

The use of Internet in public relations and its impact on the practice: A New Zealand
perspective

Deepti Bhargava

A Thesis submitted to
AUT University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters in Communication Studies (MCS)

2010

School of Communications Studies, Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies

Primary Supervisor: Dr. Petra Theunissen

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."

Signed:

Deepti Bhargava

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge all those people who have helped me in writing this thesis.

First and foremost, I'd like to thank my supervisor, Petra Theunissen, for her encouragement, guidance and patience. Her support throughout the duration of this research is beyond valuable.

I'm also grateful to Paul Dryden, the Chief Executive of the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ), for encouraging PRINZ members to participate in this study and aiding me in approaching them. I'd also like to thank the ethics committees at PRINZ and AUT University for their valuable assistance and suggestions.

I thank all the participants who took part in the survey and interviews conducted for their time and inputs.

Finally, I'd like to express my gratitude to Rajni and Ashwani, my dearest aunt and uncle for their continuous moral support and to my loving husband Rajat for his encouragement. This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Bala and Naresh, who have always been my source of inspiration.

Abstract

This study explores the trends in the application of various Internet tools in the public relations practice of New Zealand and the impact these have on certain key aspects of the practice such as skills, encroachment, gender balance and ethics.

A mixed methods approach including an online survey and semi-structured in-depth interviews has been followed. An attempt has been made to answer the research questions with the aid of the data collected from 133 survey respondents and ten interview participants.

The findings revealed that there are considerable variations in the use and application of the different online tools in the New Zealand public relations practice. This discrepancy was found to have been influenced by the area of work and experience of the practitioners along with their knowledge of the Internet and the organisational environment they operated in. Further, it appears that practitioners do not have a full grasp of the nature of online tools and their scope of utilization in the practice. Areas of further investigation have been highlighted and recommendations have been made for the future researchers to help aid a better understanding of online public relations.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 The Internet and public relations: An overview	1
1.2 Purpose, scope and importance of this study	2
1.3 Structure of the thesis.....	5
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	6
2.1 Introduction.....	6
2.2 The impact of the communication revolution	6
2.3 Opportunities and challenges for public relations practitioners	8
2.4 The Internet's usage by public relations practitioners over the years	17
2.5 Literature summary and research questions.....	27
Chapter 3: Methodology	30
3.1 Introduction.....	30
3.2 An overview of mixed methods and the pragmatic paradigm	30
3.3 The application of mixed methods to the present research.....	32
3.4 Quantitative data collection and analysis methods	35
3.5 Qualitative data collection and analysis.....	43
3.6 Summary of the research methodology	46
Chapter 4: Survey Results	47
4.1 Introduction.....	47
4.2 Area of Work	48
4.3 Years of Experience.....	48
4.4 Length of Internet usage in communication planning	50
4.5 Strategic use of Internet in public relations	52
4.6 Frequency of use of Internet tools.....	55
4.7 The public relations functions where Internet tools are being applied	59
4.8 Impact of the Internet on the practice of public relations	63
4.9 Change in job roles as a result of the Internet.....	65
4.10 Summary of the survey results.....	69
Chapter 5: Interview Results.....	71
5.1 Introduction.....	71
5.2 Overall impact of the Internet on public relations	71
5.3 Use of strategy in application of Internet tools	77
5.4 Internet and encroachment on practitioner roles.....	81
5.5 Impact on ethics	83
5.6 Impact on skills	86
5.7 Impact on perceived gender imbalances	89

5.8 Impact of the Internet on balance between young and senior practitioners.....	92
5.9 Summary of the interview results	93
Chapter 6: Evaluation, Conclusions and Recommendations	96
6.1 Introduction.....	96
6.2 Discussion of findings.....	96
6.3 Limitations and recommendations	110
6.4 Concluding summary	111
Bibliography	114
Appendix A: Ethics Approval for Survey.....	126
Appendix B: Ethics Approval for Interviews	128
Appendix C: Survey Questionnaire	130
Appendix D: Online Survey Format.....	135
Appendix E: Survey Information Sheet.....	143
Appendix F: Interview Questions	146
Appendix G: Interview Information Sheet	148

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The Internet and public relations: An overview

The Internet was originally developed in the 1960s at the U.S. Defense Department by a group of researchers headed by Dr. Robert W. Taylor. It was an extension of their network called ARPANET. The researchers soon realised the importance of networking and by 1986, the U.S. National Science Foundation established NSFNET to extend the network to more research institutions. ARPANET ceased to exist in 1990, but the Internet spread rapidly across the globe and grew to one million users in 1992 (Falk, 1994; Giovannetti, Kagami & Tsuji, 2003).

The Internet began impacting on our ordinary lives only in the late 1990s, with the development of the World Wide Web (Gillies & Cailliau, 2000; Giovannetti *et al.*, 2003). Since then, the Internet has been used extensively for accessing instantaneous information and communicating across geographical boundaries. Due to its characteristics of speed, efficiency and economy, the Internet began to be applied increasingly across industries ranging from retail and banking to the media (Giovannetti *et al.*, 2003). The emergence of social media in the new millennium gave the World Wide Web a new name, 'Web 2.0' (Breakenridge, 2008). Though social media has various definitions, in essence, it is a medium for people to collaborate and share content via Internet tools ranging from video-sharing, photo-sharing and blogs to social networking websites, virtual worlds and micro-blogs (Mersham, Theunissen & Peart, 2009). Seitel (2001, p.298) cites British futurist, Peter Cochrane, who in 1998 predicted what the world was heading towards in the 21st century by saying, "If you are not online, you don't exist." It is beyond doubt that since the last decade, the Internet has evolved faster than any other communication channel and has dynamically changed our lives and professions. The practice of public relations is one such profession that has considerably been affected by this online revolution (Phillips, 2001).

The contemporary practice of public relations was defined back in 1976 by the pioneer in public relations education, Rex Harlow, who examined close to 500 definitions and concluded that:

Public relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and co-operation between an organisation and its public; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on, and responsive to, public opinion; defines and emphasises the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of, and effectively utilize, change; serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and ethical communication techniques as its principal tool (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000, p.4)

In response to this definition, Broom (2009, p.25) offers a more succinct definition of public relations referring to it as, “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the publics on whom its success or failure depends.” From the two above definitions, it is evident that public relations is essentially about communicating effectively in order to build valuable relationships and therefore the Internet being a medium for communication is bound to have implications for the practice. The impact of the Internet on public relations has been subject to considerable discussion (see 2.2 and 2.3) in the existing literature but the scope of the research has largely been limited to assessing the use of e-mails and websites in the public relations functions of media relation and crisis communication. The overall observation regarding the application of the Internet by public relations practitioners is that they tend to apply the online tools in a fashion similar to traditional media tools such as print and broadcast and fail to include the Internet in their strategic planning process (see 2.4). While several advantages of the Internet have been identified which include reduced costs, enhanced speed, customization and direct contact with the target publics, practitioners participating in earlier studies have expressed their concerns over several challenges (see 2.3) such as the accentuation of crisis due to the globalised networking on the Internet and the difficulty in keeping up to date with the constantly evolving Internet world. Today’s public relations practitioners are confronted by a changing media environment that is significantly more complex, diverse and dynamic than the traditional media sphere and requires them to share information in a far more transparent and interactive manner than ever before. The implication for the practitioners is to acknowledge and understand the changing demands and perspectives of their publics and fully utilize the opportunities offered by the new media channels.

1.2 Purpose, scope and importance of this study

The purpose of the present study is to identify the trends in the application of the various Internet tools in the public relations practice of New Zealand and the impact these have on certain key aspects of the practice. This study draws its references from the existing literature in the areas of Internet, public relations and the mixed methods research approach. In context to the Internet, the literature explored includes the evolution of the Internet, the various online tools and their applications, the impact on our professions and the issues of access and infrastructure (Falk, 1994; Giovannetti *et al.*, 2003). Literature on public relations is examined to facilitate a better understanding of the practice, the theories involved, the role of the practitioner, the various functions involved, the possible issues or challenges faced by practitioners and the impact of the Internet on the practice. (Cutlip *et al.*, 2000; Phillips, 2001; Holtz; Levine, 2002; Lattimore *et al.*, 2004; Breakenridge, 2008; Broom, 2009). Additionally, the literature regarding the public relations practice in New Zealand, along with the impact of the Internet in other industries such as radio and banking is also explored. Not much is known about the role that Internet plays in the public relations industry here (Podder, 2005; Tymson & Lazar, 2006; Choi; McEwan; Sterne, 2008; Mersham, Theunissen & Peart, 2009).

A review of the aforementioned literature on the topic of the Internet's use in public relations reflected that the earlier studies have largely been conducted among the practitioners in the U.S. and the U.K. (see 2.4). Only one particular study pertaining to the context of New Zealand could be identified and that too provided limited insight as the scope was not extended to cover trends in the use of social media tools. Not only this, the study did not explore the implications that the Internet tools had for ethics, encroachment, gender and skills, which have been recognized in literature as being crucial (see 2.3). The present study therefore attempted to cover the aforementioned gap and provide a foundation for future researchers. Since the study had to be completed within a stipulated time frame of an academic year, the scope of the research questions was limited to exploring the extent and manner (strategic vs. *ad hoc*) of the use of 19 pre-defined Internet tools, which have been decided upon based on the literature review and my own personal experience in the industry. Further, since it was observed from the literature review that the earlier studies have only explored the application of the

Internet in the functions of media relations and crisis communication (see 2.4), the scope of the present study was extended to identify the extent to which these 19 online tools are used in the entire spectrum of public relations functions. However, though it was also identified that culture might have a role to play in the strategic application of the Internet the present study refrained from exploring this area which could warrant for a separate study. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, four research questions were outlined.

RQ1: To what extent are the following Internet tools applied by public relations practitioners in New Zealand?

Blogs, micro-blogs, social networking websites, video sharing, photo sharing, wikis, podcasts, webcasts/webinars, RSS, chat forums, online gaming, virtual worlds, intranet, online newsrooms, e-alerts/newsletters, links and tags, search engine optimization, e-mail and online media monitoring.

RQ2: In which functions of public relations are the Internet tools applied?

Media relations, crisis communication, internal/employee communication, community relations, investor relations, issues management, government relations, marketing and brand PR, fundraising, sponsorship, events management, education and training and research

RQ3. Are the Internet tools applied in a strategic or an *ad-hoc* manner by the New Zealand practitioners?

RQ4. How does the use of Internet in public relations impact practitioner skills, encroachment, gender imbalances and ethics in the practice?

For the purpose of answering the above questions, the sample was derived from the members of the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ). The quantitative phase included data collected from 133 survey respondents and the qualitative phase was limited to ten face-to-face in-depth interviews with senior members of PRINZ. The scope was limited to senior members as the purpose of the interviews was to explain the

trends identified in the survey and therefore being more experienced in the practice, these practitioners would contribute valuable opinions to the study. This study is directed towards contributing to the field of public relations, Internet and research. Public relations practitioners might use the research findings to get a better understanding of the current trends and might derive best practice advice from their counterparts who were surveyed and interviewed in this study. In terms of research, this study adds value to the existing body of knowledge by providing a New Zealand perspective. In regards to the Internet, the study brings to light the opportunities and challenges in the use of emerging Internet tools that social media offers. Overall, this study is an attempt to broaden the scope for future research and theory building.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

This chapter is concerned with providing an introduction to the topic of the Internet's application and impact on public relations and offering an overview of the need, nature and scope of this study. Chapter two gives a detailed review of the literature, identifying the reasons why the Internet has changed the communications and media scenario along with the implications these changes have for the practice of public relations. The chapter also discusses earlier studies which have explored the extent and manner in which the public relations practitioners utilize the Internet in their practice, which is followed by identification of gaps in the literature that have informed the context of the present study. Chapter three is concerned with presenting the methodology followed in this study. It gives an overview of the mixed methods approach and discusses in detail the quantitative technique of survey used followed by the qualitative technique of semi-structured in-depth interviews. The explanation includes information about sampling, data collection and data analysis. Chapter four consists of details of the data analysis of the survey results which are presented with the aid of figures and tables. Chapter five provides the thematic analysis of the interview results, explaining and exploring the data gathered from the survey, while chapter six is concerned with providing a combined interpretation of the survey and the interview results, followed by identifying the limitations of the study and recommendations for future researchers and ending in a conclusive summary of the entire study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed review of the existing literature on the use of the Internet in public relations. The chapter has been divided into four segments. The first segment discusses the overall impact of the communication revolution brought about by the four main characteristics of the Internet (networking, speed, customization and consumer orientation) and the implications thereof for the practice of public relations. The second segment of the chapter elaborates on the various opportunities that the Internet offers for public relations practitioners such as enhanced speed of communication and direct interaction with publics. The segment also discusses the various challenges and concerns such as ethical issues and encroachment that accompany the opportunities brought about by the Internet. Following this, the third segment of the chapter provides an overview of the extent to which the practitioners have applied the Internet in their practice thus far and examines whether they have fully utilized the advantages the Internet offers them. The last segment of this chapter summarizes the findings of the existing literature and outlines the research questions of the present study which are formulated based on the gaps identified from the literature review.

2.2 The impact of the communication revolution

The impact of the Internet on the practice of public relations has been subject to considerable discussion in the existing literature. Much has been written about the communication revolution brought about by the Internet and the implications thereof for the public relations practitioner. It has been argued by Castells (2000) that while there are wide disparities in the penetration of the Internet with North America leading the globe with 77.4% of its population using the Internet (<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>), the medium itself has had more impact on society and organisations than previously invented communication channels like the television or the radio. According to Castells (2000), since the consumers of the Internet are also the producers, it leads to unprecedented decentralization of information and power. Castells (2000) refers to the Internet as the computer mediated communication (CMC) network that enables interactivity and states, "...they will extend the controlling

logic of major public and private organisations into the whole realm of communication” (p.385). Castells’ (2000) view is corroborated by Holtz (2002) and Lattimore *et al.* (2004), who argue that the organisations now operate in an information economy as opposed to an industrial one, and this causes a change in the traditional public relations practices that were rooted in a top-down approach. Expanding on the characteristics of the Internet that have caused the aforementioned change, Holtz (2002) explains that as a result of the Internet, people across the globe have become part of a networked society whereby time and distance have lost their meaning. This indicates that communication has shifted from the ‘one-to-many’ to the ‘many-to-many’ concept where the underlying assumption is that the information is no longer controlled by the organisation but easily accessible and readily shared. Middleberg (2001) further argues that the speed of the Internet and the networking of the users create the need for an instant response, the lack of which can damage an organisation’s reputation. But the need for speed should not negatively affect the quality of the content the second trait of the Internet era as identified by Holtz (2002). It has been noted that traditionally, the practice of public relations has mirrored the mass-production and distribution approach of conventional organisations, whereby a single press release was distributed among as many media outlets as possible to ensure maximum coverage in terms of column centimeters in print and air time in broadcast media (Holtz, 2002; Lattimore *et al.*, 2004; Broom, 2009). This form of public relations, which focused on the quantity of coverage, has been referred to by Grunig and Hunt (1984) as the ‘press-agentry’ model where the sole purpose of the practitioner was to maximize the publicity for the organisation. It is argued that as opposed to simply providing newsworthy information to the media, the Internet has made it inevitable for the practitioners to focus on the quality of the content and assuring the publics that the information being disseminated is honest, accurate and credible (Phillips, 2001). It is further suggested that instead of distributing endless press releases, practitioners increasingly need to concentrate on creating more targeted and well-placed messages, as according to Holtz (2002), the third attribute of the Internet age is that it demands customization of information. Holtz (2002) strongly argues that the Henry Ford car analogy of one-size-fits-all does not apply to public relations anymore and he exemplifies the same while citing futurist and author Watts Wacker says:

The PR industry has to recognize that the world is that different and let go the way it is used to doing things and apply a beginner's mind. In a life of complete media centrality-beyond media saturation-everyone feels they could and should be marketed to as an individual. If I can customize my computer online, or my blue jeans or my loafers, I certainly expect I should receive custom-made messages. (p.28)

The fourth and final characteristic of the information age as defined by Holtz (2002) is that as opposed to the producer-driven industrial age, we now live in an era where the 'consumer is the king'. According to Holtz (2002) the consumers in the information age are more aware and demanding, therefore, their satisfaction has become the key to organisational success. The aforementioned view implies that public relations practitioners need to break away from the more traditional 'information dissemination' and 'two-way asymmetrical' models of public relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) where the objective was to disseminate controlled organisational messages or to indulge in discussion that was more persuasive in nature and increasingly adopt the 'two-way symmetric' model that emphasizes the importance of balanced engagement to build long lasting relationships with the target publics. It has been further argued that the Internet has empowered the publics and they choose the information they want to receive and also the source from where they will accept it (Phillips, 2001; Grunig, 2009). Additionally, they prefer sources that reflect their lifestyle and engage globally with people who have similar tastes (Phillips, 2001). This reflects that there is need for public relations practitioners to become more aware of the opinions, motivations and expectations of their publics through constant dialogue and monitoring. A statement that perfectly summarizes the above was made by practitioner and author Brian Solis, who is cited by Breakenridge (2008) as commenting, "PR 2.0 is about putting the 'public' back in public relations" (p. XX), where PR 2.0 is considered as the outcome of Web 2.0, a by-product of the Internet.

2.3 Opportunities and challenges for public relations practitioners

As discussed in the previous section (2.3), it has been widely acknowledged that the communication revolution has empowered the 'publics'. This implies that while the Internet offers several opportunities to the public relations practitioners, it also creates challenges for them as they now operate in a non-traditional and more transparent environment that requires them to relinquish control (Phillips, 2001; Breakenridge,

2008; Broom, 2009; Grunig, 2009). It has been identified that the most important impact of the Internet on the practice is its phenomenal capability to make any kind of information available almost instantly (Christ, 2005). Breakenridge (2008) illustrates the ease of information access in the following comment:

You have the ability to be wired with knowledge from the time you wake up in the morning until the moment you fall asleep at night. There's your home desktop computer, PDA, work computer, wireless laptop, and Apple iPhone – you can log on just about anywhere, anyplace, to find any piece of obscure information you need. (p.27)

Breakenridge (2008) further explains that the instant availability of real-time information with social media tools such as Really Simple Syndication (RSS) news feeds, blogs and social networks can be used by public relations practitioners for research, media monitoring and issues management. This ease of information access according to Breakenridge (2008) assists in the strategic planning of communication campaigns and in the early identification of issues which helps practitioners mitigate crisis. At the same time, it has also been argued that the speed and networking capability of the Internet act as a facilitator of crises and bring global disrepute to an organisation because 'anyone' can share 'any kind' of information with 'any number' of people at a great speed (Middleberg, 2001; Holtz 2002; Alfonso & Smith, 2008, Sandilands & Mersham, 2009). To exemplify the above views, Alfonso and Smith (2008) cite the example of Kryptonite locks, whereby in 2004, a small blog called www.bikeforums.net published a post stating that one of Kryptonite's high-end bike locks could be unlocked using a ball-point pen. Within five days of this post, a similar one was published on a popular blog called 'Engadget'. According to Alfonso and Smith (2008) the news of the faulty locks soon spread all over the Internet and then rippled to the mainstream media. Kryptonite, who had initially ignored the blog post, had a crisis at hand. It has therefore been suggested that regular monitoring of the Web across various websites, blogs, newsgroups, forums and other social media becomes rudimentary for the early identification of issues so that corrective measures can be taken to avoid a crisis. (Middleberg, 2001; Holtz, 2002).

It has been noted that while the public relations practitioners are increasingly monitoring social media like the blogosphere, their relationship with citizen journalists like bloggers remains tenuous due to their desire to maintain control over information and its dissemination (Broom, 2009). This issue is further addressed by Kent (2008) who adds that the challenge for a practitioner is that controlled messages have the risk of being treated like propaganda in the blogosphere whereas uncontrolled messages have the possibility of being misinterpreted or inadequately placed. The blogosphere, according to Xifra and Huertas (2008), like every other social media channel has a conversational environment and much greater interactivity is expected even in the way public relations practitioners communicate with bloggers. A study was conducted by Steyn *et al.* (2007) to understand issues related to blogging in the Asia-Pacific region by drawing a sample of 153 bloggers from the database of a global public relations firm called Text100. The results revealed that most of the bloggers preferred to be contacted via e-mail followed by comments on their blogs. Additionally according to Steyn *et al.* (2007), on a Likert scale of 10 (where 10 = very interested and 1 = not interested at all) bloggers showed preference for receiving the content in the form of online videos (6.91), followed by graphs or figures (6.75). Steyn *et al.* (2007) conclude that the results imply that the best way for public relations practitioners to strengthen their relationship with bloggers is to give them feedback on the content of their own blogs and supply them with interactive content in the form of videos and images. Unfortunately, it has been argued that public relations practitioners continue to use social media just like they used traditional channels as a way to push promotional messages rather than using them to facilitate two-way symmetrical dialogue (Grunig, 2009). While it has been noted that the blogosphere raises challenges for the practitioners it has also been observed that there is an exaggerated significance attached to bloggers as the majority of them could be criticized for poor content, infrequent posts and lack of credibility (Kent, 2008). This implies that further research is required before any claims can be made to ascertain the value that citizen journalists such as bloggers have for public relations practitioners.

The case in favour of the use of blogs by public relations practitioners is that if 'anyone' can publish on the net, then so can public relations practitioners (Holtz, 2002). It has been acknowledged that a primary advantage of the Internet is that it allows direct access to the publics via channels such as blogs, micro-blogs and other social media websites bypassing gatekeepers like the traditional media (Broom, 2009). It is

advocated that organisations should be more proactive in communicating with their target publics and not wait for a crisis to occur and necessitate conversation, "...any activity, event, issue, opinion, or position that generates a press release or an effort to pitch an item to the press is a likely candidate for communication on the Internet" (Holtz, 2002, p.343). While it is understood that interactivity is the key in building relationships via social media, it is also observed that transparency and credibility are equally important to establish trust (Yang & Lim, 2009). This implies that practitioners need to abide by the ethical principles of the practice even while communicating with their publics online. Parson (2008) defines public relations ethics as, "...the application of knowledge, understanding and reasoning to questions of right or wrong behaviour in the professional practice of public relations" (p.9). Professional bodies such as the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) in the United States, Figureered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) in the U.K. and the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ) in New Zealand have created ethical codes of conduct to be followed by public relations practitioners. According to Pratt (1991), Lieber (2005), Broom (2009) and Tilley (2009) most of the ethical codes expect practitioners to act honestly, fairly and in a socially responsible manner; maintain integrity; balance openness and privacy; check credibility and reliability before disclosing information and abide by all laws affecting the public relations practice. Further to this, Parsons (2008) argues that with the use of social media tools such as blogs in public relations, the ethical expectation of authorship of content, transparency and credibility have become crucial as the organisation's reputation depends on them. Smudde (2005) corroborates this view and says that when a blog is written by public relations practitioners, it needs to be treated like advertising content as it is primarily promotional in nature. Smudde (2005) and Parsons (2008) argue that the readers of the social media sphere expect truth and transparency, therefore lack of disclosure can lead to sudden and wide-spread disrepute.

Parsons (2008) explains the possible repercussions of unethical blogging with the help of the example of Wal-Mart. According to Parsons (2008) in 2006 a blog called 'Wal-Mart Across America' was launched by a middle-class American couple, who wrote about their journey across the country, whereby they stayed overnight at Wal-Mart store parking lots and visited the stores during the day. Their blog posts raved about the staff and the stores of Wal-Mart, quite contrary to the popular perception of the brand being a stingy employer. A close examination of the blog by a professor at the Colorado State

University named Jonathan Rees revealed that the blog was financially supported by a public relations firm, on behalf of Wal-Mart, to counter the criticism it faced from labour unions (Parsons, 2008). In a more current example, in 2009, according to an article on www.cbsnews.com, The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in the U.S. reviewed its guidelines on testimonials and endorsements; specifying that any blogger failing to disclose freebies and/or payments received to review companies will be fined \$11,000 per violation. Although these rules do not apply globally, they indicate a start towards ensuring ethical conduct. Similarly, The Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA) is a U.S. based organisation that is dedicated towards advocating ethical principles of word of mouth marketing, in both the offline and online environments. The members of WOMMA are strictly required to abide by the code of ethics when operating in the social media sphere (WOMMA, 2009). The code currently covers issues discussed earlier in this chapter such as disclosure and honesty. Though the code does not represent any legal or governmental jurisdiction, the purpose is to encourage 'self-regulation' among communications professionals to achieve the higher goal of ethical practice (WOMMA, 2009).

From the above views and examples it could be argued that while public relations practitioners can use the Internet to communicate directly with their publics, they need to conform to ethical practice to avoid bringing disrepute to the organisation they are representing. However, more research is required in this area to establish theories that can be applied in a global context covering all channels of the Internet. In addition to the concern of insufficient transparency as discussed above, there are other ethical dilemmas which are characteristic to the online environment. Hallahan (2006) elaborates that the digital alteration of graphics and videos and the misrepresentation of copyrighted material are among the key ethical issues on the Internet. It has also been suggested that public relations practitioners should especially refrain from sending unsolicited messages via e-mails as this practice of 'spamming' the recipient is regarded as unethical (Strenski, 1995). Further to this, there is the concern of safeguarding privacy and security of the Internet users by not engaging in acts of accessing personal data such as demographic information, credit card details and web pages visited by scanning temporary Internet 'cookies', search engines and stored online forms (Tavani, 2004).

It can be argued that the issue of online ethics requires continuous academic research and professional attention, so that the various ethical codes are reflective of the dynamic online environment. In a personal conversation with the executive director of PRINZ – P. Dryden – it was revealed that PRINZ aims to advocate ethical practice among the practitioners of New Zealand in both the online and offline environments (P. Dryden, personal communication, August 18, 2009). Dryden was of the opinion that while PRINZ feels that the current principles of honesty, fairness and balance between openness and privacy apply equally to the online environment, the organisation has an active ethics committee that strives to keep the code current and relevant (P. Dryden, personal communication, August 18, 2009). However, further to his comments it could be suggested that self-regulation by practitioners or the presence of online ethical guidelines by organisations might have a major role to play in the challenge of complying with ethical online practice.

It is has been argued by Phillips (2001) and James (2008) that due to the rising challenges surrounding the effective and ethical application of the Internet tools, public relations practitioners need to keep abreast of the technological developments in the online arena. Practitioners need to increasingly consider how online dynamics will impact on their knowledge and skills. It is suggested by James (2008) that practitioners will require a better understanding of the technical side of the Internet in order to successfully employ the online tools:

If new media are to be embraced, public relations practitioners will need more technical skill in areas such as web publishing, new software operation, online security, search engine optimization (SEO), web analytics and web trend analysis software operation. (p.142)

It is further suggested that since the conversational tone of the online channels draws a complete contrast to the news release format of the traditional media, practitioners need to adapt their writing styles accordingly (Breakenridge, 2008; James, 2008). In addition to writing effectively, they also need to better understand multi-media formats such as videos and images, which according to James (2008) will presumably be used

increasingly in the practice of public relations. Besides the technical know-how, efficient time management is bound to become a crucial skill due to the pressure created to deliver content under the burgeoning demand for instant communication. James (2008) argues that the challenge for practitioners is to produce instant content that is expected to be accurate at the same time. In addition to this issue, a study by Hill and White (2000) revealed that due to the lack of sufficient time, online activities might be given less priority than 'other' routine offline tasks. Their findings were based on qualitative interviews with thirteen American practitioners who worked for organisations that had websites. The participating practitioners felt that managing the Web was a full-time job in itself and it was difficult to manage the online activities along with the routine ones that had greater urgency due to deadlines. Hill and White (2000) noted that some practitioners felt that since the organisation's top management did not assign much value to its online activities, they tended to fall off the radar for public relations practitioners. It is argued by James (2008) that the aforementioned time pressures are likely to impact on the relationships between the public relations teams and their superiors in an organisation or other departments such as Information Technology (IT) who are mainly responsible for facilitating technical aspects of the Internet and ensuring speediness. While James (2008) argues that public relations practitioners need to form better alliances with the IT department to ensure smooth running of the technical processes, the study by Hill and White (2000) suggests that practitioners felt that the IT teams were encroaching on their roles by controlling the management of the website. Hill and White (2000) cite Lauzen who defines encroachment as, "...the assignment of nonpublic relations professionals to manage public relations function" (p.35). According to Lauzen (1992) encroachment is inter-related to the roles that public relations practitioners play and the intra-organisational power held by different departments. The two key practitioner roles are identified as that of a technician, who is responsible for the technical aspects of communications such as writing and implementing orders, and a manager, who has the authority in planning and strategic thinking (Dozier, 1992). It has been argued that if senior practitioners are not efficient in enacting their manager roles in an organisation, the department as a whole will be overpowered by other more influential departments (Dozier, 1992; Lauzen, 1992). According to Dozier (1992):

Encroachment is the inevitable by-product of a calling that fails to rise above technique. The career failure of top practitioners to assume the management role within organisations is also a failure to truly emerge as a profession from the

communication skill cluster that operationally defines what practitioners do – and what the practice is (p.352).

It can therefore be suggested that public relations practitioners need to strengthen their knowledge of the Internet in terms of environmental scanning, media monitoring, research and evaluation, which according to Broom (2009) are typically assumed to fall under the manager role, and avoid being too involved with technician functions such as uploading content on websites, web design and search engine optimization and leave these for the IT teams to handle in order to manage encroachment. However, there is no evidence in the existing literature that could support the above deduction. Surprisingly, a study by Ryan (2003), sampling 200 members of the PRSA, revealed that the participating practitioners did not have any perceived encroachment issues from the IT departments but felt that they required more technical and conceptual training to keep up-to-date with the emerging online tools. It could therefore be implied that more research is required in the area to determine a conclusive relationship between encroachment, roles and the Internet and in defining the extent of technical literacy that is to be expected from a public relations practitioner. A related issue of encroachment as identified by Ryan (2003) could be turf wars that appear to be commonplace between the public relations and marketing teams in an organisation. Ryan (2003) suggests that public relations practitioners might be worried about marketers vying for using the organisation's online presence to promote their marketing interests. Although the concept of integrated communications (which involves applying advertising, marketing and public relations in an integrated manner to attain the larger communication objective of the organisation) is being advocated by marketing gurus such as Kotler (2003), public relations theorists continue to be cynical about being allied with marketing. This is evident in a book on public relations practice authored by Broom (2009) where a complete section is devoted to clarifying the "confusion with marketing" (p.26). Further, Hallahan (2007) cites public relations theorists Grunig and Grunig (1998) as commenting:

One major hurdle remains, however, before communications can be fully integrated: public relations theorists and marketing communication theorists – particularly advertising scholars – conceptualize communication in very different ways. Many marketing communications programs apply marketing

communication rather than public relations theory to communication management...in ways that we believe do not result in effective communication. (p. 310).

It could be derived from the above that even while integrated communication is being advocated, public relations practitioners perceive themselves to be better communicators than marketers and are cynical of sharing the online tools with their marketing counterparts. Therefore any overlap of online responsibilities or sharing of online tools might create encroachment issues, though further research is required to establish a definite correlation.

Apart from encroachment, it is suspected by Porter and Sallot (2003) that gender discrepancies might have a relation with the roles practitioners play and their respective use of the Internet. They tested the aforementioned hypothesis by surveying the members of PRSA and realised that it was not supported as male and female practitioners were found to be proportionally occupied in manager and technician roles and no apparent differences were observed in the way they used the Internet. Since no similar research could be identified, it is difficult to draw any valid conclusions based on the study by Porter and Sallot (2003). Though, it can still be argued that as per other literature on public relations roles, gender discrepancies are not unusual in the practice (Hon, Grunig & Dozier, 1992; Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Aldoory, 2007) and therefore any possible impact of the Internet on gender imbalances cannot be ignored. It has been widely acknowledged that while 70% of the practitioners in public relations are women, men continue to be favoured to enact a manager role (Choi & Hon, 2002; Broom, 2009) which according to Aldoory and Toth (2002) is a surprising reflection of gender imbalances in a gendered profession. It has been observed that the stereotypical perceptions of gender in the society influence the hiring decisions in the top management where presumably masculine traits such as aggression, dominance and competitiveness are preferred (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). There is no evidence available so far to either support or negate the proposition that the use of the Internet can help reduce the gender imbalance (if any) at the top management level. Further, it also needs to be examined whether the increased use of the Internet in the practice can aid in balancing the overall gender ratio by attracting more men. It has been argued by

Ono and Zavodny (2003) that while there are no gender differences in the adoption of the Internet, men are observed to be more frequent and intense users as compared to women. This inference is somewhat supported by a recent study conducted among a sample of 1250 New Zealanders above the age of 12 (Smith *et al.*, 2010). The research revealed that while there were equal numbers of male and female Internet users, the male users were more engaged, especially in terms of downloading videos and participating in e-commerce and online socializing (Smith *et al.*, 2010). The above two inferences indicate that it is probable that with men being more engaged with the Internet they might be attracted to a career in public relations if more Internet tools were used in practice, though further research will be required to validate this proposition. It is evidenced from the discussions in this section that while the Internet offers several opportunities for the public relations practitioner, it also raises critical issues that require more understanding and call for extensive research. The next section of this literature review analyses whether the practitioners have been successful in effectively utilizing the opportunities and combating the challenges raised by the Internet.

2.4 The Internet's usage by public relations practitioners over the years

Studies examining the extent of the Internet's usage in public relations date back to the late 1990s when an independent Los Angeles based public relations agency called 'The Bohle Company' published a report that included results of a survey of 334 American practitioners. The results stated that 95% of the respondents used e-mail extensively (The Bohle Company, 1998) suggesting that e-mail had already become commonplace in the practice. Around the same period, Esrock and Leighty (1999) examined a sample of 100 websites drawn from the list of Fortune 500 companies in the U.S. and found that 90% of the companies had a website and the majority of them were targeted at the investors, customers and the media. It was further identified that while the websites attempted to target the media, they failed to include media contacts and search tools, making it difficult for reporters to locate information. Esrock and Leighty (1999) suggest that it is likely that the websites were not managed by public relations practitioners but by technical or marketing staff and therefore were not efficient at servicing media requirements. They use the same assumption to explain why the websites were not used to proactively engage with the publics but only as a medium of information dissemination similar to traditional channels such as print and broadcast. Since there is no evidence in their study that validates that public relations practitioners

were not involved in managing the websites, it cannot be completely ruled out that the practitioners themselves might have been unsure of best practice utilization of websites. The lack of effective application of websites as revealed in the study by Esrock and Leighty (1999) could be attributed to the fact that websites were still relatively new concepts as the Web itself had developed post 1995 (refer to 1.1). It is therefore likely that the top management of organisations and public relations practitioners at that time had not completely identified the Web's scope as a medium for the ideal two-way symmetrical communication advocated by theorists such as Grunig (1992). A study by Thorsteinsson (2000) to assess whether the Internet could facilitate two-way symmetrical communication substantiates the aforementioned view. He interviewed four public relations practitioners from the U.K and Iceland and one tutor from Manchester Metropolitan University. The results revealed that while the practitioners acknowledged the possibility of using the Internet for asymmetrical communication models (press-agentry, information dissemination and two-way asymmetrical), they could not comprehend how it could be used to facilitate symmetrical dialogue with their publics (Thorsteinsson, 2000). His study evidenced that practitioners at that time felt that they lacked the fundamental understanding of the Internet as a medium of communication and what implications it held for their practice (Thorsteinsson, 2000). It can be argued that the small sample size of the above study acts as a considerable limitation in the generalization of the results. Though, a study conducted in the U.K. that covered a wider sample of senior public relations practitioners across the country validates the interpretations made by Thorsteinsson (2000). This study cited by (Stuntebeck, 2002) was conducted by the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) in 1997 and found that while 89% of practitioners agreed that the Internet will affect communications/public relations, 26% were still undecided about its impact on media relations and 30% felt that there had been no impact at all. Media relations entails maintaining relationships with the media to gain support for one's organisation (Lattimore *et al.*, 2004) and is widely acknowledged to be an important public relations function (Wilcox *et al.*, 2000; Lattimore *et al.*, 2004; Broom, 2009). The fact that practitioners were undecided about how the Internet impacted on media relations suggests that they were possibly unsure about the value of the Internet during this time. In addition, the results of a research by Taylor and Perry (2005) who conducted a series of four studies in 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2003 to examine how organisations used the Internet for crisis communication revealed that practitioners were equally uncertain of the value of the Internet for this function of public relations. They drew their sample of

92 crises by monitoring U.S. based news channels – CNN and MSNBC. According to Sandilands (2009), crisis communication in public relations implies:

...swiftly coordinating the organisation's response, advising and training spokespeople, often *being* the spokesperson, managing the critically important media liaison, keeping a close eye on public reaction and opinion, to orchestrating communication with a wide range of publics like investors, clients, employees and at times, angry or grieving members of the public. (p.105)

As discussed in section 2.2 of this chapter, the Internet can both facilitate or trigger a crisis as well as aid in mitigating or managing one (Middleberg, 2001; Holtz 2002; Alfonso & Smith, 2008, Breakenridge, 2008; Sandilands, 2009), which is why it has severe implications for crisis communication. In contrast to this view, the study by Taylor and Perry (2005) found that the public relations practitioners had not yet identified the value of the Internet in crisis communication. It was further found that on the occasions that the organisations included the Internet as part of their crisis communication plan, they relied on tactics such as uploading news releases and fact sheets (which have been labeled as 'traditional tactics' by the researchers) rather than using it to facilitate two-way conversation with the concerned publics (Taylor & Perry, 2005). It was observed that only 22 of the total 92 organisations studied followed a two-way communication approach, with no significant increase in the number of organisations between October 1998 and October 2003 (Taylor & Perry, 2005). All the above studies (Esrock & Leighty, 1999; Thorsteinsson, 2000; Stuntebeck, 2002; Taylor & Perry, 2005) and their respective arguments imply that during the initial years of the Internet's usage in public relations, the practitioners were largely unaware of the value of the Internet and the scope of its application in the practice.

A key limitation of the above studies is that they were all executed in either the U.S. or the U.K. and therefore present only a partial perspective. Sharif (2003) argues that a country's internal environment greatly influences the way public relations is practiced and the impact of the Internet can not be understood without taking the same into account. Sharif (2003) cites Sriramesh and Vercic who strongly believe that a country's economic and political infrastructure, the media environment and the societal conditions

determine how public relations is practiced and affected. In the light of the above statements, it has been noted by Jun (2002) that there is not enough international research, especially from the perspective of developing countries, that can be used to fully understand the impact of the Internet in international public relations. However, it was found that any studies done outside the U.S. and the U.K. (Jun, 2002; Sharif; 2003; Ayish, 2005) revealed trends similar to the above two countries and claimed that while the Internet had impacted on the practice, the practitioners had not been able to fully utilize the opportunities that the Internet provides.

Jun (2002) conducted a research on the usage of Internet in Korean public relations in context to its impact, use, strengths and issues, with an emphasis on evaluating corporate websites. A sample of 1200 practitioners was drawn from the 7500 members of the Korean public Relations Association and the response rate was 12.58% (Jun, 2002). The results presented by Jun (2002) indicate that the Korean practitioners surveyed predominantly used e-mail both internally (91.4%) and externally (89.4%). In relation to the websites, Jun (2002) found that although 67.5% of the practitioners felt that they should be managed by public relations departments, only 38.2% were found to be solely responsible for the websites in their organisations. Jun (2002) concluded that while Korean practitioners agreed to the positive impact of Internet in their practice, they used it primarily for information gathering and dissemination, and identified the lack of integration in strategic communication as a major issue. Jun (2002) feels that the Korean culture which is rooted in collectivity and high-context affects the strategic use of Internet in communication. Jun (2002) cites Park who explains that, "In collective and high-context cultures group bonds and harmony are viewed as important, overly precise, and analytical procedures and structures tend to be avoided" (p. 35). While Jun (2002) uses the above statement to explain the lack of strategic use of the Internet in Korea, he neither explores the co-relation nor provides an explanation as to what the term 'strategic' implies in context to Korean practitioners.

Strategic communication is widely acknowledged (Grunig & Repper, 1992; White & Mazur, 1995; Smith, 2005) as the process of planning communication campaigns in order to contribute to and be consistent with the overall strategic management of an organisation. The various elements of strategic planning in public relations are

understood to be: defining organisation goals and program objectives; assessing an organisation's environment to determine opportunities and threats; identifying and understanding the target public; establishing a strategy route to be followed; determining the tactics that will be employed; budgeting the resources; implementing the plan and evaluating the effectiveness (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000, Lattimore *et al.*, 2004, Smith, 2005). According to Grunig and Repper (1992) considerable emphasis is required on research and evaluation as part of the planning process as they help assess the success or failure of the plan and how an organisation's environment could possibly impact on the same. It is further argued that public relations practitioners need to have a broader perspective on evaluation which enables them to demonstrate the value of the public relations function in the strategic management of an organisation (Grunig, 2006). White and Dozier (1992) and Grunig (2006) suggest that public relations should rise above the 'technician' role and senior public relations practitioners should strengthen their 'manager' roles and apply their experience in gaining a significant position in the organisation's strategic decision making process. Further, Grunig and Repper (1992) advocate that in their capacity as 'managers' practitioners should ideally advocate symmetrical strategies to engage with and understand their publics rather than attempting to control them with an asymmetrical approach. A study by Park (2005) surveyed a sample of 2000 members of the PRSA in 2002 and revealed that the application of the Internet fell short of the 'ideal' strategic use as intended by practitioners. The study found that while the normative symmetrical approach was favoured, in reality the practitioners largely applied the asymmetrical strategies. In addition, it was found that the lack of public relations participation in the decision-making process at top management level had a role to play as the choice of strategy was found to be greatly influenced by the ideologies of the dominant coalition in an organisation (Park, 2005). It can be argued that since the majority of public relations theorists such as Grunig (2006) and White and Dozier (1992) are based in either the U.S. or the U.K., their theories about symmetrical communication and strategic planning reflect a Western perspective. Like in the case of Korean public relations where over-precise procedures were found to be avoided due to their high-context culture, other countries might also have similar social, political or economic settings which could impact on what theorists such as Grunig (2006) regard as strategic planning. The aforementioned argument is validated by a research conducted by Zhu, Nel and Bhat (2006) who explored the impact of culture on the communication strategies adopted across New Zealand, China, India and South Africa. According to

them, the communication strategies were influenced by the intercultural taxonomies such as high-context/low-context (as discussed above in the Korean study), individualism/collectivism and power distance (Zhu *et al.*, 2006). As an example, they argue that India has a more power-oriented culture and therefore people in the country need to apply irreplaceable strategies, whereas New Zealand reflected less power-distance and therefore more egalitarian strategies could be applied (Zhu *et al.*, 2006). Their study further found that while the goals might have been the same, the application of the communication strategy for cultivating business relationships varied across cultures as they emphasized on different values such as, "...marketing relationships and 'old mates' for the New Zealand culture, *guanxi* or friendship for the Chinese, *jan pehchan* or right connections for the Indians, and a mixture of business relationships and *ubuntu* for South Africans" (p. 335). Following from the findings discussed above, it could be suggested that if 'strategy' itself is applied differently in diverse cultural contexts, the 'strategic use' of the Internet is bound to vary, though no relevant research could be identified that might effectively establish this specific inter-relationship. Apart from the possible impact of the national cultural context on the 'strategic' application of the Internet in countries other than the U.S. and the U.K., it was observed by Kirat (2007) that the distancing of public relations from the top management could also have a role to play. He conducted a study among 24 organisations in the U.A.E to examine how their websites employed online media relations and found that their websites lacked content such as news clippings and contact information relevant to journalists (Kirat, 2007). The study revealed that this could be attributed to the fact that the public relations practitioners were not involved with the website's planning and content management and were instead relegated to a secondary role in the organisation (Kirat, 2007). This finding of the U.A.E practitioners' use of the Internet resonates with the study of the U.S. practitioners by Esrock and Leighty (2000), where it was assumed that the lack of content relevant to the media indicated that marketing or IT departments were responsible for website management. Further to this, a study by Weaver, Schoenberger-Orgad and Pope (2003) to investigate the extent of Internet usage by New Zealand practitioners also revealed findings which were similar to elsewhere in the world. The researchers found that the practitioners had a strong emphasis on applying the Internet for facilitating one-way communication rather than exhibiting a more sophisticated use (Weaver *et al.*, 2003). This study, based on a survey among 50 practitioners drawn from the membership database of PRINZ, found that while the practitioners identified the speed and immediacy of the Internet as its primary

advantage, they failed to acknowledge the strength of the Internet as a medium for fostering dialogue (Weaver *et al.*, 2003). The above mentioned revelation coincides with the findings of the American study by Taylor and Perry (2005) where they had observed that during crisis organisations used the Internet for information dissemination rather than applying it for engaging with their publics. From the above discussions, it can be observed that while the studies about the use of the Internet in public relations in countries other than the U.S. or the U.K. are few and far between, the findings appear to be fairly similar across the spectrum.

As opposed to the studies discussed earlier, more recent research for example by Alfonso and de Valbuena Miguel (2006), Lindic (2006) and Eyrich, Padman and Sweester (2008) refers to Internet tools other than e-mail and website. Lindic (2006) examined how the top 50 global Fortune 500 companies used RSS, podcasts and blogs along with e-mail and websites. The results indicated that a majority (38) of the organisations used more than one Internet tool (Lindic, 2006). According to the analysis by Lindic (2006) most of the organisations continued to rely upon e-mail and websites for communication, but there was a considerable rise in the use of RSS, especially in media relations, whereas blogs and podcasts were still struggling. A table by Lindic (2006, p.5) showcasing the cross-tabulation between the number of organisations using a particular Internet tool and the target audience of their application is presented below:

Table 2.1 Internet tools used to support individual publics

	Website	E-mail	RSS	Podcasts	Blogs
Suppliers	20	1			
Government and Community	45	7	1		1
Career	45	19			
Investor	47	27	2	2	
Customers	47	7	2	1	3
Media	49	28	11	5	5

Lindic (2006) argues that the Internet tools are yet to be fully exploited by public relations practitioners as channels of strategic communication. According to Lindic (2006) practitioners need to be more pro-active in employing relatively new tools like RSS feeds, blogs and podcasts, which are lagging behind more established ones such as websites and e-mails. The limitation of the research is that he fails to examine the possible reasons behind the sluggishness in the adoption of social media tools. While we could argue that the 'newness' of these social media tools could possibly contribute to the discomfort among the participating practitioners towards their use, there is no conclusive evidence in Lindic's (2006) study that could validate this supposition.

Another study based on the global Fortune 500 companies was conducted by Alfonso and de Valbuena Miguel (2006). The objective was to analyze the use of the Internet in the function of media relations and to identify any difference in trends among the countries included in the research (Alfonso & de Valbuena Miguel, 2006). For the purpose of the study, Alfonso and de Valbuena Miguel (2006) chose 15 companies each from six European countries (Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, Spain and the U.K.), the U.S. and Singapore, amounting to 120 companies and eight countries. According to the researchers, these countries were chosen based on their high rankings in the list prepared by The Economist and International Business Machines corporations (IBM) judging their ability to use computer mediated technologies to foster their economy's growth (p. 269). According to the results, the media was considered to be the second most important target audience after customers, with 78% of the website content uploaded to facilitate media relations, beating investors at whom 70% of the content was targeted (Alfonso & de Valbuena Miguel, 2006). This is in stark comparison to the results of an earlier study by Esrock and Leighty (1999) which showed that media was a secondary target audience to both customers and investors. In their research, Alfonso and de Valbuena Miguel (2006) also mention other Internet tools like video and audio being uploaded into the online media newsrooms, although it was noted that only 11% of the companies studied offered video files and only 7% offered audio podcasts. According to Alfonso and de Valbuena Miguel (2006) another disappointment was the sluggishness in use of RSS feeds. The following table exhibits the use of RSS feeds across the countries studied and reflects that while there is a moderate use in Germany, most other countries were lagging behind, with the overall adoption being only 9%.

Table 2.2 Percentage use of RSS feeds by organisations across sample countries

Countries	Use of RSS Feeds (%)
Denmark	14.3
France	7.1
Germany	21.4
Norway	0.0
Singapore	0.0
Spain	8.3
U.K.	7.1
U.S.A	13.3
All countries	9.0

(Alfonso & de Valbuena Miguel, 2006, p.273)

The researchers conclude that the global technology level of a country as ranked in the 'e-readiness' does not necessarily imply that new Internet tools are well exploited by public relations practitioners. "There are other factors such as the size of the companies (in terms of revenue and human resources), whether they are multinational or local, to which industry sector they belong, etc. that also determine to a great extent the adoption and development of their virtual press rooms" (Alfonso & de Valbuena Miguel, 2006, p. 274). While it explores some social media tools, this research overlooks several others such as instant chat, virtual worlds and social networks.

According to Eyrich *et al.* (2008) the research done by PRSA in 2007, surveying U.S. public relations practitioners about their use of 18 pre-defined social media tools was not only the most recent in the area of online public relations but also the first to provide data covering the widest spectrum of Internet tools. A total of 283 practitioners completed the survey and the Internet tools studied included:

...blogs, intranets, podcasts, video sharing (e.g. You Tube), photo sharing (e.g. Shutterbug, Flickr), social networks, wikis (e.g. Wikipedia), gaming, virtual worlds (e.g. Second Life), Life), micro-blogging/presence applications (e.g., Twitter, Pownce, Plurk), text messaging, videoconferencing, PDAs, instant message chat, social event/calendar systems (e.g., Upcoming, Eventful), social bookmarking (e.g., Delicious), news aggregation/RSS, and e-mail (Eyrich *et al.* 2008, p.413).

The results revealed that while practitioners have evidently adopted the more established Internet tools like e-mail (used by 96.1% of the practitioners surveyed which is reflective of society at large and resonating with studies discussed earlier) and Intranets (68.2%); they are also comfortable with other social media tools like blogs (41.7%) and podcasts (35.2%), which shows progress in the adoption of various tools when compared to data presented in an earlier study by Lindic (2006). The two studies, however, cannot be compared unconditionally as Lindic (2006) drew his data from global companies whereas the PRSA research cited by Eyrich *et al.* (2008) only refers to the American practitioners. Eyrich *et al.* (2008) cite the PRSA research findings to suggest that practitioners are slow in adopting social media tools that are technologically advanced and/or cater to a niche audience. These tools include virtual worlds (6.7%) and gaming (3.1%) and have been titled as “fringe tools” (p.414). According to Eyrich *et al.* (2008) the results also show that there are some tools like social networks (24%) which are becoming increasingly important due to attention given to them by professional development programs in public relations, but are not yet widely used and therefore remain in the “middle ground” (p.414). However, once again, this research only provides an American perspective and like Lindic’s (2006) study does not examine the challenges such as lack of training, newness of the channels and lack of management support that might be responsible for the laggardness in the adoption of social media.

2.5 Literature summary and research questions

It is evident from the literature that practitioners are yet to fully utilize the opportunities offered by the Internet. It appears that while practitioners apply online tools such as websites for information dissemination, they have not yet extended their use to facilitate symmetrical dialogue with their publics. Unfortunately, the majority of the literature has simply been focused on assessing the employment of e-mail and websites in public relations. Apart from a few recent studies, little is known about the extent to which practitioners apply social media tools such as blogs, micro-blogs and social networks which are supposedly more interactive in nature than websites.

The first research question for the present study therefore attempts to examine the extent to which 19 pre-defined Internet tools (including various social media tools) are used in public relations practice in New Zealand. These tools have been decided upon based on the PRSA study cited by Eyrich *et al.* (2008) where 18 such tools were assessed for their use by U.S. practitioners. Further to this, my own experience in the New Zealand public relations industry has also impacted on my choice, whereby I consider these tools to be sufficiently exhaustive for the scope of this study. I have, however, not included websites as they have been subject to considerable research in the past. The first research question therefore is:

RQ1: To what extent are the following Internet tools applied by public relations practitioners in New Zealand?

Blogs, micro-blogs, social networking websites, video sharing, photo sharing, wikis, podcasts, webcasts/webinars, RSS, chat forums, online gaming, virtual worlds, intranet, online newsrooms, e-alerts/newsletters, links and tags, search engine optimization, e-mail and online media monitoring.

Another limitation of existing research is that it focuses primarily on the impact of the Internet on media relations and crisis communication (see 2.3) with studies yet to be conducted on how it is used in community relations, investor relations, internal communication, government relations, marketing and brand public relations, fundraising, sponsorship and events management. This results in a narrow view not covering several important functions of public relations. This gap in the literature

informs the second research question of the present study, aiming to identify the extent of the use of the Internet tools across the entire spectrum of public relations functions.

RQ2: In which functions of public relations are the Internet tools applied?

Media relations, crisis communication, internal/employee communication, community relations, investor relations, issues management, government relations, marketing and brand PR, fundraising, sponsorship, events management, education and training and research.

It has also been observed that practitioners have paid little or no attention to being strategic in their application of the Internet. This observation was common among the majority of practitioners, whether they belonged to Korean (Jun, 2002), New Zealand (2003) or the global fortune 500 companies (Lindic, 2006). Since considerable emphasis is laid on planning in public relations in order to contribute to the overall strategic management function of an organisation (Grunig, 2006), it can be stated that assessing the strategic use the Internet becomes crucial for professional practice. The third research question for the present study therefore is:

RQ3. Are the Internet tools applied in a strategic or an *ad hoc* manner by New Zealand practitioners?

Apart from the lack of strategic application, the existing literature highlights several other concerns in regards to the use of the Internet in public relations practice. These include ethical issues regarding authorship of content, privacy and security; the need for new skills to better utilize the Internet in practice; the lack of public relations participation in online planning due to encroachment from other departments such as IT and marketing and the impact of the Internet on gender discrepancies in a largely female dominated practice. Although there were other observations such as the possible impact of culture on the strategic application of the Internet (see 2.3) and the value of bloggers for public relations practitioners (see 2.2), these have not been subject to examination in the present study as it would extend the scope beyond manageable parameters. As a result of time and resource constraints, the scope has been limited to assessing only a

few critical issues in order to provide a baseline for further study. The fourth and final research question therefore is:

RQ4. How does the use of Internet in public relations impact practitioner skills, encroachment, gender imbalances and ethics in the practice?

It is concluded that while extensive literature is not available on the topic of online public relations, the gaps identified in the existing studies have not only informed but also motivated the present research which aims to establish a foundation for future researchers and developing the profession of public relations.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the methodology used in the present study that aids in answering the research questions outlined earlier (see 2.5). A sequential mixed methods design was identified to be ideal for the purpose of this study, whereby the quantitative phase including an online survey was followed by the qualitative phase comprising in-depth interviews. The first segment of this chapter provides a critical overview of the paradigm applied that explains and justifies the choice of methodology. This is followed by a discussion as to how the mixed method technique was employed in the context of this study, including discussions about research validity, reliability and reflexivity. The final segment details the sampling, questionnaire design, instrumentation and procedures of analyses followed in the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study respectively. A separate ethics approval was attained by the AUT ethics committee for each stage (quantitative and qualitative) of the study (see Appendices A and B).

3.2 An overview of mixed methods and the pragmatic paradigm

The mixed methods research design is defined by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) as the one which uses both quantitative and qualitative techniques for data collection and analysis in either a parallel or sequential manner. According to Creswell and Clark (2007) quantitative techniques include the collection of closed-ended data that can be used to test a hypothesis based on numerical analysis. Quantitative research is known to have historically followed the positivist paradigm, whereby, the observer is separate from the entities that are being studied (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2006). A ‘paradigm’ according to Mertens (2005) is, “composed of certain philosophical assumptions that guide and direct thinking and action” (p.7). The positivist purists believed in the assumption that research should be completely objective so that the outcomes can be based in ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2006). On the other hand, qualitative techniques according to Denzin and Lincoln (2005) involve an interpretive approach to research and include the likes of case studies, interviews, personal experience and observations. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state that researchers using qualitative techniques hope to understand the phenomena under study in terms of the “meanings people bring to them” (p.3). The aforementioned view is corroborated by

Grbich (2007) who states that qualitative researchers question the underlying assumptions of positivism and are instead guided by the paradigms of constructivism and/or interpretivism, whereby, it is assumed that no objective knowledge can be generated that is independent of interpretation, therefore the concepts of 'truth' and 'reality' become subjective.

The inherent difference in the paradigms guiding quantitative and qualitative research gave birth to what Creswell and Clark (2007) called the 'paradigm debate'. This paradigm debate resulted in the purists' argument that the two methods of research are incompatible and therefore can not be combined which was questioned by introduction of the concept of 'triangulation' (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Hammersley (2008) cites Erzberger and Kelle in order explain triangulation as:

The use of different methods to investigate a certain domain of social reality can be compared with the examination of a physical object from two different viewpoints or angles. Both viewpoints provide different pictures of this object that might not be useful to validate each other but that might yield a fuller and more complete picture of the phenomenon concerned if brought together (p.27).

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) argue that the logic of triangulation implies that qualitative and quantitative methods can be combined to provide a holistic view of the phenomenon under study, thus giving birth to mixed methods. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) identify 'pragmatism' as the guiding paradigm of mixed methods, which rejects the pure concepts of 'truth' and 'reality' and argues that the choice of method(s) depends on the purpose of the research. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) further suggest that pragmatism provides the freedom to:

Study what interests and is of value to you, study it in the different ways that you deem appropriate, and utilize the results in ways that can bring about positive consequences within your value system" (p. 21).

The pragmatic paradigm advocates mixed methods, which have been argued by Bryman (2008) to provide several benefits to researchers. The use of mixed methods helps to offset the weakness of a solitary method and draw on the strengths of both. The usage of triangulation not only leads to greater validity but also provides a comprehensive approach to research, whereby one method could be used to explain the findings of another or investigate deeper in case of unexpected results (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Bryman, 2008). But, in addition to the advantages, Bryman (2008) suggests that mixed methods also have certain flaws. The occurrence of contradictory findings in the two methods might alter the results in a minor or major way, depending on the interpreting ability of the researcher. Also, interpretation itself might pose as a challenge with difficulties in integrating numerical and textual data. Additionally, bias might play an overwhelming role; especially in a sequential design where results of one method are known before conducting the other; thereby influencing the researcher's interpretation (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Bryman, 2008).

3.3 The application of mixed methods to the present research

The research discussed in this thesis follows a sequential mixed methods design of explanatory nature, which is a two-phase design where the collection of quantitative data is subsequently followed by the collection of qualitative data. The purpose of using this design is rooted in the assumption that qualitative results will help 'explain' and/or 'expand' the quantitative data collected in the first phase (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Mertens, 2005; Creswell & Clark, 2007). In context to the present study, the first phase consisted of an anonymous online survey to gather numerical data about the trends in the use of Internet in public relations in New Zealand. It was noted that some of the questions; like the ones pertaining to the strategic use of Internet and the impact of Internet on ethics, gender, skills and encroachment required more explanation to provide a better understating of the results. It was therefore deemed necessary to conduct a second phase of research including semi-structured interviews with senior practitioners so that their rich experience could be used to inform and explain the survey findings and present a complete view of the phenomenon studied. The merit of choosing a sequential design as explained by Creswell and Clark (2007) was that the research was easier to implement with only one kind of data collected and analysed at a time. However, several challenges were also faced in following this research design. The first being a pragmatic one: the research ideally needed to completed within an academic

year and thus there was limited time available to apply the full spectrum of the mixed method approach. Creswell and Clark (2007) suggest that adequate time be allocated to the qualitative phase in particular as it is known to be more time consuming. For this purpose, the interviews conducted in the qualitative phase were limited to ten, as the number was sufficient to validate the findings and more manageable within the time-frame. Also, practitioners from only Auckland and Wellington were interviewed to save time spent in travelling. The qualitative sampling is discussed in detail under section 3.5 of this chapter.

Another concern was the application of the concepts of internal and external validity to the mixed methods design. According to Cavana, Delahaye and Sekaran (2001) internal validity refers to the presence of a cause and effect relationship between the variables in a quantitative study. In qualitative research it is explained as the ‘credibility’ of the account provided by the subjects. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) suggest that for the purpose of mixed method studies, internal validity and credibility should collectively be called “inference quality” (p.36). The present study being based in pragmatism rejects the notions of pure ‘truth’ and ‘reality’, however to ensure a good inference quality, sampling techniques based on best practice advice are followed (refer to sections 3.4 and 3.5 for details of sampling techniques for each phase). Also, as noted earlier, the interview phase was guided by the need to explain the ‘missing links’ of the survey results, thus, enhancing the inference quality. Additionally, since the interpretation is based on corroborating the quantitative and qualitative data, the limitations of each method are offset by the combined strength of both thereby improving inference quality.

When explaining external validity, Cavana *et al.* (2001) refer to the extent to which the results can be generalised beyond the conditions of the study being conducted. This concept is drawn from quantitative research and is referred to as ‘transferability’ in qualitative research. Once again, Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) suggest that the two terms be collectively referred to as “inference transferability” (p.37). It has also been suggested by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) that inference transferability is relative and interpretations cannot be “fully transferable to *all* (or even most) settings, populations (of entities, people, texts, etc.), or time periods” (p.42), though some degree of transferability is possible. Since the scope of this study is limited to the practitioners in

New Zealand, where the sample was drawn from the database of members of the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ), a complete transferability across all populations, settings or times was not intended and cannot be guaranteed. In the quantitative phase, a snowball sampling was used to offset part of this limitation by attempting to reach practitioners who were not PRINZ members. In the qualitative phase, the interviews were purposefully restricted to senior PRINZ members since the aim of the second phase was not generalisation but enhancing validity.

Along with validity, 'reliability' is also considered as a component of a good research. It is primarily drawn from quantitative research and is understood to be the accuracy or dependability of the method employed so that consistent results can be assured (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Wrench *et al.*, 2008). Reasonable measures have been taken to ensure that the quantitative data collected is reliable. Firstly, the two Likert scale related questions in the survey included items that were all in the same direction to avoid any confusion in answering. Additionally to ensure consistency, the results obtained from the coded data analysis on SPSS were cross-checked with those obtained from the online survey data collection tool called 'Survey Monkey'. Further to this, Cronbach's Alpha reliability test was conducted for the coded survey data on SPSS, which showed that Cronbach's Alpha was equal to 0.937. It has been suggested by Wrench *et al.* (2008) that the above test is one of the most commonly used to determine reliability in social sciences research and a measure greater than 0.90 is a reflection of highly reliable data. Additionally, since a qualitative phase followed the survey, it was noted that the results were complementary to the survey data collected, therefore indicating that the mixed methods approach helped in enhancing the overall reliability.

Besides reliability and validity (or inference quality and inference transferability as it is called in mixed methods); reflexivity, which is a component of qualitative research, is also given significance in the present study. In qualitative research, an interpretation is reached through the collaboration of the subjective views of the respondent and the researcher. Since the researcher speaks from a particular lens of culture, gender, ethnicity and class; the possibility of bias cannot be ignored. It is likely that the researcher's past experiences and emotions might affect the interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Grbich, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008). It is therefore suggested

that the researcher must be critically reflexive and identify possible biases (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008). For the purpose of attaining reflexivity, it becomes necessary for me as the researcher to identify my social background that might impact on my interpretations. I come from a liberal, middle-class Indian family and have been residing in New Zealand for the past two years. Having worked as an editor with a leading website in India and currently working closely with online tools in the public relations industry in New Zealand, I have an understanding of the usage of the Internet in both journalism and public relations. My attempt is to position myself as an outsider and provide an objective view of the trends in New Zealand, although it can be suggested that my involvement with the public relations industry in this country positions me closer to the subjects of this study and therefore my interpretations are not likely to be overshadowed by my cultural and ethnic descent.

3.4 Quantitative data collection and analysis methods

A survey methodology was chosen for the quantitative study based on the fact that by following certain principles of design; sampling; distribution; data coding and statistical analysis, a survey could scientifically collect quantifiable data that could represent a population without examining the entire population. Additionally, since this is the first study of its kind in a New Zealand context (as far as could reasonably be established), the reliability test was essential to ensure that the results are stable and dependable. A scientific reliability test was possible only with a survey methodology where data could be coded and uploaded on SPSS for measuring 'Cronbach's Alpha' along with other statistical analyses (Cavana *et al.*, 2001; Czaja & Blair, 2005; Wrench *et al.*, 2008).

Regarding the design of the survey questionnaire, there were eight questions in total (See Appendix C) with an overall estimated completion time of five minutes. The survey contained seven closed-ended questions followed by an open-ended question. The first question sought classification data about the 'area of work' of the survey respondents. This question aimed at categorizing the respondents into in-house practitioners, consultants, freelancers and others. This was done to facilitate cross-tabulation of data to identify and interpret the variance (if any) in Internet adoption between these categories of practitioners. A previous research by Weaver *et al.* (2003) studied the impact of Internet in New Zealand public relations by categorizing

practitioners into in-house and consultancies. The variation in their findings led me to assume that there might be a difference between these two categories of practitioners as they have different work environments, time demands, resource availabilities and functions (Weaver *et al.*, 2003; Tymson & Lazar, 2006; Broom, 2009). Area of work therefore was the first variable to be studied.

The second question sought classification data in context to the 'experience of the respondents in public relations'. The purpose of including this question was to test if the variable of experience had any correlation with the manner in which the Internet tools were used; therefore answering research sub-questions one, two and three pertaining to the extent of use, area of application and use of strategy. Since the second question was measured in number of years, a closed range of options (zero-four years; five-nine years and so on) were provided to avoid any ambiguity and facilitate the coded analysis (Cavana *et al.*, 2001).

The third question of the survey tested the variable of 'years of Internet usage' and following the pattern of question two, had a closed range of options (zero-two years, three-five years and so on). The results did not directly answer any research question but highlighted Internet familiarity (or the lack thereof) among the public relations practitioners surveyed. The above three questions sought demographic data of the respondents. It is suggested by Wrench *et al.*, (2008) that such questions should be placed towards the end of the survey, because respondents tend to become fatigued while answering a long survey and can easily answer the demographic questions in the end without much cognitive thinking. Additionally, respondents might get irritated by answering extremely personal questions in the start and their subsequent answers might get biased (Cavana *et al.*, 2001). Since neither of these issues were deemed to impact on this study (as the questions were not of extremely private nature such as those pertaining to state of health or income and the survey itself had only eight questions that required five minutes to complete, therefore not long enough to fatigue the respondents) they were placed at the beginning. Additionally, the placement of the demographic questions at the start was based on the recommendations of members of the PRINZ Ethics Committee, who pre-tested the survey questionnaire. As opposed to the view presented by Wrench *et al.*, (2008) the committee members argued that respondents

were more likely to provide demographic data at the start as it required little thinking before proceeding to other time-taking questions.

The fourth question in the survey pertained to investigating whether the Internet tools were applied strategically or not, therefore the results directly answering research sub-question number three. The only earlier study that could be used as a reference to judge the strategic use of Internet by New Zealand practitioners was the one study by Weaver *et al.* (2003). The study revealed that although there was a desire among practitioners to be more strategic, they were unable to be so (Weaver *et al.*, 2003). Survey question four therefore aimed to identify if the present situation was any different from the one observed by Weaver *et al.* (2003).

The fifth question in the survey used an interval scale to examine the variable of 'frequency of the use' of the nineteen Internet tools itemised to be measured on the scale (See Appendix C). A five-point Likert Scale with the anchors 'all the time', 'most of the time', 'sometimes', 'rarely' and 'never' was used to answer research sub-question one pertaining to the extent of use of the Internet in public relations. The use of an interval scale facilitated the computation of statistical analyses such as deriving a mean, standard deviation and variance; therefore providing a better understanding of the magnitude of differences in use of various Internet tools (Cavana *et al.*, 2001; Corbetta, 2003).

The sixth survey question asked respondents to identify the functions of their practice in which the nineteen Internet tools were applied. It has been observed in the literature that most of the existing research, such as the ones by Esrock and Leighty (2000); Stuntebeck (2002); Taylor and Perry (2005); Lindic (2006) and Alfonso and de Valbuena Miguel (2006), has focused on the use and impact of Internet in the functions of media relations and crisis communications, while other public relations functions such as community relations, investor relations, government relations, marketing and brand PR, fundraising, sponsorship and events management have largely been ignored (see 2.5). The sixth question of the survey was therefore designed to fill this gap. It

provided a list of functions in a multiple-choice format (See Appendix C) where more than one option could be chosen to identify the functions in which Internet is applied.

The seventh question was again based on an interval scale to measure the degree of attitudinal response with seven statements about the impact of Internet on public relations. A Likert scale with anchors 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'agree' and 'strongly agree' was used. The topics explored in these statements related to the impact of the Internet on opportunities, challenges, skills, gender imbalances, encroachment and ethics. The eighth and final question was an open-ended question that asked respondents to identify how their own job had been affected by the Internet. The results aimed to answer sub-question four pertaining to the impact of the Internet on the public relations practice in the form of the opportunities, issues and challenges it creates. An open-ended question is designed to allow the survey respondents to further explore a concept by not limiting their response to pre-determined options or scales (Cavana *et al.*, 2001). It is considered best to keep the open-ended question at the end as by then the respondents have a fair understanding of the kind of information that the survey seeks. It is likely that the respondents might get confused or annoyed to start a survey with a question that does not define any answer options and requires them to dwell straight into a cognitive process (Cavana *et al.*, 2001).

Various other points were also considered when designing the survey questionnaire. The first being the attempt to provide an exhaustive set of options in case of multiple-choice questions, so that the respondents could make a clear choice. Defining a larger number of mutually exclusive choices instead of a few vague ones helps reduce the possibility of variance in interpretation by different respondents and therefore enhances reliability (Groves *et al.*, 2004). Considering the above; in question number one that pertains to the respondent's area of work and question number six which relates to functions in which Internet is applied; the open-ended option of 'other' was also provided in case the defined options were not exhaustive enough. Additionally, care was taken to ensure that the wording of the questions was simple and explicit to avoid ambiguity in interpretation and response. As per the recommendations of the PRINZ Ethics Committee members who pre-tested the survey; technical or loaded words were

avoided and in the case of some questions an explanation was provided to ensure that the respondents were clear about the scope of the question. For example, in question number eight, which prompted an open response as to how the respondent's own role had been affected by the Internet, a line of explanation guided the respondents to focus on the key job areas that had been affected. This ensured that all the respondents could comprehend the question and answer in the same context, making the interpretations more consistent across respondents (Groves *et al.*, 2004).

Following the completion of the survey design, the next stage in survey methodology was the sampling of the respondents. A sample is the subset of the population under study that can be examined to represent the population as a whole (Cavana *et al.*, 2001). The population to be studied in this research was the public relations practitioners of New Zealand. Since there were no statistics available on the total number of practitioners, I relied upon the data published by the local professional body called the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ), which as per their 2009 Annual Report had a membership of 1261 on 31 December 2008. The report also cited the 'TRENDS survey' conducted by PRINZ in September 2008 which had a sample of 734 respondents drawn from PRINZ members, former members and various network groups in the communication industry. The survey has been an annual exercise by PRINZ since 2006 to provide data on the trends in the profession for recruiters, employees and academics (PRINZ, 2009). According to the 2008 survey; out of every 100 practitioners surveyed; 74 were females, 74 either worked in Auckland or Wellington, 75 had at least a degree qualification and 72 belonged to PRINZ. The survey also revealed that nearly two-thirds of the practitioners were employed in-house as opposed to in consultancies (PRINZ, 2008). Since no other source of population estimation or description was available, I relied on the information available on the PRINZ website (www.prinz.org.nz) and chose the 1358 practitioners listed on it in June 2009 as the sampling frame. The sampling frame is understood to be a list of all the elements in the population from which a sample is drawn (Cavana *et al.*, 2001).

The technique of probability sampling was followed and it involved the random selection of every second member in the PRINZ database. This method of sampling was used as the purpose was to select individuals that could represent the population so that

the results had the potential to be generalised. A random selection ensures that each person in the sampling frame has an equal chance of being selected (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Wrench *et al.*, 2008). However, as noted by the PRINZ 2008 TRENDS survey, there were more in-house practitioners as compared to those who worked in consultancies, therefore to avoid misrepresentation; a disproportionate stratified random sampling was followed. This meant stratifying the 1358 members into in-house and consultants and then disproportionately drawing a random sample from each stratum (Cavana *et al.*, 2001; Creswell & Clark, 2007). Eventually a total sample of 350 PRINZ members was drawn with 229 in-house practitioners and 121 consultants. This technique was considered valuable as ‘area of work’ (in-house or consultancy) was a variable in the study and therefore could be better examined following an appropriate representation of each stratum. Overall, the total sample of 350 was considered as a good size to represent the 1358 individuals in the sampling frame according to a table (see Appendix D) provided by Cavana *et al.* (2001). However, since according to the TRENDS survey 72 out of 100 public relations practitioners belonged to PRINZ, it implied that 18 were non-members (PRINZ, 2008). To offset the limitation of their non-representation, a snowball sampling was also incorporated, whereby, the chosen sample was asked to forward the survey to any interested non-PRINZ members. Since the survey was anonymous, it is not known whether the results reflect the views of non-PRINZ practitioners as well and it is acknowledged that complete inference transferability, though attempted, cannot be guaranteed.

The next stage in survey methodology after sampling was the distribution of the survey. The questionnaire was formatted using an online survey creation tool called ‘Survey Monkey’. An online survey (see Appendix E) was used because it was a low cost method to reach the 350 individuals in the geographically dispersed sample. The only expense involved was an annual registration fee of \$200 for Survey Monkey, which amounted to 0.57 cent per individual. This was comparatively less than what would have been incurred on telephone calls, travelling, printing, postage etc. in case other modes like face-to-face or mail surveys were used. More follow-up was also possible at no additional cost (Czaja & Blair, 2005). The lack of Internet access among the sample could pose as an obstacle in using online surveys. However, an e-mail address was available on the PRINZ website for every individual in the sample. This implied that they had access to the Internet and could be contacted via e-mail. Consequently, for

some individuals a telephone number or postal address was not listed, making it difficult to reach them via telephone or mail surveys. It is understood that lengthy online surveys or those with embedded pictures of multi-media tools take long to download, causing irritability in respondents leading to a low response rate (Czaja & Blair, 2005). This limitation was overcome by avoiding any graphics or multi-media features other than the AUT University logo. Additionally, a simple clutter-free format was chosen to avoid strain on the eyes and facilitate quick downloading. However, technical difficulties arising out of browser issues, low connection speeds etc. were beyond the control of the survey administration. Attempts were made to keep the navigation simple by providing 'prev' and 'next' buttons to move front and back in the survey. This ensured that the respondents did not get confused or burdened while answering. A progress indicator was also provided on top of the survey, since it was not a long one. Manfreda and Vehovar (2008) suggest that in a survey with many pages; a progress indicator might remind them of the length remaining causing them to quit early, but it reduces drop-outs in a short survey as it assures that the survey is nearly finished. A major concern in administering an online survey was that of sending the invitations. It was likely for the e-mail containing the survey link to be ignored or be treated like spam as it would be coming from an unknown source. (Manfreda & Vehovar, 2008). To offset this limitation, Paul Dryden, the Executive Director of PRINZ, was requested to send a pre-notification e-mail to all the individuals in the sample. This e-mail contained a brief note about the purpose of the survey, an assurance of its legitimacy and encouraged participation. According to Manfreda and Vehovar (2008) such pre-notifications are known to be effective in increasing the response rate. Following this, the actual invitation e-mail was sent that included the link to the online survey with an information sheet (see Appendix F) attached. The information sheet included details about the survey and the research; information about ethical approval, voluntary consent and privacy as well as researcher and supervisor contact details in case of further queries. For reassurance, a note about the anonymity of the participation was also provided at the start of the online survey as is considered best practice (Groves *et al.*, 2004; Czaja & Blair, 2005; Manfreda & Vehovar, 2008).

A time of fifteen days was provided for the respondents to complete the survey, at the end of which, a reminder e-mail was sent and a further time of seven days was given to allow for more responses. Of the 350 e-mails sent, 43 bounced back as delivery failures

due to out-of-office settings or wrong e-mail addresses. From the remaining 307, 133 responses were collected, accounting to a 44.3% response rate, which was deemed as above average and therefore considered acceptable and reliable. This judgement is based on the research done by Sheehan (2001) where 31 studies about the response rates of surveys distributed via e-mails (sourced from eight online databases) were examined. The findings revealed that on an average the studies reported a mean response rate of 36.83% (Sheehan, 2001), implying that the 44.3% rate of the present study is better than the expected average.

All of the responses received were then analysed in the final stage of the quantitative phase of this study. The data collected via Survey Monkey was coded into an Excel sheet, which implies conversion of the results into numeric data (Groves *et al.*, 2004). This coded data was uploaded onto the data management system SPSS for the purpose of conducting statistical tests and analyses. The variables as referred to earlier in this chapter were: area of work, experience (years), usage of Internet (years), usage of strategy, frequency of use, area of application. Additionally, survey question seven pertaining to the measurement of attitude towards seven statements about change in the practice as a result of the Internet was divided into the seven corresponding variables namely: overall change in practice, increase in opportunities, increase in challenges, increase in encroachment, reduction in gender imbalance, new skills and new ethics. The negative scaling pertaining to data collected in response to 'reduction in gender imbalances' was reversed to match the other six so that the coding was consistent. The tests on all the variables were limited to frequency distribution analyses, cross-tabulation, measures of central tendency including mean, median and mode and Pearson's co-relations coefficient. The reason was that the above tests revealed sufficient data that could be used for meaningful and valuable interpretation and covered the entire scope of the quantitative study. Although it can be recommended that future researchers on this topic can use other tests such as inferential analysis and non-parametric analysis to expand their interpretative scope, it was not deemed necessary. Being the first study of its kind, the purpose was to provide basic statistics that could be used as a starting-point. For the purpose of the open-ended question 'enumerative content analysis' was used, where the repetition of words in a text was assumed to reflect their importance (Grbic, 2007). The text was first coded according the number of times certain words were repeated and then a word frequency was generated. The

rank ordering of these frequencies subsequently facilitated an understanding what the survey respondents thought were the main changes caused by the Internet to their jobs. A detailed discussion of the results of all the statistical analyses conducted during the quantitative phase is presented in chapter four.

3.5 Qualitative data collection and analysis

The analysis of the quantitative data obtained from the first phase of this study revealed that certain aspects required further explanation in order to make valuable interpretations. For example, although it was known that the majority of the public relations practitioners surveyed used strategy ‘sometimes’ while applying Internet tools (details of the survey results are discussed in chapter four), the reason behind that could not be established from the quantitative data. Similarly in regards to the open-ended question in the survey; while it was evident from the results that practitioners agreed that there was a rise in challenges and a change in skills and ethics, the nature and extent of these changes was not known. Another concern was that there was no clear consensus on what the practitioners felt about the impact of the Internet on encroachment and gender imbalances. Therefore, as explained earlier in this chapter, the qualitative phase was aimed at filling the gaps to enhance the research validity and reliability (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Creswell & Clark, 2007). For the purpose of this phase, it was decided to conduct in-depth interviews. Such interviews usually involve a one-on-one, face-to-face interaction that builds a degree of intimacy; thereby facilitating disclosure (Johnson, 2002). These were chosen as the aim was to elicit a rich experiential account from the interviewees that could provide depth and details about the topics which required further investigation (Johnson, 2002). The interviews followed a semi-structured pattern, whereby an outline of the topics to be covered was created and each topic was introduced with an open question (See Appendix G) for the interviewee to dwell in (Flick, 2002; Corbetta, 2003). This pattern ensured that a rapport was developed with the interviewee, who didn’t feel controlled and could answer comfortably and explicitly (Flick, 2002). The order of the questions or topics to be covered was kept flexible and depended on the flow of the interview. Additionally as is best practice, explanations were provided in case the interviewee was unsure of the questions; clarifications were sought when the answers were ambiguous and probing was done when further elucidation was required (Corbetta, 2003).

The selection of the interviewees was based on purposive sampling, which required the choice of sample to be based on certain criteria (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The criterion in this study was that the participants were required to be senior practitioners in the field of public relations so that their rich experience could be used to expand and explain the survey results. Once again, the guidance of Paul Dryden, the Executive Director of PRINZ, was sought to identify the more experienced PRINZ members who could provide valuable input for the study. Since limited time was available, a convenience sampling was followed and the individuals who could be easily reached (Cavana *et al.*, 2001) based on their location, were selected from the list provided by Dryden. The purpose was to select practitioners from Auckland (since I reside there) and Wellington (so that a single trip would suffice) to minimise the time and cost involved in travelling. The use of convenience sampling is likely to affect the transferability of the results as practitioners in other smaller cities might differ in opinions (see Sterne, 2008). However, the PRINZ Trends survey conducted in 2008 (discussed earlier in the quantitative study) had revealed that 74 out of the 100 public relations practitioners surveyed lived in either Auckland or Wellington, thereby covering a majority and validating the choice of sample. Further, to save time, only ten individuals were selected in the sample. This did not impact on the reliability of the results as the guiding factor was not generalisation via a large sample but providing quality data that could explicate the survey results. Following the sampling design of the quantitative study, here too, the selected sample had a mixture of consultants and in-house practitioners to better identify the variance in their opinions regarding the topics which required further investigation.

To make a contact with the participants, an e-mail introducing the study was sent, with an information sheet attached. The information sheet (See Appendix H) provided further details about the purpose and nature of the study with explicit details about consent and privacy of the participants. Once consent was received, further contact was made via e-mail, telephone or personal interaction to determine a suitable time and location for the interview. All participants (barring one who chose a cafe), chose their office for the interview as it was more convenient to them. This proved advantageous as the participants did not feel overwhelmed or controlled by the researcher and answered without any discomfort (Cavana *et al.*, 2001). All the interviews commenced with a rapport building exercise which covered exchanging pleasantries, introducing the study,

providing a copy of the information sheet and taking written consent. This ensured that the inhibitions (if any) were removed and trust was built to facilitate natural flow of information during the interview (Cavana *et al.*, 2001). In addition to note taking, a Dictaphone was used to record the interviews, so that they could later be transcribed for the purpose of interpretation. The participants were informed that their inputs will be recorded and none had any concerns regarding the same. The questions in the interviews pertained to the impact of the Internet on ethics, gender imbalances, skills, encroachment and the relationship between young and senior practitioners (See Appendix G). All of these questions were aimed at answering research sub-question number four relating to the changes in the practice in the form of opportunities, challenges and issues raised by the Internet. Additionally, there were questions that examined whether the use of Internet was complimentary or supplementary to the traditional mediums and strategic or ad-hoc. These attempted to answer research sub-question three relating to the strategic use of Internet in public relations. Overall, these questions were an attempt to provide an explanation of certain trends that were not completely comprehended with the survey results. The last question to wrap-up the interview was “that is all the questions I have, do you have any final comments?” This covered any unexpected information or concluding remarks from the participants.

After the completion of the interviews, the recorded information was manually transcribed into documents to facilitate analysis. For analysing the transcripts, thematic content analysis was used. In the initial stage, open coding was followed to identify and code the dominant themes emerging from the transcripts. The next stage was axial coding, whereby, the themes were compared amongst each other and concepts or categories were developed that represented similar themes. The last stage was selective coding, whereby the number of participants who mentioned a particular theme was included to indicate the strength of an opinion on a dominant concept (Cavana *et al.*, 2001; Grbic, 2007). The thematic content analysis allowed for contextualisation and development of theoretical interpretations which could support and elucidate the survey results. The results of this thematic analysis of the qualitative data are presented in chapter four.

3.6 Summary of the research methodology

It is concluded that the sequential mixed method design was the most appropriate for the purpose of the present study as it helped offset the limitations of relying purely on either quantitative or qualitative techniques. The qualitative data collected in the second phase of the study could be used to explain the trends identified in the quantitative phase, so that the overall interpretations demonstrated an enhanced inference quality. As evidenced in this chapter, reasonable measures have been taken to ensure that the sampling of the participants is representative of the population of the New Zealand public relations practitioners, though a complete transferability cannot be expected. While statistical analyses were used to examine the data collected from the online survey in the quantitative phase, thematic analysis was applied for the textual data obtained from the interviews. The two sets of data were then collectively interpreted in an attempt to answer the research questions of this study. The next chapter provides the results of the quantitative phase of this study which outline the numerical trends in the use of the Internet by public relations practitioners in New Zealand. While these numerical results alone are not sufficient to answer all the research questions, they provide a foundation for future researchers and also identify specific areas which could be explored further in the qualitative phase of the present study.

Chapter 4: Survey Results

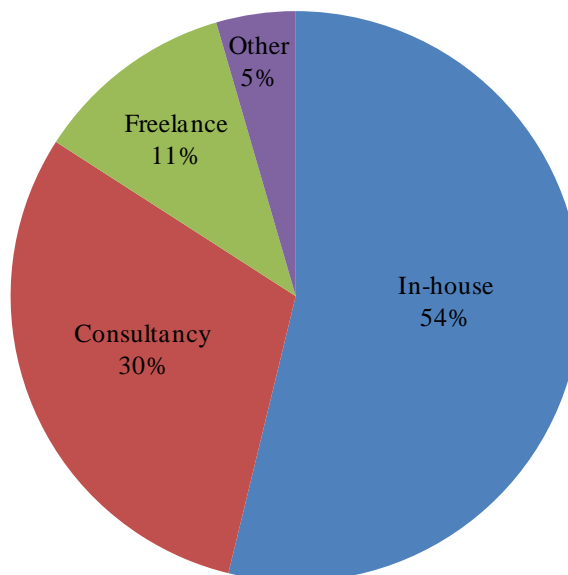
4.1 Introduction

The quantitative study in this research intended to identify the trends in the application of Internet tools in New Zealand's public relations practice by gathering numerical data through an online survey. This chapter presents the results of the statistical analyses that were conducted on the data collected from the 133 survey respondents. Figures and tables have been used to exhibit the statistical data obtained from the survey results in relation to the seven closed-ended and one open-ended question asked in the survey. These questions pertained to obtaining classification data from the participants along with identifying the frequency of their use of the 19 Internet tools (see 2.5) and the extent to which they are applied across the spectrum of public relations functions. Attitudinal data towards seven statements measuring the impact of the Internet on certain key aspects (opportunities, challenges, skills, ethics, gender and encroachment) of the practice is also depicted. Finally the results of a content analysis conducted on the textual data obtained from the last open-ended question are also shown using frequency measurement of the prominent thematic categories identified. Descriptive statistics, including percentage distributions and measures of central tendency such as mean, median and mode, are reported across variables (see 3.4 for discussion on variables). Additionally, cross-tabulation has been used to depict a comparison between the percentage distributions of certain variables. Classification variables such as 'area of work' and 'years of experience' have primarily been used for the purpose of cross-tabulation as they facilitate the identification of differences in trends (or the lack thereof) among the various categories of respondents. Finally, Pearson's co-relation test has also been applied on some of the cross-tabulated variables to measure the degree of inter-dependence between them. As mentioned earlier (see 3.1) all the survey questions were approved by the Ethics Committee at AUT University (see Appendix A) and are enlisted for reference in Appendix C. The format of the online survey can be viewed in Appendix E. The results presented in this chapter are in order of the questions asked in the online survey and each section is titled according to the variable measured in the question.

4.2 Area of Work

The first question of the survey aimed at obtaining demographic information of the survey respondents about their area of work. This question was answered by 132 of the 133 respondents and the analysis revealed that the majority of them worked as in-house practitioners, as opposed to being employed with public relations consultancies. This mirrors the disproportionate stratified random sampling technique that was followed to avoid misrepresentation, since it was known from the results of the PRINZ 2008 Trends survey that two-thirds of the practitioners in New Zealand work in-house (see 3.4). The results of the present survey reveal that in addition to working as in-house practitioners and in consultancies, a small percentage of respondents were freelancers and a handful 'others' that included: marketing manager, lecturer, CEO, PR department with a full service communications agency and an independent consultant. One respondent also indicated at being a 'seconded from in-house'. Figure 4.1 is a pictorial classification of the survey respondents according to their area of work.

Figure 4.1: Area of work of the survey respondents

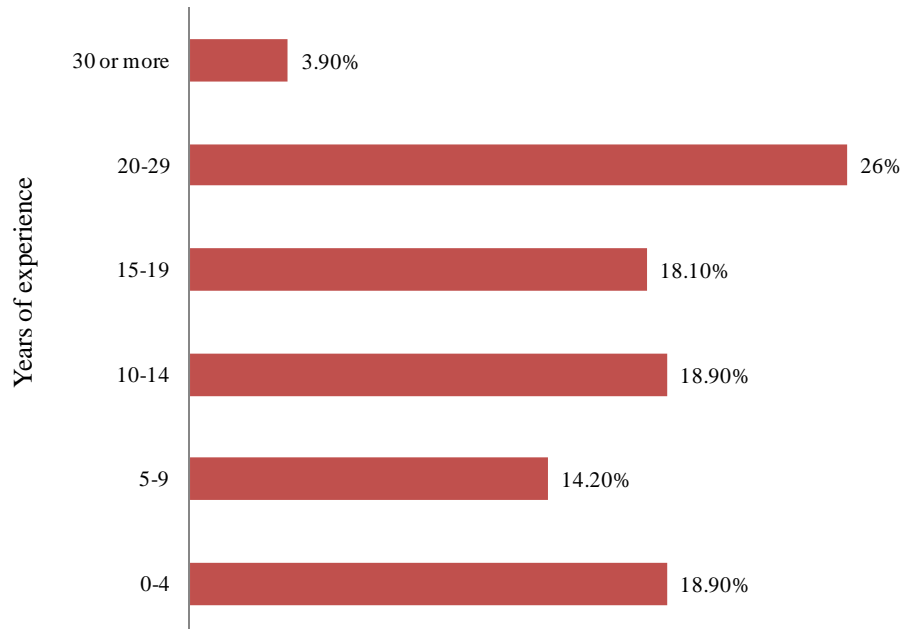


4.3 Years of Experience

127 of the 133 participants responded to the survey question pertaining to the years of experience in the practice. The results revealed that the experience of the survey

respondents was reasonably spread over the various categories provided. However, the majority of them had been in the practice for a longer period of time.

Figure 4.2: Experience of the survey respondents in the public relations practice



The measures of the central tendency (mean, median and mode) that signify the average experience and the measure of dispersion (standard deviation and variance) that represent the spread around the average experience (Alreck & Settle, 1995) are presented in table 4.1. The results imply that on average the respondents had ten to fourteen years experience. This corresponds with the results of the 2008 PRINZ Trends survey conducted among the practitioners in New Zealand, which showed that the practitioners had an average experience of 11.2 years in the practice with an overall experience of 19.4 years (PRINZ, 2009).

Table 4.1: Central tendency and dispersion of the years of experience

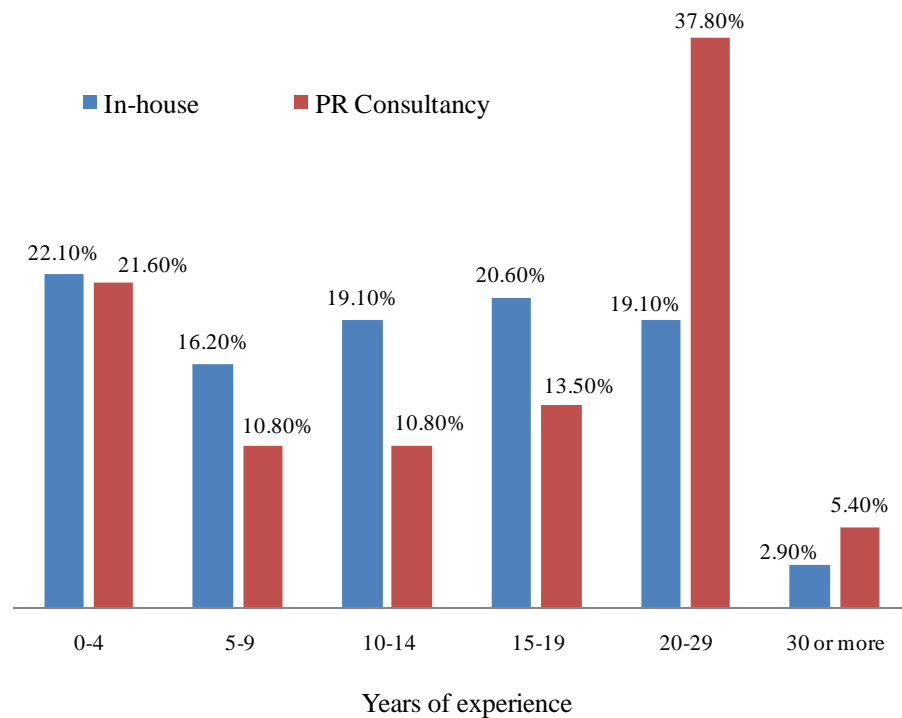
Mean	3.30	Mode	5
Median	3.00	Standard Deviation	1.550
Valid	127	Missing	7

Minimum value is 1 (0 to 4 years of experience)

Maximum value is 6 (30 or more years of experience)

A cross-tabulation between the 'years of experience' of the survey respondents and their 'area of work' revealed that majority of the more experienced respondents worked in public relations consultancies. On the other hand, the in-house respondents were almost evenly spread over the different experience levels, as shown below in figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3: Experience of the survey respondents by area of work

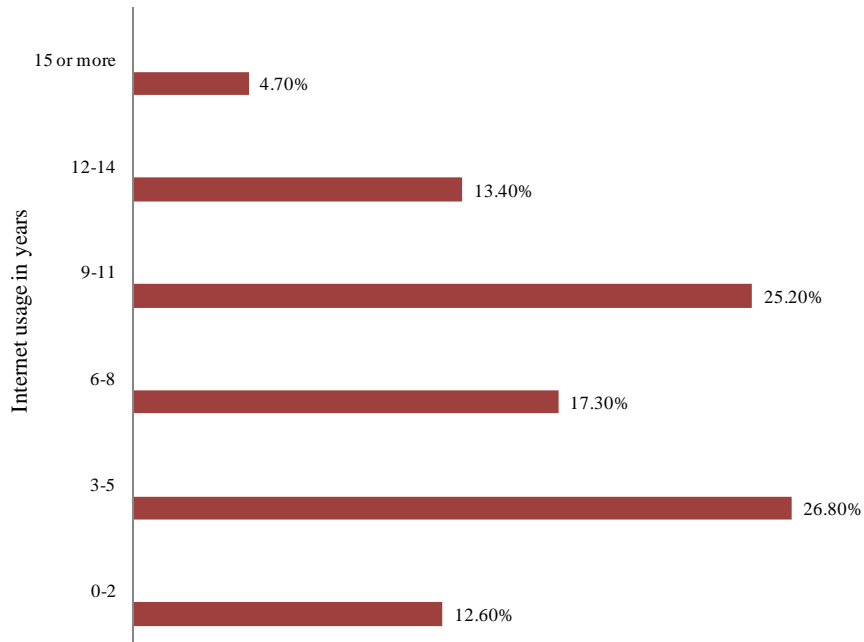


4.4 Length of Internet usage in communication planning

Respondents were asked to select the number of years they have been using the Internet as part of their communication plans. The maximum option was that of fifteen or more years followed by 12 to 14, 9 to 11 and so forth. A small range of three years was chosen in each option to avoid any ambiguity in results. The maximum range of 15 or more years was defined based on the knowledge that the Internet itself began impacting on our ordinary lives in the late 1990s with the popularity of the World Wide Web (see

1.1) and therefore it would be highly unlikely for any practitioners to have been using the Internet prior to that. Once again 127 of the 133 participants responded to this questions and the results revealed that the majority of the respondents have been using the Internet in their communication plans for three to five years, closely followed by nine to eleven years.

Figure 4.4: Years of Internet usage in communication plans of the survey respondents



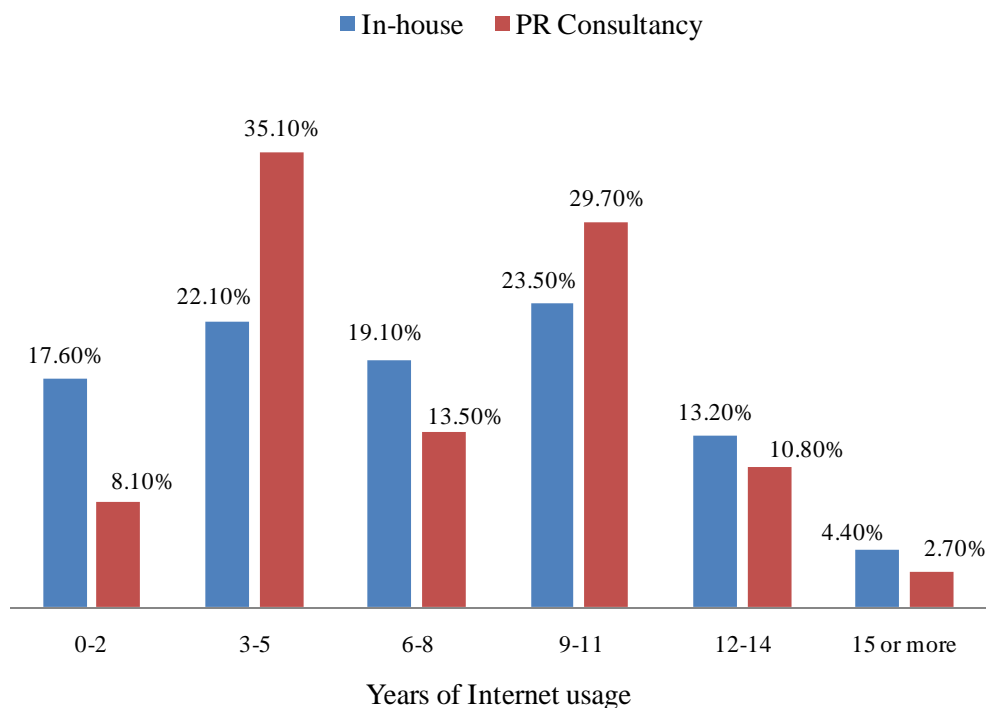
As per the measures of central tendency, the average length of usage of the Internet in the communication plans of the survey respondents was six to eight years as shown in the table below. This indicates that the New Zealand practitioners began using the Internet much later than when it became popular (nearly 15 years ago).

Table 4.2 Central tendency and dispersion of the years of experience

Mean	3.14	Mode	2
Median	3	Standard Deviation	.947
Valid	127	Missing	7
Minimum value is 1(0 to 2 years of Internet usage)			
Maximum value is 6 (15 or more years of Internet usage)			

A cross-tabulation was done between the ‘length of Internet usage’ and the ‘area of work’ of the respondents to identify if there was a variance in the pattern between in-house practitioners and those working in consultancies. The results showed that a large proportion of the respondents from consultancies had been using the Internet in their plans for either three to five years or nine to eleven years, whereas the use by in-house practitioners was more or less spread across the different ranges as shown in figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5: Years of Internet usage in communication plans by area of work



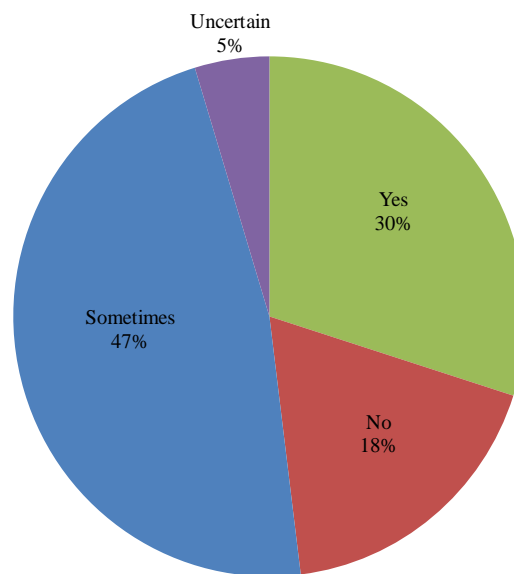
Pearson’s co-relation test was run to examine the degree of co-relation between the two cross-tabulated variables namely ‘length of Internet usage in plans’ and ‘area of work’. The value of the co-efficient of correlation (r) was found to be 0.106, which implies that the two variables have a positive but weak co-relation, thus suggesting that the length of use of Internet is not strongly dependent on whether the respondents belonged to consultancies or worked as in-house practitioners (Cavana *et al.*, 2001). This aspect has been elaborated further in chapter six titled ‘discussion’.

4.5 Strategic use of Internet in public relations

The respondents were asked if their use of the Internet was based on a specific strategy. It was observed in the literature review that the term ‘strategy’ has largely been defined

by Western theorists such as Grunig and Repper (1992) and White and Mazur (1995) though culture might have an impact on the same (see 2.4). For the purpose of this study the Western interpretation of strategic planning that includes defining objectives, assessing strengths and weaknesses, formulating strategic route, budgeting, implementing tactics and evaluating results (see 2.4) is considered. 127 of the 133 survey respondents answered this question and the results indicated that the majority of the respondents 'sometimes' adhered to the use of strategy while applying Internet tools. There were also a few respondents who were 'uncertain' about the same. This resonates with the findings in existing identifying that public relations practitioners failed to use the Internet as part of their strategic planning process (see 2.4).

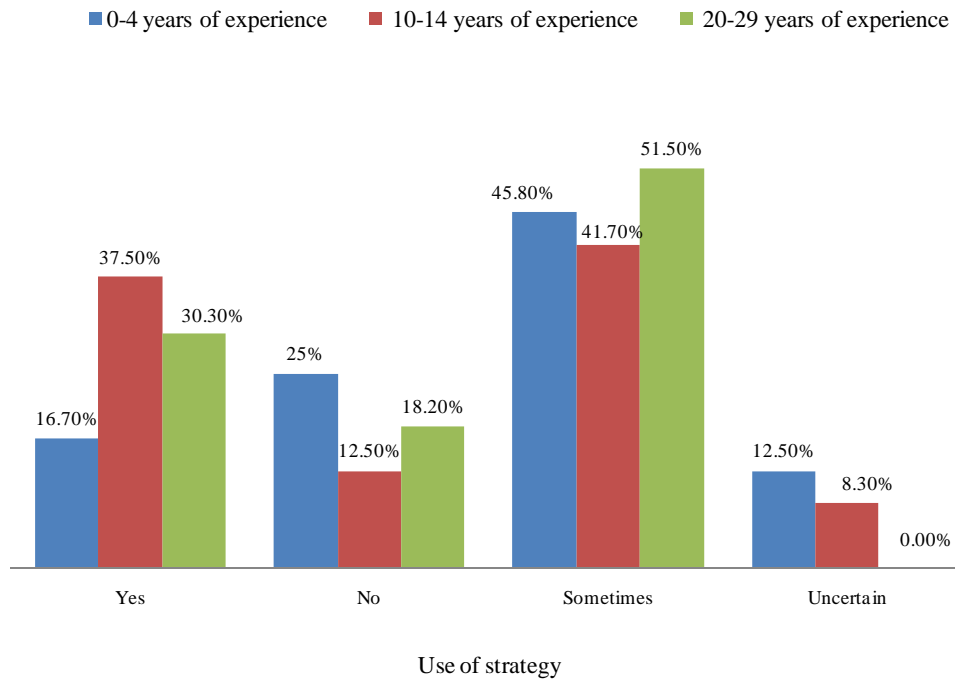
Figure 4.6: Use of strategy in application of Internet tools by survey respondents



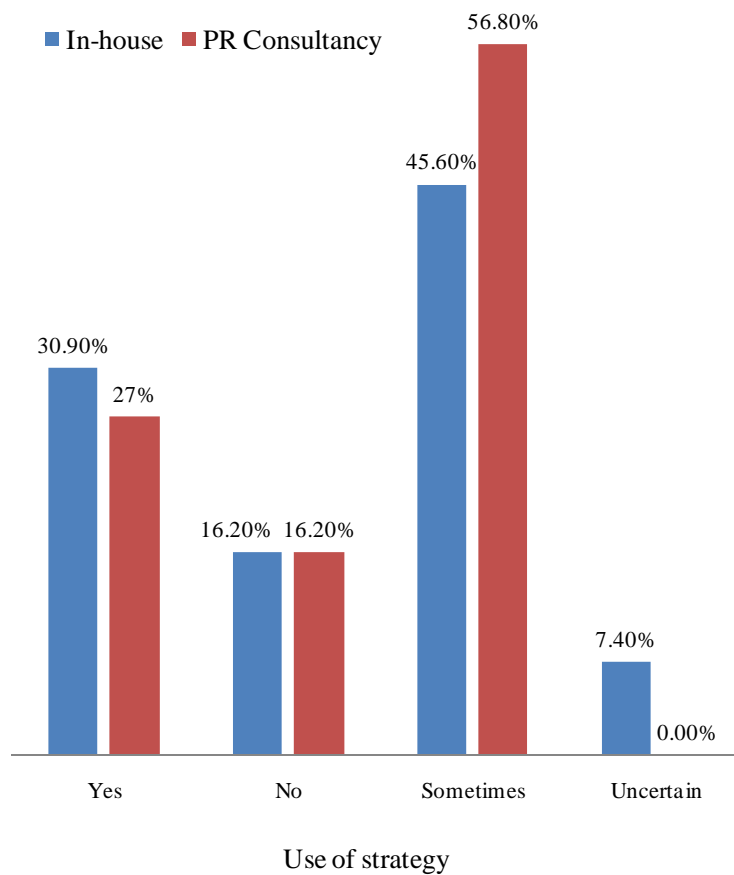
A cross-tabulation was done between 'use of strategy' and 'years of experience'. The results revealed that the majority of those who applied the Internet as part of a strategy had more than ten years of experience and most of those who did not use Internet strategically or were uncertain had less than four years of experience. This finding resonates with the suggestion made by public relations theorists such as Grunig (2006) and White and Dozier (1992) that senior practitioners need to better enact their strategic role to become part of an organisation's decision making process (see 2.4).

This implies that senior practitioners tend to be more ‘strategic’ as evidenced in the results depicted in figure 4.7. The aforementioned revelation is further tested in the interviews by examining the impact of the Internet on the power balance between young and senior practitioners.

Figure 4.7: Strategic use of Internet by years of experience



A co-relation analysis was done between ‘years of experience’ and ‘use of strategy’. The co-efficient of co-relation (r) was determined at -0.223 , indicating an inverse but weak co-relation (Cavana *et al.*, 2001). This implies that practitioners with the least experience were the most uncertain about the use of strategy and vice-versa. The cross-tabulation and the co-relation analysis suggest that experience might be a determining factor in the strategic use of Internet. The ‘use of strategy’ was also cross-tabulated with ‘area of work’. The results showed that while there was not much of a difference in the data pertaining to the strategic use of the Internet by the consultants and in-house practitioners, all the respondents who were ‘uncertain’ were found to be in-house practitioners. Though it can be argued that since they had less than four years of experience, the application of strategy is inter-related with experience rather than area of work. This is probed further in chapter six titled (see 6.2).

Figure 4.8: Use of strategy in application of Internet tools by area of work

4.6 Frequency of use of Internet tools

Survey question five asked the respondents to rate their frequency of use of nineteen pre-defined Internet tools on a five-point Likert scale, where one equalled 'all the time' and five equalled 'never'. Thus, a lower rating average indicated a more frequent use of the Internet tool in question. The survey results revealed that the established Internet tools such as e-mail, e-alerts and newsletters, online newsrooms and Intranets were among the most frequently used ones. On the other hand, relatively new social media tools including virtual worlds, online gaming, Wikis, photo-sharing and micro-blogs were among the least frequently used. However, moderate use was observed for some other social media tools including blogs, video-sharing, Really Simple Syndication (RSS) and social media websites.

Table4.3: The average frequency of use of the Internet tools (1=All the time and 5=Never)

Rank	Internet tool
1	E-mail (1.22)
2	Online Media Monitoring (1.65)
3	E-alerts/newsletters (2.00)
4	Intranet (2.18)
5	Links and Tags (2.30)
6	Online Newsroom (2.41)
7	Search Engine Optimization (2.56)
8	Blog (3.38)
9	RSS Feeds (3.44)
10	Video-sharing (3.48)
11	Social networks (3.59)
12	Webcasts (3.84)
13	Chat forums (3.87)
14	Micro-blog (3.97) and Podcasts (3.97)
15	Wikis (4.05)
16	Photo- sharing (4.09)
17	Online Gaming (4.68)
18	Virtual Worlds (4.77)
19	-

A cross-tabulation was done between ‘frequency of use’ and ‘area of work’ to examine if there was a difference in the usage trends between in-house respondents and those working in consultancies. The results showed that both categories of respondents were

equally placed regarding use of tools such as e-mail, media monitoring, online gaming, RSS and webcasts. However, there was a noticeable variance in their use of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) tools; social networks; micro-blogs and blogs, with the consultants using these more often than the in-house respondents. In comparison, Intranet, e-alerts/newsletters and online newsrooms were the tools which were used more by in-house respondents.

Table 4.4: Frequency of use of Internet tools by area of work (1= All the time and 5=Never)

Rank	In-house Practitioner	PR Consultancy
1	E-mail (1.20)	E-mail (1.19)
2	Intranet (1.52)	Online Media Monitoring (1.57)
3	Online Media Monitoring (1.63)	E-alerts/newsletters (2.28)
4	E-alerts/newsletters (1.77)	Links and Tags (2.29)
5	Links and Tags (2.17)	Online Newsroom (2.59)
6	Online Newsroom (2.34)	Search Engine Optimization (2.66)
7	Search Engine Optimization (2.61)	Blog (2.92)
8	RSS Feeds (3.41)	Intranet (3.14)
9	Video-sharing (3.48)	Social Networks (3.21)
10	Blog (3.64)	RSS Feeds (3.42)
11	Social networks and Webcasts (3.80)	Video-sharing (3.51)
12	Chat (3.95)	Micro-blog (3.57)
13	Podcasts (3.97)	Chat (3.77)
14	Micro-blog (4.08)	Webcasts (3.82)

15	Photo-sharing (4.09)	Photo-sharing (3.92)
16	Wikis (4.14)	Wikis (4.03)
17	Online Gaming (4.72)	Podcasts (4.12)
18	Virtual Worlds (4.91)	Virtual Worlds (4.61)
19	-	Online Gaming (4.74)

A cross-tabulation was also done between 'frequency of use' and 'years of experience'. The results evidenced that there was no significant variance in the average rating of respondents from the different experience levels.

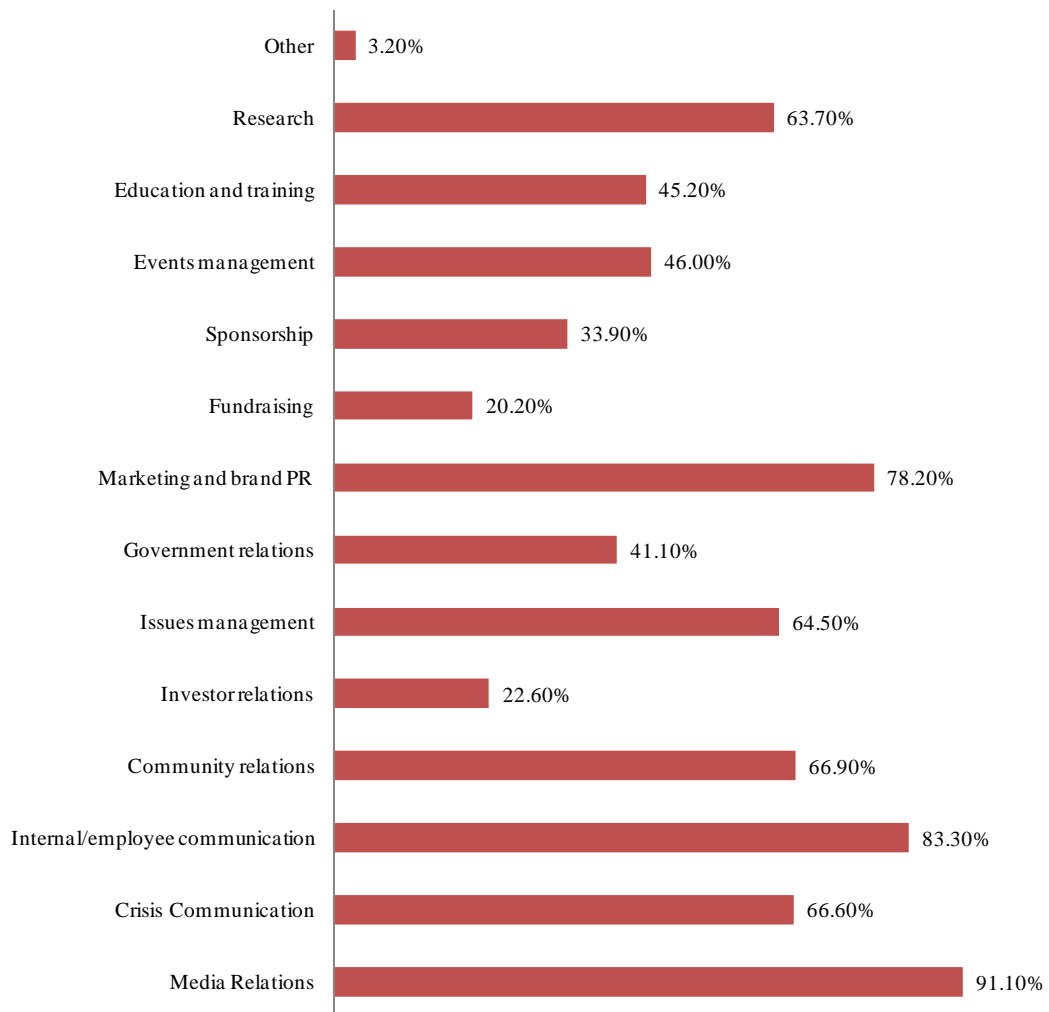
Table 4.5: Frequency of use of Internet tools by years of experience (1= All the time and 5=Never)

	0-4 years	5-9 years	10-14 years	15-19 years	20-29 years	30 or more years
Blog	3.23	3.06	3.65	3.61	3.45	2.40
Micro-blog	3.71	3.65	3.78	4.26	4.16	3.80
Social Networks	3.38	3.18	3.65	4.00	3.71	3.20
Video-sharing	3.55	3.24	3.48	3.43	3.60	3.60
Photo-sharing	4.25	3.80	4.35	4.32	3.90	3.40
Wikis	4.15	3.94	4.24	3.96	4.07	3.60
Podcasts	4.15	4.13	3.95	3.55	4.03	3.60
Webcasts	4.05	4.00	4.04	3.55	3.68	3.80
Really Simple Syndication (RSS)	3.32	3.59	3.86	3.23	3.36	3.00
Chat	3.95	3.69	3.86	3.82	3.97	3.80
Online Gaming	4.70	4.73	4.86	4.52	4.77	3.80
Virtual Worlds	4.65	5.00	4.77	4.95	4.69	4.20

Intranet	2.59	2.35	2.41	1.87	1.84	2.40
Online Newsroom	2.55	3.06	2.05	1.87	2.55	3.00
E-alerts/newsletters	2.09	2.20	2.09	1.91	1.84	2.00
Links and Tags	2.53	2.13	2.33	2.36	2.20	2.20
Search Engine Optimization	3.28	2.88	2.67	2.22	2.21	2.20
E-mail	1.18	1.41	1.09	1.39	1.15	1.00
Online Media Monitoring	1.64	1.71	1.52	1.70	1.72	1.50

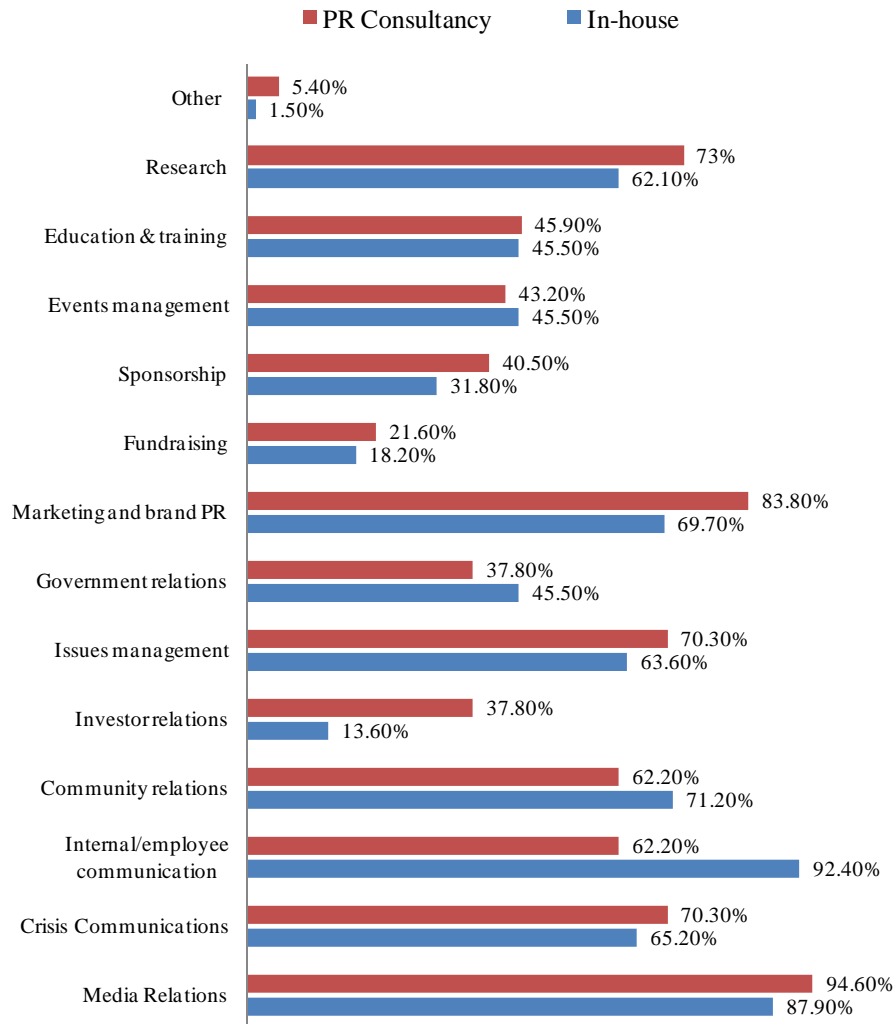
4.7 The public relations functions where Internet tools are being applied

In a multiple-choice question, where more than one option could be selected; the survey respondents were asked to identify the functions for which they applied the Internet tools. The results evidenced that the majority of the respondents opted for media relations, whereas investor relations received the least number of votes. An open-ended option of 'other' was also provided in the case the given functions were not exhaustive enough and it received four answers including: reseller and partner communications, networking, monitoring and evaluation and none.

Figure 4.10: Functions where the survey respondents apply the Internet tools

When cross-tabulating the results with ‘area of work’, it became evident that the consultants used the Internet more than the in-house practitioners for functions such as media relations, crisis communication, issues management, marketing and brand PR, sponsorship and research. On the other hand, the in-house practitioners applied the Internet more than their counterparts working in consultancies in the functions of internal/employee communication, community relations and government relations. The variance is presented in the figure below.

Figure 4.11: Application of Internet tools by area of work of the survey respondents



In addition to the area of work, the results were also cross-tabulated with the years of experience. The analysis revealed that the most experienced respondents applied the Internet more than the least experience respondents in the functions of issues management, crisis communication, investor relations, marketing and brand PR, education and training and research. This aspect is elaborated further upon in chapter six while discussing research sub-question two pertaining to the public relations functions where practitioners in New Zealand apply Internet tools.

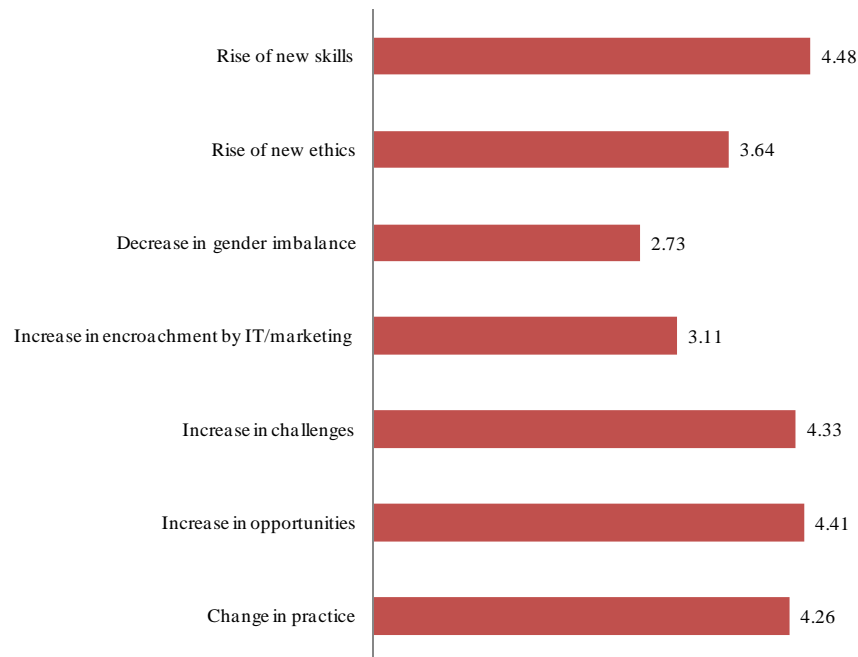
Table 4.6: Application of Internet tools by years of experience

	0-4 years	5-9 years	10-14 years	15-19 years	20-29 years	30 or more years
Media Relations	87.0%	94.1%	87.0%	95.7%	90.9%	100%
Crisis Communication	43.5%	52.9%	69.6%	78.3%	78.8%	60.0%
Internal Relations	82.6%	82.4%	82.6%	91.3%	81.8%	60.0%
Community Relations	69.6%	58.8%	73.9%	65.2%	63.6%	80.0%
Investor Relations	13.0%	17.6%	21.7%	13.0%	39.4%	20.0%
Issues Management	39.1%	52.9%	60.9%	73.9%	84.8%	60.0%
Government Relations	34.8%	29.4%	39.1%	43.5%	51.5%	40.0%
Marketing and brand PR	69.6%	82.4%	73.9%	82.6%	84.8%	60.0%
Fundraising	21.7%	35.3%	13.0%	4.3%	27.3%	20.0%
Sponsorship	39.1%	35.3%	34.8%	21.7%	36.4%	40.0%
Events Management	52.2%	52.9%	52.2%	34.8%	39.4%	60.0%
Education and Training	39.1%	47.1%	47.8%	43.5%	48.5%	40.0%
Research	65.2%	58.8%	39.1%	69.6%	75.8%	80.0%

4.8 Impact of the Internet on the practice of public relations

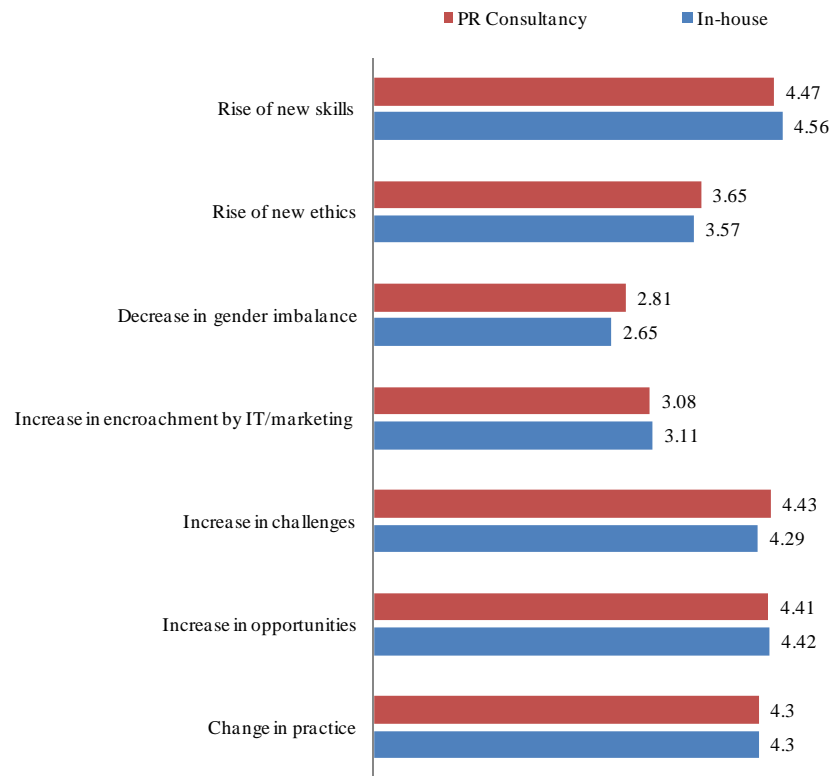
One of the survey questions (See Appendix E) aimed to measure the degree of attitudinal response towards seven statements about the impact of the Internet on public relations. A five-point Likert scale was used, whereby one denoted 'strongly disagree' and five represented 'strongly agree'. An average rating was obtained for each of the itemised statements and a higher rating implied a stronger agreement by the respondents and vice versa. The results of the analysis disclosed that majority of the survey respondents agreed that the Internet has changed the practice of public relations, increased opportunities and challenges, and given rise to new skills and ethics. However, the nature and extent of these changes could not be established from the survey results. Therefore, these were further investigated during the qualitative phase of the study, the results of which are discussed in chapter five. Additionally, the respondents were neutral about whether the Internet has increased encroachment of public relations roles by other departments such as marketing and Information Technology (IT) and were also undecided about its impact on gender imbalances. Therefore, these aspects too were probed further in the qualitative phase and the results are presented in chapter five.

Figure 4.12: Attitude towards statements about impact of the Internet on public relations practice (1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree)



The results of this attitudinal question were also cross-tabulated with 'years of experience'. There were no noticeable differences in the ratings of the respondents from the various experience levels. The results were also cross-tabulated with 'area of work' and the results evidenced that there was no apparent difference in the attitude of in-house respondents and those working in consultancies.

Figure 4.13.: Attitude towards statements about impact of the Internet on public relations practice by area of work (1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree)



4.9 Change in job roles as a result of the Internet

The last question of the survey was an open-ended question, asking respondents to elaborate how their own role has changed as a result of the Internet. The textual results were analysed using content analysis, whereby the text was coded into categories which included phrases that had the same interpretation. For example, the category of ‘high speed of communications’ included phrases which referred to the communication process as being instant, real-time, sped-up or faster. The dominant categories identified were counted in each textual unit (N=94, skipped question=39) and the absolute frequencies were tabulated to reflect the change in their own roles as perceived by the respondents. Most textual units included more than one category and were therefore counted multiple-times, but under different categories.

Table 4.7: Perceived changes in roles of the respondents as a result of the Internet

Rank	Category	Frequency
1	Change in media monitoring	19
2	New communication channel(s)	14
3	Easier to do research	14
4	New skills	13
5	High speed of communication	12
6	Now use social media	8
7	Role more time-demanding	8
8	Need to keep-up with Internet	8
9	Change in budgeting consideration	7
10	Less personal interface	7
11	No change	7
12	Role now involves web activities	6
13	Direct publishing to stakeholders	5
14	Different writing style	3

Some examples of the poignant statements made by the survey respondents in context to the above categories are presented in the table below to facilitate a better understanding of what the categories signify.

Table 4.8: Perceived changes in roles of the respondents as a result of the Internet: example statements

Category	Example Statement
Change in media monitoring	<i>Monitoring stories and client business has certainly changed. We have to be so much more aware of blogs and other forums that can take a story or incident and run with it.</i>
New communication channel(s)	<i>The internet has added another communication channel to the PR practitioner's tool box.</i>
Easier to do research	<i>I can access information from research from all over the world...I can also read news from all over New Zealand and the world on relevant topics without subscribing to newspapers.</i>
New skills	<i>New skills needed in managing the fears and also the expectations of the senior executive around Web 2.</i>
High speed of communication	<i>Positively, there is virtually instantaneous communication.</i>
Now use social media	<i>Today I use Twitter, Facebook, Bebo, MySpace, podcasts, webinars etc. to forge stronger and more honest relationships with the media and other groups.</i>

Role more time-demanding	<i>Obviously the website takes up a lot more time than in the past. Have to keep your hand in with the emerging media, but never feel on top of things as there is always something new and don't really have time to investigate fully.</i>
Category	Example Statement
Need to keep up-to-date	<i>You are expected to constantly keep up-to-date and up-skilled with the latest forms of communication available via the internet (Facebook, Twitter, etc) and often field queries as to how we can leverage off these forms for PR purposes.</i>
Change in budgeting consideration	<i>Enables to stretch budgets as many Internet activities are free or very low cost for extensive coverage.</i>
Less face-to-face contact	<i>You can reach a huge number of people at low cost via email, and through a website. You lose the face-to-face or voice contact, which is also a challenge, but it does mean you can focus on face-to-face for those people who need to be treated that way.</i>
No change	<i>It hasn't changed my role at all. There's nothing wondrous about what the internet provides. It's simply a rather large step forward from the introduction of faxes or mobile phones to television for that matter.</i>
Role now involves web activities	<i>My current role includes responsibility for our internet, intranet and e-publishing. Previously, it is unlikely that there would</i>

	<i>have been a role with specific responsibility for these channels.</i>
Direct communication with stakeholders	<i>Rather than depending on journalists to publish stories to the wider public, as a PR person I'm attempting to communicate and engage with the public directly.</i>
Different writing style	<i>I have had to learn to write in a different style for the web.</i>

4.10 Summary of the survey results

The results from the first phase of this mixed method study revealed that the respondents were more adapt to using more ‘traditional’ and established Internet tools such as e-mail, Intranet and e-newsletters as compared to the emerging social media tools including micro-blogs, virtual worlds and online gaming. However, some relatively new tools such as blogs, RSS, social networking websites and video-sharing were also found to be moderately used in public relations. Online media monitoring appears to have become very popular among the respondents, who indicated in the open-ended question that they increasingly use Internet tools for gauging news and public opinion. It was observed that these Internet tools are applied in almost every function of the practice, although to a largely varying degree. For example, while the majority of the respondents agreed to the use of Internet in media relations and internal/employee communications, only a small proportion identified investor relations and fundraising as a function where the Internet was applied. In addition, the majority of the respondents stated that they did not use these Internet tools strategically at all times. However, the reason for this could not be established from the survey results alone and therefore was explored in the qualitative phase of this study. Similarly, a variance was observed in some results for in-house respondents as opposed to consultancies, though it could not be fully explained from the quantitative data. Further, although the attitudinal rating gathered from question number 7 (see figure 4.15) evidenced that the respondents agreed that the Internet had given rise to new opportunities, challenges, skills and ethics, the nature of these changes could not be deciphered from the survey results. It was also noted that the respondents were undecided about the impact of the Internet on gender balances and encroachment of

public relations roles by other departments. Thus, not all aspects of the quantitative study could be explained from the statistical analysis, and selected results were examined further in the qualitative study. The results of the qualitative study (which included thematic analysis of ten in-depth interviews) are presented in the next chapter, therefore providing a comprehensive explanation of the quantitative data presented thus far.

Chapter 5: Interview Results

5.1 Introduction

The qualitative phase of this study aimed at explaining the quantitative data collected from the online survey. This helped facilitate a better understanding of the impact of Internet on certain key aspects of the public relations' practice such as the use of strategy, ethics, skills, gender imbalances and encroachment, which could not be clearly deciphered from the numerical analyses alone. This chapter presents the results of ten semi-structured in-depth interviews that were conducted as part of the qualitative study. The participants (see 3.5) included senior public relations practitioners, who worked in either consultancies or in-house and lived in either Auckland or Wellington. In order to protect their privacy, their names have been concealed and they are referred to in the thesis as PIC (Participant One: Consultant), P3I (Participant Three: In-house practitioner) and so forth. A total of thirteen questions (see Appendix G) were asked to each of the participants and their answers were coded to conduct a thematic content analysis. The first step was to transcribe the audio content into textual documents. The texts were then coded into dominant themes, which were later compared amongst each other to create categories that included related themes. The number of participants who mentioned the various themes was also identified to provide more strength and validity to the data analysis. Each interview question comprises a key variable being studied under the qualitative analysis. For example, the eighth question '*Do you have any specific ethical concerns about the active use of Internet in PR? Can you tell me what they are?*' relates to the variable 'Impact on ethics'. The thematic analysis of each of these questions/variables is discussed in the sections following herewith.

5.2 Overall impact of the Internet on public relations

The participants were first asked to state the ways in which they thought that the Internet had impacted on public relations. This was asked to expand and validate the data collected in the survey pertaining to the perceived changes in the roles of the respondents as a result of the Internet. It was found that the answers of the interview participants were consistent with those gathered from the survey respondents (see 4.9)

and some new insights were also revealed. *Speed of communication* emerged as the most dominant theme with eight participants agreeing that the greatest impact of the Internet was that it made communication instantaneous. These practitioners felt tools such as e-mail enabled faster communications irrespective of geographical boundaries and facilitated instant notifications and feedback, which were seen as advantageous. This finding was consistent with the survey results (see table 4.3), where 12 of the 94 respondents felt that the Internet had increased the speed of communications. Another theme that resonated with the survey data was that the Internet provided public relations practitioners with *new communication tools*. Four of the interview participants compared current tools to when they first started working in public relations and had relied on limited tools such as news releases and brochures. According to them, the Internet has “revolutionized” communications by reducing the dependence on print communication and the manual handling of documents, and has offered a wide choice of new and more convenient channels such as e-mail and the various social media platforms. Further to this, three of the participants also felt that the use of Internet, especially blogs and social networking sites reduced the reliance on mainstream media which was guarded by “gate-keepers and influencers” like journalists and enabled practitioners to *communicate directly with stakeholders*. These participants argued that corporate websites, blogs and social media forums like Twitter allowed practitioners to self-publish the information they need to disseminate to their stakeholders, which was not possible earlier. These participants felt that social media allowed practitioners to customize the messages according to their different target audiences, which was not feasible with the ‘one-for-all’ format of the news releases.

While the participants acknowledged the aforementioned positive effects of the Internet, they also lamented that the *Internet had reduced the much needed personal interface*. Half of the participants interviewed strongly accused e-mails as the cause of decline in personal communication, which according to them, often results in misunderstandings. These participants felt that people tend to communicate via “endless lengthy e-mails” instead of talking to or meeting the person concerned. Additionally, these practitioners felt that social media was further “distancing people” and hampering relationship building. This feeling is evident in remarks like:

Social media is more distancing as people have relationships with the computer rather than through meeting or talking to a person. In a face-to-face meeting, you can have the whole conversation without saying anything but understanding a whole lot. But, in e-mail etc. there is always the chance of being misunderstood (P3I).

It should however be noted that the opinions reflected here were that of senior practitioners and it is not known if younger practitioners, who are perhaps more accustomed to the use of the Internet, have similar or different views on the same. Another concern shared by five (the same who felt Internet was distancing) of the interview participants was that the “immediacy of communications” created *time demands on their roles as public relations practitioners*. The comments made by these participants substantiate the findings of the survey results where eight participants felt that the use of Internet was making their roles more time consuming. The common sentiment among the participants was that it was difficult to manage the Internet activities along with their “other responsibilities that are driven by deadlines”. A possible explanation for this feeling was given by one of the participants who said:

Often in smaller companies, it is an add-on to someone’s job description and if you don’t have the necessary resources and time, it’s not going to happen (P6C).

The interview participants were further asked to assess if they thought they used the Internet more or less than they would like to and if they spent more time managing Internet tools than what they were being paid for/could charge for. The answers of the above five participants suggested that they *spent far too much time on the Internet*. They argued that there was a “communication overload” because of the 24/7 nature of the Internet, creating pressure on them to act immediately in all situations. Three of these five participants claimed that they received a multitude of e-mails every day which demanded considerable time and attention to respond to. P3I explained:

You go away for the day and you have 350 e-mails in your inbox it actually means you have to spend the whole day and next morning and people expect that you would reply immediately. There’s that pressure on you perhaps you don’t do things as well as you might have but it also means that you sort out very quickly what your priorities are.

Three of the participants who worked in consultancies agreed that it can be difficult as consultants to charge for all the time involved in managing their clients' online presence as social media platforms such as Twitter, especially, demand round-the-clock attention. These participants however believed that the best way to negotiate was to provide the clients with a smarter evaluation of the value of their time invested online. P2C pointed out:

There is a difficulty in judging the return on investment (ROI)...but rather than just counting column inches you need to find out ways to testing audience reaction to the message and the simple way is research.

In stark comparison to this, P7I claimed that public relations has never been a nine to five job and therefore the 24/7 involvement with social media was overrated and should not be considered as a challenge.

Apart from the impact of the Internet on the communication aspect of their roles as discussed above, the participants also felt that the Internet had changed how they conducted some of their public relations functions. These answers helped explain exactly how the Internet had impacted on the two functions of research and issues management which were identified to be among the top five areas of Internet application among experienced practitioners in the survey results (see 4.14). Five of the participants interviewed felt that the *Internet made it easier to do research*. These five participants acknowledged the ease with which the information could be uploaded, shared and/or searched via the various Internet tools. They claimed that public relations practitioners no longer needed to search for relevant information in libraries, when everything they wish to know was readily available at the click of a mouse. These participants were enthusiastic about how blogging and social media websites such as Facebook had further facilitated their access to content, which was uploaded in real-time on these platforms in a variety of formats including graphics, audio and video. One of the participants felt that the Internet was fast beating radio as the provider of breaking news. All these five participants resonated that the ease with which they could perform "desk-research" helped them prepare better for their campaigns and empowered them with knowledge. However, a concern was also observed among four of the interview participants regarding *loss of control over information*. These participants were of the opinion that social media enabled everyone to upload content without thorough checks regarding authenticity and accuracy, which they perceived as a drawback. According to

these participants, even within an organisation, as opposed to earlier times where there would be only one spokesperson, now every employee can publish wrong or speculated information online, without knowledge of the organisation's leaders. It appeared that participants were quick to assume that any information distributed outside the 'control' of the public relations practitioners would tend to be 'misleading' and was likely to create new issues for the organisation that were nonexistent before and also require different solutions. While this concern was not identified in the survey results, it resonates the existing literature in which Middleberg (2001), Holtz (2002) and Alfonso and Smith (2008) argue that the speed with which rumoured content is shared online can accentuate crisis (see 2.3).

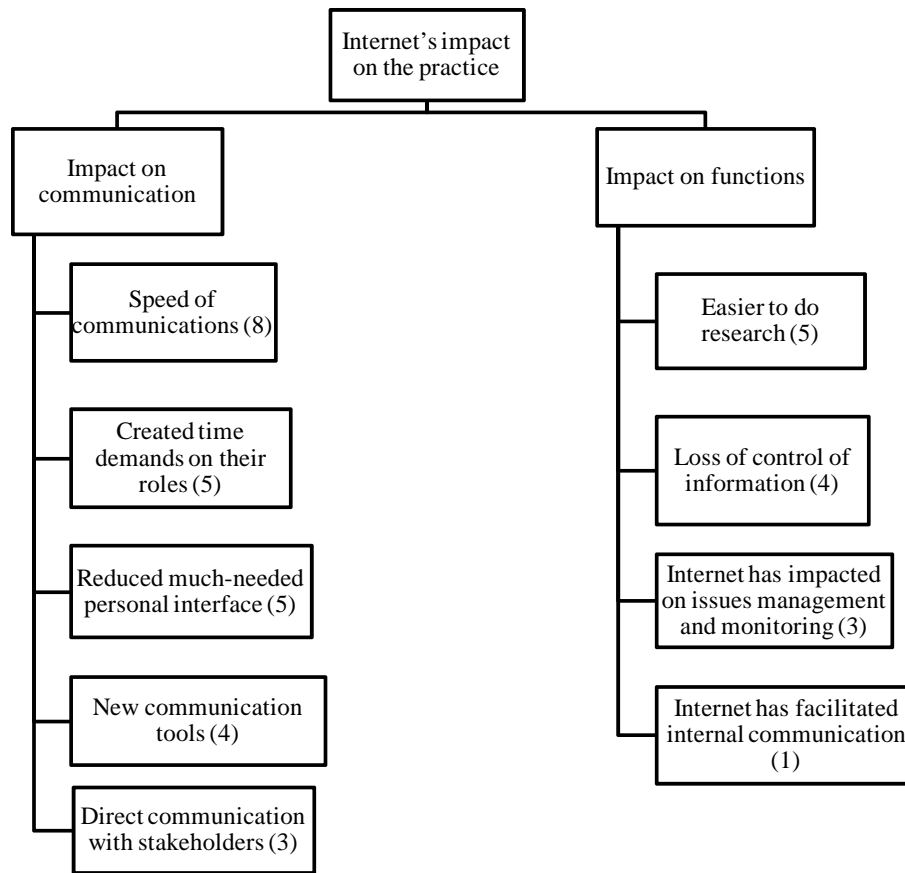
Further, it was surprising that while the survey respondents had given an average usage rating of 1.64 (where 1= Use all the time and 5 = Never) to online media monitoring (see figure 4.9) only three of the ten interview participants talked about the same and also appeared apprehensive of relying exclusively on the Internet for monitoring. One of the participants praised search engines like Google for being effective in searching for issues by entering keywords that were of concern and examining related reactions. This participant also mentioned the micro-blog Twitter as being "wonderful" in terms of gauging instant public opinion on an issue. The participant stated that most organisation leaders get upset by noticing a single negative mention of their brand, though public relations practitioners could now easily track online conversations to assess whether it is the majority or minority view, therefore worth being concerned over or not. Another participant had a similar view than the aforementioned one but added that while it was important to monitor social media, it was not implied that all the relevant stakeholders were engaged and influenced by it. The participant was cynical about using social media for monitoring and even questioned, "Just because it's on Twitter, does it mean anyone's listening?" The third participant talked solely about monitoring industry blogs for opinions expressed by bloggers and the reactions their blogs received from the readers. According to this participant, industry blogs were an important source of issues tracking as they were administered by experts in the field who were also perceived as strong influencers with the power to sway reader's opinion in a particular direction. However, this participant felt that if a negative issue was found to be highlighted on the blog, it would be best to personally go and meet the blogger and have a "direct dialogue" to resolve the issue. The opinions observed added a further dimension to the

ones expressed by the survey respondents who mostly talked about the growing need to monitor online news and conversations.

Other than monitoring and research, only one of the participants felt that the *Intranet facilitated internal communications*, which formed a major part of the participant's role as an in-house practitioner. The participant clarified that they could now communicate directly with the staff regarding organisation goals and progress or issues that might concern them. The participant argued that this pro-active approach ensured that the staff members did not become negatively influenced by news and comments published by media gate-keepers. This participant's comments revealed new insight into how the Intranet could be used for engaging with staff to keep them informed and involved, thereby, mitigating internal crisis. It is to be noted that although the survey respondents identified the usage of the Internet tools in almost all the public relations functions in varied degrees; none of the interview participants explicitly discussed the impact of Internet in functions other than issues management, monitoring, research and internal communications.

All the answers to the first interview question pertaining to the impact of the Internet on their practice as discussed above could be categorized into: impact on communications and impact on functions. A tree diagram representing the thematic analysis and categorization of the answers along with the number of participants representing each theme is presented in the following figure:

Figure 5.1 Impact of the Internet on the overall practice: A thematic analysis



5.3 Use of strategy in application of Internet tools

As discussed earlier in the literature review (see 2.4) strategic planning in public relations is referred to as:

Defining organisation goals and program objectives; identifying and understanding the target public; establishing a strategy route to be followed; determining the tactics that will be employed; budgeting the resources; implementing the plan and evaluating the effectiveness (Cutlip *et al.*, 2000, p. 370).

The majority of the survey respondents had said that they 'sometimes' used the Internet tools in a strategic manner (see figure 4.6). To further investigate into the strategic use of the Internet tools, the interview participants were asked whether they used the

Internet tools as a substitute to traditional mediums or complementary to them, and whether they used these tools strategically or *ad hoc*. The results indicate that while the participants preferred to be strategic, they identified a few factors which according to them posed challenges in doing so. All the interview participants felt that the use of Internet tools in public relations should be strategic. Half of the participants felt that the *Internet tools are just like any other traditional communication channel and that the same rules of strategy should be applied* to them. One of the participants commented:

It has to be extremely strategic. And this is where I think some people get confused. They are just tools, they are no different from what a news release or brochure was 30 years ago (P2C).

Four of the participants stated that identifying the target audience and understanding which channel of communication they preferred was the most crucial in deciding whether or not Internet tools were to be used to communicate to them. One of the participants explained:

You ask the same questions, who's my target audience, what media do they use? How can I reach them best? What are the expectations and if the answer comes up 'Twitter' then that's what I have to use (P7I).

These four participants were of the opinion that social media tools should not be used only to become part of the social media band-wagon, with one of them arguing:

Sometimes people get on to it just because it's fashionable and everyone is using Facebook or Twitter. We have to do this strategically, which is an age-old thing about PR (P4C).

While all the interview participants advocated the strategic use of the Internet tools, only two could confidently assent to being strategic themselves. Both these participants agreed that they *didn't use the Internet tools in an ad-hoc manner* or as add-ons to the traditional tools, but as part of a strategic mix of communication channels. One of them suggested that Internet tools could prove to be disastrous if they were not applied strategically, while the other talked about their policy as a consultancy to inform and encourage the clients about strategically using the Internet. The latter explained:

What we try and do with clients now is structure them from beginning so that they have a strategy to achieve something and to achieve that, we say they've got to look at the Internet; a good website, blogging, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook etc.; and then we talk about mainstream as well, as we are working both sides of the street all the time (P9C).

However; even this participant, along with another, felt that *the clients were not proactive enough about the use of Internet in public relations*. Both these participants felt that their clients perceived the Internet as an entertainment source for the younger generation as opposed to being a valuable channel of communicating with the target publics. One of them remarked:

A lot of clients are too busy to come to grips with it and are really suspicious of it. There is a lot of hostility especially towards social media and they think it is something they don't need and it's very hard to convince them (P1C).

This participant argued that it was possibly the hierarchical organisational culture that was responsible for the lack of adaptation towards new channels like the social media websites and commented:

I have been encouraging my clients to put up a Facebook page for the projects they do, but to get them to make a culture change is hard. They really need to understand that in a large organisation the top-down hierarchy system doesn't work. It needs to be the person on the job who engages with the stakeholders and makes decisions about using social media (P1C).

Further to this, it was also observed that two of the practitioners who catered to older target publics didn't themselves recognize any value in employing social media tools and admitted to being 'experimental' in their approach towards social media. While the survey results found that there were no significant differences in the way senior and junior practitioners applied the various Internet tools, it appears that according to these senior interview participants 'age' plays an important factor in Internet application. One of them explained with the help of an example:

If social media tools are arguably used more actively by those younger than that (35+ age group), mostly late teens, if I'm selling a pre-paid mobile phone, they would be an interesting tool, but if I'm selling a home phone connection and a broadband, as a regular purchase that market doesn't suit social media (P5I).

In contrast to the above statement, two other participants strongly argued that the *social media demographic is not as young as it is perceived to be* and such tools should therefore be considered even if the target audience is older. One of these participants commented:

...one of the issues with social media is that we have pre-conceptions about it, which might not be accurate as it's developing so quickly and constantly evolving

with a great pace of change... the myth that older people struggle with technology is old and not true and especially not true about New Zealand baby boomers (P7I).

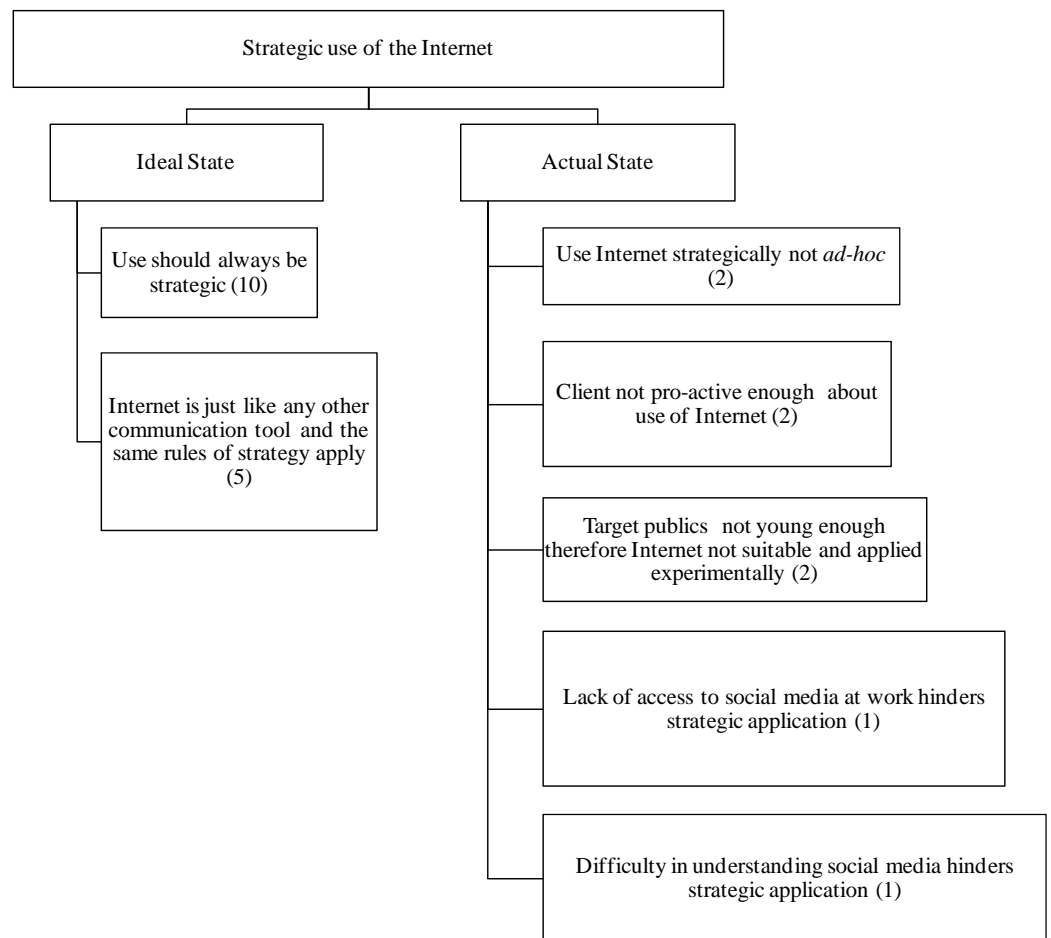
In addition to the above concerns exhibited by the participants interviewed, one of them complained about not being able to use the various Internet tools strategically due to *lack of access to the social media websites at work*. The participant stated that working in a governmental organisation, they were not allowed to access social media due to fear of potential misuse by the employees and this meant that as public relations practitioners they could not go online even to correct a misleading piece of content, which could cause disrepute. Another participant explained that the blocking of the Internet by some organisations led the public relations practitioners working in those organisations to be late adopters and therefore made them uncertain of the new Internet tools or their strategic application, which could feasibly prevent them from integrating the Internet in their strategic plan. The participant stated:

At the time when it (social media) started it was blocked by a lot of corporate organisations, so communicators like me could not go on to the Internet and try it. It was bizarre. By the time Twitter came about, Internet was unblocked. So a lot of people like me got on Twitter and didn't understand it. The role of the corporate in blocking social media has changed the use of social media by communicators (P7I).

However, another participant raised a similar issue by stating that it was *difficult to understand social media* and found it extremely challenging to keep up-to-date with the dynamic online environment, which resonates with the findings of the survey where eight respondents acknowledged the need to keep up-to-date with the Internet as a concern (see 4.9). The participant remarked:

I tried to get onto the whole Twitter thing and I just could not figure out how to really get it to work so I kind of gave up on that and never joined the whole Facebook thing...the rate of change in social media is much more than the Internet itself...and the challenge is to keep on top of the changes (P6C).

While conducting the thematic analysis of the above answers pertaining to strategic use of the Internet, it was found that they could be categorized into the normative statements that the participants advocated and the real situations they observed at their work place. The tree figure depicting the aforementioned categorization of the answers along with number of participants representing each theme is presented as follows:

Figure 5.2: Strategic use of the Internet: A thematic analysis

5.4 Internet and encroachment on practitioner roles

In the survey it was found that the respondents were unsure of the impact of the Internet on the encroachment on their roles by IT and/or marketing teams (see figure 4.12). To further investigate, the participants were asked if they had any specific concerns about sharing responsibility for Internet PR with the IT, and/or marketing teams in their organisations. Like the survey results, the results of the interviews reflect a mixed response, though the majority agrees that there are some encroachment issues. Four of the interview participants strongly felt that the IT teams in organisations end up controlling the websites as they have more technical knowledge than the public relations practitioners. These participants were of the opinion that the IT department should only act as a technical facilitator and because Internet is mainly a communication tool, the responsibility of managing the online activities of an organisation “should lay firmly with the communications people”. One of the

participants felt that the public relations teams (as opposed to IT) in large organisations are often perceived as less influential, which could be the cause of encroachment and explained:

It's clear that a lot of PR managers have great difficulties in organisations as their boss is more senior to them in years and doesn't understand PR and its principles. A lot of people get a comms degree and go into business in a large organisation and you know nothing about organisational dynamics and management systems and so how do you influence people? They listen to the accountant, they listen to the lawyers, they should listen to the PR people, but often unfortunately they don't (P1C).

In addition to the above, three of the participants also had similar issues with the marketing department and felt that while they are often allocated the responsibility to manage online communication, *marketers are not the best communicators*. These participants strongly argued that marketers always tend to follow a "sales literature" type of communication approach, which according to these participants is not what online communications should be about. As opposed to the views presented above, three of the interview participants felt that they were not concerned with encroachment of their online roles. These participants felt that the decision regarding 'who should be responsible?' *depended on the organisation and purpose of the online activity*. These participants argued that it was quite likely for each department to have certain separate online activities that they manage, but as long as they all followed a common strategy to ensure consistency in message, there was no concern of encroachment on roles. One of these participants explained:

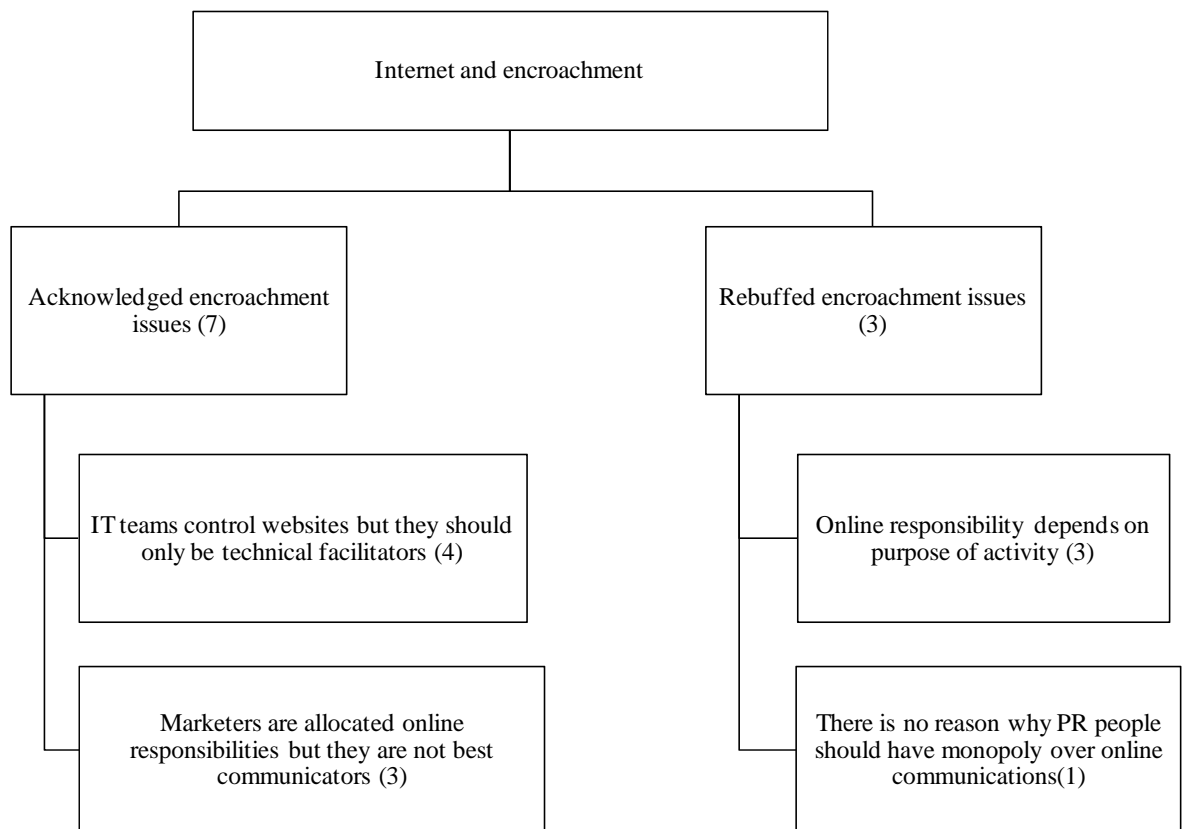
So marketing people are using it (Internet) but using it differently. The issue is when other people use it and there is overlapping of communications by the same organisation by different departments and there isn't consistent strategy. It depends on the company, as it might be entirely appropriate for the marketing team to be driving the Internet if it is a promotion based campaign, depending on what their objectives are (P10C).

Another participant strongly argued that communication practitioners should not assume as if they have a monopoly over online communications and commented:

We are not separate, we are integrated. I sit next to our marketing people and we talk all the time, it all depends on what you are doing. The idea that communications people control social media is wrong (P7I).

All three participants were of the opinion that global organisations such as theirs (or their client's) had social media policies that guided their online activities and ultimately who should be responsible, which mitigated any possibility of encroachment. On analysing the above answers, it was observed that they could be categorized into participants who acknowledged the encroachment issue and those who rebuffed it. There were no noticeable differences observed in the views of the in-house practitioners and consultants. Following is a pictorial depiction of the thematic analysis:

Figure 5.3 The Internet and encroachment issues: A thematic analysis



5.5 Impact on ethics

As discussed earlier in the literature review (see 2.3) authors such as Lieber (2005), Smudde (2005) and Parsons (2008) have argued that ethical considerations including authorship of content, privacy and security of users are crucial when engaging in online public relations. In the survey, 122 of the 133 respondents gave an average rating of 3.64 to the statement 'the Internet is giving rise to new ethics in PR' (where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). However, the nature of these new ethical

considerations could not be deciphered from the survey results. Therefore, to investigate this aspect further, the interview participants were asked (see Appendix G) if they had any specific ethical concerns regarding use of Internet in public relations. The results revealed that though it was assumed that participants might raise issues such as spamming, hacking and misuse of copyright, most of the participants limited their discussion to issues relating to blogging. The only common concern that the interview participants had was that of *insufficient transparency*. Half of the participants felt that the Internet made it possible for people to conceal their identity by using pseudonyms, making it difficult for the general public to identify the source of the information and creating concerns over credibility and authenticity. These participants strongly felt that it was unethical for public relations practitioners to upload comments or blog posts anonymously or under a pseudonym in order to further their client's interest. The latter views resonate with the PRINZ code of ethics that advocates honesty and open communication in the interest of public (see 2.3). One participant commented:

Our profession has a bad enough name for being spin doctors, it doesn't help if that sort of stuff is going on. If PR professionals are masquerading as normal citizens but really what they are doing is protecting their client's reputation for money, in other words, they are being paid for that time, then that must be unethical (P4C).

Two of the participants also strongly felt that the bloggers were misusing anonymity to further their personal interests. One of them further argued that as opposed to the traditional media, there were no checks and balances regarding the content that was uploaded by bloggers who could get away with posting "anything" anonymously. Four of the interview participants said that *self-regulation* was the only way to overcome this ethical issue. These participants felt that public relations practitioners needed to protect their individual reputations as much as that of the organisations they are representing and therefore should be more careful about indulging in unethical online practices. One of the participants commented:

I don't think it reflects on the profession, I think it reflects on them (individual practitioners). If they misjudge and say inappropriate things, they are going to discredit themselves or their client or both and so I think it's a matter of being wise (P1C).

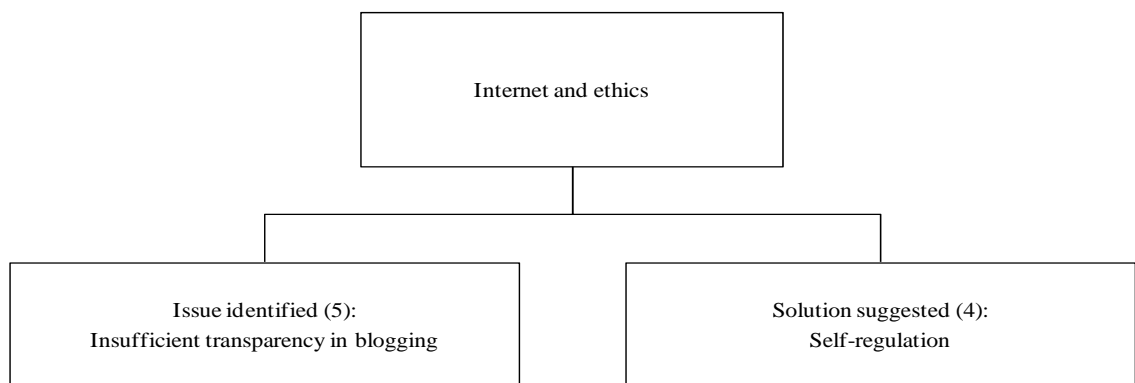
Two of these participants also felt that most of the online ethical issues such as lack of transparency or providing misleading/rumoured information get resolved on their own

in due course of time. One of the participants concluded, “It seems that the Internet users are savvy enough.” Additionally, four of the participants also felt that *organisations need to have social media policies or guidelines* for their staff; including the public relations practitioners representing them; so that they don’t misuse their online access thereby bringing disrepute. One of the participants argued:

Companies have to be very clear on what social media can be used for. If you are going to use social media, there is a time and place for it. There are things you can do and can not do. If you break that protocol there’s going to be a consequence (P9C).

The answers to the interview question pertaining to the impact of the Internet on ethics found a very limited scope of answers as the participants did not acknowledge other ethical issues such as copyright infringement which have become commonplace especially with increased manipulation of multi-media content. The answers were therefore simply categorized into insufficient transparency as the issue and self-regulation as the solution.

Figure 5.4 Internet and ethics: A thematic analysis



5.6 Impact on skills

It was identified in the literature review (see 2.3) that there is a need for public relations practitioners to develop new skills to be able to fully utilize the opportunities offered by social media (James, 2008). Certain key skills such as adapting to the writing style of the emerging media channels, understanding the application of multi-media content, better time management and technical know-how about web publishing, security and analytics were acknowledged to be crucial for the present day practitioners (see 2.3). In the first phase of this study, it was revealed that 122 of the 123 survey respondents answering question seven (see figure 4.12) gave an average rating of 4.48 (where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree) to the statement: ‘the Internet is giving rise to new skill sets for PR’. Additionally when asked about how the Internet had affected their roles as public relations practitioners, 13 of the 94 respondents to question eight (see table 4.6) recognized the need to upgrade to new skills as a significant impact of the Internet. However, it was not clear as to what ‘new skills’ these respondents were referring. Therefore, the senior practitioners participating in the interview phase were asked which they believed were the new skills sets required to use the Internet effectively in public relations (see Appendix G). Surprisingly, as opposed to the various skills identified in the literature review, the majority of the interview participants emphasised the importance of writing skills and the strategic application of social media.

Half (five) of the interview participants were of the opinion that practitioners today should *improve their writing skills*. Notwithstanding multi-media channels such as Picasa and YouTube, these participants strongly argued that social media was primarily a written form of communication and therefore practitioners needed to be able to write “quickly, effectively and successfully”. One participant reasoned that over the time the emphasis on good writing might have reduced due to lack of editorial experience. The participant commented:

The reading and writing has always been there but it has diminished over the years. My first boss was a news paper editor and was very hot on grammar, the

written word and spoken word, because if you are going to communicate, you have to do so properly (P2C).

Three of the participants also added that practitioners needed to *adapt their writing styles* based on the Internet channel being used. One participant cited the example of Twitter where one should know how to “summarize it simply” as compared to blog posts or longer pieces of online writing. In addition, four of the interview participants said that public relations practitioners today *needed to have technical skills* to better implement their online plans. Two of these participants accentuated the importance of knowledge about web design and search engine optimization (SEO) so that practitioners could promote their content better, whereas the others did not mention anything in particular. However, the common comment was that *practitioners only required basic technical know-how* and the Information Technology (IT) teams should be responsible for facilitating their online activities. One participant explained, “You don’t need more than the most rudimentary technical skills from an IT perspective unless you want to specialize as a technician otherwise you are just being jack of all trades and master of none.” This is quite contrary to the findings of the literature review (see 2.3) where authors such as James (2008) argue for the need for emphasis on technical knowledge. The opinions of the interview participants in regards to technical skills correspond to what they had commented about encroachment, where the common feeling was that IT teams should provide technical support to public relations practitioners. Further to the above, three participants felt that contemporary practitioners needed to keep up-to-date with social media. One of them commented:

They must up-skill themselves to be able to use social media fluently, I can talk the talk but the walk is different. I can tell people what to do but I need to know myself about the uploading or the downloading or integrating and all that stuff. Fluency is required every aspect of communicating via the web (P9C).

Two of these three participants also felt that while social media is dynamic, and keeping abreast of the changes is necessary, the knowledge of strategic application of these tools is also essential. One of them explained this view:

There’s the technical stuff but it changes every time. You need to have someone who has the willingness to learn new stuff. Most practitioners under 65 do. Also you need to understand that we need to take the strategic approach, what are we trying to say and hear from our consumers...social media has given us opportunity to engage but we need to use that opportunity (P7I).

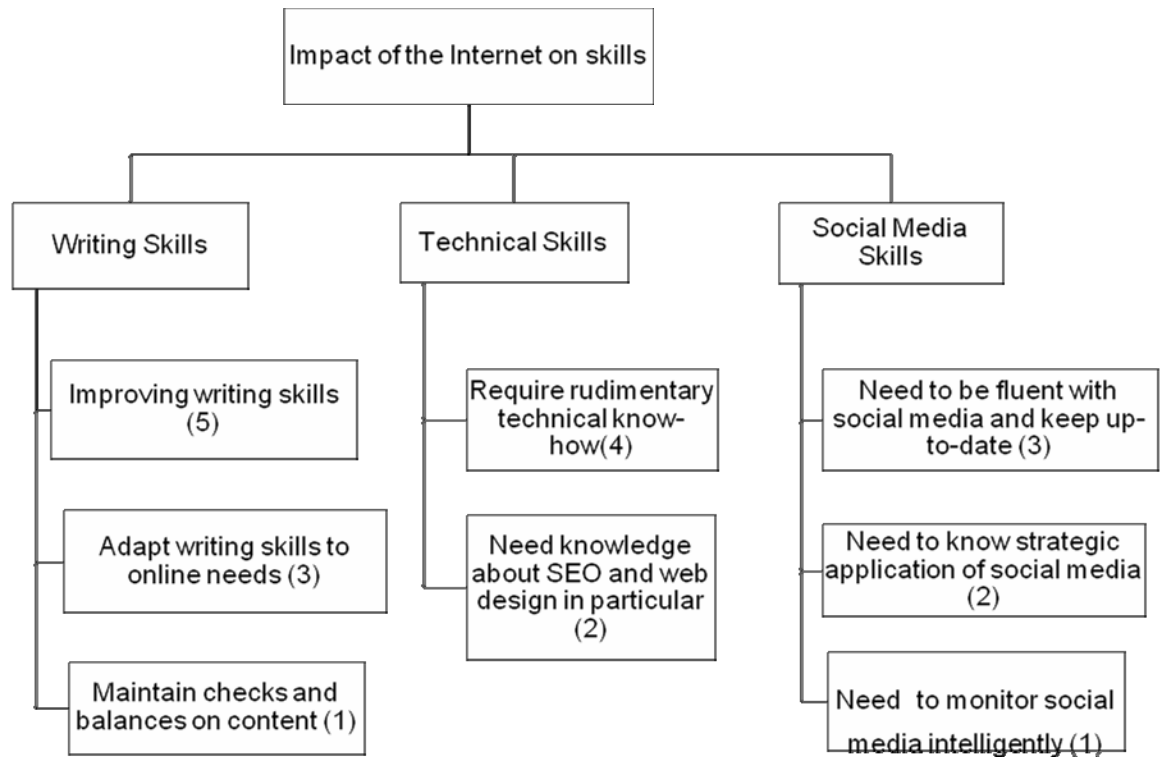
Apart from the opinions expressed above, two participants mentioned a skill each that they thought was indispensable in today's Internet era. One of them articulated the importance of intelligent monitoring of the online media but perceived the online environment to be no different from the traditional media environment and stated:

It's the ability to monitor and not being caught up trying to deal with everything, so understanding the right channels, engaging with the right ones at the right time. You need to know your business and be able to deal with the same skill set that you would use with a reporter, customer, there's a little perception that social media means we are talking in a different language. We are still dealing with human needs. It is more real time but the principles are the same (P5I).

The other participant felt that the ability to apply checks and balances before uploading content to the Web in the demanding online environment was a key skill to have as errors were likely to be noticed by a large number of people across the world in a matter of seconds.

Considering all the views presented above, it was observed that other than a few participants who discussed issues concerning social media such as strategic application and monitoring, most participants only elaborated on the need for effective writing skills and moderate technical know-how. The answers therefore have been categorized into: Writing skills, technical skills, social media skills as depicted in figure 5.5.

Figure 5.5: Impact of the Internet on skills: a thematic analysis



5.7 Impact on perceived gender imbalances

As discussed earlier in the literature review (see 2.3) even though the practice of public relations is largely dominated by women, there is a general assumption that men continue to be favoured for manager roles. In the first phase of the study, the 123 survey respondents who answered question seven (see figure 4.12) gave an average rating of 2.73 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree) to the statement 'The Internet is reducing gender imbalances in the PR practice'. This indicated that respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the above statement. To further investigate this aspect,

the interview participants were asked if they thought the Internet had any impact on the perceived gender imbalances in the practice of public relations. It was revealed that while none of the male participants and only one female participant acknowledged any impact of the Internet on gender imbalances, two female participants felt that the Internet made the practice more attractive to men. Eight of the interview participants were of the opinion that the Internet *didn't impact on the gender imbalance* in any way. Two male participants diverted from the topic and elaborated that instead of impacting on the balance between male and female practitioners, the *Internet was more likely to affect the balance between younger and senior practitioners* as younger practitioners were more Internet friendly. One of these participants commented:

It's probably more a youth vs. age thing I suppose. Over time if the older men like me don't embrace these new forms of communication then they'll be dinosaurs. You might just get younger men to come in and replace the older men (PC4).

They further commented that while public relations was a female dominated practice, men still occupied the top 'strategic' positions. One of them commented:

Women may be better communicators than men but we are not in the business of communicating. We are in the business of strategising (PC 2).

On the contrary, a female participant felt that *New Zealand was fairly balanced in terms of women's adoption of the Internet* and therefore the perceptions of the Internet affecting the gender skew in public relations was mythical which somewhat resonates with the findings of the World Internet Project New Zealand where it was found that the adoption rate of the Internet was nearly equal among male and female users (see 2.3). While the above participants felt that it was "perplexing" why more men were not joining public relations, they didn't see any reason as to why and how the Internet could impact or change this situation. One of them even commented:

Gender imbalances in a work place will not be determined by knowledge of communications. They are going to be determined by other social changes and the perception of the role of women (PC4).

As opposed to the views presented above, two female interview participants felt that the Internet made the practice *more appealing to the men as they felt comfortable using these tools*. Both these participants were of the opinion that while women are equally

adapt to using the Internet tools, the perceived masculine appeal of these tools would eventually drive more men into the public relations practice, which is regarded as a more feminine career. One of them commented:

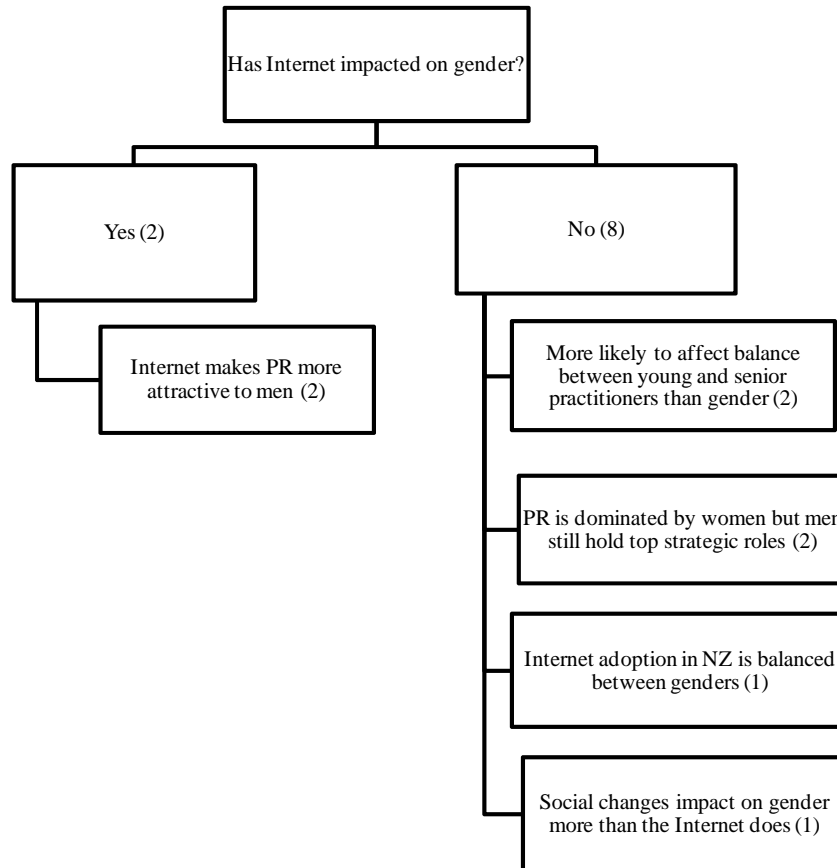
I don't think they are more adapt to it, but I do think that men are more status conscious from an early age and they don't do things that are beneath them and I think this isn't (P31).

The other participant commented:

I think it is an area that blokes seem to lean to. I think it's the space that's more natural and comfortable for men. The women still want to play in online spaces but blokes seem to like it more and will drive to get more men in PR (P10C).

Both the above views corroborate with the findings of the World Internet Project New Zealand (see 2.3) where it was revealed that while the adoption of the Internet is equal among men and women, men tend to be more engaged, especially with socialising on the Internet and engaging in e-commerce. However, since no conclusive majority view could be obtained on the impact of the Internet on gender, it is suggested that further research will be required in this area. Considering the few answers received on this topic the thematic analysis is represented as under:

Figure 5.6 Impact of the Internet on gender: A thematic analysis



5.8 Impact of the Internet on balance between young and senior practitioners

The survey results found that though experience did not impact on the frequency of use of the online tools (see table 4.4), it did govern the function in which they applied these tools (see table 4.5) as senior practitioners were found to be more involved with using the Internet in assumedly more strategic functions such as research and issues management (see table 4.5). Further it was also observed that majority of the respondents who were uncertain about the strategic use of the Internet had an experience of less than 4 years (see figure 4.7). It was therefore likely that experience might have some role to play in the strategic application of the Internet the practice which has also been largely debated in the existing literature (see 2.4). Since the interview participants were all senior practitioners, they were asked what they perceived

were the shifts in power balances between younger and older practitioners as a result of the increased use of Internet. The results revealed that while the participants agreed that older practitioners were not very fluent with the use of the Internet, they argued that younger practitioners could only manage technical implementation of these tools and did not know how to apply these strategically. All barring one participant felt that the *older practitioners were not as comfortable with technology as the younger ones*. One of them commented:

The reality is that I'm a digital immigrant and someone in their 20s is a digital native. You welcome that in your team as a new skill set, fresh experiences, and fresh perspective (P4C).

Only one participant argued that the perception that older practitioners were uneasy about the use of technology and therefore felt threatened by younger practitioners was a myth, and argued that only practitioners above the age of 65 would have a problem with technology as New Zealand baby boomers were high adopters of the Internet, though this might not be the case in other countries. However, all these participants agreed that the younger practitioners could not negotiate salaries or promotions based on their technical knowledge of online tools as *only experience could teach them the strategic application*, which was more important. One of the participants reasoned:

My observation of younger people is that they are fairly one dimensional in how they would apply online tools in a PR perspective. They simply think that being in a space or putting up something on the space as having achieved your goal and it's not. I think the concern is they confuse knowledge of a channel and mechanism with strategy knowledge which they don't have (P10C).

5.9 Summary of the interview results

The results from the qualitative phase of this mixed methods study explained the data findings from the numerical analysis of the quantitative findings. The interviews helped provide a better understanding of the trends identified in the survey results and thereby enhancing the research validity. Since the interview results mostly corroborated the findings of the survey, the survey results were confirmed to be reliable.

Overall, the interview results revealed that while the participants identified the impact of the Internet on communications in general and certain functions of public relations in

particular, they also recognized some challenges which hindered them from strategically applying the Internet tools in their practice. It was observed that research, internal communications and issues management/monitoring were the only functions that the participants referred to when discussing the impact of the Internet. However, participants were somewhat cynical of an over-reliance on online tools such as e-mails and argued that they were time-consuming and created misunderstandings. Participants appeared to favour traditional modes of communication such as telephone or face-to-face meetings. Additionally, it was also revealed that while the participants preferred to be more strategic about their use of Internet, they failed to do so at all occasions. Some participants felt that their clients were not pro-active about the use of Internet in campaigns as they perceived them to be only an entertainment source for youngsters, while other participants felt that they themselves found it difficult to understand the constantly changing environment of social media. The blocking of Internet especially social media websites in some organisations was also identified as a challenge.

The interview results further helped explain specific issues that could not be deciphered with the statistical analysis alone; the first being that of encroachment. The majority of the participants felt that there were some encroachment concerns from Information Technology (IT) and marketing teams as they were not communicators and therefore should not be involved in an organisation's online communications. However, three of the participants argued that the decision about who should manage the Internet should be based on an organisation's structure and purpose of the online activity. In regards to ethics as opposed to what was expected (see 5.5) the participants only recognized insufficient transparency as a major concern and suggested self-regulation as an ideal solution, along with creation of social media policies and guidelines. In terms of the impact of the Internet on skills, once again the participants overlooked important skills identified in the literature such as knowledge of multi-media formats and time management, and only discussed the need for effective writing and rudimentary technical knowledge as the skills required by contemporary public relations practitioners. Regarding the aspect of gender imbalances, most of the participants could not identify a visible impact of the Internet on gender imbalances and considered gender to be a very subjective topic that was influenced by other societal factors. Only two participants felt that the Internet had a masculine appeal and made public relations more appealing to men. The results presented in this chapter will be discussed along with the

survey results to specifically answer the research questions of this study. This combined interpretation of the mixed methods results is presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Evaluation, Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a combined interpretation of the survey and the interview results of this mixed methods study. The purpose is to discuss the trends identified from the data gathered during the quantitative phase and explain them with the aid of the in-depth qualitative findings. This is done in order to answer the four research questions (see 2.5) formulated from the detailed study of the literature. This discussion of the findings is followed by an outline of the limitations of this study along with some recommendations for future research. The last part of this chapter provides a concluding summary of the present study.

6.2 Discussion of the findings

As one of the first studies conducted in New Zealand to assess the use and impact of various Internet tools in the public relations practice in the country, this research makes a contribution to the growing body of knowledge on the topic of online public relations. The results revealed that on an average New Zealand practitioners have been using the Internet in their communications plans for six to eight years (see 4.4), which is less than when it first became popular nearly 15 years ago (see 1.1). This implies that the practitioners were not early adopters of the Internet which can be explained by (and is reflective of) the trends identified among the population at large. According to the World Internet Project New Zealand (WIPNZ), half of the Internet users in the country have been using it for less than ten years (Smith *et al.*, 2010). In the past decade there has clearly been a substantial increase in the country's Internet usage with the World Internet Statistics showing an increase of 321.7% between 2000 and 2009. It is speculated by Smith *et al.* (2008) that the slow penetration of the broadband has offset the adoption of the Internet in the country. Though, with the government developing a 'Digital Strategy' in 2005 followed by 'Digital Strategy 2.0' in 2008 to support the nation's digital development (Smith *et al.* 2010), there now appears to be a clear emphasis on creating policies that capitalize the opportunities offered by the online technologies. This recent step by the government is likely to impact on the Internet's

adoption rate in industries across the country, including communications and public relations.

While the practitioners might not have been early adopters of the Internet, it appears that they use a plethora of online tools to substantially varying degrees (see table 4.3). This variation suggests that the Internet tools could be categorized into: high use, moderate use and low use (fringe) tools. Thus any tool with an average usage rating between 1 (all the time) and 3 (sometimes) could be labelled as 'high use', above 3 (sometimes) but less than 4 (rarely) as 'moderate use' and between 4 (rarely) and 5 (never) as 'low use' or 'fringe' tool. The ranking of the overall average usage rating given by survey respondents indicated that e-mail, online-media monitoring tools, e-alerts/newsletters, Intranets, links and tags, online newsrooms and Search Engine Optimization (SEO) comprised the 'high use' tools (see table 4.3). Even within this group, e-mail and online media monitoring tools are substantially ahead in usage than all the others. E-mail clearly dominated usage and this is reflective of the population in general where it has been identified that 82% of the New Zealand Internet users check their e-mail at least once daily (Smith *et al.*, 2010). This finding did not come as a surprise as e-mail has been around for a longer period of time and several earlier studies have evidenced that public relations practitioners demonstrate a high usage of e-mails as they have grown accustomed to this established online technology (The Bhole Company, 1998; Jun, 2002; Lindic, 2006; Eyrich *et al.*, 2008). However, during the interviews, it was identified that the participating practitioners felt that the e-mail was also an over-used and abused form of online communication. They complained about receiving endless e-mails throughout the day which made it difficult for them to prioritise work and therefore resulted in time-management issues. They also lamented that the majority of these e-mails were poorly crafted and could lead to misunderstandings which could be avoided by opting for personal communication instead. Surprisingly, while most of the existing literature talks about the escalating use of e-mails in public relations (Phillips, 2001; Holtz, 2002; Lindic, 2002, Eyrich *et al.*, 2008) little has been discussed about its exploitation as a form of communication. However, a few studies conducted outside the realm of public relations such as the one by Burgess, Jackson and Edwards (2005) explain the same defects of e-mail that were identified by the participants of this study. This research highlighted that the majority of e-mail messages were ambiguously written leading to conflict of understanding between

the sender and the receiver and copied irrelevantly in order to safeguard oneself (Burgess *et al.*, 2005). In addition, the researchers found that employees tend to use e-mail in place of personal communication due to lack of interpersonal skills and fear of embarrassment arising due to an uncomfortable situation (Burgess *et al.*, 2005). The study identified that there was a direct relation between acknowledgment of the aforementioned defects and age, job grade and experience though no conclusive evidence was provided to explain the reason behind the correlation (Burgess *et al.*, 2005). It is therefore likely that since the interview participants were more experienced practitioners in senior positions, they were extremely critical of the emails they received as prioritisation of work was important due to their numerous responsibilities. However, since the views of junior/younger practitioners are not known, this aspect warrants further investigation to establish a significant co-relation. The research by Burgess *et al.* (2005) also found that training as to best practice use of e-mails could offset the misuse. It can therefore be implied that public relations practitioners being responsible for managing communications in an organisation should train the staff about effective email messaging to curb its excessive and inappropriate use.

Closely followed by e-mails in the 'high use' group were the media monitoring tools (see table 4.3). Online monitoring has been acknowledged to aid in the early identification of issues, gauging of public opinion and measurement of communication campaigns (see 2.3). Surprisingly, while the survey respondents exhibited a 'high use' of monitoring tools, only three of the ten interview participants acknowledged that monitoring had been affected by the Internet and were mostly cynical about it. They did not see value in measuring social media conversations as these might not be the 'majority view' or entirely reflective of their target publics thought at large. This feeling indicates that while practitioners engage in online monitoring, they are largely uncertain about the value it provides vis-à-vis the time and effort that is involved in doing so. It appears that the constantly burgeoning social media tools are creating challenges for the practitioners in defining their scope and purpose of monitoring. This dilemma is further being stretched due to their own perceptions (which might not be informed by research) that their target publics are not part of or being influenced by the social media sphere. It appears that the industry in New Zealand is eager to obtain clear-cut answers to their concerns as considerable emphasis has been laid on discussing social media monitoring with two sessions dedicated to this topic at the 2010 annual PRINZ conference.

However, no academic research could be identified that critically examined the value of online monitoring for the practice of public relations. Further, little is known in the literature about what encompasses 'intelligent' monitoring which implies that the New Zealand practitioners who claimed to be using such tools 'very frequently' are following a more *ad hoc* approach. Clearly, more academic interest is required on this topic to inform the practice along with regular debates, discussions and professional training to keep up-to-date with the dynamic social media sphere.

While e-mail and monitoring tools comprised the 'high use' tools among both in-house practitioners and consultants, there were considerable variations in the use of Intranets and blogs. Intranets featured among the 'high use' tools for in-house practitioners but 'moderate use' for consultants, whereas blogs exhibited the reverse trend (see 4.4). The discrepancy in the use of Intranets was not startling and could be attributed to the fact that they are primarily used to facilitate internal communications (Murgolo-Poore, Pitt & Ewing, 2002, Broom, 2009). Since the function of internal communications requires full-time commitment and deeper understanding of organisational issues, it is usually governed by the in-house staff rather than consultants (Wilcox *et al.*, 2000; Tymson & Lazar, 2006, Broom, 2009). Even in New Zealand, the 2008 TRENDS survey (PRINZ, 2008) found that as opposed to 98% in-house practitioners, only 37% consultants were involved in internal communications and this number too was observed to be decreasing over the years. Clearly, Intranets have been the domain of in-house practitioners and if the TRENDS survey results are to be followed, this tendency will only increase in the future. However, the variance in the usage of blogs came as a surprise as there the literature review did not indicate that consultancies were more inclined to be involved in blogging. Though, as identified in the interviews (see 5.3), it is likely that the restrictions imposed on internal staff result in their not being able to use blogs as much as the consultants do. It appears that organisations in New Zealand continue to follow a culture that is rooted in the 'control paradigm' whereby it is perceived and feared that engaging in an open dialogue via social media will only result in negative outcomes. This finding supports the observation by Grunig (2009) that organisations need to bring about a culture change that enables them to relinquish control and utilize the opportunity of engagement offered by the emerging Internet tools.

Overall, it has been noted that practitioners (both in-house and consultants) use blogs more frequently than other 'moderate use' social media tools such as social networks, micro-blogs, chats and webcasts. This finding is supported by the existing literature

where a recent study conducted in the U.S. (Eyrich *et al.*, 2008) highlighted similar trends (see 2.4). Though, even that study could not sufficiently identify the reasons behind the relatively lower use of social media tools in comparison to blogs. However, in the answers to the open-ended survey question (see table 4.7) and during the interview stage (see 5.3) of the present study it was observed that the participants exhibited the lack of a clear understanding of the ever changing social media sphere and acknowledged the need to keep up-to-date as a challenge. The aforementioned views imply that the dynamism of the social media sphere, which has been observed earlier to impact on 'intelligent' monitoring, hinders the adoption of social media as it does not give the practitioners enough time to get accustomed to a particular tool before something new overrules it. Further to this, the interview participants also appeared to perceive the social media as the domain of the young (see 5.3) and therefore not applicable among their older target publics. Conversely, the research by WIPNZ (Smith *et al.*, 2008) has identified that although age impacts on Internet usage, the difference is flattening, with the major discrepancy arising only in the 70+ age bracket. Even in social media usage, a steeper grading occurs only after the 40+ age bracket (Smith *et al.*, 2008) which indicates that 'baby boomers' (Kurtz, 2008), which comprise the middle age group, are not very far in their social media use from their younger counterparts Gen Y (Kurtz, 2008), referred to as the 'digital natives' by Smith *et al.* (2008). Clearly, public relations use of social media is based on practitioners' perceptions that might not be informed by recent research, indicating the need for academia to educate practice by popularising studies such as the one conducted by WIPNZ.

As opposed the nascent research about other social media tools, there is a considerable number of literature available that claims that blogs are a useful means of communicating directly with the publics, gauging their opinions and conducting research (Porter *et al.*, 2007; Kent, 2008; Xifra & Huertas, 2008, Broom, 2009). However, the interview participants were also quick to acknowledge the ethical issues (discussed later in this chapter) of transparency and credibility of content arising out of blogging (see 5.5), which reflects that though the blogosphere is more used than other social media tools it faces its own share of cynicism. This feeling of apprehension resonates in a research paper by Kent (2008) who suggests that there is an exaggerated significance attached to blogging in the existing literature, which overlooks important

ethical issues. It is therefore implied that the usage by the New Zealand practitioners is governed by their perceived importance of the blogosphere which exceed its real (or actual) value. This perception appears to be influenced by the overstatement of advantages associated with blogging. Clearly, more critical research is required in this area to ascertain the 'real' value that the blogosphere holds for the public relations practitioners, which in turn might impact on its use in the future.

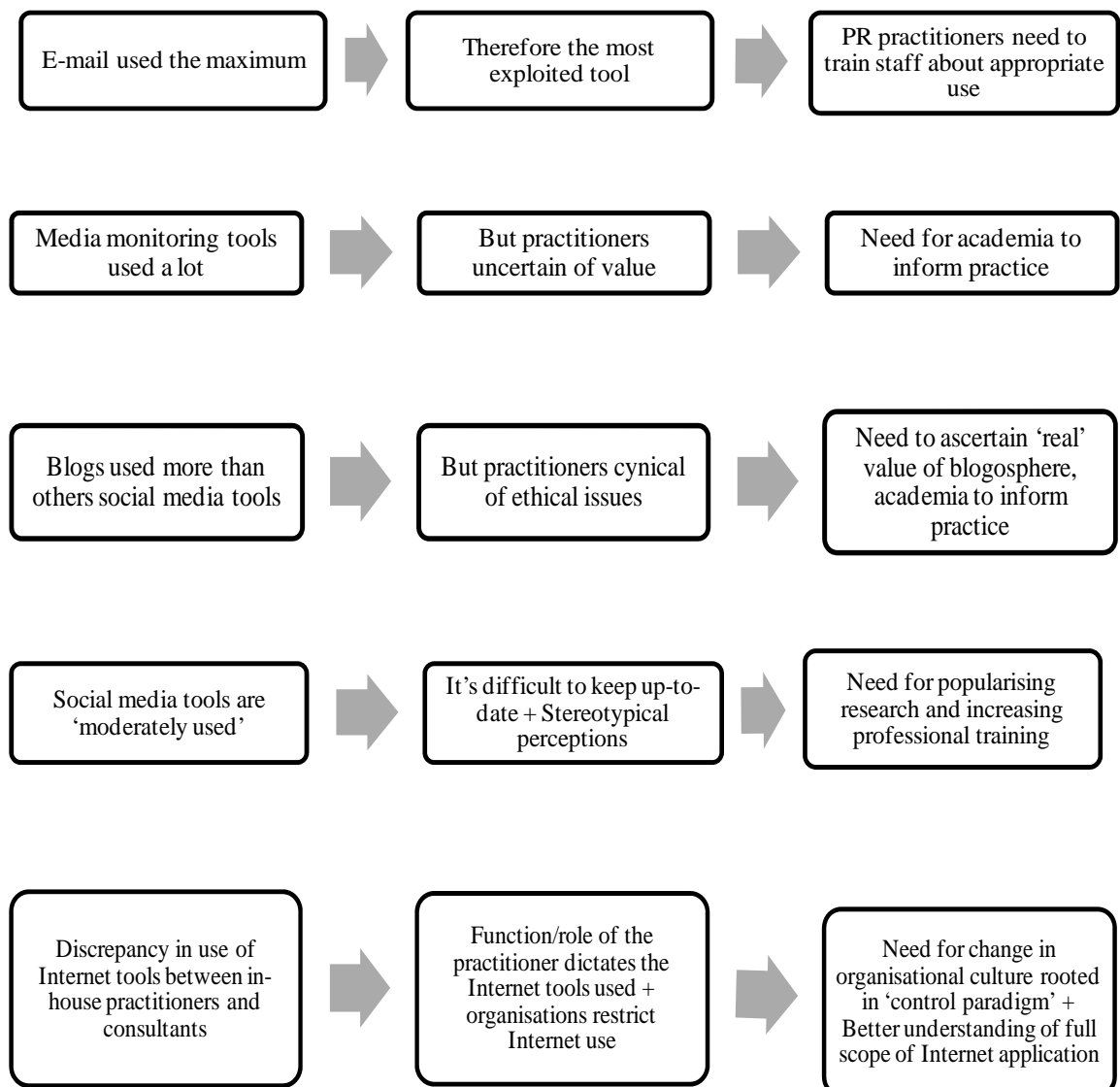
Finally, the 'low use' tools according to the present study included online gaming, virtual worlds, photo-sharing and Wikis (see table 4.3). This category too exhibits variations between in-house practitioners and consultants. While photo-sharing and micro-blogs are part of the 'moderate use' tools for consultants, they fall under 'low use' for in-house practitioners with podcasts exhibiting the reverse trend. Unfortunately, there is no evidence identifiable in the existing literature that could explain the aforementioned discrepancies, other than the fact that in-house practitioners in New Zealand (as discussed earlier) are battling with the Internet restrictions. But it is surprising that while in-house practitioners are lagging behind consultants in other social media tools, they are ahead in the usage of podcasts (see table 4.3). It is likely that with podcasts increasingly being used as a form of internal communication (Broom, 2009), which - as discussed earlier - has been acknowledged to be a function of the in-house practitioners, their use by consultants is limited. Clearly, there is need for a better understanding of the scope of application of Internet tools such as podcasts among consultants.

However, there are no such discrepancies in the use of online gaming, virtual worlds and Wikis which are truly 'fringe tools' among both in-house practitioners and consultants (see table 4.4). The study by PRSA (Eyrich *et al.*, 2009) suggests that these are niche tools which are technologically advanced and slightly complicated and therefore the public relations practitioners are discomforted by them. It appears that the same explanation could apply to the practitioners in New Zealand, though further research would be required to examine if there are other reasons that impact the use of 'fringe tools'.

Overall, in answer to research question one (see 2.5) pertaining to the usage of the 19 pre-defined Internet tools, this study has observed that the area of work of the practitioners (i.e. in-house or in consultancy) greatly impacts on the Internet tools that

are being used and there is a clear need for more research and training so that biased (and inaccurate) perceptions can be replaced with a factual understanding. Undoubtedly, along with the research, the organisations themselves will need to bring about a culture change that facilitates two-way symmetrical communication. The trends, challenges and their possible solutions discussed above are depicted in figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1 Use of Internet tools in public relations: trends, issues and suggestions



As shown in the above diagram, the use of Internet tools is dictated by the functions of the public relations practitioners. This inference was further supported by figure 4.11, where in-house practitioners and consultants were found to have applied Internet tools in different functions. Understandably, the in-house practitioners applied Internet tools

in the function of internal communication more than consultants for reasons such as the need for continued commitment and economies of scale as discussed earlier. It appears that a similar explanation could be attributed to the functions of community relations and government relations, which tend to be associated as an internal function requiring ongoing communication as opposed to 'situational' campaigns (Tymson & Lazar, 2006). Further, it has also been noted that consultants are usually viewed as 'outsiders' who only have a superficial grasp of an organisation's publics and their problems (Wilcox *et al.*, 2000, Tymson & Lazar, 2006) and therefore not appropriate for functions such as community relations. On the contrary, consultants were found to be more involved with applying the Internet for issues management, crisis communication and research as these are considered as functions which require the practitioners to be in their 'expert prescriber' and 'problem solving facilitator' roles, which according to Broom (2009) are usually associated with outside counsel due to need for objectivity and specialised skills. The above inference was further supported by the interviews where the senior participants who worked in consultancies felt that a crisis would be the only time when they would prefer to be more involved with the organisation's online communication.

The only surprises here were the functions of marketing/brand PR and investor relations. According to the 2008 TRENDS survey, both the above functions were mostly handled in-house (PRINZ, 2008). Yet, the survey results of the present study showed that consultants were far more involved in applying Internet tools in these functions (see figure 4.11). It could be argued that since in-house practitioners face restrictions in the use of the Internet (see 5.3), they outsource the online activities required in the aforementioned functions. Another possibility that could have impacted on the area of application of Internet tools could be the varying work profiles of the practitioners. Since work profiles were not a variable in selecting the sample, it cannot be determined whether the consulting practitioners (who claim to be using Internet tools in marketing or investor relations) worked in those firms that specialised in these particular functions.

Apart from area of work, the functions where the Internet tools were applied were also impacted upon by experience of the practitioners. While all other functions exhibited

only marginal variances, crisis communication and issues management (see table 4.6) exhibited a substantial difference with the application of the Internet increasing with experience. This finding was supported by the TRENDS survey where it has been noted that while 71% of the practitioners with more than 15 years of experience were involved in issues management, only 31% of those with less than 5 years of experience were responsible for it (PRINZ, 2008). While no such comparisons were available for crisis communication, it has been widely acknowledged in the literature that both the aforementioned functions are the domains of the 'expert prescriber' and/or the 'problem solving facilitator' which comprise the 'manager' roles in public relations (Wilcox *et al.*, 2000; Broom, 2009). As discussed in the literature review, the aforementioned roles according to theorists such as Grunig and Repper (1992) require strategic planning which is influenced by experience and seniority. It is therefore implied that crisis communication and issues management are strategic functions which are more likely to be conducted by senior and more experienced practitioners. This finding was further supported by the interview results where the senior practitioners were of the opinion that their junior counterparts were not strategically inclined. However, further research will be required to conclusively establish that age/seniority/job grade impact on the strategic use of the Internet.

Overall, in answer to research question two, pertaining to the functions where the Internet tools are applied, it was observed that the area of work of the public relations practitioners (in-house vs. consultancy) was the determining factor. However, in relation to key strategic functions, experience also played an important role.

Ironically, while the senior public relations practitioners who were interviewed felt that the junior practitioners were not 'strategic' in their use of Internet tools, they themselves agreed to not being strategic at all times (see 5.3) . The same trend was reflected in the survey results where the majority of the respondents (irrespective of experience) said that their use of the Internet was only 'sometimes' based on strategy (see figure 4.6). This finding resonates with studies conducted elsewhere in the world such as the one by Jun (2002) in Korea and Park (2005) among the U.S. practitioners where it had been noted that practitioners fail to integrate the Internet in their strategic planning (see 2.4). A previous study conducted in New Zealand (Weaver *et al.*, 2003) had also revealed

that practitioners felt the need to be more strategic in their use of the Internet but were falling short of their own expectations. The researchers remarked that this discrepancy might change with more experience with this channel. However, six years later in 2009, practitioners continue to battle with their own benchmarks of more sophisticated and strategic Internet use. This revelation confirms Grunig's (2009) argument that even today public relations practitioners continue to use new media channels the same way as they used the traditional ones. He implied that the practitioners still follow the information dissemination model rather than the strategic management paradigm which emphasises on two-way communication (Grunig, 2009). Clearly, issues discussed earlier in this chapter pertaining to the lack of organisational pro-activeness in using social media (and the banning of social media at work) are causing the practitioners to adopt a more *ad hoc* and experimental approach. While this indicates that organisations in New Zealand have not been able to shift from the 'control paradigm' to a more symmetrical communication approach, it also suggests that practitioners have not been able to position public relations as a strategic management function. According to Grunig (2006) it is the responsibility of the senior practitioners in the 'manager' roles to prove the value of public relations thereby becoming part of the organisation's decision making process. A recent study by Sterne (2008) to assess the business perceptions of public relations in New Zealand found that the practice was often misunderstood at the senior management table and its real role in the organisation was not clear. Unfortunately, this indicates that senior practitioners in 'manager' roles have not been able to advocate the value of the profession. This is reiterated by the findings of the present study where practitioners have not been able to convince the management organisation regarding the strategic use of the Internet. The aforementioned arguments suggest that there is a dire need for better standards of measurement and evaluation that can help prove the value of public relations efforts both offline and online. This suggestion is based on Grunig and Repper's (1992) argument that considerable emphasis needs to be laid on research and evaluation as part of the planning process in order to demonstrate the overall value of public relations as a management function.

Apart from experience, there appears to be several underlying assumptions regarding gender differences in strategic thinking. For example, two male practitioners suggested that the top positions were still occupied by men as public relations is a strategic function. This implies that women are not considered to be 'hard core' strategic

thinkers. Existing literature also claims that while the majority of the practitioners are female, male practitioners are favoured in top positions due to the association of these positions with presumably masculine traits of dominance and competitiveness (see 2.3). However, there is no research identifiable that proves the aforementioned supposition. It is therefore surprising that in a female dominated practice, strategic management roles continue to be associated with men. It is most likely that such perceptions are not based on facts but rather on societal stereotypes. Without a doubt, the correlation between gender and strategy in public relations practice warrants further investigation.

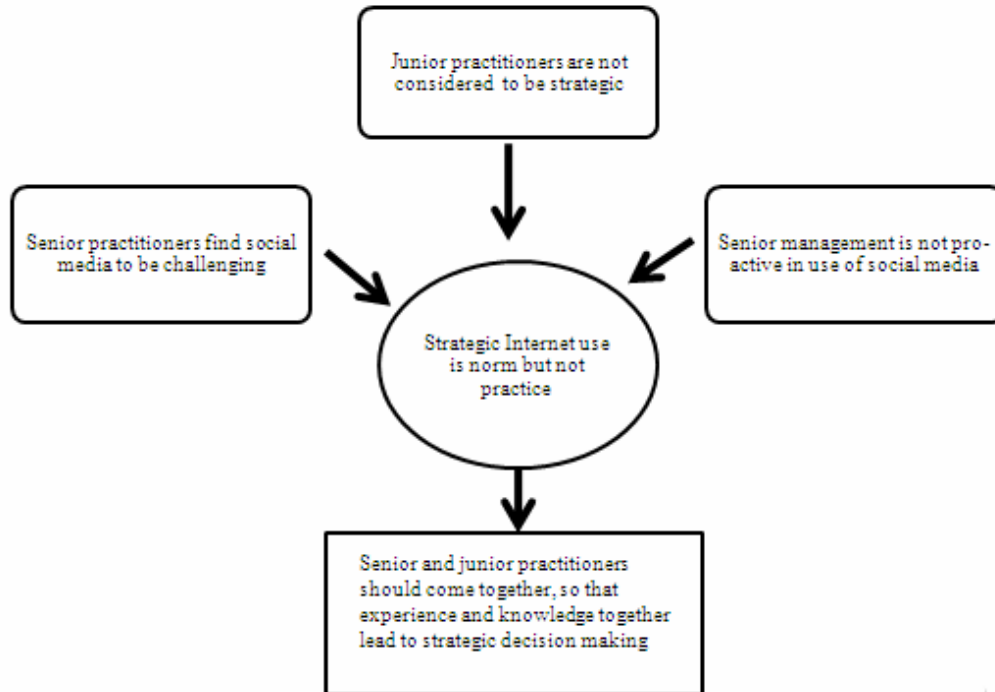
Unlike the gender perceptions, which may not be based in truth, the view that experience impacts on strategic thinking is supported by existing literature. As discussed earlier in this chapter, strategic functions such as crisis communication and issues management are considered to be better managed by senior practitioners. Since it has also been noted that senior practitioners are unable to be strategic due to their ongoing struggle with the dynamic online environment, it is suggested that younger practitioners who are regarded as 'digital natives' should be involved in strategic planning.

Hopefully, the amalgamation of the knowledge of the younger practitioners with the experience of their senior counterparts will help in the better utilization of the new media sphere. Further, according to the TRENDS survey (PRINZ, 2008) the incoming practitioners of New Zealand have qualifications in public relations/communications rather than being journalism graduates (as compared to more experienced practitioners). Since several tertiary educators increasingly including social media in their curriculum, it is likely that the incoming practitioners will have a greater and more sophisticated understanding of the channel and will be able to inform strategic decisions. This should assist in the strategic application of the social media and strengthening the position of public relations in an organisation's strategic management function.

Following the above discussions, the answer to research question three (see 2.5) is that being strategic in the use of Internet is an ideal towards practitioners strive rather than current practice. This can hopefully improve with organisations adopting symmetrical communications and practitioners advocating their inclusion in strategic decision

making. Further, an enhanced relationship between younger and senior practitioners could ensure that knowledge and experience together inform strategy.

Figure 6.2 Strategic use of Internet: trends, issues and suggestions



As represented in the above figure, there is an expectation that the knowledge of the junior practitioners will lead to a more strategic use of the Internet. Therefore, it becomes imperative that these incoming practitioners will have new skills such as the technical know-how of the online environment. Strangely, while the survey respondents agreed that the ‘Internet is giving rise to new skills’, the interview participants only emphasised the importance of writing, which as per the existing literature (see 2.3) is an age-old public relations skill rooted in the historic origins of professional public relations practice. Though the interviewees talked about the need to adapt the writing style to the social media sphere, they largely ignored multi-media tools such as videos on YouTube and photos on Picasa. The participants’ inclination towards Internet tools that entail writing (such as blogs) could be a result of them having a background in journalism or having worked with peers who had previous editorial experience. Since it has already been established in this chapter that the in-coming practitioners will have a qualification in public relations/communications (as opposed to journalism) including online communications (PRINZ, 2008), it is indicated that they will demonstrate much more than just good writing skills. Therefore, there is a need for public relations authors to acknowledge these new skills in order to keep the expectations from practitioners

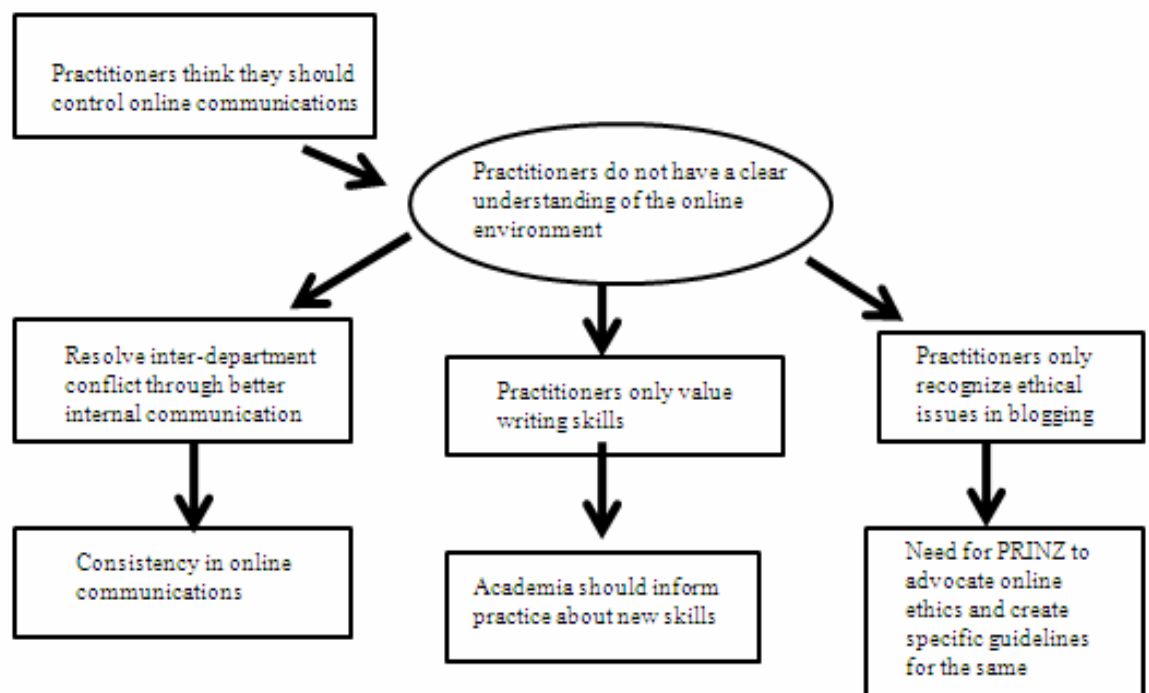
relevant and current. This will further enable senior practitioners hiring new practitioners to judge incoming practitioners' skill sets fairly.

Apart from the above, the interview participants mentioned the need to know technical and design aspects such as SEO and content layout. Here too the participants argued that public relations practitioners required only rudimentary technical knowledge. This suggests that senior New Zealand practitioners view the technical work as belonging to the IT departments and assume that anyone pursuing this stream would be regarded as a technician rather than a manager, which appeared to contradict findings in the existing literature where studies such as the one by Esrock and Leighty (2000) established that the practitioners complained about encroachment from IT departments due to their own lack of technical knowledge. However, this finding also reiterates the theories discussed by White and Dozier (1992) and Grunig (2006) where it is advocated (see 2.4) that senior public relations practitioners should better enact their 'manager' roles in order for public relations to be considered as an important part of the organisation's strategic management function. However, it was also observed that New Zealand practitioners felt that public relations departments 'controlled' the online arena. It was revealed that practitioners disregarded marketers as being short-sighted and lacking communication skills. It appears therefore that perceptions of marketers have not changed and that the turf battle between public relations and marketing still exists. This resonates with the findings of the existing literature where it has been acknowledged that though the concept of integrated communications is being advocated, public relations authors over the years such as Broom (2009) have continued to be extremely cynical of marketers (see 2.3). It can be debated that without resolving inter-departmental conflicts such as these, an organisation will not be able to engage in consistent online communication. As advocated by some interview participants, any department should be able to engage with the online publics as long as the message is consistent and in accordance to the larger goal of the organisation. It is therefore suggested that an organisation needs to have specific online policies or guidelines which are followed by each department to ensure consistency. Another possible way to avoid encroachment issues (if any) would be to have clearly demarcated job descriptions which explicitly detail the online responsibilities to avoid overlapping of tasks.

Another reason to have online policies would be to ensure that the practice of ethical communication was being followed. As identified in the literature (see 2.3), the use of

Internet (social media in particular) gives rise to various ethical concerns. These include spamming, hacking, copyright issues, content alteration, insufficient transparency and user privacy (Tavani, 2004; Fitzpatrick & Bronstein, 2006). In the face of so many possible issues, it is surprising that the interview participants were only concerned about insufficient transparency in blogging by the general public and public relations practitioners (see 5.5). Further, they advocated an oversimplified solution suggesting that the ethical issues resolved on their own and could be controlled with the ‘self regulation’ by the practitioners. This once again relates back to their relatively higher use of blogs than other social media tools such as video-sharing, social networks, micro-blogs and chats (see figure 4.3). It appears that, since the practitioners are not using multi-media tools, they are unaware of potential issues such as manipulation of images/videos among others. This indicates that there is a need for specific guidelines that explain the entire spectrum of ethical issues that could arise along with providing advice on the best practice to be followed. It is therefore suggested that the PRINZ will need to lead the advocacy of online ethics by creating a set of guidelines that cater specifically to the online environment. Following the above discussions, the answer to research question four (see 2.5) is summarised in the figure shown below.

Figure 6.3: Impact of the Internet on the practice: Trends, issues and suggestions



6.3 Limitations and recommendations

While every possible measure was taken to offset any limitations of this study, there are some that could have impacted on the interpretation of the results discussed above. Firstly, though snowball sampling was used to facilitate representation of non-PRINZ members, the anonymity of the survey makes it difficult to determine whether the views reflected include any practitioners outside the PRINZ membership. It is therefore acknowledged that a complete transferability of the interpretations, though attempted, cannot be guaranteed. Similarly, in the interview stage only senior PRINZ members were interviewed as the purpose was to assess 'change in the practice' which they would be able to identify due to their vast experience. However, it is possible that the middle or entry level practitioners have different views on the same topics, which was beyond the scope of this research and therefore not accounted for. Further, it was observed that the work profiles of the practitioners might have impacted on their Internet use, but this too was not a variable in the sampling process and therefore the aforementioned correlation could not be conclusively established. In addition, the senior practitioners interviewed were all from either Auckland or Wellington drawn according to judgement and convenience sampling. It is possible that practitioners residing in smaller cities might vary in opinion from the selected participants, though it could be argued that since the majority of the New Zealand practitioners reside in either of these two big cities (see 3.5) the results have sufficient validity and reliability.

While a mixed methods approach was followed in an attempt to be comprehensive, a few of the findings could be investigated further to arrive at exhaustive conclusions. Firstly, there is a need to ascertain whether there is a direct correlation between being cynical about the emerging Internet tools and age/job grade. Since the opinions of only more experienced practitioners are known, it would be feasible to examine the views of junior practitioners. In addition, research is required to test the perception of senior practitioners that their junior counterparts are not strategic. While literature is known to support this, it is possible that this supposition is based entirely on perceptions. Similarly, exhaustive research is required to examine the correlation between gender and strategy. It was surprising that even in a female dominated practice, men are

presumed to be favoured for the top strategic roles. Once again, it is likely that this view is biased and based on perceptions rather than reality. Other than the above, a more critical approach is required to ascertain the 'real value' of the blogosphere and investigate whether its advantages are merely hyped or truly suitable to the practice. In addition to this, further research is necessary to determine the full scope of the nature and application of emerging Internet tools such as social networks and micro-blogs, and examining the reasons why certain tools such as virtual worlds and online gaming are viewed as 'fringe tools'. Lastly, it is recommended that along with providing better training and professional development opportunities, PRINZ needs to create guidelines for online practice in order to advocate ethical online communication.

6.4 Concluding summary

The public relations practitioners of New Zealand participating in this study demonstrated ambivalence towards the use of Internet in their practice which is similar to the trend identified elsewhere in the world. While they saw advantages in using the Internet to facilitate direct communication with their target publics and enhancing the overall speed of communications, they were equally anxious about the time pressure that the Internet exerted on their roles and the loss of control over the information circulated about the organisations that they represent. The findings pertaining to the extent of use of Internet tools reflected similarities with a recent study conducted among American practitioners revealing that just like in the U.S., practitioners in New Zealand are more comfortable with the employment of established Internet tools such as the e-mail and intranets whereas they are evidently lagging behind in their adoption of social media tools. Even within the social media sphere, the practitioners exhibited a lack of interest in presumably niche tools such as virtual worlds and online gaming, and felt more comfortable using blogs. The general observation was that the practitioners are yet to identify the complete scope of the Internet's application in public relations and tend to be attracted towards tools that entail writing (such as blogs and e-mails) rather than other tools that use multi-media formats (such as video/photo sharing, webcasts and podcasts). Since it has been identified that the majority of the practitioners in New Zealand have prior experience in journalism, it is understandable why writing skills continue to be held in greater regard than other technical or interpersonal skillsets

necessitated by the Internet. Surprisingly, as opposed to the findings of the existing literature, practitioners in New Zealand argued that only rudimentary technical online knowledge was required as they preferred their IT teams to facilitate the technical management and did not want to be relegated to 'technician' roles themselves. This finding confirmed that though some of the practitioners were concerned about encroachment of their online responsibilities by the IT teams, they were not interested in further understanding the technical ramifications to avoid such infringement, as they feared that it would take away important time and attention from their strategic 'manager roles'. It was also found that in contrast to their normative perceptions towards being 'strategic' they did not match their own standards of sophisticated use of the Internet in all occasions. A difficulty in keeping up-to-date with the dynamic online environment and the lack of organisational support was found to be blamed for the non-inclusion of the Internet in strategic planning. It appears that although emphasis on tertiary and professional training is required to educate the incoming and existing practitioners about the strategic use of the Internet, a change in organisations towards an open culture advocating symmetrical communication is also deemed necessary. It appears that the communication practice in New Zealand, like elsewhere in the world, is still governed by the control paradigm and it is assumed and thereby feared that symmetrical dialogue will only result in negative outcomes such as circulation of misleading information and widespread disrepute, and that it will remain a distant ideal. This suggests that more awareness is required in understanding the best practice that is both effective and ethical. Further, standards regarding measurement and evaluation of online engagements need to be developed to aid the practitioners in analyzing and proving the value of their online efforts to their respective clients and organisations. It was surprising that while the survey respondents demonstrated a high use of the online monitoring tools, there were still concerns about the value of monitoring vis-à-vis the time, efforts and costs involved. It appears that the lack in effective monitoring and evaluation could be associated to the fact that the majority of the practitioners applied the Internet for facilitating media relations, which has been identified by the TRENDS survey to be the most important function in New Zealand public relations. This is similar to the status of the practice elsewhere in world as according to the review of the literature there was a clear prejudice in assessing how the Internet impacted media relations and crisis communication as opposed to other functions of the practice. While the practitioners in New Zealand exhibited a fair amount of Internet usage across the various functions, it appears that a clear understanding of the full scope of the Internet is

still lacking. This further leads to the strategic use of the Internet being acknowledged an ideal rather than a practice. Clearly, a better interrelation between the junior and senior practitioners is required so that knowledge and experience could together aid in the strategic decision making. Just like experience, gender might also be a consideration in the use of the Internet, though the present study has not been able to establish a clear hypothesis and while it appears that gender stereotypes in the use of Internet tools and the perceptions of male and female traits exist in New Zealand, the topic warrants further research to derive a conclusion. It is therefore concluded that while there is an increasing body of knowledge advocating the use of the various Internet tools for symmetrical communication, the practice in New Zealand is yet to come to grips with the highly interactive and ever changing world of the Internet.

Bibliography

- Aldoory, L. & Toth, E. (2002). Gender discrepancies in a gendered profession: a developing theory for public relations. *Journal of public relations research*, 14(2), 103-126.
- Aldoory, L. (2007). Reconceiving gender for an “excellent” future in public relations scholarship. In E. Toth (Ed.), *The future of excellence in public relations and communications management: challenges for the next generation* (pp 399-412). London, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers. .
- Alfonso, G.H. & de Valbuena Miguel, R. (2006). Trends in online media relations: Web-based corporate press rooms in leading international companies. *Public Relations Review*, 32, 267–275.
- Alfonso, G.H. & Smith, S. (2008). Crisis communications management on the web: how internet-based technologies are changing the way public relations professionals handle crisis. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 16(3), 143-153.
- Ayish, M. I. (2005). Virtual public relations in the United Arab Emirates: A case study of 20 UAE organizations’ use of the Internet. *Public Relations Review*, 31, 381–388.
- Ayish, M.I. (2005). Virtual public relations in the United Arab Emirates: A case study of 20 UAE organisations’ use of the Internet. *Public Relations Review*, 31, 381–388.
- Breakenridge, D. (2008). *PR 2.0: new media, new tools, new audiences*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson education.
- Broom, G.M. (2009). *Cutlip & Center’s effective public relations*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson education.
- Bryman, A. (2006). Integrating quantitative and qualitative research: how is it done? In A. Bryman (Ed.), *Mixed methods volume III*. London: Sage Publications.

Bryman, A. (2008). Why do researchers integrate/combine/mesh/blend/mix/merge/fuse quantitative and qualitative research? In M. Bergman (Ed.), *Advances in mixed methods research*. London: Sage Publications.

Burgess, A., Jackson, T.W. and Edwards, J. (2005). Email training significantly reduces email defects. *International Journal of Information Management*, 25(1), 71-83.

Castells, M. (2000). *Rise of the network society*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Cavana, Y.B., Delahaye, B.L. & Sekaran, U. (2001). *Applied business research: qualitative and quantitative methods*. Australia: John Wiley & Sons Australia, Ltd.

Choi, M.G. (2008). *The impact of Cultural Context on Corporate Web Sites: A New Zealand and South Korean*. Auckland, Auckland University of Technology.

Christ, P. (2005). Internet technologies and trends transforming public relations. *Journal of Website Promotion*, 1(4), 3-14.

Corbetta, P. (2003). *Social research: theory, methods and techniques*. London: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J.W. & Clark, V.L.P. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE publications.

Cutlip, S.M., Center, A.H. & Broom G.M. (2000). *Effective public relations*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Czaja, R. & Blair, J. (2005). *Designing surveys: A guide to decisions and procedures*. Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press.

de Leeuw, E. & Hox, J. (2008). Mixing data collection methods: lessons from social survey research. In M. Bergman (Ed.), *Advances in mixed methods research*. London: Sage Publications.

Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Introduction: the discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE publications.

Dow Jones/Public Relations Society of America (2007). *New Technology Tools Have High Acceptance Rate in Public Relations*. U.S.A: PRSA.

Dozier, D. M. (1992). The organizational roles of communications and public relations practitioners. In J.E. Grunig (Ed.), *Excellence in public relations and communications management* (pp. 327-355). Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Esrock, L.S. & Leighty, G.B. (1999). Corporate World Wide Web pages: Serving the news media and other publics. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 76(3), 456-467.

Esrock, L.S. & Leighty, G.B. (2000). Organisation of corporate Web pages: Publics and functions. *Public Relations Review*, 26(3), 327-344.

Eyrich, N., Padman, M.L. & Sweester, K.D. (2008). PR practitioner's use of social media tools and communication technology. *Public Relations Review*, 34, 412-414.

Falk, B. (1994). *The internet roadmap*. San Francisco, California: Sybex.

Fitzpatrick, K. & Bronstein, C. (2006). *Ethics in public relations: responsible advocacy*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Flick, U. (2002). *An introduction to qualitative research*. London: Sage Publications.

Fontana, A. & Frey, J.H. (2005). The interview: from neutral science to political involvement. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The sage handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Gillies, J. & Cailliau, R. (2000). *How the web was born*. New York, NY: Oxford university press.

Giovannetti, E., Kagami, M. & Tsuji, M. (2003). Introduction. In Giovannetti E., Kagami M. & Tsuji M. (Eds.), *The internet revolution: a global perspective*. New York, NY: Cambridge University press.

Grbic, C. (2007). *Qualitative data analysis: an introduction*. London: Sage Publications.

Groves, R.M., Fowler, F.J., Couper, M.P., Lepowski, J.M., Singer, E. & Tourangeau, R. (2004). *Survey methodology*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Grunig, J. E. (2006). Furnishing the edifice: ongoing research on public relations as a strategic management function. *Journal of public relations research*, 18 (2), 151-176.

Grunig, J.E. & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing public relations*. U.S.A.: Wadsowrth/Thomson learning.

Grunig, J.E. & Repper, F. C. (1992). Strategic management, publics, and issues. ? In Grunig J.E. (Ed.), *Excellence in public relations and communications management* (pp. 117-157). Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Grunig, J.E. (2009). Paradigms of global public relations in an age of digitalisation. Prism 6(2): Retrieved March 25, 2010, from http://praxis.massey.ac.nz/prism_online_journ.html

Grunig, L.A., Grunig, J.E. & Dozier, D.M. (2002). *Excellent public relations and effective organisations*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Grunig, L.A., Grunig, J.E. & Ehling, W.P. (1992). What is an effective organisation? In J.E. Grunig (Ed.), *Excellence in public relations and communications management* (pp. 65-90). Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hallahan, K. (2007). Integrated communication: Implications for and beyond public relations excellence. In E. L. Toth (Ed.), *The future of excellence in public relations and communication management: challenges to the next generation* (pp. 299-337). New Jersey, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

- Hammersely, M. (2008). Troubles with triangulation. In M. M. Bergman (Ed.), *Advances in mixed methods research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Hill, L.N. & White, C. (2000). Public relations practitioners' perception of the World Wide Web as a communication tool. *Public Relations Review*, 26 (1), 31-51.
- Holtz, S. (2002). *Public relations on the net*. New York, NY: AMACOM.
- Hon, L., Grunig, L. A. & Dozier, D. M. (1992). Women in public relations: problems and opportunities. In Grunig J.E. (Ed.), *Excellence in public relations and communications management* (pp. 65-90). London, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- James, (2008). A review of the impact of new media on public relations. *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Relations*, 8, 137-148.
- Johnson, J.M. (2002). In-depth interviewing. In J.F. Gubrium & J.A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: context and method*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Johnson, R.B. & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2006). Mixed methods research: a research paradigm whose time has come. In A. Bryman (Ed.), *Mixed methods volume II*. London: Sage Publications.
- Jun, M.C. (2002). *Internet usage in Korea- a survey of public relations practitioners*. Department of communication, University of South Alabama.
- Kent, M. L. (2008). Critical analysis of blogging in public relations. *Public Relations Review* 34, 32-40.
- Kirat, M. (2007). Promoting online media relations: public relations departments' use of Internet in the UAE. *Public Relations Review* 33, 166-174.

Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis: an introduction to its methodology*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Kurtz, D. L. (2008). *Principles of contemporary marketing*. Australia, Singapore: Thompson South-Western.

Lattimore, D., Baskin, O., Heiman, S.T., Toth, E.L. & Leuven, J.K.V. (2004). *Public relations: the profession and the practice*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Lauzen, M. M. (1992). Public relations roles, Intraorganizational power, and

Levine, M. (2002). *Guerrilla P.R. wired*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Lieber, P.S. (2005). Ethical Considerations of Public Relations Practitioners: An Empirical Analysis of the TARES Test. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 20(4), 288-304.

Lindic, J. (2006). *How do corporations use internet for public relations?* Paper presented at the 19th Bled eConference, Slovenia.

Manfreda, K.L. & Vehovar, V. (2008). Internet surveys. In D. de Leeuw, J.J. Hox & D.A. Dillman (Eds.), *International handbook of survey methodology*. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

McEwan, R.W. (2008). *Radio on the Internet: Opportunities for new public spheres?* Auckland, Auckland University of Technology.

Mersham, G., Theunissen, P., Peart, J. (2009). The nature of public relations. In Mersham, G., Theunissen, P. & Peart, J. (Eds.), *Public relations and communication management: An Aotearoa/New Zealand perspective (pp 1-18)*. New Zealand: Pearson.

Mersham, G., Theunissen, P., Peart, J. (2009). The practice of public relations. In Mersham, G., Theunissen, P. & Peart, J. (Eds.), *Public relations and communication management: An Aotearoa/New Zealand perspective (pp 19-31)*. New Zealand: Pearson.

Mersham, G., Theunissen, P., Peart, J. (2009). Public relations and marketing. In Mersham, G., Theunissen, P. & Peart, J. (Eds.), *Public relations and communication management: An Aotearoa/New Zealand perspective* (pp 19-31). New Zealand: Pearson.

Mersham, G., Theunissen, P., Peart, J. (2009). Social media. In Mersham, G., Theunissen, P. & Peart, J. (Eds.), *Public relations and communication management: An Aotearoa/New Zealand perspective* (pp 146-161). New Zealand: Pearson.

Mertens, D.M. (2005). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: integrative diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Meyerson, D.E., Fletcher, J.K. (2000). A modest manifesto for shattering the glass ceiling, *Harvard Business Review*, 78,126-36.

Middleberg, D. (2001). *Winning PR in the wired world*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Murgolo-Poore, E., Pitt, L.F. & Ewing, M.T. (2002). *Public Relations Review*, 28 (1), 113-123.

Naudé, A. M. E. , Froneman, J.D. & Atwood, R.A. (2004). The use of the internet by ten South African non-governmental organisations—a public relations perspective. *Public Relations Review*, 30, 87–94.

Newson, D., Scott, A. & Turk, J. V. (1989). *This is PR: the realities of public relations*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Ono, H. & Zavodny, M. (2003). Gender and the Internet. *Social Science Quarterly*, 84(1), 111-121.

Parsons, P.J. (2008). *Ethics in public relations: a guide to best practice*. London: Kogan Page Limited.

Phillips, D. (2001). *Online public relations*. London, U.K.: Kogan Page Limited.

Podder, B. (2005). *Radio on the Internet: Opportunities for new public spheres?* Auckland, Auckland University of Technology.

Porter, L.V. & Sallot, L.M. (2003). The internet and public relations: investigating practitioners' roles and World Wide Web use. *J & MC Quarterly*, 80(3).

Prat, C.B. (1991). Public Relations: The Empirical Research on Practitioner Ethics. *Journal of Business Ethics* 10 (3), 229-236.

PRINZ (2008). PRINZ PR TRENDS survey, summary of key results. Retrieved May 25, 2009, from http://www.prinz.org.nz/site/resources/PRINZ_Research/default.aspx

PRINZ Member List. (n.d.). Retrieved June 5, 2009, from <http://www.prinz.org.nz/tools/clients/directory.aspx?SECT=Members>

Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (2008). *Trends survey 2008*. Auckland, New Zealand: PRINZ.

Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (2009). *Annual Report 2009*. Auckland, New Zealand: PRINZ.

Rubin, H.J. & Rubin, I. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: the art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Ryan, M. (2003). Public relations and the web: organisational problems, gender, and institution type. *Public Relations Review*, 29, 335-349.

Sandilands, A. (2009). Crisis and issues management. In Mersham, G., Theunissen, P. & Peart, J. (Eds.), *Public relations and communication management: An Aotearoa/New Zealand perspective* (pp 104-116). New Zealand: Pearson.

Sandilands, A. & Mersham, G. (2009). Reputation, image and identity. In Mersham, G., Theunissen, P. & Peart, J. (Eds.), *Public relations and communication management: An Aotearoa/New Zealand perspective* (pp 217-231). New Zealand: Pearson.

Seitel, F.P. (2001). *The practice of public relations*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc.

Sharif, A. (2003). *Factors affecting the adoption of the internet by public relations practitioners in Kuwait: a comparison of two social systems*. School of Journalism, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University.

Sheehan, K. B. (2001). E-mail survey response rates: a review. *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, 6(2)

Smith, P., Smith, N., Sherman K., Kripalani, K., Goodwin, I., Bell, A. & Crothers, C. (2008). The Internet: Social and demographic impacts in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Observatorio (OBS*) Journal*, 6, 307-330.

Smith, P., Smith, N., Sherman, K., Goodwin, I., Crothers, C., Billot, J., Bell, A. (2010). *The Internet in New Zealand 2009*. Auckland: Institute of Culture, Discourse and Communication, AUT University.

Smudde, P. M. (2005). Blogging, ethics and public relations: a proactive and dialogic approach. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 50(3), 34-38.

Some Characteristics of Serious Bloggers in the Asia-Pacific Region, and Why PR Professionals Might Care About Them. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 52(3), 39-44.

Sterne, G.D. (2008). Business perceptions of public relations in New Zealand. *Journal of Communications Management*, 12 (1), 30-50.

Steyn P., Van Heerden G., Pitt L., Boshoff C. (2007). Meet the Bloggers:

Strenski, J. B. (1995). The ethics of manipulated communication. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 40 (3), 33-35.

Stuntebeck, V.A. (2002). *Public relations on the web: A look at measurement and evaluation of this new medium*. College of Arts and Sciences, Georgia State University.

Sudman S. (1976). *Applied sampling*. New York, San Francisco, London: Academic Press.

Tashakkori A. & Teddlie C. (2003). Past and future of mixed methods research : from data triangulation to mixed model designs. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioral research*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications.

Tashakkori A. & Teddlie C. (2006). Introduction to mixed method and mixed model studies. In A. Bryman (Ed.), *Mixed methods volume II*. London: Sage Publications.

Tashakkori A. & Teddlie C. (2008). Quality of inferences in mixed methods research: calling for an integrative framework. In M. Bergman (Ed.), *Advances in mixed methods research*. London: Sage Publications.

Tavani H. T. (2004). Ethics technology: ethical issues in an age of information and communication technology. New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Taylor M. & Perry D.C. (2005). Diffusion of traditional and new media tactics in crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, 31, 209–217.

Teddlie C. & Tashakkori A. (2009). *Foundations of mixed methods research*. London, U.K.: SAGE publications.

The Bohle Company (1998). Public relations agencies getting ‘wired’ and equipped. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 43(2), 26-27.

Thorsteinsson J. (2000). Public relations and the internet: An exploratory study into how the internet affects public relations. Department of retail and marketing, Manchester Metropolitan University.

Tilley, E. (2009). Ethics and public relations. In Mersham, G., Theunissen, P. & Peart, J. (Eds.), *Public relations and communication management: An Aotearoa/New Zealand perspective (pp 204-216)*. New Zealand: Pearson.

Tymson C. & Lazar (2006). *The new Australian and New Zealand public relations manual*. Manly, Australia: Tymson communications Pty Ltd.

Weaver, C; Schoenberger-Orgad M. & Pope A. (2003). Public relations on the Internet: The state of the art in New Zealand, *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal*, 4 (2), 31-55.

White, J. & Dozier, D. M. (1992). Public relations and management decision making. In Grunig J.E. (Ed.), *Excellence in public relations and communications management* (pp. 65-90). London, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

White, J. & Mazur, L. (1995). *Strategic communications management: making public relations work*. England, New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Wilcox, D.L., Ault P.H., Agee, W. K. & Cameron, G.T. (2000). *Public relations strategies and tactics*. New York, N.Y.: HarperCollins Publishers Inc.

WOMMA (2009). *Ethics code*. Retrieved from <http://womma.org/ethics/ethicscode.pdf>

Annual report 2007-2008. Retrieved from http://static.radionz.net.nz/assets/pdf_file/0010/1796761/Radio_NZ_Annual_Report_2008.pdf

Wrench J.S., Thomas-Maddox C, Richmond V.P. & McCroskey J.C. (2008). *Quantitative research methods for communication*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Xifra J. & Huertas A. (2008). Blogging PR: An exploratory analysis of public relations blogs. *Public Relations Review*, 34, 269–275

Yang, S. & Lim, J. S. (2009). The Effects of Blog-Mediated Public Relations (BMPR) on Relational Trust. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 21(3), 341–359.

Zhu, Y., Nel, P. & Bhat, R. (2006). A cross cultural study of communication strategies for building business relationships. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 6(3), 319-341.

Appendix A: Ethics Approval for Survey



M E M O R A N D U M Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

To: Petra Theunissen

From: **Madeline Banda** Executive Secretary, AUTEC

Date: 3 July 2009

Subject: Ethics Application Number 09/114 **Has the internet changed the practice of public relations in New Zealand in the past years?**

Dear Petra

Thank you for providing written evidence as requested. I am pleased to advise that it satisfies the points raised by a subcommittee of the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) at their meeting on 21 May 2009 and that I have approved the first stage of your ethics application. This delegated approval is made in accordance with section 5.3.2.3 of AUTEC's *Applying for Ethics Approval: Guidelines and Procedures* and is subject to endorsement at AUTEC's meeting on 13 July 2009.

Your ethics application is approved for a period of three years until 2 July 2012.

This approval is for the first stage of the research only, relating to an anonymous online Questionnaire. Full information and documentation for any remaining stages needs to be submitted and approved before those stages commence.

I advise that as part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTEC:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/about/ethics>. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 2 July 2012;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/about/ethics>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 2 July 2012 or on completion of the project, whichever comes sooner;

It is a condition of approval that AUTECH is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTECH approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are reminded that, as applicant, you are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

Please note that AUTECH grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to make the arrangements necessary to obtain this. Also, if your research is undertaken within a jurisdiction outside New Zealand, you will need to make the arrangements necessary to meet the legal and ethical requirements that apply within that jurisdiction.

When communicating with us about this application, we ask that you use the application number and study title to enable us to provide you with prompt service. Should you have any further enquiries regarding this matter, you are welcome to contact Charles Grinter, Ethics Coordinator, by email at charles.grinter@aut.ac.nz or by telephone on 921 9999 at extension 8860.

On behalf of the AUTECH and myself, I wish you success with your research and look forward to reading about it in your reports.

Yours sincerely



Madeline Banda

Executive Secretary

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: Deepti Bhargava deeptibhargav@gmail.com, AUTECH Faculty Representative,
Design and Creative Technologies

Appendix B: Ethics Approval for Interviews



M E M O R A N D U M Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

To: Petra Theunissen

From: **Madeline Banda** Executive Secretary, AUTEC

Date: 30 September 2009

Subject: Ethics Application Number 09/114 **Has the internet changed the practice of public relations in New Zealand in the past years?**

Dear Petra

I am pleased to advise that a subcommittee of the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) approved the second stage of your ethics application at their meeting on 24 September 2009. This delegated approval is made in accordance with section 8.1 of AUTEC's *Applying for Ethics Approval: Guidelines and Procedures* and is subject to endorsement at AUTEC's meeting on 12 October 2009.

This approval is for the second stage of the research only, relating to semi-structured interviews. Full information and documentation for any remaining stages needs to be submitted and approved before those stages commence.

I remind you that as part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTEC:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics>. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 2 July 2012;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 2 July 2012 or on completion of the project, whichever comes sooner;

It is a condition of approval that AUTEC is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEC approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are reminded that, as applicant, you are responsible for ensuring

that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

Please note that AUTEK grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to make the arrangements necessary to obtain this. Also, if your research is undertaken within a jurisdiction outside New Zealand, you will need to make the arrangements necessary to meet the legal and ethical requirements that apply within that jurisdiction.

When communicating with us about this application, we ask that you use the application number and study title to enable us to provide you with prompt service. Should you have any further enquiries regarding this matter, you are welcome to contact Charles Grinter, Ethics Coordinator, by email at ethics@aut.ac.nz or by telephone on 921 9999 at extension 8860.

On behalf of the AUTEK and myself, I wish you success with your research and look forward to reading about it in your reports.

Yours sincerely



Madeline Banda

Executive Secretary

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: Deepti Bhargava deeptibhargav@gmail.com, AUTEK Faculty Representative, Design and Creative Technologies

Appendix C: Survey Questionnaire

Q1. Please indicate your area of work

In-house practitioner

PR Consultancy

Freelance

Other (please specify)

Q2. How many years have you been working as a PR/communications practitioner?

0-4

5-9

10-14

15-19

20-29

30 or more

Q3. How many years have you been using the Internet as part of your communications plan?

0-2

3-5

6-8

9-11

12-14

15 or more

Q4. Is your use of Internet based on specific online strategy? (The strategy may vary from client to

client/plan to plan)

131

Yes

No

Sometime

Uncertain

Q5. Rate how often you use the following tools as part of your communications plan?
(You may use these

as part of conducting research, communicating with your target audience, implementing tactics or

evaluating plans)

1= All the time, 2= Most of the time, 3= Sometimes, 4= Rarely, 5= Never

Blogs

Micro-blogs (e.g. Twitter)

Social networking websites (e.g. Facebook)

Video-sharing (e.g. YouTube)

Photo-sharing (e.g. Flickr)

Wikis

Podcasts

Webcasts/webinars

RSS

Chat forums

Online gaming

Virtual worlds (e.g. Second Life)

Intranet

Online newsroom

E-alerts/e-newsletters

Links and tags

Search Engine Optimization

E-mail

Online media monitoring

Q6. Which area of work do you use these Internet tools for? (You can select more than one answer)

Media relations

Crisis communication

Internal/employee communication

Community relations

Issues management

Government relations

Marketing and brand PR

Fundraising

Sponsorship

Events management

Education and training

Research

Others (please specify)

Q7. Please rate your opinion on the following statements

1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4= Agree and 5= Strongly agree

The Internet has changed the PR practice

The Internet is increasing the opportunities for PR

The Internet is increasing the challenges for PR

The Internet is increasing encroachment of PR roles by IT and/or management departments

The Internet is reducing gender imbalances in the PR practice

The Internet is giving rise to new ethics in the PR practice

The Internet is giving rise to new skill sets for PR practitioners

Q8. How has your own role changed due to the Internet? (Please specifically state your key job areas that have been affected by the Internet)

Appendix D: Online Survey Format

Internet and the practice of public relations in New Zealand.

1.

14%

This is an anonymous survey and your responses will be kept strictly confidential.

By completing this questionnaire you are indicating your consent to participate in this research.

This survey is designed to identify how the practice of public relations has changed in New Zealand due to the Internet over the past years. The aim is to look at identifying the extent and the specific areas of change along with the issues and opportunities that this change (if any) results in.

The survey is part of a research to be conducted by Deepti Bhargava, student, Master of Communications Studies, AUT University.

Number of questions in the survey = 8

Approximate time required to complete the survey = 5 minutes

1. Please indicate your area of work

- In-house practitioner
- PR consultancy
- Freelance
- Other (please specify)

[Next](#)

[SURVEY PREVIEW MODE] Internet and the practice of public relations in New Zealand. Survey - Windows Internet Explorer

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?PREVIEW_MODE=DO_NOT_USE_THIS_LINK_FOR_COLLECTION&sm=jsy0ck%2fXepiognRpkZ2xSPdna8m8Incl4SC9zgo58rjc%3d

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

AUT
UNIVERSITY
TE HĀKANGĀ ARĀKŪ I TAMAKI MĀKAU RAU

Save and complete survey later

Internet and the practice of public relations in New Zealand.

2.

29%

2. How many years have you been working as a PR/communications practitioner?

- 0-4
- 5-9
- 10-14
- 15-19
- 20-29
- 30 or more

3. How many years have you been using the Internet as part of your communications plan?

- 0-2
- 3-5
- 6-8
- 9-11
- 12-14
- 15 or more

**4. Is your use of Internet based on specific online strategy?
(The strategy may vary from client to client/plan to plan)**

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Uncertain

Prev Next



[Save and complete survey later](#)

Internet and the practice of public relations in New Zealand.

3.



5. Rate how often you use the following tools as part of your communications plan?
 (You may use these as part of conducting research, communicating with your target audience, implementing tactics or evaluating plans)

	All the time	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Blogs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Micro-blogs (e.g. Twitter)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social networking websites (e.g. Facebook)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Video sharing (e.g. YouTube)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Photo sharing (e.g. Flickr)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wikis	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Podcasts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Webcasts/webinars	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
RSS	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Chat forums	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online gaming	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Virtual worlds (e.g. Second Life)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Intranet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online newsroom	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
E-alerts/e-newsletters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Links and tags	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Search Engine Optimization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
E-mail	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online media monitoring	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Internet and the practice of public relations in New Zealand.

4.

57%

6. Which area of work do you use these Internet tools for? (You can select more than one answer)

- Media Relations
- Crisis Communication
- Internal/employee communication
- Community relations
- Investor relations
- Issues management
- Government relations
- Marketing and brand PR
- Fundraising
- Sponsorship
- Events management
- Education and training
- Research
- Other (please specify)

[Prev](#)[Next](#)

Internet and the practice of public relations in New Zealand.

5.



7. Please rate your opinion on the following statements

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The Internet has changed the PR practice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Internet is increasing the opportunities for PR	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Internet is increasing the challenges for PR	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Internet is increasing encroachment of PR roles by IT and/or management departments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Internet is reducing gender imbalances in the PR practice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Internet is giving rise to new ethics in the PR practice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Internet is giving rise to new skill sets for PR practitioners	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Prey](#)
[Next](#)

Internet and the practice of public relations in New Zealand.

6.



8. How has your own role changed due to the Internet?

(Please specifically state your key job areas that have been affected by the Internet)

[Prev](#)[Next](#)

Appendix E: Survey Information Sheet



Date Information Sheet Produced:

29 04 2009

Project Title

“Has the internet changed the practice of public relations in New Zealand in the past years?”

An Invitation

You are invited to participate in an ‘online survey’ which is part of a research to be conducted by Deepti Bhargava, student, Master of Communications Studies, AUT University. This research is part of the partial fulfilment of the above mentioned Master’s degree.

Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to refuse participation or withdraw at any time without any adverse consequences. You have the complete right to not answer any one or all of the questions on this online survey.

What is the purpose of this research?

The aim of this research is to identify how the practice of public relations has changed in New Zealand due to the Internet over the past years. The research will look at identifying the extent and the specific areas of change along with the issues and opportunities that this change (if any) results in.

This research is part of the partial fulfilment of my Master’s in Communications degree from AUT. The results from the preliminary data collection will be transcribed and recorded. These will then be analysed thoroughly to identify the trends and draw conclusions. The entire data collection procedure, the results and the analysis will be recorded and written in the form of a thesis as part of this research project.

On completion, the thesis will be marked for grading to achieve partial completion of the Master’s degree.

How was I chosen for this invitation?

For the purpose of this research an anonymous online survey was created to be circulated among known public relations practitioners in New Zealand. You are one of those practitioners who were identified to be a member of PRINZ (Public Relations Institute of New Zealand) working in the practice of public relations in New Zealand. Your e-mail

address was available and taken from the Internet and the online survey was hence e-mailed to you at the identified address.

Please be aware that completion of the attached online survey questionnaire will be taken as indicating your consent to participate in this research. You have the right to refuse participation or withdraw at any time without it leading to any adverse consequences.

What will happen in this research?

This research looks at specific Internet tools and their use by public relations practitioners in New Zealand to identify how that has changed their practice of public relations. The purpose is to enlighten how the Internet has led to a rise in opportunities, challenges and issues in public relations. A detailed literature review has been undertaken to identify and understand various Internet tools and their applications in public relations. The literature has also helped recognize the trends in their usage and the opportunities and challenges they hold for the practice. The existing literature however has largely been written from an American perspective with a few journal articles focussing on specific areas of the world including Asia-Pacific, South Africa and the UAE. The aim of the research is to fill this gap in the existing literature and look at trends specific to New Zealand.

You will be required to complete a survey (as attached) that aims at getting quantitative data regarding the trends in the use of Internet tools by public relations practitioners in New Zealand and in what ways that has changed their practice. There are eight questions to be answered. You have the right to not answer any one or all of the questions.

The thesis that will be written as part of this research will not identify individuals or reflect any personal opinions. Particularly interesting statements will however be used in the research without identifying the respondents who made them.

What are the discomforts and risks?

No discomforts or risks whether physical, psychological are involved in this online survey.

What are the benefits?

This may benefit you in understanding the change that has been caused in your practice. It may also benefit you in better understanding the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead for you as a practitioner.

Benefits to the researcher

This research will lead to the partial fulfilment of my Master's degree in Communications from AUT University. It will also help me better understand the changing practice of public relations and what role Internet plays in doing so.

How will my privacy be protected?

The online survey is anonymous so your name will not be identified. Please be aware that completion of the attached online survey questionnaire will be taken as indicating your

consent to participate in this research. You have the right to refuse participation or withdraw at any time without it leading to any adverse consequences.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There are no costs involved in this online survey. You will need to spare no more than 10 minutes of your time to complete this survey.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

Please consider this invitation and if accepted return the completed online survey within 15 days. Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to refuse to participate. You can contact me via e-mail at deeptibhargav@gmail.com in the case that you need any further information regarding this online survey or research.

You can withdraw at any time from this research without any adverse consequences. If you wish to receive a report of outcomes, please contact me.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Completion of the attached online survey questionnaire will be taken as indicating your consent to participate in this research.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Feedback will be provided to participants on request. The respondents can send their request to me at deeptibhargav@gmail.com.

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, *Dr Petra Theunissen*, petra.theunissen@aut.ac.nz, 921-9999 7854 (ext)

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTEK, Madeline Banda, madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 8044.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details:

Deepti Bhargava, Student, Master's in Communication Studies, AUT University

E-mail address: deeptibhargav@gmail.com

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr Petra Theunissen, Senior Lecturer, Communication Programmes, School of Communication Studies. E-mail address: petra.theunissen@aut.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *type the date final ethics approval was granted*, AUTEK Reference number *type the reference number*.

Appendix F: Interview Questions

1. In your opinion, how has the Internet impacted on the practice of public relations? Which are the tools you think have had the most impact?
2. Do you use the Internet as a substitute for traditional mediums or do you use them complementary to them? If you use different tools for different purposes, which do you use complementary and which do you use as a substitute?
3. When you use these Internet tools for your campaign planning, do you use them strategically or ad hoc (as they happen)?
4. Do you think that an organisation's online activity (especially social media) should be managed 'in-house' rather than through a public relations consultancy? If so, why? If not, why not?
5. Do you have any specific concerns about sharing responsibility for Internet PR with IT, marketing and PR/communications positions in your organisation? If so, what are they?
6. Do you think that the Internet is (or may be) affecting the roles and power balances between younger and senior practitioners at your work place? Can you elaborate, please?
7. Do you think the Internet has had any impact on perceived gender imbalances in the public relations practice? Can you elaborate, please?
8. Do you have any specific ethical concerns about the active use of Internet in PR? Can you tell me what they are?
9. What new skill sets does a practitioner need to use the Internet in PR effectively?
10. Are you currently using Internet (for PR) more or less than what you would like to? Can you elaborate?

11. Do you think that the Internet is helping organisations to do a lot of the PR functions themselves and therefore reducing the need to hire a PR consultancy?

12. (Specific question)

a. (In-house practitioner only) Do you spend more time managing Internet tools for public relations than what you are paid for? Can you elaborate, please?

b. (Public relations consultant only) Do you spend more time managing Internet tools for public relations than what you charge? Can you elaborate, please?

13. Do you have any other comments regarding the use of the Internet in PR that you would like to share or that you think I should know about?

Appendix G: Interview Information Sheet



Date Information Sheet Produced:

1 September 2009

Project Title

The use of internet tools in public relations and their impact on the practice: A New Zealand perspective

An Invitation

You are invited to participate in an interview, which is 'stage two' of a research conducted by Deepti Bhargava, student, Master of Communications Studies, AUT University. This research results in partial fulfilment of the aforementioned Master's degree.

Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to refuse participation or withdraw at any time without any adverse consequences. You may choose not to answer any one or all of the questions during this interview.

What is the purpose of this research?

The aim of this research is to identify how the practice of public relations has changed in New Zealand due to the Internet over the past years. The research will look at identifying the extent and the specific areas of change along with the issues and opportunities that this change may have resulted in.

This research is part of the partial fulfilment of my Master's in Communications degree from AUT University. The results from the data collection will be transcribed and recorded. These will then be analysed to identify the trends and draw conclusions. The entire data collection procedure, the results and the analysis will be recorded and written in the form of a thesis as part of this research project. A scholarly article may also be published.

On completion, the thesis will be marked for grading to achieve partial completion of the Master's degree.

How was I chosen for this invitation?

For the purpose of the interviews, 10 senior public relations practitioners were selected using convenience and judgement sampling, working either in-house or in a consultancy and based in either Auckland or Wellington.

You are one of the practitioners as identified by your PRINZ membership, and working in the practice of public relations in New Zealand. Your contact details were made available through the Internet and you are subsequently been approached to participate. You have the

right to refuse participation or withdraw at any time without it leading to any adverse consequences.

Please be aware that signing the attached consent form will be seen as indicating your permission to participate in this research.

What will happen in this research?

This research looks at specific Internet tools and their use by public relations practitioners in New Zealand to identify how that has changed their practice of public relations. The purpose is to enlighten how the Internet has led to a rise in opportunities, challenges and issues in public relations. A detailed literature review has been undertaken to identify and understand various Internet tools and their applications in public relations. The literature has also helped recognize the trends in their usage and the opportunities and challenges they hold for the practice. The existing literature however has largely been written from an American perspective with a few journal articles focussing on specific areas of the world including Asia-Pacific, South Africa and the UAE. The aim of the research is to fill this gap in the existing literature and look at trends specific to New Zealand.

In 'stage one' of this research, an anonymous online survey was circulated among 350 public relations practitioners in New Zealand, who were part of an initial snowball sample. 133 practitioners have responded to the survey and their responses have been analysed. Based on this analysis specific trends and issues have been identified. Your participation in 'stage two' will help gain a deeper understanding of these issues and trends in the use of Internet in the practice of public relations.

Ten in-depth semi-structured interviews with senior practitioners (in-house and consultancies) from Auckland and Wellington will be conducted to collect qualitative data regarding these issues and trends.

As a participant, you will be answering 13 specific questions to during an interview that will last no longer than 60 minutes. You have the right to refuse to answer any or all of the questions. The interview will be audio-taped and transcribed for the purpose of the research. These interviews will not be published but particularly interesting statements may be used for the purposes of this research without identifying the respondents who made them or the organisations for which they work.

What are the discomforts and risks?

No discomforts or risks whether physical, psychological are involved in this interview.

What are the benefits to you?

This may benefit you in understanding the change that has been precipitated by the Internet in your profession. It may also benefit you in better understanding the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead for you as a practitioner. The ensuing results of the results may also be used to develop theories to inform practice.

Benefits to the researcher

This research will lead to the partial fulfilment of my Master's degree in Communications from AUT University. It will also help me better understand the changing practice of public relations and what role Internet plays in doing so.

How will my privacy be protected?

The interview will be recorded on audio-tape and by note-taking only after your explicit consent, as provided on the consent form.

Consent forms will be stored at the AUT University until the research has been completed and the thesis has been submitted and passed. The collated data will be stored to allow for conducting analysis and drawing conclusions. It is not intended to store these or related data for longer than six years.

If you withdraw from this research, all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.

The key finding will be recorded and interpreted. You (or your organisation) will not be identified in the thesis but any of your particularly interesting statements may be used if you consent to this (as per the consent form).

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There are no financial costs involved in this interview except your time. You will need to spare an hour of your time to be interviewed.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You have three days to consider this invitation. Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to refuse to participate. You can contact me via e-mail at deeptibhargav@gmail.com in the case that you need any further information regarding this interview or research.

You can withdraw at any time from this research (prior to its completion) without any adverse consequences. If you wish to receive a report of outcomes, please contact me.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

To participate in this research you will need to complete a consent form. The form has been attached to this information sheet. This will be collected from you prior to commencing the interview.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Feedback will be provided to participants on request. The respondents can send their request to me at deeptibhargav@gmail.com.

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, *Dr Petra Theunissen*, petra.theunissen@aut.ac.nz, (09) 921-9999 ext 7854.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTEK, Madeline Banda, madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz , (09) 921 9999 ext 8044.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details:

Deepti Bhargava, Student, Master's in Communication Studies, AUT University

E-mail address: deeptibhargav@gmail.com

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr Petra Theunissen, Senior Lecturer, Communication Programmes, School of Communication Studies.

E-mail address: petra.theunissen@aut.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 30 September 2009, AUTEK Reference 09/114