosen as you either work inhouse or as a PR consultant in Auckland.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you.

By completing the consent form, which will be handed to you at the beginning of the interview, you are giving consent for your data to be used as part of this research.

You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

What will happen in this research?

If you agree to participate, I will arrange a suitable time for a personal interview. The interview will last no longer than 60 minutes and will contain general questions on your experience in the public relations industry as well as questions on your preferences concerning social media applications, your use of social media in your daily work as well as your views and experiences with their application.

Once you have attended the interview, your answers will be submitted to a pool of data. The data will be transcribed and analysed in order to identify patterns and trends. No identifiable personal information will be collected. This will protect your privacy and the confidentiality of the information you have provided.

The interview may be audio-taped for the purpose of this research. Your interview will not be published, but interesting statements may be used for this research without identifying you or your organisation.

What are the discomforts and risks?

Besides sharing a maximum of 60 minutes of your time to answer my questions during a personal interview, your participation does not involve any discomforts and risks.

How will discomforts and risks be alleviated?

If you do experience discomforts or risks, you may end the interview at any time. You may choose to answer any or all of the questions.

What are the benefits?

The findings of this research might benefit the public relations industry, scholars and probably yourself by providing updated insights into the actual role social media play in the public relations practice and how public relations practitioners perceive their application in comparison with traditional media. Furthermore, public relations professionals might use this research as a benchmark in order to evaluate their own application of social media.

This research will lead to the partial fulfilment of my Master of Communication's degree from AUT.

How will my privacy be protected?

The interview will only be recorded via audio-tape or note-taking after your given consent on the consent form. The consent form as well as your data will be stored at AUT in order to allow the analysis for the purpose of this research. The data will be destroyed after a period of six years. If you withdraw from this interview, all of your relevant data will be destroyed immediately.

You and your organisation will not be identified in the thesis or any other publications that may result from this research. However, interesting, non-identifiable statements may be used.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

You will need to spend approximately 60 minutes of your time for this interview. There are no other costs involved in this interview.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You will have 14 days to consider this invitation to participate in the interview.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Yes, a summary of the findings will be provided to all interview participants after the completion of the thesis should you wish to receive it. The complete thesis may be provided on request.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Petra Theunissen, *petra.theunissen@aut.ac.nz,* +64 (09) 921 9999 ext. 7854.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, Kate O'Connor, *ethics@aut.ac.nz* , 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact me and my supervising professor as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Stefanie Martens,

Student, Master of Communication Studies,

School of Communication Studies, AUT

Email: stefaniemartens80@gmail.com

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Assoc. Prof. Petra Theunissen

School of Communication Studies

Phone: +64 (09) 921 9999 ext. 7854

Email: petra.theunissen@aut.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 11 September 2019, AUTEC Reference number 19/326.

APPENDIX B3: CONSENT FORM

Consent Form

Project title: **The Role of Social Media in Public Relations Practice – A New Zealand Perspective**

Project Supervisor: **Assoc. Prof. Petra Theunissen, School of Communication Studies, AUT**

Researcher: **Stefanie Martens, Student, Master of Communication Studies, AUT**

- O   I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Participant Information Sheet dated 2 September 2019.
- O   I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- O   I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that the interview will be audio-taped and transcribed.
- O   I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- O   I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- O   I agree to take part in this research.
- O   I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): YesO   NoO

Participant's signature: ………………………………………….……………………………………………………

Participant's name: ………………………………………….……………………………………………………

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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…………………………………………………………………………………..

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 11 September 2019, AUTEC Reference number 19/326

APPENDIX C: ANALYSED COMUNICATION CAMPAIGNS

Number	Year	Communication Category	Number	Year	Communication Category
1101	2011	Issues, Crisis, Emergency Management	1501	2015	Corporate PR
1102	2011	Issues, Crisis, Emergency Management	1502	2015	Corporate PR
1103	2011	Public Sector PR	1503	2015	Public Sector PR
1104	2011	Public Sector PR	1504	2015	Public Sector PR
1105	2011	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR	1505	2015	Public Sector PR
1106	2011	Marketing Coms - Integrated	1506	2015	Internal Communications
1107	2011	Internal Communications	1507	2015	Internal Communications
1108	2011	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR	1508	2015	Issues, Crisis, Emergency Management
1109	2011	Marketing Coms - Integrated	1509	2015	Marketing Coms - PR
1110	2011	Marketing Coms - PR	1510	2015	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR
1111	2011	Marketing Coms - Integrated	1511	2015	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR
1112	2011	Marketing Coms - PR	1512	2015	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR
1113	2011	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign	1513	2015	Sustained PR
1114	2011	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign	1514	2015	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign
1115	2011	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign	1515	2015	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign
1116	2011	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign	1516	2015	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign
1117	2011	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR	1517	2015	Paul Dryden Tertiary Award
1118	2011	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign	1601	2016	Public Sector PR
1119	2011	Sustained PR	1602	2016	Public Sector PR
1120	2011	Sustained PR	1603	2016	Internal Communications
1121	2011	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR	1604	2016	Internal Communications
1122	2011	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign	1605	2016	Issues, Crisis, Emergency Management
1123	2011	Public Sector PR	1606	2016	Marketing Coms - Integrated
1124	2011	Marketing Coms - Integrated	1607	2016	Marketing Coms - PR
1125	2011	Marketing Coms - PR	1608	2016	Marketing Coms - PR
1126	2011	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR	1609	2016	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR
1201	2012	Corporate PR	1610	2016	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR
1202	2012	Public Sector PR	1611	2016	Sustained PR
1203	2012	Public Sector PR	1612	2016	Sustained PR
1204	2012	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR	1613	2016	Sustained PR
1205	2012	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR	1614	2016	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign
1206	2012	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign	1615	2016	Paul Dryden Tertiary Award
1207	2012	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign	1701	2017	Public Sector PR
1208	2012	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign	1702	2017	Public Sector PR
1209	2012	Sustained PR	1703	2017	Public Sector PR
1210	2012	Marketing Coms - PR	1704	2017	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR
1211	2012	Marketing Coms - PR	1705	2017	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR
1212	2012	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign	1706	2017	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR
1213	2012	Internal Communications	1707	2017	Marketing Coms - Integrated
1214	2012	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR	1708	2017	Marketing Coms - Integrated
1215	2012	Paul Dryden Tertiary Award	1709	2017	Marketing Coms - PR
1301	2013	Public Sector PR	1710	2017	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign
1302	2013	Public Sector PR	1711	2017	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign
1303	2013	Internal Communications	1712	2017	Communicating in Diversity
1304	2013	Internal Communications	1713	2017	Communicating in Diversity
1305	2013	Issues, Crisis, Emergency Management	1714	2017	Communicating in Diversity
1306	2013	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR	1715	2017	Sustained PR
1307	2013	Marketing Coms - Integrated	1716	2017	Paul Dryden Tertiary Award
1308	2013	Marketing Coms - PR	1717	2017	Paul Dryden Tertiary Award
1309	2013	Marketing Coms - Integrated	1801	2018	Public Sector PR
1310	2013	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR	1802	2018	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR
1311	2013	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR	1803	2018	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR
1312	2013	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR	1804	2018	Marketing Coms - Integrated
1313	2013	Paul Dryden Tertiary Award	1805	2018	Marketing Coms - Integrated
1314	2013	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign	1806	2018	Marketing Coms - PR
1315	2013	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign	1807	2018	Marketing Coms - PR
1316	2013	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign	1808	2018	Marketing Coms - PR
1317	2013	Sustained PR	1809	2018	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign
1318	2013	Sustained PR	1810	2018	Sustained PR
1319	2013	Sustained PR	1811	2018	Sustained PR
1401	2014	Corporate PR	1901	2019	Corporate PR
1402	2014	Internal Communications	1902	2019	Public Sector PR
1403	2014	internal Communications	1903	2019	internal Communications
1404	2014	Issues, Crisis, Emergency Management	1904	2019	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR
1405	2014	limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR	1905	2019	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR
1406	2014	Marketing Coms - Integrated	1906	2019	Marketing Coms - PR
1407	2014	Marketing Coms - Integrated	1907	2019	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign
1408	2014	Marketing Coms - Integrated	1908	2019	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign
1409	2014	Marketing Coms - PR	1909	2019	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign
1410	2014	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR	1910	2019	Communicating in Diversity
1411	2014	Limited Budget/Not-for-Profit PR	1911	2019	Communicating in Diversity
1412	2014	Paul Dryden Tertiary Award	1912	2019	Sustained PR
1413	2014	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign			
1414	2014	Special Event/Project/Short-term campaign			
1415	2014	Sustained PR			
1416	2014	Sustained PR			