# An analysis of ethnic diversity in public relations campaigns: An Aotearoa New Zealand perspective

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## Abstract

In the context of today's multicultural societies, this study explores how public relations practitioners of Aotearoa New Zealand address the ethnic diversity of publics in campaigns. It aims to discover the relevant trends pertaining to consideration of minority ethnic groups in strategic planning and how practitioners reflect on ethnic identities in key areas of planning, including research, strategy, and tactics. The study also reflects on the salience of ethnic diversity across campaigns from different organisational sectors.

The study has used quantitative content analysis, guided by a post-positivist framework, to examine 91 award-winning PRINZ case studies from 2019 to 2023 aimed at generating foundational findings pertinent to ethnic diversity in strategic campaign planning.

Overall, the study revealed a respectable degree of awareness and acknowledgment of ethnic diversity among practitioners since over half of the campaigns considered minority ethnic groups in their planning. At the same time, the findings also found planning efforts pertaining to minority ethnic groups to be more tactical in nature, without necessarily being informed by research or strategy. As a result, communication with ethnically diverse publics may be prone to issues of othering and/or stereotyping.

Importantly, most campaigns which addressed ethnic diversity in their planning reflected a consideration for Māori publics, which is desirable given the country's bicultural foundations. Yet, the limited or a complete lack of presence of other minority ethnicities, including Pacific peoples, Asians and MELAA, in campaign planning merits reflection as well, in view of the country's demographic reality. Additionally, relational tactics were found to be used mostly in the case of Māori publics while communication with other minority ethnic groups were less participatory and collaborative in nature. Finally, the study found a higher proportion of public and not-for-profit sector campaigns considered ethnic diversity in strategic planning in comparison to campaigns from the private entities.

As a piece of foundational research, the study offers relevant insights into strategic planning practices specific to minority ethnic groups, with an emphasis on the role of research and strategy. Further, on account of its focus on how practitioners engage with publics' identities in planning, the study also contributes to the evolving understanding of public relations as a socio-cultural practice. It is thereby hoped the study motivates further research around ethnicity, culture or race in public relations within the context of public relations in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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## Attestation of authorship

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

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"কৰ্ম মুখৰ এই চহৰৰ, অন্ধ গলিৰ গুহাৰ মুখৰ"

(Kormo mukhor ei sohoror, Ondho golir guhaar mukhor)

Few lines from a poem in Assamese, my native language, by Homen Borgohain. It dwells on why people matter in our solitary journeys through life. The lines loosely translate to – *in a city buzzing with life, I stand in a dark alley facing a cave.*

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Public relations in the globalised and diverse communication context

The twenty-first century has often been termed the ‘era of globalization’ or the ‘age of globalization’ within public relations scholarship (Anani-Bossman & Bruce, 2022; Sriramesh, 2010; Sriramesh & Stumberger, 2018; Sriramesh & Verčič, 2019). The complexity that the term embodies is attested to by the lack of a universal definition (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011). In simple terms, globalisation is the movement of people or goods across national boundaries (Bhawuk, 2008). While the movement of people or commodities across borders has been going on for centuries, the distinguishing aspect of the current period of globalisation is its speed and scale which, according to Gordon (2021), has been made possible by the advances in telecommunication technologies and transportation of the last few decades. The growing interdependencies across the world (Verčič et al., 2015) have, arguably, transformed the world into a *global village* (McLuhan, 1994). Ertem-Eray (2024a) is of the view that globalisation, despite its many dimensions, is essentially about forging connections between people and making them aware of those connections.

Heath (2001) stated that, “one of the ironies of the era of globalization is the feeling that the globe is simultaneously shrinking as it expands into an enlarging kaleidoscope of people, languages, cultures, governmental structures, and economic systems” (p 625). Some scholars have argued globalisation would lead to *McDonaldized* or homogeneous societies where a dominant culture would supersede indigenous or other local cultures (Levitt, 1983; Martens et al., 2010). However, most scholars (Bhawuk, 2008; Starck & Kruckeberg, 2000) today agree that globalisation “is not about homogeneity but about diversity” (Saint-Jacques, 2015a, p. 20). It is now widely accepted globalisation engenders diversity and heterogeneity and the emergence of multicultural societies is an attestation of that view (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2019; Bhawuk, 2008; Landis, 2008).

Much like globalisation, diversity is a multidimensional construct and, therefore, eludes a standard formulation (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023; Hon & Brunner, 2000). One way to define diversity is to understand it as the “difference in ethnicity, race, gender, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, disability, veteran status, age, national origin, and cultural and personal perspectives” (Bhawuk & Triandis, 1996, p. 85). Diversity contains categories that are alterable (age, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation etc.) and unalterable (religion, class, income, marital status etc.) (Sha & Ford, 2007). In a way, diversity refers to differences between individuals based on primary or unalterable traits and secondary characteristics or alterable traits (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023).

In this regard, Bhawuk (2008) emphasised the role of communication in negotiating and navigating the burgeoning diversity in societies. Furthermore, Starck and Kruckeberg (2000) argued that “the basis of these intercultural relationships, whether business or culturally oriented, will be communication” (p. 57).

Communication is undoubtedly at the heart of the discipline of public relations. The Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ), the professional body of public relations practitioners in Aotearoa New Zealand, defines public relations as:

> The deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding and excellent communications between an organisation and its publics. Communications management shall be defined as the systematic planning, implementing, monitoring, and revision of all the channels of communication within an organisation, and between organisations (PRINZ, n.d.-c).

For a discipline that is principally communication-oriented (Vujnovic & Kruckeberg, 2010), diversity, thus, becomes a key aspect of public relations in a globalised communication ecosystem. This is chiefly because globalisation has upended prior assumptions of communication being neatly circumscribed within territories that contain fairly homogeneous publics (Weaver, 2011).

So far within public relations, there are two broad areas of diversity research: internal and external. The former refers to application of diversity principles within the organisational ecosystem, or the workplace (Hon & Brunner, 2000; Mundy, 2016). It largely operates in the realm of an organisation’s *diversity*, *equity* and *inclusion* (DEI) practices which may be understood as the set of “policies and systems that encourage representation and participation of people of different genders, races, ethnicities, religions, ages, sexual orientations, disabilities, and classes” (Penn LPS, 2023). The internal or organisational domain of diversity constitutes a major part of diversity-centred research in public relations (Mundy, 2019). This is an important area of research which addresses crucial questions around experiences and empowerment of diverse public relations practitioners within organisations (Diggs-Brown & Zaharna, 1995; Edwards, 2015b; Kern-Foxworth, 1989; Len-Rios, 1998; Pompper, 2004, 2007; Qiu & Muturi, 2016; Tindall, 2009).

On the other hand, external diversity research relates to how diversity of the external context is considered and reflected in public relations planning and communication (Hon & Brunner, 2000). In view of the increasing diversity of an organisation’s external publics, a focus on application of diversity principles within strategic communication planning is of particular relevance (Mundy, 2016, 2019; Uysal, 2013).

It must also be noted that internal and external dimensions of diversity do not necessarily function in isolation from each other. An organisation's internal stance on diversity could potentially affect its external communication practices and, conversely, a complex and diverse external context may influence how practitioners reflect diversity in their communication (Hon & Brunner, 2000; L'Etang, 2012). As a result, externally oriented research lends nuance to our understanding of how diversity is practised in the discipline as it enables the researcher to critically examine whether diversity is thought of in tokenistic terms or is integrated into its overall strategic communication approach (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023; Mundy, 2016; Sriramesh, 2007). In a way, focusing on how practitioners reflect on diversity critically brings to the fore the societal and ethical dimensions of practice in today's increasingly plural societies (Valentini et al., 2016). This is borne out by Edwards (2011b) who stated "how practitioners understand the value of different groups to society and to their clients will be reflected in the importance they attach to them in their work" (p. 75).

In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, Bhargava and Theunissen's (2023) study on the state of DEI within public relations in the country, commissioned by the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ), highlighted the need for incorporating diversity in both the make-up of the profession as well as the way in which communication is planned and executed.

### 1.2 Purpose, scope and importance of the study

The present study locates itself primarily in examining the integration of diversity within the communication practices of public relations in Aotearoa New Zealand. Its focus is on understanding the role of external diversity in the strategic planning of public relations campaigns. While it emphasises diversity that is external to the organisation, it does reflect on the internal nature of strategic communication planning which usually takes places away from the publics within organisational boundaries.

Furthermore, in view of the broad expanse of what constitutes diversity, the study will limit its diversity focus to the *ethnicity* (a primary characteristic) of the publics targeted by communication. The choice of *ethnicity* as the principal construct for studying diversity is an acknowledgment of the country's growing ethnic diversity (Stats NZ, 2024b). Moreover, 'ethnicity' was among the top five DEI issues identified by organisations, according to Diversity Works New Zealand (2022).

As a socially constructed term, *ethnicity* has often been used interchangeably with *race* and *culture* (Pompper, 2005; Sison, 2009; Sue, 2001). However, the researcher will use

*ethnicity* to refer to diversity of publics as it is more commonly used in the country's official data sets (Stats NZ, 2024a) and by public relations practitioners to segment audiences in campaigns.

Existing scholarship has reaffirmed the continuing relevance of understanding how ethnic identities of publics inform and influence practice in terms of their representation and consideration in strategy (Edwards, 2011b; Macnamara & Camit, 2017; Ni & Sha, 2023; Rahman & Bhargava, 2015; Sha, 2006; Sison, 2009, 2017, 2020; Theunissen & Rahman, 2012). Not only does ethnicity impact how publics interpret communication messages, it also serves as a critical basis for examining the socio-cultural elements of practice in context of a diverse and multicultural environment where sites of difference often become sources of discrimination and marginalisation (Aldoory, 2001; Edwards, 2015b; Ertem-Eray, 2024a; Munshi & Kurian, 2005; Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013; Xifra & McKie, 2011).

In the past, studies have explored the role of ethnicity, race or culture in communication in a diverse context with a focus on issues of representation of diverse publics in campaigns and the potential impact of racio-ethnic factors on how messages are perceived by minority groups (Rahman & Bhargava, 2015; Sha, 2006; Theunissen & Rahman, 2012; Tindall & Vardeman-Winter, 2011; Vardeman-Winter, 2010). Scholars have also dwelled on successful campaigns in a multicultural context (Macnamara & Camit, 2017; Sison, 2020). At the same time, while the need to reflect diversity as an integral element of communication practices has been emphasised (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023; Edwards, 2011b; Mundy, 2016), very few studies have analysed the extent to which practitioners have integrated ethnic or cultural variables in planning (Sison, 2009).

The current study therefore addresses the identified gap in public relations research with a specific focus on ethnic diversity within the public relations practice of Aotearoa New Zealand, thereby establishing the basis for further studies in this area. In view of the foundational nature of the study, the researcher came up with a single research question to explore the concept and generate data which may serve as a reference point for the future.

RQ: How is ethnicity diversity addressed in the strategic planning of public relations campaigns in Aotearoa New Zealand?

To fulfil the objective, the researcher analysed a sample of public relations case studies available on the PRINZ website. Since, PRINZ is the national professional body of the discipline in Aotearoa New Zealand, the sample is considered to be a fair representation of the public relations practice in the country. Additionally, since the case studies pertain to award winning campaigns, the data is also expected to reveal current standards in terms of their ethnic diversity consideration in communication plans.

In total, 91 case studies from across five years were examined. The researcher selected quantitative content analysis as the research method. While the researcher would have benefitted from views of practitioners and publics pertaining to diversity considerations in a multi-ethnic country, the scope of the study has been limited to assessing diversity consideration as evident from campaign case studies in view of the limited timeframe and scope of a master's thesis.

Despite its stated limitations, the study is optimistic of its contribution to the field of diversity research in public relations research, especially in areas of race, ethnicity and culture. To begin, the study is expected to provide a benchmark for comparing future assessments of ethnic diversity consideration in practice. It is hoped that the findings of the study would motivate interest and appreciation for the potential implications of decisions related to ethnic diversity consideration in strategic campaign planning among practitioners. This is particularly salient for a discipline which has often been criticised for its ethnocentric and functionalist bias with a propensity to water down complexity (Bachmann, 2019; Ciszek et al., 2022; Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012). Having considered that, in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, the study is expected to stimulate a more reflexive and culturally-inclusive approach to ethnic diversity in campaign communication. Finally, by facilitating a more nuanced understanding of how ethnic diversity is reflected in communication practices, the study contributes to the growing body of socio-cultural research in public relations with an Aotearoa New Zealand perspective.

### 1.3 Structure of the thesis

The present chapter has introduced the topic of study by providing a brief overview of the importance of ethnic diversity in public relations in context of a globalised communication context. The second chapter undertakes a detailed review of relevant existing literature on strategic public relations planning and communication and the role that ethnic diversity consideration plays in it, especially in relation to increasingly plural and diverse societies such as Aotearoa New Zealand. It also identifies the current gaps in literature concerning ethnicity, race and culture-related public relations research.

The third chapter outlines the research methodology for the present study including its ontological and epistemological assumptions. It explains and justifies the use of the post-positivist framework for the study as well as provides an overview of quantitative content analysis which is the method of choice for the study along with sampling and data analysis protocols. The fourth chapter is concerned with presenting the findings of the content analysis of the sampled case studies along with preliminary observations pertinent to the scope and object of the study. The fifth chapter provides a detailed thematic discussion of

the findings along with addressing their implications. Finally, the sixth chapter provides a conclusive summary of the entire study along with observations on the potential benefits of the study for both scholarship and practice. It also cites limitations of the study and highlights opportunities for future research.

# Chapter 2 Literature Review

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter gives a detailed overview of the relevant literature in the area of strategic communication and planning, and culture in the field of public relations in view of the study's focus on understanding the salience of ethnic diversity in the communication practices of public relations in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The first segment provides a descriptive account of strategic communication and elaborates on the increasing consensus within scholarship on the need to frame communication from the perspective of publics. The segment also delves into the literature on strategic planning with a specific interest in research, strategy and segmentation of publics. Given the implication of cultural diversity in a multi-ethnic context, the second segment, thereafter, explores the role of culture in public relations and examines the ways in which cultural differences are addressed by major schools of thought. The third segment provides an overview of the multicultural society of Aotearoa New Zealand and dwells on how cultural considerations pertaining to ethnically diverse publics affect communication in terms of meaning as well as representation. The final segment briefly summarises the findings from scholarship leading to the formulation of the research question.

## 2.2 Strategic communication

Scholarly interest in strategic communication has witnessed significant growth in the first two decades of the 21st century (Zerfass et al., 2018), which studies suggest is a response to the rise in global uncertainty (Mahoney, 2011). The fragmentation and diversity of global populations, proliferation of communication channels and widespread adoption of digital technologies add to the complexity of the global communication landscape (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2013; Plowman & Wilson, 2018). Zerfass and Huck (2007), therefore, viewed strategic communication as a tool that "prepares organizations for an uncertain future" (p. 108).

Strategic communication straddles multiple disciplines (public relations, marketing, technical communication, organisational communication etc.), is applicable in various contexts (health, crisis, political, social service etc.) and is utilised by different types of organisations, be it public sector, not-for-profit, or private sector (Falkheimer & Heide, 2014). In the view of Falkheimer and Heide (2014), strategic communication represents a natural evolution in the wide field of communication which has, hitherto, consisted of communicative disciplines or functions residing in their individual siloes. Therefore, some scholars have

equated strategic communication with integrated communication (Zerfass et al., 2018). However, Hallahan et al. (2007) asserted that strategic communication is separate from integrated communication as the former is implicative of a strategic or purposeful orientation of the communicative process while the latter encompasses strategic as well as routine communication.

Hallahan et al. (2007) described it as “the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfil its mission” (p. 3). Holtzhausen and Zerfass (2013) elaborated it as “the practice of deliberate and purposive communication a communication agent enacts in the public sphere on behalf of a communicative entity to reach set goals” (p. 284)”. Zerfass et al. (2018) conceptualized it as communication that is consequential to the survival and success of an entity which further accentuates the significance of strategic communication.

### 2.2.1 Strategic communication and public relations

An emphasis on the strategic nature of communication is at the core of the discipline’s early theorising from the Excellence theory standpoint. Defined simply as the “management of communication between organizations and publics” (Grunig, 1992, p. 4), public relations, according to Grunig et al. (1992), contributed to organisations “by building quality, long-term relationships with strategic constituencies” (p. 86). Subsequently, Grunig et al. (2002) envisioned the discipline as a strategic management function because of its capacity to communicate and build relationships with publics considered strategic to the organisation’s goals. It may therefore be argued that strategic communication aligns with the foundational premise of public relations. In fact, in many countries, particularly in Europe, the term ‘strategic communication’ is more commonly used to refer to public relations (Macnamara, 2015; Zerfass et al., 2018). Scholars have also posited that co-option of ‘strategic communication’ as a substitute for ‘public relations’ is an attempt to mitigate the pejorative connotations of the latter term (Moloney & McGrath, 2019).

That said, strategic communication itself has invited critical inquiry from scholars in recent years. The word ‘strategy’ in management literature is generally associated with notions of power, decision-making and being outcome-focused (Lukaszewski, 2001; Mintzberg, 1979; Perrow, 1991). This is not surprising since organisational strategy is guided by systems theory which works on the principle of strategic control exercised by organisations in pursuit of their goals (Macnamara & Gregory, 2018). Consequently, as most public relations communication is initiated from within organisations, strategic communication tends to be organisation-focused and functionalist (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012). Functionalist approaches imply the use of communication with the principal goal of securing control, minimising dissent and ensuring acceptance of organisational goals

through the use of persuasion with publics (Hallahan et al., 2007). Understandably, scholars have argued the inherent focus on achievement of organisational goals in strategic communication often has led to practitioners attaching greater importance to organisations relative to publics in communication (Botan, 2021; Macnamara & Gregory, 2018; Motion & Weaver, 2005; Steyn, 2007). Also, from an excellence framework point of view, a lack of adequate attention to publics and their concerns in strategic communication marks a departure from the ideal of two-way symmetry which recognises the interests of both organisations and publics (Grunig & Grunig, 2008).

Practitioners enact strategic communication in the public sphere which alludes to the societal dimension of the practice (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2013). Thus, an overt emphasis on organisational objectives at the expense of constituents of society precludes public relations from helping organisations to fully integrate in society (Macnamara, 2015). As a matter of fact, the boundary-spanning role of public relations (Grunig et al., 2002) allows practitioners to have a societal orientation as "they have one foot in the organization and other in the environment, constantly interacting with constituencies within and outside the organization" (Sriramesh et al., 1992, p. 579).

The notion of publics is, therefore, foundational to public relations (Pieczka, 2019). Simply defined, publics are groups of people organisations and practitioners communicate with (Topić, 2017). However, scholars have suggested the concept of publics has often been misinterpreted and misrepresented in practice (Pieczka, 2019; Rakow, 2018; Sommerfeldt & Iannacone, 2023). According to Pieczka (2019), current understanding of publics in the discipline is at odds with the democratic sensibilities that originally characterised Dewey's (1927/2012) notion of 'public'. Dewey (1927/2012) suggested a 'public' has agency and are meaning-making creatures contributing to the functioning of a healthy democracy. But Rakow (2018) has argued that public relations often ignores the foundational tenets of 'public' on account of its predominant organisational orientation. In time, as Sommerfeldt and Iannacone (2023) have noted, "publics went from being the solution to problems to becoming the problem" (p. 27). Pieczka (2019) has termed the tendency to discount the agency of publics as the instrumentalist bias as publics become "a means for organizations to control their environments" (p. 239). The instrumental view of publics is also a reflection of the power differences between organisations and publics (Botan, 2023; Kent, 2023; Leitch & Motion, 2010; Leitch & Neilson, 2000). However, Mackey (2006) has categorically stated that society is an organisation's biggest stakeholder.

Accordingly, scholars have emphasised situating any meaningful analysis of communication outside the locus of organisations in order to examine its role in the wider

environment, particularly in relation to publics (Holtzhausen, 2000; Ihlen & van Ruler, 2007; Macnamara, 2015; Macnamara & Gregory, 2018; Wakefield, 2010). Not only does a renewed focus on the external context allow for a potential reconciliation between organisational interests and publics in the framework of strategic communication, it also leads to formulation of meaningful communication strategies that align with an organisation's civic responsibility and positively impact the health of society (Munshi & Kurian, 2020; Sha, 2023).

Eventually, public relations must take on the role of fostering high quality relationships between organisations and its publics with a view to facilitate a functional and robust society (Kent & Theunissen, 2021). Relationships often result when organisations and publics are able to trust each other and engage in dialogue (Lane, 2020), which again is contingent on whether organisations and publics are considered as equals in the process (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012). In addition, a relational-dialogic orientation in practice (Kent, 2023; Kent & Taylor, 2002) encourages an awareness of the limitation of a short-term approach in strategic communication. Kent and Theunissen (2021) have argued a long-term view of communication strategy does not imply discounting the importance of a planned sequence of events in strategy or planning. Instead, they argue, it counters the risks of the standard planning process which often "lulls professionals into a false sense of security" (p. 37) on account of its short-termism and highly tactical nature. Ultimately, the realisation of a fully-functioning society is dependent on the capacity of organizations to value diversity through communication practices that meaningfully engage with society's diverse publics (Kent & Theunissen, 2021; Place, 2021).

Public relation strategies that acknowledge the centrality of publics in the communication process, thus, answer to Hon and Brunner's (2000) call for "diversity as social responsibility" (p. 309) issued to the discipline. This is reinforced by Gregory's (2020) statement that "planning and managing public relations campaigns can never be seen in isolation from the background in which they are set" (p. 1).

### 2.2.2 Strategic public relations campaign planning

A public relations campaign is a "planned set of public relations activities, normally over a limited period of time and with specific objectives addressing a particular issue and involving an identified group" (Gregory, 2017, p. 177). The strategic public relations planning process is systematic and sequential in nature (Gregory, 2017). The RACE [Research, Action, Communication, Evaluation] model, proposed by Marston (1979), is one of the earliest and most popular models in the discipline. ROPE [Research, objectives, programming, evaluation] (Hendrix & Hayes, 2012), ROPES [Research, objectives, program,

evaluation, stewardship] (Kelly, 2001) and RAISE [Research, adaptation, implementation strategy, evaluation] (Kendall, 1997) are some of the more recent planning templates. Notwithstanding the multiplicity of models, the strategic planning process mostly consists of four or five key stages (Broom & Sha, 2013; Gregory, 2017; Smith, 2021). For example, Smith's (2021) strategic planning model comprises of nine sequential steps which can be constituted into the following four stages: formative research, strategy, tactics and evaluative research.


(Smith, 2021, p.24)

Regardless of the model used, strategic public relations planning is based on the systems theory (Gregory, 2017; Macnamara & Gregory, 2018; Topić, 2017). This means organisations operate as system that is interconnected to various publics, within and outside it, and the resultant inter-dependencies therefore imply organisations must be mindful of their environment at all times (Grunig et al., 2002). As such, it heightens the need for good communication with publics and even positions them at the heart of all strategic planning (Botan, 2021; Smith, 2021). Suffice to say, as boundary spanners who work at the intersections of organisations and their diverse publics (L'Etang, 2012), public relations practitioners have a vital role to play in this regard.

In view of the need for practitioners to better understand their publics, scholarship contends research is integral to devising a robust strategic plan for campaigns (Botan, 2021; Kent & Taylor, 2011). Botan (2021) has asserted that planned communication campaigns should ideally begin and end with research to learn about and understand an organisation's publics. Botan (2018) emphasised that strategic communication should be "research-based and public-centered rather than organization or message-centered" (p. 8). On another note,

Tam et al. (2022) posited that a greater focus on research (or, environmental scanning) could contribute to the empowerment of public relations discipline in strategic management as senior management (dominant coalition) generally consider knowledge about the environment critical to business success. However, practitioners continue to disregard the importance of research in strategic planning and have tended to rely on past experiences in the field instead of dedicating adequate resources to research (Smith, 2021). In fact, Botan (2021) asserted that most campaign failures are partly attributable to practitioners making assumptions on behalf of their publics or stakeholders.

In Gregory's (2017) view, broad categorisations that assume all people behave similarly is not an ideal approach. Knowledge gained from research may improve communication with publics through a better understanding of their context and needs (Smith, 2021). Such contextual research could determine how a message is tailored, who would communicate the message, the channels to be used, the appropriate tone, and if it required participation and collaboration of the publics (Gregory, 2017; Smith, 2021). For example, Gregory (2017) drew attention to the fact that people from diverse cultures may interpret website content differently and social acts like drinking which is commonplace among certain groups may not be encouraged by others. In addition, a growing consciousness around race, ethnicity and equality would suggest that a lack of adequate attention to publics and their values may put at risk an organisation's "license to operate" (Gregory, 2017, p. 174) in an increasingly interconnected and diverse society (Mundy, 2021; Sison, 2020).

In public relations planning, research is followed by strategy, which may be thought of as the "big picture" or "guiding light" that lends a campaign its purpose (Gregory, 2017, p. 187), whereas tactics refer to the methods utilised to implement the strategy (Smith, 2021). Yet, practitioners have often failed to dedicate sufficient resources to the former on account of an overabundant focus on the latter (Botan, 2021; Kent & Theunissen, 2021; Steyn, 2007). In fact, Steyn (2007) noted that practitioners often mistake tactics for strategy. Elaborating further on the failure of practitioners to commit to strategic thinking, Botan (2021) observed that practitioners "sometimes try to jump straight to this box because they believe they know what is best for these people" (p. 12). According to Gregory (2017), practitioners prefer tactics to strategy in planning because "it is easier and more exciting to think of a raft of ideas that will deliver the objectives than to think about the rationale behind them" (p. 187). Gregory's (2017) view is also supported by Kent and Theunissen (2021) who have argued that the allure for short-term, operational focus is understandable as strategic thinking taxes the practitioner's knowledge and tests their understanding of a particular context. However, the authors have cautioned that a persistent disavowal of strategic

thinking may eventually prove counterproductive to the organisation in the long run as was seen in the case of Volkswagen during the car manufacturer's emissions control fiasco (Kent & Theunissen, 2021). Gregory (2017) has further contended that a predominantly tactical orientation to planning often prevents practitioners from identifying outcomes that are relevant to particular publics. This dynamic has important implications in a diverse, globalised context of public relations as publics who do not see themselves meaningfully considered in communication may not extend trust or form relationships with those organisations (Ertem-Eray, 2024a). The view is corroborated by other scholars who have contended that publics are not mere recipients of messages since they are the ones who ultimately decide how to engage with any communication content (Botan, 2018, 2021; Moloney & McGrath, 2019).

In contrast to the top-down approaches of strategic planning that are governed by notions of strategic control, alternative approaches place a greater emphasis on a bottom-up, participatory and collaborative orientation (Botan, 2021; Macnamara, 2015, 2021; Toledano, 2018; van Ruler, 2021). In this regard, Gregory (2017) has highlighted the increasing use of collaboration in public sector campaigns as examples of strategic planning that acknowledge and espouse the views of publics in communication. It has been suggested that co-production of solutions contribute to greater sense of ownership, as consensus is arrived at through mutual understanding and dialogue (Gregory, 2017; Lane, 2020). In fact, Sison (2020) has argued that inclusive approaches are integral to public sector communication, particularly so in a diverse environment, since practitioners "are expected to address and in some ways represent concerns of their local constituencies" (p. 350). Similarly, not-for-profit entities, committed as they are often to serve the marginalised groups of society, too adopt a more inclusive approach to strategic communication as their survival is dependent on the long-term benefit of their stakeholders (Ashra-McGrath, 2017; Edwards, 2014).

Strategic communication that involves collaboration and co-production of solutions can be said to embody a co-creational approach to communication (Botan, 2021; Botan & Taylor, 2004). A co-creational model views publics as "co-creators of meaning and communication is what makes it possible to agree to shared meanings, interpretations and goals" (Botan & Taylor, 2004, p. 652). Co-creation implies the primacy of publics in the communication process as "the collective knowledge and experience of a public far outweighs the content of any one, or even many, strategic communication messages in the meaning-making process" (Botan, 2021, p. 9). Co-creation often involves deliberative techniques that require publics and organisations to come together and arrive at a consensus through an iterative process of asking questions, seeking clarification, learning

complex issues, assessing risks and making compromises (Gregory, 2017). Although they are time-consuming, such techniques engender trust and foster relationship-building, and contribute to the democratization of strategy (Edwards, 2016; Gregory, 2020) without necessarily delegitimising the pursuit of organisational goals (Gregory, 2017; Torp, 2015).

Understandably, newer, or emergent, approaches to strategic communication imagine communication processes to be less prescriptive, more flexible and sensitive to environmental changes (Frandsen & Johansen, 2015; Gregory, 2017; Toledano, 2018), where empathy (Toledano, 2018; Yeomans, 2016), listening (Macnamara, 2016, 2018, 2022) and co-creation (Botan, 2021; Botan & Taylor, 2004) are key aspects of communication between organisations and publics. Without empathy, communication is unlikely to have a dialogic orientation (Kent & Theunissen, 2016; Taylor & Kent, 2014), since dialogue merits an "empathic turn towards the other without a self-interested agenda" (Toledano, 2018, p. 134). Further, Yeomans (2016) has distinguished between *true* and *instrumentalist* empathy. In intercultural settings, the former suggests "a human concern for the *other* in order to understand experiences, feelings and situations that may be different from our own" (p. 71), while the latter principally aims at understanding the interests of diverse publics as potential customers.

Listening has been considered to be morally and ethically essential to strategic communication since it enables practitioners to understand and accommodate the interests of less-powerful constituents (Toledano, 2018). However, Macnamara's (2016) study which involved practitioner interviews and social media content analysis found that up to 95 percent of organisational communication is centred on speaking rather than listening. Despite the potential for two-way communication, dialogue and engagement on internet and social media (Taylor & Kent, 2014; Theaker, 2021; Theunissen, 2015), Macnamara's (2016) study along with similar studies in the area (Nairn & Bhargava, 2025; Bhargava, 2010; Taylor & Kent, 2014; Martens, 2020) have reaffirmed the view that online communication between organisations and publics continues to be monologic and unidirectional (Lane & Kent, 2018), reflecting a transmissional nature (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). On that account, use of social media within strategic communication has been found to be lacking in research on publics and the wider environment (Plowman & Wilson, 2018). Not only does a lack of listening to publics or a deficit in strategic thinking regarding social media use result in the potential loss of trust for organisations (Macnamara, 2022), it also poses risks to organisations in the online sphere as internet and social media have blurred the distinctions between strategic and non-strategic publics (Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2010).

### 2.2.3 Considering segmentation and ethnic variables of publics

Mindful of the critical importance of understanding publics within strategic planning, Botan (2021) has remarked that even a well-crafted strategy may not contribute more than 10 percent to the success of the campaign as the knowledge of publics exceed that of organisations and practitioners. Publics, in standard literature, have traditionally emerged in relation to issues or situations (Broom & Sha, 2013; Grunig, 1992), which is understandable as organisations execute campaigns largely as a way to resolve or address particular issues (Gregory, 2017). As a matter of course, scholars have differentiated publics as strategic or non-strategic based on their potential to act and affect organisations on specific issues (Dozier et al., 2013; Grunig, 1992). While the ongoing debates and arguments against defining publics only in relation to organisations are understandable (Rakow, 2018; Sha, 2023; Sommerfeldt & Iannacone, 2023), it may be unfeasible for practitioners to focus on the entire general public (Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2010), especially when campaigns have time and budgetary limits (Gregory, 2017). Further, the use of broad categories such as a society or community to identify publics makes an inaccurate assumption about the lack of diversity of the publics and may subsequently result in generic messages addressed to a stereotypical made-up consumer (Gregory, 2020).

Practitioners have, therefore, used segmentation (grouping publics on the basis of defined characteristics) as a way to devise strategy and messages that are appropriate to the context of the campaign's publics or audiences (Gregory, 2020). Some of the standard ways of segmenting publics include categorising publics as customers, employees, members etc. Publics are also grouped on the basis of geography (where people live and work), psychographics (beliefs, lifestyle, values), media (readers of newspapers, magazines, social media usage etc.) and roles (parent, CEO, teacher etc.) (Gregory, 2020).

Within theory, Grunig (1983) and Grunig and Repper (1992) used the situational framework to categorise publics based on their response to any particular situation. Accordingly, as Aldoory and Sha (2007) noted, publics are either active or passive, dependent on their problem recognition (individuals recognise a problem when they face it), constraint recognition (perceived barriers to action) and levels of involvement (personal relevance of a problem). Here, the active publics, on account of their greater propensity to act on a particular issue, are generally considered to be of higher strategic importance (Dutta et al. 2012). However, the model has been critiqued for its lack of consideration for socio-cultural factors and the diversity of publics (Dutta et al., 2012; Illia et al., 2013; Sha, 2006). According to Dutta et al. (2012), "though situational theory turns the lens toward the publics, the theory is driven by the emphasis to benefit the organisation" (p. 6). Consequently,

segmentation prioritises organisational interests and relegates the diversity of publics which is characterised by their ethnicity or culture. However, Sha's (2006) seminal work in relation to situational theory which found that ethnic or racial identities of individuals had a significant impact on how they responded to a particular issue or situation challenged the validity of rational and value-free assumptions on behalf of publics (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2013).

Sommerfeldt and Iannacone (2023) termed the value-free notion of publics an *etic* view of publics as publics are conceptualized only in relation to organisational issues. In consequence, publics are oftent reduced to static entities onto which organisational assumptions are projected (Kim & Dutta, 2009). On the other hand, an emic approach acknowledges that publics emerge through their own agency and discourses that are shaped by a shared understanding of narratives and identity markers (Sommerfeldt & Iannacone, 2023). Therefore, it can be said that any strategic planning approach that downplays the importance of the characteristics or identities of publics are *etic* in nature and, unlike emic approaches, may not be fully embracing the diversity of publics.

It must be noted that Grunig (1997) had adopted a fourth variable in the situational theory, termed the *referent criterion*, which scholars have argued was a reference to societal culture or cultural identity of publics (Ni & Sha, 2023; Sha, 2006). Although it was subsequently dropped for want of satisfactory empirical validation (Illia et al., 2013), scholars continue to highlight the influence of culture on public relations communication (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011; Bhargava, 2024; Edwards & Hodges, 2011; L'Etang, 2011, 2012; Munshi et al., 2020; Sriramesh, 2019; Sriramesh & Stumberger, 2018; Theunissen, 2019; Vardeman-Winter, 2015; Wakefield, 2010). Additionally, culture, as a way to understand publics, becomes critically important in light of the increasingly multicultural societies with growing ethnic diversity (Ertem-Eray, 2024a; Saint-Jacques, 2015a; Sison, 2017, 2020; Valentini, 2019).

### 2.3 Culture and Public Relations

Over the years, scholars have offered numerous definitions of 'culture' which is indicative of culture's enduring relevance in human affairs (Anderson-Levitt, 2012; Benedict, 1959; Boon, 1972; Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2010; Samovar et al., 2017; White, 1959 etc.). Boon (1972) described culture as "operations which render complex human phenomenon communicable" (p. 227), while Benedict's (1959) definition of culture as "what really binds men together is their culture – the ideas and standards they have in common" (p.16) tied culture to the notion of being human. However, one may contend that anthropologist Clifford Geertz's definition of culture comes closest to approximating culture's dynamic, interpretive and shared nature. Geertz (1973) described culture as "a historically transmitted pattern of

meaning embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about attitude towards life" (p. 89). As such, it can be argued that meaning-making, identity construction and communication are fundamental to our understanding of culture (Samovar et al., 2017).

While culture is as ancient as human civilisation, globalisation has contributed to an increased interest in culture as a subject of critical inquiry since globalisation has led to significant changes in the way countries and societies live and communicate (Bhawuk, 2008; Kim & Bhawuk, 2008; Saint-Jacques, 2015a; Valentini et al., 2016). Globalisation has created unique opportunities and challenges for the public relations practitioner (Sriramesh, 2010). Fundamentally, it has necessitated a reassessment of existing assumptions and strategies in relation to communicating with an organisation's publics (Sison, 2017; Sriramesh, 2019; Sriramesh & Verčič, 2019; Valentini et al., 2016), especially in light of the growing diversity of publics in multiethnic, multicultural societies (Saint-Jacques, 2015b).

### 2.3.1 Why Culture Matters in Understanding Publics

Carey (1992/2009) suggested that all communication is cultural in nature and Hall (1973) referred to culture as the silent language. As a discipline that is essentially communication-driven (Vujnovic & Kruckeberg, 2010), public relations is intricately linked with culture (Sriramesh & Stumberger, 2018). In one of the earliest essays on the public relations – culture nexus, Sriramesh and White (1992) had talked of culture as an idea whose time had come in the practice of public relations. Reaffirming culture's centrality in the discipline, Curtin and Gaither (2007) asserted "cultural constructs don't affect public relations practice; they are the essence of public relations practice" (p. 12).

However, Sriramesh (2019) has averred that culture-focused research in public relations tells a story of untapped potential. While lamentable, the deficit in culture-focused research in public relations is understandable for a discipline which has historically evidenced an inclination toward models and frameworks that "simplify the complex world of practice" (Gregory & Halff, 2013, p. 423). As a concept, 'culture' does not lend easily to simplification. This is borne out by Wakefield's (2010) contention that culture is "plagued with denotative ambiguity and diversity of meaning" (p. 659). But the context of public relations has changed significantly due to globalisation and therefore past ways of practice and research must make way for fresh perspectives that accommodate the growing diversity of the wider environment (Gregory & Halff, 2013; Valentini et al., 2016). Hence, a study of culture in context of public relations practice is germane to the cause of advancing scholarship in this area (Bhargava, 2024). More importantly, in context of the present study,

culture is fundamental to understanding the salience of ethnicity within public relations campaigns as both the terms are inter-related and often used interchangeably in scholarship to refer to diverse publics (Edwards, 2011b; Ertem-Eray & Ki, 2021; Johnson, 2020; Pompper, 2005; Webber et al., 2013).

Scholarship has distinguished between societal and the corporate or organisational culture, which may also be termed as the 'practice' culture (Sriramesh, 2007; Sriramesh et al., 1992; Sriramesh & White, 1992). Both are viewed as antecedents to the discipline since they denote the context or environment in which public relations is practised (Sriramesh, 2019). The former is the external environment and relates to the world and life of the publics while the latter pertains to the internal environment within which strategizing and planning take place. Despite the categorisation, it is suggested that both societal and internal aspects of culture are inter-related and one may influence the other (Bhargava, 2024; Kent & Taylor, 2011; L'Etang, 2012; Sriramesh & Stumberger, 2018) which is a plausible argument as public relations practitioners are, essentially, boundary-spanners (Grunig et al., 2002; Vardeman-Winter, 2011). Interestingly, as Curtin (2021) has observed, functionalist frameworks of public relations under normative theories have largely operated under the assumption that "organizational culture plays a much more formative role than does societal culture in shaping how public relations is practiced" (p. 564). However, in view of the study's societal and civic orientation and its stated focus on examining how diversity of the publics features in communication, the researcher is principally interested in understanding the role of societal culture, vis-à-vis the ethnic diversity of publics, in public relations campaigns.

### 2.3.2 Models of Culture in Public Relations

#### Hofstede's dimensions and functionalist views on culture

Geert Hofstede's (1980, 1991) work is considered seminal in the field of culture, communication and public relations (Courtright et al., 2011; Kent & Taylor, 2011; Verčič et al., 2021). Most of the early work in the field of public relations in a diverse setting, especially one that involved intercultural communication, utilised Hofstede's (1980, 1991) cultural dimensions typology as the standard framework for research (Kang & Mastin, 2008; Sha & Ford, 2007; Sriramesh et al., 1999; Sriramesh & White, 1992). Intercultural communication is said to have occurred when the sender and recipient of a message are from different cultures (McDaniel & Samovar, 2015). The dimensions of culture (Hofstede, 1991), the result of an extensive study covering 40 countries, qualified national cultures on the basis of their similarities and differences. Hofstede's dimensions, therefore, are represented as a set of polar attributes: collectivism/individualism, low/high power distance, high/low context, monochromic/polychromic and masculinity/femininity (Sriramesh, 2007).

As part of a practitioner's toolkit in an intercultural context, the model provides a macro-level understanding of the complexities of various national cultures and, therefore helps practitioners avoid egregious missteps in their communication with publics from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Bardhan, 2011; Curtin, 2021). However, the model has been criticised for its oversimplification of national cultures and its failure to account for diversity within national cultures (Courtright et al., 2011; Saint-Jacques, 2015a; Sha & Ford, 2007; Sriramesh, 2019; Weaver, 2011). The idea of a static, unchanging national culture is antithetical to the dynamic and evolving nature of culture implicit in most scholarly definitions of the term (Geertz, 1973; McDaniel & Samovar, 2015; Pal & Dutta, 2008). In fact, studies have confirmed changes in the country-specific dimensional values of Hofstede's original data over time (Fernandez et al., 1997). In this regard, Wakefield (2010) is correct in his assessment that "the concept was incorrect from the outset… as most nations have long contained numerous cultures, served by their own languages, social and political leanings…" (p. 661). The issue of internal ethnic and cultural diversity is of particular significance as the site of intercultural communication has, over time, shifted from a transnational canvas to a national (or intra-national) situation (Rittenhofer & Valentini, 2015; Sison, 2017; Wakefield, 2010). For example, the demographic composition of Aotearoa New Zealand has changed considerably over the past few decades on account of globalisation and people migrating into the country from different parts of the world (Smits, 2019; Spoonley & Butcher, 2009). It can be justifiably stated that prescriptions or assumptions of absolute notions of culture to identify, classify and understand publics of diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds is not the most appropriate approach under current circumstances.

Valentini's (2007) study concerning public relations practices within the European Union (EU) context is instructive in regard to risks associated with universal assumptions of culture. Historically, the governing body of EU has treated the block as a single unit. Consequently, practitioners assumed a global approach while communicating within the block disregarding the ethnic and cultural specificities of publics in the constituent member states. However, the study found that publics in most member states were dissatisfied with their relationships with the EU commission and felt communication efforts lacked local cultural relevance, which in turn adversely affected their involvement in important constitutional referendums. Hence, practitioners must exercise caution and responsibility while communicating with publics (Hon & Brunner, 2000), especially in diverse cultural contexts, in order to strike a balance between strategic or economic interests of organisations and societal needs and expectations (Valentini et al., 2016).

The generic/specific approach within normative frameworks may, therefore, be interpreted as an attempt to bridge the differences in the camps of culture-free and culture-

specific approaches (Adler et al., 1986; Tayeb, 1988). However, Vujnovic and Kruckeberg (2010) have argued that the model continues to operate from within the locus of organisations and negotiation of cultural differences "stem from the tradition of what we would like to call organizational self-centeredness" (p. 674). According to Wakefield (2011), the model adopts an inside-out (or from headquarters) perspective on culture wherein the specific or local factors of ethnic and cultural diversity are presumed to be eventually contributive to the strategic goals of organisations. As such, it amounts to a functionalist view of culture where cultural differences are looked at in relation to a presumed standard or norm (Rittenhofer & Valentini, 2015). Consequently, this distanced or *etic* orientation (Sommerfeldt & Iannacone, 2023) toward cultural differences leads to *ethnocentrism* or *ethnocentricity*. Ethnocentrism may be understood as the tendency to view one's own culture as the standard for evaluating other cultures (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). Ethnocentrism is widely acknowledged in scholarship as one of the key deficits of the discipline (Rittenhofer & Valentini, 2015; Sriramesh, 2007, 2019; Sriramesh & Stumberger, 2018). Thus, the functionalist approaches toward cultural diversity are inconsistent with emerging paradigms of strategic communication and planning that prioritise emic, cocreative and participative strategies toward diverse publics (Botan, 2021; Macnamara, 2016; Overton-de-Klerk & Verwey, 2013). As such, they are ill-equipped to reflect the global transformations and cultural complexities of multi-ethnic, multicultural societies (Bardhan, 2011; Radford, 2012; Sriramesh, 2019).

**Critical socio-cultural models**

Criticism of the functionalist frameworks on account of their organisation-centricity (Heath & Xifra, 2015; L'Etang, 2009; Macnamara, 2012; Motion & Leitch, 1996, 2015) and a lack of meaningful engagement with cultural diversity (Edwards, 2015a, 2018; Edwards & Hodges, 2011) has led to the emergence of alternative ways of theorizing about the discipline (Edwards, 2015a, 2018; Edwards & Hodges, 2011; Heath & Xifra, 2015). Scholars have termed this alternative imagining a 'critical turn' in the discipline (Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Edwards, 2015a; Heath & Xifra, 2015). It is indicative of not merely the field's disjuncture from systems-theory driven frameworks like the Excellence model (Pieczka, 2006, 2016) but also the potential to inspire change in the way public relations is conceptualized and practised (Heath & Xifra, 2015). Instead of using public relations to advance organisational interests alone, Falkheimer and Heide (2015) suggested that critical public relations should challenge the value-free assumptions of the discipline and inspire practitioners as well as researchers to be more reflexive in their practice. Being reflexive implies practitioners are aware of their habits and biases while conducting communication (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015). In view of a global erosion of trust in organisations and public

relations' dubious reputation (Gordon, 2021; Theaker, 2021), one could argue critical public relations by encouraging a more reflexive approach may enable the discipline to salvage its reputation as well as rebuild trust and foster relationship building with publics (Kent & Theunissen, 2021, Theaker, 2021).

According to Moloney and McKie (2015), critical public relations is primarily based on an "interdisciplinary or political approach and a social justice agenda with a commitment to human dignity and freedom" (p. 152). On account of its inter-disciplinary and human-centered approach, the critical school represents a broad gamut of ideas and concerns, ranging from issues of power and narratives to questions around diversity, race and culture (Edwards, 2011a, 2015b; Holtzhausen, 2002, 2011; Motion & Leitch, 1996, 2015; Munshi & McKie, 2001). Motion and Leitch's (1996) study using Foucault and Fairclough's discursive models to deconstruct communication campaigns is one of the earliest works in this area. Critical public relations can be categorised into three schools of thought (Edwards, 2015a, 2018; Macnamara, 2012; Moloney & McKie, 2015). The *postmodern* school questions metanarratives (dominance of singular ideologies and worldviews) and advocates for activism in public relations (Holtzhausen, 2000, 2002; Radford, 2012); the *postcolonial* turn interrogates issues around race and power that perpetuate the subjugation of non-Western publics in mainstream discourse (Munshi, 2013; Munshi & Kurian, 2005; Munshi & McKie, 2001) and, finally, the *socio-cultural* approach which prioritises socially and culturally guided frameworks that emphasise the importance of diversity in practice and research (Bhargava, 2024; Edwards, 2018; Edwards & Hodges, 2011; Macnamara, 2015).

The present study aligns with the socio-cultural school of thought because of its central focus on the issue of ethnic diversity and cultural variables within the practice of public relations. Ethnicity is an important marker of personal identity in modern diverse societies and forms the basis of cultural meanings (Kymlicka, 2013). Sison (2020) has argued that, as a socially constructed concept, ethnicity is inclusive of references to language, beliefs, norms and behaviours of individuals in a group. Akova and Kantar (2020) therefore remarked "ethnicity, not race, is cultural… it covers all elements of culture" (p. 5). As such, ethnicity becomes a critical lens within the socio-cultural realm to understand how practitioners address societal diversity in their communication as well as how publics from diverse ethnic groups may respond to communication (Edwards, 2011b, 2018; Edwards & Hodges, 2011). Edwards (2018) referred to Proctor & Gamble's 'Touch the Pickle' campaign (afaqs!, 2015) as an example of how a deeper understanding of existing norms and values of a specific socio-cultural and ethnic context could enable practitioners to create socially resonant yet culturally appropriate messages, even if it dealt with social taboos like menstruation. The circuit of culture model (Curtin, 2023; Curtin & Gaither, 2005) further

illustrates how cultural differences contribute to discursive struggles (acts of creating and contesting meaning) in public relations. According to Curtin and Gaither (2005), meaning is an outcome of interactions between sender and receiver in a shared cultural space (Curtin & Gaither, 2005). Global palm oil campaigns exemplify the varied readings of communication messages in diverse cultural contexts (Curtin et al., 2015). While Western discourses generally associate palm oil with environmental degradation and habitat loss, publics in producing regions (Malaysia and Indonesia) think of palm oil as a cheap and a reliable source of livelihood and nutrition. It can, therefore, be said that how one perceives communication is dependent on their contexts, or lived realities (Curtin et al., 2015).

Equally important are identities of publics the construction of which signifies power as it "defines who is included and who is excluded" (Woodward, 1997, p. 15) from the meaning-making process. In view of the power invested in the practice of public relations (Bardhan, 2011; Edwards, 2011a; Motion & Leitch, 2015), public relations can work "both as a hegemonic instrument and a tool for resistance" (Edwards, 2011a, p. 29). It must be noted identities of publics are multi-dimensional, constitutive of ethnicity, race, gender and nationality among others, and are constantly evolving in tandem with the cultural norms and lived realities of publics within a particular context (Curtin & Gaither, 2005).

The idea that identities are multi-dimensional coheres with the concept of intersectionality in literature (Vardeman et al., 2023; Vardeman-Winter at al., 2013). Intersectionality refers to "individuals' interdependent and simultaneous identities that affect how publics confront issues" (Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013, p. 279). It implies publics have many social identities and "multiple identities map onto each other and produce identities distinct to their component parts" (Sison, 2020, p. 350). According to Vardeman et al. (2023), intersectionality is an important barometer to critically analyse and assess issues of diversity and power in public relations. An intersectional approach sheds light on how a combination of different identities affect the way publics engage with communication message. For example, Aldoory's (2001) study of a health campaign found that minority participants (African-American women) feel their ethnicity and race contribute the most to their experiences of discrimination. Another study highlighted how campaign communication for a women's vaccine primarily focused on white women instead of women of colour as the second group of women was considered to be strategically less significant based on their perceived lower economic status (Vardeman-Winter, 2010; Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013). The examples above do not just reflect an *etic*, organisation-centric approach to the diversity of publics, they also are suggestive of how certain identities of publics are foregrounded, or ascribed, by communicators at the expense of others (Sha, 2006; Ni & Sha, 2023; Vardeman-Winter, 2011; Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013). Bearing that in mind, while

intersectionality is to be aspired for when segmenting publics and devising a communication plan, Sison (2020) has contended that practitioners generally are predisposed to selecting “known distinct groupings” (p. 351). Moreover, from a socio-cultural view, markers of ethnicity and race continue to be sources of legitimate power or discrimination (Edwards, 2015b, 2018; Logan, 2021; Munshi & Edwards, 2011) and publics often related the most with their ethnic (or racial) identity in a diverse setting (Aldoory, 2011; Sha, 2006; Ni & Sha, 2023).

Sha’s (2006) study on how cultural identities are formed in an intercultural context is salient in this regard. It is suggested cultural identities are constructed through a complex interplay between processes of avowal and ascription. An avowed identity is how publics see themselves and ascribed identity is the way organisations or practitioners view the publics (Ni & Sha, 2023; Sha, 2006). Since cultural identities are multi-dimensional (Colliers, 2015; Tomlinson, 2003), publics generally avowed the identity which is the most salient, or relevant, in a particular situation (Ni & Sha, 2023). For example, African-American women in Aldoory’s (2001) research identified the strongest with their race. Ethnic identification also has implications for practitioners as studies have found ethnicity affected how people receive and process information in an intercultural setting (Sha, 2006l Illia et al., 2013). Scholars have, therefore, urged practitioners to focus on research to learn more of the salient and avowed identities of publics (Sha, 2006; Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013) and “forgo ascribing identities to particular publics” (p. 285). In the absence of research focused on publics and their ethnic identities, especially in diverse setting, communication practices may result in cultural stereotypes (Theunissen & Rahman, 2012) and perpetuate the ethnocentrism and ‘Whiteness’ in public relations (Edwards, 2015b; Vardeman-Winter, 2011).

As a cognitive shortcut used by human beings to render manageable the diversity, richness and complexity of the world, stereotyping is a universal phenomenon (Samovar et al., 2017). It may be defined as “complex form of categorization that mentally organizes your experiences with and guides your behavior toward a particular group of people” (Samovar et al., 2017, p. 389). Although a common practice, stereotyping can pose risks to communication in a culturally diverse environment when it takes on a negative form or overgeneralises (Ertem-Eray, 2024a; Hesmondhalgh & Saha, 2013). As such, it has been argued that stereotyping can reveal the ethnocentric tendencies of the discipline, hinder the acceptance of multiculturalism and contribute to “blatant discriminatory behaviors that promote unequal treatment among diverse cultural groups” (Ertem-Eray, 2024a, p. 42). For example, the negative stereotypes of Asian people during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in adverse experiences for people of the Asian community (Choi, 2024; Walker & Daniel

Anders, 2022), thereby bringing to light the systemic disparities and ethnocentric bias of the dominant cultural groups (Pompper, 2005, 2024a; Logan, 2021).

*Whiteness* is a physical fact as well as a symbolic reality, for being white often is implicative of boundaries between those who are white and others who are not (Edwards, 2015b). In fact, Pompper (2005) has argued whiteness cannot exist without the other which scholars contend is a baggage of the histories of colonialism and associated racial oppression (Edwards, 2015b; Logan, 2021). Axiomatically, scholars have linked the ethnocentrism in public relations to the discipline's white attributes (Sriramesh, 2010, 2019). This is supported by Bhargava and Theunissen's (2023) Aotearoa New Zealand-focused study which found that majority of the practitioners are predominantly white. Whiteness, therefore, is denotative of not only a lack of diversity in numbers but may also be suggestive of the resultant lack of diverse approaches to negotiating ethnic diversity. Campaigns that characterise an ethnocentric worldview may thus potentially fail to connect with all publics; they may also contribute to the perpetuation of historical inequities (Vardeman-Winter, 2011).

While the call for diversity research to go beyond the primary constructs of race, ethnicity or gender is justified (Mundy & Bardhan, 2023; Sha & Ford, 2006; Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013), existing literature and examples cited here suggest the continuing influence of ethnicity in public relations. Scholars, therefore, have continued to urge for studies that examine the public relations practice at the intersections of ethnicity, race and culture (Edwards, 2011b, 2018; Logan, 2021; Pompper, 2005). It assumes particular importance in multicultural societies which further complicates strategic planning as "richness and diversity of publics, race – among other identities – complicates communicators' abilities to identify shared meanings across many segments of a population" (Vardeman-Winter, 2011, p. 414).

### 2.4 Multicultural Public Relations

Increased mobility of people across borders has led to a dynamic reconstitution of erstwhile ethnically and culturally homogeneous countries into present-day multicultural societies (Meissner & Vertovec, 2015; Saint-Jacques, 2015b). The emergent heterogeneity, according to Wakefield (2010), is "forcing public relations people to reexamine the targets and content of their communication programs" (p. 664). Multi-ethnic, multicultural societies, therefore, can be viewed as a more proximate impact of globalisation on the cultural practices of public relations (Carey, 1992/2009; Sriramesh, 2019) in countries like US, Canada, Australia or Aotearoa New Zealand.

### 2.4.1 Multicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand

Aotearoa New Zealand is built on a bicultural foundation, on the basis of the Treaty of Waitangi (1840), known as *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* in Māori, which is viewed by many as the country's founding document (Mersham et al., 2009; Sibley & Ward, 2013). Biculturalism, as articulated in Te Tiriti, is premised on principles of *kawanatanga* (governorship by the Crown), *rangatirantanga* (tribal autonomy), equality for citizens, cooperation between Crown and iwi/tribes and reparation of historical injustices (Byrnes, 2005). Until the immigration reforms of mid-1980s, recognition of ethnic diversity in the country essentially related to Māori and Pākehā (British/European) relations as immigration was largely limited to Pākehā settlers from the European continent (Kurian & Munshi, 2006; Sibley & Ward, 2013; Smits, 2019). However, the economic and immigration reforms of the 80s and 90s which enabled the arrival of immigrants from other parts of the world, especially Asia, contributed to the ongoing transformation of the country's demographic makeup (Spoonley, 2015). Aotearoa New Zealand, today, is a truly multicultural country (Spoonley, 2023). Its population is broadly classified in terms of five ethnic categories: European, Māori, Asian, Pacific peoples and Middle Eastern/Latin American/African (MELAA) (Stats NZ, 2024a). As per the latest census, Europeans made up 67.8 percent of the population, followed by Māori (17.8 percent), Asian (17.3 percent), Pacific peoples (8.9 percent) and MELAA (1.9 percent) (Stats NZ, 2024a). As per Stats NZ (2023) projections, the ethnic diversity of the country is set to increase further in the future.

Although, unlike Canada and Australia, multiculturalism is not constitutionally guaranteed, interests of diverse ethnic groups enjoy legal protections (Sibley & Ward, 2013). Smits (2019) has contended the country is simultaneously bicultural and multicultural with the former embodying the historicity and socio-political reality of Crown-Māori relations and the latter mirroring the interests and aspirations of the growing multiethnic communities. However, the dichotomy could also lead to intergroup tensions (Mersham et al., 2009; Sibley & Ward, 2013). This is evidenced by the prevalence of ethnicity-centered stereotypes (Webber et al., 2013; Theunissen & Rahman, 2012) and a lower support for equity-focused multiculturalism relative to symbolic multicultural elements (Sibley & Ward, 2013).

Despite challenges, the country rates higher than EU and Australia in its support for multiculturalism (Ward & Masgoret, 2008). Sibley and Ward's (2013) study has suggested that the general preference for integration as an acculturation strategy proves the social cohesion and inclusive spirit of the country. Furthermore, equality of all citizens and respect for all cultures are enshrined principles in Te Tiriti (Ward & Liu, 2012). In fact, "young people do not view biculturalism and multiculturalism as mutually exclusive" (Sibley & Ward, 2013,

p. 702). A more recent survey found almost 90 percent of respondents think of Aotearoa New Zealand as a diverse and inclusive nation (Bhatia, 2022). However, identity building is a continuous process (Gilbertson, 2008; Humpage & Greaves, 2017), one which is not without its hurdles (Kurian & Munshi, 2012; Smits, 2019). In this regard, Sibley and Ward (2013) have argued that culturally-sensitive campaigns can play an important role in strengthening multiculturalism in Aotearoa New Zealand by promoting cultural diversity as well as fostering feelings of mutual respect "across dominant and non-dominant ethno-cultural groups" (p. 711). As Mersham et al. (2009) stated "bicultural foundation and becoming a multicultural nation will inevitably have implications for communication management" (p. 62).

It may be noted that scholarship references to cultural diversity and public relations in the field of practice, while limited (Weaver, 2013), have mostly adopted a bicultural lens (Comrie & Kupa, 1998; Henderson et al., 2010; Motion et al., 2012; Motion & Leitch, 2000; Weaver, 2011). For example, studies have indicated the importance of involving Māori publics in the communication process, face-to-face communication, use of Māori cultural symbols, Te ao Māori and Māori ethnic media while communicating with the group members (Comrie & Kupa, 1998; Henderson et al., 2010; Motion et al., 2012; Weaver, 2011). At the same time, despite an early call by Motion and Leitch (2000) to consider both bicultural and multicultural perspectives, scholarship on the latter remains nearly non-existent, barring a few studies that have clearly acknowledged the multi-ethnic setting of the country's communication context (Theunissen & Rahman, 2012).

### 2.4.2 Intercultural public relations – Communicating in a multicultural context

Intercultural public relations refers to public relations when, in any specific context, the avowed cultural identity of the publics do not match with the avowed cultural identity of communicating organisations (Ni & Sha, 2023). As such, intercultural public relations assumes the critical role of culture in communication between people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Ni & Sha, 2023), which may be considered particularly salient in a multicultural setting. Intercultural public relations, according to Ni and Sha (2023), can facilitate building and managing relationships with culturally diverse publics, enhance cultural competencies of practitioners and empower the traditionally marginalised. However, intercultural communication also runs the risk of becoming ethnocentric if practitioners disregard the cultural nuances and norms of other ethnically diverse publics. The failure to look beyond one's own culture may also result in what Sue (2001) has called ethnocentric monoculturalism, which implies the imposition of a normative, mostly white, worldview on other ethnically diverse groups.

In a multicultural context, ethnocentrism could lead to stereotypical portrayal of publics from minority ethnicities (Ertem-Eray, 2024a; Theunissen & Rahman, 2012). Stereotyping works on essentialist thinking which assumes people of similar ethnic or cultural backgrounds share common traits (Vardeman-Winter, 2011). While stereotypes could be either positive or negative, they have generally tended towards the latter thereby perpetuating negative perceptions of particular ethnic groups in the wider society (Bailey & Harindranath, 2006; Choi, 2024; Theunissen & Rahman, 2012). For example, Theunissen and Rahman's (2012) study of anti-violence campaigns in Aotearoa New Zealand found most of the models were Māori or Pacific peoples while members of the Asian community were almost absent. Similarly, Arabs, Chinese and Cypriots found themselves either misrepresented or rendered completely invisible in British media (Bailey & Harindranath, 2006). Theunissen and Rahman (2012) have stated that "like all cultural aspects of society, even stereotypes are in flux, constantly changing and being re-negotiated at personal and societal level" (p. 203). In that case, lack of mindful communication and research may lead to the use of stereotypes, which are likely to further existing injustices and racism for ethnically diverse publics (Theunissen & Rahman, 2012).

Moreover, studies have suggested there is a greater preference for integration compared to assimilation in Aotearoa New Zealand (Sibley & Ward, 2013; Ward, 2024). Integration implies new settlers or immigrants establish contacts with the new culture without forgoing their origin culture, while assimilation implies suppression of native culture in order to adopt host culture (Adams & Johnson, 2020; Ertem-Eray, 2024a). It would not be wrong to suggest that in a context where integration is favoured, imposition of dominant cultural frames of practitioners onto ethnically diverse publics may not only result in communication that is misinterpreted by publics (Vardeman-Winter, 2011), it also mirrors the discipline's hegemonical tendencies. Hegemony, according to Gramsci (1971), is a form of cultural domination by the elites whereby their interpretation and rendition of society and world is presented as the norm. In public relations, a hegemonical practice would suggest the imposition of the dominant cultural norms of a particular group at the expense of others within the framework of communication (Gregory & Halff, 2013). One may therefore presume that paying heed to the 'multiplicity of publics' (Leitch & Motion, 2010) becomes vital to deterring public relations from embracing a hegemonic disposition in practice.

Moreover, even when individuals assimilate, it is hard to predict the aspects of local culture that are adopted by immigrant populations (Saint-Jacques, 2015a; Wakefield, 2010). Therefore, Botan's (2021) call for more research on publics, assumes greater relevance in a multicultural context, given the challenging lack of cross-cultural awareness in the practice (Theaker, 2021). While conventional primary research may not always be possible due to

time and cost considerations (Gregory, 2020; Smith, 2021), social media due to its low-cost nature (Macnamara, 2017) enables practitioners to learn more about different publics (Theaker, 2021). Social media has particular relevance to ethnic and migrant populations in Aotearoa New Zealand where its use has been associated with how new settlers as well as established residents from minority ethnic groups relate to their experience of the country (Du & Lin, 2019; Ihejrika & Krtalic, 2021). On top of it, because social media has dialogic potential (Lane & Kent, 2018; Theunissen, 2015) and can facilitate conversations (Gregory, 2017), its use allows practitioners to learn the different ways in which minority ethnic groups engage on the platforms by encouraging more participatory forms of communication (Ciszek, 2013). In reality though, at times, social media can be a colour-blind or homogenizing space (Shuter, 2012; Singh, 2010; Sommier et al., 2019), and practitioners often down-regulate the importance of publics' ethnic identities online (Adams & Johnson, 2020). Worryingly, colour-blind approaches can lead to experiences of racism online for minority groups (Sommier et al., 2019). For example, in Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori youth face higher levels of cyberbullying in comparison to the national average (Houkamau et al., 2021). In light of this, insistence of scholars on displaying a greater awareness and mindfulness of context while communicating with diverse publics stands to reason (Theunissen & Rahman, 2012; Zaharna, 2001), even in the online arena (Macnamara, 2017).

Awareness implies a recognition of the importance of context, or the publics' lived realities, in their meaning-making process (Curtin, 2021). It speaks to the boundary-spanning role of public relations practitioners (Vardeman-Winter, 2011). Scholars have also termed practitioners cultural intermediaries who not only are transmitting information but also continuously generating representations and producing meaning at the intersection of organisations and publics (Curtin & Gaither, 2005; Curtin, 2021). In this regard, Bardhan (2011) used Casmir's (1993) third culture model to explicate the role of the practitioner in an intercultural context. A third culture is "a situational subculture wherein temporary behavioral adjustments can be made by the interacting persons as they attempt to reach a mutually agreed upon goal(s)…" (Casmir & Asuncion-Lande, 1989, p. 29). Bardhan (2011) has argued that a third culture orientation stems a practitioner's ethnocentric tendencies and instead promotes shared cultural growth, since it rejects static country-based notions of culture and instead adopts a dialogic and interpersonal approach to communication (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Lane, 2020). In a third culture world of practice, cultural differences are not a hurdle that organisations need to surmount they are an invitation for both practitioner and publics to find ways to creatively engage. Hence, the model suggests an openness to change and awareness of local cultural norms (Bardhan, 2011). Munshi et al. (2020) have cited climate-change adaptation campaigns in Aotearoa New Zealand as an example of how

inclusion of local stories and cultural norms help in making global messages more relatable to specific local publics. In this case, water conservation messages are communicated through enduring community legends of a water spirit in order to connect better with Māori populations most at risk from climate change (Munshi et al., 2020).

Language is an important element of an intercultural communication strategy (Saint-Jacques, 2015a; Wakefield, 2010). Theunissen (2019) has cited the example of Coca Cola's blunder with the 'Kia ora mate' campaign in Aotearoa New Zealand's multicultural context to underline the critical importance of language. A lack of cultural awareness on the company's part led to an unintended misinterpretation of the campaign phrase as 'Mate' in te reo Māori means death. Other scholars have also written about the critical role that language plays in intercultural situations (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2013; Macnamara, 2004; Saint-Jacques, 2015a; Sha & Ford, 2007; Vardeman-Winter, 2011). In this regard, it may be important to consider Macnamara (2004) who contended that the predominant use of English in public relations communication mirrors the discipline's ethnocentrism particularly in a multicultural environment. Hence, use of languages other than English not only helps communicators connect with minority ethnic audiences it also results in campaigns that have the potential to be informed by multiple perspectives (Werder, 2015). Sison's (2009) study of public relations campaigns in multicultural Australia highlighted the use of community languages as an effective shorthand to engage multi-ethnic audiences. However, practitioners must account for potential problems of translation as wrong translations may affect how campaign messages are perceived by audiences (Vardeman-Winter, 2011). Additionally, Sison (2017) has suggested to only rely on language to connect with ethnically diverse publics portrays a limited grasp of cultural influences on communication as "culture is much more than language" (p. 131).

The broader ambit of culture, in a way, is allusive of the multi-dimensionality of ethnicity (Ertem-Eray & Ki, 2021; Edwards, 2011; Sison, 2020). "An ethnic group consists of people who have a common cultural background embedded in language and religion" (Ertem-Eray & Ki, 2021, p. 3). According to Edwards (2011b), ethnicity encompasses differences in culture, language, region, economic and social capital, among others. The complexity of ethnicity, therefore, calls for cultural awareness and competency among practitioners in multicultural settings. Adams and Johnson (2020) have urged for a multicultural orientation to communication that reflects a "mutually respectful approach that embraces a variety of cultures" (p. 312). However, studies have indicated that practice continues to lag in terms of cultural sensitivity and multicultural orientation, thereby resulting in communication that does not sufficiently consider the diversity of publics (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023; Fatima Oliveira, 2013; Tukachinsky, 2015; Vardeman-Winter & Place,

2017). For example, Fatima Oliveira's (2013) study focused on crisis communication practitioners in the multicultural context of US and found that while the participants acknowledged the need for considering cultural nuances most campaigns displayed a lack of cultural sensitivity despite the potential risks of reputational damage during periods of crises. The findings, therefore, call into question the capacity of strategic planning in public relations to transcend its functionalist thinking and exemplify a civic and socially-oriented ethos that embraces the diverse identities of publics (Ciszek et al., 2022; Gregory & Halff, 2013; Hon & Brunner, 2000; Macnamara, 2015).

Multicultural societies have also facilitated the emergence of ethnic communication agencies (Edwards, 2015b). Yu (2018) has suggested ethnic media plays a vital role in multicultural societies by providing voice to marginalised people from ethno-racial minorities and, hence, creates space for intercultural dialogue. At the same time, the continuing relevance of ethnic media within the larger media system throws light on mainstream media's routine neglect of concerns relevant to ethnically diverse communities (Tukachinsky, 2015). This is supported by Edwards (2015b) who is of the view that ethnic channels reinforce the ethnocentrism in public relations as they are "rarely integrated into mainstream PR strategies, and is instead treated as an adjunct to campaigns that take whiteness as the benchmark reference for messages and tactics" (p. 1). This is borne out by Sison's (2009) study, one of the few to have focused on examining the reflection of diversity within communication in a multicultural environment, which found that only three out of twelve award-winning public relations campaigns in Australia considered the cultural variables of publics in their communication plans. Studies such as Sison's (2009) offer an understanding of how practitioners are engaging with their diverse socio-cultural contexts. However, despite ongoing calls to examine the cultural practices of the discipline (Edwards, 2011b, 2018; Edwards & Hodges, 2011; L'Etang, 2012), very few studies, specific to Aotearoa New Zealand, have explored the salience of ethnic diversity of publics with respect to communication practices.

It must be noted that matching the ethnicity or race of practitioners and publics is not a precondition for cultural competence and culturally sensitive communication (Adams & Johnson, 2020; Edwards, 2011b, 2015b; Pompper, 2010b; Sha & Ford, 2007). Sha and Ford (2007) suggested skills associated with multicultural public relations are not innate to an individual or contingent on their ethnic or cultural background. Therefore, practitioners can learn and acquire competencies that make them more culturally competent in multicultural environments (Fatima Oliveira, 2013; Verčič & Sriramesh, 2021). As Edwards (2015b) noted "an ability to understand the world in which those audiences live is necessary" (p. 5). The Pink Sari campaign of New South Wales (Australia) is a notable example. The health-related

campaign employed a collaborative community-based approach and extensive research to devise a culturally-sensitive approach to communicate with its diverse multiethnic publics including women from Indian and Sri Lankan communities (Macnamara & Camit, 2017). Sison (2020) has cited Melbourne's (Australia) CALD COM campaign as an example of an inclusive multicultural campaign strategy where practitioners went beyond the use of translation to engage its minority ethnic communities. While material was translated to nine languages, practitioners conducted numerous focus groups with community representatives resulting in the production of 50 storyboards which helped practitioners reach publics from over 100 other linguistic groups that did not benefit from translation.

In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, most practitioners invoked the country's bicultural ethos when asked about their understanding of diversity, equity and inclusion in public relations practice (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023). A bicultural lens to communicating diversity represents good practice. Not only is it consistent with the country's foundational document, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, it also potentially deters the discipline from assuming a hegemonic disposition (Gregory & Haff, 2013). At the same time, the limited acknowledgment among practitioners of the need for multicultural sensibility is concerning especially in view of the country's growing ethnic diversity. Valentini et al. (2016) have argued that organisations must go beyond a mono- or bi-cultural framework to adequately address the complexity of today's world.

Finally, the need for cultural sensitivity and a consideration for the diversity of publics also attests to an organisation's responsibility to publics as part of its civic role (Valentini et al., 2016). By acknowledging and integrating the ethnic diversity of the publics in their communication programs, public relations can play the role of 'social change agents' (Ciszek et al., 2022). To this effect, Bardhan (2011) appropriately stated, "practitioners should realize that, through how they communicate at the micro levels, they can become creative agents of change at more macro levels" (p. 88). Therefore, a critical examination of how practitioners factor the ethnic diversity of the country in their practice may be considered an important area of consideration within the larger expanse of socio-cultural research in public relations.

### 2.5 Research Question

The literature review highlighted how diversity has become a central to the practice of public relations in the wake of globalisation. While diversity is multi-factorial, social constructs such as ethnicity or race continue to remain fundamental to our understanding of how publics perceive and interpret communication. This is particularly true in a multi-ethnic environment where there is a lack of shared cultural understanding across diverse groups of publics. In such a context, strategic planning must pay ever more attention to understanding

the cultures and identities of ethnically diverse publics. This is essential to not only creating campaigns that register with members of diverse ethnicities but also addressing the discipline's ethnocentric perspective which has contributed to the dominance of particular cultural norms at the expense of others. Scholars have, therefore, advocated for studies that centre ethnic and racial diversity as areas of critical concern. While there are a few studies that have looked at how public relations campaigns reflect ethnic or cultural diversity in Aotearoa New Zealand (Rahman & Bhargava, 2015; Theunissen & Rahman, 2012), none of them have explored how ethnic identities are addressed as part of campaign planning. In light of the existing literature in the area and the identified gaps therein, the researcher has formulated the following research question for the present study. Though a research project can be guided by more than a single question, studies have suggested limiting the number of research questions improves the focus of a study (Crawford et al., 2020). In fact, a single research question can sufficiently reveal the motive of the study and subsequently inform the study's research design (White, 2017).

**RQ**: How is ethnic diversity addressed in the strategic planning of public relations campaigns in Aotearoa New Zealand?

# Chapter 3 Research Methodology

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses research methodology design for the present study. The lack of past data pertaining to the treatment of ethnic diversity within public relations strategic planning in Aotearoa New Zealand makes the study exploratory in nature. The researcher has selected quantitative content analysis as the method most suited to answer the research question. To begin, this chapter gives an overview of different research paradigms and the ontological and epistemological arguments for post-positivism, the paradigm for the study. Thereafter, the use of content analysis within the post-positivist framework is explained along with sampling decisions, protocol for unitization, development of coding schemes, reliability and validity. Finally, the chapter describes the method of data analysis and the operationalisation of the codes as part of the process.

## 3.2 Research Paradigms

Originally borne of Kuhn's (1962) work on the nature of evolution of scientific thought, the term *paradigm* can be described as a widely acknowledged framework for a community of practitioners which provides a theoretical foundation for furthering knowledge in that specified domain (Munar & Jamal, 2016). According to Munar and Jamal (2016), paradigms constitute a body of knowledge, methods and practice specific to a research community and often serve as the "sense-making, identity-crafting tools of scholarly communities" (p. 2). When viewed thus, paradigms are akin to a belief-system for researchers, giving them a lens to view the world of research with (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). In particular, a paradigm orientates them toward their research problem or field of inquiry with a particular perspective. An understanding of different research paradigms, thus, becomes essential for formulating the most appropriate research design for a particular problem (Maksimovic & Evtimov, 2023).

### 3.2.1 The construction of a paradigm

Ideally, any consideration of paradigms within academic research involves a contemplation of ontology, epistemology and methodology (and methods). Ontology is "the nature of our beliefs about reality" (Richards, 2003, p. 33). According to Patton (2002), ontological assumptions are based on whether researchers view reality as "a singular, verifiable reality and truth or socially constructed multiple realities" (p. 134). Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that deals with systems of knowledge and the ways in which knowledge can or ought to be acquired (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). In short, it concerns with "claims about how what is assumed to exist can be known" (Blaikie, 2000, p. 8).

Methodology may be described as “articulated, theoretically informed approach to the production of data” (Ellen, 1984, p. 9). Essentially, methodology relates to decisions around data collection and analysis, such as what type of data is considered for research, the suitable tools for data collection, and ways of analysing the collecting the data (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). While paradigm selection has often been framed as a quantitative versus qualitative dichotomy, philosophical contemplation is at the core of this exercise as the latter enables a better grasp of methodological implications (Dieronitu, 2014; Krauss, 2005). Grix (2019) has suggested that “ontology and epistemology are to research what ‘footings’ are to a house: they form the foundations of the whole edifice” (p. 51). This is in step with Guba and Lincoln’s (1994) contention that the issue of method is secondary to paradigm which is fundamentally predicated on ontological and epistemological tenets of the investigator.

### 3.2.2 Common paradigms in communications research

Three of the more common research paradigms that are used in pedagogical and social sciences research, of which the field of public relations and communications is a part, are positivism, interpretivism (or constructivism) and post-positivism (Grix, 2019; Maksimovic & Ektimov, 2023; Ryan, 2006).

The positivist school of thought subscribes to the idea that there is a single identifiable reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln et al., 2018). It has emerged from the world of natural sciences and, therefore, is governed by the scientific thought. Its ontological position is realism where reality is context-free and there is a cause-and-effect relationship between observable phenomena (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Data and its attendant analysis is assumed to be value-free and any examination or observation do not influence the outcomes (Healy & Perry, 2000). As such, positivist research relies on measurement and quantification in order to arrive at a set of principles or laws that describe, control or predict outcomes. In other words, generalisability of results is a principal concern of the positivist paradigm (Dieronitou, 2014; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). However, scholars have criticised the paradigm for its emphasis on a value-free conceptualization of reality and reliance on numerical data to represent phenomena (Gage, 1989; Held, 1990; Richards, 2003). Critics further argue the scientific method is inappropriate for the realm of social sciences where causal relationships are far harder to establish because the world we live in and human activity are incredibly complex (Mack, 2010; Maksimovic & Ektimov, 2023; Ryan, 2006).

At the other end of the paradigmatic spectrum is interpretivism or constructivism, which rejects the positivist notion of a common reality and the existence of universal laws that are descriptive of actions in the human or social realm. The interpretivist approach has,

often, been viewed as a response to the over-dominance of positivism (Grix, 2019). From an ontological standpoint, the paradigm is premised on relativism which pre-supposes the existence of multiple realities that are unique to each individual or participant in research (Dieronitou, 2014; Grix, 2019). Individual realities thus constructed, or co-constructed among individuals with shared social or cultural norms, are "not more or less true, in any absolute sense but simply more or less informed and/or sophisticated" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). Since interpretivist methodologies are more interested in understanding than explaining an objective and value-free social reality, researchers mostly utilise qualitative research methods (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Qualitative techniques enable the researcher to interpret and understand any social phenomenon in their context (Krauss, 2005). However, interpretive studies have been criticised for their lack of generalisability or the inability to extrapolate findings to the general population (Grix, 2019). In fact, Bernstein (1993) argues that the anti-foundational stance of relativism, which ontologically undergirds the interpretive paradigm, creates a world that is characterised by endless subjectivity in the absence of a common binding element. However, proponents are of the view that every individual is unique and aggregation of findings runs counter to the philosophical and ontological tenets of a relativist, constructivist framework (Krauss, 2005).

Post-positivism can be placed in between the ontological extremities espoused by positivism and interpretivism. Grix (2019) has argued that post-positivist thinking "straddles both the positivist and interpretivist paradigms" (p. 80). While post-positivism has emerged largely in response to the value-neutrality and absolutist assumptions of an objective reality inherent in positivism, the paradigm does not subscribe to the anti-foundationalist stance of interpretivist (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016; Ryan, 2006). Hence, it does not dispute the existence of a single reality independent of the observer or researcher. However, the pursuit of an absolute truth is not the ultimate objective in post-positivist research (Fox, 2008). While truth exists, post-positivism makes space for the complexity of the social world by acknowledging the intervention of human biases and meaning-making process in the interpretation of reality (Maksimovic & Evtimov, 2023; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). The ontology of post-positivism is critical realism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) which is fundamentally underpinned by the view that the reality outside of self remains unknowable because of people's interpretations and perceptions of that reality (Krauss, 2005). In contrast to the value-neutrality of positivist research and the value-laden approach of interpretivists, or constructivists, a critical realist undertakes a 'value-cognizant' approach which operates on the principle that "real objects are subject to value-laden observation" (Krauss, 2005, p. 762). As such, understanding, and not explanation and causality, is a defining element of post-positivist research (Fox, 2008) where claims to truth on the basis of research outcomes are

more probabilistic than deterministic and remain open to reinterpretation (Maksimovic & Evtimov, 2023).

### 3.2.3 Post-positivism as the paradigm of choice

The ontological fluidity of the post-positivist paradigm allows research to be epistemologically flexible. Therefore, a critical realist scholar uses both quantitative and qualitative methodologies in research (Healy & Perry, 2000) where “methods such as case studies and unstructured or semi-structured in-depth interviews are acceptable and appropriate within the paradigm, as are statistical analyses” (Krauss, 2005, p. 762). Fox (2008) argued the role of the researcher is to be the interpreter of data, thereby implying the involvement of their personal knowledge and subjective worldviews. Therefore, reflexivity of the researcher in terms of their interpretative work is another key aspect of the post-positivist framework. In light of the researcher’s interpretive role, objectivity is limited to the researcher’s practical detachment from their subjects or objects of study but does not imply the results of the study are free from their imbibed norms or values (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). In a way, the researcher’s aspiration for detachment is eventually reconciled with its theoretical improbability (Fox, 2008). Given the broad suite of possibilities, interpretive research work based on quantitative data is admissible within the post-positivist paradigm (Dieronitou, 2014). One may therefore view the emergence of post-positivist paradigm as being reflective of a broader shift away from the dualism and purism that have historically dogged the world of research (objective or subjective, quantitative or qualitative, positivist or interpretivist) (Ryan, 2006; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). In fact, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) have argued that post-positivism is the evolutionary next step of the positivist (or logical positivist) worldview given a general acceptance among both quantitative and qualitative researchers that “observation is not a perfect and direct window into reality” (p. 16).

The research question – “how is ethnic diversity addressed in the strategic planning of public relations campaigns in Aotearoa New Zealand?” – is suggestive of the exploratory nature of the study, and alludes to the socio-cultural aspects of practice in public relations. In the absence of prior data in this area of research specific to Aotearoa New Zealand, the study is an attempt to highlight the state of ethnic diversity consideration in strategic communication practices in the country. The researcher aims to arrive at results that may serve as normative data (benchmarks or standards) for future research in this area. Additionally, interpretation of the outcomes is also desired in order to gain a deeper understanding of the common themes and practices that characterise diversity-related communication practices.

One of the primary advantages of the post-positivist paradigm is the ability to marry a wide array of research techniques with an interpretive framework. Scholars have also endorsed the usefulness and applicability of the post-positivist paradigm in relation to analysing and understanding human behaviour and practices within the realm of social sciences research (Grix, 2019; Panhwar et al., 2017). In relation to the study's socio-cultural context, the paradigm not only enables the researcher to generate results that are evidence-based but also allows for interpretation that helps ground the results in their context. Situating data and results within their context serves as an acknowledgment of the complexity of human phenomenon and allows the researcher to take on a learning role (Ryan, 2006) which is in keeping with the exploratory nature of the study. The latter, Ryan (2006) has argued, limits the possibility of reductionist claims which often plagues quantitative work under positivism. In view of the above, post-positivism has been selected as the paradigm for the current study's research methodology.

The next segment relates to quantitative content analysis, the method chosen for the present study.

## 3.3 Methodology

### 3.3.1 Quantitative Content Analysis

Content analysis is a widely used, well-established and flexible research method that has historically involved analysis of large pieces of unstructured data, mostly in the form of text (Cavanagh, 1997; Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Krippendorff, 2019). As a research method within communication studies, it dates back to the 1950s when its use predominantly centred on simple list-and-count approaches to observation of pre-identified text matter, primarily newspaper content (Gheyle & Jacobs, 2017; White & Marsh, 2006). Berelson's (1952) early definition of content analysis as "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (p. 18) reflected the particular use of content analysis as a numerically oriented approach to collect information about superficial or easily observable (*manifest*) matter within text. In fact, several subsequent studies have interpreted content analysis as a systematic, objective and quantitative approach (Berger, 1998; Kassarjian, 1977; Stone et al., 1966). As a result, Dieronitou (2014) has contended that content analysis is often assumed to be an adherent of the positivist model.

Dieronitou (2014), however, has viewed the positivist interpretation of content analysis as limiting in light of the method's increasing use of qualitative approaches as well as its application in a wide variety of contexts (Forman & Damschroder, 2007; Neuendorf,

2017; Riffe et al., 2019). In fact, Krippendorff (2019) has suggested that even in the early years of the method content analysts had exhibited tendencies of combining counting frequencies of symbols and data with the practice of "drawing inferences about the antecedent conditions of communications" (p. 12). This is borne out by Weber's (1990) description of the method as "a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from data" (p. 9). Building on the conceptualisation of Weber (1990), Krippendorff (2019) defined content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (p. 2) which foregrounded the role of the researcher as an interpreter making inferences based on their understanding of the text. The focus on understanding, therefore, situates content analysis within the post-positivist school of thought. Additionally, Krippendorff (2019) has contended that text within content analysis depends on its context and the reader for meaning construction and interpretation, thereby lending further credence to a post-positivist ethos within content analysis.

It must be noted that Krippendorff (2019), from an epistemological standpoint, has disagreed with the distinction between qualitative and quantitative forms of analysis as it is argued that all reading of text and its attendant analysis, even if the research outcomes are quantitative in nature, require qualitative work. While principally in agreement with the aforesaid view, the present study qualifies the method as quantitative content analysis on account of its primary reliance on quantitative data (numerical findings) and use of a priori coding (deductive coding) as opposed to the more inductive approach in qualitative work where coding and analysis takes place concurrently and lacks pre-defined categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Neuendorf, 2017; White & Marsh, 2006).

### 3.3.2 Case studies as data

According to Flick (2023), text as data in research fulfils three main objectives – text as basis of findings, text as basis of interpretation and text as the medium for presenting and communicating findings. That being the case, in view of the post-positivist orientation of quantitative content analysis within the present study, texts are a "rich data source with great potential to reveal valuable information about particular phenomenon" (Kleinheksel et al., 2020, p. 128). In effect, it provides the empirical evidence of the object or phenomenon under study (in this instance, ethnic diversity) and provides the site for the researcher's interpretive work in order to make inferences and hypothetical generalisations (Krippendorff, 2019; Riffe et al., 2019). While most data of early-period content analysis primarily consisted of printed text (newspapers), the scope of what presently qualifies as content is much wider,

and includes photographs, advertisements, movies/video, music/audio, electronic/printed text among others (Neuendorf, 2017; Riffe et al., 2019).

For the present study, case studies of public relations campaigns have been selected as data for content analysis. Case studies are meaningful tools of research as they reproduce and reconstruct a specific set of events pertinent to specific individuals or social entities such as organisations or institutions (Flick, 2023). Specific to public relations, the use of case studies in research helps bridge the chasm between completely theory-driven work and industry practice and also helps bring to life situations from different cultural contexts (Halff, 2017), thereby making them an appropriate choice for the present study. A quantitative content analysis of case studies of public relations campaigns, in relation to the present study, is expected to bring to light information on how ethnic diversity is strategically factored in public relations planning in the Aotearoa New Zealand.

### 3.3.3 Population

In content analysis, a population is the "realm of inquiry for an investigation – the set of units to which the researcher wishes to generalize their findings" (Neuendorf, 2017, p. 74). Units are individually distinct and independent elements which the researcher considers as the primary basis for measurement or quantification to arrive at the empirical evidence for the content analysis work (Krippendorff, 2019). In brief, a population is the total set of units that, according to the researcher, qualify for investigation in any particular study.

The annual Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ) awards are a recognition of "excellence and outstanding work" (PRINZ, n.d.-b) in the fields of public relations and communication. PRINZ is Aotearoa New Zealand's representative industry body in the field of public relations. As the country's professional body, PRINZ embodies the standard of ethics that are expected of its members (Washbourne, 2017). Therefore, the award-winning PRINZ campaigns may be considered representative of the country's existing norms and ethical standards in public relations. In view of that, each PRINZ case study of an award-winning campaign is taken as the primary unit of consideration for the purpose of the present study. While PRINZ has been awarding exemplary public relations campaigns since 1974, only campaigns from 2011 onward are available as case studies on the PRINZ website in an easily accessible electronic format (portable document format, or pdf). As such, the population for the present study is the entire collection of award-winning PRINZ case studies from 2011 to 2023.

### 3.3.4 Use of Purposive Sampling

In research, sampling is the process of selecting a smaller set of objects (PRINZ campaign case-study units) from a population (all PRINZ case studies from 2011 to 2023) when the largeness of the population may limit the capacity of the researcher to effectively examine the units within the timeframe of research (Flick, 2023; Neuendorf, 2017). A sample, thus, may be considered a representative subset of the entire population allowing findings and inferences based on the sample to be generalisable to the entire population (Flick, 2023). Within the context of the present research, in view of its large population size comprising case studies for a period spanning 13 years, it was considered appropriate to sample the population.

Purposive sampling, a non-probability (or, non-random) sampling method, was used for selecting the sample for the current study. This implied not all units of the population (PRINZ case studies from 2011 to 2023) had an equal chance of featuring in the sample (Etikan et al., 2016). With purposive sampling, also known as judgement sampling, the discretion to set the parameters for sample selection rests entirely on the researcher (Neuendorf, 2017). Purposive sampling generally befits research that involves qualitative work (White & Marsh, 2006). However, as described earlier in the chapter, the post-positivist orientation of the overall research methodology is indicative of the interpretative and qualitative aspects of the method of choice (quantitative content analysis). That is why purposive sampling aligns with the study's ontological and epistemological perspective which, according to Campbell et al. (2020), is a useful criteria to judge the appropriateness of any sampling decision.

To arrive at the final sample using purposive sampling, only full-length PRINZ case studies of the past five years, i.e. 2019 to 2023, were initially considered as part of the sample. Out of a total of 140 case studies (between 2019 to 2023), 103 were full-length submissions. Moreover, since a particular campaign sometimes featured in multiple award categories, only unique instances were considered. As a result, the final sample consisted of 91 unique (distinguishable units) case studies – the 12 exclusions were repeat instances.

It may be noted the government releases census data of the country's population every five years, with 2023 and 2018 being the two most recent releases. As such, the choice of the five-year period to sample the population coincides with the census years, thus providing a useful context to longitudinally track the representation of ethnicity within public relations campaigns. While there are no universally accepted standards of sample size, benchmarking against similar studies in the field is a common approach (Neuendorf, 2017). In this context, studies carried out by Martens (2020) and Sison (2009) that used case

studies for content analysis may be considered to arrive at an acceptable sample size for the study. While Martens (2020) used 148 PRINZ case studies as her sample to study the use of social media in campaigns, Sison (2009) analysed 12 PRIA (Public Relations Institute of Australia, now known as CPRA) award-winning campaign case studies to examine the use of cultural variables in communication. Although the present study's sample size is comparable to that of Martens (2020), the scope and focal area of research of the present study is more aligned with Sison's (2009) study. Hence, the researcher has selected 12 case studies as the minimum sample size. In addition to meeting the benchmark for an acceptable sample size, the selected sample size (91 case studies) also affords the researcher the opportunity to meaningfully build on Sison's (2009) early work in this area.

### 3.3.5 Unitization

Quantitative content analysis is an empirically grounded method where answers to research questions and interpretation is based on observable evidence in the text under study (Boettger & Palmer, 2010). Empirical studies generally depend on recording of observational instances within data. Therefore, Krippendorff (2019) is of the view that identification of "what is to be observed as well as how observations are to be recorded and thereafter considered data" (p. 102) is one of the fundamental steps of any piece of research featuring content analysis in order to facilitate measurement and quantification of the relevant items of relevant objects, or variables, of the study. In effect, data requires to be chunked or broken into units (White & Marsh, 2006). According to Carney (1971), units are individually distinguishable messages or parts of messages that serve as basis for drawing samples from the population, on which variables are counted or quantified, and form the medium for reporting analyses. "Units" are also termed as "categories" in content analysis (Boettger & Palmer, 2010; Cavanagh, 1997; White & Marsh, 2006).

Krippendorff (2019) contends there are three types of content units. Sampling units are the fundamental units of the study and are the basis on which a sample is drawn from a population. In the present study, each unique PRINZ case study in the final sample is the sampling unit. Recording or coding units are, usually, of the same size or smaller than the sampling unit and are "distinguished for separate description, transcription, recording or coding" (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 104). These become handy when measurement occurs at a more granular level relative to the sampling unit or if the sampling unit is too complex to be coded reliably. For example, PRINZ case study adheres to a specific format of representation of data to showcase the different stages of campaign planning (PRINZ, n.d.-a). When coding occurs at the level of the entire case study, sampling unit and recording unit are one and the same. However, if coding occurs to search for ethnic diversity consideration

in specific segments of the case study, then the recording unit corresponds to the segment being coded. Some of the recording units in context of the present study are audiences, tactics, research and strategy. Context units define the scope or limit of information that researchers (or coders) need to consider within recording units, thereby facilitating the process of coding or counting (Krippendorff, 2019). Krippendorff (2019) has stated, “meaning of a word typically depends on its syntactical role within a sentence” (p. 105). Correspondingly, context units may be considered as guides for coders, providing them with context and broader understanding of the variable under consideration within a recording unit (Gheyle & Jacobs, 2017). While sentences are the smallest context units for coding the presence of words, the size of context units may be bigger depending on the characteristics of the variable (Krippendorff, 2019). Since the present study is examining the consideration of ethnic diversity in strategic planning, the researcher has taken the context unit to be the same size as the recording unit to account for the broad nature of the term. By doing this, the researcher reduces the chances of assuming the mere presence of words signifying ethnic diversity as confirmation of consideration of ethnic diversity in planning. According to Krippendorff (2019), well-defined and meaningful context units contribute to a study’s reliability and validity (Krippendorff, 2019).

### 3.3.6 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity of research are interlinked. In fact, reliable data is a precondition for research and its findings to be deemed valid (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). According to Riffe et al. (2019), quality of data, to a large extent, determines the measure of reliability of content analysis. Krippendorff (2019), therefore, has suggested that researchers should ideally rid their data of pollutants or distortions so that the meaning of the text remains consistent irrespective of circumstances. Riffe et al. (2019) have contended that there is limited scope for distortion of text in content analysis due to the unobtrusive nature of the process. The process has been called unobtrusive because analysis of text takes place after data has already been produced and, therefore, separated from the context of production. As a result, the possibility of bias or distortion creeping into the data on account of message producers becoming self-conscious or reactive to acts of observation and measurement is limited (Riffe et al., 2019). Referring to the non-invasive nature of content analysis, Weber (1990) had similarly observed that “there is little danger that the act of measurement itself will act as a force for change that confounds the data” (p. 10).

In addition to data that is free of bias and pollutants (Krippendorff, 2019), reliability assumes outcomes of content analysis are independent of the researcher or the measurement process. As such, reliability is said to have been achieved if data remains

constant through different iterations of it being measured (Kaplan & Goldsen, 1965). Due to its emphasis on repeatability of results, reliability is considered a proxy for replicability (Neuendorf, 2017). Scholars have, therefore, argued that stability and reproducibility are two important criteria to establish reliability (Krippendorff, 2019; Riffe et al., 2019; Weber, 1990). Stability is the measurement of the extent to which application of coding or measuring protocols yields the same outcomes over time (Krippendorff, 2019). As the assessment of stability usually involves only one coder (the researcher) (Riffe et al., 2019), the measure is also termed as intra-coder reliability (Neuendorf, 2017). However, establishing reliability of research on the basis of stability checks alone is deemed inadequate (Weber, 1990). In a single coder study, reproducibility provides additional evidence of reliability. Reproducibility, also termed inter-coder or inter-rater reliability, "involves two or more coders applying the protocol to the same content" (Riffe et al., 2019, p. 113). Intercoder reliability refers to the degree of agreement between the outcomes of the coding process executed by two or more coders under varying conditions (Krippendorff, 2019). It is considered a better estimate of reliability in content analysis studies as it is suggestive of a shared understanding of the data among the researchers and minimises the possibility of personal bias or interpretation (Kleinheksel et al., 2020).

Percentages are a common way to represent inter-coder reliability (Lovejoy et al., 2014), with a minimum acceptable inter-coder agreement being between 70 percent and 80 percent (Boettger & Palmer, 2010). Any score in excess of 90 percent is considered acceptable to most researchers (Gheyle & Jacobs, 2017).

In relation to the present study, reliability of the study was assessed both in terms of stability and inter-coder reliability. In order to assess the stability of the coding protocol, the researcher executed the coding of the sample one week apart and arrived at the same results, thus confirming the study's intra-coder reliability. To test the present study's inter-coder reliability, an independent individual from a similar educational and cultural background was engaged to test for the study's inter-coder reliability. A comparable level of cognitive ability is desired among coders even for manifest content analysis as it would involve a clear understanding of the instructions and rules of coding (Krippendorff, 2019). Subsequent to the training and familiarisation of the independent coder with the data and the coding instructions, the individual was required to work with a smaller sample of ten case studies. In nine out of the ten case studies, the coding process produced the same results as that of the researcher, which translates to an acceptable inter-coder reliability of 90 percent.

Validity in research may be defined as "the extent to which a measuring procedure represents the intended – and only the intended – concept" (Neuendorf, 2017, p. 122). Riffe

et al. (2019) contend that the validity of a study and its results confer on it the capacity to speak truthfully and legitimately about its claims to a wider audience. While there are different typologies to assess validity of research, face validity is the most commonly used framework in content analysis studies (Cavanagh, 1997; Krippendorff, 2019).

According to White and Marsh (2006), face validity is an assessment of the degree to which the coding process "gets at the essential aspects of the variable that is being measured" (p. 31), and is inherently subjective in nature. Scholars therefore have suggested the adoption of a WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get get) approach to face validity (Gheyle & Jacobs, 2017; Neuendorf, 2017). Similarly, Krippendorff (2019) is of the view that face validity is rooted in common sense. Therefore, it has been suggested that face validity is suited to content analysis which is "fundamentally concerned with reading of texts, with what symbols mean, and how images are interpreted, all of which are largely rooted in common sense, in the shared culture in which the interpretations are made" (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 362). In order to ensure research based on content analysis satisfies face validity, scholars have called for the development of a theory-driven coding scheme with clear instructions and definitions of variables to promote face-validity (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). Potter and Levine-Donnerstein's (1999) emphasis on theory-based definition is comparable to Neuendorf's (2017) focus on matching conceptual definition with operationalisation (measurement) for enhancing validity of research. The matching implies that a researcher can work backwards from what was measured about the variable to how it has been defined in the study. The steps involved contribute to objectivity of the study's coding or measurement process (Neuendorf, 2017).

While Potter and Levine-Donnerstein (1999) also recommend the use of an expert standard to ascertain validity, the criterion has not utilised in the present study as it pertains to coding of text that is largely manifest and research results are intended to be accessible to individuals who may not necessarily qualify as experts (Neuendorf, 2017).

In context of the present study, coding relied on the conceptual definition of "ethnicity" in order to reliably and objectively measure the presence of ethnic diversity within the case studies of award-winning PRINZ campaigns. Theoretical understanding of *ethnicity* as derived from scholarship suggested that ethnicity is implicative of differences among individuals or groups principally on account of culture, language, religion and place or origin (Edwards, 2011b; Ertem-Eray & Ki, 2021). The researcher, therefore, searched the text for presence of words or phrases that referred to the use of language other than English (Te reo Māori, Mandarin, Hindi), sites of worship, distinct cultural norms or worldviews of an identified group of people and country qualifiers (Indian, Chinese) in order to objectively

code for “ethnic diversity”. This was particularly useful while coding for the variable in units that did not clearly specify an ethnic group and the researcher had to code for the variable based on inferences “from the appearance of specific sets of manifest elements” (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999, p. 267).

### 3.4 Data Coding and Analysis

The research method selected for the present study is content analysis, which may be described as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inference from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 24). While Krippendorff (2019) disputes the quantitative and qualitative distinction in content analysis, the present study qualifies the method as quantitative due to the use of a priori coding (Boettger & Palmer, 2010; Neuendorf, 2017).

#### 3.4.1 A priori coding

One of the principal differences between qualitative and quantitative research in content analysis stems from whether coding is guided by an emergent or a priori approach (Neuendorf, 2017). Qualitative approaches utilise the emergent approach where themes or categories emerge upon a close, and often repeated, reading of the text by the researcher (Neuendorf, 2017). Quantitative content analysis, on the other hand, uses a priori method i.e. coding scheme is finalised before the process of coding begins (White & Marsh, 2006). Neuendorf (2017) qualifies a priori scheme as before-the-fact coding and states that “all decisions on variables, their measurement, and coding rules must be made before the final measurement process begins” (p. 18). Moreover, as coding rules, variables and definitions are generally informed by theory or concepts found in literature (Kleinheksel et al., 2020), a priori method is deductive in nature (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999).

According to White and Marsh (2006), a priori coding scheme facilitates the researcher in the process of coding by operationalising “concepts that may themselves be amorphous. It establishes categories that are relevant and valid” (p. 31). In the present study, the coding scheme relied on the theoretical definition of ethnicity in order to code for ethnic diversity in the PRINZ case studies. Moreover, the selection of categories or recording units were informed by the researcher’s understanding of the strategic planning process, and hence corresponded well with available scholarship in the area. For example, some of the categories or recording units selected for the study are audiences, strategy, tactics and research. Additionally, organisational sectors (government, non-profit, private) were also constructed as recording units for the purpose of coding. Finally, before the process of coding, the researcher undertook a reading of the text in order to confirm the pre-defined

categories or recording units covered all possible aspects of the variable under observation within the text, as “a complexity and depth of thinking may be necessary in coding, even with an a-priori coding scheme” (White & Marsh, 2006, p. 33).

### 3.4.2 Coding Techniques

Coding of data which involves searching for, observing and transcribing or recording instances of manifestations of the studied variable in text is an integral part of content analysis (Krippendorff, 2019). Researcher must, therefore, employ rigour involving careful, iterative reading of content (White & Marsh, 2006).

Manual or human coding, simple computer-assisted method and content analysis software are the most commonly used coding techniques (Boettger & Palmer, 2010). In manual coding, the researcher is entirely responsible for development of coding instructions as well as recording of data during analysis which generally involves physical copies of the text and highlighters or pens done on a physical sheet of paper (Boettger and Palmer, 2010). While the coding process is fairly simple, manual coding is not a practical choice for large sets of data as it is time-consuming. Simple computer-assisted method differ from the manual method in its use of readily available word processing and document software such as Microsoft Word or Adobe PDF. The use of software results in quicker and easier search for words or phrases in texts compared to manual coding (Boettger & Palmer, 2010). Finally, content analysis software, or computer coding (Neuendorf, 2017), use special tools for implementing large-scale commercial content analysis programs.

The present study utilises the simple computer-assisted method for the purpose of coding. While the coding protocol along with definition of the variable and selection of recording units was conceptualised and developed by the researcher, searching for presence of the variable in the case studies was carried out on a computer. Since each PRINZ case study was available in a pdf format, the researcher used the Adobe PDF software to search and highlight words or phrases in text that corresponded to the theoretical definition of ethnicity to code for the consideration of ethnic diversity across the different categories. In addition to facilitating a quicker analysis of data, the use of software also reduces the possibility of coder fatigue which is one of the principal threats to reliability when human coders are involved (Boettger & Palmer, 2010; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999)

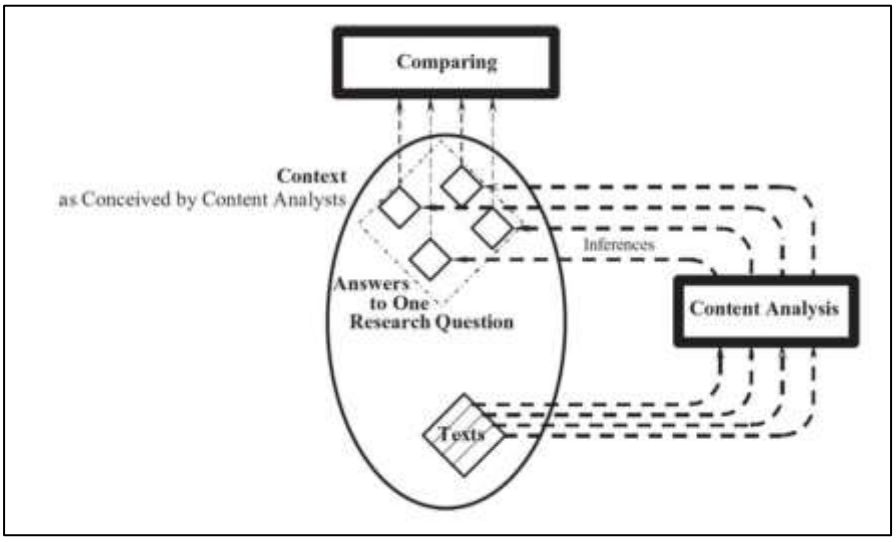
### 3.4.3 Medium of recording and storing data

Another important aspect of the coding process is the stability of the medium in which data is stored. Krippendorff (2019) recommends that data should be “recorded in a medium that is durable enough to withstand recurrent examinations” (p. 128). The recorded entries in

the medium form the study's codebook (Boettger & Palmer, 2010). While there are no perfect solutions for storage and recording as coding requirements vary based on the demands of each study, spreadsheets such as Microsoft Excel are generally considered a suitable option for studies that primarily rely on generation of descriptive statistics such as frequencies or counts (Boettger & Palmer, 2010). As such, the present study used Microsoft Excel for recording categories, units and, most importantly, the coded data which forms the basis of the study's results. Additionally, the Excel spreadsheet was also periodically backed up on an external hard drive in order to prevent the threat of complete data loss in the event of a computer malfunction.

### 3.4.4 Coding and Analysis

The present study is descriptive in nature, and theory building is not its goal. Accordingly, it aims to serve as a reference or benchmark for reflection of particular characteristics (ethnicity) of publics in public relations campaign planning (Riffe et al., 2019). In view of its focus on assessment of presence, frequency, or centrality of a concept (ethnicity) in text, it may be considered as a conceptual analysis (Indulska et al., 2012). This is further borne out by the formulation of a single research question of the study with an exploratory focus. An analytical approach best suited to the context of the present study is through studying the phenomenon or concept by drawing distinctions of its representations across various bodies of texts or within different parts of a single unit of text (Krippendorff, 2019). Figure given here provides a visual representation of the suggested analytical approach to be adopted for content analysis in the present study.




(Krippendorff, 2019, p. 99)

Upon the satisfactory completion of developing the coding scheme or protocol (variables, definitions, units or categories) using a deductive a priori coding, the sampled

data set comprising the 91 unique award-winning PRINZ case studies from 2019 to 2023 were rigorously and critically analysed and the occurrences of the coded variable were duly recorded on the Excel spreadsheet.

Each communication campaign or case study was treated as the sampling unit for the study. For each sampling unit, corresponding year of award and the communication category was also entered in the datasheet (Excel). Additionally, the sector to which the campaign sponsor (organisation or company) belonged also was noted to generate data pertaining to each sector's reflection of ethnic diversity in strategic planning (see Appendix).

There were different recording units (or categories) to search and code for ethnicity within each case study. At a macro level, the case study itself was considered as a recording unit. Other recording units that were categorised and formalised to promote the coding of ethnicity in the body text of each case study were -

- Ethnicities of audiences – Asian, Māori, Pacific peoples or MELAA
- Different segments of the case study each representing a different part of the planning process such as research, audiences, strategy, and tactics
- Different communication tactics used to address ethnic audiences (Further detail on each recording unit is provided as part of the findings chapter in the segment particular to the unit).
- Organisation types (government or public sector, private sector, not-for-profit)

Across all recording units (categories), a binary attribute approach, as suggested by Riffe et al. (2019), was applied while coding for the variable in each unit. '1' for when the particular unit confirmed its reflection of ethnicity and '0' when it did not apply.

The resulting dataset was then organised in the spreadsheet with the option of filtering the results based on award year, award category, type of sector, stages of campaign planning etc. Data thus structured was subsequently allocated to different tables (placed in respective tabs of the Excel spreadsheet) in order to represent the capturing of information pertaining to the consideration of ethnic diversity (measured through the presence of the variable 'ethnicity') as exhaustively as possible. Table data was then utilised to generate graphs and pie-charts for a visual representation of the findings.

### 3.5 Summary

The chapter delved into the methodology for the present study. It explained in detail the various paradigms in social sciences research before proceeding to justify the use of the

post-positivist framework. A brief description of the research method, quantitative content analysis, was provided and its use related to the context of the present study. The sample of PRINZ case studies used in the present study were directly downloaded from the PRINZ website. Content analysis of the case studies is expected to generate new knowledge in the area of diversity communication in public relations. The next chapter presents the findings from the content analysis of the case studies. The research findings offer an evidence-based and comprehensive snapshot of how ethnically diverse publics in Aotearoa New Zealand are considered in the strategic planning of public relations, thus laying the basis for further research in this area in the future.

# Chapter 4 Findings

## 4.1 Introduction

The current chapter presents the results of quantitative content analysis of the selected award-winning PRINZ case studies from 2019 to 2023. The research sample comprises of 91 unique campaigns, or a total of 104 full-length case studies (13 were repeat instances of campaigns that featured in more than a single category in a particular PRINZ award year).

The research question for the study is:

RQ. How is ethnic diversity addressed in the strategic planning of public relations campaigns in Aotearoa New Zealand?

In view of the conceptually-oriented content analysis in the present study, the researcher has attempted to provide an evidence-based account of the current state of strategic campaign planning in terms of how practitioners and organisations have addressed ethnic diversity in the selected PRINZ case studies. The objective is to generate results that may serve as normative data, or a referential standard, for future research in the area of ethnic diversity and strategic planning in public relations. As Riffe et al. (2019) stated descriptive studies often serve "as first phase in a program of research" (p. 13). In the subsequent chapter (Chapter 5 Discussion), the researcher has interpreted the findings by drawing inferences from the empirical data about the contexts of communication (Krippendorff, 2019; Weber, 1990). Riffe et al. (2019) had noted content analysts routinely contemplate "what might have contributed to the content's form and meaning" (Riffe et al., 2019, p. 31).

For the coding process, the researcher relied on the conceptual definition of the variable (ethnicity) and searched the text for the presence of the variable across different recording units (categories) in the case studies. The researcher has utilised descriptive statistics (frequency, count, repetition etc.) to represent the numerical findings through charts and graphs generated with Microsoft Excel.

## 4.2 Overall consideration of ethnic diversity in communication plans

Ninety-one unique case studies were analysed for words or phrases that confirmed the consideration of ethnic diversity in campaign planning. In this particular instance of coding, the entire body of text was treated as the recording unit (category).

The results show that just over half of the award-winning case studies reflected a consideration of ethnic diversity as part of their campaign planning and strategy. Figure 1

visually represents the break-up of the research sample in terms of the presence or lack of consideration of ethnic diversity.

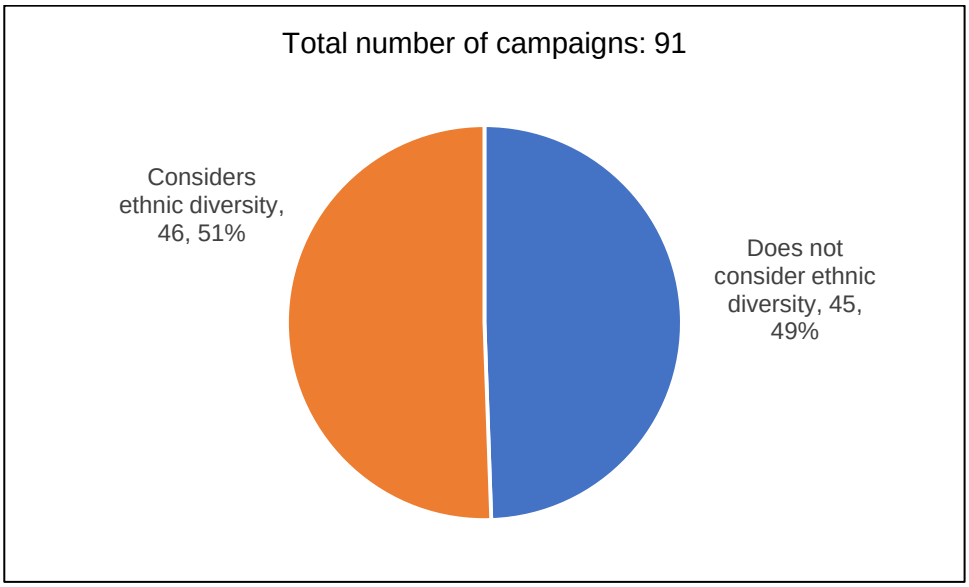



**Figure 1: Overall consideration of ethnic diversity in analysed case studies**

In all, 46 of the 91 case studies showcased a consideration for the ethnicity of its audiences as part of its overall campaign planning exercise, as articulated in the PRINZ case studies. In terms of percentage, it translated to 51 percent of the cases. At a macro level, the findings suggest campaign planners (public relations practitioners) showcased a reasonable degree of consideration for ethnic diversity within their plan. At the same time, almost half of the campaigns did not evidence a consideration for ethnic variables in their planning. Although discovering potential reasons for the lack of focus on diversity is outside the scope of the present study as that would ideally involve interviews with practitioners, it does suggest ethnicity of audiences is not deemed to be strategically significant under all circumstances.

For a deeper understanding of the aggregate information, a year-wise analysis was carried out to determine the longitudinal trends of diversity consideration in strategic planning over the five-year period (2019-2023). Figure 2 is a visual snapshot of the annual variation of diversity consideration in strategic planning within PRINZ case studies.

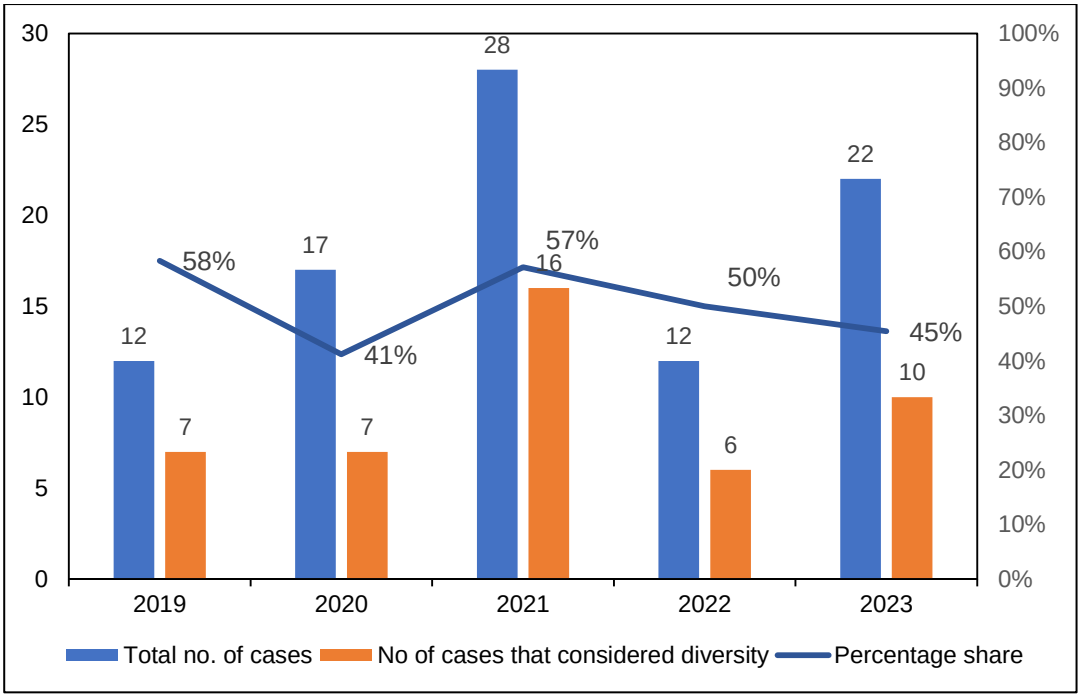



**Figure 2: Five-year trend of ethnic diversity consideration in strategic planning**

From Figure 2, it is evident that there are annual variations pertaining to the number and percentage of campaigns that acknowledged and considered ethnic diversity as an element within the strategic planning exercise. Although consideration of ethnic diversity is reflected in 51 percent of the campaigns over the five-year period, it is highest in the campaigns for the PRINZ award year 2019 when seven out of twelve campaigns did (58 percent) included the variable in their planning. Consideration of audience ethnicity dips to 41 percent in 2020, but goes back up to 57 percent in 2021. It trended lower over the final two years of the five-year period. In 2023, just 10 of the 22 case studies (45 percent) revealed a consideration for ethnic diversity.

It may be worth noting that two of the case studies that considered ethnic diversity in 2019 were listed under the ‘Communicating in Diversity’ category (a category which PRINZ has discontinued since).

Additionally, case studies of award year 2021 pertained to campaigns executed in the previous year, i.e. 2020. As such, the healthy consideration of ethnic diversity in PRINZ 2021 case studies (57 percent, or 16 out of 22 campaigns) may have been influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, a period during which organisations were expected to be more inclusive and community-oriented in their approach to publics in view of the extraordinary crisis circumstances (Anson et al., 2021; Bardhan & Gower, 2022; Hyland-Wood et al., 2021).

Overall, while in total, more than half of the case studies in the sample were found to address ethnic diversity, the year-wise breakdown reveals a more nuanced picture with visible drops and surges. In particular, the tapering off of diversity consideration over the last two years may be a matter of reflection for practitioners as it runs counter to the increasing ethnic and linguistic diversity of Aotearoa New Zealand (Stats NZ, 2024b).

The next section takes a closer look at how practitioners factored ethnic diversity across the various steps of strategic campaign planning.

### 4.3 Consideration of ethnic diversity in strategic planning steps

The panel of judges for the annual PRINZ awards assesses public relations campaigns based on the following elements of strategic public relations and communications planning (PRINZ, n.d.-a):

i. Background
ii. Research and Insights
iii. Objectives
iv. Audiences
v. Messages
vi. Strategy
vii. Tactics and Implementation
viii. What makes this a standout work
ix. Results and evaluation

Therefore, all participating organisations submit case studies of their campaigns in the format prescribed above by the PRINZ judges. The “What makes this a standout work” is a PRINZ awards-specific section that contains information pertaining to the judges’ assessment of a particular campaign’s “complexity, originality, creativity, scale, results or something else” (PRINZ, n.d.-a). Due to this, it does not qualify as a step in the strategic planning process. Accordingly, the section has not been considered a recording unit (category) for content analysis. Additionally, ‘Background’ and ‘Research and Insights’ have been treated as a single unit as both were observed to be inter-related, and labelled ‘Background/Research’ for convenience. Similarly, ‘Tactics and Implementation’ has been renamed as ‘Tactics’ and ‘Results and evaluation’ as ‘Results’. As a result, ‘Background/research’, ‘Objectives’, ‘Audiences’, ‘Strategy’, ‘Tactics’, ‘Messages’, and ‘Results’ are the recording units for assessing the extent of consideration of ethnic diversity across the different strategic planning elements within the case studies.

Overall, the findings showed that ethnic diversity was more frequently considered in ‘Audiences’ and ‘Tactics’ relative to other sections while ‘Objectives’, ‘Strategy’, ‘Messages’

and ‘Results’ revealed a lower likelihood of considering the ethnicity of audiences. Figure 3 is a visual representation of the results for the different categories corresponding to a campaign’s strategic planning steps.

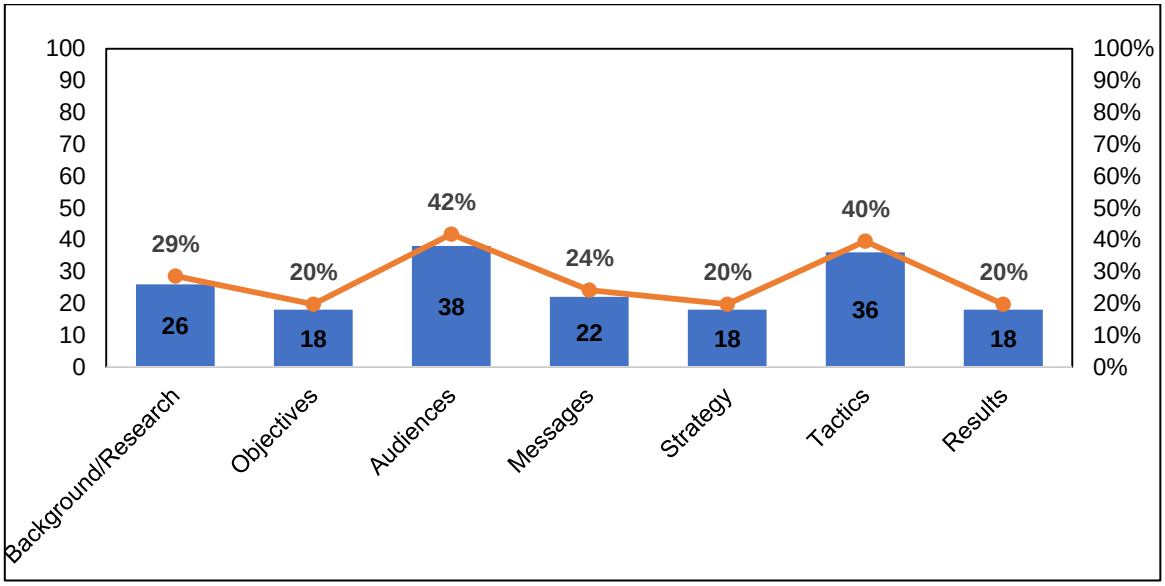



**Figure 3: Frequency of consideration of ethnic diversity across strategic planning steps**

It is evident from Figure 3 that practitioners are more likely to acknowledge the importance of ethnicity while segmenting audiences in comparison to other steps of planning as 38 out of the 91 (42 percent) campaigns factored the ethnic diversity of their publics at this step. This is closely followed by ‘Tactics’ where 36 campaigns, or 40 percent of the total, considered ethnic variables of publics as a critical element of campaign planning. The close correlation of the two may suggest that ethnicity-based segmentation of audiences generally translates to adaptation of tactics that correspond to the audience’s ethnic variables. It may be noted that ethnicity-based demographic information is a standard aspect of the census data of most countries, including Aotearoa New Zealand (Stats NZ, 2024a). Hence, the use of ethnicity as a way to segment audiences may be understood as an acknowledgment of the country’s diversity and the need for practitioners to devise communication and messages that reach ethnically diverse publics.

At the same time, ethnic diversity did not feature as prominently in ‘Background/Research’ (26 out of 91 campaigns, or 29 percent), ‘Strategy’ (18 campaigns, or 20 percent), ‘Objectives’ (18 campaigns, or 20 percent), ‘Results’ (18 campaigns, or 20 percent), and ‘Messages’ (22 campaigns, or 24 percent). In fact, if one decouples ‘Background/Research’, results for consideration of ethnic diversity in ‘Research’ is even more revealing as four case studies that suggested the importance ethnic diversity as part of ‘Background’ did not consider the element at all at during research. This may mean that diversity consideration within overall strategic planning of campaigns may not always be

informed by research or guided by a strategy with a diversity orientation. This is understandable as scholarship does confirm the lack of adequate research focused on understanding the publics as well as the tendency among public relations practitioners to jump to tactical step of planning instead of spending time on strategy (Botan, 2021).

The limited focus on the ethnic diversity of publics in the 'Objectives' and 'Results' stages of planning is interesting. It may suggest that practitioners do not necessarily consider the ethnic diversity of their publics at the outset while setting goals and objectives even when communication is subsequently tailored for ethnic groups. It should be noted that public relations practice has often been critiqued for being more organisation-centred and tactical in setting SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, resourced, time-bound) objectives as they are often a reflection of what "the planner will do, instead of a desired outcome for a particular public" (Gregory, 2017, p. 183).

A limited focus on ethnic diversity while doing research or setting objectives may also explain a lack of diversity orientation while crafting messages as less than a quarter of the 91 campaigns had messages that were tailored for the diverse ethnicities identified as target audiences. The reluctance of practitioners to let research inform their communication with publics, which Smith (2021) had observed, may result in one-way communication which precludes the possibility of dialogue or co-creating solutions with ethnically diverse members of audience (Gregory, 2017; Motion et al., 2012). Further, a lack of research may also contribute to stereotypical communication (Theunissen & Rahman, 2012) since practitioners would tend to rely on their own assumptions about publics (Botan, 2021).

The findings presented above were further segregated into their year-wise data. Figure 4 is a graphical representation of how frequently the different steps of campaign planning considered ethnic diversity as a strategic element over the five-year period.

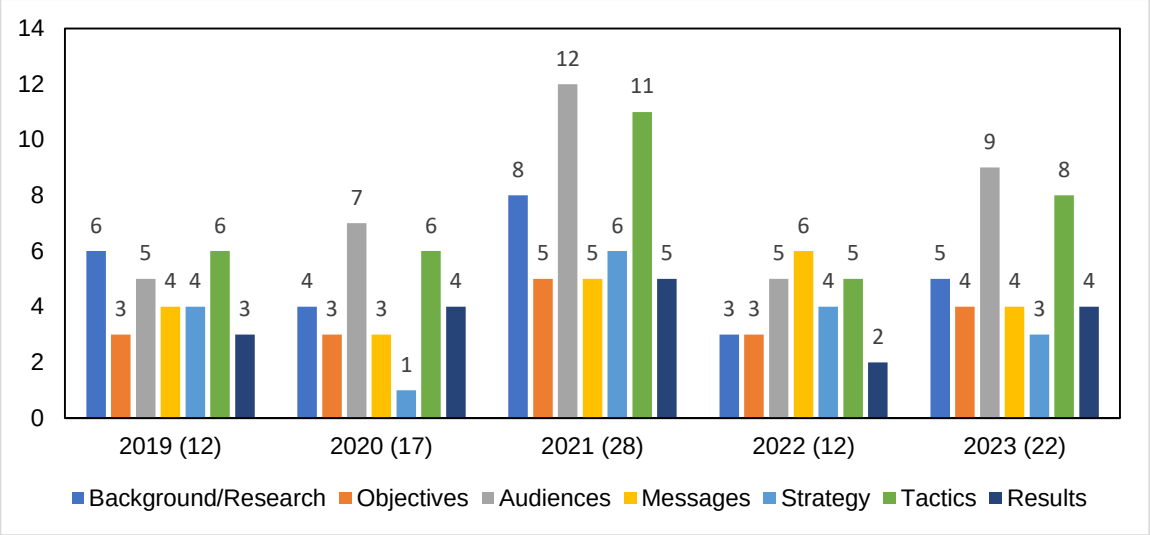



**Figure 4: Five-year trend of ethnic diversity consideration across planning steps**

It can be seen (Figure 4) that consideration of ethnic diversity is higher in *audiences* and *tactics* compared to other steps of strategic planning in four of the five years under consideration (except 2019). Therefore, it is safe to assume there is a notable trend of ethnic diversity consideration to be more tactical than strategic and goal-oriented.

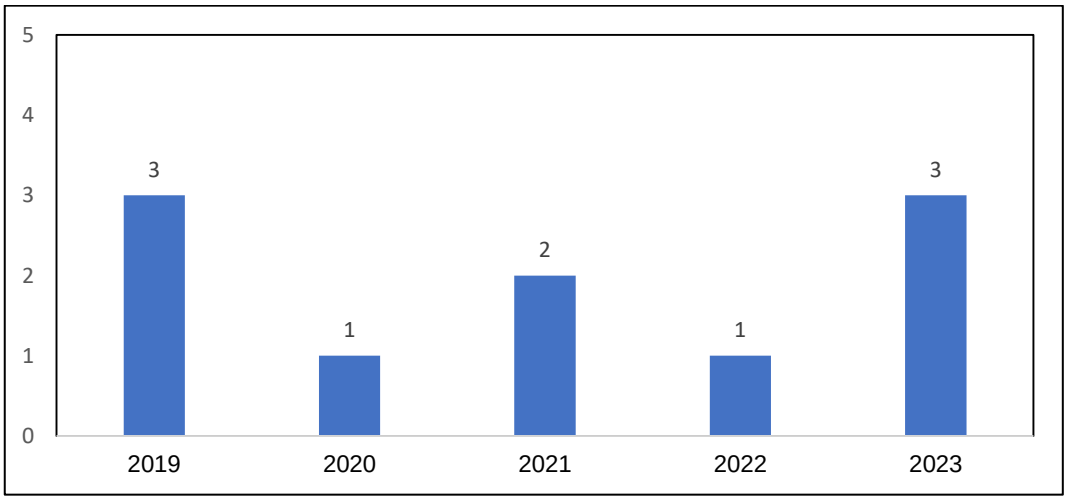



**Figure 5: Campaigns that considered ethnic diversity in every step of planning**

Furthermore, the findings show that when analysed for a complete integration of ethnic diversity across all the strategic planning steps the extent of diversity integration in planning paints a far less impressive picture. Figure 5 shows that only 10 out of the 91 campaigns have considered ethnic diversity at every step of planning.

So, while a total of 46 campaigns (out of 91) reflected a consideration of ethnic diversity in at least one step of planning (Figure 1 and Figure 2), where campaigns varied in the extent to which they considered ethnic diversity across each step (Figure 3 and Figure

4), only 10 campaigns addressed ethnic diversity as integral to each step of planning (Figure 5).

Although scholars have advocated for a holistic approach to diversity in communication practices (Bardhan & Gower, 2022; Mundy & Bardhan, 2023; Hon & Brunner, 2000), the inconsistency with which ethnic diversity has been considered in campaign planning could be indicative of a possible gap in knowledge among practitioners in Aotearoa New Zealand on application of diversity principles in practice (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023).

The following sub-sections (4.3.1 to 4.3.4) reveal the extent and nature of ethnic diversity consideration across key segments of campaign planning, including *audience segmentation, research, strategy, and tactics*. This is intended to generate more granular data on how practitioners addressed minority ethnic groups in the aforementioned areas of planning, thus providing a basis for deeper understanding and richer insights into the state of intercultural communication in the country.

### 4.3.1 Ethnicity and audience segmentation

Overall, 38 out of the total sample of 91 campaigns (42 percent) referred to the ethnicity or ethnic variables of publics during audience segmentation. It must be noted that the case studies referred to the ethnicity of audiences in a variety of ways, including standard ways of identifying an ethnically diverse group (Stats NZ, 2024a). For example, while Asian as an ethnically diverse audience group featured in only a single campaign, there were three other campaigns that identified Indians and Chinese as part of the audience. Similarly, while four campaigns identified Pacific peoples among its audiences, one campaign identified Polynesians as a member of the audience. For the ease of comparison, the researcher has considered Indian and Chinese within the broader Asian ethnicity and treated Polynesian as a referent for the Pacific peoples. Additionally, some campaigns qualified ethnically diverse publics in their audience as people with English as a secondary language (ESL), while a few others simply used broad descriptors such as people of all ethnicities or New Zealanders of all ethnicities (generic ethnicity).

Figure 6 represents the extent to which practitioners considered the ethnic diversity, when segmenting their audiences in campaigns. The analysis showed that the ‘Māori’ ethnic group figures most commonly as an explicitly categorised campaign audience.

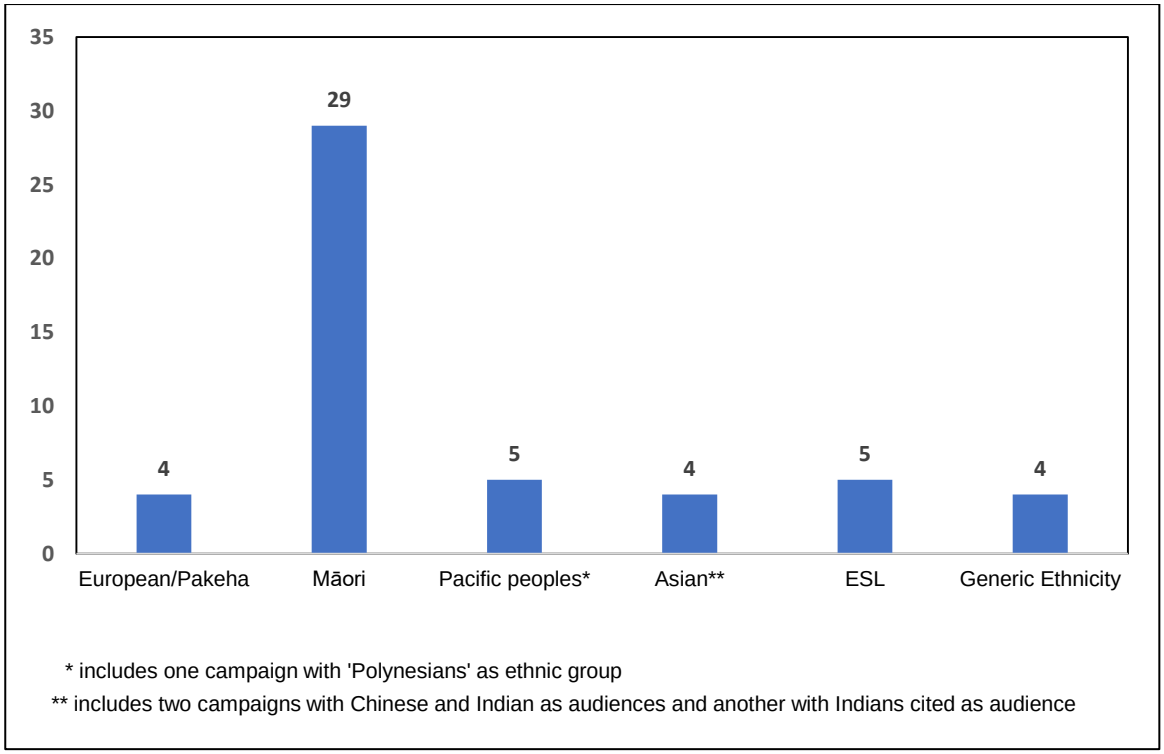



**Figure 6: Representation of ethnicity in the campaign audiences**

As the bar graph (Figure 6) shows, Māori is the most addressed ethnicity. A total of 29 (out of 91) campaigns have identified Māori people as part of their audiences. Moreover, out of these 29 campaign case studies, 20 feature no other ethnic group apart from 'Māori' and two refer to Pākehā or European along with Māori as members of audience. It must be noted many campaigns have borrowed words from Māori culture such as *mana whenua* (Māori people with territorial rights over a particular area), *tangata whenua* (Māori people of a particular locality), *iwi* (tribe), *hapu* (sub-tribe), *whanau* (family) etc. to identify the group while emphasising the cultural and historical significance of Māori as members of the audience. For example, one of the 2022 campaigns cited the unique cultural importance of local environments to Māori people while another from 2021 addressed the need to redress historical wrongs. In fact, an international organisation while citing iwi as an important audience group also acknowledged the significance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi to doing business in Aotearoa New Zealand. One could, therefore, argue that the bicultural framework of the country, to a large degree, has influenced the inclusion of Māori as an ethnic audience group (Henderson et al., 2010; Weaver, 2011, 2013). At the same time, the fact that not all of the 91 analysed case studies identified Māori in their audiences may mean that acknowledgement of the country's bicultural foundations does not necessarily translate to specifically identifying Māori as part of audience segmentation.

Among other ethnicities, Pacific peoples featured in five campaigns, with one of the campaigns exclusively targeted at them, while four campaigns addressed members of Asian

and European (Pākehā) descent as audiences of which one campaign was exclusive to Asian members (Indian and Chinese specifically) of the publics. The inclusion of minority ethnic groups, other than the majority ethnic group of European/Pākehā, is an important indicator of a multicultural orientation in planning (Adams & Johnson, 2020). In this context, it is significant to note the absence of "Middle Eastern/Latin American/African (MELAA)" as an ethnic audience group in the PRINZ case studies analysed. Only one out of the five campaigns that segmented ethnic audiences based on linguistic differences (ESL) stated the use of a language relevant to the group (Farsi) for translation purposes.

It is also interesting to note that only three (out of 91) campaigns included more than two ethnic groups as part of their audience which suggests a lack of meaningful consideration of the multi-ethnic composition of Aotearoa New Zealand's population. The deficit in identification of ethnically diverse audiences is especially concerning given the lack of ethnic diversity among the country's public relations practitioners as shown by the PRINZ's diversity, equity and inclusion report (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023). It suggests practitioners assume that the cultural particularities of ethnically diverse publics have a limited impact on how they process communication (Ni & Sha, 2023; Sha, 2006). Consequently, the resultant communication may be ineffective or may be misinterpreted on account of the implicit bias of the practitioners and possible stereotyping of ethnically and culturally diverse audiences (Ertem-Eray, 2024a; Munshi & Edwards, 2011; Theunissen & Rahman, 2012).

Overall, the findings imply that practitioners have fallen short of considering the *multiplicity of publics* (Leitch & Motion, 2010) while devising their communication plans notwithstanding the overall success of the campaigns in terms of meeting their stated goals and objectives.

### 4.3.2 Ethnic diversity in research

Research is foundational to strategic planning in public relations (Smith, 2021). Formative research involves information gathering and analysis of environment, organisations and the publics before planning moves to formulation of strategy and tactics (Smith, 2021).

The current section therefore presents the findings of the analysis pertaining to consideration of ethnic diversity within the *research* stage of the 91 campaign case studies analysed.

Overall, out of the 91 case studies, little less than a quarter (22 case studies) conducted research that factored ethnic diversity of audiences. On an annual basis, diversity research varied over the five-year period analysed (Figure 7).

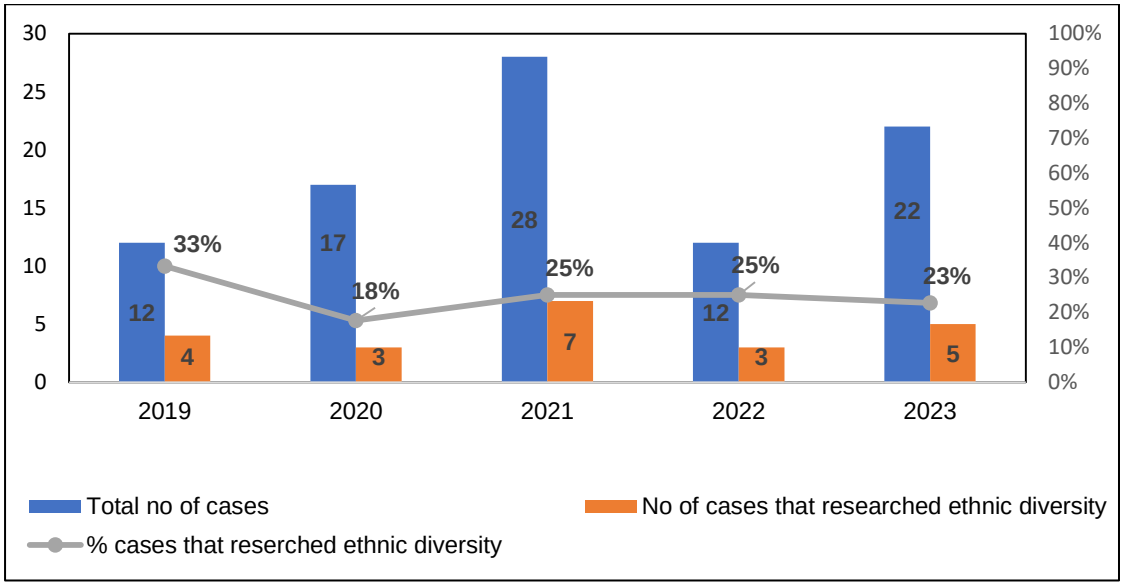



**Figure 7: Researching ethnic diversity in campaigns (five-year trend)**

As Figure 7 shows, a total of seven campaigns considered ethnic diversity in research in award year 2021, the highest for the five-year period under consideration. However, it may be explained by the fact there were relatively more award entries in the year (28). In terms of percentage share of the total number of entries, consideration of ethnic diversity in research was highest in 2019 when one of every three entries (four out of twelve) conducted research focused on audience ethnicity. The lowest consideration was reflected in 2020 when just 18 percent (three out of seventeen) of campaigns researched ethnic variables. Overall, ethnic diversity consideration in research exhibits a varying trend over the five-year period.

The researcher also analysed the kind of research (primary or secondary) that campaigns used to understand audiences of diverse ethnicities.

The findings revealed that primary research mostly comprised of interviews, telephone calls and interaction/feedback from members of publics or industry professionals. Secondary (or desk) research, in most instances, consisted of analysis of data from past campaigns (organisational database or PRINZ case studies), government websites (NZ Stats), and scanning of relevant existing media on the internet and websites. Findings (Figure 8) suggest campaigns mostly preferred the latter with 16 out of the 22 campaigns using secondary research (either exclusively or in combination with primary research) to learn about their diverse audiences.

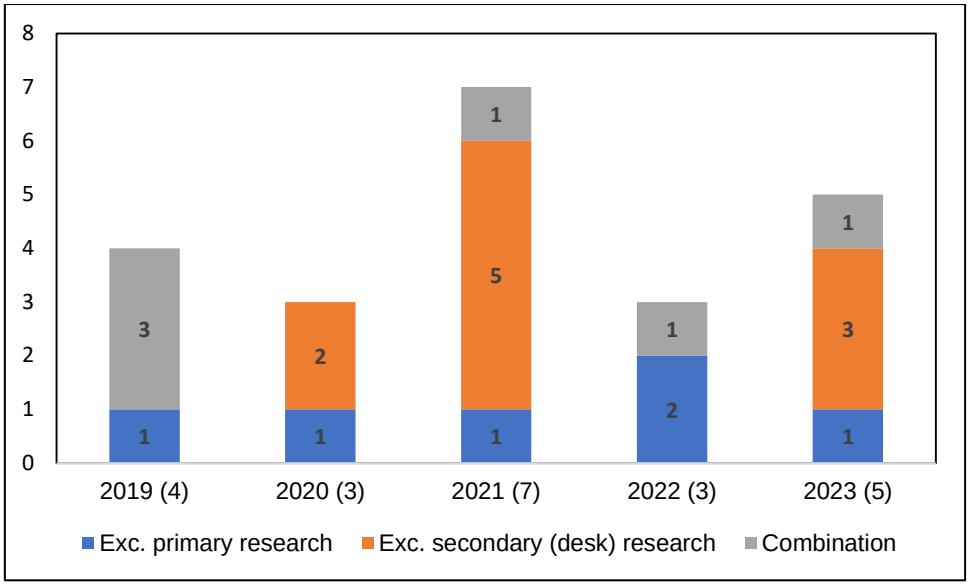



**Figure 8: Use of different research approaches to understand ethnic diversity**

As the graph (Figure 8) shows, over the five-year period, a higher number of campaigns relied exclusively on secondary research (10) in comparison to campaigns that only used primary research (6) or a combination of both (6).

The findings align with Smith's (2021) assessment that public relations practitioners generally tend to rely more on past research and data while planning for communication campaigns. The lower preference for primary research is understandable as it often entails a higher time and cost investment, which can be a limiting factor in public relations practice (Gregory, 2020). While budgets remain a constraint to conducting primary research, they alone may not determine the decision. It has been argued that avoiding time-consuming primary research could be reflective of the urgency of action and tactical focus that often characterise most campaign planning (Smith, 2021). However, in doing so, it also means potentially losing out on opportunities to unearth original information which is specific to the situation (Silverman & Smith, 2024). This is particularly relevant in the heterogeneous context of a multi-ethnic environment simply because practitioners would often need to locate themselves outside the normative assumptions of their native culture, which is generally white (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023; Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017), in order to devise campaigns that are sensitive to the cultural norms of ethnically diverse publics (Dutta, 2007; Wakefield, 2010).

The study also found that of the 22 campaigns that used research to understand diverse ethnic groups, the number of campaigns that focused on Māori people was higher than those which researched other ethnicities. Thirteen campaigns conducted Māori-centred research, two campaigns researched on Pacific peoples and one focused on the Asian

community. Six campaigns conducted research that did not target any particular ethnicity and mostly involved secondary desk research.

Figure 9 represents the frequency with which practitioners used primary and secondary research in connection with audiences of diverse ethnicities. Overall, except for Māori, no other ethnic group is meaningfully represented in research efforts of the 22 campaigns.

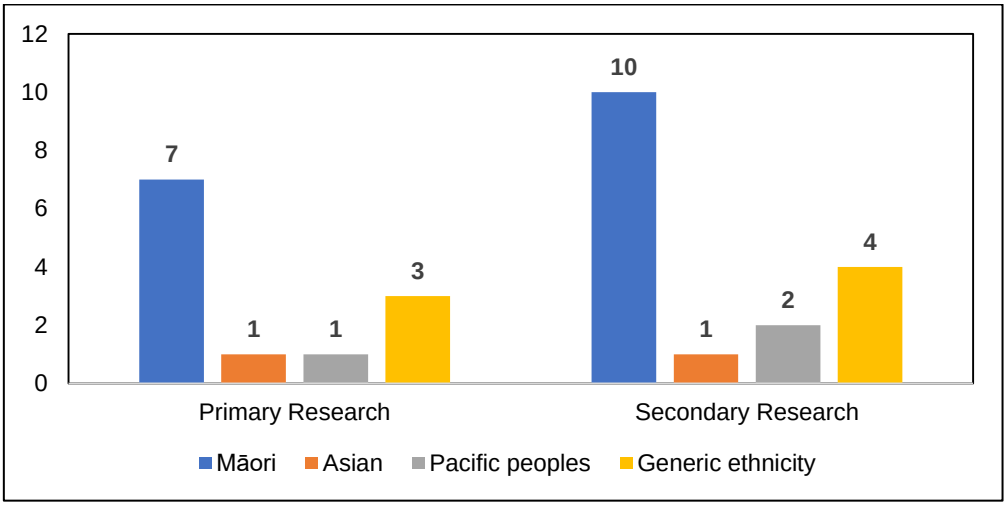



**Figure 9: Research techniques employed for different ethnic groups**

As Figure 9 suggests, Māori audiences were researched a total of 17 times (using both primary and secondary research) across the 22 analysed campaigns. Along with desk research, Māori-focused research involved whānau interviews and feedback, meetings with iwi members or iwi liaison representatives and Māori business leaders. While the pre-eminent focus of research to understand Māori people is understandable and commendable given the bicultural foundation of the country, the fact that other ethnic groups were not specifically considered more often in research is also worth taking note of. Prima facie, one may relate this to the under-representation (or complete absence as in the case of MELAA audiences) of all non-Māori ethnicities in research. Additionally, given that practitioners conducted ethnicity-focused research a total of seven times without specifying any particular ethnicity (represented in Figure 9 as ‘generic ethnicity’), one may perceive that research on ethnically diverse publics lacked meaningful consideration of their specific contexts. While generic approaches may incur less resources, they may fail to discover the important traits or characteristics and complexities of different cultures, thus potentially leading to communication that is “either generic or speak to a stereotypical, made-up consumer” (Gregory, 2020, p. 186).

### 4.3.3 Considering ethnic diversity in strategy

Analysis of the 91 campaigns revealed that only 18 campaigns (20 percent) factored the ethnic diversity of their audiences in their communication strategy. The finding corroborates earlier arguments within scholarship that suggested practitioners often pay less attention to strategy (Botan, 2021; Kent & Theunissen, 2021). It may also indicate a reluctance to engage with the cultural complexity that is characteristic of a multi-ethnic and multicultural context (Leichty & Warner, 2001).

Furthermore, of the 18 campaigns that considered ethnic diversity in the strategy phase of planning, a majority (14 campaigns) focused on Māori people with only two campaigns each considering Pacific peoples, Asian and ESL in their strategic approach.

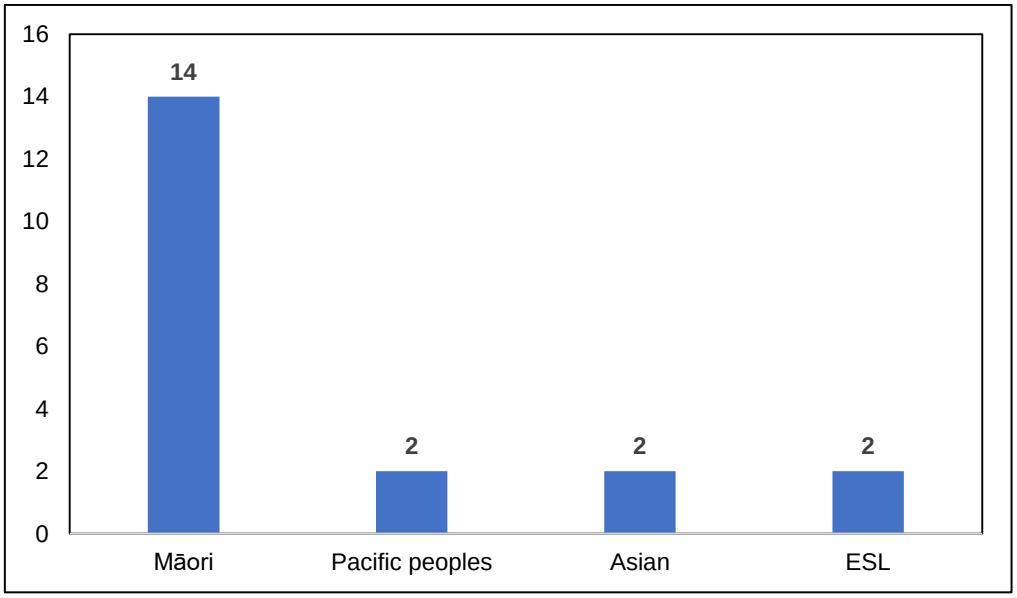



**Figure 10: Ethnic diversity in strategy**

As Figure 10 shows, practitioners have addressed the Māori ethnic group in the strategy of 14 campaigns. Pacific peoples featured in the communication strategy of two campaigns, out of which one campaign exclusively targeted the group, and the other was a wider public campaign that also included members of other ethnicities. The same was true for audiences of Asian ethnicity. Two campaigns have also considered the need to adapt strategy based on the linguistic requirements of the ESL category.

Interestingly, none of the campaigns mention a consideration of the European (or Pākehā) ethnic identity. Since majority of the public relations practitioners in Aotearoa New Zealand identify themselves as European (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023), it is likely that they assumed others in their ethnic group share their worldview and therefore crafted strategy accordingly. The ‘generic ethnicity’ label used to segment audiences also does not

feature as a matter of consideration in strategy which supports Gregory's (2017) argument that "it is incorrect to assume all embracing categorisations" (p. 183) for a community of people.

Eight of the fourteen campaigns which addressed the Māori ethnic identity in strategy have referred to the group as partners in the communication process. Hence, practitioners have striven to frame strategies that align with the Māori cultural worldview and principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The use of face-to-face communication (preferably hui in marae), storytelling from a Māori-specific context, and inclusion of iwi liaison representatives and cultural advisors were found to be the common strategic considerations.

The extent of integration of Māori culture in strategy varied across the campaigns. One campaign stressed on the importance of research and feedback, and another highlighted the co-creation of a concept design. In a different instance, a campaign's entire strategy was uniquely premised on a Te Tiriti-inspired framework for organisational communication. Two campaigns have also referred to the importance of acknowledging past injustices and history while devising any communicating strategy for Māori. Even when the focus of a campaign was on persuasion and relaying a particular message, care was taken to remain empathetic and transparent. The findings therefore indicate that practitioners have reflected a reasonable degree of cultural awareness and sensitivity while considering Māori in strategy and adopted a relationally-oriented and long-term view of strategy (Kent & Theunissen, 2021; Motion et al., 2012).

Although the number of campaigns that considered Pacific peoples and Asians in strategy was far less than that which considered Māori, the campaigns where these ethnic groups were the primary audience confirmed the importance of a culturally sensitive approach. For example, one campaign, in particular, impressed upon the need for more culturally sensitive strategies based on the insight that a continued lack of representation has contributed to feelings of being invisible in the wider society among some of the ethnically diverse communities.

While none of the campaigns exhibited cultural integration in strategy to the extent that is observed when Māori are a part of the process, beginning to consider publics from minority ethnic groups in strategy may be considered an important step toward understanding their diverse contexts (Motion & Leitch, 2009).

### 4.3.4 Different tactics and diverse ethnicities

Strategic planning in public relations remains largely tactical than strategic in its approach as practitioners continue to prioritise action, discount the importance of research

and embrace a short-term orientation in practice (Macnamara & Gregory, 2018; Smith, 2021). Findings from the current analysis is supportive of the trend. Out of the 91 analysed case studies, 36 campaigns reflected a consideration for the ethnic diversity of their audience while formulating tactics or during implementation. This is double the number of campaigns that addressed ethnic diversity in the 'Strategy' step of planning (which was 18), and comparable to the audience segmentation step where 38 campaigns identified their audiences based on ethnicity.

In the 36 campaigns that considered ethnic diversity in their tactical stage, practitioners used a variety of approaches to reach and communicate with ethnically diverse audiences. Cumulatively, across the 36 campaigns, the researcher counted a total of 92 instances when a campaign mentioned the use of a communication tactic in relation to audiences from diverse ethnicities. For example, a campaign may only cite translation as a tactic intended for diverse audiences, whereas another may use translation as well as personal meetings to engage diverse publics. In the former, number of tactical choices that apply to diverse audiences is one, while in the latter it is two.

Upon further examination, the researcher categorised the 92 instances into eight distinct tactics. These were relational approach, ethnic media, translation, visual representation of ethnic group members, social and/or digital channels, direct mail, websites and mainstream media.

In context of the present study, a *relational approach* is indicated when a campaign uses interpersonal forms of communication such as meetings which generally take place in person (face-to-face) and participants engage in discussions and provide feedback. Practitioners may also take into account the lived context of the ethnic audiences to ensure communication is culturally sensitive. A campaign may adopt one or more of these elements in order have a relational orientation. For example, in relation to Māori people, a relational approach may translate to a hui (meeting) in the marae (traditional meeting grounds) while following tikanga (Māori norms and values).

*Visual representation of ethnic group members* in communication suggests that a campaign has utilised people from an ethnically diverse group to target audiences from the same ethnicity. For example, one campaign used Māori staff members as spokespeople or ambassadors to speak with people in the audiences who identified as Māori while another used an Indian model in their campaign poster as a tactic tailored for the Indian ethnic group. Both instances qualify under the aforesaid category.

*Translation* simply means the conversion of communication collateral (print or any other form of media) from English to the primary languages of the ethnic audiences.

While the *Social media/digital* category is self-explanatory, it must be noted that the researcher only recorded the instances when the case study explicitly stated the use of those channels for communicating with ethnic audiences.

*Ethnic media* refers to niche media channels or platforms that host or promote content relevant to a specific ethnic group. These may include ethnic radio stations or community news media (usually print), such as Mai FM, Tahu FM, Radio Tarana and Waikato Chinese Weekly.

*Mainstream media* use is suggested when information specific to ethnic audiences was covered in national media. The New Zealand Herald, 1News, Radio New Zealand (RNZ) and Stuff are examples of mainstream media.

*Direct mail* use applied in instances when campaigns reached out or communicated with members of ethnic groups through email. When campaigns used *websites*, it implied organisations posted information on websites that were relevant or specifically addressed to the needs and interests of ethnically diverse publics.

Overall, the relational approach was found to be the most frequently used tactic, while direct mail and mainstream media were the least frequently used tactics to communicate with audiences from diverse ethnicities. Figure 11 represents the different communication tactics and the frequency with which they were used across the 36 campaigns that had tactics tailored for ethnically diverse audiences.

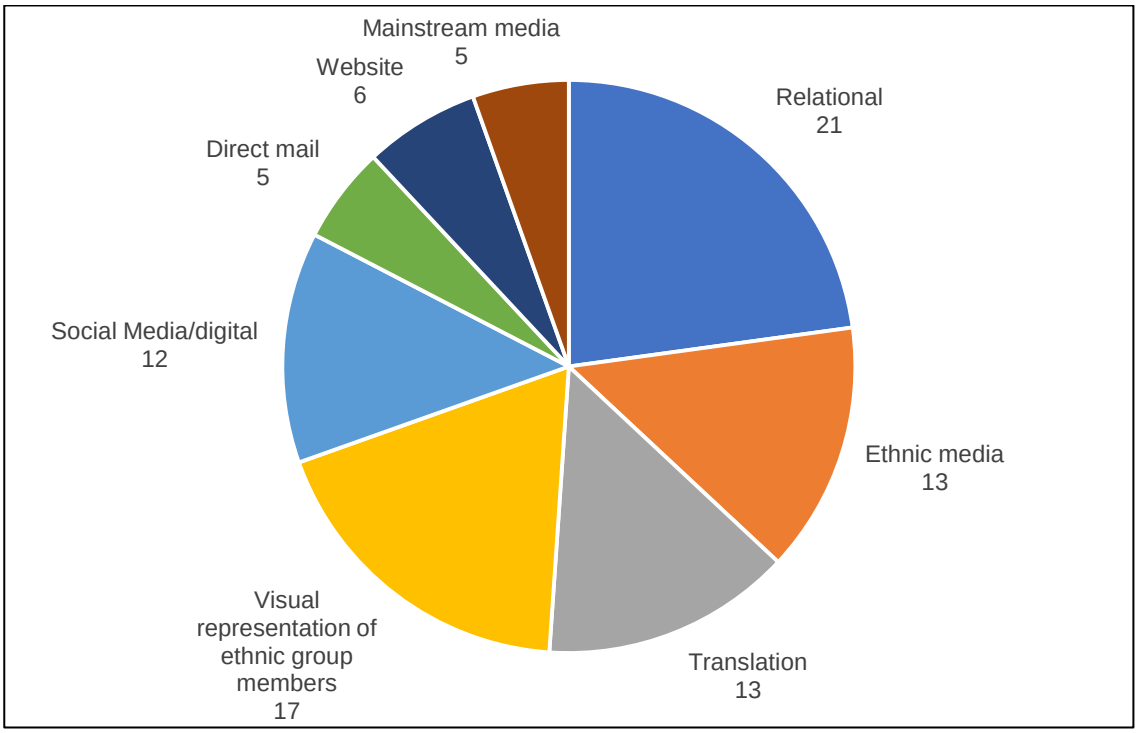



**Figure 11: Tactics used to communicate with ethnically diverse audiences**

The *relational approach*, which was used a total of 21 times mostly featured in campaigns with Māori people as their primary audience. Of the 21 times, Māori audiences were exclusively targeted through the *relational approach* a total of 16 times. Māori publics also featured in four other campaigns which used the *relational approach*, wherein the tactic was employed to target members of other minority ethnic groups too. A *relational approach* to communicating with Māori is understandable as it implies a degree of reciprocity and shared meaning-making that is central to the Māori concept of *whanaungatanga* (Motion et al., 2012). Moreover, the tactic also aligns with the oral culture of Māori within which the primacy of kanohi ti ke kanohi (face-to-face) communication is a given (Comrie & Kupa, 1998). Adoption of culturally-sensitive approaches by practitioners when communicating with Māori audiences suggests their awareness of and respect for Māori traditions and communication preferences which, according to Weaver (2011), is a desirable approach to public relations practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. Apart from Māori, the only other time when the *relational approach* was used to exclusively communicate with a particular ethnic group was in a campaign that was exclusive to Pacific peoples. Besides Māori, Pacific peoples were the only other minority ethnic group which was exclusively targeted in a campaign using the *relational approach* (one campaign).

The next-most utilised tactic to communicate with ethnic audiences is the *visual representation of ethnic group members* in communication (17 times). Practitioners employed this tactic eight times to connect exclusively with Māori audiences, twice only to reach Asian community members, and once to appeal exclusively to Pacific peoples. There were six instances when practitioners used this tactic to engage two or more ethnic groups. Most of the campaigns, while employing this tactic, used people of the same ethnicity in a poster or a video to appeal to the respective group. This is consistent with Mundy's (2015) contention that "publics must see themselves reflected in the spokespersons and images used" (p. 27). Some campaigns also used Māori staff members to engage other Māori publics, a common practice in Aotearoa New Zealand (Motion et al., 2012). As noted in these findings, the representation of Asian and Pacific peoples remains significantly low in communication collateral and people belonging to MELAA ethnicities are practically invisible.

Practitioners used translation a total of 13 times to reach minority ethnic audiences. While translation to Te reo Māori is expected in view of the higher number of campaigns that identified Māori among their audiences, campaigns also translated material to a few other languages. For example, one district-level campaign translated communication collateral to fourteen languages, which speaks to the growing ethnic and linguistic diversity of the country. In fact, translation was the most used tactic for audiences with a non-Māori ethnic identity.

Ethnic media, too, was used in 13 campaigns, with Māori audiences being reached a total of ten times while the Asian community was targeted four times through their respective niche channels. Use of translation and ethnic channels provides practitioners with a quick way to communicate their messages to audiences from different ethnic groups. However, a predominant use of these tactics whenever a campaign is required to engage publics who are not Pākehā, or white, may contribute to distancing the fact of ethnic diversity from the mainstream or standard practice of public relations (Edwards, 2015b).

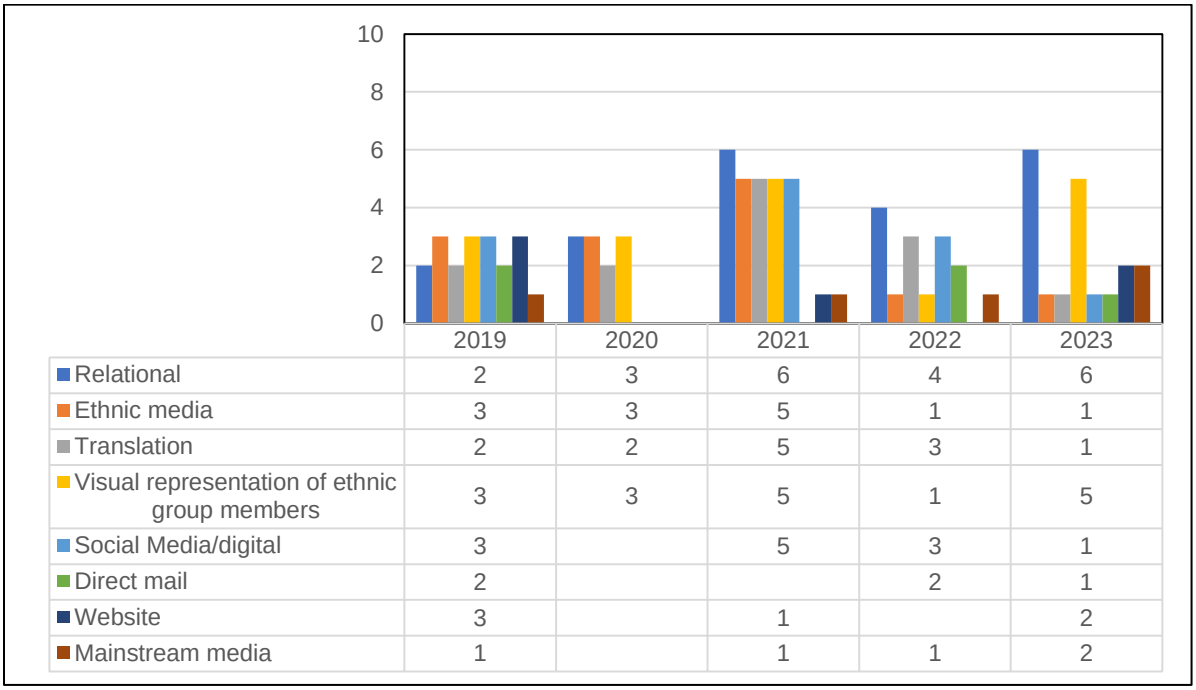
Twelve campaigns used social media and digital channels to communicate with audiences from different ethnicities. Eleven out of the twelve campaigns used the tactic to exclusively connect with audiences of a particular ethnicity (Māori in 8 campaigns; Asian in 2 campaigns, and Pacific peoples in a single campaign) while one campaign used it as a standard approach for all ethnically diverse audiences. It must be noted that, except for two campaigns that used this tactic to have a conversation and *co-create solutions* (Kent & Li, 2020) with ethnically diverse publics, social media was primarily used to transmit information. The findings support other studies in the field that have suggested organisations are keener to speak than listen to audiences notwithstanding the dialogic potential of social media (Nairn & Bhargava, 2025; Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012).

Among the less-frequently used tactics were website, direct mail and mainstream media. Campaigns used their organisation's websites six times to feature information which was relevant to audiences of different ethnicities. For example, a 2019 campaign that targeted the Asian community hosted information specific to Chinese and Indian audiences on different pages of the organisation's official website. Another campaign from 2021, created a dedicated website to invite feedback from Māori in a community-led project.

Despite the wider national reach of mainstream media, most campaign planning did not involve the use of mainstream media to reach ethnic audiences. Only five campaigns (of 36) used the channel, which is understandable since scholarship has indicated a lower preference for mainstream channels among ethnic audiences as coverage of ethnic publics has generally tended to be negative (Noronha & Papoutsaki, 2014; Tukachinsky, 2015). Along with mainstream channels, direct mail was the least used tactic with practitioners using it only five times.

Figure 12 shows the year-wise trends of use of the aforesaid communication tactics that practitioners employed when addressing ethnically diverse audience. Overall, use of the *relational approach* and *visual representation of ethnic group members* in communication remained consistent over the five-year period. On the other hand, the number of campaigns

that employed *social media*, *ethnic media* and *translation* trended downward toward the end of the period.




| | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Relational | 2 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 6 |
| Ethnic media | 3 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 1 |
| Translation | 2 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 1 |
| Visual representation of ethnic group members | 3 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| Social Media/digital | 3 | | 5 | 3 | 1 |
| Direct mail | 2 | | | 2 | 1 |
| Website | 3 | | 1 | | 2 |
| Mainstream media | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 2 |

**Figure 12: Five-year trend of tactics to communicate with ethnically diverse audiences**

The *relational approach* was the most frequently used tactic in four of the five years (the exception being 2019). A greater use of relational approaches in public relations is in step with growing consensus within scholarship around a less organisation-centred and more publics-focused approach to strategic communication (Taylor, 2023).However, it may be noted that the tactic was mostly applied when campaigns involved Māori audiences. The consistent use of *visual representation of ethnic group members* in communication alludes to it being a norm in diversity communication in fields like public relations and marketing (Cui, 1997; Johnson & Grier, 2011; Sobh & Soltan, 2018.

At the same time, the decreasing trend in the use of *translation*, *ethnic media* and *social/digital channels* is interesting and merits further exploration in future studies. For example, the decreasing use of translation may be a pointer to the tactic's practical limitations when viewed in juxtaposition with the increasing linguistic diversity of the country, now home to over 160 languages (Cunningham & King, 2018). Use of ethnic media, which remains a relevant media choice among ethnic audiences (Yu, 2018), may be affected by the evolving media consumption habits of the groups (Ministry for Ethnic Communities, n.d.).

In reference to social media, while its use has become a norm among public relations practitioners of the country (Martens, 2020), the findings indicated that practitioners do not necessarily reflect on the ethnic diversity of audiences while using the channel (only 12 out

of the overall sample of 91 campaigns considered the ethnicity of audiences on social media). Furthermore, one may also view the decreasing trend of engagement with ethnic or cultural variables on social media as illustrative of the colour-blind and homogenising tendencies of *virtual cultures* (Adams & Johnson, 2020; Shuter, 2012; Singh, 2010; Sommier et al., 2019).

Finally, the use of *mainstream media*, *websites* and *direct mail* in relation to ethnic audiences remained noticeably restricted throughout the five-year period. None of them were used more than three times in any particular year. The limited use of websites is surprising given the high reliance among ethnically diverse groups on web content for information (Ministry for Ethnic Communities, n.d.).

On a related note, while practitioners took care to adapt tactics to reach diverse ethnic groups, they did not exhibit a similar level of diligence in tailoring messages for those groups. Compared to the 36 campaigns which customised tactics, only 22 campaigns reflected a consideration for ethnic diversity in respect of messages. Of these, 16 campaigns addressed messages to Māori audiences, two campaigns targeted their messages at Pacific peoples and Asians (one each), while four campaigns intended their messages for all minority ethnic communities without specifying any particular ethnic group. Differences were also observed in how practitioners related a consideration for ethnic diversity to the element of messaging. For example, in nine of the 22 campaigns, relevance of ethnic diversity was limited to transmitting information to particular ethnic communities. Three of these campaigns also emphasised the use of translation. This suggests communicators may have been primarily interested in ensuring specific messages reached particular groups (Gregory, 2017), without necessarily factoring the contexts within which those messages would be consumed (Leitch & Motion, 2010). Leitch and Motion (2010) have suggested prioritising form or content of the message over the context is a possible indication of communication that is not symmetrical (Leitch and Motion, 2010). While one-way communication may be necessary on occasions, it limits opportunities for collaboration and co-creation which is a better way of working with publics (Botan, 2018; Gregory, 2017).

At the same time, 13 campaigns evidenced an awareness of context while communicating with ethnic audiences. Here, messages accentuated the role of relationships, long-term thinking and particular cultures and histories which implies messaging may have been influenced by a strategic focus on particular ethnic groups. Understandably, a majority of these context-guided messaging related to Māori audiences which further underlines the significance of biculturalism within the framework of strategic campaign planning in Aotearoa New Zealand (Henderson et al., 2010; Weaver, 2011).

The final section of quantitative content analysis focuses on how different types of organisations reflect ethnic diversity in their strategic planning.

### 4.4 Organisation sectors and ethnic diversity consideration in strategic planning

This section presents the analysis of the 91 PRINZ case studies to understand the extent to which different types of organisations considered ethnic diversity in their campaigns. For the purpose of the current research, organisations are categorised into three broad sectors: government or public entity, private enterprise and not-for-profit.

Of the 91 case studies, 46 were public sector campaigns, while the number of private sector and not-for-profit campaigns were 32 and 13 respectively. Numerically, a higher number of public entities showcased a consideration for ethnic diversity in campaigns relative to private and not-for-profit organisations. Figure 13 gives a breakdown of the organisational sectors in relation to their consideration of ethnic diversity in campaign planning.

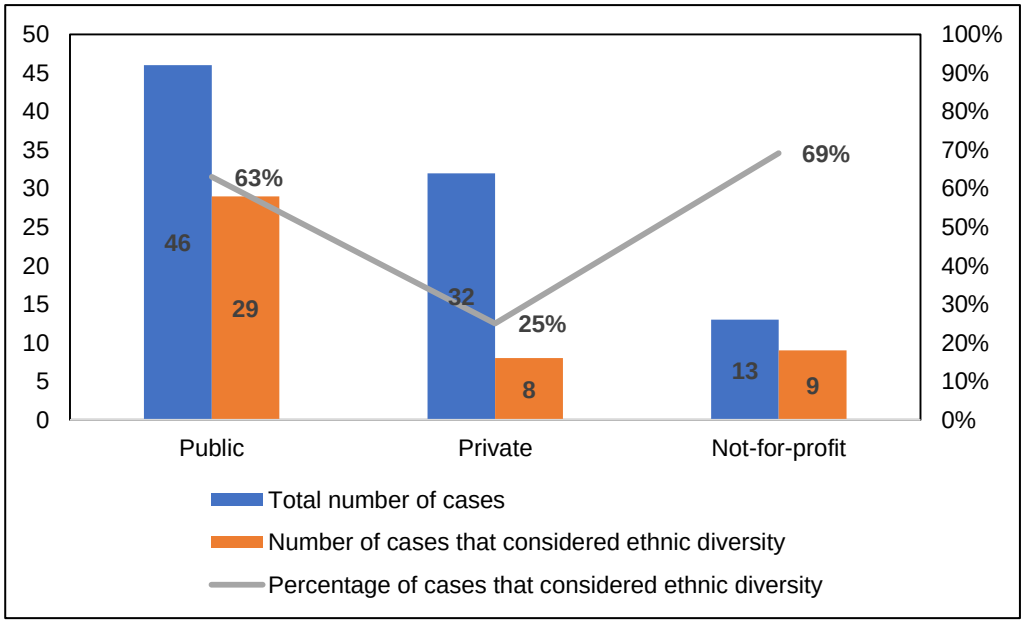



**Figure 13: Organisation sectors and consideration of ethnic diversity in campaigns**

As Figure 13 shows, 29 out of 46 (63 percent) public sector campaigns considered the ethnic diversity of their audiences as part of their strategic planning exercise. While the number of not-for-profit campaigns (nine) that factored ethnically diverse audiences was less than that of the public sector, the not-for-profit sector's overall consideration of ethnic diversity in terms of percentage share was the highest (69 percent). On the other hand, only a quarter of the private sector campaigns addressed ethnically diverse audiences in any part of their strategic planning process. Since the total number of campaigns was not the same for all the three sectors, comparison in terms of percentage share gives a more accurate

reflection of the likelihood of ethnic diversity consideration in each of the sectors. Therefore, based on the results, it can be argued that both public and not-for-profit campaigns fare better in this regard relative to private corporations.

Scholars have argued that commitment to diversity in the practice of public relations is consistent with an organisation's mandate for social responsibility (Sison, 2020; Bardhan & Gower, 2022). However, the results suggest that commitment to diversity in communication, ethnic diversity in this instance, may be influenced by the organisational sector. It could be argued that the higher consideration of ethnic diversity in the public sector and not-for-profit campaigns is on account of a foundational commitment to serving societies and publics in both public and not-for-sector organisations (Goulet & Frank, 2002). Public and not-for-profit sector communication is, therefore, expected to be inclusive of diverse publics (Pompper, 2024b; Sison, 2020), especially in the context of today's increasingly multi-ethnic and multicultural societies (Saint-Jacques, 2015b; Spoonley, 2023). Conversely, the limited consideration of ethnic diversity in private sector campaigns probably indicates that strategic communication efforts may be geared more towards the achievement of strategic business goals(Macnamara & Gregory, 2018), instead of fostering organisational commitment to diversity (Bardhan & Gower, 2022).

Overall, the public sector accounted for the lion's share of campaigns that considered ethnic diversity in strategic planning, followed by the not-for-profit and private sector (Figure 14).

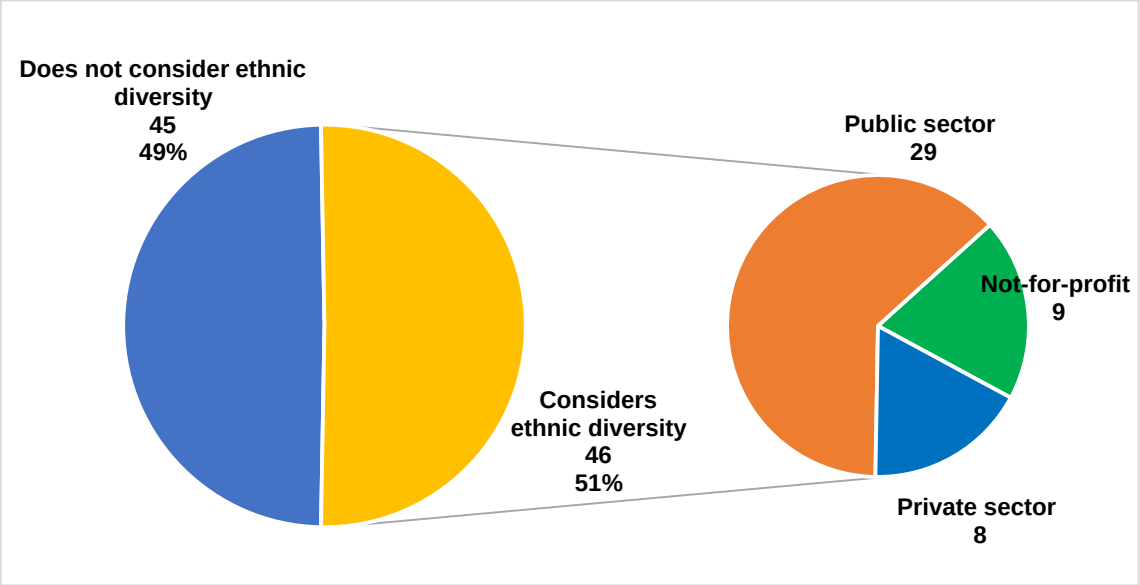



**Figure 14: Share of organisation sectors in campaigns that considered ethnic diversity**

As Figure 14 shows, out of the 46 campaigns that considered ethnic diversity, public sector accounted for 29 (63% of the total) while the not-for profit sector and private sector

accounted for 9 (20%) and 8 (17%) respectively. At the same time, of the 45 campaigns that did not consider ethnic diversity, private sector accounted for 24 (53 percent), public sector 17 (38 percent) and not-for-profit 4 (9 percent).

Over the five-year period (Figure 15), except for 2019, public sector campaigns outnumbered private and not-for-profit sector campaigns for their consideration of ethnic diversity in strategic planning. This may be attributed to an overall higher number of award entries from the public sector compared to private and not-for-profit sectors. The same explanation holds for the not-for-profit sector in 2019 since there was a higher number of not-for-profit entries (7) compared to the public (4) or the private sector (1).

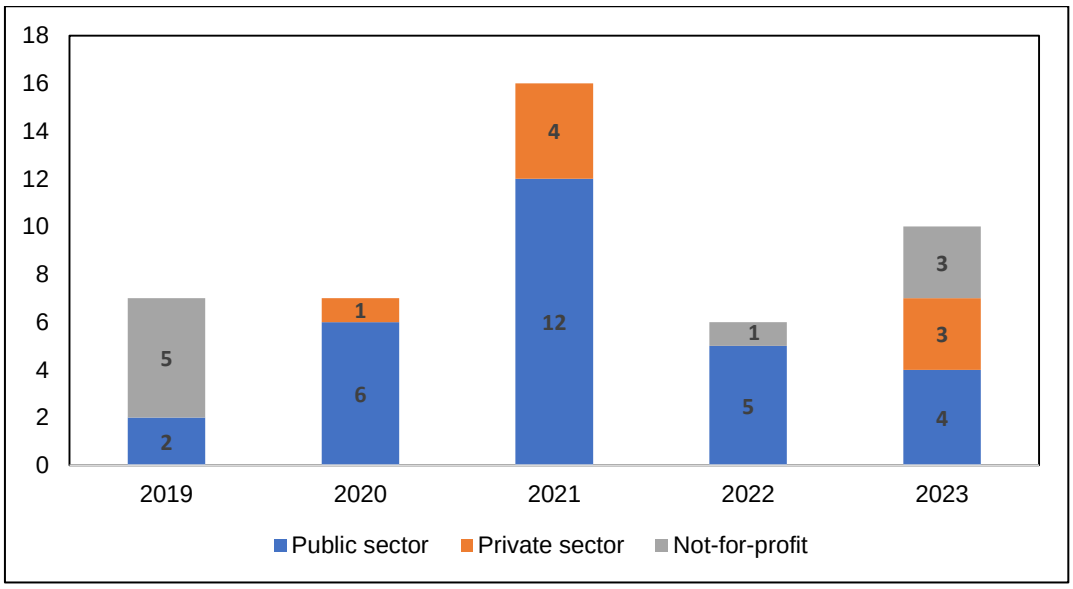



**Figure 15: Five-year trend of ethnic diversity consideration across organisation sectors**

Further, except for the public sector, no other sector featured campaigns for their consideration of ethnic diversity in each of the five years under consideration. The consistency with which public sector campaigns factored the diversity of its audiences is indicative of the sector's inclusive approach to communication (Sison, 2020). In fact, case studies of two public sector campaigns emphasised that inclusive and equitable communication are integral to their planning and strategy.

At the same time, although the not-for-profit sector accounted for none of the campaigns that addressed ethnic diversity in 2020 and 2021, it is due to the fact that there were no entries from the sector in those years.

None of the private sector campaigns of 2019 and 2022 acknowledged the ethnicity of their audiences in strategic planning. Overall, the inadequate focus on ethnically diverse

publics in strategic planning of the analysed private sector campaigns paints a less-than appealing picture of diversity consideration. Scholars have suggested financial interests and a profit motivation have often influenced a corporation's commitment to diversity, especially in respect of minority ethnic groups in campaign planning (Pompper, 2024b; Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013). It is also worth noting that a significant number of private sector campaigns (16 out of 32) were in the corporate, marketing or internal communication award categories, which suggests an emphasis on business interests (Macnamara & Gregory, 2018) or organisational culture (Sriramesh et al., 1992) instead of a wider societal orientation (L'Etang, 2011, 2012).

### 4.5 Summary of Findings

The chapter presented the results of the quantitative content analysis of 91 PRINZ case studies of award-winning campaigns from 2019 to 2023 in order to understand how public relations practitioners of Aotearoa New Zealand considered the ethnic diversity of publics in strategic campaign planning. Since, PRINZ is the national professional body of public relations in Aotearoa New Zealand, the selected sample was considered nationally representative and, therefore, appropriate for the purpose of the study. In addition to examining consideration of ethnicity across the different stages of strategic campaign planning, the researcher analysed how campaigns from different organisational sectors addressed ethnic diversity to provide further depth and context to the study's findings.

At a macro-level, the results indicated a healthy consideration of ethnic diversity among the case studies with over half (46 of 91) of the campaigns addressing ethnic variables of audiences in one or more steps of the strategic planning process. However, the results also confirmed variations in the manner and extent to which campaigns addressed ethnic diversity across the different planning steps. Practitioners paid greater attention to the ethnicity of audiences during segmentation of audiences and devising tactics in comparison to the stages that involved research and formulation of strategy. Overall, the Māori ethnic group featured in a greater number of campaigns (29) as a target audience relative to other ethnicities (Pacific peoples and Asian), while none of the campaigns mentioned the MELAA ethnic category in their audiences.

The findings also reflected a greater preference for secondary research which aligns with existing scholarship on the subject although there were examples of campaigns that combined both approaches providing practitioners with a richer view of their intercultural context. Similar to audience segmentation, Māori people remained central to the majority of campaign research focused on ethnic groups which is understandable given the bicultural framework of Aotearoa New Zealand.

In strategy and tactics as well, campaigns have showcased a higher level of consideration to audiences of Māori ethnicity which essentially follows from the group being predominantly represented at the audience segmentation step. While the findings indicate that consideration of ethnic diversity in campaign planning is more tactical than strategic, the campaigns that did reflect on the importance of ethnic diversity while formulating strategy emphasised the importance of being culturally sensitive to ethnically diverse audiences.

In terms of tactics, the practitioners employed a wide variety of approaches to communicate with ethnically diverse audiences with most campaigns adopting a *relational approach* to engage Māori publics. To that effect, campaigns used collaboration with audiences and employed a feedback mechanism as part of the relational approach which is suggestive of communication techniques that go beyond the traditional one-way transmission of communication. Some campaigns also *represented ethnic group members in communication* to reach out to publics that identified with the same ethnicity along with other tactics such as use of *translation*, *ethnic media* and *social/digital channels*. The use of digital and social media channels, while low in the initial years, peaked in 2021, which may be on account of the pandemic, a period during which most communication moved online. Interestingly, ethnically-oriented communication on social media declined after 2021, which could imply a colour-blind approach to online communication (Sommier et al., 2019) despite an increasing use of those channels by organisations to communicate with their publics (Plowman & Wilson, 2018; Wang et al., 2021).

Finally, public sector and not-for-profit organisations were found to be far more likely to address ethnic diversity in their strategic campaign planning in comparison to the private sector.

The next chapter (Chapter 5 - Discussion) transitions from the *descriptive* to the *inferential* (Rourke & Anderson, 2004) to provide an empirically-based and theory-informed (Krippendorff, 2019) discussion of the findings presented in the current chapter.

# Chapter 5 Discussion

## 5.1 Introduction

The current chapter offers an interpretation of the findings of the quantitative content analysis of the selected PRINZ case studies to answer the research question - how is ethnic diversity addressed in the strategic planning of public relations campaigns in Aotearoa New Zealand?

As one of the first exploratory studies in the country to examine the consideration of ethnic diversity in public relations planning, it offers foundational insights that may serve as reference for future diversity-centred studies.

Overall, the findings indicated that while, at the macro level, campaigns reflected a consideration of ethnic diversity during planning there were variations in the extent to which ethnic variables were factored across the different steps of strategic planning as well as in different organisational sectors. The results confirmed that one of the principal features of diversity-focused communication in Aotearoa New Zealand is its predominantly bicultural orientation. At the same time, a conspicuous lack of engagement with other ethnic minorities, including Pacific peoples, Asians and MELAA, also surfaced during the analysis.

This chapter presents a discussion of the five key themes that characterise the study's findings pertaining to the consideration of ethnic diversity in strategic planning of campaigns in Aotearoa New Zealand.

## 5.2 A healthy, but inconsistent trend, of ethnic diversity consideration

For a predominantly white discipline that has often been criticised for its inadequate consideration of ethnicity or race-related issues (Edwards, 2009, 2015b; Liu & Pompper, 2012; Logan, 2021; Ni & Sha, 2023; Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013), the results indicate a healthy level of diversity consideration in the analysed campaigns at a macro-level. Forty-six of ninety-one analysed campaign case studies have revealed a consideration of ethnic diversity within at least one or more steps of their strategic planning process. This suggests public relations practitioners in Aotearoa New Zealand consider ethnic diversity an important element of the planning process (see Section 4.2). Further, in a globalised communication landscape of increasing complexity (Gregory & Halff, 2013), ethnicity is a key socio-cultural variable of publics in a multicultural society (Akova & Kantar, 2020; Sison, 2020). Therefore, this study's findings on reflection of ethnic diversity within strategic planning steps sits well with the emerging consensus around transitioning strategic communication away from its largely organisation-centred tendencies to a more publics-oriented approach (Botan, 2021).

One of the earliest comparable studies that examined the frequency with which practitioners considered the cultural variables of audiences in their segmentation strategies found that just about a quarter of Australian public relations campaigns admitted the diversity of its audiences in their plans (Sison, 2009). The present study, thus, is indicative of an improvement in the consideration of ethnic diversity of publics in the broader Australasian public relations context since Sison's (2009) early research in this area. In a way, the differences are worth noting, since both countries are representative of a multicultural context of communication. Australia has an official multicultural policy, while Aotearoa New Zealand's commitment to diversity is premised on the bicultural framework of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Spoonley, 2023). Although Aotearoa New Zealand lacks an official policy on multiculturalism (Spoonley, 2023), it has been argued that the country's bicultural orientation is not antithetical to its evolving multicultural character, since the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi endorse equality for all the citizens of the country (Ward & Liu, 2012). In fact, scholars have contended that Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural framework is likelier to contribute to a more meaningful engagement with cultural diversity compared to Australia where ethnocentric tendencies are not uncommon notwithstanding its official multicultural mandate (Hoffman, 2016; Love & Tilley, 2014). This is understandable as societal contexts and ethnic cultures influence communication practices within public relations (L'Etang, 2012). Public relations scholars of the country, too, have consistently stressed the need for reflecting on diversity while communicating with publics (Motion & Leitch, 2000; Weaver, 2011). In effect, one could argue that Aotearoa New Zealand's unique response to ethnic diversity which includes both a bicultural framework and multicultural awareness may have a positive impact on how practitioners address diversity in their communication. Hence, the respectable level of ethnic diversity consideration in strategic planning which the findings indicate stands to reason. Correspondingly, an awareness and acknowledgment of ethnic diversity in campaign planning potentially indicates practitioners' commitment to a diversity-oriented approach in communication (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023; Brunner, 2009; Edwards, 2011b; Hon & Brunner, 2000).

At the same time, it is worth noting that recent annual trends of ethnic diversity consideration in campaign planning evidence a declining trend (see Figure 2), since compared to case studies of 2019 when 58 percent of the campaigns factored the ethnicity of its audiences less than half of the 2023 campaign case studies (45 percent) included the variable in their strategic planning exercise. Although more studies in the future are warranted to ascertain if a lower consideration of ethnic diversity becomes a standard feature of strategic planning in Aotearoa New Zealand, the dip does present as a point of inquiry and contemplation for both researchers and practitioners, especially in view of the

country's growing ethnic diversity (Stats NZ, 2024b). In public relations, the discounting of ethnic or cultural variables of publics has been related to a global approach (Valentini, 2007). Since a global view of publics tends to assume homogeneity of publics by glossing over their heterogeneous character (Gregory & Halff, 2013; Valentini, 2007), it is implicative of a functionalist, mostly US-originated interpretation of public relations which has often been linked with the expansion of multinational corporations around the world (Macnamara, 2012; Sriramesh & Stumberger, 2018; Vujnovic & Kruckeberg, 2010). However, scholars have noted that global approaches to public relations are not without adverse impacts at the local level. For example, Hoffman (2016) stated ethnocentrism in Australian public relations is a consequence of a global approach. More tellingly, Gregory and Halff (2013) are of the view that global practices have resulted in a "loss of heritage and richness" (p. 418) in the UK public relations field. The attraction for the global approach is understandable as it is the normative or standard approach and allows practitioners to frame communication primarily from an organisational perspective (Rittenhofer & Valentini, 2015), without having to deal with the complexity of their external context reflected in the growing ethnic and cultural diversity of its publics (Pal & Dutta, 2008; Sison, 2020). Yet, studies have shown ethnic variables have a meaningful impact on how publics engage with campaigns or any form of public relations communication (Ni & Sha, 2023; Sha, 2006; Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013).

Coming back to the findings, it is interesting to note that two of the campaigns which addressed ethnic diversity in strategic planning in 2019 (in which diversity consideration was highest at 58 percent) were entries in 'Communicating Diversity' award category, a category which no longer exists. Further, one could argue that the respectable level of diversity consideration in the 2021 case studies may have been on account of the pandemic when communication was expected to be more inclusive (Anson et al., 2021; 2022; Hyland-Wood, 2021). If one parses the preceding observations in conjunction with the declining trend of ethnic diversity consideration for the final two years, the findings may be interpreted as potentially reflective of a trends towards a homogenising, global approach. Given that, any further indication of a drop in diversity consideration would not only be out of step with the rising plurality of the country's population (Stats NZ, 2024b), it would also reinforce the view that practitioners are moving away from embracing the inherent complexity of their practice and, instead, adopting a more standardised approach to communication for all constituent publics (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2015).

Advising against functionalist approaches, Macnamara (2015) suggested that strategic communication must make an effort to "adhere to the dominant value systems of society" (p. 338). Within Aotearoa New Zealand, surveys have found that 90 percent of the population take the country to be inclusive and diverse (Bhatia, 2022). However, as Sison

(2020) has contended, aspiration for diversity in public relations often falters at the point of practice. Therefore, it would be appropriate to suggest that public relations practitioners must continue to reflect a higher consideration of ethnic diversity in their strategic planning to underscore their allegiance to diversity in communication as well as to convey that they are alive to the aspirations and ideals of the country's publics.

### 5.3 Ethnic variables not integral to every step of planning

Scholarship has stressed the importance of integrating diversity in the communication strategy of campaigns (Edwards, 2011b; Henderson et al., 2010; Hon & Brunner, 2000; Mundy, 2016, 2019). Hence, from a strategic planning point of view, integrating a consideration for ethnic diversity would imply practitioners incorporate the variable across the different steps of planning. The results of the content analysis of PRINZ case studies from 2019 to 2023, however, revealed the reflection of ethnic diversity varied across the planning process and only a limited few integrated ethnic diversity across the entire strategic planning process. Of the 46 campaigns that considered ethnically diverse publics in their planning, just 10 campaigns included ethnicity as a salient factor in every step of planning, from *research* to *tactics and implementation* (see Section 4.3).

In regard to the importance practitioners attached to ethnic diversity across the individual steps of planning, it appeared the ethnicity of publics was considered more significant during the audience segmentation and tactical stages in comparison to research or strategy. A total of 38 campaigns segmented audiences based on their ethnicity (see Section 4.3.1) or related ethnic variables (such as country or language), while 36 campaigns tailored tactics based on ethnicity-dependent considerations. On other hand, the number of campaigns that did formative research on ethnicity and considered ethnically diverse publics at a strategy stage was fewer – 22 and 18, respectively.

The higher frequency of ethnicity consideration in audience segmentation is understandable since demographic-based segmentation is a standard practice in public relations as well as in the official census data of the country (Gregory, 2020; Stats NZ, 2024a). A higher reflection of ethnic diversity in audience segmentation, in all likelihood, is a mere acknowledgment of the bicultural or multicultural context of the specific campaign and may not always result in a diversity orientation in research or strategy which, according to Smith (2021) and Gregory (2017), constitute the core of strategic planning in public relations.

However, a preponderant focus on ethnic diversity within tactics (see Section 4.3.4) without a corresponding reliance on research and strategy suggests there was a lack of meaningful integration of ethnic variables in the strategic planning for a large number of the

analysed PRINZ case studies. In short, consideration for ethnic diversity in campaign planning was found to be more tactical, rather than research-informed or strategy-oriented.

The findings are not surprising. They corroborate existing views in scholarship on strategic communication and planning that suggest practitioners lean more towards outcomes and results than spending time on understanding the publics with whom communication needs to take place (Botan, 2021; Gregory, 2017; Smith, 2021). A tactical approach to communication strategy may yield results in the short-term but Kent and Theunissen (2021) cautioned that it could be potentially detrimental in the longer-term. Moreover, a largely tactical approach which is not sufficiently informed by research on publics may lead to practitioners assuming the primacy of their knowledge and experience over the lived experience of the publics (Botan, 2021).

While the experience and knowledge of a skilled public relations practitioner is of immense value to an organisation's communication strategy (Gregory, 2020; Grunig et al., 2002), there are legitimate risks to practitioners relying solely on their worldviews and wisdom while planning campaigns. Smith (2021) alluded to this risk as pervasive yet implicit and argued that even seasoned communicators "know they've been lucky so far with their hunches" (p. 24). Specifically, in a diverse, multi-ethnic context, a lack of focus on research or time devoted to strategy, particular to ethnic communities, may result in practitioners becoming ethnocentric and imposing their own worldviews and cultural frames of references onto people (Sriramesh, 2019; Sue, 2001). As a result, practitioners may end up ascribing wrong identities to publics (Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013) which, quite often, lead to stereotypes. Worryingly, such stereotypes tend to be problematic (Theunissen & Rahman, 2012) and generally portray ethnically diverse publics in a negative light (Ertem-Eray, 2024a). In doing so, they perpetuate existing inequities and racism (Theunissen & Rahman, 2012; Vardmena-Winter, 2011). In addition to causing problems of essentialism (Vardeman-Winter, 2011) or stereotyping (Theunissen & Rahman, 2012) in communication, an inaccurate knowledge about ethnic groups may also create a dire situation where "publics reject messages and organizations because they feel messages are speaking to another group of people" (Vardeman-Winter, 2011, p. 436). Hence, a higher emphasis on research, especially primary, in the context of campaign planning in Aotearoa New Zealand can be thought of as a reliable check against the use of negative stereotypes for ethnically diverse publics. It may be noted that a few campaigns cited the need for practitioners to guard against the inconsiderate use of stereotypes although none of them related to ethnicity-based stereotypes despite the routine occurrence of ethnic stereotypes in media and communication-related fields (Choi, 2024; Bailey & Harindranath, 2006; Pompper, 2010a, 2021; Theunissen & Rahman, 2012).

A reluctance toward primary research, evidenced by a greater reliance on secondary research (see Section 4.3.2), is understandable in view of the higher attendant time and cost commitments (Gregory, 2020). Additionally, practitioners are being increasingly required by their organisations to deliver more cost-effective communication which further limits the scope for primary research (Smith, 2021). Yet, research decisions may also be contingent on organisational priorities or the discretion of practitioner(s). For example, in 2019, one campaign avoided primary research due to budget limits, while another decided to go ahead despite similar constraints. Smith (2021) contended practitioners avoid research as they fear it may interfere with creative aspects of communication, which is implicative of prioritising the form of content instead of its context (Leitch & Motion, 2010; Motion & Leitch, 2009). Yet, meaning-making is context-specific and the context in which publics perceive communication is often culture-determined (Curtin & Gaither, 2005), which is closely linked to ethnicity (Akova & Kantar, 2021; Johnson, 2020; Sison, 2020). So, the lower incidence of ethnic diversity of the publics in research and strategy of the analysed campaigns may be interpreted as practitioners perhaps underrating the cultural context of their campaign's ethnically diverse publics.

An inadequate emphasis on research and lack of strategic orientation in planning is problematic under all circumstances of public relations communication (Botan, 2021; Kent & Theunissen, 2021). However, it is particularly salient in the context of a multicultural society where publics may not always share the same cultural frames of reference as those of the practitioners (Bardhan & Gower, 2022; Ni & Sha, 2023). In this context, downplaying the ethnic or cultural differences of the environment may result in a hegemonic practice (Gregory & Halff, 2013) which draws extensively from the dominant cultural norms of a predominantly white professional community (Edwards, 2015b; Vardeman-Winter, 2011; Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017), which is also a characteristic trait of public relations in Aotearoa New Zealand (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023). Understandably, critical scholars of Aotearoa New Zealand have consistently advocated for a bicultural as well as multicultural awareness among public relations practitioners (Leitch & Motion, 2010; Motion & Leitch, 2000; Weaver, 2013). Encouragingly though, with more than half of the 91 analysed campaigns having evidenced a consideration for ethnically diverse publics (see Section 4.2) as part of their strategic planning in some form, one can safely reject any notion of public relations practice of Aotearoa New Zealand being hegemonic in its disposition.

In fact, with more than 36 campaigns found to have addressed ethnically diverse publics at the tactical stage, the findings suggest practitioners are reasonably aware of the need to communicate with and reach minority ethnic groups. However, Gregory (2017) has contended that practitioners, in most instances, employ tactics to cater to the achievement of

organisational goals without necessarily focusing on the desired outcomes from the perspective of publics. This is borne out by Macnamara's (2016) work in the area of organisational listening which suggested most organisations in their communication are principally interested in speaking rather than listening to publics. Unfortunately, without genuine empathy for publics (Kent & Theunissen, 2021), characterised by an effort to listen to "the concerns, aspirations and good ideas of stakeholders" (Gregory, 2017, p. 170), communication tactics are unlikely to engender dialogue and relationship building, particularly in a multicultural context (Ertem-Eray, 2024a). When practitioners extend this organisation-centric approach of tactical planning to ethnic groups, ethnicity or race ends up being interpreted "as an attribute of a public, as a culture, which can be instrumentalized for the benefit of an organization" (Waymer & Heath, 2015, p. 299).

From a non-functional and socio-cultural perspective (Edwards, 2009), fully engaging with the multiple diversities of publics (Sha & Ford, 2007) is a reliable gauge of a successful and inclusive public relations practice. Therefore, a predominantly tactical approach to ethnic diversity in strategic planning, bereft of sufficient research inputs or strategic orientation toward those publics, potentially precludes public relations from becoming truly inclusive and aligned with its civic responsibilities (Munshi & Kurian, 2020). With only 10 of the 91 analysed campaigns reflecting a consideration of ethnic diversity across all the essential strategic planning steps, the findings indicate public relations communication in Aotearoa New Zealand is far from achieving a fully-integrated approach to diversity in its practice. More importantly, it suggests the prevalence of a functional, not civic, view of diversity in planning.

### 5.4 A bicultural framework of ethnic diversity in strategic planning

It has been suggested that the globalised communication landscape, where diversity and differences are a norm, would require practitioners who are culturally adept and can skilfully navigate the complexities which characterise communication with multi-ethnic communities (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011; Pal & Dutta, 2008; Rittenhofer & Valentini, 2015; Wakefield, 2010). The results of the study revealed that practitioners of Aotearoa New Zealand may not have yet realised the multi-ethnic reality of the country's changing demographic within the ambit of strategic planning.

Analysis of the 91 PRINZ case studies indicated that consideration of ethnic diversity within strategic planning of campaigns is largely reflective of the country's bicultural diversity (see Section 4.3.1; Section 4.3.2; Section 4.3.3 and Section 4.3.4). The study found that the Māori ethnic group was considered with a greater frequency in the strategic planning of the analysed campaigns compared to Pacific peoples, Asians or MELAA ethnic group. For

example, in audiences and research, Māori audiences were addressed a total of 29 and 17 times respectively. The evidenced bicultural orientation to strategic planning in the country is consistent with the findings of a recent study conducted among public relations practitioners of the country which found that most practitioners are keen on incorporating bicultural principles in practice (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023).

In contrast, Pacific peoples were addressed in audiences and research a total of five and three times respectively, while the Asian community featured in audiences and research considerations a total of four and two times respectively. The MELAA ethnic group did not receive any consideration at all in planning.

It must be noted that Motion and Leitch (2000) had urged the discipline to accord importance to both biculturalism and multiculturalism. Despite the ideal of an inclusive approach to intercultural communication, the results have shown that practising a balanced approach in strategic planning in a way that can be deemed truly representative of the country's diverse ethnic groups is a difficult proposition. In this context, Mersham et al.'s (2009) observation that the bicultural-multicultural framework would come with its own set of challenges for the country's public relations practitioners stands to testimony.

The bicultural approach to planning and practice is both necessary and understandable. Essentially, it is largely reflective of the foundational principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi which established the historical framework for Māori-Crown relations based around issues of indigenous rights, land ownership and sovereignty over land (Henderson et al., 2010; Spoonley, 2023). By virtue of the document, "biculturalism is enacted as partnership and actively recognises power relationships" (Henderson et al., 2010, p. 32). Bearing that in mind, the discipline has generally acknowledged and agreed upon the need for cultural awareness and sensitivity when it comes to communicating with Māori audiences (Motion & Leitch, 2000; Weaver, 2013). Active use of Māori artwork and cultural artefacts in some of the analysed campaigns that involve Māori audiences as well as use of Te Reo Māori words and phrases such as *mana whenua*, *iwi* or *hapu* to refer to Māori publics reflect practitioners' attempts to integrate a Māori worldview in mainstream practice of public relations (see Section 4.3.1). A few campaigns have also acknowledged the need for rectifying past wrongs that Māori people have endured. Hence, acknowledgment and implementation of bicultural principles in campaigns and strategic planning amount to a positive step in the direction of honouring the foundational tenets upon which Aotearoa New Zealand was established.

Moreover, a bicultural awareness in strategic planning potentially keeps at bay the ever-present risks of ethnocentric monoculturalism (Sue, 2001) or hegemony in the field of

practice (Gregory & Halff, 2013), given a largely white discipline (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023). A monocultural or hegemonic view disavows campaigns of the richness of the diverse cultural contexts of ethnic publics (Rittenhofer & Valentini, 2015). Ergo, communication remains susceptible to misapplication of ethnic stereotypes which may not always resonate with those audiences (Theunissen & Rahman, 2012; Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013). In context of the study's findings, a relatively higher consideration of Māori publics in strategic planning would suggest that practitioners are aware of the need to be culturally sensitive to Māori norms and practices in campaigns (Motion et al., 2012). At the same time, there is room for greater consideration of Māori cultural views as only a limited number of campaigns reflected a holistic integration of Māori norms and culture across all the steps of planning. For example, while 29 campaigns identified Māori publics as a key segment of their audiences, only 17 researched them and even fewer considered them in strategy (14). While low budgets could be a reason for curtailing primary research-based interventions to understanding Māori, practitioners, arguably, may have also been predisposed to relying on personal experience as well as existing knowledge on how to appropriately communicate with Māori publics (Comrie & Kupa, 1998; Motion et al., 2012; Weaver, 2011). Consequently, it may have led to a tactical approach to Māori publics in strategic planning. A tactical focus on Māori may yield culturally sensitive communication, however it may not necessarily lead to empowerment of Māori publics which is at the core of the partnership-based framework of bicultural relations (Henderson et al, 2010; Weaver, 2011). Hence, from a socio-cultural standpoint, one may suggest that while culturally sensitive communication to Māori ethnic group is to be desired, strategic planning must also make an effort to address larger issues of empowerment (Edwards, 2018; Love & Tilley, 2014; Motion et al., 2012; Motion & Leitch, 2015; Weaver, 2011). In fact, two of the campaigns that addressed Māori publics specifically mentioned that an awareness around issues of marginalisation and historical injustices guided communication efforts with Māori, thereby alluding to the vital concern of power. (see Section 4.3.3). A few campaigns also encouraged participation by collaborating with Māori audiences to co-create solutions which is good practice as co-creation and participation facilitates empowerment (Botan, 2021; Weaver, 2011).

In this regard, research, particularly primary research, will continue to be of critical importance to advancing practitioners' understanding of the Māori ethnic group. As Mersham et al. (2009) have remarked "understanding only comes with continued exposure to the particular cultural group" (p. 66). This is also supported by local public relations practitioners who while voicing their support and acceptance of a bicultural view have also conceded that more needs to be done to put those principles into practice on a regular basis (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023). In the same vein, a bicultural lens must also reflect in the strategy step

as it enables a higher-order thinking, crucial to affording a more holistic, empowering and inclusive approach, as opposed to the short-term, goals-oriented view of a tactical approach (Kent & Theunissen, 2021).

The flip side of the observed bicultural orientation in the analysed campaigns is the significant under-representation of all other minority ethnic groups in strategic planning (see Section 4.3.1; Section 4.3.2; Section 4.3.3 and Section 4.3.4). The frequency of consideration of Asians and Pacific peoples in strategic planning is incommensurate with their population variables, and the MELAA ethnic group does not at all feature explicitly in any campaign. As such, while practitioners have evidently attended to the call of embracing a bicultural lens to communication, the results suggest there is a significant deficit in their multicultural orientation. The foundation of biculturalism, thus, may have strongly motivated the more frequent inclusion of Māori audiences. On the other hand, a similar consideration for other diverse ethnicities has not transpired despite the current demographic reality of the country (Stats NZ, 2020, 2024a) and a broad-based acceptance of the country's multicultural character (Bhatia, 2022; Sibley & Ward, 2013; Smits, 2019). In fact, the number of campaigns that contain more than two ethnic groups in their audiences is just three.

The results carry important implications in terms of how practitioners continue to address ethnic diversity in public relations campaigns. Continuing to accord less attention to Pacific peoples, Asians and MELAA communities in strategic planning is not ideal if public relations aspires to foster inclusion and community-mindedness in society (Liu & Pompper, 2012; Valentini & Kruckeberg, 2011).

There is inherent power in the practice of public relations (Edwards, 2009). Organisations and practitioners have the prerogative to initiate conversations (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012) and decide who is included and who is excluded from those conversations (Curtin et al., 2015). Lugo-Ocando and Hernández-Toro (2015) and Vardeman-Winter et al. (2013) have referred to the unequal distributions of power and noted how they contribute to othering of certain groups who are qualified as different from the dominant or larger cultural groups. With regard to *othering*, Hall (1991) argued that the effect of othering was essential to the meaning-making process within communication. However, Vardeman-Winter et al. (2013) have criticised it for leading to the persistence of prejudices and stereotypes about groups of people, eventually contributing to their marginalisation (Munshi & Kurian, 2005). Marginalised groups often feel ignored and unseen, which Xifra and Mckie (2011) qualified as the invisibility of race, a phenomenon not entirely uncommon in the fields of media and communication (Bailey & Harindranath, 2006; Schug et al., 2017). In context of Aotearoa New Zealand, while scholars have alluded to the inclusive character

of the country in relation to its growing ethnic diversity (Sibley & Ward, 2013), first-person accounts of immigrants and minority ethnic groups often mirror a different reality (Nachowitz, 2015; Sharma et al., 2025). For example, Sharma et al.'s (2025) recent study found that ethnic minority youth often felt being othered and invisible in the wider society due to their ethnic identity. Similar findings were reported by Nachowitz (2015) in his study focused on the Indian diaspora where respondents confirmed experiences of discrimination and racism were not uncommon within the country.

Across the 91 analysed campaigns, Pacific peoples featured in audiences five times while members of Asian ethnic group appear four times (see Section 4.3.1), which suggest an under-representation of those particular groups. Further, even when practitioners identify a particular ethnic group, it does not automatically imply communication is adapted based on group-specific preferences or insights. For example, one of the campaigns which had both Māori and Pacific peoples as target audiences devised communication only from a Māori point of view. While the under-representation of Pacific peoples and Asians is concerning, the complete absence of MELAA ethnicities is equally striking, if not more, as it renders them invisible (Xifra & McKie, 2011). Given the of cost and time pressures under which campaigns are planned and delivered (Smith, 2021), it is not hard to see why something as consequential as misrepresentation or invisibility of particular ethnicities may fail to register with practitioners especially if the groups are not considered strategic enough (Vujnovic & Kruckeberg, 2010). However, campaigns that decided to meaningfully engage with minority ethnic audiences discovered vital truths about the group as part of planning and implementing a campaign. For example, in one of the analysed case studies, practitioners found a particular ethnic group felt persistently ignored and unseen when campaigns addressed the group because communication seldom accounted for their specific cultures and lived contexts, thereby revealing issues of institutionalised bias and racism.

From the standpoint of communication, an insufficient consideration of Pacific peoples, Asians and MELAA in strategic planning may result in campaigns that do not resonate with those groups of publics, and practitioners may resort to the use of stereotypes (Samovar et al., 2017). While stereotypes have a role in the practice of public relations, unless informed by research or mindful consideration for the publics involved, they can also create problems (Theunissen & Rahman, 2012). Therefore, it is advisable that practitioners discard monolithic assumptions about ethnic groups and adopt a more nuanced understanding of what is considered acceptable in diverse ethnic groups since people's cultures are not static units (Curtin, 2021). Undoubtedly, research and continuous engagement with publics from diverse ethnicities are central to developing such a nuanced understanding (Adams & Johnson, 2020; Macnamara & Camit, 2017; Sison, 2020). While

the process can be time- and resource- intensive, strategic planning that is based on research, feedback and involvement with diverse publics yields campaign outcomes that potentially far exceed the impact that may accrue from achievement of organisational goals alone. The Pink Sari (Macnamara & Camit, 2017) and Morewell CALD (Sison, 2020) campaigns exemplify the larger social impact of inclusive multicultural campaigns.

Therefore, in light of the limited consideration of diverse ethnicities (other than Māori) in strategic planning of the sampled PRINZ campaigns, a greater reflection on the multicultural character of Aotearoa New Zealand is encouraged during campaign planning. While biculturalism is hewn into the structure of Aotearoa New Zealand, it does not preclude the possibility of a multicultural lens that encompasses the wider reality of the country today. In fact, an assumption of equality of all citizens and respect for all cultures is part of the articulated vision of Aotearoa New Zealand, as enshrined in Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Ward & Liu, 2012). Thus, in order to build "functional communities of inclusiveness and harmony and support" (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2008, p. 27), practitioners must strive to go beyond a strictly mono- or bi-cultural lens to understand their complex context (Valentini et al., 2016). Minus an inclusive and community-minded spirit, practitioners run the risk of executing campaigns that further push publics into their tribes (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2008).

Societal inequities and risks of fissures around faultlines of ethnicity and race have grown manifold in recent years, especially in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic (Ciszek et al., 2022; Mundy & Bardhan, 2023). Locally, in Aotearoa New Zealand, there are ongoing debates around a potential re-imagining and re-interpretation of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Burns et al., 2024; Humpage & Greaves, 2017; 1News, 2024), even as ethnic pay gaps are increasing (Maré, 2022). Under such circumstances, the call for an inclusive and multicultural orientation in strategic planning goes beyond the discipline's functional remit, it orientates the discipline to a possibility of being more socially responsible and humanist in its outlook and practice (Brunner, 2017; Ciszek et al., 2022).

### 5.5 Higher use of relational tactics for Māori, less so for Pacific peoples, Asians

Despite the employment of eight key tactics to reach diverse audiences, the *relational approach* was used predominantly to engage Māori while tactics like the use of *visual representation of ethnic group members* in communication, *translation* and *ethnic media* were more common with other non-Māori ethnic groups, such as Asian and Pacific peoples (see Section 4.3.4).

The use of *relational approach* (generally implying meetings and discussions with members of publics) suggests a more publics-centred approach to communication. It aligns

with the growing body of research in public relations that has strongly advocated for strategic communication to become publics-centred to overcome its overt organisation-centricity (Botan, 2023; Macnamara & Gregory, 2018; Rakow, 2018; Taylor, 2023). Frequent use of the relational tactic to communicate with Māori audiences is consistent with existing scholarship on Māori communication which has stressed the importance of physical meetings and face-to-face interactions (kanohi ti ke kanohi) underpinned by a spirit of reciprocity, or *whanaungatanga* (Comrie & Kupa, 1998; Motion et al., 2012). It also coheres with the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi which champion a partnership-based approach (Henderson et al., 2010). The fact that the tactic requires an active involvement of practitioners with the publics as equal partners in the process makes it *emic* in orientation. Emic approaches (Sommerfeldt & Iannacone, 2023) allow for shared meaning-making which leads to culturally sensitive communication and engenders the possibility of co-creating solutions (Botan, 2021; Gregory, 2017). The fact that many of the campaigns that relied on relational approaches to communicate with Māori evidenced a consideration of a Māori worldview in communication, collaborated with Māori to devise solutions, embraced a long-term focus and/or acknowledged the need for equitable and inclusive communication may be suggestive of an emic view of publics.

Of the 18 campaigns that considered ethnic diversity in strategy, 14 specifically addressed Māori publics. It follows that use of relational approaches with an *emic* view of communication may have have flowed from a strategic-level focus (Gregory, 2017) on Māori publics. Additionally, adoption of culturally sensitive approaches by practitioners when communicating with Māori audiences suggests their awareness of and respect for Māori traditions and communication preferences which, according to Weaver (2011), is a desirable approach to public relations practice in Aotearoa New Zealand given the country's bicultural foundations.

However, the few times when the tactic was used to communicate with non-Māori audiences (Pacific peoples in one campaign) or a wider audience comprising all ethnicities (four campaigns), it did not reflect the level of cultural integration or participation of publics that was observed when Māori audiences alone were involved. Sison (2020) contended that participatory forms of communication existed on a spectrum where the goals of a communication campaign could be any of the five: inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower. It was further argued that a lower emphasis on collaboration and a higher focus on one-way communication evidenced a functionalist use of participation, where participation was a means to the end of securing organisational goals (Sison, 2020). Keeping that in mind, it may be suggested that when Māori are not exclusively targeted in a campaign, the use of relational approaches generally implied lower level consultation and collaboration and

a greater focus on one-way communication despite the participatory nature of the *relational approach*.

The *visual representation of group members*, *ethnic media* and *translation* can be considered less emic, or etic, in their approach as they did not require the practitioners themselves to get involved with the publics. Māori people, not surprisingly, were targeted a higher number of times relative to other ethnic groups. However, vis-à-vis the *relational approach*, these tactics were used more frequently to communicate with other ethnically diverse groups, including Pacific peoples and Asian.

Use of group members in communication to engage people from minority ethnic communities is a standard practice in communication-oriented disciplines (Cui, 1997; Johnson & Grier, 2011; Motion et al., 2012; Sobh & Soltan, 2018). When ethnic staff members of organisations act as spokespeople, communication is expected to be culturally-sensitive. In context of Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori employees generally interact with members of publics on behalf of organisations (Motion et al., 2012). In addition to the use of Māori to communicate with other Māori publics in the society, the study also found campaigns which used representatives from Pacific peoples and the Asian community in the role of ambassadors for organisations. Motion et al. (2012) used the term cultural intermediaries (Curtin & Gaither, 2005) to describe their role since they act as intermediaries for organisations in a cultural context.

Although the declining trend in the use of ethnic media and translation in the analysed case studies merits further examination in future studies (see Section 4.3.4), it does not, however, distract from their salience and popularity among practitioners in relation to intercultural communication (Mersham et al., 2009; Noronha & Papoutsaki, 2014; Saint-Jacques, 2015a; Sison, 2020; Tukachinsky, 2015; Vardeman-Winter, 2011; Wakefield, 2011; Yu, 2018). A consistent use of ethnic media to connect with ethnic groups may also be seen in light of lower representation, or even misrepresentation, of minorities in mainstream media (Noronha & Papoutsaki, 2014) leading to marginalisation of group interests (Tukachinsky, 2015). The said marginalisation is further indicated by the present study which found few examples of mainstream media use in campaigns to communicate with minority ethnic groups. While the limited use of national media by practitioners to connect with ethnic audiences may be related to the negative image of mainstream channels among those groups (Noronha & Papoutsaki, 2014), it also indicates the possibility that practitioners are making assumptions about the media consumption habits of ethnically diverse publics which are constantly evolving (Ministry for Ethnic Communities, n.d.). To add, the implications associated with the use of ethnic media are analogous to Edwards' (2015b) arguments

against the prevalence of ethnic communication agencies. According to Edwards (2015b), the use of ethnic communication channels reflects the treatment of ethnic diversity as an adjunct to mainstream concerns of public relations where campaigns “take whiteness as the benchmark reference for messages and tactics” (p. 1).

Translation, too, while important (Kent & Taylor, 2011; Wakefield, 2011), runs the risk of oversimplification as language in itself does not fully convey the complexities and nuances of one’s ethnicity or culture (Mersham et al., 2009; Sison, 2017). As a result, ethnic audiences may end up misinterpreting translated messages (Vardeman-Winter, 2011). For this reason, a research-informed approach to planning may justifiably be considered fundamental to communication in a multicultural context. It ensures translated messages are culturally appropriate (Wakefield, 2010) and communication stays clear of problematic stereotyping (Ertem-Eray, 2024a) by helping practitioners understand the cultural nuances of diverse ethnic groups (Curtin, 2021; L’Etang, 2012).

Ethnic media risks marginalisation of groups (Tukachinsky, 2015), yet it remains a relevant media choice for ethnic minorities (Ministry for Ethnic Communities, n.d.). Considering the country’s burgeoning linguistic plurality (Cunningham and King, 2018), it is hard to imagine translation catering to all non-English speakers. Still, it serves vast segments of publics who prefer communication in their native tongue (Ministry for Ethnic Communities, 2023). Suffice to say, despite their limitations, ethnic media and translation have practical utility in a multicultural country like Aotearoa New Zealand. However, their etic orientation, implied by a lack of involvement with the publics in their cultural context (Ni & Sha, 2023), limits the scope for practitioners to build meaningful relationships with ethnically diverse publics. It is further compounded by the fact that these tactics are often not complemented by relational approaches, especially in the case of non-Māori minority ethnic communities. In this context, a more mindful approach to strategic planning is warranted so that practitioners “develop awareness that preconceived perceptions may exist and that these perceptions may influence the choices they make” (Theunissen & Rahman, 2012, p. 204).

Social media, when used with a dialogic orientation (Nairn & Bhargava, 2025), can foster conversations and dialogue with publics (Ertem-Eray, 2024b; Kent, 2013; Theunissen, 2015). However, only two campaigns (of the 11 that factored the publics’ ethnic variables while communicating online) utilised the channel to promote two-way communication between the organisation and its ethnically diverse audiences. The results have reinforced existing views in scholarship which have suggested the use of social media in practice often does not live up to its potential (Kent & Li, 2020; Kent & Theunissen, 2016). It indicates

practitioners use it to simply transmit information from organisation to publics leaving scant room for listening to their views (Macnamara, 2022). Avoidance of conversations on social media is understandable as the number of platforms have proliferated in recent years and conversations are time-consuming (Martens, 2020). Furthermore, organisations tend to use it more as a promotional tool that helps manage impressions through the sharing of positive stories about their values, work and people (Bhargava & Nairn, 2025). However, if practitioners continue to use social media largely to transmit organisational information to ethnic groups without engaging them in conversations, they are potentially giving up on opportunities to learn how ethnically diverse publics communicate online (Ciszek, 2013). This is a valid cause for concern since a deficit of cross-cultural awareness has been cited as a major challenge for public relations in the times to come (Theaker, 2021). Studies have found that use of social media among ethnic minorities and immigrants in Aotearoa New Zealand are closely linked to how those groups make sense of the new environment and integrate in society (Du & Lin, 2019; Ihejirika & Krtalic, 2021). In effect, by under-valuing the impact of ethnicity on social media, practitioners may limit the extent to which meaningful relationships are built with ethnically diverse publics, sometimes around issues that truly matter to them (Ciszek & Logan, 2018; Hon, 2016).

Online spaces, which includes social media, have also been critiqued for adopting a colour-blind approach (Adams & Johnson, 2020; Shuter, 2012), which Ertem-Eray (2024b) has argued to be a built-in bias of the technology. Colour-blind perspectives in communication generally assume “that it is more beneficial to actively ignore or downplay cultural/ethnic differences… to reduce minority members’ identification with their in-groups, in favour of an overarching identity, such as an organization or society as a whole” (Sommier et al., 2019, p. 9). One could say they are lockstep with the homogenising tendencies of functionalist approach in public relations (Gregory & Halff, 2013). As such, a reflection on how ethnically diverse audiences engage with social media is encouraged for a more inclusive approach to communication (Ciszek, 2013).

In sum, practitioners employed a more comprehensive tactical approach to communicate with Māori compared to Pacific peoples or Asians, highlighted by the extensive use of the *relational approach* to connect with Māori audiences. Mundy (2016) had observed that “campaigns that are limited to traditional and social media, without physically going into the local community to have real discussions, miss important opportunities to make connections and reinforce diversity values externally” (Mundy, 2016, p. 28). Hence, given the fairly limited use of relational tactics to communicate with other non-Māori ethnic minorities, future campaigns may like to consider a higher use of relational tactics, in combination with other established tactics, to engage Pacific peoples, Asians or MELAA.

### 5.6 Public sector and not-for-profit campaigns more focused on ethnic diversity

While past studies have examined individual campaigns centred on race, ethnicity or cultural issues (Ciszek & Logan, 2018; Macnamara & Camit, 2017; Tindall & Vardeman-Winter, 2011; Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013), very few, if any, and none in Aotearoa New Zealand, have assessed the frequency with which public relations campaigns from different organisational sectors have addressed ethnic diversity in their strategic planning.

The analysis of the current study revealed that a higher percentage of public sector and not-for-profit campaigns considered ethnic diversity of audiences during the five-year period under review. On the contrary, private sector campaigns demonstrated a significantly lower consideration of ethnic diversity in their strategic public relations planning (see Section 4.4). This sectoral variation is an interesting finding of the study given the secular, broad-based acceptance of diversity values among most organisations (Bardhan & Gower, 2022; Mundy, 2019).

All organisations are fundamentally accountable to society, and must therefore reflect the values (such as diversity and inclusion) that are socially relevant (Holtzhausen, 2005; L'Etang, 2005; Johnson, 2020). Yet the results suggest that the sector to which an organisation belongs may be linked to its commitment to diversity.

The differences in the consideration of ethnic diversity in the analysed campaigns from different sectors may be explained through an understanding of the key values and objectives of public, private and not-for-sector entities. According to Goulet and Frank (2002), public and not-for-profit organisations "exist both to serve and to create changes in both society and individuals" (p. 202). As a matter of course, there exists room for practitioners in the public and not-for-profit sectors to exude a commitment to diversity and civic responsibility (Hon & Brunner, 2000; Munshi & Kurian, 2020). While financial performance is an important marker of success and sustainability for all types of organisations, Van der Wal et al. (2008) found that the private sector attached a higher value on profitability as opposed to the public sector which was more inclined toward a social justice agenda. Macnamara and Gregory (2018) contended that an underlying focus on financial objectives has contributed to the organisation-centricity of strategic communication. It is also argued that unlike the private sector which can focus on a narrower set of audience, not-for-profit entities address a wider and more diverse audience, often working "on behalf of vulnerable or marginalised groups" (Ashra-McGrath, 2017). In reference to public sector communication, Luoma-aha and Canel (2020) have averred practitioners encounter a far higher diversity and multiplicity of publics compared to their counterparts in the private sector. It is, therefore, not surprising that both public sector and not-for-profit communication

have generally assumed an inclusive, citizen-centred and diversity-oriented approach to communication (Ciszek, 2013; Johnson, 2020).

It must be noted that use of consultative processes and community-driven communication solutions with emphasis on face-to-face communication and physical meetings have long been a part of the public relations setup in Aotearoa New Zealand (Motion & Leitch, 1996; Motion & Weaver, 2005; Munshi et al., 2016, 2020). Hence, in addition to an inherent civic orientation, prevailing norms of communication and engagement in the country may have also influenced a higher consideration of minority ethnic groups in strategic planning within public sector communication.

On the other hand, in the case of private sector campaigns, an emphasis on achievement of business or financial objectives may influence communication to be more focused on groups with better economic potential or higher purchasing power (Johnson, 2020). However, an understanding of the predominant private sector values alone may not fully account for a lower consideration of minority ethnic groups in campaign planning. A reflection of the prevailing socio-economic context of the country may be considered instructive in this regard. In context of Aotearoa New Zealand, despite the country's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, 2024; Public Service Commission, 2023), ethnic pay gaps are a reality where the majority white population (people of the European ethnicity) continue to out-earn those from minority ethnic groups (Cochrane & Pacheco, 2022). According to a recent RNZ news report, income disparities are highest for Asians and Pacific peoples (Xia, 2024). The stratification of publics based on their perceived economic potential, while antithetical to the socio-cultural and civic notions of public relations (Edwards & Hodges, 2011; Johnson & Sink, 2013), is not uncommon as Vardeman-Winter et al. (2013) observed in relation to Merck's vaccine campaign. Munshi and Kurian (2005) have called this a "hierarchy of publics" (p. 514). In context of the present study, it is worth noting that a large number of private sector campaigns were focused on corporate, marketing or internal communication efforts (see Section 4.4) which probably indicates campaigns are oriented more towards organisational or strategic considerations (Macnamara & Gregory, 2018). However, the findings do not suggest that the under-consideration of ethnic diversity in strategic campaign planning in the private sector is on account of lower economic prosperity of ethnically diverse publics.

Moreover, one must resist the urge to instinctively associate strategic planning of private sector campaigns with a distanced or instrumental view of ethnicity, race and cultural matters (Waymer & Heath, 2015). US ice-cream maker Ben & Jerry's is a worthy example

(Segal, 2024). The company has consistently advocated for the minorities while remaining profitable. Its principled stance during the Black Lives Matter movement, which was not without its fair share of critics, challenged the presumed incompatibility between business health and a social justice agenda (Ciszek & Logan, 2018). In the current study, while a higher reflection of diversity would have been desirable, it is important to state that a quarter of the campaigns did address ethnic diversity in their campaign planning. One private sector campaign, in particular, reflected a consideration of ethnic diversity (Māori audiences) across all the steps of strategic planning thus suggesting a holistic integration of diversity in their communication plan. Keeping that in mind, private sector campaigns of the future can consider paying more attention to ethnic diversity in their strategic planning.

### 5.7 Summary

The chapter has discussed the five key trends that emerged from the findings of the current study. Firstly, it highlighted how despite an overall respectable level of consideration for ethnic diversity in the analysed PRINZ case studies, there were noticeable differences in how different steps of planning addressed ethnically diverse publics. The discussion, subsequently, reflected on the largely tactical nature of strategic planning pertaining to minority ethnic groups and delved into the possible reasons for the same. Third, it confirmed how practitioners principally adopt the bicultural lens in relation to communicating in the multicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand and how it aligns with the country's unique history. It also dwelled on what the evidenced marginalisation of other ethnic groups in strategic planning potentially means for the practice of public relations in Aotearoa New Zealand. Fourth, the use of *relational approach* along with other tactics like *ethnic media*, *translation* and *social media* was also discussed, wherein the importance of relational approaches to enabling a contextual understanding of ethnic communities was underscored. Finally, the researcher argued that a higher consideration of ethnic diversity in public sector and not-for-profit campaigns is probably on account of an inherent commitment to social good and civic orientation in both public and not-for-profit organisations. At the same time, a greater focus on ethnic diversity in strategic planning of private sector campaigns was also encouraged. The next, and final chapter, briefly summarises the current study and identifies its limitations while offering relevant recommendations for future research.

# Chapter 6 Conclusion

## 6.1 Concluding Summary

The present study examined how ethnic diversity is reflected in the strategic planning of public relations campaigns in Aotearoa New Zealand. In doing so, it adds to the growing body of diversity-focused research in public relations (Ertem-Eray, 2024a; Hon & Brunner, 2000; Mundy, 2016, 2019; Sison, 2020). A majority of past studies exploring ethnic diversity in public relations has focused on issues of representation and practitioner experiences within organisations (Johnson, 2020). While those concerns are worthy of continuous reflection, the present study has focused its attention on understanding the ways in which practitioners engage with the ethnic identities of publics in communication planning (Mundy, 2019). The study thereby has acknowledged the socio-cultural nature of public relations, given the central role of meaning-making and publics' identities within practice (Curtin, 2021; L'Etang, 2012; Edwards & Hodges, 2011).

It must be noted that critical socio-cultural work has been a vital contribution of Aotearoa New Zealand in the field of public relations research (Leitch & Motion, 2010; Motion & Leitch, 1996, 2009; Weaver, 2013). However, apart from Comrie and Kupa's (1998) early work related to Māori communication, Weaver (2013) observed that the critical academic oeuvre has largely utilised discourse theory as a way to understand the social context. Resultantly, a focus on ethnicity and culture has been lacking within the space of socio-cultural inquiry. Although recent studies have dwelled on the nexus of culture and communication within Aotearoa New Zealand's unique context (Munshi et al., 2020; Theunissen, 2019; Theunissen & Rahman, 2012), gaps remain, and there are no existing studies that provide a broad integrative view of how practitioners reflect the country's ethnic diversity in public relations campaigns.

Additionally, the study is aligned with an epistemic shift within the discourse of strategic communication from one that is organisation-centred to being more oriented toward the publics (Botan, 2021; Falkheimer & Heide, 2015; Macnamara, 2015), a dynamic which has intensified in the wake of globalisation (Ertem-Eray, 2024a). Moreover, "since the ethical and moral center of many organizations is often reflected in the communication practices" (Brunner, 2017, p. 3), the study has afforded an illustration of how practitioners have attended to their responsibility of engaging with ethnically diverse publics in Aotearoa New Zealand (Stats NZ, 2024b).

Overall, the lack of existing data related to diversity consideration in public relations campaign planning makes the study foundational in the area of intercultural communication in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand. Additionally, the socio-cultural perspective of research has also afforded the study a non-functional lens (Edwards, 2012), wherein the object of research goes beyond helping practitioners devise more efficient or effective campaigns that ultimately contribute to achievement of organisational objectives alone (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015). Here, the adoption of a non-functional lens is also aided by the fact that all the analysed campaigns can already be qualified as successful and highly effective campaigns, borne out by the recognition of their excellence in the annual PRINZ awards. Instead, the primary goal of the study is to open a space for future scholarly inquiry and encourage practitioner reflection in the area of diversity communication potentially leading to a more inclusive and non-instrumental approach to minority ethnicities in strategic planning (Edwards, 2015b; Falkheimer & Heide, 2015; Kent & Theunissen, 2021; Waymer & Heath, 2015).

The findings make for a healthy reading of ethnic diversity consideration in the 91 analysed campaigns. While the country's practising community remains mostly white (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023), the results did not suggest it has led to an overtly ethnocentric or monoculturalist practice (Sriramesh, 2019; Sue, 2001). In more than half of the analysed campaigns, practitioners evidenced an awareness and recognition of the country's ethnic diversity to some degree in their communication plans (see Section 4.2). That said, a tapering off of ethnic diversity consideration toward the end of the five-year period (see Section 5.2) may lead one to question if strategic campaign planning in Aotearoa New Zealand is tending toward a homogeneous approach notwithstanding the growing ethnic diversity of the country's population (Gregory & Halff, 2013).

The top-level findings are complicated by the fact that consideration of ethnic diversity is not reflected equally in all the steps of strategic planning (see Section 5.3). It appeared practitioners' focus on minority ethnic communities is primarily concentrated in the audience segmentation and tactical steps of the planning process, unaccompanied by a correspondingly commensurate reflection in the key steps of research or strategy. Less than a quarter of the analysed campaigns conducted formative research to understand their ethnic audiences, which effectively limits the possibility of practitioners to get close to the lived contexts of a particular cultural group (Curtin, 2021; Mersham et al., 2009). Under-utilisation of research, specifically primary research, may lead to campaigns where practitioners impose their own cultural norms on ethnic groups in order to simplify the communication process (Gregory & Halff, 2013). Consequently, problems of stereotyping may arise despite campaigns acknowledging the diversity of the publics in the plan (Bardhan

& Weaver, 2011; Vardeman-Winter, 2011). Further, a lack of sufficient consideration of ethnic diversity within strategy, when combined with the evidenced deficit in research, implies a tactical approach to communicating with ethnically diverse publics. The resultant instrumental approach in the analysed campaigns, thereby, potentially falls short of mirroring a fully-integrated view of ethnic diversity in planning.

Underscoring the bicultural framework of Aotearoa New Zealand, the study confirmed the Māori-dominant view of ethnic diversity in the analysed campaigns as consideration of Māori in strategic planning exceeded that of other ethnic groups (see Section 5.4). One can, therefore, safely say that principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the recognition of Māori as mana whenua (indigenous people of the land) have influenced practitioner considerations. The finding also align with past scholarship which has called for implementing a bicultural orientation to public relations in Aotearoa New Zealand (Motion et al., 2012; Motion & Leitch, 2000; Henderson et al., 2010; Weaver, 2013), and more recent studies which have foregrounded the centrality of biculturalism to practitioner understanding of diversity (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023). The bicultural framework of the country is assumed to act as a bulwark against ethnocentrism (Hoffman, 2016). It follows that evidence of bicultural awareness in planning in the analysed campaigns implies planning is less affected by ethnocentric or hegemonic proclivities (Gregory & Halff, 2013). However, despite the higher consideration of Māori cultural norms and practices in campaign planning relative to other ethnicities, integration of a Māori view across all steps of planning was inconsistent. It suggests there is further room for practitioners to fully engage with a bicultural perspective in strategic planning and, subsequently, contribute to empowerment of Māori.

On the other hand, consideration of other ethnic groups such as Asians and Pacific peoples were subdued in the analysed campaigns while there was no evidence of MELAA ethnicities being factored in strategic planning. A few campaigns acknowledged the ethnic diversity of the country's multicultural society by qualifying their audiences with descriptions such as *people of all ethnicities*. However, such broad categorisations are not advisable if the intent is to learn more about the publics (Gregory, 2020). Instead, they are symptomatic of the discipline's homogenising tendencies (Liu & Pompper, 2012). If one views public relations exclusively through a functionalist or strategic management lens (Macnamara, 2012; Radford, 2012), the challenges of engaging with a multiplicity of publics are understandable. However, for a discipline with a commitment to civic responsibility, reflection of ethnic diversity in strategic planning that largely limits itself to a bicultural orientation is suggestive of a practice that may be adrift of fully integrating diversity in practice (Brunner, 2017; Hon & Brunner, 2000; Edwards, 2011b).

Another key finding of the study is the predominant use of relational tactics when communicating with Māori **(**see Section 4.3.4 and Section 5.5**)**, which is suggestive of a greater involvement of practitioners with Māori ethnic group as these approaches generally constitute face-to-face communication. The use of ethnic media, translation and group members in campaign material or as cultural ambassadors are more common when other minority ethnicities are involved. While all the identified tactics contribute to reaching ethnically diverse publics, the study posits that relying on tools such as translation or ethnic media to the exclusion of relational techniques, especially in context of non-Māori ethnic groups, runs the risk of creating further barriers to understanding those groups (Edwards, 2015b; Mersham et al., 2009; Vardeman-Winter, 2011). Despite the dialogic potential of social media (Ertem-Eray, 2024b; Taylor & Kent, 2014), communication with ethnic publics on social media was also found to be more one-way than conversational, which validates findings of past studies (Lovejoy et al., 2012; Martens, 2020). Hence, it has been suggested that a greater use of relational approaches in campaigns, for Māori as well as Pacific peoples, Asian and MELAA, would facilitate a deeper understanding of the diverse cultural contexts among public relations practitioners of the country.

There were evident differences relating to how organisational sectors reflected on ethnic diversity in their campaign planning (see Section 4.4 and Section 5.6), which was counterintuitive as most organisations, irrespective of their sector, acknowledge the importance of diversity on their official websites or corporate collateral (Bardhan & Gower, 2022; Mundy, 2016). It was argued that the higher consideration of ethnic diversity in public sector and not-for-profit strategic planning was a reflection of an organisational commitment to society and public good in both the sectors (Goulet & Frank, 2002; Luoma-aha & Canel, 2020). Moreover, robust traditions of public consultation and deliberation which are a feature of public sector communication in Aotearoa New Zealand (Motion & Leitch, 1996; Motion & Weaver, 2005; Munshi et al., 2016) was also forwarded by the researcher as a factor that may have motivated communication to be inclusive of different ethnic groups. In the private sector, a lower consideration of ethnically diverse publics was deemed to be potentially indicative of a higher organisational focus on strategic and organisational goals, further supported by the fact that half of private sector campaigns were from marketing or corporate award categories. Although scholarship has indicated practitioners may sometimes distinguish audiences on the basis of their perceived economic potential (Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013), the present study did not indicate anything to that effect. But given the significantly lower frequency of consideration of ethnic diversity in private sector campaigns relative to public or not-for-profit sector, practitioners working for private organisations may like to reflect more on the country's expanding ethnic diversity in future campaigns.

Kleinmann (2017) has asserted that ethical and civic duties of organisations are just as important as fiscal performance. Moreover, the crisis of trust that organisations and their communicators face today among the publics may worsen if “organizations do not make people feel that they belong and that their social identity dimensions (and ways they intersect) are respected” (Ertem-Eray, 2024a, p. 32). Hence, a more inclusive approach is therefore suggested so that practitioners in the private sector are better able to reflect the discipline’s societal role (Valentini et al., 2016).

### 6.2 Implications of the study for practice

In a world that is being increasingly splintered along socially-constructed fault lines, an awareness and acknowledgement of ethnicity or race in communication is essential to becoming a competent, ethical and empathetic public relations practitioner (Ciszek et al., 2022). In light of that, the study has significant implications for practice in an increasingly diverse, multi-ethnic and multicultural context (Bardhan, 2011; Ertem-Eray, 2024a; Pal & Dutta, 2008; Sison, 2017, 2020).

The study has highlighted that consideration of ethnic diversity in campaign planning is mostly addressed from a tactical point of view without necessarily being informed by research or strategy. In doing so, it has foregrounded the need for practitioners to fully integrate their consideration of ethnically diverse publics across all steps of planning especially research and strategy. A higher emphasis on research implies practitioners have a better chance of avoiding the risks of stereotyping particular groups of people and thereby realise more culturally sensitive communication (Theunissen & Rahman, 2012). At the same time, consideration of minority ethnic groups in strategy may lead to a greater sense of empowerment among those groups since strategic thinking fosters a long-term orientation and focuses on relationship building (Kent & Theunissen, 2021). The critical roles that research and strategy play in formulating more inclusive communication plans may also be emphasised in classroom settings. This may help public relations students when they graduate into the field of practice to critically reflect on their planning choices and resist the urge to be purely tactical while communicating with ethnic minorities.

Further, the confirmation of a bicultural view of ethnic diversity in strategic planning implies practitioners must remain alive and attuned to the views and aspirations of mana whenua Māori as part of their practice. This is supported by Motion et al. (2012) who stated “the dynamic nature of indigeneity means that the multiplicity of viewpoints with Māoridom is constantly evolving” (p. 58). Therefore, practitioners may consider undertaking Māori-focused cultural capability training programs, developing an awareness of tikanga (Māori customs and values) and/or learning basic Te reo Māori (to begin with) to become more

competent and empathetic in their communication with Māori publics. To that end, public relations programs at universities and other tertiary institutes may also offer courses that provide students the opportunity to learn more about the Māori worldview. This may help them develop an appreciation for the country's bicultural ethos which is particularly salient for international students who would like to pursue a public relations career in the country. PRINZ, too, may consider organising Māori-focused online webinars or in-person modules at regular intervals for practitioners and students alike.

At the same time, the study has also identified opportunities for practitioners to be more cognisant of the country's multi-ethnic milieu, particularly in respect of Pacific peoples, Asians and MELAA ethnicities. Under-representation or a lack of consideration of minority ethnic groups in campaigns may result in feelings of marginalisation (Xifra & McKie, 2011) which could negatively impact relationships between organisations and affected groups of publics (Ertem-Eray, 2024a). Hence, practitioners are suggested to be more mindful while devising communication plans, be it segmenting audiences, conducting research or formulating strategy, based on ethnic considerations. Doing so aligns the discipline with its societal responsibilities (Valentini et al., 2016). Within academia, educators may encourage assignments and minor campaigns that require students to undertake fieldwork connected with different ethnic groups. Additionally, curriculum may also include more diversity-related topics which may help students inculcate an awareness and appreciation for race/ethnicity concerns later in their professional career (Muturi & Zhu, 2019).

Practitioners are also urged to consider a greater use of relationally oriented approaches while communicating with ethnic minorities wherever possible since tactics that involve participation and face-to-face communication engender a sense of inclusion among ethnically diverse publics (Motion et al., 2012; Sison, 2020; Weaver, 2011).

Henderson et al. (2010) had boldly declared in their essay, "the right to articulate or declare an identity, and having a commitment to others, does not mean each can be fully known by the other" (p. 32). It probably implies that the road to becoming a culturally competent and empathetic communicator is a never-ending journey, and it calls for a heightened awareness, mindfulness, reflection and embracing the messiness within the field of practice (Edwards & Hodges, 2001; Ihlen, 2022; Theunissen & Rahman, 2012; Yeomans, 2016; Zaharna, 2001). Hence, training programs, including cultural competency initiatives, may like to stress on the importance of reflective and critical thinking to help practitioners overcome potential cultural biases while putting together campaigns in a multi-ethnic context (Fatima Oliveira, 2013). Within the classroom environment too, students may be encouraged to be more empathetic and reflective about "the lives of others" (Yeomans, 2016, p. 73),

traits which may serve them well in the future within a multi-ethnic and multicultural terrain of communication.

### 6.3 Limitations

As a first-of-its kind exploratory study in Aotearoa New Zealand, the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge in the area of diversity research within public relations focused on ethnic diversity as it relates to strategic campaign planning. In the absence of similar studies in the past, the findings may also serve as a foundational reference for future studies in the area of diversity-focused research. However, there are limitations to the study. One of the primary limitations is the limited sample size. Although the 91 PRINZ case studies covering five years of award-winning campaigns (2019-2023) can be considered a nationally representative sample spanning a variety of organisations and situational contexts, it is not an exhaustive set of all the winning entries presently available on PRINZ website where case studies are available from the year 2011 onwards. Due to its exploratory nature, the study did not set out to test hypotheses and arrive at causality or generalisable conclusions (Fox, 2008; Grix, 2019). But analysis of a larger sample of campaign case studies would have afforded the researcher more empirical evidence to draw inferences from about the specific contexts of communication (Krippendorff, 2019). This could have helped in developing a comprehensive understanding of how practitioners consider and integrate ethnic variables in strategic planning. One could also potentially use the resultant findings and interpretations as a richer basis for formulating hypothesis of future studies. Another limiting factor was restricting content analysis to only PRINZ case studies which effectively ruled out campaigns that may have involved interesting intercultural work but executed by organisations that do not have an existing PRINZ membership. But content analysis is a time-intensive research method (Maier, 2017) and though the researcher would have ideally liked to analyse a larger sample size it was not possible on account of the one-year research timeline for the master's level study.

Finally, any content analysis study presupposes the primacy of the researcher to arrive at conclusions, which Riffe et al. (2019) have termed as the lone scholar approach. Due to working in isolation away from message producers (practitioners and organisations) and consumers (publics), the researcher is not privy to their views and perceptions on the issue (Riffe et al., 2019). Future studies may, therefore, also incorporate these entities in order to have a broader view of the various factors that affect diversity-focused communication in public relations campaigns and thereby add richness to the understanding of the specific contexts in which intercultural or cross-cultural communication occurs in Aotearoa New Zealand.

### 6.4 Recommendations for future research

It is hoped this study generates future interest in the area of ethnicity, race and culture within the larger canvas of diversity in public relations research. The need for an increased focus on diversity has been validated in scholarship, considering the growing ethnic diversity within today's multicultural societies (Edwards, 2011; Mundy, 2019; Sison, 2020). Unfortunately though, it is contended that an inadequate focus on matters pertaining to race/ethnicity or the multiplicity of publics within academia has ill-equipped students and future practitioners to navigate the complexities of the profession (Leitch & Motion, 2010; Waymer, 2012). The contention is corroborated by the fact that functionalist or organisation-centered thinking continues to have a significant influence on public relations research (Edward, 2012; Macnamara, 2012; Volk, 2016). Yet, as Edwards (2015a) has argued, employing an alternative lens to analyse and understand the discipline may lead to a more insightful and creative domain of practice. With that in mind, the researcher is optimistic future research will build on the findings and observations from the present study.

While the current analysis employed content analysis as a research tool to examine ethnic diversity consideration in campaign planning, subsequent work may include more qualitative work, with a constructionist framework, like interviews and focus groups with practitioners and minority ethnic communities. For example, studies may explore how publics of diverse ethnicities view campaigns that address them. This will aid researchers to gauge if existing tactics of communication resonate with minority ethnic communities and whether they feel communicators acknowledge and respect their cultural identities. This will help to develop a holistic understanding of the specific contexts in which intercultural communication takes place, because public relations work is not value-neutral or simply functional, it is ideological (Edwards, 2012; Gower, 2006). In view of the observed disparities in ethnic diversity consideration across organisational sectors, another interesting research area could be an exploration of how practitioners from different organisations address diversity, ethnic or otherwise, issues in external communication practices. One may also like to explore how organisational culture or habitus of practice impacts personal practitioner values regarding implementing diversity principles in campaigns (Edwards, 2009; Len-Rios, 1998; Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017). The unique cultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand also calls for research to better understand how practitioners attend to the bicultural-multicultural duality – if it is viewed as an irreconcilable dichotomy or a more inclusive approach is within the realm of practical possibility.

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## Appendix: Coding Table

| Year | Campaign | Sector | Brief Description | Background /Research | Objectives | Audience | Strategy | Tactics | Messages | Results |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2019 | 1 | Non-profit | A healthcare provider changes from a corporate structure to a co-operative | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2019 | 2 | Govt/Public Sector | Focused on raising awareness around drone operation regulations | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2019 | 3 | Private Sector | A retailer focuses on plastic reduction | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2019 | 4 | Non-Profit | A campaign to generate testicular cancer awareness | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2019 | 5 | Non-profit | An institution charts the gender equality journey in the country | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 2019 | 6 | Non-profit | A campaign to generate bowel cancer awareness | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2019 | 7 | Govt/Public Sector | A climate change campaign with a focus on melting glaciers | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2019 | 8 | Non-profit | A drive to secure community consensus on a piece of legal document | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2019 | 9 | Govt/Public Sector | A community engagement initiative as part of an infrastructure project inauguration | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 2019 | 10 | Govt/Public Sector | Raising awareness on the country's biosecurity protocols | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2019 | 11 | Non-profit | Focused on raising awareness of a Māori-centred business funding venture | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2019 | 12 | Non-profit | Raising funds for a dog welfare outfit | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2020 | 13 | Private Sector | Raising the profile of an alternative medicine entity | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

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| 2020 | 14 | Govt/Public Sector | Motivating public interest and participation in a local election | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2020 | 15 | Govt/Public Sector | Launch of a website and mobile platform with focus on local history and culture | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2020 | 16 | Govt/Public Sector | A campaign focused on road safety | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 2020 | 17 | Govt/Public Sector | A blood donation campaign | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2020 | 18 | Private Sector | Focused on establishing communication channels between leadership and staff | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2020 | 19 | Govt/Public Sector | Launch of a public pathway | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2020 | 20 | Private Sector | Launch of an app dedicated to women in a particular lifestage | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2020 | 21 | Private Sector | Raising government's awareness around property management issues | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2020 | 22 | Govt/Public Sector | Launch of a dedicated helpline of a public organisation | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 2020 | 23 | Private Sector | Focused on online safety | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2020 | 24 | Private Sector | An employment drive for a primary industry company | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2020 | 25 | Govt/Public Sector | A road safety campaign | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2020 | 26 | Govt/Public Sector | Motivating public interest and participation in a local election | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 2020 | 27 | Private Sector | Launch of a new communication technology service | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2020 | 28 | Govt/Public Sector | A local financial entity's campaign to highlight its social contributions | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2020 | 29 | Govt/Public Sector | An environmental clean-up campaign | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2021 | 30 | Private Sector | A campaign to protect corporate reputation during COVID-19 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2021 | 31 | Private Sector | Promoting business growth during COVID-19 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2021 | 32 | Govt/Public Sector | A campaign to change public's waste disposal behaviour | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 2021 | 33 | Private Sector | A retailer's public outreach campaign during COVID-19 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2021 | 34 | Govt/Public Sector | Generating public engagement for regional policy matters | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2021 | 35 | Govt/Public Sector | Encouraging community participation and feedback in local parks' plans | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2021 | 36 | Private Sector | A community engagement initiative as part of an infrastructure project inauguration | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2021 | 37 | Private Sector | Launch of a lifestyle project for seniors | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2021 | 38 | Govt/Public Sector | A local water conservation campaign | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2021 | 39 | Govt/Public Sector | A public institution seeks community support for development plans | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 2021 | 40 | Govt/Public Sector | Aimed at improving community ties as part of land ownership transfer | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2021 | 41 | Govt/Public Sector | The naming of an infrastructure equipment | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 2021 | 42 | Private Sector | A women's health equity campaign | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2021 | 43 | Private Sector | A corporate initiative to communicate commitment to biculturalism | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2021 | 44 | Govt/Public Sector | A campaign to raise awareness of electoral voting processes | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 2021 | 45 | Private Sector | An internal campaign to promote safety protocols during COVID-19 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2021 | 46 | Private Sector | A cyber-security awareness campaign | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2021 | 47 | Govt/Public Sector | An internal campaign to | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | promote safety protocols during COVID-19 | | | | | | | |
| 2021 | 48 | Private Sector | An internal campaign focused on health and mental well-being during COVID-19 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 2021 | 49 | Govt/Public Sector | A local water conservation campaign | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 2021 | 50 | Govt/Public Sector | A local water conservation campaign | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 2021 | 51 | Govt/Public Sector | Crisis communication during a major road closure | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2021 | 52 | Govt/Public Sector | Focus on greater public participation in a seasonal survey of birds | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 2021 | 53 | Govt/Public Sector | Launch of a recreational water facility | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 2021 | 54 | Private Sector | Boost public image of a beverage brand | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2021 | 55 | Govt/Public Sector | Motivate public participation in a national event during COVID-19 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2021 | 56 | Govt/Public Sector | A public outreach campaign during COVID-19 communicating health protocols and operational continuity | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2021 | 57 | Private Sector | Promoting operational safety in the horticultural sector | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2022 | 58 | Govt/Public Sector | A campaign to promote positive attitudes toward limiting water use | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2022 | 59 | Govt/Public Sector | Promoting community participation in local/regional planning exercise | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 2022 | 60 | Govt/Public Sector | An awareness campaign focused on a region's wastewater system | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 2022 | 61 | Govt/Public Sector | A campaign to raise awareness of personal finance and investing | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2022 | 62 | Govt/Public Sector | A campaign against | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | curtailment of air traffic services | | | | | | | |
| 2022 | 63 | Govt/Public Sector | A campaign to raise awareness and drive engagement for emissions reduction | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2022 | 64 | Non-profit | An internal campaign aimed at raising awareness around governance and audit protocols | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2022 | 65 | Govt/Public Sector | A community-centred local emergency response | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 2022 | 66 | Non-profit | A community-focused COVID-19 vaccination drive | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2022 | 67 | Private Sector | Launch of an international beverage brand in the country | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2022 | 68 | Govt/Public Sector | A media campaign to highlight fire emergency response measures | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2022 | 69 | Govt/Public Sector | Drive youth engagement on local council's online platforms | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2023 | 70 | Non-profit | A name change campaign of a non-profit | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2023 | 71 | Govt/Public Sector | A campaign to prevent avoidable home fire accidents | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2023 | 72 | Govt/Public Sector | Increase public participation in local body elections | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2023 | 73 | Private Sector | A sales campaign of an airlines | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2023 | 74 | Private Sector | A personal campaign of a mayoral candidate | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 2023 | 75 | Non-profit | A regional Māori-centred climate action campaign | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2023 | 76 | Govt/Public Sector | An education campaign to raise awareness of natural hazards, especially volcanic eruptions | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 2023 | 77 | Govt/Public Sector | A tourism campaign targeted at local New Zealanders | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2023 | 78 | Govt/Public Sector | A community-oriented national blood donation campaign | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2023 | 79 | Private Sector | Aimed at fostering positive relations between a community and a private operator | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2023 | 80 | Govt/Public Sector | Foster greater public participation in local body elections | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2023 | 81 | Private Sector | Promoting a new business among policymakers and public stakeholders | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 2023 | 82 | Private Sector | Promoting positive relations between government and an industry collective | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2023 | 83 | Private Sector | A mental health campaign by a luxury car brand | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2023 | 84 | Private Sector | A food retailer's local community event | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2023 | 85 | Non-profit | A campaign focused on pay equity | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2023 | 86 | Private Sector | An internal campaign aimed at improving | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | operational safety | | | | | | | |
| 2023 | 87 | Govt/Public Sector | A reputational and trust-building campaign of a public service provider | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2023 | 88 | Private Sector | A national hiring drive of a food retailer | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 2023 | 89 | Private Sector | Launch of a new home appliance | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2023 | 90 | Private Sector | Launch of a new line of laptops | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2023 | 91 | Non-Profit | A charity's Christmas time fundraising event for the homeless | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |